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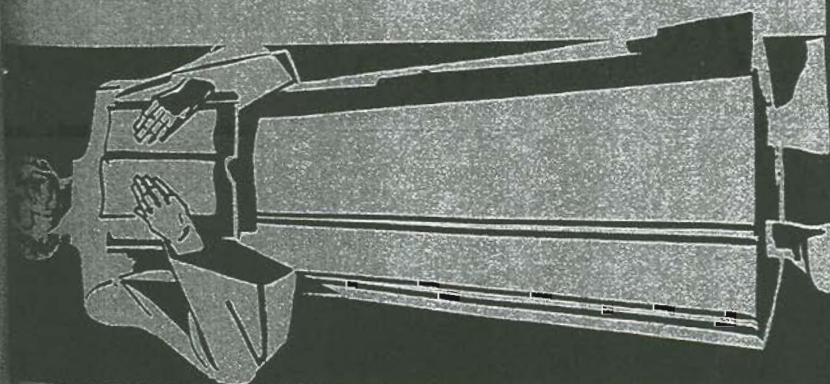
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Leuenberg Concord: Three Responses

CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANS REACT TO LEUENBERG CONCORD

HANS-LUTZ POETSCH

Speaker, German Lutheran Hour

TRANSLATION BY EDITOR

Over one hundred persons participated in the German-Scandinavian Theological Conference held at Ratzeburg from May 24 to 28. The main topic of discussion was the Leuenberg Concord with critical analyses of this document.

This conference drew participants from outside of Germany. From Sweden came Bishop Bo Giertz of Göteborg and from America, Dr. J. A. O. Preus, President of the Missouri Synod. Lay and clerical representatives of both state and free churches from Finland, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Sweden and Canada, participated in the church services and devotions, in addition to the lectures and the discussion groups. Some were at the conference for the first time, others had participated in the first conference held at Sittensen in 1968. Oberkirchenrat Dr. Reller was present temporarily to represent the administration of the Lutheran Church of Hannover. Also present was Professor Dr. Peter Brunner of the University of Heidelberg who urged adoption of the Leuenberg Concord, though he was critical of it in several points.

In comparison with the 1968 meeting, Ratzeburg concentrated more on theological issues. The evening sessions drew scarcely more than one hundred parishioners from the vicinity of Leuenberg. They also took part in the theological discussions. At the 1968 meeting at Sittensen, the group of over one thousand had to be broken up into several parallel discussion groups. At that conference the major concern was directed against liberal theology as it confronted the churches. That drew much attention. So many other newly founded confessional groups joined the conference. These were groups within the established state churches still confessing the validity of the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions for theology. At Ratzeburg, the major concern was the proposed declaration of fellowship between the Lutheran and Reformed churches. At the press conference held at Ratzeburg, it soon became evident that the Leuenberg Concord was generally unknown to the public. That gave the impression that one day millions of Protestants would be united into one church without even being aware of it.

The hospitality afforded at Ratzeburg cannot go unmentioned. Many guests were lodged in parsonages and in private homes in the vicinity. Lunch and dinner were offered in a restaurant with the price included in the general conference fees.

The cathedral church of Ratzeburg was the setting for the opening service. The liturgist was Pastor Wolfgang Büscher; the

lector was diocesan dean, Dr. Hauschild; and the preacher for the occasion was Bishop Bo Giertz, who spoke on the blessings of the spiritual gifts for Christ's church in our time. A prayer service was conducted by diocesan superintendent, Dr. Joachim Heubach, coordinator of the conference. Daily devotions were conducted by Pastor Dietrich Studen-Bücken. The church which has been frequently renovated in the last two decades provided an impressive place for the worship services. Unfortunately acoustics presented a problem and a speaking system had to be used. The conference ended with the celebration of the Sacrament in the cathedral church with Bishop Giertz preaching. A communion service was conducted at the end of the conference in St. Peter's Church with Dr. Jörgen Glenthøj of Denmark as preacher.

There were fewer lectures at Ratzeburg than Sittensen. This allowed for more thorough discussions. First on the agenda were greetings by Dr. Preus, president of Missouri Synod, Dr. G. Rost, supervising bishop of the Breslau Synod and Dr. Heubach, professor of church history at the University of Kiel. The first lecture was given by Dr. Asendorf, pastor of the Church of Hannover who spoke on "This Historical Background of the Leuenberg Concord." He mentioned the union attempts as far back as the time of the Reformation with the Augsburg Confession of 1530. This he contrasted with the humanistic union attempts of Erasmus, Calvin and those of more recent times. He made explicit reference to the difference with the Protestant consciousness of unity and the "fanatical unionism" of the modern ecumenical movement. He labeled as a perversion of the Gospel into Law those attempts at union based on anything else than the truth of the Gospel. Hans Dombois, a specialist in church law, posed the question concerning the true nature of church fellowship. Would the Leuenberg Concord necessitate a basic administrative restructuring of the old Prussian union because of political reasons? In conclusion Asendorf mentioned the 19th century confessional Lutherans such as Vilmar and Löhe as ecumenical theologians in the proper sense. "The present fanaticism spells the end of the ecumenical movement. This fanaticism has practical consequences which are difficult to recognize."

Dr. Preus spoke on "The Leuenberg Concord from an American Perspective." He reported that Lutheran-Reformed discussions in America broke off in 1966. Documents of these discussions were published in the volume *Marburg Revisited*, but they had no official validity and had no affect in bringing churches of the two confessions closer together. Talks were resumed in April 1972. A meeting is planned for November to discuss specifically the Leuenberg Concord. Dr. Preus set out to explain the concept of church fellowship in the Leuenberg Concord and saw in it a confusion of the *una sancta catholic ecclesia* and the visible church. Preus also called attention to the dangerous lack of distinction between the Law and the Gospel which would call into question any proposed concept of the church. Finally, he pointed to the necessity of confessional Lutherans to stand together for the truth of the Gospel, and not to feel isolated.

In an expanded meditation on John 17:17-23, Bishop Giertz

discussed the indissoluble connection between the unity in the Spirit and the outward union, a theme not seriously considered in the Leuenberg Concord. The title of his lecture was "That 'They Be One—How Is It Possible?'" Professor Dr. Peter Brunner gave a lecture entitled "Problems of the Leuenberg Concord." He called for corrections in many points. He expressed the conviction that the Concord was a good thing and earnestly demanded to support the adoption of the document. According to his opinion, he favored any attempt at a "union." Rather, Brunner looked at the document in the light of the unfortunate developments within the Evangelical Church of Germany which are becoming more and more destructive of German Protestantism. From this point of view, Professor Brunner saw it as an improvement. (*Ed.'s Note: Brunner has since reversed himself*).

The final lecture was given by Dr. Glenthøj. It was entitled "Communio Sanctorum or the New Concept of 'Church Fellowship' in the Leuenberg Concord." Marks of church fellowship are joy and joint purpose. At the same time, he warned against a confession that sets minimum and maximum limitations. Glenthøj also saw that in the Leuenberg Concord, the truth was being sacrificed for organizational unity. Condemnations of opposing doctrines in the Confessions as well as the Confessions themselves lost some of their force, but were not clearly retracted. Nothing at all was said about the almost universal recognition of the rite of baptism among the Lutheran, Reformed and Union churches. The connection between Parts I to III to Part IV gives the impression that the theologians had taken on the role of church politicians. Not one statement of the document is validated by a Scriptural passage in spite of the fact that the study of Scriptures dominates theological studies today. It is necessary to construct the doctrinal methodology from the doctrine set down in the Leuenberg Concord.

In between the lectures, words of greeting were brought to the assembly. Among those who spoke were Professor Dr. Leiv Aalen of Oslo, Pastor Dr. Dimo Kiviranta of Helsinki and University Lecturer Erik Petrm of Sweden. Pastor Büscher spoke of the loss that *Kirchliche Sammlungen* had suffered through the death of Pastor Dr. Hellmut Lieberg and his wife. At this moment the conference united in prayer. Oberkirchenrat Dr. Reller raised the question in his word of greeting of how it would be possible to work with truth and clarity in the changing situations which the Leuenberg Concord would bring about. In his opinion, the Leuenberg Concord could effect Eastern and Roman Catholicism. The Leuenberg Concord is going to present many unanswered questions in the future for church law and politics. The question was discussed whether the Concord would help reinstate the use of Lutheran Confessions.

Time was given after the lectures to pose questions to the essayists. In the midst of the discussions there was opportunity for formal words of greeting. Worthy of note was fair exchange of views between Professor Brunner and Oberkirchenrat Reller who were the only ones who favored the Concord, and the other participants who took the opposing view. The unanimity was astonishing and not really expected. Still let it be said that the favorable attitude of Brunner

and Renner to the Concord was based more on practical reasons and hardly on theological reasons. This reporter attended only part of the discussion groups and can only report on them. Group I, Dr. Künneht of Munich; Group II, Pastor Haupt of Hannover; Group III, Dr. Hauschild, diocesan dean of Neumünster; Group IV, Kirchenrat, Dr. Schlichtling, dean of Bamberg; Discussion Group V, Oberkirchenrat Dr. G. Rost of Wuppertal. Special interest was focused on Dr. Preus' report on the American experiences in union attempts. Just the week before the Presbyterians withdrew from participation in COCU, an attempt to unite different confessions according to the Blake-Pike Plan. This plan would have made a union of churches possible, but is now dissolved. An influential American publication indicated that lay people do not share the same interest that their church leaders do in social and political matters and in the problems of church union. For example, the Methodists in the last four years lost over a half-million members. This has forced the denominational leaders to reassess the mission of the church. When the Presbyterians put up \$10,000 for the defense of Angela Davis, 6,000 persons wrote letters, most of them in protest. There is a basic difference between the United States and Germany in the matter of church finances. In Germany, the churches are financed through the church taxes. In the United States, members are free to withdraw their membership and financial support when the church no longer serves their spiritual needs. Dr. Künneht brought up the example of Holland where the union arrangements between the Lutheran and the Reformed go far beyond that of the Leuenberg Concord in regard to the content. Here relations between the Lutheran and Reformed have weakened instead of strengthened since formal agreement. The public in Germany has no idea of these developments. The whole matter of our relationship to the press must be reassessed. As a result of their discussions, this group came to this conclusion: "The Leuenberg Concord does not stay within the orbit of the Lutheran Confessions, but instead it supports non-Lutheran concepts in its statements. These statements lay aside the Lutheran Confessional writings, and set themselves up as the sole basis for altar and pulpit fellowship." In the second session the group resolved to meet later with the other discussion groups for the purpose of agreeing on a united public declaration. The discussion group took exception to Professor Brunner's opinion that the Leuenberg Concord intends only church fellowship and not church union. Brunner understands "union" as excluding organizational union—history has shown that "union" does not have this meaning.

The first evening lecture was given by Professor Dr. Walter Bodenstein of the University of Kiel on the theme, "Why I Am Still a Lutheran." This lecture with its dialectically opposed theses lent itself to public discussion. The speaker showed the weakness of modern theology in the light of the confessors' faith and what it meant to hold to the Lutheran Confessions.

Pastor George Huntemann, Ph.D., Th.D., of Bremen spoke on the question, "What is Still Valid Today?—The Christian Ethic in the Face of the Moral Revolution in our Time." The lively presenta-

tion expanded on the holiness and unavoidable service to God's law in view of the present decay of tradition and proper behavior.

On the last evening, Pastor Dr. Hans-Lutz Poetsch of Bremen lectured on the theme, "The Certainty of Faith in Our Time." It was brought out that only the Christian faith gives the proper attitude and frees the individual for service to the neighbor. There is no certainty without faith worked by the Holy Spirit.

As soon as it is possible, the result of German-Scandinavian Theological Conference will be available in print. Before the next conference, closer contacts will be made between Scandinavia and Germany with open invitations to other countries and continents. Further theological work on the questions raised will be continued and broadened in the next months.

The question which cropped up in the discussions more than any other, what conclusions must be met if the Leuenberg Concord is adopted in spite of all protests from the east and the west. The members of the conference did not delude themselves. They know well that if the Concord is adopted, the consequences will be inevitable. Time will tell whether the supporters of the Concord will allow it to go the disastrous path upon which the founders of the unions of past centuries guided theirs. So that instead of creating unity, it will bring about new and painful divisions in the church of Jesus Christ.

THE GERMAN—SCANDINAVIAN THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE AT RATZEBURG

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TRANSLATION BY THE REV. WILHELM TORGERSOHN

The Church Gathering for the Bible and the Confession of Faith (*Kirchliche Sammlung um Bibel und Bekenntnis*) held its conference from May 24 to 28. Originally this north German area had its own autonomous Lutheran Territorial Church in the former Duchy of Lauenburg. Today it is part of the Lutheran Territorial Church of Schleswig-Holstein. It has a separate administrator within that church. Indication of the strong confessional leanings of this administrative district was seen in that the synodical convention had chose a prominent member of the Church Gathering (abbr. KS), the Rev. Professor Dr. Joachim Heubach, to be the superintendent. Now Dr. Heubach also serves as chairman of the Church Gathering. Headquarters are located at the island city of Ratzeburg, just south of Lübeck, only a few miles from the East German frontier. Here we find the impressive brick cathedral built by Duke Henry the Lion. The Superintendent is only an official guest in the cathedral since technically it belongs to the Lutheran Territorial Church of Mecklenburg, now behind the Iron Curtain. The dean of the cathedral has only two parishes under his supervision because the

frontier separates him from most of his circuit. The civil government still exercises rights of patronage within the church of the Lauenburg district. All church responsibilities exercised in times past by the dukes of Lauenburg are today in the hands of county officials, so that the head of the county board has considerable influence in the choice of the superintendent.

Old dated relics of Germany's ecclesiastical history? Perhaps. But the conference to which Superintendent Dr. Heubach issued invitations in behalf of the KS dealt with problems of current importance. The conference was concerned with "The Leuenberg Concord," prepared in September 1971. Perhaps the peculiar nature of this church region made possible a conference which investigated critically the declared intentions of various church leaders in regard to the Leuenberg document. Confessional Lutherans from Scandinavia, North America and Germany, from territorial and free churches, had gathered to express their deep concern over general Protestant plans for union that were now, in the wake of the Leuenberg Concord, to be turned into reality. Most prominent participants and discussion leaders were the Bishop of Göteborg, The Rt. Rev. Bo Giertz, and the President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, The Rev. Jacob Preus.

The KS had on a previous occasion extended invitations for a German—Scandinavian Theological Conference. Four years ago the conference at Sittensen near Hamburg took issue with those who denied the basic facts of faith and salvation: The deity of Christ, the virgin birth, Jesus' vicarious atonement, the resurrection and ascension. The Church Gathering found itself in a common front with the pietistic Confessional Movement "No Other Gospel." It probably was no coincidence that this movement was not represented at the Ratzeburg meeting. Here the participants dealt with the central issues of the Lutheran Confessions: The clear distinction between law and gospel; justification and sanctification; baptism and the Lord's supper; and the clear confession of the Gospel against all anti-scriptural union. Here the KS properly proved itself a *Lutheran* movement, while the Confessional Movement "No Other Gospel," arising out of the pietistic groups and the general Protestant *Allianz*, as a matter of policy assent to union.

It was of particular interest for the participants from the Lutheran Free Churches to note the unanimity shown all attending by rejecting the Leuenberg Concord and the theological approach on which it is based. It was a great source of joy to learn that this rejection grew out of a deep common understanding of the scriptural Gospel. Here we must no doubt give much credit to Bishop Giertz who made this possible with his spiritual approach. He served the conference with two sermons and one scholarly presentation. On the basis of a profound exegesis and exposition of John 17 he showed that we simply are not able to bring about the unity of all Christians, but that this unity already exists as a miracle from God. And the most important thing we need to effect the union of churches is the love of Christ, the new life, a spiritual awakening.

President Preus dealt with the Leuenberg Concord from an

American point of view. He referred to the Lutheran—Reformed dialogues in the U.S.A. which ended in 1966. The unofficial presentations and conclusions from these talks are published in "Marburg Revisited" and had no influence on the participating denominations nor on their relationships with one another. Discussions were resumed in April 1972, and the next meeting, scheduled for November, will deal principally with the Leuenberg Concord. President Preus then turned his attention to the Concord's understanding of church fellowship. He rejected its understanding as a confusion between "una sancta catholica ecclesia" and the visible church. Preus pointed out the tragic lack of the proper distinction between law and gospel which was evident in the document's rather questionable understanding of the nature of the church. Finally Dr. Preus pointed to the necessity that confessional Lutherans must stand together in their witness to the truth of the Gospel and should not feel that they are alone or abandoned.

The Rev. Dr. U. Asendorf spoke on the topic "The Historical Background of the Leuenberg Concord," while The Rev. Jørgen Glenthøj of Denmark dealt with "Communio sanctorum—or The New Concept 'Church Fellowship' in the Leuenberg Concord." All presentations agreed in their rejection of the Concord.

The moving, almost tragic climax of the conference came with the lecture of the retired Heidelberg dogmatician Prof. Dr. Peter Brunner. He considered "Problems of the Leuenberg Concord." What Professor Brunner called some of the "problems" of the document were to the unprejudiced listener the various points of a devastating theological critique: A soft-pedaling of the holy Trinity and of Christ's nature as true son of God; a suppression of God's wrath, with the attendant danger of covering up the mystery of God's love; a suppression of the apocalyptic return of Christ and in connection with that a reinterpretation of the Kingdom of God into a development of peace and justice within this world. Nevertheless, Professor Brunner attempted, with passionate appeals, to move the conference towards a stance in favour of the Concord. He insisted that there were yet some starting points for the possibility of scriptural agreement. Rejection of the Concord would open the floodgates to powers highly destructive of the church.

No one was able to agree with Peter Brunner in that. It was with deep emotion that during the discussion even his students and friends among the participants indicated to him their disagreement. This they did so clearly and forcefully. They all recognized that this Concord is not a document making for true unity between the Lutheran and the Reformed churches; but it is the artificial product of current liberal theology. It actually expresses infinitely less than the genuine ecumenical unity that is already present now in the Christian churches. A learned Finnish pastor said: "The Leuenberg Concord is the worst ecumenical document since Lausanne 1927."

Many of the participants were faced with the question: *What are we to do?* Beyond all tentative answers there remained this truth: Basic to the rejection of all false doctrine is the scriptural, unambiguous proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of

the sacraments in accordance with their institution. For this ministry the confessionally committed brethren will have to find closer forms of cooperation and strengthen one another more. The true unity of the Church has not been advanced by the Leuenberg Concord; indeed, it is a source of greatest danger. We all will now have to face this fact openly. For Lutherans the hour of decision is at hand!

THE CONCEPT OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP IN THE LEUENBERG CONCORD: A CRITIQUE

EUGENE F. KLUG

An essay delivered before the Lutheran-Reformed Dialog held at the Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, November 10. Numbers in the essay refer to the Leuenberg Concord, (Springfielder, March 1972).

Introduction:

Nothing pains the Christian more perhaps than the fractured condition of Christ's church on earth, nothing, that is, except the sharp, often deep differences in belief and teaching that have caused the divisions. Knowing full well that God's will bespeaks "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4, 3) and that "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" Christians ought "all speak the same thing," with "no divisions," and "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment," (1 Cor. 1, 10) we take seriously the apostolic injunction to foster and maintain genuine fellowship and unity in Christ's church on earth.

Such earnest spirit of concern undoubtedly motivated the framers of the Leuenberg Concord. Nor have we reason to believe that a lesser sense of anguish and disquiet prompted previous efforts towards healing divisions within the churches. Even though many of these strivings ended in failure, we are in no position to judge motives towards union of the churches within Christendom.

However, looking at the hoped-for goal, a Lutheran of Confessional concern for unity, is drawn self-evidently to the Book of Concord—containing the ecumenical creeds, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Luther's Large and Small Catechisms, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord. In itself the Book of Concord is intended to be an ecumenical and catholic summary or statement of faith, a genuine basis of concord, "derived from the Prophets and the Apostolic Scriptures," and, as such, it remains a "platform for faith and purity of teaching within the church" (Preface, Book of Concord).

Leuenberg, Part IV, addresses the problem of "Achieving and Realizing Church Fellowship." On the basis of earlier discussion (Parts I to III), it presupposes agreement among partners to the "concord" on the following points, among others: historical differences as expressed in the 16th century Confessions (Lutheran and Reformed) are no longer viable or valid in our day, nor therefore divisive; there is a common understanding of the Gospel; agreement can now be claimed on previously controverted articles like Christ-

ology, the Lord's Supper, Baptism, Predestination; and, finally, such differences as still remain do not prevent altar and pulpit fellowship between the churches that "acknowledge one another as the church of Jesus Christ." With these premises granted, the hope is that the divided churches now recognize a common basis for concord.

The task of this essay is to evaluate Leuenberg's proposals for fellowship. It is my hope to do this in a way which remains sensitive to the desired goal of unity, and yet with the greatest amount of objectivity and frankness. Anything less would, I believe, defeat the purpose of the Lutheran-Reformed dialogues.

Part I.

We readily rejoice over some of the evangelical emphases which run through the document. This bespeaks the earnestness with which the conferees worked. On the other hand, it is to be doubted—unless a spirit of doctrinal indifference has taken over completely—that the mere assertion of church fellowship (29), without actual, demonstrated consensus of faith, constitutes a *de facto* healing of "the separation which arose in the 16th century and has lasted until today." Hardly out of "loyalty to the confessions which bind them" could this be asserted. At least for Lutherans grounded on the Book of Concord! Leuenberg has not shown that measure of agreement which would allow Confessional concerns (thetical and antithetical) of the 16th century to be dismissed as no longer valid or of present bearing in the divisions between the churches. Nor has it substantiated the claim that such doctrinal differences as still exist "do not imply separation of the churches" (32). The fact that theological cross-currents cut through and polarize sides within the denominations today—liberal v. conservative, etc.—does not *ipso facto* make the "thought-forms of the 16th and 17th centuries" mere historically conditioned shells or antiques of no contemporary pertinence (5).

Leuenberg speaks of "fellowship," not union, and to that end asserts that it "leaves intact the binding force of the confessions within the participating churches," meanwhile rejoicing over "the common mind reached on central matters" (37). Is such optimism actually in touch with reality? Union would be the natural outcome then, if actual consensus in faith and teaching had in fact been attained and the old differences were no longer valid. The purported "common understanding of the Gospel" (38), on which the church fellowship is to be based, is cancelled out by Leuenberg itself when it notes that among unsettled doctrinal differences there is the Law/Gospel distinction (39). This admission, plus the expressed need for future dialogues "to clear up doctrinal differences," like "hermeneutical understanding of Scripture, the questions of confession and church, baptismal practice, pastoral office and ordination," etc., would suggest to any participant for whom "the binding force of the confessions" is still intact that an adequate basis for fellowship, let alone unity, is still very much a dream. Altar and pulpit fellowship on such a basis could hardly claim to be grounded on actual consensus of teaching and belief, prompted by unity of spirit, and in line with the Reformation heritage, particularly *sola Scriptura*.

We are dealing with eternal verities of God, taught in His Holy Word, and responsible churchmanship would appear to leave no alternative than that of pursuing fellowship on the basis of genuine unity of faith, clearly expressed, as in the Book of Concord.

Part II.

A basic premise for "achieving church fellowship" rests on the claim that "the signatory churches are agreed in the understanding of the Gospel" (31). This refrain runs throughout the document (par. 1, 4, 6-12; 38, 41). Of the essence is the question, What precisely is the "gospel" concerning which such agreement is claimed? This is a concern pressed forth by the inherent contradiction in Leuenberg itself: namely, how can those who disagree on the Law/Gospel distinction (39) be in agreement on the Gospel? We readily grant that it may indeed be possible, by the very power of God's Word in Holy Scripture, that Christians in all the various communions cling in trusting faith to their Savior from sin, Jesus Christ, and to no other. But it is also true, as our discussions in Princeton evidenced, that such clarity does not always exist; witness, e.g., the accent on "doing the gospel." It is to be doubted, therefore, that a common understanding of the Gospel exists when a "confusion *inter legem et evangelium*" (FC, SD, V, 27) still obtains. This is an especially sensitive point. It was then, as our Confessions attest (cf. Apol. IV, 5; SA III, IV; FC (Epit.) V; FC (SD) V.), and it remains so now.

In general it may be granted that Leuenberg Part II (and Part III which belongs with it in substance) leaves the impression that a concerted effort was made, not only to speak evangelically, but to bring the Reformed position more closely in line with Lutheran teaching and terminology on given, crucial topics, e.g., Christ's salvatory work, the sacraments, and even predestination. (As regards the latter, e.g., see par. 25.) However, what is explained as the content of the Gospel (9) is a wholly inadequate summary of the redemptive, atoning, vicarious work of the Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Christ's work "as the Crucified and Risen One, who took upon him the judgment of God, and thereby made manifest the love of God to the sinner," (9b) is cast in such ambiguous terms that virtually anything, from the declaratory theory of the atonement to the acceptance theory—and others in between—is possible as interpretation. Surely there must be an awareness that much of European theology at this time, Lutheran and Reformed, moves with an aversion to the blood atonement and vicarious satisfaction for sins, that Christ bears, satisfies, placates the avenging wrath of God against sin and sinners. There is nothing in Leuenberg which supports in so many words the *fait accompli*, the objective fact, of Christ's vicarious atonement for the justification of sinners (forensic sense), a changed condition effected by Christ's propitiation, which exists even before faith comes into the picture. The forgiveness of sins—which is not even mentioned—although it is the exact equivalent and content of that act of God whereby He for Christ's sake declares the world innocent, acquitted, righteous, is something which faith, by

the power of the Holy Spirit, *accepts*, not something which faith *effects*! Berkouwer, Dutch Reformed dogmatician, is critical of fellow-Reformed Barth because he "relates reconciliation to faith," and so, like Brunner, sees ultimately a discontinuity with the universality of God's grace in Christ (cf. *Work of Christ*, 289).

This is the place likewise to note that the setting "in the midst of the world the beginning of a new humanity" (10) is a philosophical fiction begun by Barth (or perhaps rather by Feuerbach), fostered by Tillich in his *New Being*, and consummated in metaphysical speculation by Teilhard de Chardin through his *Omega Point*—all of it blatant anthropocentrism. In such theologizing there is no room for, nor need for, Christ being made a curse for us (Gal. 3, 13), since Christ merely represents the new, obedient, true man in the sense of a kind of "corporate personality," not the vicarious substitute whose sacrifice brought a once and for all, perfect offering for sin (Heb. 7,27; 10,14; 1 John 1, 7; 2,2; Rom. 3, 24.25).

A clear understanding of the Gospel is also vitally connected with the church's whole eschatological mission in this world. Leuenberg appears to be listening to another drum beat. Eternal salvation, with all its blessings, is considerably blurred by the doubtful eschatology of "the Coming One, who opens up for the world its future." Conceivably this could mean Christ in His second advent and return for judgment. But it sounds more like Ernst Bloch, or Moltmann perhaps, or even Garaudy, talking and "informing," or shaping, "Christian" eschatology. One wonders, from what is asserted in Leuenberg (14), what precisely the church's message to the world is to be? Since the subject-heading is "Justification as the Message of the Free Grace of God," one might expect something truly evangelical; instead the focus runs in the direction of "temporal justice and peace between individuals and peoples." It is beyond debate that these are highly desirable goals; but a political stress is here being introduced into the nature and meaning of the Gospel which is foreign to the NT, a serious commingling of Law and Gospel. Excellently well the Augsburg Confession (VI) notes that "faith is bound to bring forth good works," in fact, "that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will." In similar way the Formula of Concord sets forth the nature of these good works under the Third Use of the Law, in the article which follows close on the heels of Article V, where Law and Gospel are clearly set forth. Leuenberg, on the other hand, introduces a political angle which is not welcome to the NT, for works measured by "rational, objective, contemporary criteria," however noble they may appear, are not by that token of measurement the same as the Will and Commands of God.

Further, while we do not deny that the Gospel is the heart and core of the Holy Scripture's content, are the Scriptures only a "fundamental witness . . . through the word of apostle and prophet?" (Barth!) The whole issue of the objective, ontological nature of Scripture opens up here, the matter of its inspired, authoritative, dynamic power as the "Holy Spirit's lyre," one of the *larva Dei*, or masks of God, by which He reveals Himself, to use some of Luther's

favorite terms. Leuenberg appears to grant a validity beyond its deserts to the historical-critical method, and the various presuppositions that accompany this method, which have placed the Holy Scriptures under a devastating reductionist attack. While the Formula of Concord (Epit., intr., 7.8) clearly attested that "the Holy Scriptures alone remain the only judge, rule, and standard, according to which, as the only test-stone, all dogmas shall and must be discerned and judged" and that no other writings or findings are judges "as are the Holy Scriptures" in matters that pertain to the Christian, we live in a day when theology has denied that the Holy Scriptures are in fact the inspired revelation and Word of God. Because of the effect of the Semler-Reimarus-Bultmann, etc., pipeline, the Bible has been shoved to the side as the authoritative Word by which we have God's revelation and the Gospel. So, if uncritical acceptance of the historical-critical method (with all its sub-schools) belongs to the basis on which Leuenberg is grounded, there is further reason to doubt that there is "common understanding of the Gospel" among its supporters, whether on this side of the Atlantic or the other. Then the words, "common understanding of the Gospel," become but the fig leaf behind which sorely torn churches attempt to hide their shame. Then "differences" go beyond mere "style of theological thought and church life" and pierce the very heart of the Gospel itself.

Part III.

As regards the Sacraments, we can rejoice again over Leuenberg's attempt to highlight their significance in the faith and life of the churches (par. 13-16). But as presently worded, the document itself prompts the question of whether the *vis exhibitiva* and the *vis effectiva* of the Sacraments are really spelled out. What does the ambiguous statement, "Jesus Christ is present by the Holy Spirit," (13) really mean? It would appear from what is said concerning Baptism, "Jesus Christ bestows on us through his Word the forgiveness of sins and eternal life" and the renewal by the Holy Spirit, that a rather fine statement has been made in behalf of Baptism's power. Conspicuous by its absence, however, is any reference to infant baptism. This is a particularly troubling omission, in view of the growing tendency within Lutheran churches, even Catholic churches, to leave the need for infant baptism as an entirely optional thing for parents.

The nature and efficacy of Baptism and particularly the Lord's Supper as means of grace are stated in such general terms that the discerning reader will immediately be aware that several meanings can be read into the phrases, including those which have previously divided the church bodies on this whole issue. Particularly is this so for the Lord's Supper. As a result, Leuenberg is hardly an adequate statement on the issue of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament, at least not if past differences (and present) are born in mind, and assuming that Lutherans still intend to be Lutherans, and Reformed, Reformed. The Lutheran Confessions, from the Small Catechism through the Augsburg Confession to the Formula of Concord, plainly

assert what they hold to be the Scriptural teaching on the Lord's Supper, specifically that communicants (worthy or unworthy) receive in this Sacrament Christ's true, essential body and blood (v. Reformed teaching which consistently insists "that the true essential body and blood of Christ is absent" FC(SD) VII,2) in, with, and under the elements, bread and wine, as Christ instituted and promised by His Word, for the forgiveness of sins. Leuenberg, on the other hand, is designedly ambiguous, allowing either the Reformed spiritual, or symbolical, sense of real presence, or, conversely, the Lutheran interpretation. The very ambiguity, of course, favors and suggests the former! Need we repeat the caution that this is not the time for clever phrasing, but for face-on, earnest attention to the issue, as the text of Scripture prods and binds us? The Heidelberg Catechism came closer than most in this exercise of compromise-phrasing; but Lutherans understandably rejected it. Leuenberg, as it presently stands, can hope for no more! This is not a time for sentimental, emotional rhetoric which merely sobs, How can there be strife in connection with the love feast? but for asking, simply and basically, what is the nature and meaning of the Lord's Supper according to Christ's words of institution?

Closely tied in with the question of differences on the Lord's Supper, is the whole question of Christ's person, particularly *de duabus naturis in Christo* and the communication of attributes. The latter is not even entered into, in spite of the fact that it is so vital to a correct understanding of Christ's person as true God and true man. (Predestination likewise is insufficiently addressed, if all ambiguities, in the light of past differences, are to be eliminated.) The personal union of natures in Christ, divine and human, is something very dear, we know, to the heart of every true Christian, Reformed or Lutheran. It would be utterly naive, however, to believe and to say that "we can no longer apply the former censures" (23), on the strength, e.g., of a brief formula like "the total unity of the Person" as an adequate statement of the Scriptural teaching concerning the two natures in Christ. Behind that phrase, after all, there can still lie hidden the Reformed rejection of the true communion of natures and the communication of the divine attributes to the human nature of Christ (cf. Col. 2, 9; FC VIII; and Chemnitz' *De Duabus Naturis in Christo*.) Needless to say this would leave the whole important matter of the *enhypostasia* (the true Person of the Son of God in human flesh) in doubt, a question on which not only Lutherans divide from the Reformed, but from "Lutherans" themselves today, as a result of Bultmann's demythologizing.

Part IV.

"The Church, properly so called, is the congregation of saints who truly believe the Gospel of Christ" (Apol. VII & VIII; AC VII & VIII; SA III, XII; Large Catechism II, 47-49). To recognize that the Church, the Body of Christ, is to be found there where the marks of the Church are present, Word and Sacraments, has always been a characteristic of the Lutheran church and its Confessions. It has also taken seriously the injunctions of God's Holy Word towards

purity of teaching in the articles of faith, and has established altar and pulpit fellowship with other Christians when and wherever a genuine consensus in the articles of faith has been discovered. By the same token it has viewed fellowship without doctrinal consensus as unionism, a sinful and unethical charade, out of character with Scriptural injunction.

Accordingly, the mere assertion that by common declaration "church fellowship is achieved," (34) is not only premature, but wishful thinking, in view of the differences still remaining. Leuenberg errs, not in its zeal for structuring a platform for fellowship, but in declaring pulpit and altar fellowship between parties who lack an actual unity of faith and teaching. This was the mistake of the Arnoldshain Theses, also the abortive 1817 Union, as well as other efforts back to the 16th century. If in fact the Confessions are taken seriously (30), then it seems to be incumbent upon the heirs of those Confessions not to bury their differences but to bare them. Honest and frank confrontation is still the only route to genuine unity.

Without doubt the unity of the church on earth is a very good, God-pleasing goal for which we all must earnestly yearn, work and pray. Perhaps it is also true, as has often been claimed—by Leuenberg too (36)—that a united church would be a blessing which would do much, humanly speaking, to increase the church's effectiveness in the world as it preaches the Gospel to the unconverted and seeks to bring healing to the sick body of mankind also in other ways, physical, social, and economic. But does the Gospel really first then become credible? This appears to be a bit of incredibly near-sighted reading of the facts as promised by our Lord. The apostles went out with the Gospel into a hostile world, a world which always opposed the Gospel, then as now, for there is nothing in man's conscience which confirms its truth, as in the case of the Law. Men are repelled by the very implication that they are sick sinners in need of a Savior, specifically Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1, 18-23); and finally only the man who has been crushed by what Luther calls the "upper millstone," the Law, is ready for help from the "lower millstone," God's sweet Gospel.

Leuenberg, as a matter of fact, appears to misuse grossly the "*satis est*" of the Augsburg Confession, Article VII, thus joining a long parade of similar offenders, who have reached the conclusion that a simple, broad statement of agreement on "the Gospel" and "the right administration of the Sacraments" is a sufficient basis for fellowship. The Confessors were actually speaking of something else, as Apol. VII, 31, proves; namely, of "true, i.e., of spiritual unity, without which faith in the heart, or righteousness of heart before God cannot exist." Therefore, they add that "human rites" play no role here, nor "are they effects of the Holy Ghost." Further, they expound this spiritual unity to mean "that those are one harmonious church who believe in one Christ; who have one Gospel, one Spirit, one faith, the same Sacraments; and we are speaking, therefore" they say, "of spiritual unity." Mistakenly the Leuenberg conferees adapt what belongs to, builds, and constitutes the unity of the true Church of believers in Christ—"the righteousness of faith is what the kingdom

of Christ is" (Apol. VII, 45)—and conclude that these are minimal and sufficient grounds for fellowship among church bodies on earth, no matter how widely they may still differ on other fundamental articles of faith, which are then considered to be non-divisive. Such confusion can only augur further difficulty and division for the future. On the other hand, an actual consensus of belief and teaching would avail greatly towards genuine unity among the churches.

Part V.

Leuenberg shows remarkable restraint and sensitivity on matters that concern "regulations of church law," ordination, mergers, pluralism in liturgical, diaconal, and organizational practice and life. One gains the impression that these are spheres where great care must be exercised lest these very cherished, sacrosanct areas be trespassed; but, on the other hand, the differences in doctrinal matters and articles of faith are skirted by sweeping declarations of fellowship in spite of the cleavages still remaining. The Lutheran Confessions (e.g., AC VII) viewed matters of liturgy, practice, polity, etc., as of minimal importance, and usually not disruptive and destructive of unity within Christ's church, preferring to place the heavy foot or pedal on the doctrinal matters themselves, as taught clearly in God's Word, where liberty, therefore, was not an option.

By the same token it must be stated that the concept of ecumenicity addressed in paragraphs 46-52 hardly seems to accord with the unity of faith and ecumenical dimension in Christ's church on earth as taught in Holy Scripture (Eph. 4,3ff; 1 Cor. 1, 10; etc.), and as Confessional Lutheran theology has always understood it.

It is one of the ironies of 20th century theology, to be sure, that some cross-currents have developed, in defense of given articles of Christian belief, according to which Lutherans committed to their Confessional stance at times find themselves in unity of mind and heart and belief with, and closer to the evangelical Reformed than with some who bear the name Lutheran but who have been swept along with a Scripture-reducing, social-Gospel peddling kind of theologizing.

For times such as these, therefore, Leuenberg is not the answer, nor would any similar document, which like it is postulated on artful phrasing of disputed points and fellowship by compromise. The Lutheran Symbols were written for the same ecumenical purpose as the three ecumenical creeds of early Christendom: to unite the church on earth in the true faith with one voice and heart, and without equivocation. That is our task for today. Only such a basis can afford a platform for genuine unity and fellowship.

Editor's Note: This is probably the last of four issues on the Leuenberg Concord. The series began to indicate that Lutheran—Reformed fellowship on a world-wide basis was immanent. At the meeting attended by Dr. Klug, the Missouri Synod representatives were the holdouts on the Lutheran side against Lutheran—Reformed fellowship.