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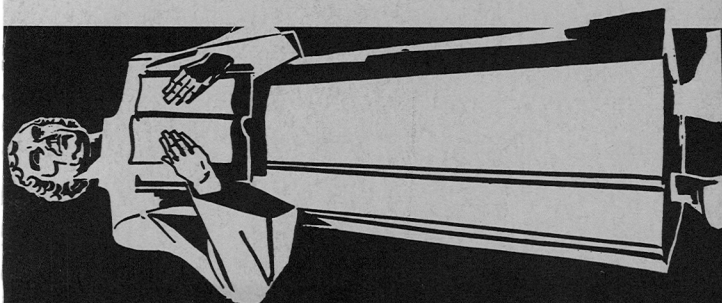
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the springfielder

VOL. XXXVI • NO. 2

SEPTEMBER, 1972



# The Theses of The Ratzeburg Conference to The "Leuenburg Concord"

Translation by The EDITOR

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Leuenburg Concord was prepared in 1971 in anticipation of fellowship between Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Europe. While enthusiasm for the ecumenical movement in the United States has been on the decline, the European document is gaining adherents in our country and is meeting with a favorable response in some circles. In May, confessional minded Lutherans from both the state and free churches met in northern Germany near the city of Luebeck and produced the following response.

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JUST AS CHRISTIANITY cannot settle its controversies by dividing into all sorts of sects, so it must not permit the truth of the Gospel to be sacrificed to forces demanding more fellowship among the churches.

The Leuenburg Concord attempts to prepare the way for a possible wider church fellowship between Lutheran and Reformed denominations. This task is accomplished not by making corrections that would make such a document acceptable, but by disposing with the normative quality of the Lutheran Confessions. Thus the document is not acceptable. Four points sum up the reasons for rejecting the Leuenburg Concord.

1. *The Leuenburg Concord falsifies the concept of the holy church.*
2. *The Leuenburg Concord annuls the validity of the Lutheran Confessions.*
3. *The Leuenburg Concord abridges the Gospel.*
4. *The Leuenburg Concord does away with a theology of the Sacraments.*

1. Disregarded is the Lutheran Confessions' principle claim that it speaks in the name and in the stead of the holy church. Replacing this claim to catholicity is an ecclesiastical scheme uniting regional and confessional denominations, whose only common basis is that they came into existence in the 16th century as a protest to the Roman Catholic Church. This does not fit into the Lutheran understanding of the church. In addition, this can cause new difficulties in our current relations with the Roman Catholic Church, not to mention other ecumenical consequences.

In general, the concept of the church in the Leuenburg Concord is quite different from that of the Lutheran Confessions. Consequently the establishment of denominational fellowship becomes a formality, opposed to the very essence of the church.

Under point 2 of the Leuenburg Concord, CA VII is cited in a way that the content of this article is lost. The *satis est* ("it is enough for the true unity of the church") becomes an absolute dictum without any consideration for the previous articles and the context.

The Leuenburg Concord offers an unclear definition of "denominational fellowship."

Thus, while point 2 gives the impression that the Lutheran concept of church unity is adopted, the discussion of denominational fellowship in points 29-36 give the impression of surrendering the Lutheran concept.

While the Leuenberg Concord wants to establish pulpit and altar fellowship by the mutual recognition of each church's ordination, it still wants to fall short of establishing a union, a position not unlike that of the Evangelical Church Union. This is of a new pattern for ecumenical activities. To single out the question of the clerical office and offices is really ecumenically anachronistic, especially since the current basic question still have to be answered.

2. Although the "Concord" does not want set aside the older confessions, the question of the hermeneutical function of the confessional writings cannot be avoided. The result is that the "Concord" attains the rank of an additional confession in addition to previous ones. We are left with only two meaningful possibilities:

a) Subscription to the Leuenberg Concord can only be interpreted as confession substituting the confessional vow originally made at ordination.

b) If subscription to the Leuenberg Concord stands along side the original ordination vows to the older confessions, then we are faced with the problem of double standards of truth.

Regardless of which option is chosen, the Lutheran Church has disqualified itself as a participant in ecumenical discussions, as she has cast doubts concerning the unique validity of her own confessions. In addition, the breadth of interpretation allowed by the Leuenberg Concord becomes an additional burden in discussions with the Reformed Churches. It is still inconclusive now whether the Leuenberg Concord will lead to a new confession or to further divisions, as happened, for example in the Lutheran-Reformed unions of the 19th century.

The Lutheran Churches in Germany also have to face the prospect of antagonizing other Lutheran Churches.

3. The Leuenberg Concord differs from the Lutheran Confessions in its concept of the Gospel. Basic for Lutheran Confessional theology is the distinction between Law and Gospel. The Leuenberg Concord leaves unresolved the issue of the Law and the Gospel for later doctrinal discussion. Besides, the Lutheran and Reformed look at justification differently.

Basic to the doctrine of justification is the confession that Christ is true God and true man in the sense of "a felicitous change of places between our sin and His righteousness," a thought coming from the christological teaching of the ancient church.

The Leuenberg Concord hardly speaks correctly a) about the hiddenness of God, because it is silent about God's wrath and the miracle of His mercy; b) about man because it does not see him clearly under God's wrath and as one who has received God's grace for the sake of Christ; c) On the matter of God's deed of justification, which the "Concord" describes as the "message of justification, a phrase open to all sorts of secular misinterpretations.

Quite significant is the absence of the praise of God and the mission in the description of the Christian's service (points 10 and 11) especially if God's act of justification is reduced to only a message of justification.

In the matter of eschatology, the Leuenberg Concord is unclear and unsatisfactory. In connection with a deficiently constructed eschatology, the proper development of justification becomes just as impossible as the proper distinction between Law and Gospel.

Neglecting eschatology and the doctrine of the Law and the Gospel leads to neglecting the concept of the two kingdoms, so basic in providing a contemporary political ethic. No reason is given for the absence of any discussion in this area. The Leuenberg Concord casts doubt on its own credibility because of the very fact it demands a program of Christian service in the world.

4. If the deed of justification is reduced to a message of justification, and the presence is merely understood as a presence in the Holy Spirit (point 13), this must necessarily result in some very significant changes in doctrine of the sacraments. Thus there is no distinction between a general concept of the word of God and a particular concept of the word of God in connection with the sacraments. With this understanding, baptism is not in any way necessary for salvation. The Leuenberg Concord contradicts the Lutheran Confessions by reducing the concept of baptism to a general word (*das verbalisierte Taufverständnis*). Thus the ecumenical basis provided by baptism is lost.

In a similar way the doctrine of the Lord's Supper is reduced to a general word theology (*verbalisierte Abendmahlsverständnis*), since it fails to recognize the significance of Christ's presence in the elements. All attempts in explaining the Real Presence remain unresolved.

The Leuenberg Concord does use the method of the Arnoldshain Thesis which paralleled the eating and drinking of the bread and wine with the reception of body and blood of Christ (point 19).

The diametrically opposed positions of the Reformation churches in the matter of the Lord's Supper are glossed over in points 15 and 18 and thus severe doubts are placed on the credibility of the Leuenberg Concord. (Lutheran Theology in CA X and Reformed Theology in the Heidelberg Catechism, 86, are both not given consideration, according to a note of the writers of this document.)

The use of the words "with bread and wine" (point 18b) cast doubt upon the Lutheran doctrine that unbelievers actually eat the body and blood of Christ, the *manducatio indignorum*. So also in point 19a "The Act of Eating and Drinking," another interpretation besides an oral eating and drinking, the *manducatio oralis*, is permitted.

Also ambivalent is the concentration on WITH, in place of IN, WITH, and UNDER in points 15 and 18.

Summing up the entire document, the following points should be made.

- a) Generally the text of the "Concord" avoids any appeal to the Holy Scriptures.

- b) Generally the text of the "Concord" does not orient itself to the doctrine of the Trinity and thus forsakes the universal confessional testimony of the churches.
- c) The text of the "Concord" uses the antiquated formulas of liberal theology. This method cites the confessional concepts but without further explication. On the other hand it adopts quite uncritically modern thought forms of a legalistically oriented activism or an uninterpreted eschatology. The classical errors of an outmoded Protestantism are repeated by describing the Protestant churches as common products of the Reformation revolt (point 4).

Completely unharmonious factors are combined in point 5, "Different Presuppositions for the Church Today." Also unclear are which principles of 16th century theology are viable for today. Thus the present theological ecclesiastical situation becomes the real norm. The confessional concept of the church stands in opposition to this type of thinking.

- d) It has been adequately demonstrated that the text of the "Concord" can be interpreted differently by either side. This of course stands at odds with the very purpose of an ecclesiastical agreement. This contradiction is built into the "Concord." On the one hand it is not supposed to be a new confession, and yet on the other hand it claims a common understanding of the Gospel (points 6-16). The phrase "the common understanding of the Gospel" has all the marks of a confession. Still unresolved is the question of the contradictions caused by those confessions already in force which condemn opposing opinions. Unlike other recent documents of a similar vein, e.g. Barmen Declaration, Arnoldshain Theses, the Leuenberg Concord does not condemn opposing points of view. Refusal to take a stand on false doctrine will confuse congregations and hamper the work of pastoral care. Thus the document does not point out which specific denunciations of false doctrine are supposedly no longer divisive. Testing anything theologically becomes impossible.
- e) There is no legitimate reason for surrendering the classical concepts of unity involved in denominational fellowship, communion fellowship, and confessional fellowship. The Leuenberg Concord is hardly serviceable. While intensive discussions between Roman Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran theologian are taking place, the "Concord" reverses gears and opts in the name of ecumenical concern for an unbelievable method of subtraction in theology, based only on a bare minimum of agreement. Such a loss in theological substance cannot really make it ecumenically responsible. The "Concord" is premature because it fails to be clear and explicit, a necessary quality for a document opening a new horizon. The immensity of such a task is not really grasped by the document. Under these circumstances, a con-

denatory verdict is not in order. The current pluralistic situation does not allow the writing of a document which is safe from all manipulations. The current secular movement prevent coming to terms with the document in the time limitations set forth (March 1, 1973).

The goal of total denominational fellowship stands before us. Only a clear doctrinal agreements will foster that goal.

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