

REPORT OF THE LUTHERAN/REFORMED JOINT COMMITTEE

Geneva, 28-29 January, 1970

The Lutheran/Reformed Joint Committee met in Geneva at the Hotel La Résidence, 11, route de Florissant, January 28-29, 1970, following the decisions of the Executive Committee of the LWF and the Executive Committee of the WARC (minute of the Ex. Com., LWF, 1968, page 22, minute of the Ex. Com., WARC, 1968, page 14).

The members of the Lutheran/Reformed Joint Committee as appointed by their respective Executive Committees are :

Lutherans : Bischof Dr. Friedrich Hübner,
Germany ;
Prof. Dr. Gérard Siegwalt,
France ;
Bischof Dr. A. Wantula,
Poland ;
Prof. Theodore Tappert,
USA.

Reformed : President Dr. James I. McCord,
USA ;
Rev. Dr. Jacques Rossel,
Switzerland ;
Rev. Dr. J. Staedtke,
Germany ;
Dr. V. Kejr,
CSSR.

All the members were present throughout, except President Dr. James I. McCord who became ill after the first session. The Rev. Dr. André Appel, General Secretary LWF and the Rev. Dr. Marcel Pradervand, General Secretary WARC, were present for the final session. Staff members in attendance were : the Rev. Dr. Harding Meyer, Department of Theology LWF and the Rev. Richmond Smith, Department of Theology WARC.

The terms of reference for the Lutheran/Reformed Joint Committee were :

- a) the continuation of the theological dialogue
- b) the practical implications of a theological consensus
- c) the role of the two world organizations in the life of the younger Churches
- d) the interpretation of 'a closer working relationship'.

(Minute of the Executive Existence Committee of the LWF 1968, page 22 -

Minute of the Executive Committee of the WARC 1968, p. 14.)

After lengthy and careful discussion, following oral reports on the Lutheran/Reformed situation in Germany, France, Europe, North America and in the life of the younger Churches overseas, the Committee gave unanimous approval to the following findings as representative of the common mind of the Group :

A. THE CONTINUATION OF THE DIALOGUE

The Committee unanimously expressed its conviction that committed dialogue must continue looking towards the unity of these two great branches of the church of the Reformation. We therefore endorse the opinion already stated by the 1968 *ad hoc* Lutheran/Reformed Evaluating Committee that such a dialogue be encouraged and coordinated by the two World Bodies.

The Joint Committee believes that this dialogue should be continually seen not in abstraction from but in the context of the wider stream of the wholeness of the Christian Church. Nevertheless the Joint Committee registers its belief that a special historical and theological relationship exists between the Lutheran and the Reformed, and therefore these conversations have a specific relevance within the oikumene. We quote with approval the statement made : 'The differences which separate the Lutheran and the Reformed from one another turn out to be opposition within a common position which is not to be found in the same way between other churches' (Auf dem Weg I, IV). At the same time we must be aware that the specific search for unity between Lutheran and Reformed involves implications for other

bi-lateral dialogues and for other confessional families and we must be continually sensitive to these wider relationships. To that end both the Lutheran and Reformed partners are required to be open to correction in their conversations with each other and such openness should now and in the future be more evident than hitherto.

With regard to the present continuing Lutheran/Reformed conversations on the European level the Joint Committee was privileged to examine the *draft* report of the European Lutheran/Reformed group, Leuenberg, 1969, which is yet to be finalized. The Joint Committee warmly welcomes the general approach in this document and in particular registers its approval for the methodological proposals for the establishment of organic unity (Kirchengemeinschaft). The following extract is quoted with the qualification that it is still subject to review and modification by the Leuenberg group in their final report :

The Creation of Church Fellowship

The model of a 'concord' is suggested as an appropriate form whereby church fellowship between the Lutheran and Reformed churches of Europe can be implemented. This should be approved by an assembly of authorized representatives from all Lutheran and Reformed and United Churches in Europe.

It should embrace :

1. A statement which expresses substantially agreement in the understanding of the centre of the Gospel with reference to the formation of the confessions of the Reformation and in this way adopt an interpretative position to the existent confessions and doctrinal statements of both churches.
2. A statement that the doctrinal condemnations which refer to the other church and are expressed in the confessional writings of both churches have been rendered obsolete by theological development and that the remaining differences in ecclesiastical doctrine, order and style of life possess no church-separating significance.
3. The statement of full pulpit and altar fellowship.

The Lutheran/Reformed Joint Committee recommends to the Executive Committees of the LWF and the WARC that this approach could well be commended by the two world bodies

to whatever groups of member churches are engaged in Lutheran/Reformed conversations elsewhere in the world as a possible *modus operandi*.

The Joint Committee further recommends that a closer relationship be encouraged between the European Lutheran/Reformed conversations and the Lutheran/Reformed conversations in North America so that both areas may benefit from a mutual exchange of opinion.

B. THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A THEOLOGICAL CONSENSUS

The Lutheran/Reformed Joint Committee dealt with the question of the practical implications of a theological consensus. Short oral reports were given on the position of the Lutheran/Reformed conversations and negotiations being conducted in the USA and Europe. They evidenced how, despite the mutually recognized principle that agreement on the proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments is sufficient for church unity, the transition from this theological consensus to the accomplishment of church fellowship often encounters, for various reasons, considerable difficulties.

The Committee was of the conviction that in the present situation it is essential to pay increased attention to the question of the reasons for and the overcoming of this hiatus between theological consensus and its practical realization within the Church.

Several suggestions for the solution of these difficulties seemed to present themselves :

1. On reaching a theological consensus it is perhaps not always possible to establish immediately organic unity. Therefore, the given possibilities for interim steps towards complete church unity should be used, e.g. the intensifying of collaboration in the religious, missionary, diaconal and social fields ; arrangements concerning mutual recognition of the sacraments, agreements regarding intercommunion, pulpit and altar fellowship.

2. If despite an achieved theological agreement it is desired to renew or continue discussions, care should be taken that the themes of these discussions are not one-sidedly theological-doctrinal, nor oriented towards the doubtful aim of a doctrinal consensus that is worked out in detail.

It is necessary to look into and clarify exactly those problems which in part resist a purely theological dogmatic grasp and

which for that reason hinder the practical realization of a theological consensus : various interpretations of the function and binding force of common church confessions and doctrinal decisions, differences in forms of worship, piety, ethos, church order, church structure, etc. Such conversations should however never call in question the fact that for both churches, agreement in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments is sufficient for church fellowship and demands church fellowship.

3. In the event of a continuation of conversations care must be taken in the composition of the discussion group. Where the problem is no longer exclusively the establishment of a doctrinal consensus but more the practical ecclesiastical realization of the consensus, it is important to include above all pastors, laymen and church-leaders who are commissioned by their church and who by their position and function in the church can implement the theological consensus in the life and activity of the churches.

4. Finally, on attaining theological agreement it will be important to strengthen the encounter on regional and local levels, in order to create there the reality and forms of a living church fellowship.

A survey of existing Lutheran/Reformed relations in various countries has at the same time shown that the problem does not always lie in the realization of an established doctrinal consensus. Frequently there is also – conversely – an existing church fellowship, which has not been sufficiently interpreted and considered from a theological perspective. Although such forms of effective and at the same time proleptic church fellowship are to be welcomed in principle, it is still of the greatest importance that they be theologically tested and substantiated so that they become genuine and stable.

C. THE ROLE OF THE TWO WORLD ORGANIZATIONS IN THE LIFE OF THE YOUNGER CHURCHES

The Lutheran/Reformed Joint Committee considered the specific remit of the role of the two world organizations in the life of the younger churches. Our discussion was set in the context of the clamant needs of the younger churches in their missionary and ecumenical situations and with particular reference to local and regional church union negotiations.

The Joint Committee registered its positive concern for this question by stressing the need to have adequate representation of the younger churches in the Lutheran/Reformed Joint Committee and recommends accordingly to the Executive Committees of the LWF and the WARC.

It was noted that in the past considerable criticism of the allegedly negative role of the World Confessional Families (WCF) with regard to the church union question has been expressed by younger churches, in particular by the EACC. This in turn has produced a new awareness on the part of the WCF of the problems and situations of the younger churches involved in local and regional union negotiations.

The Joint Committee is convinced that both the LWF and the WARC should now seek to encourage in new ways their respective member churches to enter into fellowship and common action and conversation, looking towards union where they have not already done so.

The Joint Committee is fully aware of the very great variety of controversial questions confronting any member church moving into union negotiations. We note in particular that the emergence of any united church automatically raises such issues as – the identity of that church, its relationship to history in faith and in practice, the status of that church, and the question of nationalism and the church. We believe that the way forward lies through agreement in the proclamation of the gospel and therefore through agreement on common statements of faith ; and we further recognize that on the basis of such common statements of faith a variety of theological positions is possible and meaningful. This development must of necessity involve continuity of the theological heritage and of the missionary development of the whole church. We believe that this theological relationship points to a continuing relationship between any union church, having Lutheran or Reformed traditions and the LWF and the WARC respectively, in the hope and faith that such unions as are effected locally and regionally ought to find expression on the wider international level, as an enrichment contributing towards the fullness of the one church.

We recognize that the continuing relationship of a union church with the WCF creates specific constitutional and practical difficulties for both the WCF and the member church concerned. We therefore recommend that both the LWF and the WARC should seek to find a positive solution for these same difficulties.

D. A CLOSER WORKING RELATIONSHIP

The Lutheran/Reformed Joint Committee finally dealt with the question of a 'closer working relationship' between the LWF and WARC. This was based on an oral introduction to this question by the two General Secretaries and with reference to a letter from the Chairmen of the European Lutheran/Reformed discussions which submitted suggestions for closer collaboration between the two world bodies.

The Committee would like to make the following recommendations to the Executive Committee of the LWF and WARC.

1. In view of this year's Assemblies, the Committee requests the two Executive Committees to look for possibilities of providing for a closer working relationship between the LWF and WARC in the field of theology. Since many current theological problems facing our churches have no direct reference to confessional differences, attention should always be paid in tackling individual problems as to whether and to what extent joint treatment is possible or advisable.

2. The Committee requests the Executive Committees to present the questions and conclusions of the Lutheran/Reformed conversations to this year's Assemblies in a form commensurate with their importance.

It further suggests that in future the LWF and WARC work together when planning their Assemblies.

3. A survey of the present relationships between Reformed and Lutheran Churches has shown that certain tensions may arise in connection with the foundation and oversight of overseas congregations.

The Committee therefore recommends that the two Executive Committees keep this problem in view and that in the event of any such tension the LWF and WARC will be informed so that from case to case they may combine to look for a solution.

The Committee also recommends that the LWF and WARC seek fundamental agreement with regard to the foundation and care of overseas congregations.

4. The Committee considers it important that the LWF and WARC discuss the mutual understanding of their ecumenical commitment and their role in the further development of the

ecumenical movement. In this connexion two questions are specially relevant :

- a) How can the proclamation of the gospel be safeguarded as the central commission of the Church and be properly implemented in the present situation ?
- b) What is the attitude of the LWF and WARC to the challenge presented to the churches by the Fourth Assembly of the WCC, 'to work towards the time when a truly universal Council will once again speak for all Christians and show the way into the future ?'

It was resolved to submit the foregoing findings to the respective Executive Committees of the LWF and of the WARC.

If the Executive Committees should instruct the Lutheran/Reformed Joint Committee to meet again in 1971, it is recommended that the meeting be in Geneva, beginning Wednesday 2.00 p.m. February 3, with departure after breakfast on Saturday, February 6, 1971.

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