

Leuenberger Texte 2

**Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft
Gemeinschaft reformatorischer Kirchen in Europa**

**Sakramente, Amt, Ordination
*Sacraments, Ministry, Ordination***

Verlag Otto Lembeck | Frankfurt am Main

Leuenberger Texte
Heft 2

Zur Lehre und Praxis der Taufe
On the Doctrine and Practice of Baptism

Zur Lehre und Praxis des Abendmahls
On the Doctrine and Practice of the Lord's Supper

Amt - Ämter - Dienste - Ordination (Neuendettelsau-Thesen)
*Ministry - Ministries - Services - Ordination (Neuendettelsau
Theses)*

Thesen zur Amtsdiskussion heute (Tampere-Thesen)
Theses on the Current Discussion about Ministry (Tampere Theses)

Im Auftrag des Exekutivausschusses
für die Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft

herausgegeben von Wilhelm Hüffmeier

*By order of the Executive Committee
for the Leuenberg Church Fellowship*

Verlag Otto Lembeck | Frankfurt am Main

On the Doctrine and Practice of Baptism

**Result of the consultation at the 4th General Assembly
of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship,
Vienna-Lainz, 9 May 1994**

Resolution of the General Assembly of 9th May 1994:

The General Assembly accepts the findings resulting from the consultations of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship "On the Doctrine and Practice of Baptism" in its version of 9 May 1994 and requests of the churches of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship to receive this result of the doctrinal conversations.

(The original version of the text is available in German)

On the Doctrine and Practice of the Lord's Supper

**Result of the consultation at the 4th General Assembly
of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship,
Vienna-Lainz, 9 May 1994**

Resolution of the General Assembly of 9th May 1994:

The General Assembly accepts the findings resulting from the consultations of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship "On the Doctrine and Practice of the Lord's Supper" in its version of 9 May 1994 and requests of the churches of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship to receive this result of the doctrinal conversations.

(The original version of the text is available in German)

Ministry - Ministries - Services - Ordination (Neuendettelsau Theses)

Theses on the Consensus on the Question of „Ministry and Ordination“ between the Churches Participating in the Leuenberg Agreement (Neuendettelsau Theses 1982/1986)

Resolution of the General Assembly of 23rd March 1987:

The General Assembly accepts the Neuendettelsau Theses in its version of 1986. These theses are to serve as a basis and help for future ecumenical conversations. The consensus documented here ought not to be called into question in bilateral conversations with ecumenical partners of other denominations.

Theses on the Current Discussion about Ministry (Tampere Theses)

**A contribution of the Leuenberg churches
towards the ecumenical dialogue concerning
the current discussion about ministry**

Resolution of the General Assembly of 23rd March 1987:

The General Assembly receives the Tampere Theses in its version of 1986 as a helpful impulse for further work on joint contribution of the Leuenberg churches towards the ecumenical dialogue.

ON THE DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE OF BAPTISM

The Leuenberg Agreement (LA) formulated the common understanding of baptism as follows:

The fundamental witness to the Gospel is the testimony of the apostles and prophets in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It is the task of the Church to spread this Gospel by the spoken word in preaching, by individual counselling, and by Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In preaching, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Jesus is present through the Holy Spirit. Justification in Christ is thus imparted to men and in this way the Lord gathers his people. In doing so he employs various forms of ministry and service, as well as the witness of all those belonging to his people.

a) Baptism

Baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In Baptism Jesus Christ irrevocably receives man, fallen prey to sin and death, into his fellowship of salvation so that he may become a new creature. In the power of his Holy Spirit he calls him into his community and to a new life, to daily repentance and discipleship."

Proceeding from this understanding and in accordance with the mandate of the Agreement for doctrinal conversations, the South Europe Regional Group was engaged in questions of baptismal practice. This mandate was given in the Agreement in article 37 and was defined by the General Assembly at Driebergen, 1981. The following churches were represented in the South Europe Regional Group:

1. Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (since 1991 EKD)
2. Waldensian Church, Italy
3. Evangelical Church in Baden, FRG
4. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, FRG
5. Church of the Czech Brethren, Czech Republic
6. Evangelical Church in Germany, FRG
7. Evangelical Church of the A.C. in Austria
8. Evangelical Church of the Palatinate, FRG
9. Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, FRG
10. Evangelical Church of the A.C. in Romania
11. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Wurttemberg, FRG
12. Slovenian Lutheran Church in Slovenia
13. Synod of the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Bavaria, FRG
14. Lutheran Church in Hungary
15. Permanent Council of Lutheran and Reformed Churches in France
16. Reformed Christian Church in Croatia
17. Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia
18. Reformed Church in Hungary
19. Silesian Evangelical Church of the A.C. in the Czech Republic
20. Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches
21. Slovak Evangelical Christian Church of the A.C. in Yugoslavia
22. Slovak Evangelical Church of the A.C. in the Slovak Republic

The South Europe Regional Group met three times (1984-1986) for doctrinal conversations on the subject of "Reformation understanding of baptism and today's problems of baptismal practice" in Gallneukirchen. Basic questions of contemporary understanding of baptism were dealt with as well as differences in baptismal practice in the various churches and social contexts. The results of bilateral and multilateral conversations, especially the Lima Declarations on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (1982) were taken into account in the discussions.

The present revised text has its roots in the conclusions of the South Europe Regional Group in Gallneukirchen of 16 February 1986. The revised version had been worked out (6 February 1988) in accordance with proposals for amendment brought by Group 5 at the Strasbourg General Assembly (18-24 March 1987) and in view of the reactions from the Churches (1988-1992), was established by the Executive Committee on 28 October 1993, and presented to the 4th General Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. Doctrinal conversations have now led to the following consensus in theological understanding and on church practice.

I. ON THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

1. *Baptism as a Gift of God*

Baptism, performed with water in the name of the triune God, has its foundation in the reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ. In baptism, the act of reconciliation accomplished by Jesus Christ is expressly imparted and appropriated to each individual personally. In the power of the Holy Spirit, baptism is an effective sign of God's favour and promise.

Through his Holy Spirit, God awakens and preserves faith in those who have been baptised, and brings them into Christian fellowship. Baptism, administered in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is a call to become one of the people of God, whereby one is incorporated into the Body of Christ.

In baptism God promises and gives us forgiveness of sins, liberation from godless bondage and fallenness in sins, and the rebirth which makes a new life possible. Jesus Christ brings the baptised person into the reality of the kingdom of God which is now dawning and yet to come. The baptised person experiences in faith this liberating change of dominion, and accedes to it. This faith is lived out in a conversion - always needing to be renewed - to discipleship of Christ.

2. *Baptism as an Irrevocable and Unrepeatable Act*

God's act of salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ took place for us once for all. Baptism is a valid sign of the beginning of the new life. In baptism we are received irrevocably into God's fellowship of salvation. For this reason baptism is unrepeatable. In our baptism, which takes place just once, we recognize and trust the promise of faithfulness given to us by the triune God for our entire lives. We can always refer back to it. Again and again we can entrust ourselves to it.

3. *Baptism as the Beginning of the Journey with Jesus Christ*

Baptism has faith as basis and aim. Such faith is simultaneously a gift of God and a human response. In faith the person responds to God's gift with thanksgiving, joy and obedience. God's unconditional Yes to human beings in the visible sign of baptism has as its aim the baptised person's confession of faith - his or her freely spoken Yes.

Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*: "For anyone readily understands that (in sacrament) these two, promise and faith, are necessarily yoked together. No one can believe if there is no promise. If there is no faith, a promise is useless."

(cf. WA 6,517,8-10)

John Calvin: "The first point about baptism is the divine promise, which says (Mark 16:16): 'He who believes and is baptised shall ... 'Unless faith is present, or comes to life in baptism, the ceremony is of no avail; indeed it is a stumbling-block not only at the moment we receive baptism but for all our life thereafter.'"

(cf. Calvin, Institutes IV 14,1; 15,13)

The history of the baptised person with Jesus Christ is founded upon the salvation promised personally in baptism. In this continuing story, the baptised person stands under the acceptance and promise of the God who has called him/her by name and is with him/her. At the same time, baptism is the basis and beginning of a lifelong growth in the community of believers.

The Church baptises on the basis of the commandment and promise of its Lord. It is the baptised and baptising community of believers. By administering baptism, the Church commits itself to accompany the baptised on their journeys of faith through prayer, pastoral care and instruction. This acceptance and companionship by the community of believers encourages baptised persons to see and profess themselves as members of the Body of Christ.

4. *Baptism as a Call to Discipleship*

God's work in the act of baptism encompasses both justification and the renewal of our life. Thus baptism becomes the beginning and foundation of the lifelong process of sanctification.

The baptised person stands under both the promise and the claim of the word of God. Thus, a visibly exercised discipleship of witness and service should grow out of baptism in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism also has ethical consequences. It has to do not merely with personal sanctification, but also with the fact that Christians, as the redemptive community of the baptised, are called to take responsibility for the world, in common and irrespective of any frontiers which divide. Indeed, baptism challenges us to work for the fulfilment of the will of God in all areas of life. Baptism makes us capable of and ready for the service of love, which concerns itself with human need and seeks to eliminate its causes. At the present time, efforts toward justice and peace in the world belong especially to this task.

5. Baptism as the Mandatory Way to Our Salvation

In Jesus' death and resurrection, God broke the power of sin and evil and inaugurated new life in the granting of his righteousness and in the promise of the new creation. God extends salvation to us in the preaching of the word of God, in baptism and in the Lord's Supper. We speak of the necessity of baptism for salvation with the fact in mind that the preaching of the word of God, baptism and the Lord's Supper are the ways in which God desires to encounter us, meet our need, and free us from the power of evil. This does not exclude the fact that God also has other ways of reaching human beings, since he is not constrained in his loving freedom. We ourselves, however, are commanded to hold to those means to which God bound himself in the Gospels and which he proffers us.

II. INFANT BAPTISM AND ADULT BAPTISM

The basic model of all New Testament discourse is missionary baptism. In our churches infant baptism (suckling baptism included) is the regular practice. According to our present theological understanding, nonetheless, the one baptism shows itself to be of equal value in infant and in adult baptism. In supporting infant baptism, the faith-preceding "sola gratia" is more strongly stressed. In supporting adult baptism, the close connection between "sola gratia" and "sola fide" is more strongly emphasized. Both forms of baptism presuppose the preaching of the word of God and the readiness to attend to it all through one's life. In an increasingly secularized society both infant and adult baptism take on ever more strongly the nature of a confession of faith.

The following are to be listed as arguments in favour of infant baptism:

- the preventient redemptive action of God, of which baptism is a visible sign,
- the desire of the parents to have their child received into God's covenant with his people and thereby place the child under the lordship of Christ,
- the coherence of the history of faith whose beginning comes from God in baptism,
- faith as a gift of the Holy Spirit, regardless of one's age.

The following are to be listed as arguments for adult baptism:

- faith, which is the aim of God's promise given at baptism, is personally confessed,
- consciously experiencing one's own baptism can have a strengthening effect and add a sense of commitment for the baptised person as well as for the entire congregation.

In both child and adult baptism, God's promise of grace always precedes the human response. With trust in the validity of God's promise of grace, our churches affirm the common practice of infant baptism. This practice, furthermore, takes seriously the well-founded desire of churches and families to have their children accepted into the sheltering communion with God from the very start. This demands that we take seriously the close connection between faith and baptism by giving greater attention to the responsibilities of baptism. Under the current circumstances in which the usual practice of child baptism is no longer taken for granted in some places, adult baptism receives an increased significance from missionary (evangelistic) points of view and calls for a renewed attention of congregations.

III. BAPTISM, MEMBERSHIP AND APOSTOLATE

1. *Baptism and Membership*

In baptism "Jesus Christ irrevocably receives human beings, fallen prey to sin and death, into his fellowship of salvation" (LA 14). Thus baptism results in being incorporated into the community of believers (*congregatio sanctorum et vere credentium*). Baptism establishes and seals alliance to the universal and apostolic Church (*ecclesia catholica et apostolica*). This is made concrete by membership in one single congregation and church (*ecclesia particularis*).

"Our common baptism is thus a basic bond of unity (Eph. 4:3-6) and accordingly "a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship" (Lima-Baptism No. 6).

2. *Baptism and Apostolate*

The Church lives from the creative and salvific presence of the Holy Spirit, in which Jesus Christ as Lord is always giving himself anew to his congregation in the proclamation of the Word, in baptism and in the Lord's Supper, thus gathering, protecting and upholding his Church. For this reason the Church is called and sent forth as the "people of God" to bear witness to the Gospel to all people in word and in deed, and to invite them to open themselves to the dawning of the kingdom of God and to become members of the body of Christ. Participation in the missionary task of the Church (apostolate) is founded upon baptism. Each member of the body of Christ is called and enabled to give witness to his/her faith and to deliver the Gospel message to the world. In fulfilling this task the Holy Spirit employs many different talents and bestows manifold special gifts. All these gifts and talents are coordinated with one another through the Holy Spirit and should serve to promote the one service of reconciliation (cf. II Cor. 5:18 f).

3. *Baptism and the Priesthood of all Believers*

The "priesthood of all believers" has its foundation in baptism: "*... all Christians truly belong to the religious class ... For baptism, gospel, and faith alone make men religious, and create a Christian people. ... The fact is that our baptism consecrates us all without exception, and makes us all priests, as Peter (cf. I Peter 2:9) says: 'You are a royal priesthood and a kingdom of priests' "* (M. Luther, *To the Christian Aristocracy ...*, WA 6, 407, 13 ff; cf. also WA 6, 564, 11-12).

This priesthood of all the baptised places upon all members the responsibility for the Church's mission. The task of the ordained ministry (continual and public proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments) does not discharge the congregation from the responsibility inherent in the priesthood of all the baptised. Rather, the Church's responsibility for witness and service in preaching, pastoral care and diaconal ministries should be attended to through the cooperation of those called to leadership with all other members of the Church. It is also the task of the ordained ministry to equip the baptised for service and mission through preaching and sacramental ministry.

4. *Baptism and Admission to the Lord's Supper*

Baptism inaugurates one's participation in Holy Communion as the feast of those who belong to Christ through faith and baptism. Participation in Holy Communion in churches of the Reformation has as its prerequisite instruction in the basic doctrine of the faith and the Sacraments. In efforts to enable baptised children to take part in Holy Communion before their confirmation, it is necessary that the children have an appropriate understanding of what happens in the Supper.

5. *Baptism and Resignation of Membership*

Termination of church membership does not repeal a person's baptism. For this reason the church has an ongoing responsibility for the pastoral care even of those who left the community of the Church.

IV. ON BAPTISMAL PRACTICE

1. *"Juridical Aspect" of Baptism*

When the Holy Scripture speaks of God's gift of redemption with words and examples from juridical terminology (i.e. grace, justification, et al.), it is intended to show how serious God is in his dealings

with us and how binding this is for us. The juridical terminology expresses the fact that God's promise establishes a new relationship. Such figurative language should not, however, be transposed directly into the formal legal concepts of our current political reality. Such expressions are to be interpreted more carefully so that the original theological dynamics are retained.

In cases where baptismal regulations lead to legal claims, their pastoral aim must be kept in mind. It is in accordance with the distinctive style of church law, that in the interpretation of its rules the principle of equity (*Epikeia*) be observed. The recognition of good tradition within congregations and the possibility for reasonable exceptions (dispensations) are also among the basic principles of interpretation. Finally, a degree of freedom of interpretation should be left intact in those cases where an over-hasty judicial decision would have a hindering effect on spiritual development. This is not to recommend yielding in those cases where the church must find the courage to say No (a No which is encompassed within God's enduring Yes). But there must always be room in church law for the evidence of the love of Christ.

2. Ordering of the Baptismal Service

Because the baptised person is called through baptism into the fellowship of believers, baptism should be celebrated during a congregational service. The churches should exchange with one another liturgies of baptism as well as sermon outlines for baptisms. Particular emphasis should be placed on demonstrating the declarative power of the symbol. The high status of baptism should be affirmed by a celebratory formulation of the worship service. Formulation of the specific baptismal liturgy and baptismal preaching require careful attention. The pre-baptism interview with the parents - and, when possible, with the godparents - is indispensable.

3. Baptismal Teaching

More attention should be paid in the church's preaching to teaching on baptism. There is a need for thorough-going explanation of the meaning of baptism and for aids which help people become aware of and reaffirm their own baptism (e.g. the celebration of Easter Eve). "Followup" instruction does not by any means end with a course for 14-year-old confirmands. Letters to godparents, seminars for parents of confirmands, weekends for the congregation and retreats for elders are examples of programmes necessary to give adults practice in expressing their faith.

Adult catechisms in both Roman Catholic and Protestant spheres combine these endeavours. We must seek in the everyday life of the parish, for example in the church adult education, for ways and means in which today, in the tradition of New Testament paraenesis, we can guide adult Christians to live their lives on the basis of their baptism. It is worth noting that in charismatic movements people are evidencing the wish to live in a manner conscious of their baptism and to confess a personal faith. According to the interpretation of the Reformation this can in no way occur through re-baptism, but instead will have its place in the congregation in the form of reaffirmation of baptism and public testimony.

4. Baptism and Confirmation

As to the essence of confirmation, there exists no uniform comprehension concerning its theological basis. This is further evident in the fact that service books present a varied choice of baptismal liturgies and questions to confirmands. The confirmation instruction of a person not yet baptised should focus on his or her baptism. A person who is baptised after receiving instruction does not need to be confirmed as well.

Confirmation is, for example, not only to be understood as a mutual affirmation of baptism nor as the consummation of the liturgy of baptism but there are also the idea of a blessing and sending-out which builds upon baptism; a festive conclusion of formal catechesis and a rite of passage in an established church situation. The traditional role of confirmation as admittance to Holy Communion has become looser since it has actually become possible in various churches for non-confirmed children to take part in the sacrament accompanied by the parents. There are no overwhelming theological arguments in favour of postponing admission to communion until confirmation instruction is complete. The relationship between baptism, confirmation and admission to communion must be discussed further.

5. Postponement of Baptism

The postponement of baptism is an action of the church which has to be regulated by the recognised church rules of conduct:

a) The church will, for pastoral reasons, acknowledge parents' conscientious scruples against the baptism of their child at the time provided by the church's rules of conduct and temporarily postpone the baptism.

b) In cases where, according to human insight, the person applying for baptism will not recognize that God's promise of grace in baptism has faith as its aim and where, in the case of an infant baptism, the Christian upbringing of the child to be baptised cannot be expected to occur, the minister and presbytery (elders' meeting) can postpone the baptism anticipated. For reasons of pastoral care a definitive refusal ought not to be given but a postponement of baptism should be offered along with further discussion

6. Rejection of Baptism

A categorical refusal of baptism calls into question the understanding of baptism as the mandatory road to salvation. This challenges the church, in its evangelistic proclamation to explain the meaning and significance of baptism.

7. The Dedication and Blessing of Children

The desire for a "child-blessing" and "dedication" may, depending on the intention of the parents, be a manifestation of the view that a special emphasis should be put on the aspect of baptism as an affirmation of faith. When, however, such "child-blessing" and "dedication" carry with them a devaluation of baptism and of that element of God's promise it contains, it should be refused.

In particular, a "dedication" or "child-blessing" in a form of an "act similar to baptism" is in no way permissible because:

- the child-blessing can be understood to be a sacrament-like substitute, and
- common baptismal practice and the reciprocal recognition of baptism form a bond of unity in ecumenical dialogue; this unity of practice and unanimity among the churches cannot lightly be put at risk.

Children can, however, at the wish of their parents, be mentioned by name for intercessory prayer in congregational worship.

IN ALL OF OUR DELIBERATIONS, WE WANT TO BE LED BY THE WORDS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL:

"BY BAPTISM WE WERE BURIED WITH HIM, AND LAY DEAD, IN ORDER THAT, AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD IN THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, SO ALSO WE MIGHT SET OUR FEET UPON THE NEW PATH OF LIFE." (Rome 6:4)

Members of the South Europe Regional Group during the period of 1984 - 1986

D. Dr. Johannes Hanselmann D. D. (Chairman), Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, FRG
Dr. Hans-Rudolf Bek, Pastor
Evangelical Church in Baden, FRG
Dr. Andrej Beredi, Bishop
Slovak Evangelical Church of the A. C. in Yugoslavia
Michal Bihary, university lecturer
Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia
Hans-Heinrich Bornkamm, Dean
Evangelical Church in Baden, FRG
Gino Conte, Pastor
Waldensian Church, Italy
Dr. Johannes Dantine, University Professor, Oberkirchenrat
Evangelical Church of the A.C. in Austria
Dr. Vladimir L. Deutsch, Senior and Dean
Protestant Church in SR Croatia / Theol. Faculty
D. Dr. Hans Helmut Eßer, Professor
University of Münster – Chair for Reformed Theology, FRG
Dr. Pavel Filipi, Professor
Church of the Czech Brethren

Martin Girsberger, Theol. Collaborator
 Swiss Protestant Federation
 Dr. Alasdair Heron, Professor
 University of Erlangen – Chair for Reformed Theology, FRG
 Imre Hódosy, Bishop
 Reformed Church in Yugoslavia
 Michal Hromanik, Bishop's delegate
 Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia
 Dr. Kalman Huszti, Professor
 Reformed Church in Hungary
 Dr. Hartmut Jetter, Oberkirchenrat
 Evangelical Lutheran Church of Württemberg, FRG
 Ludvik Josar, Pastor
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Slovakia
 Dr. Friedrich Kalb, Oberkirchenrat (Senior Church Official)
 Evangelical Church in Bavaria, FRG
 Vili Kercmar, Pastor
 Silesian Evangelical Church of the A.C. in Czechoslovakia
 Dr. Vladislav Kiedron, Bischof
 Silesian Evangelical Church of the A.C. in Czechoslovakia
 D. Dieter Knall, Bishop
 Evangelical Church of the A. C. in Austria
 Dieter Kuller, Pastor
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, FRG
 Dr. Herbert Lindner, Pastor
 Evangelical Church in Germany
 Olaf Lingner, OKR
 Evangelical Church in Germany
 Dr. Dr. Wenzel Lohff, Professor
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, FRG
 D. Dr. Ján Michalko, Generalbishop and Professor
 Slovak Evangelical Christian Church of the A.C. in Czechoslovakia
 Gottfried Müller, Pastor
 Evangelical Church of the Palatinate, FRG
 Dr. Peter Neuner, Professor
 Catholic Faculty of the University of Passau, FRG
 Dr. Wilhelm Neuser, Professor
 University of Münster - Church History and Comparative Study of Confessions
 Wessel Nuyken, Oberkirchenrat (Senior Church Official)
 Evangelical Church in Germany - Church Office
 Antoine Pfeiffer, Pastor
 Eglise réformée d'Alsace et de Lorraine
 Helmut Roser, Senior
 Evangelical Church of the A. C. in Austria
 Klaus Schacht, Pastor
 Evangelical Church of the A.C. in Austria
 Dr. Gerhard Schullerus, Pastor
 Evangelical Church of the A.C. in Romania
 Dr. Janos Selmeczi, Professor
 Lutheran Church in Hungary
 Dr. Dr. Albert Stein, Professor & Dean
 Ev. theol. Faculty of the University of Vienna
 Evangelical Church of the H. C. in Austria
 Dr. Gerhard Strauß, Oberkirchenrat i. R.
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, FRG
 Dr. Joachim Track, Professor
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, FRG
 Dr. Jan Vencovsky, Pastor
 Church of the Czech Brethren

Pierre Vonaesch, Theol. Secretary
Swiss Protestant Federation
Dr. Georg Vischer, Pastor
Swiss Protestant Federation
Hartmut Wenzel, Pastor, Church President
Evangelical Reformed Church in Bavaria, FRG
Martin Weyerstall, Pastor und Secretary
to the Coordinating Committee of the Leuenberg Doctrinal Conversations
Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, FRG
Dr. Eberhard Winkler, Professor
Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR

ON THE DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

In the Leuenberg Agreement (LA), the participating churches have described their mutual understanding of preaching, baptism and the Lord's Supper in the following words:

"The fundamental witness to the Gospel comes through the word of apostles and prophets in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The Church has the task of spreading this Gospel both by word of mouth in preaching and individual counselling and also through Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Through preaching, Baptism and the Lord's Supper Jesus Christ is present by the Holy Spirit. Thus is justification in Christ communicated to men and thus does the Lord gather his people." (LA 13)

"In the Lord's Supper Jesus Christ, the Risen One, imparts himself in his body and blood, given in death for all, through his word of promise with the bread and wine. He assures us thereby of the forgiveness of sins and sets us free for a new life of faith. He allows us to experience anew the fact that we are members of his body. He strengthens us for service to humankind.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we proclaim the death of Christ through which God has reconciled the world to himself. We confess the presence of the Risen Lord in our midst. Rejoicing that the Lord has come to us, we wait for his glory yet to be." (LA 15 & 16)

In view of traditional differences between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches about the doctrine of the Lord's Supper the Churches have declared:

"In the Lord's Supper the risen Jesus Christ imparts himself in his body and blood, given up for all, through his word of promise with bread and wine. He thus gives himself unreservedly to all who receive the bread and wine; faith receives the Lord's Supper for salvation, unfaith for judgment.

We cannot separate communion with Jesus Christ in his body and blood from the act of eating and drinking. To be concerned about the manner of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper in abstraction from this act is to run the risk of obscuring the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

Where such a consensus exists between the churches, the condemnations pronounced by the Reformation confessions are inapplicable to the doctrinal position of these churches." (LA 18-20)

In accordance with the commission of the Leuenberg Agreement to 'continuing doctrinal conversations' (LA 37) - with the goal of deepening our common understanding of the Gospel and constantly making it relevant to the present day - the South Europe Regional Group has concerned itself with questions relating to the doctrine and practice of the Lord's Supper. The themes and formulations were chosen for four reasons:

1. Recent exegetical insights as well as bilateral and multilateral ecumenical dialogues (cf. "The Lord's Meal", "Convergent Declarations on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry"), have led to a deeper and richer understanding of the sacrament. The manifold dimensions of the Lord's Supper (e. g. the ecumenical, diaconal, socio-ethical and missionary dimensions) have been newly recognised and reflected upon. These insights gained from theological dialogues ought to be critically received and made fruitful for a common protestant understanding of the Lord's Supper.

2. With respect to the practice of the Lord's Supper a variety of changes have taken place in Churches in many different ways: increased frequency of celebration of and participation in the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Supper in the regular Sunday service, and new forms of celebrating the Lord's Supper. Fresh emphasis has been attached to the following aspects of the Lord's Supper: the Lord's Supper as a visible sign of fellowship, and as a meal of eschatological joy and hope. This raises questions about the relationship of these newly assessed aspects to the traditionally dominant ones of the Lord's Supper (e.g. the Lord's Supper as the offer of forgiveness of sins, and the relation of the Lord's Supper to confession of sins). The same applies to the appropriate forms of celebration in their potential variety and necessary uniformity.

3. New questions, or old questions emerging in new forms, arise in ecumenical encounters and in the process of the change and secularisation of life in different social contexts; for example, the question of admission to the Lord's Supper (invitation of members of other Churches, children and the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Supper and baptism). This leads to questions relating to the connection between the Lord's Supper and Church membership, the Lord's Supper and confessional allegiance, the missionary aspect of the Lord's Supper, and practice appropriate to the context and faithful to the gospel.

4. Especially in the regional group - transcending the differences between Lutherans and the Reformed - it has become visible how various ecclesiastical moulds and devotional practices as well as the manifold challenges encountered amidst various situations and social conditions have done their part in determining the doctrine and practice of the Lord's Supper. That is exactly why in this regional group it seemed important and enriching to devote particular attention to questions regarding the doctrine and practice of the Lord's Supper.

The present text resulting from consultations cannot and would not wish to treat the doctrine and practice of the Lord's Supper in an exhaustive manner. The intention is rather to present several fundamental statements for the present situation which underlie the understanding of the Lord's Supper and suggest a common way of approaching the pending questions of its practice. Open to new questions and insights, yet protective of existing devotional practice, the variety in the understanding and form of the Lord's Supper is to be exhibited, and that which is common, which is given and entrusted to all of us, is to be set out.

The findings of the consultations resulted from a process stretching over many years. The South Europe Regional Group met three times for doctrinal conversations on the theme "The Relationship of the Doctrine, Practice and Fellowship of the Lord's Supper" in Budapest (1989) and in Gallneukirchen in Austria (1988 & 1990). During these doctrinal conversations each participating church introduced its own practice of the Lord's Supper and current developments and questions relating to the Lord's Supper. Common ground and different emphases in theory and practice of the Lord's Supper in different churches and social contexts were discussed and placed in the context of fundamental theological insights both in tradition and in the present, especially in the context of recent exegetical insights and the results of bilateral and multilateral ecumenical dialogues. What proved to be important, fruitful and encouraging was the fact that the doctrinal conversations were integrated into the fellowship of the Lord's Supper which was shared by the participants.

As to the use of the German language: the present text, as is also the case with the Leuenberg Agreement, uses the word "Abendmahl" [literally 'evening meal' but translated here as 'Lord's Supper']. The "Last Supper" might be the nearest English equivalent to 'Abendmahl']. This concept has imprinted itself in the Protestant Churches. It refers to the last meal of Jesus with his disciples, the most important root of the Lord's Supper. Of course this description runs the risk of being misunderstood as belonging merely to past history or of conveying little meaning to people today. That is why it should be made clear that the Supper concerns our Lord Jesus Christ. He is its origin and centre. That is what the designation "Herrenmahl" [literally "the Supper of the Lord"] (I Cor 11:20) is intended to express. The concept "Eucharist" (= thanksgiving; I Cor 11:23) points to the fact that our first response to God's loving care is gratitude. For this reason it is helpful to explain this wider use of language and to explain its meaning to congregations.

It is also instructive to be reminded of the language practice in other Reformation churches. Thus in the Church of the Czech Brethren the expression "Supper with the Lord" is used. In the Hungarian-speaking and Slovak region the word "Lord's Evening Meal" is common, in the Slovak Lutheran and Reformed Churches "Meal of the Lord", and among the Waldensians "Holy Meal". The Silesia Evangelical Church of the A.C. speaks of the Lord's Supper only in the context of confession of sins as "Confession of sin and the Holy Supper".

The Executive Committee received the findings of the consultations on 2nd February 1991 and sent the text to the Churches participating in the Leuenberg Agreement along with the request for their official comments. The resultant text of the consultations of the South Europe Regional Group was revised on the basis of their comments, established by the Executive Committee on 29th October 1993 and presented to the General Assembly of Leuenberg Church Fellowship, which adopted it in the present version.

The doctrinal discussions have led to the following agreement in the theological understanding and Church practice of the Lord's Supper.

FIRST PART : THE DOCTRINE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

I. The Institution and Foundation of the Lord's Supper

1. Our churches celebrate the Lord's Supper upon the command and promise of Jesus Christ. In the Lord's Supper Jesus Christ acts by inviting us to his table and giving himself. According to the understanding of the Reformation Churches, the Lord's Supper is a "bequest (foundation)" of Jesus Christ.

The traditional conception is based on the fact that the institution of the Lord's Supper was effected through Christ "on the night when he was betrayed". More recent historical research - proceeding in accordance with the variance in the NT accounts of the institution (I Cor. 11:23-26; Mt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20) has raised far-reaching questions (the actual words of institution, the date of the inauguration, the connection with the Passover meal et al.) Whatever the result of the historical research dealing with each of these questions may be, historically, the Lord's Supper is incontestably founded upon the proclamation and life of Jesus and his way to the cross.

The inauguration of the Lord's Supper has its historical basis in the last meal of Jesus with his disciples. The radius of the foundation and meaning (in the context of the history of salvation) of the Lord's Supper stretches from the redemptive action of God to Israel (Passover meal), the table fellowship of Jesus with sinners, the experience presence of the risen one by the disciples and his community today, unto the fellowship of the eschatological feast.

2. Accepting this understanding of its inauguration, the celebration of the Lord's Supper has a threefold ground:

It rests in the bestowal of Jesus Christ, in his service to others unto death and in the present experience of our risen Lord.

It rests in the history of God the Father with humankind, in which God liberates the sinner from distress and guilt, meeting him/her with his forgiveness and love, granting fellowship and opening a future under the Word.

It rests in the presence of the Holy Spirit, who gives us faith, leads us into fellowship with Jesus Christ and one another, and liberates and empowers us to witness and service in the world through following Jesus Christ.

II. The Meaning of the Lord's Supper

A. The Lord's Supper as Promise and Gift

The Church lives under the promise and in the certainty that Jesus Christ acts in word and sacrament as the present Lord through the Holy Spirit. For this reason, it never ceases to plead for His presence. In his Supper, Jesus Christ inaugurates the fellowship beyond all divisions and strengthens us on the way in the expectation of the kingdom of God.

1. The meaning of the Lord's Supper is not to be grasped in **a single** concept. Out of the abundance of meanings, the following are of special importance for us:

a) In the Lord's Supper Jesus Christ gives himself to us in his body and blood by means of bread and wine. He meets us in the promise of forgiveness of sins and of reconciliation. He wishes to have fellowship with us. Thus in faith we receive Christ himself (christological aspect).

b) In the Lord's Supper, through preaching and praise, there occurs the remembrance and appropriation of the reconciliatory act in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. With the eating of bread and the drinking of wine we become partakers of the unique sacrifice of Jesus Christ in his body and blood given up for all of us (real presence). So we are made part of the action of reconciliation (soteriological aspect).

c) In the Lord's Supper we celebrate the dawn of the kingdom of God in the hope of a final renewal of creation. The Lord's Supper is thus an event of new covenant and a prophetic sign of the universal salvific will of God and of the future Lordship, in which God will be all in all.

In this way the Lord's Supper is a feast of joy in the midst of sorrow, a feast of forgiveness in the midst of all guilt, a feast of fellowship in the midst of all division (eschatological aspect).

d) In the Lord's Supper the Church becomes visible as communion. At the same time each eucharistic celebration is the sign, remembrance and challenge of the fact that the received gift stands in the communion of all believers and in the solidarity with the world to which God's redemptive will is addressed (ecclesiological aspect).

2. In the Lord's Supper nothing else is given to us than in preaching by spoken words: the whole gospel. But we receive it in another manner: With bread and wine, the act of reconciliation, complete in Jesus Christ, is personally presented and appropriated to each and every individual in the power of the Holy Spirit. Promise and gift of salvation occur in the form of the elements and the institution of offering and receiving, of eating and drinking. The sharing of bread and wine, and the fellowship of the table of the Lord become visible signs of unity with Christ and with one another.

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper word and gift, preaching and act belong together. There must be the Word which clearly marks the event, announces the promise, awakens faith, maintains freedom, and enables justification. This is required at the same time also of the gift, of action, and of the act of fellowship as visible signs. The offering of the sacrament is tightly bound to the proclamation of the Word.

3. For the sake of the public proclamation of the Word and of the specific character of the Lord's Supper as a sign of the visible church unity, the orderly conducted celebration of the Lord's Supper is bound to explicit commission through the Church. (cf. Augsburg Confession XIV)

B. Receiving the Lord's Supper

1. The old - and also much used in the Protestant Churches - designation of the Lord's Supper as Eucharist (Thanksgiving) points to the fact that the Lord's Supper ought to contain thanks and praise of the triune God as response to the gift which we receive. Out of this praise and thanks grow the new life and conduct into which Jesus Christ has liberated us.

2. In the Lord's Supper Jesus Christ grants us the forgiveness of sins. Thus he liberates and commits us in the Lord's Supper to live out of the power of his forgiveness, to forgive one another and to let others partake of the joy of guilt forgiven.

3. In the Supper the Lord serves us and strengthens us upon our way. So as he comforts us in our fears and doubts, giving us fresh courage and fresh power, and thus, as those sent for service in the world, we can and should set up right others, comfort, encourage, help them and speak on their behalf.

4. In the Lord's Supper the righteous one takes care of the unrighteous, the free of the captives, the high one of the lowly. So we should also let those in needs of us share what we have received.

5. In the Lord's Supper Jesus Christ offers us reconciliation and fellowship. By doing so, he challenges us to constantly seek after appropriate relationships in social, political and economic life. In fellowship in Christ all divisive differences of origin, race, sex, class and nation are overcome. For this reason we ourselves are unable to accept the various unjust conditions and manifold divisions in our society and the world.

6. The table of the Lord's Supper is the table of one Lord, thus the Lord's Supper being a sign of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. That's why the refusal of eucharistic communion is a painful reminder of the division of Christian Churches and, at the same time, a challenge to overcome this division. The eucharistic hospitality is one step toward it.

C. Invitation to the Lord's Supper

In the Lord's Supper Jesus Christ liberates us to new life. He is the ground of faith, because, in encountering him, we must become people of trust and of freedom who constantly experience a new beginning. He is the ground of love, because the commitment of God's love makes each become in his own way worth loving and therefore able to be loved. He is the ground of a hope, which sustains

us in trials and tribulations, which in patience never gives up, and which in a holy 'restlessness' never acquiesces in injustice. Therefore, in the Lord's Supper, Christ invites the whole church to fellowship with him and with one another time and again.

1. According to the order of our Churches baptism is the presupposition for admission to the Lord's Supper. This principle stems from the tradition of most of our churches and from their understanding of the relationship between baptism, the Lord's Supper and the community. Though the New Testament does not make a specific point of the fact that baptism and the Lord's Supper belong together, yet it is obvious that the desire for baptism is the first response to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:4, 8:36), while the feast of the Lord's Supper takes place in the community constituted by baptism (Acts 2:42). Incorporation into the 'Body of Christ' (I Cor. 12:13) happens in baptism. Through baptism comes the vocation to new life by participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3f), while in the Lord's Supper the community is brought ever anew into fellowship with the Lord, maintained and guarded in faith (I Cor. 10:14ff). Therefore it is provided that the Lord's Supper, unlike baptism, is to be repeated (I Cor. 11:26).

2. Through urbanisation and secularisation as well as the widespread loss of enrolment for the Lord's Supper two problems present themselves today: It is no longer apparent who is baptised amongst the participants at the Lord's Supper. In this case two possibilities present themselves: A return to the practice of enrolling for the Lord's Supper or an indication that the invitation to the Lord's Supper is on condition of baptism and church membership, which then makes admission to the Lord's Supper the responsibility of the individual. This latter possibility appears to us today to be the more appropriate one.

3. On the other hand, there can arise, among those who seek to enter the Church, the desire to be able to participate in the Lord's Supper without prior baptism. It is our fundamental view that the reception into the fellowship of Jesus Christ through baptism opens the access to the table of the Lord. This wish should not be lightly dismissed, though. In exceptional cases and situations, decisions are to be made based on pastoral responsibility. At the same time it remains the unmistakable witness of the New Testament that the invitation of Jesus addressed to all is the call to binding discipleship and to a concrete confession. For this reason baptism and the Lord's Supper are inseparably united.

4. In the beginnings of the Reformation admission to the Lord's Supper was bound to one's understanding the sacrament (learning of the main points). Following the introduction of the confirmation, admission to the Lord's Supper, i. e. the first celebration of the Lord's Supper, was linked to the completion of confirmation instruction (the examination and the act of confirmation). As against this practice still widespread in our Churches, some changes have taken place: the first Lord's Supper is celebrated in not a few congregations during the period of confirmation instruction; the frequency of celebrations of the Lord's Supper and also family services with the celebration of the Lord's Supper raise the question of the participation of children who have been brought along; the Lord's Supper with children has in several churches been introduced.

5. In our churches the invitation to partake of the Lord's Supper is extended, with increasing frequency, to members of churches with which no inter-communion exists. This occurs above all in connection with the pastoral care of couples and families of mixed marriages. Our churches understand this invitation as a step toward overcoming division.

6. Whoever resigns from the fellowship of the Church excludes himself from participating in the Lord's Supper. Upon re-entry he or she turns back to the fellowship which partakes of the Lord's table.

SECOND PART: QUESTIONS OF PRACTICE

I. Basic Questions

1. Exegetical insights, ecumenical dialogue and encounter, as well as an understanding of the wholeness of human encountering have led in various churches to a renewed appreciation of the fellowship and joy of the Lord's Supper and its various dimensions, resulting in changes in the practice of the Lord's Supper. This is seen in the enlarged offer to celebrate the Lord's Supper and in an

increase of participants in it. The newly gained understanding of the Lord's Supper and the open invitation to the Lord's Supper are to be welcomed. Here essential aspects of the understanding of the Lord's Supper have been regained.

2. In our churches the Lord's Supper has always had to do in every form with the forgiveness of sins. This can be seen in the fundamental catechisms of our churches. This connection was a constantly distinctive feature of the Lord's Supper in the churches since the Reformation. But increasingly the idea arose out of it, that confession, repentance and the reception of forgiveness should be preconditions for participation in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Supper would be preceded by a preparatory service (or also other ordinances); attendance was obligatory. Thus there enters into the feast of joy at the same time a more dominant tendency towards harshness and gloom. This has made it difficult for many to attend the Lord's Supper.

On the other hand this change in practice also raises questions. Is it not the case that certain aspects (thorough preparation, test of worthiness, sincerity of approach to communion) which were central to the Reformation devoutness of the Lord's Supper have been lost, or are at least losing its significance? It is clearly noticeable also that the connection between confession, the forgiveness of sins and the Lord's Supper has been loosened, and confession as a separate form is being underplayed. This is regretted by not a few members of congregations. Our churches should retain, in each appropriate form of the celebration of the Lord's Supper, an opportunity for the congregational members personally to affirm and to be able to recognise their guilt and for forgiveness to be spoken of. But at the same time also the independent forms of confession and repentance must not be lost from the field of vision. Apart from the individual confession of sin which must not be bound to a liturgical order, elements can be inserted not only on days of penance, at weekend devotions and prayer meetings, but also on special occasions in the context of Sunday services which are up to these concerns.

3. The proclamation of the Word and the Lord's Supper belong together as two expressions of the gospel and they must not be played over against one another. In this sense we affirm the regaining of the practice of binding together preaching and the Lord's Supper at the Sunday service. It is important that the status of the sermon is protected and strengthened and that the Lord's Supper retains its character as offer.

4. Today the Lord's Supper is celebrated increasingly in fellowship groups or in connection with projects for congregational upbuilding. In understanding such celebrations of the Lord's Supper it is important to point out that the proper practice of the Lord's Supper should bear in mind the connection between the group and the congregation. The Lord's Supper belongs within the congregation and in the celebration of the Lord's Supper this solidarity and unity should become visible. Each member and each group of the congregation has a responsibility for the whole congregation, as the congregation for its part has an ecumenical responsibility.

5. The Lord's Supper being a feast shared commonly among God's people, those who are unable to visit congregations on account of illness or weakness shouldn't be excluded from it. By means of celebrating the Lord's Supper at home or at hospital, the fellowship with Christ and the affiliation to their churches are assured for the old and the ill.

6. Concerns about alcoholics and participating children have often led to celebrating the Lord's Supper in such a way that all participants partake of juice from unfermented grapes instead of wine. This practice has its limits, however, in view of the correspondence between symbol and the word of institution.

7. The question of the connection of the Lord's Supper and Church discipline must be thought through afresh. Certainly the Lord's Supper and Church discipline belong together on principle according to the understanding of the Reformers. It is nevertheless to be asked, according to what criteria such Church discipline today can be effected in a theologically appropriate and practically feasible manner. It ought to be examined further how Church discipline can be asserted based on the insight that in the Lord's Supper forgiveness of sins is offered and that Christ grants forgiveness to all those who ask for it.

II. Fundamental Elements of the Liturgy

1. The form of the liturgy of the Lord's Supper must correspond to the institution of the Lord's Supper (Augsburg Confession, art. X, XIII, XXIV). From it arise the following indisputable components for an evangelical celebration of the Lord's Supper:

- Words of institution (in the scriptural recording),
- Invitation,
- Offering of bread and wine,
- Prayer (The Lord's Prayer, if not already used at another point in the service of worship),
- Thanksgiving and
- Praise.

The proclamation of the salvation of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins are indissolubly bound to the Lord's Supper. Proceeding from these fundamental components there is a meaningful range in the variety of forms. But the following basic principles should be observed: The components of the institution must again be recognisable in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The congregation must not be over-extended by too many unexpected innovations. The level of flexibility should correspond with the level of freedom. A responsible form, which ties together the basic elements, is also an ecumenical requirement. Regaining the Lord's Supper for the Sunday service requires a renewed reflection on the form of the whole service.

2. The invocation of the Holy Spirit upon those gathered at the Lord's Supper and for the whole Church at the celebration of the Supper is certainly appropriate to the Reformation understanding of the Lord's Supper. It expresses the fact that the presence of the Lord "through the Holy Spirit" (LA 13) comes to us by his grace alone and also that the faith which receives the Lord is effected by his Spirit (Epiclesis).

3. In the inclusion of the eucharistic prayer (anamnesis) into the liturgy of the Lord's Supper, its original meaning is to be respected. Through its immediate connection with the words of institution (1 Cor. 11:24) the eucharistic prayer receives its liturgical meaning. It is the worshipful narration of the history of salvation, which makes clear the significance of the words of the institution. Through their connection with thanksgiving and praise they are guarded against being misunderstood as mere historical recitation.

4. Symbolic actions, adding to the indispensable components of the liturgy of the Lord's Supper, have their legitimacy in the concern to make the service more thoroughly experienced in all its dimensions. The exchange of the peace-greetings is for example a visible sign of the peace with God and of the peace with one another and of the fellowship which we experience in the Lord's Supper. This sort of action is also stimulated through ecumenical encounters and the richness and variety recognisable in it. But the limit of this expansion of symbolic actions lies where the simple and basic meaning of the Lord's Supper is no longer in speech and form.

III. The Order of Service - The Participation of the Congregation

1. The invitation to participate in the Lord's Supper must be applied carefully to context and tradition. The structure should correspond to the fellowship and joyful character of the Lord's Supper.

2. Human beings in their piety are deeply concerned with all questions relating to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. All changes should therefore be discussed within the congregation beforehand and clearly explained. The teaching sermon about communion is also helpful in this connection. New forms should only be introduced with the agreement of the congregation or their representatives. Furthermore such changes should be made intelligible for occasional participants and for visitors from other congregations.

3. In the arrangements for the distribution (processing forward, kneeling or standing in a circle, sitting at the table, distribution in seats) the form should correspond to the space available and the size of the eucharistic congregation; in particular the nature of the gift, of fellowship at one table and of receiving should be taken into consideration. Coming forward *can be* a clear expression of receiving and confession, and is therefore desirable.

4. At the distribution of bread and wine elders, assistants or other members of the congregation should take part as helpers at the Lord's Supper. This shows clearly the nature of the Lord's Supper as a celebration of the congregation. The helpers must be instructed in this task. Responsibility for the celebration of the Lord's Supper lies with those commissioned thereto by the church, i.e. those ordained for that purpose.

5. The retention of the common cup at the distribution of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper requires, under present circumstances, careful measures of hygiene. But this should not obstruct the nature of the celebration of the Lord's Supper as a complete fellowship of sisters and brothers. The use of individual cups together with a single dispensing chalice (and possibly the intinctio) should be considered in view of the actual wording of the words of institution and the strong symbolism of the chalice of fellowship which are to be taken into account.

6. Although according to protestant understanding the elements at the Lord's Supper undergo no transformation, yet attention is demanded for the special use of created gifts of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper as well as the ecumenical consideration of an appropriate dealing with the left-over elements.

7. Common meal times in the congregation (e.g. Agape) must be organised in such a way that the difference from the Meal of the Lord clearly remains.

FINAL REMARKS

For many centuries the Lord's Supper (Eucharist) has - also - been a sign of separation between the churches and confessions. With joy we recognise and experience within the participating churches of the Leuenberg Agreement how the communion in the Lord's Supper brings us together and keeps us together in all different challenges, situations and emphases in the understanding of the Lord's Supper.

The "model of oikoumene among churches of the Reformation" in the Leuenberg Agreement is a consensus reached in central matters, and is open for the variety of reconciled diversity. It has proved to be effective in our doctrinal conversations and in the common practice. It is a model of realised oikoumene, which makes new encounters and directions of common witness and service possible (LA 37). Encouraged by the experience and the gained understanding, we interpret the results of our conversations as an invitation to further conversations and ecumenical encounter. The recognised and realized fellowship under the word and in the celebration of the Lord's Supper for us is a sign of hope, and at the same time a challenge to seek dialogues and the fellowship within the oikoumene. By this we are confirmed to invite a secular world to faith, to partnership in the church and to the Lord's Supper as the announcement of forgiveness and as a feast of joy.

When we bless 'the cup of blessing', is it not a means of sharing in the blood of Christ?

When we break the bread, is it not a means of sharing in the body of Christ?

Because there is o n e loaf, we, many as we are, are one body; for it is o n e loaf of which we all partake.

(I Corinthians 10:16, 17)

and

For every time you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes.

(I Corinthians 11:26)

Members of the South Europe Regional Group during the period of 1988 - 1990

D. Dr. Johannes Hanselmann D. D., Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, FRG

Dr. Hans-Rudolf Bek, Pastor
Evangelical Church in Baden, FRG

Dr. Andrej Beredi, Bishop

Slovak Evangelical Church of the A. C. in Yugoslavia
 Michal Bihary, University Lecturer
 Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia
 Hans-Heinrich Bornkamm, Dean
 Evangelical Church in Baden, FRG
 Gino Conte, Pastor
 Waldensian Church, Italy
 Dr. Johannes Dantine, University Professor, Oberkirchenrat
 Evangelical Church of the A.C. in Austria
 D. Dr. Hans Helmut Eßer, Professor em.
 University of Münster – Chair for Reformed Theology
 Dr. Pavel Filipi, Professor
 Church of the Czech Brethren, Czech Republic
 Dr. Alasdair Heron, Professor
 University of Erlangen – Chair for Reformed Theology
 Imre Hódosy, Bishop
 Reformed Church in Yugoslavia
 Michal Hromanik, Pastor
 Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia
 Dr. Wilhelm Hüffmeier, Oberkirchenrat
 Secretary to the Leuenberg Doctrinal Conversations
 Dr. Kalman Huszti, Professor
 Reformed Church in Hungary
 Dr. Hartmut Jetter, Oberkirchenrat
 Evangelical Lutheran Church of Wurttemberg, FRG
 Ludvik Josar, Pastor
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Slovakia
 Dr. Vladislav Kiedron, Bischof
 Silesian Evangelical Church of the A.C. in the Czech Republic
 Dieter Kuller, Pfarrer
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria
 Dr. Dr. Wenzel Lohff, Professor
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, FRG
 D. Dr. Ján Michalko, Generalbishop and Professor (Dez. 1990 †)
 Slovak Evangelical Christian Church of the A.C. in Slovakia
 Gottfried Müller, Pastor
 Evangelical Church of the Palatinate, FRG
 Dr. Wilhelm Neuser, Professor
 University of Münster - Church History and Comparative Study of Confessions
 Klaus Schacht, Pastor
 Evangelical Church of the A.C. in Austria
 Dr. Gerhard Schullerus, Pastor
 Evangelical Church of the A.C. in Romania
 Dr. Manfred Seitz, Professor
 University of Erlangen - Pastoral Theology
 Dr. Janos Selmeczi, Professor
 Lutheran Church in Hungary
 Dr. Gerhard Strauß, Oberkirchenrat i. R.
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, FRG
 Dr. Joachim Track, Professor
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, FRG
 Dr. Jan Vencovsky, Pastor
 Church of the Czech Brethren, Czech Republic
 Dr. Georg Vischer
 Swiss Protestant Federation
 Hartmut Wenzel, Pastor, Church President
 Ev. Ref. Church (Synod of the Ev. Ref. Churches in Bavaria and Northwest Germany), FRG
 Martin Weyerstall, Pastor
 Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, FRG

Dr. Eberhard Winkler, Professor
Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR

Theses on the Consensus on the Question of "Ministry and Ordination" between the Churches Participating in the Leuenberg Agreement

(Neuendettelsau Theses 1982/1986)

1st set of theses: **MINISTRY**

1. The Leuenberg Agreement (LA) between Reformation churches of Europe sees the common understanding of the gospel as described in Parts II and III of the Agreement to be basic for the declaration of church fellowship (LA 29ff). The reciprocal granting of fellowship in the pulpit and the Lord's Supper includes the mutual recognition of ordination (LA 33). The churches participating in the Agreement have committed themselves to further theological work on questions of the ministry (LA 39).

2. Recent research and the agreed position of our churches affirm that it is not possible to establish from the New Testament one single obligatory church order and structure of the ministry. In the New Testament various congregational orders are found; development is also apparent within the New Testament. This gives the churches the freedom to grant reciprocal recognition to differing orders.

3. Apart from this general affirmation the Leuenberg churches were able to declare a broad agreement among themselves on the question of ministry, which has also been considered in the framework of ecumenical discussion (LA 49)

A) The Lutheran and Calvinist reformations have from the beginning stressed the priesthood of all believers (cf. I Peter 2:9). This is founded upon baptism and pertains to being a Christian as such. Luther can speak of the freedom of a Christian in faith, which includes the service of Christians in love, as a participation in the kingship and priesthood of Christ (WA 7:27f). Also the Heidelberg Catechism speaks of the participation of Christians in the threefold ministry of Christ (Heidelberg Catechism questions 31 and 32). In the New Testament (apart from Jewish priests) only Jesus Christ himself and thereafter all Christians are spoken of as priests. In that sense the church has a priestly character. Only in this context can we speak of ministry in the church.

B) The conception of the "Ministry" [Amt] does not occur in the New Testament. In its place the New Testament speaks of service and that as a multiplicity of services. According to Paul each Christian has received a gift so as to fulfil a service. Likewise within the recent ecumenical discussion talk is rightly addressed emphatically to the church's (and the Christian's) service. Service should be understood here not only as serving within the congregation but also as serving in the world. The Reformed tradition speaks from the start about a distinction between services and of a distinctive ministry; but the Lutheran churches also acknowledge de facto (especially since the 19th century) beyond the ordained ministry a plurality of forms of service. The relation of the ministry instituted by God to the ministries (services) of the church is variable. In which manner the church orders the ministries (services) given with the one ministry of reconciliation is entrusted to human responsibility, but presupposes a *vocatio externa* (lawful calling). This responsibility includes the relation of the services to the world.

C) The churches participating in the Leuenberg Agreement are agreed that among the many services there is a particular ministry [Dienst] for the word and the sacraments, which was there in the time of the formation of the New Testament and following that period was exercised by specific ministers [Amtsträgern] who were appointed in various forms. This particular ministry's task in the administration of Baptism and Lord's Supper is not yet unmistakably specified in the New Testament itself. The ministry as a particular service has its basis in God's reconciliation with the world through Christ. It is oriented to Christ as the word of reconciliation, which has to be preached to the world (2 Corinthians 5:18ff). The word reconciliation is *viva vox, praesentia spiritus, praedicatio* (living voice, presence of the Spirit, preaching). That means that the Holy Scripture primarily in the acts of preaching, hearing and speaking into concrete situations becomes the word of God. The event of the word of God includes hearing, keeping and witnessing. God's word therefore always occurs in relationships: God - human being, human being - human being. The sacraments testify and warrant this fellowship-creating reality of the word as a visible speaking (*verbum visibile*).

For this reason it is, according to Reformation understanding, the task of the particular ministry (or service) publicly to proclaim the service of Jesus Christ accomplished in the work of redemption which

brought the church into being and to articulate it (*ministerium verbi divini*) and thereby to equip the congregation for their service in the world.

In this connection the following criteria are valid:

- The word constitutes the ministry, not vice versa.
- The ministry serves word and faith.
- It is there to serve the justification of sinners, not the justification of the church nor the status quo.
- The ministry is connected with the apostolic continuity and unity of the church, its freedom and its love.

The church is neither founded upon the "Ministry" (the traditional hierarchical catholic misunderstanding) nor is the "Ministry" derived from the general priesthood nor established by the congregation itself "for the sake of order" (a widespread protestant misunderstanding). The particular ministry is established and given to the church by the Lord. (cf. Eph 4.11) The ministry does not stand above the church, but is a service of the church. The ministry consists in the public proclamation of the word and in the dispensation of the sacraments before the congregation and yet within the congregation, who exercise their functions of priesthood of all believers in prayer, personal witness and service.

D) In ecumenical discussion there is also increasing talk of a "service of episkopé". In the New Testament there is no clearly recognisable difference between presbyters and episcopoi. Certainly not all congregations had episcopoi. Nevertheless the "historic episcopate" did develop in the tradition. Also the Reformation churches acknowledge a service of reciprocal visits (Visitation) and of oversight (Episkopé).

In the Lutheran reformation a reform of the office of bishop was envisaged. At the present day most Lutheran churches have established an episcopal ministry which is exercised on its own or with other organs of church leadership. In the Reformed churches the "service of episkopé" is performed by the presbyteries and by the synods and can be exercised by individual presiding officers (moderators, church presidents, präses or others) in the name of the synods. There are also Reformed churches which have bishops. The churches of the Reformation are unanimous that they do not regard the churches as founded upon the office of bishop. They understand the "service of episkopé" exclusively as a service to the unity of the church, not as an office [Amt] over the church, but as a service [Dienst] in the church.

2nd series of theses: **ORDINATION**

1. In the New Testament there is no single form for the calling to a ministry (cf. Matthew 10; 28:18ff; John 20:21 etc.). The first letter to the Corinthians speaks about a plurality of services which are based on various gifts of grace (chapter 12). In the pastoral letter (I Timothy 4:14 and II Timothy 1:6 cf. Acts 6:6) the talk is about a more ordered conferring of a particular service, and that by "laying on hands", clearly following Old Testament precedents.

2. In the broader development the New Testament deposit was variously interpreted. What was later called "ordination" is interpreted in various ways: as a personal enabling, as authorisation, as an act of blessing or as calling. These conceptions are not mutually exclusive; they can overlap and be associated one with another in various ways.

3.1 According to Lutheran understanding the service of public proclamation and administration of sacraments derives from orderly calling (Augsburg Confession 14). This calling takes place in ordination. It is an action of God through the whole people of God: On God's behalf congregation and ordainer operate jointly. With the authorisation to proclaim the word and administer the sacraments the ordained receive the assurance of the Holy Spirit for his service; confirmation and intercession of the congregation sustain them.

3.2 Within the Reformed tradition ordination is primarily spoken of as ordination to the service of word and sacrament, which takes place in conjunction with the other services of leadership. Fundamentally the congregation as a whole has to fulfil the commission of the Lord of the church to take care that God's word is proclaimed and the sacraments administered.

Therefore Reformed congregations also ordain honorary preaching elders to the service of word and sacrament. At the same time it is an irrevocable rule that nobody in the Christian congregation should publicly serve word and sacrament without lawful calling. The orderly calling by the congregation is

publicly confirmed in the ordination. Along with ordained ministers, elders, teachers and deacons are called to the leadership of the congregation, and in some Reformed churches are also ordained.

4. The Lutheran churches, like the Reformed have held on to ordination, and they take the view that fundamentally each Christian through baptism is capable of the service of proclaiming the word and administering the sacraments. On this basis they understand ordination as lawful, public calling to the particular ministry of the church. This takes place through the congregation in God's name. They further understand ordination as an authorisation by God and commissioning by the congregation publicly to proclaim the word of God and administer the sacraments: the Holy Spirit's help is invoked for this service. Thus ordination is seen as an act of blessing.

5. Neither race nor gender can have decisive significance for the call to the service of public proclamation and administration of sacraments (Galatians 3:27f). Churches in which women are not yet ordained and in which women ministers are not allowed must ask themselves whether this historically conditioned practice corresponds to contemporary Reformation understanding of ministry and congregation.

6. In the Lutheran and Reformed churches ordination takes place in a service of worship. The act of ordination itself happens in prayer and laying on of hands. It is carried out by persons who are already in the service of public proclamation of the word and administration of the sacraments. It is possible for persons to take part in the act of blessing who are not in this service. The act of ordination in Lutheran churches is done by holders of an episcopal office (e.g. bishop or superintendent), in the Reformed churches it is conducted by superintendents or moderators of presbyteries.

7. Ordination is valid for the whole lifetime. The rights and duties accorded with ordination can be suspended, surrendered or withdrawn. They can also be resumed without being ordained anew.

8. Apostolic Succession [Sukzession] is understood in our churches as succeeding [Nachfolge] in the apostolic teaching and mission. This succeeding [Nachfolge] finds its expression in proclamation, teaching and church life. In this sense the continuity whereby the church ordains to the ministry [Dienst] of proclaiming the word and administering the sacraments pertains to this apostolic succession [Nachfolge].

9. Our churches distinguish between ordination and commissioning to other services, with or without laying on of hands. Ordination is a calling to service of proclaiming the word and administering the sacraments. Hence all should be ordained who are involved in this service of proclaiming the word and administering the sacraments even if they are occupied with a church function other than pastoral ministry to a congregation.

See the introduction for the development of this paper and the churches involved.

English translation of the authorized German original, 1992

Theses on the Current Discussion about Ministry (Tampere Theses, 1986)

Section I: On Defining the Meaning of Key Concepts

Thesis 1: Word - Church - Ministry

According to the common Reformation understanding, the church is constituted as 'Jesus Christ becomes present in her as Lord in word and sacrament through the Holy Spirit' (Barmen III) and creates faith. In conformity with Christ's institution there is a ministry pertaining to word and sacrament, the *ministerium verbi*, (Augsburg Confession V) which 'proclaims the gospel and dispenses the sacraments'. The Lutheran tradition understands this office more from the word which is the basis of the church: the Reformed tradition, by contrast, sees this office more as pertaining to the correct order of the church. The churches from both traditions which have signed or are participating in the Leuenberg Agreement concur that 'the ordained ministry' belongs to the being of the church. The churches which come from the Reformation emphasise, however, that the whole congregation and not just the ordained ministry have the responsibility for the proclamation of the word and for the right use of the sacraments. The ordained ministry in itself alone does not guarantee the true being of the church but remains subordinate to the word of God.

Thesis 2: General Priesthood - Ordained Ministry

The proclamation of the gospel and the offer of saving fellowship are entrusted to the congregation as a whole and to its individual members, who through baptism are called to witness to Christ and to serve one another and the world, and who through faith have a share in Christ's priestly office of intercession. In order to maintain constant and public proclamation of the gospel and to maintain correct doctrine, trained members of the congregation are specially chosen and ordained. As servants of the word they should also confront and comfort the congregation with the word of God and dispense the sacraments to them thus serving the unity of the congregation. Together with the diverse witness and various services of the congregation, they should represent it before the world. The ministry [Dienst] of the word - in the exercise of proclamation, as well as in instruction and pastoral care - always depends on the universal priesthood of the congregation and should serve it, as also the universal priesthood of the congregation and everyone baptised depends upon the special service of the proclamation of the word and the administration of the sacraments. Thus, according to Reformation understanding, the ordained office rests upon a particular commission of Christ and at the same time stands together with the whole congregation in his service under the word of God.

Thesis 3: The Service of Leadership (episkopé) - Ecumenical Perspectives

The task of leadership of the community also belongs to the service of the word. The Lutheran as well as the Reformed and United churches recognize pastoral care and episkopé as belonging to the ordained ministry, both in the individual congregation and also at a level (regional, and beyond that, national) above the congregation. Nevertheless, the churches which have arisen from the Reformation emphasise that the responsibility for the proclamation of the gospel is the obligation of the whole congregation, and that the leadership of the congregation is also exercised through other 'ministries' [Dienste] and does not only fall to the ordained ministry.

The Lutheran churches (especially in Scandinavia) put more stress on continuity with the historical office of bishop, whereas the Reformed churches are committed in principle to a presbyterial/ synodal order. Nonetheless, the churches participating in the Leuenberg Agreement concur in regarding the service of episkopé as a service of the word for the unity of the church, and that in all churches the non-ordained members of the congregation also participate in the leadership of the church. They intend in this way also to incorporate the personal, collegial and communal dimensions in their thinking about and approach to the ordained ministry.

Although the churches participating in the Leuenberg Agreement have come from their (historically conditioned) traditions with various structures of church leadership, they are nevertheless agreed that such differences in church structure do not impede a 'church fellowship' in the sense of pulpit and table fellowship. The reciprocal acknowledgement of ministry and ordination is not impeded so long as the question of church leadership remains subordinate to the sovereignty of the word. They also recognize that in wider ecumenical discussion they can and should learn from other, non- Reformation

churches, but they hold that no single historically-derived form of church leadership and ministerial structure should or can be laid down as a prior condition for fellowship and for mutual recognition. *(For the whole compare the first set of theses of Neuendettelsau)*

Section II: On the Theme "The Modern-day Ministry"

Thesis 4: The Service of Proclamation

The service of proclamation is entrusted to the whole congregation. It must bear witness to God's word and profess Christ's name. This testimony and witness takes place not only in spoken words but also, in its pluriformity, through the community and the service to Christ's body, his congregation and each Christian within it. Although the verbal witness has the inalienable task of speaking the name of God clearly and intelligibly and proclaiming his real presence, it is also imperative to live in obedience and service.

Still in this present age, the distinctive characteristic of the ministry consists in the service to God's Word - notwithstanding all the expectations put on the Church and her clergy in current societies. This service lies within the heritage of the prophets and apostles whose mission was to voice the life-creating word to the congregation. This word always concerns the promise of a new life and the call to conversion. God gives himself to us in his word and declares us as his own. God's word is a creative word which does not return to him empty but effects what he decided and performs the function of its mission. That is why the Church also lives on the strength of God's reviving word alone. Where, however, the word ceases to be issued, proclaimed, heard, believed and acted upon, the true Church no longer exists, but is merged into the world, well as she may speak and act.

The service of the word embraces also the service of the sacraments. The sacraments make visible the same gospel through which, as in the preaching of the living word of God, Christ himself is present in the church and the world. In preaching the word and administering the sacraments which together constitute the ministry, the reality of the Church as Christ's body is renewed, her shared life fortified and her apostolic mission perceived.

Thesis 5: Prophetic Word - Proclamation as Law and Gospel

The word, which the Church must proclaim, is always a prophetic word too. It permeates into the darkness and hidden corners of the heart like a ray of light and has a transforming and restoring power. It contradicts its listeners' interests, prejudices and outlooks upon life, and confronts them with the God who judges and revives. It presents to the world and the church, which make themselves dependent on other gods and authorities, the truth of the *one* God who revealed himself once and for all in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and promised a new heaven and a new earth where justice prevails. So this word is always both judgment and promise of salvation. It announces that nowhere else is there salvation and makes clear the abyss separating God and humanity from one another.

The judging and reviving word of God is not only directed to each individual but also refers to the world of different peoples and their actual history. Because God came to the world, the Church also has to go out into the world with her proclamation and confront various threats and conflicts with her message. In the course of our discussions over "the prophetic ministry" and "the mission of proclamation today" (compare thesis 7 below) we have experienced anew the considerably differing theological terminology of our two main traditions: the Lutherans speak rather of humane (reasonable) reflections in the light of the Christian faith, whereas the Reformed get instructions directly from hearing the proclamation of the gospel. However, we could have observed also a much more significant similarity to each other in the judgment of the content of proclamation and its present-day mission.

Thesis 6: General Priesthood and Parish Ministry: Crisis and Possibilities

These days a "crisis of the church's ministry" is repeatedly spoken of. This goes no doubt hand in hand with the profound social and psychological changes in the society in which the congregation and its priests find themselves. For this reason it ought not to be understood at once and without further reflection as a crisis of faith. Rather, there is both danger and promise in this changed situation - at any rate a challenge for the present-day ministry. On the one hand many traditional "guiding images"

are dismantled, while on the other hand new expectations are put on ministers who cannot be fulfilled entirely.

As Lutheran, Reformed and United churches, we have to acknowledge in penitence that the crisis results also from the fact that in the course of centuries the office-holders of the "ordained ministry" have not always understood their mission as service, exercising it rather as supremacy, and that they discouraged "lay people" or served them with morality instead of the gospel. In addition to this "hierarchical misunderstanding" there is also a danger of "enbourgeoisement" of the ministry in our churches. This can cause the blending of the "service to the word" and its authority (the authority of the word!) with a worldly understanding of the ministry, and this happens time and again. Occasionally a minister is equated with a church official whose authority is based on his academic background. It also comes to pass that he/she is considered merely a democratically elected "church employee" on the grounds of his/her bureaucratic functions in society.

The outer shape of the congregation and its services have always been characterised to a certain extent by the surrounding society. This was also the case with the early Church. The Church must always maintain the freedom to resist society for the sake of her service to the word. It is of particular importance to see to it that neither an inherited form of the church's ministry, which mirrors a bygone social structure, nor an uncritical adaptation to the surrounding society become the standard for the structure and the exercise of the functions of the church's ministry. A minister can no more defend today the earlier authority of "ministry" than he/she can or should rely only upon the greater authority of the social sciences (psychological and sociological). A minister is always dependent on his/her congregation and the collaboration with other ministries in the congregation. This dependency, however, in reality opposes the isolation of the minister. He is expected to do alone what is assigned in fact to the whole congregation. He has repeatedly to be the delegate of all and represent the Church in his person. This can lead to overstrain in his service.

The crisis of the ministry as observed nowadays is related to a crisis of the general priesthood of all believers. The church's office-holders share the responsibility for this because they did not recognize sufficiently the shared responsibility for the general priesthood. Christians misunderstand themselves as private persons with Christian interests, and do not feel their joint responsibility for the proclamation of the word, for worship, and for the up building and the growth of the congregation. So worship becomes a private act for each Christian. The Church as an institution sustains then a public profile without a body which in the long run becomes absurd. As the public profile of the congregation dwindles, that of a particular ministry grows. The minister alone has to represent the Church in his/her person. He/she has to be the minister for everything and everybody. What the congregation cannot or will not do any longer is left to the minister. (cf. Driebergen, set of theses IV, 2.1 and 2.2).

Churches of the Reformation in Europe, which are all in different ways marked by the decline of the national church and whose core congregations are confronted with the danger of withering at the root, are facing together the task of rediscovering the priesthood of all believers and giving it a renewed form. Overcoming the crisis in the ministry is in no way merely a question of greater vitalization and specialisation of the church's ministries. First the task arises as to how the congregation can be enabled to exercise the general priesthood: in the family and workplace as well as in common worship and education pertaining to worship. The worship of the congregation especially should express the joining together of the service of the word and the general priesthood.

Thesis 7: The Task of Proclamation Today

The ministry of proclamation and the congregation itself are both confronted with the reality of a secularized society and have their share in this reality to a large degree. At the same time the office-holders of the ministry and congregations as individuals within society are faced with massive problems and threats regarding world peace, the environment as well as scientific and technical developments which present humanity with new ethical problems. Although the Church and her proclamation cannot take up positions on all issues, we are agreed that the Christian faith, should it remain alive, and thus also the proclamation, must be related to the concrete reality of present-day people and to the problems with which they see themselves confronted - in work, in the family, in their relations to society and to the international community. If the word is to be heard as encouragement to a genuine freedom enabling life and action in the faith and as a genuine instruction in ethical and social behaviour, it must relate to the diverse experience and specialized knowledge of humankind today, to experience and knowledge which belong not only to the office-holders of the ministry of proclamation or to individual Christians alone but also in common with all parish members. At this

juncture some of us (especially from the Reformed tradition) speak of the "prophetic ministry of the Church" whereas others, largely Lutherans, take rather their concepts of law and gospel as their starting point. (cf. thesis 5). At the same time we are agreed that the true warning and guiding "word of the moment" can often be heard by the Church as a word spoken "from outside" by those not belonging to the congregation or even to the Church, and without any reference to God's word. The Church also needs the experience, knowledge and critique of these people because of their notable significance to the proclamation.

In situations marked by inhumanity and injustice, the Church must proclaim the truth which judges sins and promises forgiveness and transformation. In such situations the gospel answers the world, calling upon it to accept Christ as her Lord, to do his will, to reflect his glory and to rejoice over his freedom.

Nevertheless this negative and positive confrontation with the world is only *one* way by means of which the Church can answer the occurrences of the world. The resurrected Lord is also the creating Word through whom all things were made and the new being in whom the true human image is fulfilled and marked. For this reason the gospel is acceptance - not contradiction – of created life and human existence. Because the truth for the world becomes manifest in Jesus Christ, the Church celebrates in thankfulness and joy every event in the world which reflects this truth. In prayer, thanksgiving and sacrament the Church becomes united with everything in the creation that expresses the beauty of the creator. In service to her neighbour she recognizes her affiliation and connection to each human being because he or she is created in the image of God.

In certain contexts related to unbearable suffering and radical evil where that celebration is impossible, however, the Church would be dishonest and relying on "cheap grace" if she were to speak too hastily. From time to time Christians share the doubt and apprehension of the world and are able to stand honestly, only in silent solidarity with their neighbour. This sharing is in itself a witness: an expression of faith, hope and love. For in this way the good news is shown in practice that among us humans, that he never forsakes us nor allows life or death to separate us from him. Thus even the anonymous solidarity of the Church with the suffering of the world can proclaim trustfully the resurrection of the crucified and buried one, and point to the coming reign of the wounded lamb.

List of the churches involved

Evangelical-Lutheran National Church in Denmark
Reformed Synod in Denmark
Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland
Church of Norway
Church of Sweden
Church of Scotland
United Free Church of Scotland
Ev. Synod of the German Language in the United Kingdom
Church of Lippe
North- Elbian Evangelical Church
Evangelical Reformed Church in North- Western Germany
Alliance of Reformed Churches in the FRG
Union of Evangelical Reformed churches in the FRG
Evangelical Church in Germany
United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany
Federation of Evangelical churches in the GDR
Synod of Evangelical Churches of the Czech Brethren
Reformed Church in Hungary
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Schaumburg-Lippe