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# Helsinki — After One Year

## A Symposium

**EDITORIAL NOTE:** This evaluation of the Lutheran World Federation meeting at Helsinki, Finland, in the summer of 1963, represents the thinking of five official observers from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. They are Oliver R. Harms, President; Walter F. Wolbrecht, Executive Director; Alfred O. Fuerbringer, president of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis; J. A. O. Preus, president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Ill.; and Herbert J. A. Bouman, professor of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The opinions recorded in this article do not necessarily represent the united thinking of the group, but it would be correct to say that these seasoned observers of world Lutheranism would endorse most of the comments and observations. The editor is solely responsible for Part I.

### I. BACKGROUND TO HELSINKI

The contemporary movement toward a united world Lutheranism entered upon its present phase only 40 years ago. In 1923 at Eisenach, Germany, the Lutheran World Convention was organized after World War I to enable Lutherans to pool their spiritual and physical resources to salvage the battered remnants of many mission fields, to bring relief to millions of sufferers all over the world, and to enable the European Lutheran churches to get back on their feet. After 24 years and another world war the members of the LWC were sufficiently encouraged by past successes to take a long step toward a stronger union in the organization of the Lutheran World Federation at Lund, Sweden, in 1947. Subsequent meetings were held at Hannover, Germany, in 1952, and at Minneapolis, Minn., in 1957. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is the largest American Lutheran body which has

remained outside the membership of the LWF. A number of small Lutheran groups have found membership in the LWF incompatible with their understanding of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. The LWF has refused several applicants because their fellowship practices did not conform to the standards of the LWF.

The journey from Eisenach to Helsinki was not an easy one, and the assembly at Helsinki made it quite evident that the goal of a united world Lutheranism had not yet been reached. However, longtime members of the LWF remain optimistic and regard Helsinki as a significant advance in their quest. They point to the growing number of personal friendships which have developed over the years and to the consequent dissipation of the atmosphere of suspicion and fear. They point to the accomplishments of the LWF in many areas of church work throughout the world. They point to the theme of the Helsinki gathering, "Jesus Christ — the Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever," or "Christ Today," as it was finally formulated, as evidence of a broad general agreement on the basic doctrine of justification by faith. They point to the constitutional amendments adopted at Helsinki as evidence that the members have gained a much clearer understanding of the purposes and functions which the LWF is to serve. They point to the resilience of the LWF which has enabled it to survive some serious mistakes and to adapt itself to new conditions and pressures. They point to the fact that 10 Lutheran churches have

been received into membership since Minneapolis and another 8 applications came up for consideration at Helsinki.

In the six years between Minneapolis and Helsinki, the Executive Committee gave considerable attention to the changing modern world and the plight of modern man and to theological developments in the areas of exegesis, systematics, ethics, and ecclesiology. They also spent a great deal of energy in studying the constitution and in drafting several basic amendments. It is probably correct to say that theological concerns were uppermost in the thinking of the Executive Committee. In one of the reports which they issued prior to Helsinki they described the theological task confronting the delegates of the member churches in the following words:

The Executive Committee, following a suggestion from the Commission on Theology, proposed to the member churches a theme for this Assembly taken directly from the central teaching of the Reformation, namely that God, for Christ's sake, freely justifies the sinner who believes in Him. This raises the question whether this doctrine in the light of present-day theological knowledge should still occupy the central place it holds; further, what importance is in fact attributed to it in the thinking of the congregation and especially in the preaching of the Gospel; and, finally, whether and to what extent we are in the position to bear a common witness to and make clear the reality of justification, which this doctrine affirms, and the subsequent effects produced by it in the life and service of the one who has been justified and in the Church in such a way that its relevance to the life of men today may stand out clearly. . . .

It was readily appreciated that this was not a call for a demonstration of self-confi-

dent and unmoved Lutheran churchmanship before the whole world. Rather was the need felt everywhere to reconsider together the heart of our faith and to encourage each other in believing in the righteousness which is a free gift, in an age where man's striving to justify himself makes it seem like an irrelevant deviation. Such stock-taking implies a willingness to rethink the entire position, and to seek ways of expressing its content in the language and thought forms of the present age. The result of this reconsideration in the case of the individual might be an effective antidote to feelings of resignation and might bring new meaning to his life; in the case of the churches it might deliver them from the threat of institutionalism and help them to recover the heart of their task. For the conversation on unity carried on amongst the churches this reconsideration could mean that the Lutheran contribution to this conversation might not be misunderstood as a piece of confessional self-assertion but find a hearing as a call to the central issue, which is the truth expressed in person, and lead to a genuine conversation about this truth as the basis of the unity which is sought after. We constantly owe it to the ecumenical movement to make such a contribution to the conversation.<sup>1</sup>

Prof. Warren Quanbeck of Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn., assumed the responsibility for drawing up a study document around the general theme "Jesus Christ, the Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever." He based his work on the first six articles of the Augsburg Confession. The pamphlet was mailed to pastors of all member churches and to other Lutheran churches and pastors who were interested. Delegates were encouraged to give this

<sup>1</sup> Executive Committee Report 1957—1963, Document No. 6, pp. 34 and 35.

document serious attention since the entire assembly program would be built around it. Thus representatives of world Lutheranism gathered at Helsinki to discuss the doctrine of justification and to dispose of countless items of business for their world program.

## II. DO LUTHERANS STILL BELIEVE IN JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH?

After the Helsinki assembly had twice failed to adopt a statement on justification through faith for Christ's sake, many observers jumped to the conclusion that world Lutheranism was disunited on this basic issue. This conclusion does not reflect a perceptive analysis of what really happened. Quanbeck's study document may be partly responsible for this apparent failure. It contains some strong statements which the uncritical reader may have accepted as representative of present-day Lutheran theology. For example, on page 16 one finds the arresting statement: "The New Testament knows nothing of *simul iustus et peccator*." Perhaps Quanbeck intended the expression to stimulate study and reaction. If the statement was designed to deny that the New Testament views man as *simul iustus et peccator*, whether it uses these words or not, the delegates refused to agree.

Many delegates reflected confusion in their understanding of what they were to do with the Quanbeck document and with the major essays. Some felt that their assignment was to prepare a new confession to rank with the Augsburg Confession. Federation President Franklin Clark Fry repeatedly cautioned them against this. He insisted that there was no real disagreement on the basic concept of justification

by faith among the delegates. The discussion in most of the 26 discussion groups bore out the correctness of this observation. Many fine Biblical and confessional statements were heard from representatives of every area of Lutheranism. The comments of the Missouri Synod observers were listened to very carefully and in many cases received the unofficial endorsement of the group. If the comments of the discussion groups could somehow have been distilled accurately into a floor report, a satisfactory and helpful statement on justification by faith, acceptable to the group as a whole, would probably have resulted.

The problem of formulating a general statement was seriously complicated by the diverse backgrounds of the assembly participants. European professors of theology reflected their concerns; American theological professors had different approaches and goals in mind. Lutherans from the state churches frequently found themselves unable to communicate their problems to Lutherans from pluralistic societies. Missionaries and parish pastors had interests which the theological experts did not always grasp. Young Lutheran lay delegates insisted that the discussions were not intelligible to them. It should be noted that this problem of an acceptable formulation is not confined to Helsinki. Missionaries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are struggling with precisely this same problem in many regions of the world. How much detail must be included before a satisfactory confession results? How many changes may be made in traditional formulations in order to communicate to people of non-Western traditions? Or

modern people in the West, for that matter?

Perhaps it was a mistake to adopt the final formulation of "Christ Today" rather than the title which appeared on the cover of one edition of Quanbeck's pamphlet, "Christ, Yesterday, TODAY, and Forever." This "trapped" many of the speakers into an excessive concern with subjective justification at the expense of objective justification. Had "Jesus Christ, the Same Yesterday" remained in the thematic slogan, it may well be that forensic justification would have received greater emphasis in the floor discussions. Again and again leaders and speakers in the groups showed their clear affirmation of this basic Biblical principle. There were a few who labeled objective justification as somewhat irrelevant, but it would hardly be fair to cite them as typical Lutheran theologians.

The failure to achieve unity on a statement on justification can be traced much more accurately to a breakdown in organization and mechanics than to a fundamental refusal to accept the doctrine. It was evident that many of the delegates had not done their assigned homework in Quanbeck's study pamphlet. The discussion leaders were frequently not clear on what was supposed to happen in their groups. At times they permitted too much emphasis to be placed on the problem of formulating justification through faith in a way that would be relevant and acceptable to natural man, an obviously impossible assignment, instead of leading the groups toward a formulation which would reflect an alert and confessionally loyal consensus among world Lutherans. The value of such an agreed document to world Lutherans would have been great indeed. It

should be kept in mind that an unofficial consensus was reached in many of the discussion groups and was reflected in most of the major essays. The fact that some of these papers contained strange and unacceptable formulations did not come as a surprise to men who have kept in touch with the methods of modern theologians and with certain trends in the present emphasis upon "relevance." The problem of communicating in many languages further complicated the issue.

The secretaries or recorders in the various groups frequently found themselves unable to keep up with the rapid-fire discussions or to reflect accurately what went on in the group. The consequence of this was that Bishop Hanns Lilje's floor committee on this topic was forced to work without the benefit of group discussions before them. They produced what might almost be called a "private document," couched in frequently unintelligible phrases. It was evident at Helsinki that the delegates were in no mood to substitute either the Quanbeck or the Lilje document for the Lutheran Confessions. Many delegates also expressed the conviction that neither document fully succeeded in making justification through faith relevant to modern man. This was a negative way of reaffirming the continuing value and relevance of the Lutheran Confessions, provided they are studied seriously and translated from a dusty tome into the dusty arena of daily life.

The confusion of what happened at Helsinki on the doctrine of justification was confounded by innumerable cases of inadequate press coverage by both secular and religious reporters. They were not properly briefed for their assignment. The

press agency of the convention handed them a mass of documents which they could not have digested, even if they had found the time. One reporter felt that justification meant that the delegates had to justify their trips to Helsinki. The reporter of one national American weekly is reported to have spent one afternoon in Helsinki talking with a few friends. From this came a prejudiced report which was accepted as factual and accurate by millions of interested readers around the world. The religious reporters frequently found themselves at sea along with the secular reporters. Some very competent and perceptive persons were present, but their reports usually ended up on the back page because they lacked the sensationalistic touch. One German reporter managed to get his story on the front page of his paper by reporting the "fact" that the LWF was far more interested in a *Drang nach Rom* than in strengthening inter-Lutheran relationships. This was a complete misinterpretation of the spirit which prevailed at Helsinki. Several Roman Catholic observers have chosen to interpret the Helsinki meeting in a similar light, but their reports came as a surprise to most of the working members of the assembly.

It should also be remembered that the delegates were pressed for time because of the amount of business and reports that had to be handled by them. It would be as unfair to judge the LWF solely by what goes on at its public conventions as it would be to judge The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod solely by what happens at its conventions and by the newspaper reports or other interpretations of these actions.

More serious, perhaps, than the dele-

gates' failure to adopt a general statement on justification was the absence of a consistent emphasis on and understanding of the function of God's Law in the life of the human being. The study document did focus attention on this question, but the statement quoted above about *simul iustus et peccator* seemed to be all that many delegates remembered. The essays generally failed to show the function and place of the Law of God. It is true that one has no right to ask an essayist to cover every subject, but the general comment remains valid. The discussion in the plenary sessions on the floor, in which the Missouri Synod observers were not permitted to take part, manifested this same lack. In many of the group discussions the use of the Law received the attention which it must have if the doctrine of grace and justification is to make sense. Prof. Ernst Sommerlath of Leipzig has commented that the absence of a discussion of the Law caused the Biblical doctrine of universal justification to come out sounding almost like modern universalism. It may be correct to say that many at Helsinki did not understand why or how the Law is used in truly evangelical preaching and counseling. It may be helpful for American Christians who are trying to understand the Helsinki discussions to remember that some German Lutheran churches are still deep in the grip of pietistic theology to a much greater extent than most American Lutheran groups. Representatives of missions founded by various German mission societies, themselves often born in the age of Pietism, reflected this same understanding of man's relationship to God. This background partially explains the de-emphasis of the Law.

One observer (not of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod!) quipped that delegates brought every book to Helsinki except the Bible. In the minds of some this observation has a certain validity. In one discussion group it became rather apparent that the idea of discussing the plight of modern man with the Bible as the point of departure was not appealing. In another group a Chinese Lutheran missionary who sought to bring the discussions back to the Bible was eventually all but ignored by the chairman. But those who attended the regular morning Bible study groups led by Bishop Martti Simojoki of Helsinki and Prof. Edmund A. Steimle of Union Theological Seminary, New York, considered them one of the most inspiring and helpful parts of the program. No statistics could show the general attitude of the delegates toward the doctrine of the Word, a subject which had been discussed at the meeting in Hannover in 1952. It is significant to note that Peter Brunner added this topic to the list for the next general assembly even though that program is already quite far along in preparation. He did this in answer to the request of the Missouri Synod observers.

### III. CHURCH, FEDERATION, OR AGENCY?

The Executive Committee and the Theological Commission of the LWF had done a great deal of soul-searching prior to Helsinki on the question of the nature and purpose of the federation. There were those who envisioned it as a worldwide association marked by full ecclesiastical fellowship, and there were those who insisted that it should be nothing more than an inter-Lutheran agency. The original

constitution lent itself to the "superchurch" concept, although this was not in the minds of many of the leaders. In the years following World War II the LWF found itself so busy with projects of service, aid, and mercy that it backed into many churchly functions simply because a serious vacuum existed and people were stranded without the Gospel and without physical care. Theological concerns had to take a back seat to pressing human needs. Article III of the original constitution read in part as follows:

#### III. Nature and Purpose

1. The Lutheran World Federation shall be a free association of Lutheran churches. It shall have no power to legislate for the churches belonging to it or to interfere with their complete autonomy, but shall act as their agent in such matters as they assign to it.
2. The purposes of the Lutheran World Federation are:
  - a. To bear united witness before the world to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God for salvation;
  - b. To cultivate unity of faith and confession among the Lutheran churches of the world;
  - c. To promote fellowship and cooperation in study among Lutherans;
  - d. To foster Lutheran participation in ecumenical movements;
  - e. To develop a united Lutheran approach to responsibilities in missions and education; and
  - f. To support Lutheran groups in need of spiritual or material aid.

At the convention Peter Brunner made a strong plea for an increasing "church consciousness" among the members of the LWF. The Commission on Theology in-

corporated some of his thinking in several proposed amendments which they had ready for presentation to the group. The Executive Committee had issued its own series of suggested amendments prior to Helsinki in one of its study documents. These amendments tended to emphasize what has come to be called the "agency" concept and are quite similar in tone to those which were finally adopted. If both sets of constitutional proposals had reached the floor for public discussion, an impasse would most probably have resulted. To forestall the possibility of a prolonged and fruitless debate which might have deadlocked the entire proceedings, President Fry enlisted the cooperation of a number of LWF leaders and of the Missouri Synod group under the leadership of President Oliver R. Harms. In a series of informal meetings this group prepared the amendments in the form in which they were then adopted by the assembly when they were presented by the Executive Committee.

It is inaccurate to speak of these amendments as the "Missouri Compromise" for several reasons. In the first place, they approximated quite closely the spirit of the original proposals of the Executive Committee, although the wording in some of the phrases can be called a Missouri Synod contribution. Then, too, Fry and his colleagues frequently shared the same view as the Missouri group and authored many of the provisions. Finally, it must be emphasized that the Missouri Synod observers brought no pressure to bear for the adoption of these amendments by suggesting that favorable action would clear the way for the Synod to join. As a matter of fact, the Missouri Synod observers reaffirmed what the Committee on Doctrinal

Unity of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod had recommended to the Synod's Cleveland convention.<sup>2</sup> They made it clear that the adoption of any or all of these proposals would not place the Synod under obligation, and the representatives of the LWF made it equally clear that they were placing themselves under no obligation by accepting any Missouri Synod suggestions.

The new constitution represents a decided swing toward the federation or agency school of thought and represents a rejection of what has been popularly but inaccurately called the "superchurch" view. Significant paragraphs run as follows (italicized words indicate change):

#### Article II Doctrinal Basis

The Lutheran World Federation acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and the infallible norm of all church doctrine and practice, and sees in the *three Ecumenical Creeds* and in the Confessions of The Lutheran Church, especially in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's *Small Catechism*, a pure exposition of the Word of God.

#### Article III Nature, Functions, and Scope

##### 1. Nature

The Lutheran World Federation shall be a free association of Lutheran churches. It shall act as their agent in such matters as they assign to it. It shall not exercise churchly functions on its own authority, nor shall it have power to legislate for the churches belonging to it or to limit the autonomy of any member church. [Note significant change in paragraph's sentence structure.—ED.]

<sup>2</sup> The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1962, pp. 144, 145.



2. Functions

In accord with the preceeding paragraphs, The Lutheran World Federation shall:

- a. *Further* a united witness before the world to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God for salvation.
- b. Cultivate unity of faith and confession among the Lutheran churches of the world.
- c. *Develop* fellowship and cooperation in study among Lutherans.
- d. Foster Lutheran *interest in, concern for, and* participation in ecumenical movements.
- e. *Support* Lutheran churches and groups as they endeavor to meet the spiritual needs of other Lutherans and to extend the Gospel. [Cp. section "F" of former constitution. — ED.]
- f. *Provide a channel for* Lutheran churches and groups to help meet physical needs.

3. Scope of Authority

In accordance with its nature, function, and structure, The Lutheran World Federation may take action on behalf of one or more member churches in such matters as they may commit to it.

Article IV Membership

*Membership in the Federation may be terminated by vote of the Assembly or by withdrawal.*

The significance of these changes is immediately apparent to one who has followed the history of the LWF carefully and who also has some understanding of the position of the Missouri Synod toward ecumenical ventures of any sort. For example, the revised constitution calls upon the LWF to "further a united witness"

among its own members by thorough doctrinal study before it can "bear united witness before the world," as the former constitution suggested. Further, the new constitution calls upon the LWF to "develop fellowship and cooperation in study among Lutherans" rather than "promote" this. The word "promote" connoted the possibility of some type of artificial or high pressure movement, while the word "develop" encourages patient and careful work toward that goal. Section III, 2, e is particularly significant. It directs the LWF to serve much more as a supportive agency for "member churches and groups as they endeavor to meet the spiritual needs of other Lutherans and to extend the Gospel," rather than assume "churchly" functions in developing "a united Lutheran approach to responsibilities in missions and education," as the former paragraph had provided. The provision for termination of membership underscores the voluntary nature of membership in the LWF and may even hold open the possibility of disciplinary action against an offending member.

It would appear that the revised constitution will force the LWF to rethink some aspects of its program in which it seems to be functioning very much like a church, usually because of inability or default on the part of one or more of its member churches. Joint theological education, joint worship activities, joint mission programs, and other functions will have to come under scrutiny. At the same time the revised constitution raises the difficult question: At what point do churchly people doing churchly things become a church? It is admittedly difficult for any church federation to exist without undertaking,

directly or indirectly, some aspects of work which traditionally are limited to the authority of a church body. It is possible that the Lutheran Council in the United States of America,<sup>3</sup> the proposed new agency now under consideration by the Lutheran Church in America, The American Lutheran Church, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, may provide experience in developing an acceptable "nonchurchly" framework for joint action. The continuing influence of the new LWF president, Fredrik A. Schiøtz of The American Lutheran Church, and of Franklin Clark Fry, both of whom favor the agency concept, will most likely preserve and accelerate this line of thought. At any rate, the important constitutional amendments make continuing discussion between The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the LWF possible and hold out the possibility of Missouri Synod membership.

The "churchly" pressure was most dramatically symbolized at Helsinki in the essay of Prof. E. Clifford Nelson of The American Lutheran Church, from Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. This speech, "The One Church and the Lutheran Churches," probably received the greatest amount of news coverage because it stirred the most enthusiastic reaction among the delegates. In his speech Nelson reflected the view that the "universal appeal of the Lutheran interpretation of the Gospel, the elemental quality of the Lu-

theran understanding of faith, and the catholic breadth of the Lutheran doctrine of the Church" put the Lutheran Church into the strategic center of all ecumenical activity. He advised the delegates to "be willing to leave the *Book of Concord* at home when they travel to ecumenical conferences!" He encouraged them to remember that a "confession is . . . not something divisive, but rather something unitive." This general tone caught the fancy of the majority of the delegates, who frequently felt quite lost in a barrage of theological terms.

The plea for one church which Nelson sounded is important and basic but by no means new. His solution was impractically oversimplified when he stated that Lutheran churches must simply declare themselves to be in full altar and pulpit fellowship with all other Lutheran churches. This approach caught some of his friends by surprise because he had pleaded for a much more sober and Biblical approach in previous utterances. The enthusiastic acclaim given to his speech probably was a major cause of the passing of an unfortunate and, in the minds of many, an unconstitutional resolution. The resolution provided in effect that member churches not in full fellowship should seriously reexamine their ground and provide reasons for continuing in that relationship within the next several years. This resolution represented a "meddling" in internal affairs and thus was a direct blow at the "autonomy" clause in the constitution. It also made the LWF a forum for church unity which it had previously refused to become in keeping with its constitution. The motion in effect endorsed Peter Brunner's view of what the LWF should be and thus is in direct con-

<sup>3</sup> Fuerbringer, Alfred O., and Martin H. Franzmann, "The Lutheran Council in the United States of America," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXV (April 1964), pp. 219 ff.

tradition to the sober constitutional amendments and the general tone of the gathering.

One of Nelson's comments does point up the bipolar tension with which the church must always live. He said: "In our concern to avoid syncretism and union without unity, we may have grasped the confessions so hard that we have almost squeezed them to death." This is precisely the task which a confessional church must always face. It must hold to its confessions and must refuse to compromise them. At the same time, a confession such as that of the Lutheran Church drives it vigorously and irresistibly into the center of the continuing search for greater expression of the blessed unity which Christ gave to His church. Nelson's simple resolution of this tension, which can so easily become unbearable, therefore presented a great appeal to the frequently frustrated delegates at Helsinki.

The Institute for Interconfessional Research, which the Helsinki assembly created and located at Strasbourg, has been the subject of considerable interest. Some have described it as the first pontoon in a bridge to be built to Rome. The various resolutions pertaining to the institute do not bear out this description. Its assignment is to carry on ecumenical research on every front and in every area of Christianity. It would be strange indeed if a great deal of its work did not involve study and analysis of the Roman Church. But the outcome of institute studies, carried on slowly and painstakingly, may well be a sharp and clear pronouncement to Rome on the doctrine of justification through faith and a clear analysis of the gradual developments which led Rome away from

this doctrine as the central doctrine. The net result could be a truly Biblical and confessional *rapprochement*, but probably not even the most ecumenical ecumenist at Helsinki expects this in the immediate future.

#### IV. EVALUATION AND REMINISCENCES

It is important to remember that the official position of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod vis-à-vis the LWF has not altered from the one found in the Cleveland convention report (see n.2 above). Nor can it be different unless the Synod in convention decides that the "new look" of the LWF warrants increased contacts or a different pattern of relationship.

One brings back so many impressions from a kaleidoscopic meeting like Helsinki that it takes a year or more before they can be soberly sifted and evaluated. The emotional impact of the meeting was enough in itself to justify the presence of the Missouri Synod observers. An awareness of the size and strength which God has given to the Lutheran Church in the world leads an observer to fall to his knees and to sing a "New Song of Praise" to God. This, by the way, was the title of a very fine essay delivered by President A. Lumbantobing of the Batak Lutheran Church, the one member church which was accepted without formally endorsing the Augsburg Confession. Circumstances of language and culture made it impossible for these Indonesian Lutherans to understand the Lutheran Confessions, but their own confession is generally regarded as thoroughly Lutheran. The visit to Helsinki helps one to respect the many European Lutheran churches and the overseas mission churches which have remained con-

fessionally loyal in the face of terrible obstacles. It instills a sense of gratitude for the doctrinal strength which God has given to The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod and an increased sense of obligation to share it with others. The experience of Bishop Lilje's floor committee taught a very valuable lesson about the importance of being clear and articulate in everything that a responsible theological leader says.

Several important LWF division and commission meetings prior to and following Helsinki, which a number of Missouri Synod observers attended, also provided insights into the genuine spiritual vitality and Biblical loyalty which animates so many members of the LWF. The missions conference at Stavanger and the meeting of the Commission on World Services at Stockholm are two examples of this. According to several observers, it was very helpful to hear what these people were really saying. Their writings or their reported speeches sometimes give one a wrong impression of where they stand. This can be said about the difference between Bishop Lilje's failure with his floor

committee and his private conversations. Finally the understanding of the great difficulties which almost all these churches have faced in the past leads one to adopt an attitude of greater patience, greater desire to be helpful, and greater hope for the future of the ecumenical movement.

The general impression of most observers was that Helsinki was far from a failure, though it was not an unqualified success. The magnitude of the LWF and its worldwide activities make it necessary for The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod to proceed slowly and cautiously in its contacts with it. The undeniable advantages which membership in the LWF would bring to the Missouri Synod will probably encourage its members to come to an early decision concerning its relationship with the LCUSA so that this experience in ecumenical activity will enable the Synod to face the question of membership in the world body with sobriety and wisdom at a future convention. But this possibility, the observers agreed, is not at the very top of the Missouri Synod agenda.