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Lutheran World Federation

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From Tokyo to Oslo

WON YONG JI

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NOTE: THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION'S COMMISSION ON CHURCH COOPERATION sponsored an international consultation in Tokyo with some 150 people, from April 29 to May 4, 1971, under the theme "The Role of Lutheranism in an Ecumenical Age." It was the first sizeable gathering of such a nature since the recent restructuring of the Lutheran World Federation at its Evian Assembly in 1970. That it was held in Asia was also noteworthy.

From June 6 to 12, 1971, the LWF Executive meeting occurred in Oslo. It was also the first enlarged meeting (more than 100 participants) of the top governing body of the LWF since the Evian Assembly.

The Tokyo meeting provided considerable evidence that the LWF is listening to the voice of the world of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The LWF's general secretary, Dr. André Appel, also made mention of the voice of "minorities" in his address at Oslo. However, the important question is whether people *really* listen and what action they take as a result of listening. Many people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America show a pride that refuses to accept assistance from other countries to an extent that would damage their self-respect, as Prof. I. K. Katoke of the University of Dar-es-Salaam indicated in his lecture on the Gospel and cultures. Politically this attitude shows itself as movements for national liberation and self-determination, and religiously, as the rejection of nonindigenous things.

Furthermore, Lutherans at the Tokyo meeting were searching for their identity and their role. Dr. B. H. Jackayya of India delivered a keynote address on the role of Lutheranism in an ecumenical age. But this issue poses many problems for Lu-

therans who seem confused by the false alternatives of dogmatism and skepticism. Their sight is blurred by both narrow confessionalism and broad relativism—which leads to a decline in their theology. The question is: Should there be Lutherans at all with a confessional identity? Before they ever get to this issue, Lutherans appear to be suffocated by a preconceived notion that they are less ecumenical than others. They seem to be preoccupied with establishing some kind of "relationship" with existing ecumenical organizations, which are frequently more of an establishment than a movement today, rather than with concentrating on the true meaning of being "ecumenical."

Besides taking care of the routine business matters of the LWF, participants in the Oslo conference focused their stimulating discussions on the addresses of President Mikko Juva and Dr. André Appel and on the lucid presentation of Dr. Yoshiro Ishida of Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary on "Salvation, Mission, and Humanization." Today there seems to be a

trend toward polarization more in practice than in theory. Though more concrete steps should have been taken, the conference at Oslo was concentrating on the problem of keeping a balance between eschatological essence and social existence, verbal proclamation and Christian presence.

To alleviate the continuing tension caused by "a dualism of word and deed, of faith and practice that betrays the Reformation and controverts the Biblical witness," a more active dialog with the "conservative evangelicals" may be in order.*

While searching for the meaning of "being Lutheran" and for an integrated approach to mission by considering every relevant aspect of ecumenical movement and action, conference participants should have examined what it really means to be a member of a heterogeneous organization like the World Council of Churches and of a relatively homogeneous body like the Lutheran World Federation. Both "family

loyalty" and "community loyalty" were in evidence among the participants.

At both the Tokyo and Oslo conferences the three areas of concern at the Evian Assembly — namely, sociopolitical, missionary, and ecumenical — were again alluded to. However, Lutherans face an enormous task in the years to come as they wrestle with the "Christian" dimension of those concerns from a Lutheran point of view.

To a greater degree in Tokyo than in Oslo, Lutherans from all over the world have looked up to the LWF for direction about what it means to be both "ecumenical" and "confessional." To meet this challenge, Lutherans need a better articulation of their theology, as well as better strategy, promotion, and administration. The situation in which we are living also requires new ideas, sound communication systems, and cooperative interpersonal relationships. Fortunately, the conferences at both Tokyo and Oslo at least touched on some of the root issues.

Geneva, Switzerland

* See *Lutheran World* (1971), 213.