

Linking with the Lutherans

Part One of Two

I received a telephone call from a friend in a distant city. "Read the latest issue of the *Review*. It's by Johnsson. He has carefully disclosed, for the first time, that our church leaders are entering into a series of dialogues with the Lutherans. Read it, the latest issue."

The article itself is very carefully written. According to Johnsson, it is merely a friendly get-together.

Yet, as we revealed three years ago in our in-depth study, *A Hundred Years of Ecumenism—Part 1-6 [WM—358-364]*, our church is undertaking, with the Lutherans, the exact procedure the World Council of Churches and its subsidiary national councils have been using for decades to compromise doctrines and unite denominations! Meetings are held, agreements are reached, and finally organic union occurs.

Read that six-part tract set and you will understand. (It is now available in our *Ecumenism/Hungary Tractbook*.) Although not "officially" a member denomination, our church has maintained essentially the same close ties and objectives by providing voting members to WWC and other ecumenical councils in various parts of the world.

"Though the SDAC [Seventh-day Adventist Church] is not a member of the organized ecumenical movement, it recognizes those church agencies that lift up Christ as a part of the divine plan for the evangelization of the world and holds in high esteem fellow Christians in other communions who are engaged in winning souls for Christ. The SDAC is regularly represented through observers or advisors at WCC and other church meetings. For many years, a SDA has been a member of the WWC *Faith and Order Commission* in a personal capacity. The SDAC has participated in dialogues with the WCC and various religious bodies, and, since 1968, has been repre-

sented at the conference of secretaries of *Christian World Communions*. More recently, the SDAC has been represented at the annual conference of U.S. church leaders. *Christian World Communions* and various churches have responded to the SDA invitation and sent observers to the quinquennial General Conference Sessions."—*Bert B. Beach, article in Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, 1991 edition, Geneva.*

As clearly stated above by B.B. Beach, Adventist participation in WWC activities has continued unabated for nearly thirty years. Beach is generally chairman of the WWC and CWC committees he serves on. It was during a 1977 *Christian World Communions* meeting, in Rome, that Beach gave that gold medal to the pope, "as a token of appreciation" from the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Our General Conference leaders well-know that church members are upset when they bring Catholic bishops, Orthodox priests, and Protestant leaders to "bless" the delegates attending our General Conference Sessions each five years, but they keep bringing them back. Why are they more anxious to keep in good favor with the other churches than with our own people?

This new article, written by William G. Johnsson, editor in chief of the *Adventist Review* (although very carefully written) is quite revealing. Significantly enough, it is entitled "*Children of Luther*." The surface theme is that we are all—both Lutherans and Adventists—children of Martin Luther. I would like to inform William Johnsson that, in faith and practice, we are children of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy; not of Martin Luther. There were few beliefs which Luther held dear, which we today accept.

But, working on the basis of this

"children of Luther" theme, the beginning step has been successfully taken to draw the two denominations into a close fellowship. In the eyes of some, a great achievement is in the making.

Only one name of those in attendance at the reapproachment meetings was disclosed in the article. That man was the chairman of the Adventist delegation. Yes, you guessed it; it was Bert Beverly Beach, head of the General Conference Religious Liberty Department—the same Adventist leader who, on May 18, 1977, gave a gold medal to Pope Paul VI. (See *The Gold Medal to the Pope [MB-54]*, now in our *Catholicism/New Age Tractbook*.)

(Because Beach can speak half a dozen languages fluently, he has been extremely influential at the General Conference, since the early 1960s, in all matters relating to Europe and the papacy.)

We are told that the nine men representing the Adventist denomination at the Adventist-Lutheran meetings were "scholars" from Andrews University, Biblical Research Institute, *Adventist Review*, Europe, and Africa. The article mentions that the meetings were held at our Adventist seminary in Darmstadt, Germany, not far from the headquarters of the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva, Switzerland. (Geneva was selected for the LWF headquarters because, being an ecumenical organization, it wanted to be close to the WWC, which is also headquartered there.)

Reading Johnsson's article (*reprinted on page three*), the gathering sounded like a great evangelistic opportunity for the Adventists! But not so. As mentioned earlier, such meetings are regularly held by denominations affiliated with the World Council of Churches. Sometimes it takes five or ten years of such meetings, before churches enter upon

major concessions. Occasionally organic union is the result. But there are rewards along the way—which are actually far more dangerous than corporate unity: (1) Compromises are made which change worship services, so they will closely mirror one another. (2) Doctrinal modifications are quietly made “to bring us together.” (3) Regional ecumenical meetings are planned, where members of both denominations gather for joint worship services. (4) Agreements are formed, regarding restrictions on proselyting in one another’s territories.

As for the church members, who are footing the bill for all these meetings, they must be led along gingerly. Get the people used to it. Under-report on the progress. Do it all in such a way as to not alarm anyone. Keep moving closer. Continue holding high-level exploratory meetings. Encourage local and regional worship gatherings and social service ventures.

Keep in mind that our church has been involved in WWC meetings for twenty-seven years. The continued quiet progress on reapproachment talks with other denominations is taking its toll. Remarkable changes have occurred in Adventism over the past twenty years—even though, because of the blanket of silence, the lowly church members may not understand all the reasons for what is taking place.

Why is it that advance appointments are made so Roman Catholic leaders can speak to our General Conference Sessions? Why are Catholic and Protestant leaders invited to speak to the students in our colleges? Why are Catholic priests permitted to address the students in our college and university assemblies? Why are joint Adventist-Protestant church services held? Why are ecumenical Sunday sunrise services held? Why is it that Adventist pastors frequently lead out in these coming-together meetings? Why are Catholic priests on the payroll of Loma Linda Medical Center? Why are rosaries sold in their gift shop?

But back to Johnsson’s article.

Read it on the next page. The entire first session of top-level ecumenical meetings was portrayed as just wonderful. That is the impression conveyed. One might think, “What harm could come from such meetings? Surely, they could only result in great good.”

At the end of the article, Johnsson gently informs our people around the world that, after a brief pause, further Adventist-Lutheran meetings will probably begin in earnest. That was exactly why the article was written: to get us used to the idea, and soften us up for what is coming.

Before concluding our comments on Johnsson’s article, we should notice the urgent significance of what he said in the middle! And it was said loud and clear: Adventists and Lutherans can now meet in harmony, because, at last, they are in agreement on law and grace! As Johnsson phrased it: “*Salvation by grace alone.*” “*Salvation comes freely as a divine gift, without any human works added on.*” “*Not by faith plus . . . anything else.*” “*Our good works result from salvation; they do not contribute to it.*”

There is a world of difference between “*grace enabling us to obey*” and “*salvation enabling us to obey.*” That is because obedience by grace is a process of many decades leading to salvation.

It is true that obedience by grace leads to salvation. But it is an error to teach that salvation *precedes* obedience!

Error has a way of sounding fascinating, even liberating. Yet the fact is that when a person thinks he has already been saved, he need no longer concern himself about obedience!

That is why so many Adventist ministers and members are now getting involved with adultery and other sins. They have been taught they are already saved, and obedience is secondary. Repeatedly, from book and pulpit, Adventist leaders declare that we should be wary of too many efforts to obey the law of God, lest we become legalists and lose the salvation we have received. But the Spirit

of Prophecy was always firm in teaching that none should ever be taught that they have already been saved. Salvation and perdition do not come till the close of one’s probation, which, in most cases, occurs at death.

Johnsson and his fellow “scholars” are now able to relate well to the Lutherans, because of the Adventist changeover in the 1980s. Their foundational beliefs are now very much alike.

Johnsson’s article about our drawing near to the Lutherans was published in the first week of 1995 in the *Adventist Review*.

But if you read Catholic periodicals, you will discover that a different major breakthrough in Lutheran reapproachment meetings was announced in the second week of 1995. It was reported in the *National Catholic Register* (see page six).

The implication of that article is that, as the result of repeated reapproachment committee meetings, Lutherans have been brought to the point of categorically declaring that Martin Luther was in error in denouncing Catholic teachings. That is astounding! How can this be?

The answer is simple enough: It is the result of many, many reconciliation meetings, such as the Adventists are now entering upon. It is the result of repeated softening statements and compromising reports in Adventist books and periodicals. It is the result of apostasy, accepted by the church members—until they are overwhelmed by it.

Why is it that such meetings are ever permitted to start in the first place? It is believed that Jesuit penetration of Protestant denominations is the crux of the matter. Carefully placed agents prepare the way for high-level reapproachment meetings. The reunion talks between Lutherans and Catholics, and Lutherans and other Protestants, have proceeded to such a point, that it is thought well to now bring the Adventists into the proceedings. At last the Adventists are doctrinally prepared for what is coming. Perhaps three-way confer-

ences will be held before long.

We have come a long way, and now we are all getting together! The ecumenical crisis was predicted in *Great Controversy* over a century ago:

“The ministry of ‘the evangelical Protestant denominations’ is ‘not only formed all the way up under a tremendous pressure of merely human fear, but they live, and move, and breathe in a state of things radically corrupt, and appealing every hour to every baser element of their nature to hush the truth, and bow the knee to the power of apostasy. Was not this the way things went with Rome? Are we not living her life over again? And what do we see just ahead? Another general council! A world’s convention! Evangelical alliance, and universal creed!’ ”—*Great Controversy*, 444-445.

Here is additional background history on these Lutheran discussions with other churches, of which ours will be the latest addition:

As detailed in our in-depth study, *Hands Across the Gulf—Part 1-20 [WM—121-140]*, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination first began contacts with the National Council of Churches in the late 1950s, and first began sending unofficial (but voting) delegates to World Council of Churches high-level meetings in Geneva, in 1956. (Interestingly enough, the same year Rome also began sending unofficial, voting delegates to high-level WCC meetings in Geneva).

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF, the organization whose eight officials our leaders recently counseled with for several days in Germany) was established in 1947 by representatives of Lutheran churches in 23 countries. At the present time, there are approximately 55 million baptized Lutherans in the LWF. Only churches, those (4 million members) associated with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, remain outside the LWF.

Frankly, that which brought the LWF into being was the desire of

those Lutheran denominations, which held membership in the WCC, to unite in some kind of worldwide Lutheran federation. The LWF is extremely ecumenically oriented! They WANT to unite with other churches, and are quite willing to compromise doctrine in order to work toward that objective.

Why, then, are Seventh-day Adventist leaders meeting with the LWF? Indeed, why have Seventh-day Adventist leaders been voting members of WWC committees since 1968? The answer is simple enough: We are more concerned to win the favor of men than to obey the Word of God and guard our doctrinal purity.

The Lutherans have had major ongoing meetings with other denominations since the 1950s.

Lutheran-Reformed meetings began, in 1956, in the Netherlands. They quickly spread to Germany (1959), France (1964), and other nations. Major breakthroughs in the meetings occurred in 1981 and 1983, with the report, entitled “*Invitation to Action*,” calling on members to recognize, as legitimate and Biblical, one another’s doctrines of church, ministry, and Lord’s Supper, and to begin “establishing pulpit and table fellowship” worship meetings.

The first pan-Orthodox council occurred in 1961 at Rhodes, and it was there decided to lay the groundwork for single dialogue with the LWF. The Zagorsk “conversations” between the LWF and the Russian Orthodox Church began in 1974. More than 30 sessions of “dialogue” have taken place.

The LWF began holding bilateral meetings with the World Methodist Council in December 1977. One of the initial main topics was “the means of grace.” (That is frequently an initial topic in reunion meetings. It was a key topic our leaders discussed in their first session with the LWF in Germany.) Other topics included the sacraments of baptism, eucharist, and church order. The Bossey, Switzerland report (1984)

noted “important agreements.”

Pages could be written about these and other reapproachment exercises. However, let us examine the Lutheran-Catholic reunion efforts more closely. They will reveal how the compromises gradually keep taking place. (It is interesting how the compromises especially occur in the purer church body; in this instance, the Lutheran.)

Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue began in 1967 with a *Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission*. An interesting name: “Study Commission.” It sounds innocuous; all they want to do is study one another’s beliefs,—and what is wrong with that?

My friend, that is exactly what our own denomination is now entering upon with the LWF! It starts as “studying one another’s beliefs,” leads to compromising one’s own beliefs, and ends with uniting on beliefs.

But make no mistake; involved here are not beliefs of the few individuals attending the meetings, but the beliefs of entire denominations!

Enough progress had been made that the *Malta Report*, issued in 1972, summarized areas of agreement reached so far, on five areas of committee discussion: tradition and Scripture, justification, gospel and world, ordained ministry, and the papacy. The commission noted both “the progressive overcoming of doctrinal disputes” and “structural problems which are largely responsible for continuing to keep our churches divided” (*para. 46*).—Does that tell you what the goal is? It ought to. The “problems” are unique doctrines keeping churches apart.

It was also agreed that there could be “a mutual recognition that the ministry in the other church exercises essential functions of the ministry that Jesus Christ instituted in his church” (*para. 85*).

Continued on the next tract

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PILGRIMS REST

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Part Two of Two

As the years passed, the delegates to the reapproachment meetings kept at their assigned task. By 1980, they had produced the document, *"All Under One Christ,"* which listed additional compromises which would help bring them together. Elements common to their differing views of the communion service (they call it the eucharist) were especially featured.

In this document, both objective and pathway toward it are described under the general term, "communion" (*Gemeinschaft*). "Unity" implies "a full spiritual and ecclesial fellowship" (*para. 53*), "an outward, visible unity which is becoming historically manifest in the life of the churches" (*para. 33*). Each denomination agrees "that, in the other denomination, the church of Jesus Christ is actualized" (*para. 124*).—By 1980, Lutherans were saying that the papacy is the church of Jesus Christ; that is how much progress the meetings had taken them toward!

Further concessions were made in the 1981 joint Lutheran-Catholic commission document, *"The Ministry of the Church,"* which stated that "a high degree of agreement has been reached" (*para. 49*).

Regional members of the World Council of Churches are the national councils. The one in America is known as the National Council of Churches. The most extensive national dialogues between Lutherans and Catholics have occurred in the U.S; they began in 1965.

Although the two denominations have differing views of "the presence of Christ" in the eucharist (the Lord's Supper), yet, by 1967, the meetings produced the statement that the communion service of the other church had "the full reality of Christ's presence." How can Lutheran members put up with this heresy, that the mass is accepted by the God of heaven? But, because of the meetings, that is what their leaders formally agreed to.

The meetings continued, and, by 1970, in the document, *"Eucharist and Ministry,"* the statement was made that there is "no persuasive reason to deny the possibility of the Roman Catholic Church recognizing the validity of [the Lutheran] ministry . . . and, correspondingly, the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the eucharistic celebrations of the Lutheran churches" (*para. 54*).

The committee kept at its work, and the 1973 statement (*"Papal Primacy and the Universal Church"*) declared the "Petrine function" [the work of the pope] to be valid (*para. 4*) and that its "single most notable representative . . . has been the bishop of Rome" and that it would be acceptable for there to be a "renewal of papal structures" (*paras. 23-24*).

This willingness by the spiritual descendants of Martin Luther to sell out, is incredible.

A few paragraphs later, the possibility was suggested that "a distinct canonical status may be worked out by which Lutherans could be in offi-

cial communion with the church of Rome" (*para. 38*).

The suggestion was made that the Lutheran churches might be willing to "acknowledge . . . the possibility and desirability of the papal ministry, renewed under the gospel and committed to Christian freedom, in a larger communion which would include the Lutheran churches" (*para. 32*). But why should the Lutherans want to return to the pope?

By 1983, the Lutheran-Catholic meetings had advanced to the point of fully agreeing on that key doctrinal aspect which our leaders, a couple of months ago, agreed with the Lutherans within their first four days of meetings: Salvation comes alone by faith (*paras. 44, 157*). But that is not what God's Word teaches.

The Bible and Spirit of Prophecy position: Salvation is entirely made possible by Jesus, but, by His enabling grace, we must repent and cooperate with Him. This cooperative act is done by obeying, in His strength, all that He asks of us in His Word. Regarding salvation, it is not received until the close of our individual probation, which, in most cases, is after death. Apart from Christ's help, no work of man can merit acceptance or salvation. Obedience to God through Christ's empowering merits is necessary, and without it no man will be saved.

The new theology and modern Protestant position: Salvation is entirely made possible by Jesus, and we need only believe—and we already have that salvation. No work of man—with or without the aid of Christ—has any influence on whether or not a person will go to heaven.

Surely, we are near the end!

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"BOOK, MEDALLION PRESENTED TO THE POPE—In connection with a recent consultative meeting of secretaries of World Confessional Families held in Rome, B.B. Beach, secretary of the Northern Europe-West Africa Division, one of the 15 participants and the only Adventist in the group, presented a book and a medallion to Pope Paul VI on May 18.

"The book presented was the Adventist missionary book, *Faith in Action*, and the me-

dallion was a gold-covered symbol of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The medallion is an engraved witness to the Adventist faith in Christ . . .

"The Conference of World Confessional Families usually meets once a year. It is not an organization, but an informal, unstructured forum for consultation and the exchange of useful information."

—W.D. Eva, news report in *Adventist Review*, August 11, 1977, 23.