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## **USEFUL AND POSSIBLE?**

### **The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and Membership in the Communion of the Protestant Churches in Europe<sup>1</sup>**

Especially in the 1970s, public discussion was lively about the concord of Leuenberg and the Leuenberg Fellowship - which later changed its name to the Community of the Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) - was brought up by the Council of the Archdiocese of Turku at its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2008. Due to an initiative of the delegate Rev. Dr. Kalle Elonheimo, the Council "requested that the Council for International Relations to research whether the membership of our church in the Community of the Protestant Churches in Europe is necessary and possible".

Because the signing of the Leuenberg Agreement in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) was rejected specifically on theological grounds, it's appropriate to analyze the arguments theologically and to find out if the basic situation has, from this point of view, changed – not forgetting the practical side of the matter.<sup>2</sup>

The main focus of this paper is on the systematic theological analysis of the decision made by the General Synod and on evaluating whether these arguments are still valid. Analysis of the church's political tendencies both now and then and of the general historical background as well as the innovating of new constructive solutions is left out. In the description of the general discussion, only the most important addresses, from the point of view of theological evaluation, are dealt with. The most important task here is to explicate the theological and ecumenical intentions lying behind the 1977 decision and to reflect on how the argumentation is congruent with the ecumenical line-drawing of the church – Lutheran and ecumenical – after that.

The General Synod stated in its decision in 1977 that "...the striving for the clearing out of the principal and practical content of the concord have not yet in our church led to that kind of

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<sup>1</sup> The article is based on the background clearance of the Executive Secretary for Theology Tomi Karttunen for the Council for International Relations.

<sup>2</sup> For example *Huovinen* 1996, 162-163 and *Saarinen* 2002, 258-259 point out, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland hasn't signed the Leuenberg Agreement because of theological reasons.

unanimity of the interpretation of the concord that its acceptance in the form of signing it would be possible”. Moreover, the synod stated that “the concord has no practical meaning to the inter-confessional relations in Finland, and therefore there is no immediate need to sign it”.

In addition, the Foundational Committee pointed out that if we don’t have such problems with the churches of the Reformation like in the Central Europe, this doesn’t excuse us not to carry our responsibility for these relations. We have to support our sister churches which are in trouble in order to carry our part of the responsibility. To this belongs not only the positive taking part in the theological dialogue, according to the ecumenical commitment of our confession, but also the critical evaluation of the concord if necessary. In all relations one can’t go further solely on the conditions of the Lutheran confession, but the question is whether broad enough agreement has been achieved about articles of doctrine which are essential from the Lutheran point of view.<sup>3</sup> The matter was actively discussed before the decision of the General Synod and partly after that.

### **The Research of the Leuenberg Agreement in ELCF**

The Leuenberg Agreement (=LA) signed on 16.3.1973 and implemented on 1.10.1974 which intends to stop the separation of the churches with a background in the Reformation of the 16th century, takes as its fundamental point a “Common understanding of the gospel” which “opens up the possibility to declare and implement a church fellowship (Kirchengemeinschaft)”. The contract which created a unity of the Eucharist and pulpit was originally signed by Lutherans, Reformed and Union Churches and their pre-Reformatory sister churches: the Waldensian and the Church of the Bohemian Brothers. After that, five South American protestant churches with an immigrant background and seven Methodist Churches have joined the Communion on the basis of the document ”Common Declaration on Church Fellowship”. All in all, there are 105 signatory churches at the moment.<sup>4</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland took part through its delegates (Bishop Erkki Kansanaho and adjunct professor Fredric Cleve) in the preparation of the concord. A thorough clearance was also begun in Finland, in order to”clear out the content and practical consequences of

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<sup>3</sup> Foundational Committee report 3/1977 about the proposal of the Bishops’ Council 1/1976 which deals with the Agreement of the European Reformatory Churches (Leuenberg Agreement), 5.

<sup>4</sup> [www.leuenberg.net](http://www.leuenberg.net), seen 11.12.2008.

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the concord". From the early clearances, one should mention the memory of the working group of the Evangelical Lutheran Church *Theological Basic Problems of the Draft Agreement of Leuenberg* (PSME 22, 1973), the report of the working group John Vikström, Fredric Cleve, Tuomo Mannermaa *Report on the Leuenberg Agreement of the Reformatory Churches of Europe* (1974). The differing of opinion of Mannermaa was attached to the report. Especially influential has been the research of Tuomo Mannermaa, which was published in its final form in 1978, *Von Preussen nach Leuenberg. Die Ökumenische Methode der Leuenbergischen Konkordie*.<sup>5</sup>

The last time the Council for International Relations (CIR) handled the question about a possible rechecking of the decision about LA was at its meeting on May 25<sup>th</sup> 2000 after the diocesan council of the Archdiocese of Turku had made an initiative in 1998 about the matter. In its statement, the CIR asserts that "the Council for International Relations regards the initiative of the Diocesan meeting of Turku important and acceptable. Our church aims to reach this goal. Steps have been taken steps in order to fulfill the aims the initiative consists of according to the consequent ecumenical line of our church. Yet, such results have not been in this work that the signing of the Leuenberg Agreement would be grounded and advisable".

After the decision in the year 2000, an agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) was signed, which makes the practical co-operation with the Finns and Germans abroad easier, but which aims to avoid the theological problems in the concord. The ecumenical line of the Finnish Church has been cleared out not only in the line-drawings of the Archbishop and other bishops and the director of the department for international relations, but also when preparing the ecumenical strategy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church until 2015 ([evl.fi/ecumenicalstrategy](http://evl.fi/ecumenicalstrategy)). From the background material of this latest work, the article of professor and bishop emeritus Kalevi Toiviainen *Ecumenical Questions in the General*

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<sup>5</sup> The working group of Cleve, Mannermaa and Vikström concludes the part "Conclusive Remarks and Recommendations" (1974, 60): "The evaluation of the practical consequences of the Agreement shows, in the opinion of the working group, that the realization of the church fellowship of the reformatory churches in the meaning the working group has it understood can be regarded as an ecumenical step further which has valuable impacts on the pastoral functions of the churches. Yet less favorable consequences might be the increasing Reformed impact on the Lutheran churches, to some extent weaker relations to the churches which stay outside of the Agreement, the disappearance of the special features of Lutheranism and the opposition by the church intern confession-conscious groups. However, negative impacts can be eliminated, if our church nurtures its originality in the context of the church fellowship and reserves for itself the right to continue and develop ecumenical relationships to those churches which are outside of the Agreement. The working group finds it important that one is aware of the Leuenberg Agreement and one discusses it in our church. Only in this way the handling of the Agreement and its possible accepting can be based on a broad opinion. Regarding the obscurity, which continually predominates about the interpretation of the Agreement and some of its details, the working group suggests that our church in this phase would reconsider the possibility to take part in further discussions and would transfer the possible signing of the Agreement until a sufficient unanimity about the interpretation of the Agreement has been achieved."

*Synod 1976–2002* (2004) and the article of the former executive secretary for theology, Bishop Matti Repo *Doctrine and Unity: The Ecumenical Line of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland* (2008) can be mentioned. This clearance deals more thoroughly with the Leuenberg concord than the article of Repo – not forgetting the general ecumenical line of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

### **The Theological Criticism of the Leuenberg Agreement**

The earlier critical evaluation of the Leuenberg concord in Finland, but for instance also in Sweden and partly in Germany – without the philosophical-theological problematics – can be summarized for instance in the following (Forsberg 2003)<sup>6</sup>:

- 1) LA is based on the idea of "minimal consensus" and remains thus rather open to various interpretations,
- 2) LA grounds the church unity on the distinction between "Basis" (Grund) and "Shape" (Gestalt),
- 3) LA's key concept "church fellowship" (Kirchengemeinschaft) is too unclear and vague,
- 4) LA's degree of validity is unclear. In some cases it has had no consequences to the life of the signer churches,
- 5) LA's character as confessional writing and its relation to the Confessional writings of the signer church is dim. The official interpretation is that the LA doesn't replace the confessions of the signer churches but they remain valid,

The most difficult single problem in the LA is the formulation of the doctrine of Eucharist. According to the Lutheran understanding it's not satisfactory. (Compare LA 15 b: "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".)

Generally speaking, the Lutherans who had a critical attitude towards the Agreement, like Archbishop Martti Simojoki, worried about the blurring of the Lutheran identity and the

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<sup>6</sup> Forsberg states also that the signing of the Agreement would mean church fellowship with the Methodists without theological discussions. During the years 2002-2007 in Finland there was doctrinal dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the (Finnish and Swedish speaking) Methodist churches in Finland. To the Finnish discussion see also *Saarinen* 1996, 298, compare with *Peura* 2002, 177-178. To the critical European discussion about the Agreement see for instance *Leuenberg – Konkordie oder Diskordie. Ökumenische Kritik zur Konkordie reformatorischer Kirchen in Europa*. Herausgegeben von Ulrich Asendorf und Friedrich Wilhelm Kuenneth 1974.

”maintaining of the Lutheran churchly substance” and generally the maintaining of the substance of the Christian faith under the pressure of moralism on the one hand and on the other hand, the existentialistic interpretation of life.<sup>7</sup>

The accepting of the Agreement was favoured among the known characters in the Finnish Church, for instance Mikko Juva and Fredric Cleve. The supporting voices among the Bishops in the beginning were generally silenced on the one hand due to the doubts of Archbishop Simojoki and on the other hand, the thorough investigation of Tuomo Mannermaa *Von Preussen nach Leuenberg*. Mannermaa showed that the Agreement is also in its final form essentially based on the concept of unity of Professor Wenzel Lohff. Its leading idea is that ”the unanimity concerning the doctrine is not the precondition of the church fellowship but its hopeful consequence”.<sup>8</sup>

In Mannermaa’s analysis behind this “proleptic” ecumenical model, which anticipates the unity, can be seen the distinction ”basis” (Grund) and ”expression” (Ausdruck) or “qualitative” act of justification and “quantitative” doctrine. Behind the distinction there is a further developed existential theological model (for instance Gerhard Ebeling) about the transcendental philosophic model inspired by the philosophic distinction of Immanuel Kant, according to which we can’t know the “being itself” (*Ding an sich*), but only what it is “for us” (für uns). A consequent theological-doctrinal consequence of the purely qualitative mode is the detachment of the actual trust of faith (*fides qua*) and the material object of faith (*fides quae*).<sup>9</sup> The content of faith is no more objectively identifiable.

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<sup>7</sup> Toiviainen 2004, 113. Compare with the protocol of the Bishops’ Council 10.-11.9.1974, 44 the address of Archbishop Simojoki: ”I’m not a systematician and not an ecumenist, but a common Bishop and from that point of view I consider the Agreement. The situation in Germany is alarming. The Churches are in many respects scattered, the number of people leaving the Church is in many places high and the theological faculties are politicized. I understand the great concern of Bishops and churchmen and they see they must join together, in order to be able to take care of their difficult tasks. But why I am worried about the Agreement. I’m worried, because I’m worried about the remaining of the substance of the Christian faith in our Church. The traces of the general Protestantism are scary! The substance will remain only in the way that there are people who know what they believe. The faith, on which I stand and die, isn’t ambiguous but unambiguous. My final standpoint I cannot say. It depends on the interpretation of the Agreement. In our Church one has also frequently followed the line that one has pointed out the act of justification, but one has not been worried about on which the justification is based on. I believe that in the future we’ll stand just on the fundament of the confession.”

<sup>8</sup> Toiviainen 2004, 114. Although in the 1974 Report Vikström and Cleve give a more favorable interpretation of the Agreement and saw in the final form a shift from the anticipation of unanimity to the method of the hierarchy of truths, these systematicians were unanimous that ”the interpretations the Agreement gives about law, Eucharist, ministry and Christology are pretty general and incomplete from the Lutheran point of view” (Report 1974, 59).

<sup>9</sup> See Mannermaa 1978, 48-49. About the change of the concept of doctrine in modern theology see more detailed Martikainen 1987. Martikainen 1987, 19, 98 analyzes the concept of doctrine in the paradigm of the modern Luther-research and in the original understanding of Luther in the following way: ”When in the transcendental philosophy the concept of knowledge is not understood to get its essence from the object but from the knowing subject, also in theology the doctrine is not understood as the object of faith but to give an expression to faith. When the object of faith

According to Mannermaa, the essential problem, in which the method of the Agreement breaks down, is when alongside with the pure qualitative interpretation, quantitative, doctrinal redaction work is done. That is, formulations are brought closer to the old Church dogma and the historical thought models of the Reformation. So the method itself and its fundamental point of departure becomes indistinctively ambiguous and ambivalent. So the road towards unity becomes obscure. In the final Agreement one doesn't clearly distinguish, like in the existential theological model of Gerhard Ebeling – the *fides iustificans*- ja *fides dogmatica* –aspects from each other, but one aims to connect them together in the “realization phase” after the declaration of the church fellowship (Kirchengemeinschaft).<sup>10</sup> The Foundational Committee of the General Synod interpreted that in the final form the LA doesn't contain traces of replacing the doctrine of justification with a vague act of justification. On the other hand, from the point of view of the joint understanding of the gospel, which is important for the Lutherans, the committee especially regarded the treatment of the sacraments, baptism and Eucharist as defective in the Agreement.<sup>11</sup>

The Bishop's Council stated in its meeting in the spring of 1976 that the problems of the LA are especially the following: 1) Its relation to the Lutheran confession remains unclear, also 2) the content of the concept ”church fellowship”; additionally 3) the theological method of the Agreement is problematic. This is likely a hint to the proleptic ecumenical method and the theology which emphasizes actual current proclamation in the expense of the content of faith. Generally the opponents shared the worry about the ”melting away of the Lutheran identity”.<sup>12</sup>

The decision of the General Synod in May 1977 followed both the suggestions of the Bishops' Council and the Foundational Committee of the General Synod. The arguments went on the conviction that the Agreement didn't consist of only practical problems which would fade away

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is not given nor stable, there can't be doctrine which describes this. When one on the whole wants to talk about the doctrine, its an expression and explication of faith (the experience of value of the transcendental self). ... ..*Doctrina definita* describes just the way, how the real present God is the material of every article of doctrine. About the present God speak the articles on creation, redemption, sanctification, justification, Church, sacraments and love. Accordingly, Luther states that if one denies Christ in one article, one denies Him in every article. The understanding of the present God as material of all articles of faith makes it understandable, why Luther can present the whole doctrine in one article and why he, on the other hand, requires unanimity of all the articles of faith.” About the word theological interpretation of Confessio Augustana, which moves in the landscape of modern theology see also *Martikainen* 1985, 54-56.

<sup>10</sup> *Mannermaa* 1978, 150. *Saarinen* 1996, 297 sees common to Mannermaa and German researchers that they in general admit that the final version of LA is built on a ”quantitative” understanding of doctrine and they all admit that some kind of ground-expression-pattern is in the background of its ecumenical model.

<sup>11</sup> Report of the Foundational Committee 3/1977, 6-7. *Saarinen* 1996, 298 criticizes Mannermaa's monography about pointing out too much the genesis of the Agreement and regards it as more correct hermeneutics to bring up from the redaction only the last level of redaction. So also *Saarinen* 2002, 266.

<sup>12</sup> *Toiviainen* 2004, 114-115.

with time, but the trouble was in its own inherent theological problems. The Foundational Committee point out more directly than the Bishops' Council that the document hadn't cleared out enough how the model of church fellowship it represented would effect the identity of the Lutheran church and its ecumenical position.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Later Development of the Leuenberg Fellowship/CPCE**

ELCF has actively fulfilled the wish of the General Synod (1977), according to which it is regarded as "important that our Church gives its concrete support to the aspirations in connection with the Agreement through taking part in the theological discussions the Agreement presupposes". Finnish delegates have taken part in the common theological work of the Leuenberg Fellowship and later of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe and as an observer in the general meetings of the community.

Regarding the further theological work, a distinctive example is the most important ecclesiological document of the Leuenberg Fellowship *The Church of Jesus Christ* (1995). The basic distinction of the Agreement between "basis" and "expression" has also been adopted to this document.<sup>14</sup> Ecclesiologically and ecumenically problematic is the impact of the distinction to the central goal of the ecumenical movement, that is the idea of "visible unity", and its becoming dim.<sup>15</sup> If and when the ecclesiology and doctrine of ministry are not clearly a part of the "ground", the idea of Church unity is also easily understood as a kind of spiritual unity, invisible principle, not as such realizable in the empirical reality.<sup>16</sup> In line with this basic tendency, the connection between Word and Sacraments and the work of Holy Spirit also remains unclear in the Church of Jesus Christ – document (=CJC). It seems that Word and Sacraments and the Work of Spirit are separated from

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<sup>13</sup> Repo 2008, 60.

<sup>14</sup> For instance Seville 2003, 13 sees it, from an Anglican point of view, as problematic, when the distinction between "ground" and "shape" is systematized. He writes: "This will present a tension with a typical Anglican emphasis on the visibility of the church. Introducing this as the Church of England has done makes a systematic application of the distinction between shape and foundation problematic." From the Church of Sweden Ragnar Persenius (1996, 101) criticizes the fact that the distinction "ground" – "expression" is not worked out in a clear and acceptable way. He also states that he hasn't been able to clear out, whether there is one or several methods in the LA, although he took part in the preparation of the CJC-document as a representative of Church of Sweden.

<sup>15</sup> Saarinen 2005, 594 states that the goal of visible unity has belonged to the basis of WCC since 1975. The charter of Faith and Order has also taken it as its official goal. Together, these organizations comprise a majority of the Christianity. Thus, the VELKD -document Ökumene nach evangelisch-lutherischem Verständnis would be problematic while representing "perspectivism" which may lead to such a particularistic understanding of theology which is in difficulties when trying to be compatible with the other Churches and their ecumenical ideas.

<sup>16</sup> Repo 2005, 164, 173.

each other against the line-drawing in the Augsburg Confession (=CA). This leads to the separation of the theological and historical side of the Church, which from its side makes it more difficult or even impossible to understand the visible unity as an ecumenical goal. Attention has been paid to this problem in the document in the criticism from the Anglican side.<sup>17</sup>

Yet CJC speaks more clearly about the ministry of the Church and ecclesiology than the LA, but the fundamental theological grounding of these articles of faith can still be seen as problematic in light of the pattern "ground" – "expression". Although the material understanding of the doctrine in this way becomes more clear, the critics have paid attention to the fact that the doctrine of ministry and ecclesiology can also, after CJC, be interpreted as only a historically defined doctrine, which doesn't belong to the "ground" of faith. It is stated in CJC, for example, : "Since the church is a community of believers the *shape* of the church has taken various historical forms."<sup>18</sup> The Churches

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<sup>17</sup> Repo 2005, 177. Seville 2003, 16-17 writes from an Anglican point of view: "In short. The visible church remains separate from the church which is the object of faith to a degree which renders, if not arbitrary, then certainly *ad hoc* the relation between the form of the church and the foundation... This removes the unity of the church to an area where it may be affirmed in light of the *satis est* of Augsburg, but where it is not imperilled by the continuing division at the visible level. Indeed the unity of the church is rendered as impregnable as any church from beyond the mountains. It is unfortunate to read of this division between unity already given and secure and the toing and froing of the expressions of unity which this finds in the churches... Does 'reconciled diversity' entail a unity which is not fully expressed in the lives of the churches, a unity which is abstract and so potentially ideological? I suspect that this may not be the consequence sought by the Report, but it is hard to avoid." Aejmelaeus 2008, 7 asks in which way one can say the episcopacy is a sign of unity. She for instance refers to the fact the NT doesn't know the term "Bishop" in the modern sense. For example Pihkala 2007, 139-168 connects the question whether episcopacy is necessary to the interpretation the radical pietist Gottfried Arnold at the turn of 17th and 18th centuries gave to the church history as phenomenon of corruption and the discriminated and haunted, like the radical Reformation, would carry the living message. Some liberal Enlightenment theologians got their doctrine from Arnold, and the liberal Protestantism also underlined that the Christianity needs as its source only the Bible and especially the gospels. This trend of thought has given its slowly fading mark to the interpretation of the history of doctrine and church history until the 1950s. During the last decades one has more and more argumentatively denied the right of the corruption theory. Yet Pihkala admits the ministry of Bishop in the form we know is not apparent in the NT, but at the latest in the 90s the change is in process (The Letter of Clemens the Roman to the Corinthians), when at the latest during the third Christian generation, when the last eyewitnesses were about to die, it became important to make sure the continuity of the apostolic message. Aejmelaeus (2008, 7) experiences the episcopacy to awaken an image of looking back in the middle of the pluralism of the real world. Pihkala (2007, 187) on the other hand points out that the Bishop has always maintained "unity in diversity". It has not always been possible to maintain the unity and to set limits for the multiplicity. According to Pihkala, this hasn't diminished the importance of the task a bit. Persenius 1996, 107 underlines the episcopal function as the maintainer of unanimity regarding that the weakness of the Protestantism has been the inclination to create new divisions. About the Anglican criticism towards the Leuenberg Agreement in general, see also Hill 1996, 108-113.

<sup>18</sup> CJC, 85. Saarinen 1996, 294-295 on the other hand brings up that from the researchers of the Strasbourg Institute André Birmelé has even talked about "an emerging consensus in the doctrine of ministry between the documents of Meissen, Porvoo and The Church of Christ". Unlike Elisabeth Schieffer, Harding Meyer and especially Tuomo Mannermaa, Birmelé, points out in the interpretation of LA rather the history of reception than the reception of genesis. Compare with Weth 2009, 154 who points out that Barmen 1934, Halle 1937 and Arnoldshain 1957 are interconnected with the inner hermeneutic of LA. Saarinen (1996, 297) regards in the view of Birmelé as a "weak point" that the later documents are not the LA which in fact is signed when the agreement is made. Saarinen (1996, 298) is also himself of the opinion that the problems in the ground-expression-pattern are not unbridgeable. According to him, first of all the dilemma "how the doctrinal anathemas of the Confessional writings can be declared as invalid and in the same time state that the Confessional writings remain valid" is at least formally explained through the fact that, which already Schieffer mentioned, that LA (32) doesn't declare them as such invalid but only states that they "don't touch the current doctrinal status of the concerned Churches". Secondly, according to him the expression "Kirchengemeinschaft" can be



of Norway and Denmark have referred to the document CJC as a deepener of ecclesial and sacramental understanding which has been an essential background factor in the discussion which has led to the signing of the Agreement by the Churches of Norway (2000) and Denmark (2001).<sup>19</sup> Yet a theological study document can't be characterized as a binding post-Leuenberg Agreement interpretation. The further theological talks have, on the one hand, obviously been useful and have strengthened the quantitative interpretation model of the Agreement – ecclesiology, ministry, understanding of the unity -, but the Agreement itself and its basic points of departure haven't, at least in a binding way, changed. Accordingly, it would seem that the evaluating conclusions should, after all, be based on the unchanged LA.<sup>20</sup>

In the ecclesiological discussion there has also been given other kinds of estimations concerning the interpretation of the concept "Kirchengemeinschaft". The concept is, from the point of view of the unity model of LA, one of the key concepts. For instance, professor Risto Saarinen has stated that the concept "Kirchengemeinschaft" could, after the doctrinal argumentation in CJC, be interpreted with the help of the New testament concept "koinonia", which is widely accepted in the ecumenical movement as an ecclesiological basic concept. This would possibly pave the way for a mutual understanding which also would satisfy those churches which underline the importance of the ecclesiological tradition. Saarinen accepts the interpretation of Harding Meyer, according to which the concept of "Church fellowship" is not so existential and is a rather empty concept, as Mannermaa has estimated, but it would come from the German doctrinal discussions in which it has been connected with the "biblical-patristic" concept of koinonia.<sup>21</sup>

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interpreted through the "biblical-patristic" term "koinonia" as ecumenically constructive. To the comment of Saarinen can be remarked that the definition of the teaching of the Church separately from the confessional writings, that is the "current doctrinal status" remains as problematic, especially if a new doctrinal consensus at least parallel to the confessional fundament hasn't been created. I'll deal with the concept "koinonia" and its interpretation later in the text.

<sup>19</sup> *Repo* 2005, 162. To the decision of the Church of Norway see <http://www.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=5895> and to the Danish decision <http://interchurch.dk/dok/leuenberg-sign-eng.htm>, seen 11.12.2008.

<sup>20</sup> Also *Persenius* 1996, 105,107 states in his critical evaluation that the status of the negotiations after 1973 is unclear and the question about their authority accordingly dim. Although in the question concerning ecclesiology, ministry and unity one has gone further, the distinction between "ground" and "expression" is still rigid. *Saarinen* 1996, 291 argues: "...*Die Kirche Jesu Christi*. It gives guidelines for the possible common doctrine of ecclesiology and ministry for the Leuenberg-group, but its naturally not a part of the LA itself." See also *Repo* 2005, 163. Compare with *Die Kirche Jesu Christi*, 57: "Der skizzierte Grundkonsens, der die Kirchengemeinschaft ermöglicht, ist getragen von der Unterscheidung reformatorischer Theologie zwischen dem Grund und Gestalt der Kirche. Diese notwendige Unterscheidung führt in der LK dazu, 'dass Kirchen verschiedenen Bekenntnisstandes aufgrund der gewonnenen Übereinstimmung im Verständnis des Evangeliums einander Gemeinschaft an Wort und Sakrament gewähren und eine möglichst grosse Gemeinsamkeit in Zeugnis und Dienst an der Welt erstreben' (LK 29)."

<sup>21</sup> *Saarinen* 1996, 296-298; *Saarinen* 2002, 266. To the interpretation of Meyer see for example *Meyer* 1997, 339-356. Compare with the concept "communion" in the theology of Luther *Peura* 1997, 93-121. *Peura* points out that the key to the communion-concept of Luther is the real *unio cum Christo* and the idea of "happy exchange" and the ecclesiological communion the participation in Christ (*communio sanctorum*) makes possible. The thought seems to be in accordance with the communion-ecclesiology the general assembly of the Faith and Order –commission represented in Santiago de

Yet, it can be pointed out that the concept of "koinonia" can be interpreted in many ways – just as "biblical-patristic". At least for the time being, a broad common understanding, in the use of this concept hasn't been achieved, although in the ecumenical discussion the so-called communion-ecclesiology has been quite useful. For instance, the Anglican Charles Hill admits that CJC opens doors to the interpreting of the concept of "Church fellowship" in light of the concepts of "koinonia" or "communion". As a critical perception, he brings up that the document doesn't systematically connect the visible community of Church to the understanding of Word and Sacraments as constitutive signs of the Church which are served by the oversight (episcopé) of the ordained ministry.<sup>22</sup>

This brings us to the tendency of the German theological discussion to separate CA 7 from the totality of the Augsburg Confession in a way which is alien to Finnish Lutheranism and to which our Church has taken a stand, for example in its critical statement about the practice of VELKD (*Vereinigte Lutherische Kirche Deutschlands*) to authorize non-ordained persons to distribute Word and Sacraments in a limited way. In the VELKD document *Allgemeines Priestertum, Ordination und Beauftragung* (2006) the argumentation follows a line which seems to be a consequence of the separation of CA 5 (Ministry of the Church) and CA 14 (Churchly ordination) in a way which differs from the Finnish way to read CA and which is based on the understanding of the ministry essentially as a historically determined expression of doctrine.

Furthermore in light of this, the thesis that the historical genesis of the LA is its "best commentary" also seems to be adequate in the current German discussion. While celebrating 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Barmen 1934, for instance Rudolf Weth wrote in *Ökumenische Rundschau* that "the Leuenbergian view that the fundament of the church is not confession but the word of God, or Jesus Christ acting in word and sacrament, reminds us of the core statement of the third Barmen thesis."<sup>23</sup>

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Compostela (1993). From this point of view can, according to Peura, well develop an ecumenical Lutheran ecclesiology. On the one hand, when one estimates, how in the German Luther-research one has quite often criticized the Finnish emphasis on the "real-ontisch" in the faith present Christ, which on the other hand ecumenically fruitful – from Roman Catholics to Pentecostals – tensions can be seen at least in the way how the interpretation the LA about koinonia/communion and the communion-ecclesiology which Peura analyzes, fit together.

<sup>22</sup> Hill 1996, 112.

<sup>23</sup> Weth 2009, 154: "Die die Leuenberger Konkordie leitende Hermeneutik, zwischen dem 'gegenwärtigen Stand der Lehre' und den 'historischen Lehrentscheidungen' resp. kirchentrennenden Lehrverurteilungen der reformatorischen Kirchen zu unterscheiden berührt sich mit der Aufgabenstellung von Halle 1937 und dem angewandten Verfahren von Arnoldshain 1957. ... Die Leuenberger Einsicht, dass Grund der Kirche nicht das Bekenntnis, sondern das Wort Gottes resp. der in Wort und Sakrament handelnde Jesus Christus ist, erinnert an die Kernaussage der dritter Barmer These. Und die für den Leuenberger Einigungsprozess grundlegende Unterscheidung zwischen Grund, Gestalt und

When reflecting on the possible re-evaluation of the relationship of the Evangelical Lutheran of Finland towards CPCE, it is important to connect the discussion to the ecumenical documents and agreements our Church has signed after the Leuenberg discussion and to the reflected ecumenical line-drawing in these contexts and the relationship of LA to these documents.

### **The Development of the Ecumenical Methodology and the Doctrinal Ecumenism of ELCF**

As has already been stated, the criticism towards the method of LA in the ELCF has been clearly theological in its character. Yet, there have also been different opinions about how accurate the criticism has been. All in all, there haven't been only theoretical-formal but ultimately material theological reasons in the background. Behind the choosing of a certain ecumenical methodology is always also a particular understanding of the meaning of doctrine and confession for the faith and unity or Church fellowship. If the basic starting points are admitting several interpretations, it can be difficult to bind and build confidential relations. In the statements of ELCF, the desire has been to underline sufficient doctrinal unanimity and gradual going forward – not only a minimal consensus – before full church fellowship can be implemented. Lutheran identity and ecumenical openness has been wanted to be connected in this way.

The Porvoo Common Statement completed in 1992 and accepted in Finland in 1995, which includes the Porvoo Common Declaration signed in 1996, has been estimated to methodologically represent the mature phase of the ecumenical approach which is typical for the Finnish Lutheran approach. The starting point is the "gradually progressing" model of ecumenical and churchly approaching. In LA CA 7 is interpreted so that the when unanimity about justification has been reached, Church fellowship (Kirchengemeinschaft) can be declared, although for instance in the question concerning sacraments and ministry, a common understanding hasn't been reached. In the ELCF, the model of "reconciled diversity" has been interpreted in a different way: as the road of increasing common understanding. Full communion can be reached only after sufficient common understanding has been achieved.<sup>24</sup> on justification as well as other central doctrines.

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Bestimmung der Kirche berührt sich stark mit dem inhaltlichen Aufbau und Begründungszusammenhang der Barmer Thesen (vgl. I u. II, III u. IV, V u. VI).“

<sup>24</sup> Cantell 2004, 65-66. To the criticism towards the model of LA see also *Persenius* 1996, 103.

The Foundational Committee of the General Synod stated, when comparing the Porvoo Common Statement to LA, that in the Porvoo Common Statement “decisively more has been said about the most important articles of doctrine” than in LA. The Statement applies the model of reconciled diversity, but it isn’t a question of adapting to theological pluralism, but the theological starting point is the reconciling of unity und plurality to the plurality of the persons of the holy Trinity. The seventh article of the Augsburg Confession is interpreted in light of this.<sup>25</sup>

Thus one can see a clear distinction between the models of Leuenberg and Porvoo. In the background of the unity model of LA is the common experience of justification that is the “ground” (Grund), which is expressed in the historical doctrines/creeds (Ausdruck/Gestalt) as a witness to it. Tuomo Mannermaa pointed in his criticism towards the observation that in the background work of the Agreement you could clearly notice an existential philosophic, “qualitative” ground-expression - model which reduced the meaning of the material doctrine to be an expression of the historical experience of justification.<sup>26</sup> So, the CA is also interpreted in a way in which the doctrine of justification seems to be separated from the material whole of the Confession. The discussions between the Lutherans and the United represented this kind of model, but many German Lutherans pointed out in the discussions in the 1950s that the articles 1-21 of the CA are included to the “doctrine of the gospel”, not only an actual fellowship.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, in the final version of LA, as it has already been stated, the doctrinal side is pointed out more than in the pre-Agreements. In the redaction work, carried out on the bases of the given statements, was namely pressure to shift the emphasis of the text from the version with an existentially emphasized methodological starting point to a more Christological-doctrinally emphasized approach. However, the fundamental starting point itself seems to be left as it was. Going out from the methodological basic idea, strictly consequent consequences have not been drawn from the point of view of understanding the material doctrine. Yet the formulations of the text have been worked up nearer to the historical reformatory points of departure. The faith

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<sup>25</sup> Repo 2008, 63. From the Anglican point of view to the near relationship between ecumenical method and understanding of unity – that is, also doctrine – refers for instance Christopher Hill (1996, 110) when he considers the problems LA causes to the Anglicans. Hill sees the basic problem of the Agreement to be in the method, not so much in the content.

<sup>26</sup> Repo 2008, 64. See also Mannermaa 1978, 108-112. Aejmelaeus 2008, 4 considers the study of Mannermaa from the point of view of an exegete: “I must say that I find it difficult to follow his reasoning and wonder whether anyone else has really understood it.” For instance from those researchers as well Martikainen, Peura, Repo as Toiviainen seem to interpret the basic points of departure of the Agreement rather similarly. The critical remarks of Risto Saarinen have, on the other hand, given impulses to the reflection of Anneli Aejmelaeus.

<sup>27</sup> Martikainen 1980, 11-12.

theological emphasis has been transferred towards a more doctrinal direction without reflecting thoroughly, how consequent the whole is.<sup>28</sup>

In the ready Agreement, in other words, the aim was to follow the idea of the "hierarchy of truths" but it remains unclear in what sense the Church fellowship as a part of the Church of Jesus Christ is implemented. It is only stated that the Church fellowship is declared and it is "implemented" in witness and service. The Porvoo model is built on a theological-doctrinal common understanding. The tension between the doctrinal centre and the periphery is left into force and as the starting point is not taken a non-objectifiable experience of faith. The communion is built on the unanimity in the doctrine of the Church and on the sacramental essence of the Church, not on experience and the service and witness which well forth from it.<sup>29</sup>

When interpreting the starting points of the Porvoo Common Statement the Foundational Committee of the General Synod underlined that it is in congruence with the Augsburg Confession.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, with regard to the episcopacy as a sign of unity, an acceptable interpretation was reached when the ministry of episcopacy as the visual sign of the apostolic tradition was connected to the continuity of the apostolic tradition in the life of the Church. The continuity in the ministry of oversight should be understood in the context of the whole apostolic life and mission of the Church. The apostolic succession of the ministry of episcopacy is a visual and personal way to pay attention to the apostolicity of the whole Church: "The continuity of the ministry of oversight is to be understood within the continuity of the apostolic life and mission of the whole Church. Apostolic succession in the episcopal office is a visible and personal way of focusing the apostolicity of the whole Church." (Porvoo Common Statement 4 C 46).

A similar method, that is the gradually progressing model of reconciled diversity, which takes at its point of departure the thought of the hierarchy of truths (*hierarchia veritatis*), is also applied in the Joint Declaration of Justification which the General Synod accepted, like the Porvoo Common Statement, "on the basis of the confession of our Church" in May 1998. The Council of Bishops and the Foundational Committee of the General Synod regarded in their statements as important –

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<sup>28</sup> *Mannermaa* 1978, 125. *Peura* 2004, 177-179 pays attention, on the basis of the study of *Mannermaa*, to the methodological ambivalence and to the fact that from the point of view of the doctrine of Eucharist, it is problematic that the Agreement doesn't represent any more the Lutheran idea of real presence than the spiritual presence. Accordingly, when the doctrinal points of departure are vague, the question arises how this doctrinal consensus can form the fundament of ecclesial fellowship, in the way it is meant.

<sup>29</sup> *Repo* 2008, 64.

<sup>30</sup> *Repo* 2008, 64.

pointing to LA –, that the Joint Declaration doesn't distinguish between the “act of justification” and its doctrinal expression.<sup>31</sup> The trust of faith (*fides qua*) and the doctrinal content of faith (*fides quae*) are not in an abstract way separable from each other.

Yet the study *Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend?* (1986) states that in the Roman Catholic – Lutheran negotiations, unanimity could be achieved on the same basis as in the LA interpretation of the reconciled diversity. The method of the Agreement is further developed in this settlement, so that it represents a different opinion about which articles of doctrine belong to the commonly agreed centre. Yet, similarly the consensus is built in a quantitative way. Unlike these two models of German background, the Joint Declaration one doesn't mention points of emphasis or aims, but Lutheran and Roman Catholics together express the content of the doctrine of justification. With regard to the content, especially three things are fundamental: 1) justification of a sinner gets a Trinitarian-Christological basis, 2) the righteousness of a Christian is essentially bound together with the person and work of Christ, which requires a Christian and Christ to become one through faith, 3) baptism really renews a Christian.<sup>32</sup>

When the Trinitarian-Christological basis of justification is emphasized, the doctrine of justification is not isolated from the other articles of doctrine in the JDJ, but they are set to a balanced relationship to each other.<sup>33</sup> Thus, it is the same as Luther's understanding of doctrine in which the thought of the present Trinitarian God who has revealed Himself especially in Christ is at the centre, and that the denying of the present Christ in one article would be denying of Him also in the other articles.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Contract of ECG and ELCF (Vertrag) 2002 as an Expression of the Ecumenical Line**

A central reason for starting the discussion about the Leuenberg concord anew have been the practical working conditions, for instance, among the Finns in Germany. In the parish work of the Finns in Germany, a community of pulpit and Eucharist with the member churches of ECG (Evangelical Church of Germany, Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands, EKD) has existed already for

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<sup>31</sup> *Repo* 2008, 66.

<sup>32</sup> *Peura* 2002, 180-186.

<sup>33</sup> *Peura* 2002, 187. Also for example *Persenius* 1996, 103 points out, it isn't possible to separate the core of CA from the articles it publicly expresses.

<sup>34</sup> To Luther's understanding of the doctrine see *Martikainen* 1987, 98.

a long time in practice, while the principle of integration is the basis of co-operation with the local German congregations. This practical situation received an official – also theological – basis, when the General Synod accepted the contract between ELCF and ECG in 2002.

In the discussions of the Bishops' Conference, it was stated that the contract is from a Lutheran point of view better than Leuenberg. Special attention was paid to the satisfactory formulation of the doctrines of Trinity and Eucharist.<sup>35</sup> In its final statement, the Bishops' Conference maintained:

The text of the contract has been written with proficiency. It includes the fundamental the essential elements of the doctrinal ground of our Church. The contract doesn't have problematic elements in relation to the confession our Church has adopted. The text appeals short and pithy to the central common doctrinal ground. On the basis of this the communion of the pulpit and Eucharist, mentioned in the contract, and other practical co-operation between the churches is possible to carry out.<sup>36</sup>

In the handling process of the General Synod, it was stated that the basic point of departure for the contract was the Porvoo Declaration and the Meissen document, the co-operation agreement between ECG and the Church of England, which makes possible the reciprocal Eucharistic admission. Compared to LA it was possible to use the achievements of the ecumenical development and to formulate a "consensus document which is in accordance with the traditional understanding of faith of our Church as well as with the previous agreements our Church has signed." The formulation of the Eucharistic doctrine is especially brought up "from a Lutheran point of view in a satisfactory way", that is the real presence –thought is clearly explicated and also the objectivity of the media of grace.<sup>37</sup>

In the text of the Agreement about the Eucharist is stated:

We believe that the celebration of the Holy Supper in our parishes is a feast of the new covenant instituted by Jesus Christ, in which the Word of God is proclaimed and the Resurrected Jesus Christ is in the visible signs of bread and wine Himself present. In this way we receive the Body and Blood of Christ and in this way Christ forgives us our sins and redeems us to live a new life in faith. Celebrating the Holy Supper we experience that we are out of God's mercy members of the Body of Christ and that we're continually confirmed to serve people.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Protocol of the Bishops' Conference 12.-13.2.2002, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Protocol of the Bishops' Conference 12.-13.2.2002, 235.

<sup>37</sup> Protocol of the General Synod, spring session 2002, the report of the Foundational Committee, 2. *Saarinen* 2005, 594 remarks that the VERTRAG uses the term "Kirchengemeinschaft" instead of the term "visible unity". From this one cannot draw the conclusion that the term would be used in the same meaning than for instance in LA, because the agreement represents clearly the Finnish line of doctrinal ecumenism and not the thought that the Church fellowship can be declared already before thorough doctrinal discussions.

<sup>38</sup> Protocol of the General Synod, spring session 2002, draft agreement between the ELCF and ECG, § 1 (2) f.

In the discussion, the chair of the foundational Committee, Bishop Ilkka Kantola, stated that the foundational Committee paid attention to the fact that the agreement doesn't mean that our Church would join the LA. Its theological foundation and method are not built on the basis of the concord, but before all on the basis of the Porvoo Declaration and the Meissen Agreement, like it is explicitly stated in the agreement. Secondly, Kantola paid attention to the point that the doctrine of Eucharist was formulated in a way which satisfied both parties.<sup>39</sup> In the proposal of the Church Council, it is underlined in the same way that the document pays attention to the development after the agreement and to the introduction "the main content of the classical interpretation of Christian faith is summarized" and the part which deals with the Eucharist "has received a formulation which clearly enough expresses the Lutheran understanding of the real presence of Christ in the 'visible signs of bread and wine'."<sup>40</sup>

In this way, an agreement was reached which followed the Finnish Lutheran theological line-drawing, making possible a communion of altar and pulpit on the basis of our own points of departure with the member churches of ECG. The Lutheran identity was not compromised, but functioned according to our ecumenical duty, at the same time paying attention to the practical needs of the parish work among the Finns in Germany, and respectively among the Germans in Finland. The model is a good basis for further work, thinking of the needs of the work with the Finns abroad. It has already been applied in the contract with the Austrian Lutheran Church, and the Church of Sweden has also made use of the theological part of the agreement between ELCF and ECG in the agreement it has made with ECG.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> ELCF General Synod, discussion protocol, spring session 2002, 218.

<sup>40</sup> Proposal of the Church Council to the General Synod number 6/2002, 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Saarinen* 1996, 293-294 regards as a problem of the ecumenical revising of the LA that the Agreement has been a "take or leave" –contract. In addition to the Meissen Agreement and the Methodist agreements, the Leuenberg Community hasn't been willing to make new agreements. After this, the Church of Norway has in its own agreement added its own hermeneutical framework to LA and pointed out it interprets the agreement through the Porvoo Agreement and that it dissociates from the building of a "protestant block". Yet, *Saarinen* sees it unrealistic to take all the Leuenberg-Churches to the preparation of a new agreement and regards as an another alternative a parallel agreement with the Meissen with the EKD and seeing, if also other Leuenberg-counterparts could sign it. In a way the Finnish 2002 agreement has been used in the latter way. In the document collection for study use Ecumenical workbook *Saarinen* (1998, 221) states that "certain ecumenical consequence" apparently presupposes that "it isn't favorable to join the Leuenberg-group, if the group doesn't regard the other commitments of the joining party as theologically legitimate (compare with *Leuenberg, Meissen and Porvoo*)".



## Conclusions

Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that the ecumenical line of ELCF has been based on the model of gradually developing reconciled diversity during the last decades. According to it, a sufficient common doctrinal understanding should be reached before more steps can be taken towards visible unity and enter into altar and pulpit fellowship. In this way, we want to be loyal to the Lutheran identity the confessional foundation of our Church expresses and at the same time to be ecumenically open.

The Diocesan council of Turku estimated in its initiative that "On the one hand, one can be of the opinion that the theological criticism directed towards the theological method of the Leuenberg Agreement in general, and especially towards the content of the concept of 'Kirchengemeinschaft', is both still to the point and in its character permanent. On the other hand, it can be asked whether the contract with the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) and the Porvoo agreement and the memberships and agreements with different Church families actually express such connections with the Community of the Protestant Churches that it is reason to ask the question, whether our Church's ecumenical line has been theologically consequent."

On the basis of the analysis it can be stated that increasing the connections with the Community of the Protestant Churches in Europe in the form of the Agreement with EKD in 2002 or through the Porvoo Agreement, and not not to sign LA, is not in contradiction with the basic line: simultaneous ecumenical openness and strong Finnish Lutheran identity. Namely, the decisions have been built on the chosen ecumenical theological line which is anchored in the Trinitarian-Christological faith and which points out the essential importance of the thought of real presence in Lutheran theology, so that the doctrine of justification is placed into a balanced relationship to other articles of CA. From the beginning, we have taken part in the theological work of the Leuenberg-group, and we have sent Finnish observers to the theological consultations of CPCE– also to the newest one: *Ecclesia semper reformanda*.

In the final form of LA, more weight has been given, on the one hand, to doctrinal ecumenism than in the pre-Agreements, but on the other hand the substantial weight of doctrine and confession remains, especially from the point of view of Lutheran identity and the ecumenical place of Lutheranism, unclear. Even Wenzel Lohff, who was the main architect of the LA, has affirmed that it has been brought into question, whether LA as a method of a protestant special group is

sufficient, for instance, as a fundament of the work of the WCC.<sup>42</sup> While analyzing the JDDJ, it was noted that a better way than a doctrinal minimum consensus, e.g. towards the Roman Catholic Church, was the common expression of the content of the doctrine of the justification, so that the remaining differences can be reconciled with each other. According to Wolfgang Huber, Cardinal Walter Kasper has criticised the method of the CPCE as "unreconciled diversity". Yet, Wolfgang Huber has, on the basis of his "Ecumenism of profiles", also agreed to the formulation of Cardinal Kasper: "Thus we approach each other not on the basis of the lowest common nominator, but we rather come more in that way closer that we enrich each other vice versa."<sup>43</sup>

The fact that the doctrine of ministry and ecclesiology have been elaborated in the later theological work of the Leuenberg fellowship/CPCE, doesn't clear away the unclear role of doctrine and confession in the Agreement itself. Moreover, the later theological work of the CPCE has also been based upon the distinction between "fundament" (Grund) and "form" (Gestalt), whose openness to various interpretations is one basic reason for the theological problems of the Agreement.

Matti Repo has come to same kind of results in his analysis on the ecumenical line of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. According to him, the ELCF established its line of doctrinal ecumenism in the 1970s when the awareness of the ecumenical theology in general had become deeper. Ecumenism was considered to be more than only co-operation between churches. It included both "fellowship" and "unity". Thus, e.g. in the Porvoo Statement, the objective of visible unity is not seen as a separate aim distinguished from church fellowship (Kirchengemeinschaft). It isn't only a question of witness and service, but of making visible in the visible Church as a true Church the oneness given as a gift in Christ. Lutheranism is interpreted in accordance with the CA as aiming to represent Catholic Christianity going out from its own Lutheran/ecumenical starting points. That is why we try to reach sufficient unanimity before the fellowship of altar and pulpit or recognizing the ministry of the church.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Lohff 1991, 35.

<sup>43</sup> Huber 2007, 141.

<sup>44</sup> Repo 1998, 68-69. After the studies of myself and Matti Repo, the questions of Anneli Aejmelaesus can also be answered; 1) if the teaching of the ELCF has been changed from the line chosen in the 1970s and if 2) there is now greater clarity about problematic issues. The ecumenical line which aims to also take the doctrinal questions seriously when building the unity of the Church has thus been the same, and in the Agreement itself, no changes have occurred. Yet, on the fundament of ecumenical development, and we have been able to sign a theologically coherent contract about co-operation with the Evangelical Church of Germany (2002), which has been able to avoid the theological problems of LA.

The same ecumenical line has obviously been followed in the theological dialogue between the ELCF and the Union Methodist Churches (Finnish and Swedish-speaking). Let us remind that already in the decision of the General Synod in 1977 was stated: "...the General Synod considers also actions in order to get Eucharistic communion with those non-Lutheran churches which have signed or will sign the Leuenberg Agreement." The best way to deal with practical problems in the Ministry among the Finns abroad, for instance in Switzerland, seems to be a similar theological basis as in the Agreement with EKD. It's natural to support the Swiss Evangelical Lutheran Church as a Lutheran minority Church and prioritize co-operation with it.

This kind of position is in accordance with the line of the ecumenical strategy of ELCF Our Church. A Community That Seeks Unity (26.1.2009). The first aim of the strategy is formulated "Our aim is the visible unity of the Church". About the practical means and starting points of this aim I pay attention especially to three subpoints mentioned in the strategy:

- We aim towards the expression of Christian unity in worship and intercommunion.
- We commit ourselves to the legacy of undivided Christendom and seek Christian unity on the basis of our Lutheran identity.
- We seek unanimity with all Christians on the basis truths of faith.

On the basis of the study can be summarized – making the theses of Juhani Forsberg little more precise – that at least the following theological, with the Lutheran identity integral, arguments support the current ecumenical line of the Evangelical Lutheran Church not to sign the Leuenberg Agreement:

- 1) LA is based on the idea of "minimal consensus" and remains thus pretty open to various interpretations. The theological work after the Agreement has reduced various interpretations, but the text is still ambivalent and differs from the line of the ELCF to underline the whole Augsburg Confession, and our Lutheran confession in general, as the basis of interpretation. This is connected with the perception that
- 2) LA grounds the church fellowship upon the distinction between "basis" (Grund) and "shape" (Gestalt). Then the ultimate interpretation is that only the act of justification is the qualitative basis and the explicated doctrine is the historically determined, quantitative shape or expression. Although the final version of the Agreement doesn't represent this ultimate interpretation, but points out more than the previous versions the meaning of the doctrine,

the consequence from that point of departure still seems to be that the content and meaning of the faith, and of the confession become dimmer.

- 3) LA's key concept "church fellowship" (Kirchengemeinschaft) is too unclear and indefinite. Its interpretation through the concept of "koinonia", on the other hand, brings the intentions of the counterparts nearer to each other, but it doesn't take away the problem of many interpretations which are caused by the starting point. Moreover, the distinction between "basis" and "shape" brings problems to the objective of aiming toward the goal of visible unity.
- 4) LA's decree of validity is unclear. In some cases, it has had no effects on the life of the churches which have signed. In other cases, it is seen to define a "protestant" ecumenical identity.
- 5) LA's character as a confessional book and its relations to the confessional writings of the subscribed churches is unclear. The official interpretation is that LA doesn't replace the confessions of the signers, but they remain valid. On the other hand, in the hymnals of the German Land Churches LA is among the "confession like" documents printed in the appendix.
- 6) The most difficult single problem of LA is still the formulation of the doctrine of Eucharist. It is not satisfactory, according to our Lutheran understanding. There are still also other problematic articles of doctrine.

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