

# THE WINDOW

Number 20

June 1989

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MEISSEN AGREEMENT

---

*An abridged transcript of the talk given by Canon John Hind, Principal of Chichester Theological College, Church of England, at the Society's AGM in March*

The Meissen Agreement was first presented to the General Synod of the Church of England on 9th November 1988. In moving that the Statement be received, the Dean of Rochester pointed out that it was the 50th Anniversary of Kristallnacht on which Synagogues throughout Germany were desecrated. The fact of human sinfulness is always with us, and no European could seriously believe in the fantasy of moral progress following the experience of two world wars and the other horrors of our century. The struggle for repentance, reconciliation and christian values could however also be seen in the midst of these horrors; of which the inspiring witness of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Bishop George Bell are salient examples.

The havoc and devastation of the wars was not something which concerned somebody else, and certainly not an affair of which the churches and Christians as individuals could wash their hands.

It would be facile to say that the disunity of the churches played any direct part in these matters; but the divisions between Christians are an example of precisely the divisions between human beings which Christianity claims to overcome in Christ. There is therefore a very particular connection between the evidences of sin in twentieth century European history and the ecumenical movement - and the Meissen agreement in particular.

The quest for christian unity has always to be seen in this wider context as part of God's universal plan.

"God has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

The Archbishop of Canterbury commented on this passage from Ephesians in his opening address to last year's Lambeth Conference: "In this vision there is ultimately no difference between the quest for the Church's unity and the quest for human healing in the widest sense. The Church is the model to which the whole human family will look for its healing and reconciliation. To the degree that the Church is effectively gathering in unity in the assembly of worship around God and the Lamb, it is the sign of hope and the bearer of good news to the whole world."

The Meissen statement is at the moment of course merely a proposal for agreement (until it has been formally received and approved by all the participating churches). The text was prepared by conferences in 1987 and 1988 in this country and Meissen in Saxony in the German Democratic Republic. The churches party to these discussions were the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the German Democratic Republic (BEKDDR) and the Church of England.

It is a common experience of those involved in drawing up international and ecumenical agreements that the place and context of meetings plays an important part in what is achieved. Theological agreement is not a matter of "mere" doctrine, because theology itself is not a matter of mere doctrine, but concerns



the whole life of the Church, its worship, patterns of social life, interaction with the environment, relations with the society in which it is set and so on. So we can say that to some extent this statement arises not simply out of the discussions and common worship of the participants, but also out of their being able to share just a little of the ecclesial experience of one another. They meet each other, get to know, like, trust and understand each other. They learn something about one another's situation of life and so grow closer. Their meeting produces results, of which the published text is only part; it is however this part, the published text, that others can see, to which they must respond, and on the basis of which they may perhaps have to make decisions - and all without having experienced the breadth and depth of the encounter. So the ecumenical advance party can get far ahead of the rest of the troops, who naturally wonder what is going on. It is therefore important to understand the context of the Meissen statement - how it came to be, and how it relates to the growing fellowship of the churches concerned.

It is important to stress that this is not only an Anglican-Lutheran dialogue, because the German churches are both federations of Landeskirchen, regional churches which since the Reformation have subscribed to one or other of the Reformation confessions, either the Lutheran Augsburg Confession or the Calvinist Heidelberg Confession. In both East and West Germany "united churches" are also included as members of the respective churches.

In the light of the great division between Roman Catholic and Protestant in the western church, it is sometimes easy to forget just how sharp the conflict was in the sixteenth century between different branches of the Reformation. Lutherans and Calvinists took strongly different lines on several different aspects of ecclesiology and sacramental theology, and Anglicans in particular often need reminding that what we simplistically call "continental protestants" have historically been anything but a homogeneous whole. One of the reasons why members of the Church of England make this mistake is because, unlike the German Reformation churches, the Church of England is not a "confessional" church. The authoritative texts of the English Reformation are the 39 Articles, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal. None of these three is more important than any other, and although the Articles look like a variation on the common theme of Reformation Confessions, the very fact of their being balanced by a definitive liturgy and a rite of ordination makes their status different.

If the English commonly regard Lutherans and Reformed as minor variations of one another, Lutherans in particular have often regarded the Church of England as confessionally determined by the Articles alone, as if by an English version, and somewhat defective to boot, of the Augustana. By way of contrast, the Preface to the ASB 1980 contains a telling phrase: "those who seek to know the

The Window is sent quarterly to Members and Associate groups of the Anglican-Lutheran Society. Information about the Society and membership applications are available from the Secretary.

#### ANGLICAN-LUTHERAN SOCIETY

##### Co-Patrons

The Most Revd Dr Robert Runcie  
Archbishop of Canterbury  
The Rt Revd Dr Johannes Hanselmann  
President of the Lutheran World  
Federation

##### Co-Presidents

The Rt Revd David Tustin  
Bishop of Grimsby  
(Anglican)  
The Rt Revd Tore Furberg  
Bishop of Visby  
(Lutheran)

##### Vice-President

The Rt Revd John Gibbs  
(Anglican)

##### Chairman

The Revd Tom Bruch  
(Lutheran)

##### Vice-Chairman

The Revd Geoffrey Brown  
(Anglican)

##### Secretary

The Revd Barbara Melaas  
(Lutheran)

##### Treasurer

Sister Naomi SSM  
(Anglican)

##### Committee Members

The Revd David Driscoll  
(Anglican)  
Mr Richard Kubica  
(Lutheran)  
Mr Colin Podmore  
(Anglican)

#### THE WINDOW

Editorial Office  
Anglican-Lutheran Society  
30 Thanet Street, London  
WC1H 9QH

##### Co-Editors

The Revd Geoffrey Brown  
The Revd Tom Bruch



mind of the Church of England in the last quarter of the twentieth century will find it in this book."

We should not make too much of this distinction, but it is true to say that on the whole since the Reformation the Church of England has been a liturgical rather than a confessional church. It is also true to say - and this is important in trying to understand the approach and problems of the Church of England in ecumenical matters - that the fact that the Ordinal is an authoritative text gives rise to a special, ordained ministry of word and sacrament, with a constitutive role in the church which marks it off from other reformed churches. It is hardly surprising therefore that different members of the Church of England interpret these facts differently. Members of other churches often wonder how they can possibly make any sense of the Anglican way of being the church.

There is more, then, to the dialogue between the Church of England and the churches of the Reformation in Germany than a simple bilateral conversation between two roughly similar bodies who have merely (!) to come to an agreement about points on which they have traditionally disagreed.

It is in this context that we should try to understand the Meissen text. Its aim is to take a step towards full, visible unity - hence the title. This involves a much wider process of reconciliation than that between our particular churches; it is therefore a step on the road to full fellowship between the Church of England and the EKD, and between the Church of England and the BEKDDR. It is a step on the way to the wider healing of the divisions of Christendom: and as such it is both a sign and a means of disclosing the reconciliation of all things in Christ.

It is not a blueprint for a united church, nor is it a simple statement of friendship, of peaceful coexistence. It is a proposal for action based both on what we can already perceive in one another and on some things which we can either foresee or be prepared to commit ourselves to.

There is still time  
to book a place  
at the Society's

**INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE  
1989**

13 - 19 September

Kloster Wennigsen  
Hannover  
Federal Republic  
of Germany

Write now to:  
The Conference Secretary  
Anglican Lutheran Society  
30 Thanet Street  
London WC1H 9QH

Formally the Meissen document falls into two parts: chapters I - V constitute a Common Statement on the basis of which the churches are asked to make a Declaration (chapter VI). The chapter titles are:

- I The Church as sign, instrument and foretaste of the Kingdom of God
- II The Church as koinonia
- III Growth towards full, visible unity
- IV Communion already shared
- V Agreement in faith
- VI Mutual Acknowledgement and Next Steps

Chapter VI is a Declaration consisting of two parts. The Meissen statement concerns relations between churches, as churches. Even though it may be the case that formal mutual condemnations have not alienated us, long history and differing experience have separated us and led us apart. Churches, like estranged friends, need to edge towards each other again, to rediscover each other, to recognise one another again, especially as neither party is exactly what it was before.



The first part of the Declaration, if it is made by the participating churches, will be an ecclesial act whereby, on the basis of what we are able to see in one another, and in the context of firm decisions to be taken now about positive further steps to increase our fellowship in life and mission, we acknowledge one another as churches, and recognise in one another's churches authentic preaching and sacramental life, ordained ministry and episkope. This Acknowledgement rests upon carefully worked out and realistic affirmation of the present level of relations and understanding between us, the common faith we share, the doctrine of the church and the vision of the goal of unity.

The Acknowledgement looks forward and seeks to contribute to the achievement not only of the modest next steps (which in fact go no further in Anglican terms than put our relations with the German churches on the same footing as those with other churches in this country in the light of the new Ecumenical Canons), but also of the ultimate goal of full visible unity. At the moment our ordained ministries, for example, are not interchangeable. There is no short cut to making them so, but the drafters of the Meissen text believe it is possible, on the basis of where we have already got to, to take cautious steps forward, recognising both the possibilities and the constraints of our present position.

It is the task of the ecumenical officers of our various churches now to work out practical bi-lateral agreements (i.e. C of E and EKD, and C of E and BEKDDR) to implement these next steps, and without which the Statement itself could not become an Agreement.

We do not yet know the complete picture of what the full visible unity of the church will or must entail, and many details will have to be worked out as we grow together. We do know, however, that nothing less than a full sharing in faith, in common life, oversight, witness, service and decision making will be faithful to what God has revealed to us.

---

**THE MEISSEN STATEMENT:  
"ON THE WAY  
TOWARDS VISIBLE UNITY"**

---

*This is an extract from the quarterly English-language Bulletin of the Evangelical Church in (Federal) Germany (EKD). The EKD and its counterpart in the GDR (East Germany) together comprise the United, Lutheran, and Reformed Landeskirchen (regional churches) of the two countries.*

*The Meissen Statement is said to be the first official German-English theological agreement since the Reformation in the 16th-century. Released last year by German Evangelical and English Anglican representatives, it is now being discussed and debated within each constituency. Official acceptance of the declaration is expected next year.*

(In the Meissen Statement,) the Church of England... and the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the German Democratic Republic (along with their member churches)... commit themselves to strive together for full, visible, unity, and to take all possible steps towards closer fellowship in as many areas of Christian life and witness as possible....

The... statement recalls the common tradition of the churches in worship, spirituality, and theology, and co-operation between them in many areas of social and pastoral concern, and indicates their substantial agreement on the doctrine of the church and of the ministry, as well as on a wide range of other fundamental theological questions. The one remaining difference - ...the understanding of the historical episcopate... - is not regarded as a hindrance to closer fellowship between the participating churches.

On the basis of such findings the delegation recommend that their churches jointly declare that they acknowledge:

- one another's churches as churches belonging to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ, and



truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God;

- that in their churches the Word of God is authentically preached, and the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist are duly administered;

- one another's ordained ministries as given by God and instruments of his grace, and that they look forward to the time when the reconciliation of their churches makes possible the full interchangeability of ministers;

- that personal and collegiate oversight (episkope) is embodied and exercised in their churches in a variety of forms, episcopal and non-episcopal, as a visible sign of the church's unity and continuity in apostolic life, mission, and ministry.

The participating churches... also commit themselves to share a common life and mission, and to take all possible steps towards closer fellowship in as many areas of Christian life and witness as possible.

The joint declaration also provides for a continuation of official theological conversations, forms of joint oversight and regular consultation on significant matters of faith and order, life and work, participation in one another's worship, exchange of ministers, eucharistic hospitality and sharing in the celebration of the eucharist, and mutual invitations to ordinations.

Further practical ways of developing the existing fellowship, such as encouraging twinning schemes between church districts and local congregations, visiting programmes, student exchanges, and regular conferences of church leaders, will be agreed upon separately between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Church of England and the Federation of the Evangelical Churches in the GDR....

(EPS)

---

**PERESTROIKA IS LIKE  
A SPRING BREEZE  
FOR SOVIET CHURCHES,  
SAYS BISHOP**

---

Atheism has no significance in the Soviet Union any more, according to the recently-consecrated bishop of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Soviet Union. Bishop Harald Kalnins likened the present situation in the Soviet Union to a "spring breeze" for the churches.

In a recent interview, Bishop Kalnins described how church attendance in the Soviet Union is increasing. In past weeks he held three services in the Leningrad area and each time the congregation doubled. Consecrated last November, the 77-year-old bishop is responsible for more than 500 German-speaking congregations in an area stretching more than 5,000 kilometres.

The most important task at present is to make local authorities - especially in remoter areas of the Soviet Union - aware of the freedoms that Christians are allowed under the policy of perestroika, he said. He reported that in his travels through the Baltic region he still meets a great amount of concern among Christians who fear reprisals from the authorities. He reassures these Christians that Moscow is the capital of the Soviet Union and that decisions taken in Moscow on religious freedom must be respected.

"The church is separate from the state, but the problem is that the state doesn't separate itself from the church," Kalnins said. The Lutheran church in the Soviet Union is careful not to indulge in polemics, but it has often had to remind local authorities of the decisions of the Gorbachev administration, he added. More recently, however, the church has felt both protected and treated with respect by the state.

(LWI) (ed)



---

**SWEDISH CLERGY  
MARCH AGAINST  
LOW SALARIES**

---

Clergy of the Stockholm diocese marched in protest against low salaries here recently and were backed up by the majority of clergy all over Sweden. They demanded, through their union, a rise in wages of more than 40 percent.

The initial salary for a curate, after more than four years of study at the university and one year of pastoral theological training, is slightly more than 8,000 Swedish kronor a month. In comparison, a completely untrained ticket collector at the Stockholm underground has a salary of 12,000 Swedish kronor per month.

Low salaries and high study loans combined with long working weeks make recruitment difficult for the Church of Sweden and there is a shortage of clergy in most dioceses. The bishops of the 13 dioceses, including the Archbishop of Uppsala, support the clergy's demand for higher salaries.

The Church of Sweden is a national Church (since 1593) and the clergy's salaries are controlled by the state but paid by the local congregation. There exists an agreement that the clergy are not allowed to go on strike. The demonstration was addressed to the Ministry for Civil Affairs, the National Union of the University Graduates and the Authority on Wage Agreements for the Government Sector.

"We were met with sympathy and good will from the ministry and from the national union," said Ms Kerstin Propper, curate in a Stockholm congregation and chairperson of the local branch of the union. "The authority on wage agreements for the government sector, however, was more unresponsive. As a whole, we believe that the demonstration has benefited our cause and we are willing to postpone further, perhaps more drastic measures."

(LWI)

---

**COMMUNITY OF LUTHERAN WOMEN  
IN SWEDEN  
CONVERT TO CATHOLICISM**

---

A Protestant community of women in Sweden has converted to Roman Catholicism. Nine nuns and a novice of the Lutheran Community of the Daughters of Mary of Vadstena, in northern Sweden, have changed over to Catholicism and joined a Benedictine abbey. In the long term, the community hopes to become a Benedictine priory.

During the last few years, three other Lutheran communities have together chosen to join the Roman Catholic Church.

In Sweden, 95 percent of the population belongs to the Lutheran Church. With 118,500 members, the Catholic Church represents a small minority.

(LWI)

---

**BISHOP PRAISES  
LUTHERAN - EPISCOPAL  
CO-OPERATION**

---

Lutefisk, as every good Norwegian Lutheran knows, is an acquired taste - a culinary delicacy consisting of fish soaked in lye water, skinned, boned and boiled.

In a bit of Scandinavian word-play, Episcopal Bishop Craig Anderson of the Diocese of South Dakota conferred the title "Lutepiscs" on a Lutheran clergy couple who are working in the Episcopal ministry on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

The Rev. Barbara Wangsness and her husband, the Rev. Natanael Lizarazo, are co-pastors at Trinity Lutheran Church in Edgemont, S.D. But they spend about half their time serving Episcopal parishes at the western end of Pine Ridge. Their Episcopal partner in the ministry is the Rev. Benjamin Tyon, a priest who is a member of the Lakota tribe.



Funding for the couple's work in the episcopal ministry comes from Evangelical Lutheran Church in America funds given by South Dakota Synod congregations.

(L)

---

### ANGLICAN AND LUTHERAN PUBLISHERS IN JOINT VENTURE

---

With a vision of becoming "the world's leading publisher of serious theology in the English language," an English publisher of theological works has recently announced its intention to join forces with an American publishing group. The new publishing house, "Trinity Press International", represents a new venture in Lutheran-Anglican co-operation: the Rev. Harold Rast, once a senior editor of Fortress Press (the publishing house of the former Lutheran Church in America, now part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) and a pastor of the ELCA has teamed up with Bishop Frederick Borsch of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles as well as with other scholars, church leaders and publishers to form the new business. SCM Press Ltd. is the UK publisher which will take part in the project.

Supported by a US \$1.5 million matching grant from Trinity Episcopal Church in New York, the new house plans to publish fifty books a year, beginning with twenty one titles to be published this autumn. Works of scholars such as E.P. Sanders, Margaret Davies, Jurgen Moltmann and John Macquarrie will be amongst those featured in the first publication runs.

Originators of the new scheme launch the project in the knowledge that financial factors make the publishing of scholarly books a risk. In a prepared statement, Bishop Borsch stated: "Given its ecumenical focus, the press will require significant, broad-based support throughout the Christian community if it is to fulfil its promise. Its success depends upon recruiting additional partners if this new venture is to have a legitimate chance to flower and bear fruit."

LWI/L (ed)

---

### ROMAN CATHOLIC, ANGLICAN AND LUTHERAN BISHOPS FOSTER UNITY

---

"Anything that divides" Lutherans and Roman Catholics "must end," said Rocky Mountain Synod Bishop Wayne Weissenbuehler of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, who joined his local Roman Catholic and Episcopal counterparts for theological discussion and worship during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The Denver gathering was the first joint public worship service in Colorado of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the other two church bodies. Weissenbuehler led several hundred members of the three churches in jointly renewing their baptismal vows. "Baptism is the starting point of our communality," he said.

Roman Catholic Archbishop J. Francis Stafford of Denver spoke on justification by faith at an afternoon session, with Weissenbuehler and Denver Episcopal Bishop William C. Frey responding.

The archbishop, who has been active in ecumenical dialogues since 1977, called the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue "the flagship of our (Catholic) ecumenical discussions."

Bishop Weissenbuehler told the group that the traditional understanding of justification by faith among Lutherans "is under heaviest fire from liberation theology."

Bishop Frey said the seemingly slow pace of ecumenical discussion results from presenting "our theology in front of us rather than putting our bodies first," working together in cooperative endeavours.

From his experience with disagreements among Anglicans, Bishop Frey said it may be necessary for the three religious bodies to acknowledge they will not be in complete accord.



---

## NEW BALTIC RELIGION LAWS PROPOSED

---

The Soviet Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are drawing up their own religion laws.

Up to now the churches and religious groups there have been subject to regulations introduced in the 1920s for the entire Soviet Union. In Latvia, the state Council for Religious Affairs is preparing a proposal for reform that will be presented to the republic's Supreme Soviet.

Latvia's largest religious group is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia. The government's Council for Religious Affairs consulted all registered churches and religious bodies, asking them what they would like the reforms to do. They were told that their views would be taken into account as the new law was drawn up.

The Lutheran church made 26 recommendations - 20 concerning parish life and 6 concerning the pastorate. A major principle the church emphasized was that the congregation should be recognised as a legal entity whose interests are not restricted to church affairs.

Latvian Lutherans said congregations and their pastors should have more rights and possibilities to be legally active outside the church. Congregations should be allowed to collect money and open their own bank accounts, thus enabling them, for instance, to finance social work. They also want to have their own libraries with Christian literature.

Even before the new law on religion is introduced, four church buildings that were confiscated by the state more than twenty years ago have now been given back to the Lutherans. New congregations have started in several places.

Many people are coming back to the churches. Pastors are asked to minister to people more often than before. They are now allowed to visit hospitals and old people's homes. And Bible knowledge

is even allowed as a school subject.

Many young people in the Latvian church are looking for answers to questions about the meaning of life and directions they should take. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia is becoming more active in its youth work, particularly at the parish level. To keep up with these developments the church appointed one pastor to head its youth work.

Young Latvian Christians have been granted permission to attend church meetings abroad - something that was unheard of in the past. In Riga, Latvia's capital city, there are plans for a youth conference with participants from Sweden. Some young Christians in Riga have developed a program of visitation for the poor and the sick.

In rural areas the situation is more difficult. There are few parsonages or parish buildings, which the state confiscated in the past, where congregations can meet. Many pastors have to travel from Riga to visit rural parishes. The church expects that the law reform will enable these pastors' residences and parish buildings to be returned.

One other area where church work was restricted is evangelism. The church has plans for using video cassettes of religious films as well as other evangelistic material from abroad. Not so long ago help from abroad was strictly prohibited.

Friedrich Koenig

(L)

---

## INDEX TO ABBREVIATIONS

---

LWI	Lutheran World Information
L	The Lutheran
ACC	Anglican Consultative Council
AMM	Anglican Media Mailing
EPS	Ecumenical Press Service
CT	Church Times
etd	edited
ppd	paraphrased