

PASTOR GENERAL'S REPORT

TO THE MINISTRY OF THE
WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD



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SEPTEMBER 25, 1979

Greetings, Ministers and Wives:

This will be the last Pastor General's Report you will receive before leaving for the Feast.

I hope we may all do our best to make this the GREATEST feast in 1900 years. Already God has started to make this the greatest in our time. Normally we have had to borrow one million dollars in June or July, to be paid back out of the Holy Day offerings at the Feast. We also customarily had to borrow a million dollars in January and pay it back after Passover time Holy Day offerings. THIS YEAR, IN SPITE OF THE MASSIVE ATTACK BY THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA, WE HAVE NOT HAD TO BORROW AT EITHER TIME! In spite of troubles, and Garner Ted Armstrong trying to draw away our members after him, GOD HAS RICHLY BLESSED HIS WORK THIS YEAR! How THANKFUL we should be!

Certainly God has intervened to give us a truly great send-off for this year's Festival! Now its up to us to let this great blessing of His inspire us to the highest pitch of enthusiasm to make this the greatest Feast of our time--and, so far as I know, this Festival had not previously to our time been held at all for centuries--perhaps for about 1900 years!

On the Feast of Trumpets, just day before yesterday, I held an afternoon service here at our home in Tucson. The Tucson Church held the usual morning and afternoon services, but for the afternoon service here at our home, my wife's mother, Rona's mother, Mel and his family, Mr. Tkach and Kevin Dean and Henry Cornwall attended. My wife's mother's dog, Suzy, came also. And when we all stood up for prayer at the beginning, Suzy stood up also, standing on her hind feet, bracing herself with her front paws against my legs.

Remember, fellows--those of you who will be speaking during the Feast --God has ordained these annual Festivals to REMIND US every year of the various stages in His Master Plan for our spiritual creation. BE SURE AND PREACH ON THE MEANING OF THIS FESTIVAL!

Pray, and FAST AND PRAY, between now and the Feast, for Christ's further blessings, and that He will inspire us all--both ministers and lay members--to make this the most inspiring Festival of our lives!

Last year the special Festival edition of the book, "The INCREDIBLE HUMAN POTENTIAL," was ready and given out to members. This year the book, "TOMORROW--What It Will be Like," is ready and one will be given to each family. This book is devoted to the very event this Festival portrays. Some of you who will be speaking at one or more of the Festival sites may find some inspiring sermon material about the coming millennium in this book.

Let us all praise and thank God for the special way in which He has blessed us this year.

FROM MINISTERIAL SERVICES

The count for the Holy Day offering is not yet complete and will not be for another day or two. However, with 293 Churches, the results so far are very encouraging. To date the Offering has almost duplicated last year's offering. However, with 42 Churches yet to call in this year's Trumpets offering, it could well be the highest ever in the history of the Work of God.

It is clear that God is blessing His Church greatly, now that it is on the track again. It is interesting to note that an apostle is one sent forth bearing authority, and now that Mr. Armstrong is using that authority to set the Church aright and make it ready for Christ's return, striving to remove every spot and blemish and iron out every wrinkle, God is opening doors and pouring out His blessings more than ever before. Let's all realize how very soon Christ's return is and that God is even now setting the stage for the exciting role His Church will play in the events leading up to the end of this age.

Remember, you cannot just "have" a Great Feast. You must "make" it a Great Feast. As ministers we must not neglect prayer and Bible study during the Festival. Our minds must continually be on the all-important purpose of this Festival, which reminds us of "Tomorrow--What It Will Be Like." Let's make it a point to meet many brethren, talk with them, encourage all of them about the growth in God's Church since Mr. Armstrong has taken full control again. Let's make this the best Feast ever!

--Joe Tkach, Ministerial Services

SPOKESMAN'S CLUB INFORMATION

For those of you who may be requesting Spokesman's Club Manuals in the next few weeks, we want to mention that the manual is being revised slightly and we are expecting delivery of the new manuals around the end of November. We are sorry for the inconvenience this may cause some of you, and appreciate your understanding and patience.

One change we are instituting concerns the Certificates of Merit that are given to the men who complete the twelve speech lessons. From now on, the blank certificates and the folders to frame them will be sent out as a supply item. The local club will be responsible for having the names of the men and the club printed on the certificates locally. Depending on the resources available to the club, they can have the needed information either printed, typed or handwritten (as long as the handwriting is of an appropriately formal style--as in calligraphy).

Supplies of the blank certificates will be sent to all international offices so that clubs in various parts of the world can send their requests to their regional office.

--Joe Tkach, Ministerial Services

UPDATE ON MOST RECENT COURT HEARING

Friday, September 21, over 1000 members went to Superior Court in downtown Los Angeles to show once again that they disapprove of the state's onslaught against the Worldwide Church of God. Some carried neatly painted signs outside the courthouse, while others stood quietly in the hall just

outside the courtroom, or sat inside during the Church's hearing before Judge Thomas T. Johnson. "But," as a Los Angeles Times reporter observed, "there were no disturbances."

God's people conducted themselves in an exemplary manner showing that they are sincere, law-abiding and peaceful people. And, by their very presence, showed their whole-hearted support for the Church and its leadership. By generating media coverage (on radio, TV and in newspapers) the crowd drew the attention of a disinterested public which is largely unaware that its own religious freedom is being eroded in California by what is happening to God's Church. The members there were, in effect, concerned people "looking over the shoulder of the judge" as he decides in these important matters.

The issues discussed during the lengthy court hearing involved the setting of a date for a deposition of Mr. Rader in the attorney general's office. (This deposition would be a court-compelled session where the state would grill him regarding church matters.) The attorney general also wanted the judge to order Mr. Rader and Mr. Henry Cornwall (an assistant to Mr. Herbert Armstrong) to hand over various documents to the state--papers which the Church's attorneys feel are protected by the first amendment of the constitution and should NOT be surrendered. In addition, the court had to decide whether to end the ban it had imposed against the church's obtaining information from the state about the outrageous false charges brought against the Worldwide Church of God nine months ago.

The process for obtaining information in a lawsuit is called "discovery." The court has ordered the church, Mr. Rader, Mr. Armstrong and the other individual church officials who are defendants to comply with the state's "discovery" by giving the state all information it is demanding about church matters. At the same time the court has prohibited the church from using the same "discovery" procedures to obtain information from the state regarding any "facts" on which the state has based its charges. Nevertheless, the judge continued the ban on discovery by the Church until November 26, saying that the Church had failed to give documents to the attorney general's office up to the present. Totally ignored here is the paramount question of whether the state has the lawful right to be intruding into Church financial documents and other matters in the first place!

Concerning Mr. Rader's deposition, Judge Johnson accommodated Mr. Rader's schedule and the Work of the Church by setting the date during the week that Mr. Rader will be in Los Angeles after the Feast of Tabernacles, and prior to his trip to China with Mr. Herbert Armstrong. During this discussion the attorney general had urged the judge to order Mr. Rader to give his deposition sooner. This would have interrupted very important preparations with Mr. Armstrong just before the Feast of Tabernacles, thus showing the attorney general's disregard for the observances and beliefs of this church.

Dates were also set for documents from Mr. Rader and Mr. Cornwall to be delivered to the attorney general--within 30 and 45 days. Church Attorney Allan Browne told the brethren after the hearing that the forbidding of our acquiring a better understanding of the nature of the charges against the Church, and the order to give extensive Church information to the state "puts us in a straitjacket on the one hand, but on the other hand, the court is saying 'We're going to put you in the boxing ring and give the Attorney General some gloves and tell him to go to work!'"

Mr. Brown went on to say that he felt the Court's action was in error as a matter of law and contrary to our judicial process. He and our other attorneys are advising Mr. Rader, Mr. Cornwall, and the Church to not produce any documents or appear for any depositions until we are told by the highest court in the land that, in effect, we no longer have any first amendment right to the free exercise of our religion.

In the meantime, Mr. Browne said that the Church will be appealing these decisions to higher courts. He added that in light of many recent court decisions in other parts of the country, he is confident that actions against the Church by the California Attorney General will be proven wrong and illegal.

FOUNDATION ESTABLISHING CULTURAL TIES WITH CHINA

The September 20, 1979 Pasadena Star-News ran the essence of a news release reporting recent progress in establishing cultural ties between the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation and The People's Republic of China. The Star-News has granted permission to reproduce the article for your interest.

Ambassador foundation presented concert in China

The Ambassador International Cultural Foundation, an agency of the Worldwide Church of God, presented a concert in Peking to launch its activities in the People's Republic of China, according to Stanley R. Rader, executive vice president of the foundation.

Rader, who has been on an extensive visit to China as lecturer and guest of the Chinese government, also lectured at the University of Peking

during his visit. The first event was a concert by 130 leading Chinese dancers, actors, singers and musicians at the the National Palace Theater at the University of Peking.

"This concert realizes and initiates an ambitious program of artistic cooperation between the Ambassador Foundation and the People's Republic of China and is the first of many cultural events which are now in the planning stages," Rader said.

BILOXI SURVIVED!

As Mr. Armstrong mentioned in his recent letter, both Savannah and Biloxi survived the recent holocaust of hurricanes along the southern Atlantic and Gulf Coast areas. If these storms, with winds up to 150 miles an hour, had hit our Festival sites with all their fury, it's doubtful we would have been able to hold the Festival in either of those areas this year. Thankfully, God spared our Festival cities from serious damage.

However, the Hilton Hotel in Biloxi is an example in stark contrast to the protection we received. This, of course, is our first year in Biloxi. During the first year at any site there is usually a motel or two which will not commit their rooms to us. Not having had any experience with us, they are reluctant to set aside their facilities for a full 8 to 10 day period.

As it turned out, the Hilton Hotel decided not to rent us a single room in its beautiful new facility. Hurricane Frederic itself did not hit Biloxi

directly, but one of the tornados it spawned did! Interestingly enough, the only hotel/motel that was damaged by this tornado was the Hilton. The tornado swept through town, destroyed the Hilton and left the rest of the city intact for the Festival. Perhaps the Hilton should have made its facilities available to the Church for the Festival!

Biloxi Reservation Changes

As soon as the Festival Office had confirmed which motels were lost to Hurricane Frederic, a post card was mailed to the people assigned to those facilities explaining the situation and assuring them that they would receive re-assignment confirmations as soon as possible.

By Tuesday (9/18), Al Garrett, Biloxi Housing Officer, had finished re-assigning the 537 people who had been displaced by the hurricane damage in the Pascagoula-Biloxi area. Tuesday night, new confirmations were printed and the following day they were mailed. Allowing 3 to 5 days for delivery, the people whose reservations were affected should have received their new assignments by Monday or Tuesday (9/24-25) of this week.

For those few who have not received a new confirmation (due to complications in mail delivery, etc.) before leaving for the Festival should, upon their arrival in Biloxi, visit the Housing Office located in the Coliseum. Their room reservations will be available for them there as well.

Frankly, we were surprised at how easy the reassignment process went. The establishments we were able to contact following the storm did all they could to help us out. With the extra rooms we were able to find combined with the rooms we already had on hand, we had just enough rooms to go around!

Ministerial Allotment

Several ministers have called or written in questioning whether any money from the allotment that was not used for Festival expenses should be returned. Apparently, some of the ministers are wondering if they can keep whatever is not spent of their ministerial allotment and simply count it as income and pay the tax on it.

Please let us re-emphasize, the Ministerial Allotment must be considered an expense account. Any of the allotment not used at the Festival for purposes outlined in the memo accompanying the allotment check, should be returned to Pasadena after the Festival. Though the I.R.S. looks at it as expense money, it is, of course, Second Tithe and any monies returned will be used in helping us meet our expenses in other Festival areas. So, if you have excess Festival Tithe this year, please mail it to the Worldwide Church of God, P.O. Box 385, Pasadena, CA 91102, Attention: Accounting Department.

Have a great Feast!

--Sherwin McMichael, Festival Department

PUBLISHING SERVICES UPDATE

A questionnaire was recently mailed to 20,000 new Plain Truth readers. These people could be called "babes in the truth" as they have only received The PLAIN TRUTH for three months. The returns, which are now coming

in at a very high rate, are fascinating and valuable because they give us an insight into what type of people are now becoming readers. We will also learn what people expect and what they want from The PLAIN TRUTH and how they first became aware of The PLAIN TRUTH and this Work. This type of survey helps us to understand our readers better and find out what type of articles they like to read, etc. This will enable us to adjust our approach and, hopefully, improve our promotional and newsstand programs. The editorial information will help Brian Knowles in a similar way.

When we tabulate the results we will be able to compare with a survey we did several years ago. It will be interesting to see if our readership profile has changed in the last few years. We will, of course, share these results with you in later reports.

The staff of Publishing hopes you all have a wonderful Festival.

--Roger Lippross, Publishing Services Director

PLEASE ANNOUNCE

Those transferring to St. Petersburg for the Feast should try to bring along a song book. Since St. Petersburg has become primarily a transfer site, there are not enough local churches to supply song books for everyone. Please arrange to check a book out of your local church library to bring with you.

--Festival Office

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Firsthand Report From Dominica

Following is a letter containing interesting and vivid insights to the hardships ahead for a whole island of people, including our brethren. The storm is past but the difficulties for the inhabitants of Dominica have just begun.

Dear Mr. Halford:

I intend writing you a letter from which I am sure you can't find humor. On returning to Dominica on August 27th, news of a hurricane coming was being spread. By 12:00 noon August 29th the storm was in full force in Dominica. But before I tell you more of the storm, be it known that all members of God's Church here are alive and safe!

The island of 80,000 people, 298 square miles (very mountainous) and economy 95% agriculture, was hit for five hours by winds of up to 150 MPH from hurricane David.

The aftermath leaves Dominica in a state of disaster. Agriculture is 90% destroyed and most industries are related to agriculture. Internal telecommunications have become non-existent, with electricity supplies in the same position. I live 14 miles from the capital, and am not looking forward to electricity in my village for two years.

Hospitals, hotels, schools and churches are in the same position of ruin and destruction.

More than half the population is homeless and some 40 people died in the storm. In some villages there is a 50% complete destruction of houses. Generally, most roofs are gone. One of the brethren lost her house and shop completely.

Our evergreen forests have become a thing of the past. Trees that could not fall are completely defoliated and debranched.

One American observer thought it better to evacuate the island in view of massive sums it will need to bring the country back to where it was.

The immediate problem of Dominica after the storm is that of feeding itself. With the economy and agriculture destroyed, we are at the mercy of international food aid for at least the next six months till some crops and farms can be rehabilitated. Much aid is flowing in from outside presently, but all who can are leaving the island, especially women and children are doing so. The remaining schools not destroyed or made roofless are refugee camps.

My wife and children have been sent to St. Lucia, my wife's homeland, but I have to stay to face the arduous road ahead, of national reconstruction. The seminar in Tobago had surely made and left me better prepared for this.

I hope that the same hurricane did not adversely affect the Work and brethren in USA.

Please ask your Church area to pray for and remember the Dominican brethren. The time ahead can be very gloomy and discouraging for some. But with God's help, nothing is impossible.

In Christian fellowship,
Chrisford Vidal

United Kingdom

On August tenth the Work made front-page headlines in a U.K. newspaper for what is believed to be the very first time. The paper in question was the Exeter Express and Echo which has a readership of almost 100,000 in the South West of England.

The article, which was naturally far from complimentary, had been prompted by the distribution of 10,000 brochures in the town promoting The PLAIN

TRUTH. Two dissident former members took the opportunity to "warn" readers of the evils that would befall them if they became involved with this "American-based church." Our pastor in the area, Mr. John Jewell, immediately contacted the paper with the true facts in the case and as a result a more favourable article appeared the following week (this time only on page six!). We also took advantage of the publicity generated by the story by placing a quarter-page advertisement with the paper very similar to the one used in response to the current legal battle in the States ("Just What is the Worldwide Church of God?").

August registered an excellent increase in mail income of 39% over the same month last year. The year-to-date rise is 23% (compared with an inflation rate which is now hitting 15%). Total literature mailed was encouragingly high for the time of year--27,477 items for all the areas serviced from Radlett.

S.E.P. was again considered an overwhelming success by over 2000 teenagers from all parts of the British Isles and Europe who attended the camp. One headline in the local press called the Loch Lomond site a "haven for the youngsters," and another report referred to the venture as probably "unique of its kind and scope in Britain."

A total of 3,700 are expected to attend the four Feast sites in Britain and Ireland this year--1,600 at Prestatyn (North Wales), 1,500 at Camber Sands, 350 at Edinburgh and 250 at Kenmare (Southern Ireland). In addition, there will be English-language sites in Hirshals, Denmark (120) and Jerusalem, Israel (300). Five sites on the African mainland and one in Mauritius will cater to around 530 Feastgoers.

Canada

We are happy and thankful to once again report a 25% increase in income over August of last year. Combining the year-to-date increase of twelve percent with an eight percent figure on expenses, we are moving into the winter months with confidence despite higher expenditures on advertising and media.

The "World Tomorrow" radio program is currently aired on 65 Canadian stations. Next month, we will add four additional stations giving increased coverage to Saskatchewan. Radio responses continue to be of high quality, demonstrating the powerful impact of Mr. Armstrong's messages.

Newsstand distribution now stands at 350,000 (50,000 of which is in the French language). Most of the major cities and towns in Canada now have some newsstands carrying The PLAIN TRUTH. As responses and finances justify, we will continue to develop the distribution. We are awaiting approval from some major chain stores which, if obtained, could boost the circulation by several thousand almost overnight.

Asia

Plain Truth subscribers for Malaysia exceeded the 10,000 mark this month with 10,047 now on the mailing list.

Final preparations are being made for the Feast of Tabernacles in the following cities throughout Asia: Colombo, Sri Lanka; Pune (Poona), India; Kya In Village, Burma; and Panang, Malaysia. The anticipated number of

people meeting together for the Feast in these areas, God willing, will be about 375.

Australia

Our Plain Truth mailing list is well on its way to our goal of 100,000 for Australia, and 35,000 for Asia. We now have 57 churches, an increase of nine this past year. Mail is up 50% over last year, and the volume of literature being sent out to our readers has increased by 56%. We anticipate we will have mailed out around 2,000,000 items of literature by the end of this year.

Next year it is planned for the Australian Plain Truth mailing list to increase to 120,000, and the Asian P.T. list to rise to a maximum of 40,000. This means we will mail out, including the two Plain Truth mailing lists, an estimated three and a quarter million items of literature--some six times the volume sent in 1976!

--Compiled by Rod Matthews, International Office

MAIL COMMENTS

This week's letter comments focus on the Feast of Tabernacles and Mr. Armstrong's forthcoming China trip.

The closer we get to the Feast, the more excitement and enthusiasm we're seeing as people begin to anticipate what they feel will be the most spiritually rewarding Feast ever.

Mr. Armstrong's forthcoming trip to China has sparked a deep interest with many of the brethren. The trip has captured the imagination of the members and many letters reflect the fact that Mr. Armstrong's personal appeal for the brethren's prayers for his guidance has had a great impact. Included in the letters below are typical examples of the comments we have received about the Feast and the China trip.

--Mail Processing Center

Looking Forward to the Feast

Received my Feast confirmation today. Feast fever running high. Looking for the cure at the Lake of the Ozarks.

--Mrs. Malcolm Martin (Houston, TX)

I'm really looking forward to the Feast this year more than I ever have before. With all the trials the Church has gone through this past year we need this Feast to draw us all closer together.

--Mrs. Virginia A. Richmond (Corydon, KY)

I'm getting so anxious for the Feast to arrive, hopefully to a new site which in itself is exciting but also to be rejuvenated with the spiritual food I know we will receive this year. Am praying for those who will be giving sermons that God will inspire them and also the listening. That we will be doers of the Word and not just hearers.

--Mrs. Pauline E. Barnes (Tyrone, OK)

I am already getting quite excited over the Feast. I just know this will be the best Feast I ever kept. It is now my sixth Feast and they really do keep getting better.

--Ann Przemielewski (Buffalo, NY)

My wife and I are so excited about the upcoming Feast of Tabernacles 1979! This is the first time since I have been out of high school that my vacation time will be perfect for the Feast. I have lost two previous jobs because of my keeping of God's Holy Days. This year will be my 10th Feast. It will be my wife's 23rd or 24th Feast! We are so excited!!! We can hardly wait!!

--Mr. & Mrs. Jackie McConnell (Springfield, MO)

Mr. Armstrong's China Trip

I just wanted to let you know that we are thrilled beyond words at the news of God's apostle going to China! To realize God's representative is going at their invitation! How wonderful. We know that God is really with you in all you are doing now and are awed by it all.

--Olan McRay (Birmingham, AL)

We have been keeping our eyes and ears open for every little tidbit of information about your upcoming trip to China this fall. We are very excited about it and of course we have been praying a great deal about it lately.

--Mr. & Mrs. Warren Larson (Marysville, WA)

I will pray for you on your trip to China. Every Gospel mission you undertake brings us that much closer to God's Kingdom.

--V. Korstrap (Long Beach, CA)

We are excited about your coming trip to China and praying for your good health and that God will give you the wisdom to know how to preach the Gospel in a country that doesn't even admit God's existence.

--Mr. & Mrs. Randy Gregory (Austin, TX)

We are very excited about your trip to China and the red carpet treatment Mr. Rader received from them. God is surely speeding things up when we realize that you will be taking the gospel to a country which has over one quarter of the entire world's population.

--Mr. & Mrs. Frank Fridrich (Austin, TX)

ON THE WORLD SCENE

BIG BOOSTS FOR CHURCH UNITY: Vatican sources, on the eve of Pope John Paul II's visit to Ireland and the United States, have announced the convening of an extraordinary conclave of cardinals in November. The purpose of the meeting has not yet been revealed, but it will undoubtedly be an important one. For the "princes of the church" to gather for reasons other than the election of a new pope or the naming of new cardinals is unprecedented.

Whatever the reason for the conclave, there is much movement below the surface in the field of ecumenism--the search for common religious ground--especially between Roman Catholicism and the mainline Protestant churches. Ecumenism will be very much in evidence during the Pope's trip to the U.S., with the scheduling of several meetings between the Pontiff and representatives of Protestant and Jewish groups.

Ecumenism received a big boost too in September with the election of Bishop Robert Runcie as the Church of England's 102nd Archbishop of Canterbury. Bishop Runcie replaces Dr. Donald Coggan, who retires when he reaches his 70th birthday next January. The 57-year-old Bishop Runcie, incidentally, is the Bishop of St. Albans.

Within hours of his election, Bishop Runcie told reporters he wanted to meet Pope John Paul and leaders of other churches as soon as possible, hopefully within his first year of office. According to Anglican sources, the two leaders have important things to discuss, the chief being progress towards unity and intercommunion.

The two churches entered into a serious dialogue 10 years ago with the formation of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. This team of learned theologians has issued three agreed statements on the eucharist, ministry and ordination, and authority, and these have still to be approved by the Pope and the Archbishop.

The toughest nut to crack for the Anglican-Catholic theologians has been the question of papal primacy. They issued a joint statement on church authority in 1976 but failed to agree in the area of papal authority. Now there appears to be some movement, as yet unspecified, on this thorny issue and other controversial points. A joint statement from London on September 14 said that "Real convergence took place, which if it fell short of complete agreement on these highly divisive issues, encouraged the commission to hope that it might be able to offer its final report to the authorities of the two churches within two years."

Lutheran Rebellion Now Focal Point of Unity Drive

Perhaps the most important milestone in the church reunity movement will occur next June 25th. On that date, Lutherans around the world will be honoring the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession. A report from the Religious News Service gives the ecumenical significance of the coming anniversary:

"A document that proved unsuccessful in reconciling Lutherans and Catholics in the early days of the Protestant Reformation is getting new attention as a possible basis for further progress in the modern ecumenical movement. It is the Augsburg Confession which was drafted by Philip Melanchthon on behalf of the Protestant territories of northern Germany for presentation to Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530.

According to a RNS release dated September 21, "there were two basic purposes Melanchthon had in mind in drafting the confession--to set forth the principles of the Lutheran movement and to seek to demonstrate that they were in agreement with essential doctrines taught by the Church of Rome. It was divided into two parts: Articles of Faith (I-XXI) and articles of the Roman Abuses, which have been eliminated in the Reformed Churches

(XXII-XXVIII). When the confession was read in German before the Diet, the Roman theologians responded by drafting a Confutation of the document. The Confutation was accepted by the emperor as his own position, and read to the Lutherans on August 3, 1530. While the Augsburg Confession thus failed in its original aim to heal the breach between the Lutherans and the Romans, it immediately became a rallying point for Lutheran supporters. It has since been described as the most ecumenical confession of the Reformation."

In 1530, Roman theologians, according to this report, had no difficulty with the first 21 articles of the confession, which dealt with such subjects as the Lord's Supper, baptism, free will, and the church. But articles 22 through 28, which dealt with such distinctly Lutheran emphases as justification, good works, confession, and repentance, posed problems. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession states that "for the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments." This position has been taken by both Lutherans and Catholics, both in the 16th century and today, and is one of the elements of the confession that is prompting theologians to reexamine it as a basis for contemporary ecumenism.

In 1976, a Vatican ecumenist told the Lutheran World Federation's executive committee that efforts to have the Augsburg Confession accepted as an "expression of Christian truth" were being looked upon favorably by Cardinal Jan Willebrands, president of the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity.

"We have no illusions that the efforts for a Roman Catholic reception of the Augsburg Confession as a basis for a common confession will be easy," said Professor Heinz Schuette of Bonn, who was then the secretariat's expert in Lutheran-Roman Catholic relations. But he noted that the confession's 450th anniversary would be celebrated in 1980, and suggested that "it would be an important event if we could come closer by that date to the real intention of the Augsburg Confession, which is unity of the churches which remain churches, but at the same time become one Church."

Church historians have also pointed out that the Augsburg Confession must be examined today from the perspective of 4-1/2 centuries of development of Christianity since it was first drafted. "Many of the articles of the Augsburg Confession, and particularly those in the second part, do not seem to be very relevant today," says Kirchenrat Werner Schnoor, former editor of the newspaper of the Lutheran Church in Mecklenburg, West Germany. The dean of the School of Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America adds: "What Lutherans and Roman Catholics believe in common is far and away more significant than what divides them."

"By going back to the original purpose of the confession," concludes the RNS report, "Lutherans and Catholics may find that it has real meaning in the 20th century despite all that has happened since the Reformation. Bishop Cyril Wismar of the New England Synod of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches recently noted that the Augsburg Confession was 'intended to be a positive declaration within the church, not to be a divisive thing. It's taken 450 years for us to realize that,' he said. 'It's my hope that by the end of the millennium we will be back to where we were before, one Church in Christ.'"

Significantly, the Roman Catholic bishop of Augsburg, in consultation with Lutheran officials has asked Pope John Paul II to visit Augsburg for the Augsburg Confession Ceremony. However, the Lutheran leadership appears divided at the moment, and unless an official invitation is extended, the Pope will not attend. The Vatican however has announced that it will send some leading cardinals, including Cardinal Jan Willebrands, head of the unity secretariat.

It is also significant that a rallying point of the unity movement seems to be a common perception--or, rather, misperception--of what the gospel message really entails. The truth of God, on the other hand, should stand in even starker contrast in the years ahead.

--Gene H. Hogberg, News Bureau