

Background;

Justification by God's Grace 1517-2017

From Stumbling Stone to Common Ground

On the Eve of 2017, the year commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we are gathering in Oslo, Norway, to focus on the ecumenical achievement of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999)*. Specifically, we shall celebrate the multilateral nature of this Declaration. While it was negotiated successfully as a bilateral Catholic – Lutheran enterprise, we lift it up today as a doctrinal statement to which three Christian World Communions officially adhere, the third being the World Methodist Council.

The significance of the Joint Declaration's multilateral character has not yet been fully explored. So today, we gratefully recognize the presence of Dr. Walter Klaiber of Tübingen, Germany, a Professor of New Testament and a Methodist Bishop. Dr. Klaiber, collaborating with Professor Geoffrey Wainwright, was one of the drafters of the *Methodist Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (2006)*.

One of the ways in which the multilateral nature of the Joint Declaration has shown itself is through the ecumenical study on *The Biblical Foundations of the Doctrine of Justification, An Ecumenical Follow-Up to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (2012)*. This is a study, strongly encouraged by Cardinal Walter Kasper, by which the broader biblical basis for the doctrine of justification is explored - within and beyond the *corpus paulinum*. This study is quadrilateral, since, in addition to the three signing partners to the JDDJ, it was carried out with the participation of the *World Communion of Reformed Churches*. The leadership role of Bishop Klaiber was very important for the achievement of this study.

One of the main purposes of bilateral and multilateral dialogues at the international level is to offer the churches worldwide opportunities for in-depth ecumenical studies and mutual ecclesial recognition at the national and regional levels. Such in-depth studies are commonly carried out with reference to specific theological issues, as well as subjects of regionally relevant character. One such study is *Justification in the Life of the Church. A Report from the Roman Catholic – Lutheran Dialogue Group for Sweden and Finland (2010)*. This bilateral study was carried out on the basis of the many elements that bind the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches together in Sweden and Finland. On this background the commission embarked upon the important topic of justification in the life of the church. It was promoted and co-chaired by Dr. Eero Huovinen, professor of systematic theology, later bishop of Helsinki.

As our perspective moves from the agreements achieved to the challenges that lie before the ecumenical movement in the time to come, there are good reasons to focus on the work of the

Roman Catholic – Lutheran Commission on Unity (from 1967). This Commission has been, and continues to be, sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. It is currently co-chaired by Bishop Huovinen. The Catholic co-chair is Bishop William Kenney of Birmingham.

The Commission, normally just called «the Catholic – Lutheran Dialogue», began its current phase in 2009, by taking up the topic «Baptism and Growing Communion». It is a dialogue discussing the kind of unity that might arise out of the churches' shared understanding of the sacrament of Baptism. And in light of the fact that the JDDJ is now recognized by three church families, it is of significant interest to note that the present phase of the Catholic – Lutheran dialogue is conducted trilaterally. The third partner is the *Mennonite World Conference*. This is a remarkable development in the area of interconfessional dialogues, particularly since baptism is an area where the Mennonite teaching differs from that of the two other communions. In other areas, however, the Lutherans and the Mennonites have recognized substantial agreement with each other. An act of repentance by the Lutherans in 2010 for the persecution of Mennonites at the time of the Reformation has also brought these two communions closer together.

The work of the Commission on baptism had to be interrupted, however, in 2013, so that the Commission could complete and publish the Catholic – Lutheran document *From Conflict to Communion*, which relates and analyzes the story of the Reformation from the point of view of both traditions. The document is a core ecumenical study document with a view to the commemoration in 2017 of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and the 50th anniversary of the Commission itself. In 2014, the Commission on Unity resumed its work on the topic of baptism and unity.

It will be a privilege, as we approach the year 2017, to hear the perspectives of our speakers on the status and the future of doctrinal ecumenism centered on the doctrine of justification. It involves, in different ways, Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Mennonites and Reformed.

The Anglican Communion is not directly involved with the discussions on justification. This communion must, however, also be mentioned in this context, being a major participant in the ecumenical search for communion based forms of Christian unity, regionally and globally.

Professor Stephanie Dietrich, of VID Specialized University in Oslo, will outline this ecumenical scene for us. We welcome her, our international guests, and all other participants, to a clarifying and instructive day of presentations, exchanges, worship and refreshments.

RELEVANT BOOKS AND REPORTS:

Church and Justification. Understanding the Church in the Light of the Doctrine of Justification. By the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission. Published by the Lutheran World Federation, 1994.

Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999)

William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK, 2000

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_3_1101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html

Felleseklæring om rettferdiggjørelseslæren

Inngått mellom Det lutherske verdensforbund og Den romersk-katolske kirke 31. oktober 1999.

Tilslutning fra Metodistkirkenes Verdensråd 23. juli 2006. Utgitt av Den norske kirke, Mellomkirkelig råd, Oslo, 2009.

<http://www.metodistkirken.no/hoved/service/33447/download/id/29736/name/Joint+declaration+on+the+doctrine+of+justification.pdf>

The Apostolicity of the Church

Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, 2006

Walter Klaiber: Justified before God. A Contemporary Theology

Abington Press, Nashville, 2006

Eero Huovinen: Baptism, Church and Ecumenism

Collected Essays, Gesammelte Aufsätze

Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft (63), 2009

Justification in the Life of the Church

A Report from the Roman Catholic – Lutheran Dialogue Group for Sweden and Finland

Uppsala, Stockholm and Helsinki, 2010

The Biblical Foundations of the Doctrine of Justification

An Ecumenical Follow-Up to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

Paulist Press New York, Mahwah, New Jersey, 2012

From Conflict to Communion

Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation 2017

Report of the Lutheran Roman Catholic Commission on Unity

Evangelische Verlagsanstalt and Bonifatius, 2013

(English and Norwegian versions)

<https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion%20EN.pdf>

https://kirken.no/globalassets/kirken.no/om-kirken/slik-styres-kirken/mellomkirkelig-rad/2015/dokumenter/fra_konflikt_til_felleskap_2015.pdf