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JOINT DECLARATION OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON JUSTIFICATION

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Abstract

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was signed by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation on 31st October 1999 in Augsburg, Germany. What is the content of this declaration? After almost twenty years what in actual fact has happened? This article examines the theology of this joint declaration, evaluates its strengths and weaknesses, and then discusses its possible uses in the life of the Churches.

Keywords: Doctrine of Justification, Ecumenism, Lutheran World Federation, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

1. Introduction

On 31st October 1999, in Augsburg, Germany, the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) signed a joint declaration regarding the doctrine of justification.¹ In this article I wish to introduce this document, to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, as well as discuss its possible role in ecumenism and in the life of the churches in the future.

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¹See the declaration in http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html.

2. The Process of Formulating the Declaration²

In 1994, a Joint Commission set-up by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity announced that they had agreed upon a text. That text was given to the churches for their perusal and response. Based on their responses and suggested corrections, a new group of experts was set up and given the task of revising the text in light of the churches' responses and suggested modifications. The group met in 1996 and in 1997 in Wurzburg, Germany, to carry out the revision as requested. The revision produced in 1997, in Wurzburg, was presented as the definitive text to the leaders of the churches, so that it could be officially acknowledged by those individual churches.

In 1997, the LWF validated the declaration. It said that, in accord with the consensus as stated in the declaration, the rejection and condemnation of other churches, which had been official Lutheran teaching, was no longer valid for the churches which accepted this Joint Declaration.

However, on 25th June 1998, the Vatican published a *nota* which included several objections regarding some of the formulations in the Joint Declaration. Firstly, it emphasised that Catholics could not accept the Lutheran point of view regarding *simul iustus et peccator*, namely that a baptised person is both justified and a sinner. Several other objections were raised.

This *nota* from the Vatican created a difficult situation, because the LWF had already accepted and acknowledged the Joint Declaration. A change in the text which had been validated by one of the parties would automatically invalidate the entire consensus. However, the Catholic Church didn't want this to happen. To overcome this problem, the text which was signed on 31st October 1999, was divided into three sections: 1) The Joint Declaration; 2) An Official Joint Statement; 3) An Appendix with several texts that could be explained more fully when needed. The Official Declaration & Statement and the separate Appendix addressed the difficulty raised by the Vatican.

3. The Method and the Basic Concept³

Basically, the Joint Declaration used modern scientific techniques to review a dispute from 16th century Europe, which made use of

²The entire process is documented in F. Hauschildt, U. Hahn, A. Siemens, ed., *Die Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre, Dokumentation des Entstehungs- und Rezeptionsprozesses*, Göttingen, 2009.

³See, K. Lehmann, "Was für ein Konsens wurde erreicht?," http://www.bistummainz.de/bistum/kardinal/texte/texte_1999 (accessed 28 October 2009).

concepts and expressions from the past which were no longer easily able to be understood by most modern people. It was necessary to carry out this cleansing process for the sake of the progress of ecumenism, and the achievement of unity. Each church has had its own traditions, separate from each other, since the 16th century. At that time, accordingly they judged and condemned each other, declaring that churches that followed traditions different from their own betrayed the true faith in the Gospel and Jesus Christ.

If a church in the modern day entered into faith dialogue with another denomination, an individual church doesn't need to think that it is betraying its tradition or its ancestors in faith, by approaching another church.

However, we must start from the given situation. At the time of the division, the different sides didn't really listen to the other side. Often argumentation was based on interpretations that blamed the other. A problem such as this must be and can be overcome. In these days we have the scientific means of interpreting which facilitates new ways of understanding.

If in following this process we gain a new consciousness, whereby, if one party doesn't reiterate something that will necessarily be denied by another party based on the truth of the New Testament, or if one party doesn't reject something that another party regards as essential to their faith, *then a fundamental consensus will be reached, even though there still could be formulations, emphases or explanations that differ.*

In line with this basic concept, ecumenical dialogue searches for a fundamental consensus, and then tries to re-evaluate the mutual evaluations and condemnations of the churches in years gone by. If it becomes clear that the fundamental consensus is concerned with a certain dogma, then there is a foundation upon which the next step in the process can be made towards achieving full unity.

This method or concept was used to achieve a fundamental consensus between the Lutheran and Catholic Churches regarding justification. Different formulations and explanations don't have to divide churches, if one church doesn't say that what is rejected by the other church means that it completely rejects its understanding of the Gospel or vice versa. If there is a fundamental consensus like this, then formulations, emphases and different explanations in various details can be there and will not negate that fundamental joint consensus.

According to this way of looking at things, two or more traditions can state what can be said together. This will be sufficient to form a

unified church, while leaving open the opportunity for different theories and explanations to emerge which don't have to be in agreement in every last detail.

According to this basic principle, the Joint Declaration elucidates:

- 1) The teaching of the Gospel about justification.
- 2) The doctrine of justification as an ecumenical problem.
- 3) A common understanding of justification.
- 4) The development of that common understanding under the following sub-headings: "The inability & sin of humanity in the face of justification"; "Justification as the forgiveness of sin and judgement"; "Justification through faith and caused by grace"; "The justified person as a sinner"; "The Law and the Gospel"; and "The good works of a justified person."

The final topic is a consideration of "The meaning and purpose of an achieved consensus."

Each of these sub-headings, in No.4, follows this format: "We acknowledge together that...," and is followed by, "This matter is understood from the Lutheran position as meaning..." and "This matter is understood from the Catholic position as meaning..." Then finally, it is stated, "This difference is able to be accepted..." and does not negate the fundamental consensus.

4. Achievements of the Joint Declaration

As a resume that shows the consensus achieved via the Joint Declaration, I would like to quote the official joint statement which was added to address the difficulty raised by the Vatican, the leadership of the Catholic Church:

- Based upon the agreement which has been achieved in the Joint Declaration regarding the doctrine of justification, the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church declare together: "The understanding of the doctrine of justification as expressed in this declaration shows that between Lutherans and Catholics there is a consensus regarding basic truths of the doctrine of justification" (No. 40). Based on that consensus the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church declare together: "The doctrine of the Lutheran Churches as mentioned in this declaration is not condemned by the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Confessions of the Lutheran Faith do not apply to the doctrine of

the Roman Catholic Church as mentioned in this declaration” (No. 41).⁴

This was a far-reaching achievement. With both sides saying that they had achieved consensus regarding this essential doctrine of the Christian faith. They stressed that, based on this consensus, there was no longer a basis to judge and reject the doctrine as formulated and promulgated in the individual churches. An excellent achievement, which then raised the question about whether or not there were still sufficient reasons to say that the churches could not become one, even though there were still divisions caused by differing opinions regarding the other church’s attitudes to the Gospel and faith in Jesus Christ.

In light of this, it is appropriate to look at what is contained in the document that could be seen as a task to be addressed in the future:

In the Official Joint Statement, the following can be read:

- Based upon the achieved consensus, there needs to be ongoing dialogue, particular regarding the topic which is detailed in the Joint Declaration (No. 43) as a matter which needs further attention, so that full unity may be achieved between the churches, a unity in diversity in which differences are accepted without rancour and are no longer sources of separation. Both Lutheran and Catholic parties in a spirit of ecumenism will try to give witness, as together they interpret justification in a language that is relevant to modern women and men, respecting current individual and social concerns.⁵

In No. 43, the following is stated:

- A consensus which embraces the basic truths of the doctrine of justification must influence the life and teaching of our churches. In this matter, it must prove its strength. In connection with this, there are other different, but heavy questions, that need further consideration. Among these topics are the following: the connection between the Word of God and the magisterium of the Church, ecclesiology, ecclesial authority, church unity, leadership, the sacraments, and the relationship between justification and social ethics. We believe that this consensus which has been achieved has prepared a strong foundation for further action. The Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches will continue to strive together to deepen our common understanding of justification, so that our common understanding may bear fruit in the life and teaching of the churches.

⁴ *Official Joint Statement*, no. 1, The English text can be accessed at http://www.lutheranworld.org/special_events/EN/gof99e.pdf.

⁵*Official Joint Statement*, no. 3.

Below we will consider whether or not, from the promulgation of the declaration to the present, the Lutheran and Catholic Churches have fulfilled that promise. We will consider whether or not the Joint Declaration has borne fruit. Before, however, I wish to mention several topics in which the Joint Declaration did not make use of all the opportunities which in fact were present to clearly and forthrightly formulate the consensus regarding the doctrine of justification.

5. Several Topics which did not Make Use of All Available Opportunities⁶

In this section I will describe several topics contained in the Joint Declaration, and I will point out weaknesses that affect the declaration, because either both parties or one of the parties wasn't sufficiently courageous to formulate the consensus as it had actually been achieved, at least in scientific discussions. In this regard I return to Otto Hermann Pesch who himself took part in the process of working on the foundations of the declaration.

5.1. Justification by Faith Alone

We all know that at the heart of Luther's teaching regarding justification is the formulation that justification happens, *sola fide*, that is, *by faith alone*. It is impossible for the Lutheran tradition to leave behind this formulation. However, in the text of Joint Declaration, this formulation is not included. The Catholic party was not courageous enough to use it. This formulation is stated as a form of Lutheran doctrine, while the Catholic doctrine still holds the formulation from the Council of Trent which emphasised faith, hope and charity, and understands faith as an agreement of the mind with the truth of the Divine Word.

As a reason for the Catholic party to reject it, an anxiety was expressed that Luther's formulation would cause people to regard the struggle to live a moral life, the place of the Church and the confession of faith, or Creed, as being unimportant. A traditional anxiety based upon a misconception was here allowed to remain.

Actually, when Luther and those of the Lutheran tradition speak about faith, they understand faith as being the complete offering of oneself with full confidence and belief to the All-merciful God. Contained in this understanding of faith, are hope and charity, and

⁶See, Otto Hermann Pesch, "Die 'Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre' vom 31.10.1999, Probleme und Aufgaben," <http://www.theologie.uni-hd.de/oek/institut/forum/forum13/GE.pdf>, 5-9.

certainly faith as being an acceptance of the Word of God is not excluded. If understood this way, what else is there that needs to be added to faith in the process of justification?

In actual fact there are numerous formulations in the text of the document which say in different words what was stated by Luther in his *sola fide* expression. An example is the statement that we obtain divine life, “only because of God’s mercy which forgives and gives new life, which can only be received as a gift and cannot be earned by our own efforts, in whatever form” (No. 17).

In reality also, the Catholic tradition no longer understands faith as only being a marriage of the intellect and the teachings of faith. In the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation, the Second Vatican Council said the following: “Thus men (sic) freely surrender themselves completely to God, by offering ‘the obedience of their intellect and their full desire to the God Who Reveals,’ and freely receives the revealed truth which has been gifted by Him” (DV, No. 5).

Based on the development that has already taken place in the Catholic Church, the Joint Declaration could actually be braver, and could resolutely make use of a formulation that is so important for the Lutheran tradition, namely justification by faith alone.

5.2. *Simul Iustus et Peccator*

The Catholic objection to Luther’s famous formulation almost derailed the Joint Statement at the last minute, as we have seen above. Finally, in line with Luther’s statement that a baptised person could at the same time be righteous and a sinner, it was said that both parties agreed that sin no longer separates from God a person who “is in Christ” (Rom 8:1).

They also agreed that egotistic and disorderly desires or concupiscence, remained in the baptised and justified person, and that such desires were not in accord with the will of God. In line with Luther’s teaching, the Lutheran tradition used the word “sin” for such desires, and that the soul of a person is sinful, having turned away from God. Freed from committing new sins, a justified person could be called righteous and a sinner at the same time. The person is righteous only because his/her sinful desires are not taken into account by God.

The Catholic party wanted to limit the usage of the word “sin” to wrong moral actions which were freely carried out. Concupiscence couldn’t be regarded as sin according to this definition, but could only be seen as a tendency towards sin. It certainly needs to be taken

seriously because the baptised can easily follow that tendency and fall into sin, if he/she doesn't struggle earnestly.

It appeared as though both parties only used the same word in different ways. However, the individual parties suspected that each other's different use of language could result in misunderstanding.

The Lutherans were concerned that the attitude to go against God which was imbedded in the human soul would be lessened in importance, if it was stated to be just a tendency towards sin which could be followed or rejected.

The Catholics were concerned that the statement regarding sin that remains in person, didn't sufficiently respect the fundamental difference between the state of a sinner and the state of a baptised and justified person.

Because of difficulties and concerns such as these, we find in the Joint Statement a formulation which is rather contrived and not strong: "[The justified person] can still be influenced by the power of sin (Compare with Romans 6:12-14), and must continually struggle throughout his/her life against the tendency to oppose God, and to oppose the egoism of the old person (Compare with Galatians 5:16; Romans 7:7, 10). Also, the person who has been justified must each day ask forgiveness of God. In accord with the Lord's Prayer (Mat 6:12, 1 John 1:9), he/she asks forgiveness from God, and is called to repent, and he/she is always forgiven once again" (No. 28).

According to Otto Hermann Pesch, based on his scientific research of Luther's teaching, the Lutheran party could honestly confess that Luther's own interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator* was rather fluid. Sometimes he used it, but on other occasions he didn't use it even though he could have done so.

On the other hand, based on study of Paul's theology, the Catholic party could honestly confess that Paul didn't understand concupiscence, uncontrolled desires, as just a tendency, but that he also saw it as sin. Certainly the argumentation of Paul is full of tensions, and there is no agreement among the experts as to whether in the different texts Paul was referring to Christians, to the baptised, or reflecting on his own life before he followed Christ.

De facto, it must be said that the individual Lutheran and Catholic traditions strongly stress an aspect of Paul's argumentation that was a source of tension in himself. So we need to ask, in a situation like this, must one party demand that the other party underline and accept a formulation that only supports one section

of the biblical teaching? In addition, is the difference between the two points of view really so big that on the one hand, totally uncontrolled desires are regarded as sin, however no longer separate a person from God, as long as that person is baptised and doesn't give in to temptation, and then on the other hand, those desires cannot be called sin in a complete sense, when a baptised person doesn't follow them, because they no longer separate the person from God?

In reality, the difference isn't very great. Because of this, based on modern research, a fundamental consensus could be formulated more clearly and strongly.

5.3. The Certainty of Salvation

Another topic which caused anxiety right to the last moment was the certainty of salvation. In this matter, the Council of Trent said in a polemic way that heretics possessed a faith that was full of arrogance. The Council of Trent and Catholic theology from then on assumed that according to Luther's teaching the certainty of personal salvation before God was based on a subjective conviction that a person felt saved: I am saved because I believe I am saved.

In reality, though, Luther's thought was the opposite. His opinion was based on Matthew 16:19b: "Whatever you loose in this world will be loosed in heaven." From this text he drew the conclusion that anyone who had doubts about the absolution given unconditionally by a confessor, and without connection to any work of penance done by the penitent, called Christ a liar. Free from any subjective feeling, Luther relied on the most objective focus of the Church, namely Jesus Christ himself. Whoever in faith relied upon the Word of Christ, can know for sure that he/she is saved. Because of this in the 1st and 2nd drafts of the Joint Statement, the following formulation was written: "Faith *IS* the certainty of salvation."

When this text was reviewed in Rome, the difficulty with the formulation was raised, because that formulation was misunderstood as heading in the direction of subjectivism, as mentioned above. Two sentences were formulated as a replacement, which exactly expressed the opinion of Luther:

"A person may be anxious about his/her salvation when they regard their own weaknesses and shortcomings. While conscious of one's personal failures, a person of faith can know for certain that God desires his/her salvation (No. 36)."

This text is preceded by two sentences upon which it rests: “No-one can believe in God in this sense [as described earlier in the document] and at the same time regard the Promised Word as being uncertain. A person should not question the compassion of God and the reward of Christ.”

These two sentences are the basis for the statement, “Faith is the certainty of salvation.” Putting this into the text enabled the teaching of Luther to be accepted completely, and there was no reason to delete the conclusion, “Faith is the certainty of salvation,” as had been demanded by Rome. The difficulty seen by Rome in the statement was a false one, and a complete consensus on this matter could be agreed upon.

5.4. The Doctrine of Justification as the Standard of Measurement

According to Luther, the doctrine of justification was the standard by which all topics in Christian teaching could be measured. Catholics had this concern: How could this one doctrinal point arbitrarily be raised as the standard of measurement for all other issues of doctrine? Was this a fundamental point of dissension?

By way of addressing the issue, let’s consider this: If a person said that Jesus Christ was not the only basis for our life before God, but only if we depend on the Virgin Mary; or if a person said that the sacraments, when carried-out correctly, were channels of divine grace independent of faith; or if a person said that the Church and her authorities connected people to God, therefore the giving or retaining of God’s grace and His love was dependent on them, and therefore everyone, including Catholics, must state that the doctrine of justification is false, then opinions like this would be directly in opposition to what has been formulated in that doctrine, because only God through Jesus exclusively, without any contribution on our behalf, gives us in faith his justice as our justification.

If this consideration is correct, then in fact, a fundamental consensus has emerged that embraces the idea that the doctrine of justification forms a standard of measurement for numerous elements of Christian teaching.

Catholic theology prefers to state things this way: The criterion and standard of measurement for all elements of Christian teaching is confession in the Triune God and in our salvation in Jesus Christ.

However, this fundamental confession can be expressed via the doctrine of justification, in such a way that both traditions can come to a basic consensus.

6. The Relevance and Hopes for Ongoing Ecumenical Dialogue

6.1. What has Happened since the Joint Declaration was Promulgated?

6.1.1. Hopes and Disappointments

The Joint Declaration on the doctrine of justification raised big hopes in many people when it was signed in Augsburg. There were theological reasons for that enthusiasm and hope. The doctrine of justification wasn't just one of a variety of doctrines, but rather it was the one containing a central theme which influenced and defined views on many different themes and aspects of faith. Because of this, a consensus regarding the doctrine of justification raised hopes that with this having been achieved, agreement and consensus in a number of other doctrines of faith could easily happen.⁷

Also, the consensus gave birth to another big hope. The Joint Declaration was planned and authenticated as an official document which had been signed by the authorities of each of the churches. So there was a hope that the contents of this declaration would become part of the official teachings of those churches, and become the foundation for future ecumenical dialogue.

However, after the period of initial enthusiasm, many people quickly became disappointed with what developed later. It cannot be said that the document remained unnoticed, but many people questioned whether or not there had been any change in the attitude of the grass-roots members of both signatory churches, and people questioned how far the theology and the leadership of the churches were using the declaration as a basis of internal teaching, both in the individual churches, and for ongoing dialogue.

So as to be able to evaluate the process of the reception of the document fairly, it would seem necessary to differentiate three aspects of the process and examine them individually:⁸

1. The results of the dialogue which were used as a basis for ongoing dialogue, and how those results were used;

⁷ See, Birgitta Kleinschwärzer-Meister, "Ökumenische Dialoge – nur ein Glasperlenspiel? Überlegungen zur Rezeption von Dialogergebnissen," *Una Sancta* 3 (2009) 199.

⁸Birgitta Kleinschwärzer-Meister, "Ökumenische Dialoge," 200-204.

2. How far those results were authorised by official decisions of leadership in the churches;
3. How those results have been integrated into the teaching and traditions of the churches.

Regarding the first point, it needs to be said that the declaration itself was the highpoint of a process of reception which made use of the results from numerous efforts and scientific researches as we have sketched above, and it validated those results.

Regarding the second point, it can be emphasised and should be noticed that the declaration in its official form was signed by official representatives of the Catholic and Lutheran Churches.

Regarding the third point, it needs to be acknowledged that shortly after the signing, a number of problems and difficulties arose.

We will discuss two aspects of those difficulties:

a) The dogmatic and juridical weight of the declaration and to what extent it was binding, remained unclear after its official reception. This uncertainty was experienced in both churches. It wasn't sure if the form of the doctrine of justification which had been agreed upon in the Joint Statement itself formed a part of dogmatic teaching that was compulsory and must be adhered to by the individual churches. Did the form of the doctrine of justification in the Joint Statement become a criterion to evaluate the teaching of the Council of Trent and the official Lutheran Confession of Faith (such as *Confessio Augustana*)? Or was the opposite true: that the Council of Trent and the Lutheran Confession of the 16th century provided the criterion to evaluate that form of doctrine in the Joint Statement? Regarding these matters many problems had yet to be ironed-out in theology and in the official teaching of the churches.

b) The position and theological role of the doctrine of justification was not the same in the Catholic and Lutheran Churches. Because of the different theological positions, the individual church could draw different conclusions from the consensus regarding the doctrine of justification in relation to other fields in Christian faith, for example teaching about the Church and hierarchy.

For example, in 2000, the Catholic Church issued a statement regarding indulgences for the Jubilee Year. The concept of indulgences was one of the reasons for Luther's reformation. More than a little it went against the doctrine of justification because of the Lutheran understanding of grace. At the same time the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a document, *Dominus Iesus*, in

which it was stated that the reformed churches could not be called “Church” in the fullest sense. Certainly the Lutheran Churches could draw a conclusion from the consensus regarding the doctrine of justification that those who defended the doctrine of justification in its true form were orthodox in faith and must be acknowledged as the Church of Jesus Christ which they stand by and live-out the Gospel as preached by Jesus.

Besides the process of accepting and making use of the teaching of the Joint Declaration, we should also describe a couple of important matters in the process of ecumenical dialogue which have taken place in the 21st century. In these, the Joint Declaration played a central role and became the foundation stone for ongoing developments.

6.1.2. Two Important Events in the Process of Accepting and Making Use of the Joint Declaration⁹

When the World Methodist Federation Conference was held in Seoul, South Korea, the Methodist Churches which had gathered at that conference expressed their official agreement with the Joint Declaration. This was on 23rd June 2006. This event needs special attention because the Methodist Churches were not involved in the controversy about the doctrine of justification in the 16th century. Nor were they mentioned in the Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration. Because of this they could not be signatories to the document. They followed a different track. The Methodists clarified in a theological response their understanding of the special contents of the Joint Declaration.¹⁰

Firstly, the Methodists expressed their agreement with the third chapter of the declaration, “A Common Understanding of Justification.” They added: “We give special thanks because of the Trinitarian approach in the explanation of the saving action of God in articles 15-17 of the document” (Methodist Statement No. 2).¹¹

Concerning chapter four of the Joint Declaration in which the Lutheran and Catholic parties discussed various aspects of the doctrine of justification, and each time expressed consensus on a

⁹ See, Theodor Dieter, “Zehn Jahre ‘Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre,’ Eine Zwischenbilanz aus lutherischer Sicht,” *Theologie und Glaube* 52 (2009) 162-174.

¹⁰English text of the Methodist Statement: *Accepted by God – Transformed by Christ: The Doctrine of Justification in Multilateral Ecumenical Dialogue*, The Lutheran World Federation – A Communion for Churches, Geneva, 2008, 75-79.

¹¹Dieter, “Zehn Jahre ‘Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre...,” 164.

specific topic, then described special considerations according to the individual parties, the Methodists followed a similar path.

The Methodist response quoted the agreed-upon formulation that took into account the seven topics, and agreed with the Joint Declaration. Then the Methodists raised the seven special matters which had been emphasised by the Lutherans and Catholics and received by the individual churches as being differences of opinion. According to the evaluation of the Methodists, “these did not give sufficient reason for a division between the two parties that had signed the Joint Declaration and the Methodists” (No. 3).¹² Following on from this, the Methodist Response described the position and the special Methodist emphasis on the seven topics covered in the Joint Declaration.

A question then arose regarding to what extent the Lutheran and Catholic parties could agree to and accept the Methodist interpretation. In a document, “An Official Common Agreement” which was signed by both partners, it was stated that they accepted the response of the Methodists and that their response was in accord with the fundamental consensus which had been achieved in the Joint Declaration.

Also, the Joint Declaration played an important role in international dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics, which resulted in the document regarding “the apostolicity of the Church.” This document was an example of how the Joint Declaration was used as a basis for other forms of dialogue. If it is acknowledged that a church preaches the Gospel in a true and authentic way, then it must be concluded that that church possesses the appropriate authority to protect and defend the apostolic teaching.

Then the question arises whether or not there exists a form of apostolicity which does not depend on actual physical succession of authority. It can be asked if in the matter of *apostolic succession* and the apostolic basis of the Church, a fundamental consensus can be reached which allows different forms of authority and different ways of appointing leaders.

However, it seems that the churches find it easier to accept different emphases in doctrine rather than different customs regarding church structures and the forms of ecclesial leadership.

¹²Dieter, “Zehn Jahre ‘Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre...,’” 165.

Therefore there is not yet a document about apostolicity which has been officially accepted by the leadership of the Catholic Church.

7. Consequences for the Church

If we reflect on the relevance of the teaching regarding justification in the way we have done, we can see a number of consequences for the Church and its life.

Justification which conscientises humanity regarding its responsibility for creation, and gives humanity a standing and self-worth that cannot be taken away and will stay strong in every life situation, is not only relevant for Christians, the members of the various Christian churches. It is relevant for the whole of humanity.

Because of this, it is clear that the Church cannot close-in on itself, and may not live-out the teaching on justification for its own benefit only. It must speak to anyone who is willing to hear about hope which inspires, about liberation which can happen in connection with the true God.

The Church doesn't need to keep on searching for new members, but rather it should keep on giving witness to the hope that it possesses. It should keep on witnessing to the liberation one experiences in union with God, so that others can be liberated and be enabled to take-on the basic attitude which can give standing, self worth and freedom to them, wherever they may be.

Clearly, those who consequently live according to this basic attitude, which comes as a result of an awareness that a person doesn't need to try to justify him/herself, will be liberated from the compulsion to produce, to be successful, and to have prestige, and so on. They can become an alternative community which can heal our modern society from many serious illnesses.

May the churches together confess to the justification given by God because of His grace, exclusively as a gift, so that together they may bear witness to the healing power given by God to them, so that as many people as possible may experience life in all its fullness.