

**On the occasion of the affirmation of the
Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)
by the World Methodist Conference
Seoul, South Korea, 23 July 2006**

Remarks by

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Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I am privileged to be your guest here at the 19th World Methodist Conference, and bring you warm greetings from the Lutheran World Federation in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Lutherans are grateful to God for many years of collaboration between our communions, and for the ecumenical progress taking place in different parts of the world.

The formal affirmation of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) by the World Methodist Council at this Conference represents a new ecumenical landmark, for which we must thank and praise God together.

By this event, it is made clear that the Joint Declaration, signed by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg, Germany, was not only a bilateral agreement between two ecumenical partners. It was an event which lifted up our shared biblical faith in God's justifying grace, a faith which paradoxically became an area of division in the Western church in the 16th century.

The World Methodist Council was the first ecumenical partner to solemnly bring congratulations on the achievement of the JDDJ. This was done on the day of the signing itself in 1999, in the sacristy of the Church of St Anne immediately after the worship celebration. A lovely greeting was presented to us, signed by three officers of the WMC, President Dr Frances Alguire, Dr Geoffrey Wainwright, Chairman of the Ecumenics and Dialogue Committee, and General Secretary Dr Joe Hale.

In 2003, at the Tenth Assembly of the LWF in Winnipeg, Canada, we were very pleased to welcome your President, Prelate Sunday Mbang, as well as Cardinal Walter Kasper, whose greetings affirmed our ecumenical bonds.

And today the World Methodist Conference is the first Christian world communion, besides the original signing partners, to formally affirm, by means of a substantial theological statement, the agreements in basic truths of justification expressed in the JDDJ.

As we celebrate this important event today we should not see justification merely as a piece of theological doctrine but as an expression of the living gospel itself, which is nothing else than the living Christ present among us and within us. It has the richness of liberating and saving grace, by which we are reconciled to God and to one another. It transforms us into a community of hope in a world where hope is in short supply. How appropriate, therefore, to celebrate the affirmation of the JDDJ by Methodists worldwide in the context of this great conference, with its very theme, “God in Christ Reconciling”!

One of the ways in which the apostle Paul interprets the power of the gospel, i.e. that we are justified by God's grace, is by forcefully proclaiming how this power - in Greek: *dynamis* - transcends walls that separate us from God and from each other as individuals and groups. This effect of the power of the gospel is not an effect that may or not be there, while the gospel remains the same. The effect of transcending barriers belongs to the very nature of the gospel.

As we know only too well, even from the history of the twentieth century, Christian churches have not always assisted in bringing down walls of separation. In some cases churches have been instruments in upholding discrimination by providing religious rationales and bible quotations in their support.

The message of justification by faith, as it comes to us through the letters of the apostle Paul, proclaims forgiveness of sins by God's grace in Christ, without the law. It also proclaims full human dignity through faith, without concern for ethnicity, gender and social status.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:27-29)

The church is called to reflect and represent God's will for all humanity. This means that the way we consider each other in the church, as belonging to Christ and united with the Triune God, shapes our attitude toward all people. As we consider our fellow Christians as really united with God, we must consider all human beings as created in God's image and as potentially enjoying a unity with God also in spiritual ways.

Christ's Sermon on the Mount does not only teach us how we shall live in the church. It teaches us how we shall live in the world, and with all human beings. Let me quote what is possibly one of the most relevant parenetic statements from the Sermon on the Mount for our world today:

'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. (Matthew 3:43-44)

Love of one's neighbor - and, indeed, love of one's enemy - is directly and organically related with faith in God's justifying grace. It is also the strongest impetus we have to counteract the forces of division and confrontation that have taken hold of our world to a frightening extent over the last few years.

Some have criticized the JDDJ for not sufficiently drawing the consequences of the agreements reached. But these consequences relate to deep realities in the churches and in the world, which must be dealt with in many and concrete ways. We have overcome a theological difference, which has divided Western Christianity since the time of the Reformation. Now we must grow together in the mystery of our union with God, through God's justifying grace, for the renewal of our churches and for the healing of humanity.

We are aware of independent initiatives in our churches where Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists and others are facing common challenges. The act of endorsement we are celebrating today will be an encouragement for new and broader forms of ecumenical cooperation among our respective communions.

It is my hope that national and regional ecumenical organizations will pay attention to this document and its central message. It is not a private document among Catholics, Lutherans and Methodists. It is essentially an ecumenical agenda for furthering Christ's prayer for his disciples before he died, "that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:22b-23.)

I am grateful for the theologians of our respective communions who have worked together on this Common Affirmation. Theologians are not given due appreciation. But we thank God for entrusting them with the wisdom that has brought us to this result.

We commend this document to those who carry responsibility for teaching and oversight in our churches and centers of theological education. May it inspire firmness in the faith that in Christ we are freed for life, knowing that in the final analysis our dignity as human beings, the good relations between religious communities and the future of our global village are all based on God's boundless grace in the divided world that God so loves.
