

**Address at the celebration for the  
Tenth Anniversary of the Formal Signing of the Joint Declaration  
on the Doctrine of Justification**

**Adelaide**

**29 October 2009**

On November 19, 2008, when speaking about St Paul in the *Year of St Paul*, Pope Benedict XVI said that “it is precisely because of (his) personal experience of the relationship with Jesus that Paul places at the centre of his Gospel, an irreducible opposition between two alternative paths to justice: one based on the works of the law, the other founded on the grace of faith in Christ.”

He went on to say towards the end of his address that “it is Christ who unites us with and in the one God: it is Christ who guarantees our true identity in the diversity of cultures; and it is He who makes us just. To be ‘just’ means simply to be with Christ and in Christ. And this suffices. Other observances are no longer necessary. That is why Luther’s expression “sola fide” is true if faith is not opposed to charity, to love. Faith is to look at Christ, to entrust oneself to Christ, to be united to Christ, to be conformed to Christ, to his life. And the form, the life of Christ, is love; hence, to believe is to be conformed to Christ and to enter into his love. That is why, in the letter to the Galatians, St Paul develops above all his doctrine on Justification; he speaks of faith that operates through love.”

Pope Benedict XVI quoted Luther very easily and spoke very easily of justification by faith without any need to refer to the division that occurred in the Church because of the debates, in Luther’s day, about his message of “sola fide”.

This is illustrative of the new relationship that exists between Lutherans and Catholics because of their involvement together for the past forty years in ecumenical dialogue and collaboration. It is a result also of their shared participation in the journey of spiritual ecumenism, of praying together and for each other, that we might be one. There is no more significant illustration of this new relationship that made Pope Benedict’s comments so possible than the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification on October 31, 1991.

As we mark its tenth anniversary, the question arises of how this Joint Declaration has shaped us and will shape us in the future. It has already shaped us in many ways. Most fundamentally it has created a new level of communion between Lutherans and Catholics. They can now view each other differently because the Joint Declaration established a new foundation upon which to base all their collaboration and prayer and dialogue. They can now look at each other and recognize faith in the same gospel of Christ in very different expressions of faith about how we are saved and how we are one with Christ.

When the Joint Declaration was signed in Augsburg, the signing was also celebrated in different ways in Australia, certainly here in Adelaide, and in Brisbane. Those public ecclesial acts, very formal actions by leaders of two Christian communions, were the public acknowledgement of a gift that had been received from God. The gift was the discovery of shared faith despite efforts over 400 years to condemn each other's expression of the one faith and to try to express our own version of it in a way that was as opposed as possible to that of the other.

A gift has been given to us which creates in us a responsibility to live in a new way because of that gift. The claim that we now have a new level of communion and therefore a new foundation for all aspects of our relationship can be mere words unless it begins to affect the actual lived experience of Lutherans and Catholics.

The most obvious example of how this new relationship has borne fruit, and an example which I think illustrates very powerfully that the signing of the Joint Declaration was a gift, is the association with that Joint Declaration by the World Methodist Council. I was a Catholic observer at a meeting of the Executive of the World Methodist Council in Hong Kong a year or so after the signing of the Joint Declaration. I represented the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity because of my role as Catholic Co-Chairman of the International Dialogue with the World Methodist Council. At a meeting of their committee concerned with relations with other Christian Churches, I was privileged to observe the decision being made to approach the World Lutheran Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to see if it were possible to expand the accord that had been reached in this Joint Declaration by including another party, the World Methodist Council.

Conversations did take place with Methodists and in fact with the World Alliance of Reform Churches. As it turned out, it was only the World Methodist Council that produced a statement of their faith in the Doctrine of Justification which was found acceptable by Lutherans and by Catholics so that this new level of communion, this new foundation for ecumenical relations, has expanded to include member churches of the World Methodist Council.

Because of the formal inclusion of the World Methodist Council in this new relationship, the Uniting Church in Australia is also involved. They are a member church of the World Methodist Council and took part in the consultations within that communion before the new relationship was established at the World Conference of the World Methodist Council in Seoul, Korea on July 23, 2006.

I think one of the tasks that lies ahead is to formalize an agreement with other Christian churches especially the family of Reformed Churches and the Anglican Communion, so that we can state before the world that we have all reached some new level of agreement on the most divisive issue at the time of the Reformation. This also needs to include newer churches who are often more imprisoned by the polemics of the Reformation than Lutherans and Catholics have been for most of last century.

However, the gift of and the responsibility arising from the Joint Declaration must not be seen only in terms of institutional relationships between World Communions. The Declaration also needs to be taken seriously by churches in their ordinary living of the gospel in local contexts. The fact that we have entered in Christ into a deeper level of communion which we formally acknowledged in Augsburg ten years ago and in Seoul three years ago must affect the way we relate to each other. If it does not, we cannot claim to take seriously the gift we have been given by Christ who has achieved this within us.

My sense is that most ordinary Catholics and perhaps even some Lutherans today have forgotten how important the doctrine of Justification is in their understanding of their relationship with God in Christ, despite the fact that the Australian Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue based here in Adelaide, produced a more accessible account of this doctrine in their own Statement on Justification published in November 1998. Somehow we have to find a way to help ordinary Catholics and Lutherans not only to discover the importance of the doctrine of justification by

faith for themselves, but also to discover that they share this doctrine to a great extent with other Christians and especially with Lutherans or Catholics and the members of the Uniting Church. Cardinal Cassidy, when he was President of the Pontifical Council, phrased it this way when he said that the consensus on justification “must be brought into the heart of our churches, into the very life of our congregations and parishes.”

Of course, any attempts to do this will be hampered by the loss of interest in ecumenism that is prevalent right throughout the Western world. Churches, congregations and communities are more focused now on their own survival. If they look towards other communities than their own, they tend to look at the secular world which challenges them so much, or at the Muslim community which challenges them in another way.

The fruits of the ecumenical movement since the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, which marked the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement and the centenary of which we will be celebrating next year, have been enormous. But because further gains are more difficult, people have tended to settle for what has been achieved or to turn their interest elsewhere. We can't afford to do this because to do so would be unfaithful to Christ who prayed the night before he died that we might be one. We have no right not to continue to try to build deeper relationships with each other and to deal with those things that inhibit a future truly united church.

To ready ourselves for the tenth anniversary of this signing, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in its May meeting, devoted a session to a discussion of justification by faith. We were assisted by Pastor Robert Bartolomeus and Fr Gerard Kelly in our discussions. What was interesting is that bishops were as interested in reflecting on the meaning of the doctrine for themselves as they were in the differences between our two communions in describing this doctrine. Ideally that experience of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference would be replicated for other Australian Catholics and Lutherans. Their own growth in the life of the Spirit, their own relationship with Christ, their own commitment to living the life of Christ in our secular world and engaging in the mission of preaching the gospel of Christ to our world could not but be enhanced by all rediscovering the power of this doctrine and rediscovering it with the aid of the insights that come by seeing it as well through other's eyes.

We cannot simply celebrate this tenth anniversary with a liturgical service. We were given a gift by Christ that bore great fruit in Augsburg, but that gift involves also a great responsibility for us to do something more as a result of this new level of communion that we have been given, solely by God's grace through faith.

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**Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Interreligious Relations**