



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION***

Monday, 7 November 2005

*Dear Bishop Hansen,
Dear Lutheran Friends,*

It is with great joy that I welcome the representatives of the Lutheran World Federation on the occasion of your official visit to Rome. With gratitude I remember the presence of your delegation both at the funeral of the late Pope John Paul II and at the solemn inauguration of my own ministry as Bishop of Rome.

For many years the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation have enjoyed close contacts and participated in intensive ecumenical dialogue. This exchange of ideas has been most productive and promising. Indeed, one of the results of this fruitful dialogue is the *Joint Declaration on Justification*, which constitutes a significant milestone on our common path to full visible unity. This is an important achievement. In order to build on this accomplishment, we must accept that differences remain regarding the central question of justification; these need to be addressed, together with the ways in which God's grace is communicated in and through the Church.

As I mentioned during my recent *visit to Cologne*, I hope the future progress of our dialogue on these issues will not only be placed in a context of "institutional" questions, but will take into account the true source of all ministry in the Church. In fact, the mission of the Church is to *witness* to the truth of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Word and witness go together: the Word calls forth and gives form to the witness; the witness derives its authenticity from total fidelity to the Word, as expressed and lived in the apostolic community of faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The International Lutheran Roman-Catholic Commission on Unity will soon complete its fourth phase of dialogue and publish its findings in a document on the Apostolicity of the Church. We are all aware that our fraternal dialogue is challenged not just by the need to verify the reception of these shared formulations of doctrine in our respective communions, but even more so today by a general climate of uncertainty regarding Christian truths and ethical principles which formerly went unquestioned. This common patrimony in certain cases is being undermined by changed hermeneutical approaches.

Our ecumenical path together will continue to encounter difficulties and will demand patient dialogue. I draw much encouragement, however, from the solid tradition of serious study and exchange which has characterized Catholic-Lutheran relations over the years. We are comforted by the fact that our search for unity is guided by the presence of the Risen Lord and by the inexhaustible power of his Spirit “which blows where it wills” (*Jn* 3:8). As we prepare to mark the five-hundredth anniversary of the events of 1517, we should intensify our efforts to understand more deeply what we have in common and what divides us, as well as the gifts we have to offer each other. By persevering in this journey we pray that the face of Christ may shine ever more brightly in his disciples in order that all may be one so that the world may believe (cf. *Jn* 17:21).

Let us thank God for all that has been achieved so far in Catholic-Lutheran relations, and let us pray that we may continue to move together towards the unity that the Lord wills.

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