

DEBATE ON THE REFORMATION ANNIVERSARY FAITH AND ORDER COMMISSION

Summary

1. The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation being commemorated by churches around the world in 2017 presents a number of significant opportunities for the Church of England. These include:
 - strengthening relations with partner churches in Continental Europe, including the Evangelical Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland – EKD) and the Lutheran churches of the Porvoo Communion;
 - deepening reconciliation between churches historically divided by the events of the Reformation, in England and internationally;
 - promoting reflection within the Church of England and in wider society on the continuing significance of the theological themes of the Reformation, with the good news of Jesus Christ being at the centre of that.

Recognizing the historic significance of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ) between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), affirmed in the resolution passed at the Anglican Consultative Council last year, is pertinent to all three of these in the light of the church-dividing controversies of the sixteenth century.

Background

2. The choice of this anniversary year derives from the view that Martin Luther's protest against the practice of indulgences on 31 October 1517 marked the beginning of a single movement called 'the Reformation'. It would not be difficult to find reasons for criticising that view, and certainly the Protestant Reformation took a path in England quite distinct from that followed by those parts of Germany first affected by Luther's teaching; similar statements could also be made about other European countries. Yet it is also undeniable that the English Reformation cannot be disconnected from what happened in Wittenberg. However we would date the start of it, a movement – complex, fluid, diversifying and evolving – began there that transformed the face of European and ultimately global Christianity, and the history and self-understanding of the Church of England remain inseparable from it.
3. There are further reasons for why we in the Church of England should attend carefully to this fifth centenary of the Reformation. Churches that cherish the memory of Luther and have commemorated the centenary in the past have this time asked other churches to share it with them, and indeed made strenuous efforts to enable it to be a truly ecumenical and global occasion. The Roman Catholic Church has responded to this invitation by producing four years ago with the LWF a document to help members of their churches to mark the anniversary

together and to grow in faith and in unity through doing so.¹ Pope Francis himself was present for the Joint Ecumenical Commemoration of the Reformation in Lund on 31 October in 2016 to launch the anniversary year, issuing a Joint Declaration with the President of the LWF that includes a paragraph in which they 'invite our ecumenical partners to remind us of our commitments and to encourage us. We ask them to continue to pray for us, to walk with us, to support us in living out the prayerful commitments we express today.'²

Strengthening relations

4. A particular part of the context for the Church of England is the high priority being given to the Reformation Anniversary by our church partners in Continental Europe, including Lutherans and others with whom we have Synodical agreements through the Meissen, Porvoo and Reuilly Agreements. In the debate at the July sessions of Synod in 2016 following the referendum on U.K. membership of the European Union, the need to affirm such partnerships afresh was repeatedly stressed by participants. The commitment to marking the anniversary on the part of the EKD and the Lutheran churches of the Porvoo Communion, including their congregations in this country, is especially noteworthy.
5. The EKD is sponsoring a wide range of activities in this anniversary year.³ One of these is the European Reformation Roadmap, which is sending a 'Storymobile' around key cities for Reformation history across Europe with a travelling exhibition, as a catalyst for local events. The exhibition will be coming to Liverpool on 21 February, Cambridge on 23 February and London on 25 February. The Council of Lutheran Churches in Great Britain, most of whose members also belong to the Porvoo Communion of Churches if they are not party to the Meissen agreement, is coordinating these visits, and further details can be found on the website they have created for the anniversary.⁴
6. The EKD is also the primary sponsor for the 36th Protestant Kirchentag, taking place from 24 to 28 May in Berlin and Wittenberg with satellite events being held in other German cities. Reflecting on international ecumenism and on interfaith and intercultural dialogue, it will also look ahead to the next 500 years of Protestantism, under the overall theme "You see me" (Gen 16:13).⁵ A number of delegations will be attending from the Church of England, while the speakers will include several of our bishops.
7. The Council of Lutheran Churches in Great Britain has a key role in organising the finale for the anniversary year in this country on 31 October itself. A major

¹ The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), 2013, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity*, available at <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion.pdf>.

² For the full text, see <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/10/31/full-text-joint-declaration-for-the-500th-anniversary-of-reformation/>. The Associated Press' clip of Pope Francis and the LWF President (Bishop Younan) signing the joint statement can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQicA8IDmqA>.

³ See the website 'Reformation 2017', at <https://r2017.org/en/>.

⁴ 'The Quincentenary of the Reformation', at <http://www.reformation500.uk/anniversary.htm>.

⁵ The main Kirchentag website is at <https://www.kirchentag.de/english.html>.

service at Westminster Abbey with strong ecumenical representation will be followed by a symposium on the theme “Liberated by Grace” (the LWF Theme for the year), with presentations by prominent historians and church leaders, in the adjoining St Margaret’s Church.

8. The member churches of the Council are also members of the LWF, which will be coordinating events around the world on 31 October. The close relationship between the Anglican Communion and the LWF as two communions of churches has global significance. There will be a number of opportunities for the Church of England to affirm that relationship during 2017, including this debate.
9. We hope that members of the Church of England will support these events, and also the many other activities that will be happening at a more local level. Dioceses, cathedrals and parishes that have links with partners in Continental Europe have a particular role to play in promoting creative, prayerful engagement that can strengthen the ties between us and our appreciation of the different ways in which we share the one gospel of Jesus Christ.

Deepening reconciliation

10. The emphasis on reconciliation in the approach to the Reformation Anniversary on the part of the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church is evident in the activities noted at paragraph 3 above. Given the vital importance in that relationship of JDDJ, affirming the convergence it represents is one way in which the Church of England and other Anglican churches can contribute to deeper reconciliation between all churches divided by the events of the sixteenth century.
11. JDDJ was able to conclude that ‘The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics’ (JDDJ, paragraph 40).⁶ Allowing that the two communions expressed their teaching in different ways and that there remained important questions for further investigation, it was able to identify and affirm this consensus and therefore maintain that differences in the doctrine of justification need no longer in and of themselves divide the two communions. Crucially, such an affirmation also clears the way for closer partnership in mission and evangelism: acceptance of the conclusion of JDDJ means that Christians from the two communions can be confident that the message of salvation they seek to communicate is at heart the same.
12. The wider ecumenical significance of JDDJ has long been recognised. The World Methodist Conference formally associated itself with it in 2006, and the World Communion of Reformed Churches is currently considering a parallel form of action to coincide with this anniversary year. Both the Roman Catholic Church and the LWF have expressed the hope that more churches will join them. The response from the Anglican Communion needs to be seen in this context.

⁶ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 1999, available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101_999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html.

13. In Resolution 16.17 on the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, the Anglican Consultative Council meeting last year stated that it:
- (1) welcomes and affirms the substance of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ), signed by Lutherans and Roman Catholics in 1999; and
 - (2) recognizes that Anglicans have explored the doctrine of justification with both Lutherans and Roman Catholics; and
 - (3) recognizes that Anglicans and Lutherans share a common understanding of God's justifying grace, as the Helsinki Report stated that we are accounted righteous and are made righteous before God only by grace through faith because of the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and not on account of our works or merits; and
 - (4) recognizes that in 1986 the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) produced a statement *Salvation and the Church*, which observed that our two Communion are agreed on the essential aspects of the doctrine of salvation and on the Church's role within it.
14. The ACC resolution is a carefully crafted whole. It recognizes that JDDJ is an agreement between two other global communions, addressing their specific issues in moving towards reconciliation and using their distinctive theological terms. Its substance can nonetheless be welcomed and affirmed by the Anglican Communion as convergent with its own attempts to formulate common statements on similar subjects with each of those communions. There is no claim to have reached final agreement here or to have an identical understanding of all matters relating to the doctrine of salvation. There is, however, significant convergence and substantial agreement on key questions, and this needs to be welcomed, for the sake of the reconciliation of the Church of Christ and its witness to the world.
15. In its last Quinquennium, the Faith and Order Commission considered carefully the extent to which the articulation of common doctrine in JDDJ was consonant with the teaching of the Church of England, and concluded that a positive answer could be given. The Faith and Order Commission encouraged the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order (IASCUFO) to work on this area in preparation for the Reformation Anniversary. That work led to Resolution 16.17 being drafted by IASCUFO.
16. Anglicans will continue to disagree, as they did during the reception process for *Salvation and the Church*, about the extent to which the Church of England's understanding of the doctrine of justification, as set out in its historic formularies (e.g. in Articles XI–XIV of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion), aligns with the ecumenical documents referred to in Resolution 16.17. Some – though by no means all – Evangelicals, within and beyond the Church of England, have voiced reservations about the interpretation of Reformation doctrine expressed in those documents. Nonetheless, we hope that all members of the General Synod may be able to 'welcome signs of convergence between the churches on the doctrine of salvation' as we face together the challenges of mission and evangelism, and to count the developments noted in Resolution 16.17 among them.

17. Reconciliation between churches is not only a matter of doctrinal statements. The exchange of material gifts between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope in October last year in Rome was a powerful act of communication about ecumenical reconciliation, not least because of the nature of the gifts themselves.⁷ Clarity about the extent of doctrinal agreement is however vital in giving confidence to churches in such deepening of relationships.
18. Reconciliation in the context of the Reformation Anniversary also concerns the healing of memories among the churches in this country and the on-going task of deepening mutual trust and understanding. As the statement released last year from Presidents of Churches Together in England (including the Archbishop of Canterbury) reminds us, together with the accompanying Reflections, the English Reformation can be seen as stretching from the 1530s into the second half of the seventeenth century. It left a lasting threefold division in English Christianity, between Anglicans, Roman Catholics and 'dissenting' Protestants who, for various reasons, could not find a home within the Church of England.⁸
19. All three held political power at various points in the long English Reformation, and all have their martyrs, but the Church of England, for all our fondness for boasting of tolerance, still bears a heavy burden in terms of the persecution of Christians whose response to the Reformation was at variance with the national church. It therefore has a particular responsibility for ensuring that the commemoration of the Reformation Anniversary this year can be an occasion of healing and for growth in unity between the churches in this country.
20. Initiatives at local level are likely to be especially important in this respect. Many members of the Church of England will take part in the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18–25 January), which this year uses materials produced by the churches in Germany around the theme of reconciliation.⁹ One event that will be running throughout 2017 is *Still Reforming: Reformation on London's Doorsteps*, focusing on a different London church each month and how its particular story relates to the history and legacy of the Reformation.¹⁰
21. Towards the end of October, a conference organised by Churches Together in England for all Ecumenical Officers from across its 40 plus member churches will be an important opportunity to take stock of what has been happening during the year and to ask what steps the churches in this country might be being called to take for the sake of fuller reconciliation and greater unity in witness to the one gospel of grace.

⁷ A video clip of the exchange, on the 5th October 2016 during vespers at San Gregorio al Celio in Rome, can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijU9vboJgA>.

⁸ Churches Together in England, 'Presidents' Statement on "Reformation 1517" in England', at http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/276196/Home/Resources/500th_anniversary_of/500th_anniversary_of.aspx?redirected=1.

⁹ Available at <https://ctbi.org.uk/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2017/>.

¹⁰ See

[http://www.reformation500.uk/userfiles/files/Booklet%20500%20Reformation%20v7%20printready.compressed%20\(1\)\(2\).pdf](http://www.reformation500.uk/userfiles/files/Booklet%20500%20Reformation%20v7%20printready.compressed%20(1)(2).pdf).

Promoting reflection

22. The Reformation Anniversary has been the catalyst for a still growing number of conferences, books, journals, internet resources and media presentations. Promoting dialogue between contemporary academic studies and church life is especially important in this area, where many people in the church may take for granted perceptions about the past that have been widely questioned by historians for some time. These might include the picture of widespread popular dissatisfaction with Catholic Christianity in this country in the first half of the sixteenth century, and the idea of a direct connection between the approach of Luther and later developments in such areas as human rights, democracy and the value of individual freedom.
23. Given the need to listen carefully to the work of historians before answering, then, what is the continuing relevance today of the Reformation as a major movement in Christian history for the church and for wider society? There will be various occasions this year when that question can receive sustained attention. One will be the Symposium happening in Cambridge to coincide with the visit of the Reformation Roadmap Storymobile on 23 February mentioned earlier, when Rowan Williams will be giving a keynote address on the significance of the Reformation for Anglicans. This will be a public event and, though numbers are limited, we hope to make the address available afterwards so that many more can benefit from engaging with the thinking of the former Archbishop of Canterbury on this subject.¹¹
24. In January last year, there was a theological conference under the Meissen Agreement on the theme *Reformation then and now*, whose proceedings have now been published.¹² The theme for the Porvoo consultation in February 2017 in Bergen will be *Identity, Memory and Hope: The Continuing Significance of Reformations for our Churches and Societies*. The Reformation continues to resonate in all subsequent invocations of reform in the life of the churches, including our own current programme of Renewal and Reform. Can reflection on the Reformation help us in any way with its further development?
25. Resolution 16.16 of last year's Anglican Consultative Council – directly preceding 16.17 referred to above – encouraged Anglican churches to engage particularly with the resources produced by the LWF for the Reformation Anniversary. Consisting of four volumes, each containing chapters by a number of different authors from across the globe, these resources focus on the theme 'not for sale' to suggest ways in which the characteristic themes of the Lutheran reformation can illuminate specific challenges that face Lutheran churches today, such as

¹¹ To book a place, go to <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/reformation-then-and-now-tickets-28522580807>.

¹² Richard Chartres, Christoph Ernst, Leslie Nathaniel and Friederike Nüssel, eds., *Reformation then and now: Contributions to the Ninth Theological Conference within the Framework of the Meissen Process between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church of Germany* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016).

education, relations between different generations, human trafficking, medical ethics and the promotion of gender justice.¹³

26. Some parishes may find these texts useful for reading and discussion. They might also prompt us to some parallel work of our own. What would we in the Church of England identify as the outstanding social and ethical challenges that we are facing? What are we currently doing to address them? How might themes from Reformation theology be brought into dialogue with that activity and stimulate theological reflection on it? And how might what we are doing be enriched by enhancing our partnership with other churches, giving practical expression to common faith in the gospel of salvation?¹⁴
27. The Reformation might be described as being, at heart, a movement to rediscover the gospel as good news. This Reformation Anniversary should also therefore be a time to ask how we can proclaim that gospel afresh to our generation. What new ways of sharing the gospel might be needed so that our culture can hear the message of salvation? One outcome of this year needs to be a fresh determination to make engagement with that question a core priority in the years ahead.

Bishop of Coventry, Chair of Faith and Order Commission
January 2017

¹³ The four books, *Liberated by God's Grace*, *Salvation – not for Sale*, *Human Beings – not for Sale*, and *Creation – not for Sale*, are available at no cost for download as e-books at <https://2017.lutheranworld.org/content/reflecting-131>.

¹⁴ See for instance the report on the involvement of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope in an anti-slavery and human trafficking initiative at <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5262/archbishop-justin-and-pope-francis-back-anglican-catholic-anti-slavery-and-human-trafficking-initiat>.