

Resolution of The Anglican Consultative Council on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (2016)

The Anglican Consultative Council

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

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The Archbishop of Canterbury has marked an act of reconciliation between the Catholic and Protestant churches on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

During a service at Westminster Abbey today, the Archbishop presented copies of a text supporting an agreement resolving the theological dispute behind the Reformation to the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation.

The text is a formal resolution approved by representatives from the Anglican Communion, who have welcomed the substance of the Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification, signed by the Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran World Federation, World Methodist Council and World Communion of Reformed Churches.

The profound difference in opinion on the understanding of justification – how humankind can be reconciled to God in Jesus Christ – was the fundamental issue which divided the Church in the West during the Reformation.

The service at Westminster Abbey marked the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation in Europe, dated from Martin Luther publishing 95 theses protesting against the practice of indulgences, on 31 October 1517 in Wittenberg. Held in partnership with the Council of Lutheran Churches, it was led by the Dean of Westminster, the Very Revd Dr John Hall, with the sermon preached by Archbishop Justin.

In his sermon, the Archbishop said the Reformation was “a gift of God, not only in itself but as a sign of the faithfulness of God to His work of revealing the good news of Jesus to a world in need – and the faithfulness of God in using His church despite our failings.”

He added: “What do we do with the gift today? Will we be willing ourselves to be reformed, setting aside our differences because we are caught up in the grace that is found through faith? Will we find from God alone the strength and grace to be a united blessing to His world, so that our witness of unity in diversity overcomes our fears of each other? Will we seize afresh in confidence the hope that God who never abandons His church will again reform us, so that the world may see that Jesus came from the Father?”

Archbishop Justin said that these things were already happening in so many ways and that much has been accomplished. But he concluded with the challenge that “we have not yet allowed ourselves to be captured by the revolution of the gospel so that we may bless the world as we should, and as God enables us to do.”

Speaking ahead of the service, the Bishop of Coventry, the Rt Revd Dr Christopher Cocksworth, said: “The Joint Declaration was a historic breakthrough in overcoming the divisions that emerged from the Reformation through a fresh statement of its key concern, how sinners can be put right with God and empowered to live in a new way. The good news of forgiveness and freedom through Jesus Christ is what unites us as Christians. It’s the word of grace and hope that - together - we want to share with all the world.”

The Revd Canon Dr John Gibaut, Director of Unity, Faith and Order for the Anglican Communion, said: “In our separate bilateral dialogues with both the Catholic Church and the communion of churches in the Lutheran World Federation, Anglicans have explored the questions of justification, and are agreed on the essential aspects of our salvation in Christ. During the historic 2017 anniversary, Anglicans rejoice in the extraordinary achievement that the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification represents as a sign of healing after 500 years of division.”

The resolution passed by the Anglican Consultative Council in 2016 ‘welcomes and affirms the substance of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.’ The resolution was noted in a motion approved by the General Synod of the Church of England earlier this year on the Reformation Anniversary, as it welcomed ‘signs of convergence between the churches on the doctrine of salvation’.