



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LUTHERAN AND CATHOLIC BISHOPS
DISCUSS NUCLEAR WAR, OTHER CONCERNS

WASHINGTON--The quest for peace in the nuclear age, on-going progress in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue in the United States and joint observances of the 500th anniversary of the birthday of Martin Luther, on November 10, 1983, were among topics discussed at the eighth annual meeting of Lutheran and Roman Catholic bishops here.

The meeting was conducted under the auspices of Lutheran World Ministries and the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB). Chaired by Archbishop John F. Whealon of Hartford, chairman of the BCEIA, and the Reverend James R. Crumley, Jr., Bishop of the Lutheran Church in America, the meeting was held at NCCB headquarters on October 27-28.

The annual meetings provide an opportunity for the bishops and their consultants to review the broad spectrum of concerns and activities shared by Lutheran and Catholic communities throughout the country and the developing ecumenical relationships between them.

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Participants in this year's meeting included bishops from The American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, and the Lutheran Church in America. Joining with the bishops were some of the members of the U.S. Lutheran-Catholic dialogue commission and the national staff of the churches.

Roman Catholic participants presented the second draft of the pastoral letter prepared by the Catholic Bishops' Committee on War and Peace entitled "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," the document will be discussed at the annual meeting in Washington November 15-18 of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Lutherans reported on statements relating to the same areas of concern which the AELC, ALC and the LCA adopted at their conventions this past summer.

As in past years, time was devoted to joint reflection on pastoral matters affecting the on-going relationships of the Lutheran and Catholic people in this country. Among the matters discussed were the possible geographical alignments of dioceses and districts/synods where possible in the future, Catholic-Lutheran mixed marriages, and Catholic-Lutheran relationships in the area of campus ministry.

The meeting heard a report on work now in progress in the U.S. Lutheran-Catholic dialogue on the subject of justification by faith, a matter of central importance for Lutheran-Roman Catholic ecumenical relations, and one which has occupied the dialogue commission longer than any previous topic. It is hoped

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that a report from the dialogue will be forthcoming either next year or in 1984.

Attention was also given to a report recently issued by the international Lutheran-Catholic commission, "The Ministry in the Church." Observing that publication of such international reports should not pass without comment from Lutheran and Catholics in the United States, the bishops recommended that a joint Lutheran and Catholic panel of American experts be convened for the purpose of offering initial comment.

Of special interest were reports on decisions taken within recent months towards the full unity of the three Lutheran Churches represented at this meeting, and the steps they have taken with the Episcopal Church toward an increased sharing in eucharistic worship.

The statement of ecumenical commitment enacted by the general convention of the Lutheran Church in America this past September was also given close attention by the bishops.

In past years the bishops have given encouragement to the joint Roman Catholic and Lutheran observance of the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession (in 1980) and the anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi (in 1983). This year the bishops recommended joint programs of study, reflection, and prayer during 1983, the year which will mark the 500th birthday of Martin Luther.

The text of a paper called "Background Information" on the anniversary of Martin Luther is attached.

Besides the chairmen, participants in the meeting were Coadjutor Bishop Raphael M. Fliss of Superior; Auxiliary Bishop William H. Keeler of Harrisburg; Bishop Ernest L. Unterkoefler

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of Charleston; Bishop John M. Wurm of Belleville; Father Carl J. Peter of the Catholic University of America; Father John F. Hotchkin, Executive Director of the BCEIA Secretariat; Father J. Bryan Hehir, Associate Secretary for International Justice and Peace, United States Catholic Conference; Dr. Eugene J. Fisher, Executive Director of the Office for Catholic-Jewish Relations, NCCB; Rev. E. Harold Jansen, Bishop Eastern District The American Lutheran Church; Rev. William H. Kohn, President, Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches; Rev. Roger Field, representing Rev. David W. Preuss President, The American Lutheran Church; Dr. H. George Anderson, President, Luther College, Decora, Ia.; Dr. Joseph Burgess, Division of Theological Studies, Lutheran Church in the USA; Dr. George Lindbeck, Yale Divinity School; and Dr. William Rusch, Lutheran Church in America.

Next year's meeting of Lutheran and Catholic bishops will be held October 25-26 in Washington.

Background Information

On the occasion of the 500th birthday of Martin Luther (November 10, 1983) the BCEIA and LWM together wish to affirm the great importance Martin Luther has for our two traditions. This should be an occasion for common study and celebration.

Dialogues at both the international and national levels have re-examined the controversies of the sixteenth century, and in the process they have also looked again at the person and work of Luther. Lutherans cannot escape the fact that they have at times made Luther into a hero instead of emphasizing that to which he devoted his life, the centrality of the Gospel. It is salutary for Lutherans to see Luther as he really was, warts and all. On the other hand, Luther has not always been correctly appreciated by Catholics and his theology has not always been correctly presented. Yet we note that in the last few decades Catholic scholars have come more adequately to understand the Reformation and consequently Luther and his theology.

Recent years have been marked by important dates which have brought Roman Catholic and Lutherans together in unprecedented ways.

In 1967 the Lutheran community observed the 450th anniversary of the Reformation. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops accepted the invitation of the Lutheran churches in the United States to join in the observance of that anniversary. There were numerous services of worship held in cathedrals and churches throughout the country.

In 1980 the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession brought forth an even more remarkable series of services and study programs shared by Roman Catholics and Lutherans in churches both large and small, urban and rural all across the land.

Our experience of studying and dialoguing together during the celebration of the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 1980 will be a model we can profit from in 1983, the anniversary year of the one from whom a world wide family of Christians, one of the three largest in the world, takes its name.

For Lutherans this anniversary year will be a time of study, reflection and prayer:

- study of the origins of their community and the central Christian truths which direct its life;
- reflection on the paths of history along which Divine Providence has guided them; and
- prayer for the future that their community, under God's grace, may continue to give a living witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Roman Catholics, too, may find a special significance in this anniversary year. Martin Luther is not for them a forgotten figure of the past. He is very much remembered by them even though the forcefulness of his personality and of

criticisms he raised within the church have engendered in Roman Catholics a certain reserve. Some of his sharp strictures have remained for Roman Catholics a source of sadness. Nevertheless Roman Catholics today are willing and able to overcome the hesitation they naturally experienced in years gone by concerning the life and work of Luther.

Several factors account for this. (1) The passage of time and the suffering of our disunity have stilled the polemics of past ages when we thought ourselves so deeply separated in belief. Together the Lutheran and Roman Catholic communities have endured to face a new age when new challenges have been raised to the Christian understanding of life, challenges which both communities must face together, challenges which have at times exacted a heavy cost from both communities. Through this same period there has been an evident growth in appreciation of the strong links which bond these communities to each other in Christ and an ever increasing unwillingness to yield to the temptation to describe or define themselves over against each other. (2) Concomitantly an advance in historical and theological research has led to a more correct understanding among Roman Catholic scholars of Luther and his teaching. Excesses by Luther have been highlighted, yet at the same time the context in which he lived and wrote has been fully spelled out. His theology cannot be understood in terms of slogans or statements made in a polemic situation. Luther retained a considerable part of traditional Catholic faith and did not, for example, intend to imply that "faith" excludes either works, or love, or hope.

This has brought us to the point where we may ask along with Jan Cardinal Willebrands ---

Who would still deny today that Martin Luther was a deeply religious person who with honesty and dedication sought for the message of the gospel? Who would deny that in spite of the fact that he fought against the Roman Catholic Church and the Apostolic Sec - and for the sake of truth one must not remain silent about this - he retained a considerable part of the Catholic faith? Indeed, is it not true that the Second Vatican Council has even implemented requests which were first expressed by Martin Luther, among others, and as a result of which many aspects of Christian faith and life now find better expression than they did before? To be able to say this in spite of all the differences is a reason for great joy and much hope. (Address to the Fifth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Evian, France, July 15, 1970.)

From this perspective we can see how for Roman Catholics this 500th anniversary can also be a time for study, reflection and prayer:

- study which will bring a more exact understanding of Luther, his concerns and the issues he raised. Such attentive study will reveal that many of the differences which later, during the centuries of separation, became the focus of attention between Lutherans and Catholics were not originally the principal concerns of the Reformer himself;

- reflection on the many ways opening before us for our communities to be a source of ongoing strength and support for each other and thus together a more effective and appealing witness to the teaching of Our Lord;
- prayer that the Holy Spirit may continue to lead us to an ever fuller communion in the Church.

Martin Luther was a prolific genius, but his work can be seen to be centered on one reality: Faith - the faith which justifies sinners and gives to our daily lives the true meaning and destiny intended by God. Again, in the words of Cardinal Jan Willebrands:

It is undoubtedly a good thing to recall to mind a man for whom the doctrine of justification was the "articulus stantis et cadentis Ecclesiae" (the teaching whereby the Church stands or falls). In this we could learn from him that God must always remain the Lord, and that our most important human answer must always remain absolute confidence in God and our adoration of Him. (Evian address.)

If, as we hope may happen, Lutherans and Roman Catholics find the opportunity in this anniversary year to meet in the places where they live this faith and to share with one another the insights it has brought them, we are confident that this will be a great blessing for both our Christian communities. We gladly recommend such meeting in study and prayer to the bishops, pastors and people of our churches.