

Ecumenism

Luther Commemorated

By NC News Service
The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission has commemorated the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth with a joint statement praising Luther's reforms as relevant for today.

The statement also says Lutherans and Catholics should study more about each other's church as a means of reconciliation and "to see in Luther a common teacher."

"Luther's call for church reform, a call to repentance, is still relevant for us," said the commission statement.

"He summons us to listen anew to the Gospel, to recognize our own unfaithfulness to the Gospel and to witness credibly to it. This cannot happen today without attention to the other church and to its witness, and without the surrender of polemical stereotypes and the search for reconciliation," it added.

The statement was formulated at a meeting May 2-7 at Kloster Kirchberg in West Germany. The dialogue commission is composed of members appointed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican

Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

The statement said many of the insights of Vatican II reflected concerns of Luther. It listed:

- The decisive importance of the Bible in the life and teaching of the church.

- Description of the church as the people of God.

- Recognition of the individual's right to religious liberty.

Lutherans are also asked to recognize some "negative effects" of Luther such as anti-Semitic expressions in some of his writings.

Baptism Report Issued

Los Angeles (NC) — The standing committee of the two national associations of diocesan ecumenical officers for the Catholic and Episcopal churches in the United States has issued a report on Anglican-Roman Catholic baptisms, the committee co-chairman, Msgr. Royale M. Vadakin, announced.

The committee has also issued a five-year report reflecting on studies made by the committee of Anglican-Roman Catholic covenants, Anglican-Roman Catholic marriages and models for ministry to engaged and married couples.

Msgr. Vadakin is chairman of the Los Angeles archdiocesan commission on ecumenical and interreligious affairs.

The standing committee was established in 1978 by the National Association of Diocesan Ecumenical Officers (NADEO), the Catholic organization, and the Episcopal Diocesan Ecumenical Officers (EDEO), the Episcopal organization.

The Rev. Harold Hultgren is the Episcopal co-chairman and the committee has five members in addition to the co-chairmen.

"The standing committee's findings indicate

greater understanding, increasing enthusiasm, and, often, a very deep commitment on the part of the laity of both churches to the quest for Anglican-Roman Catholic unity," the final report said. "We have encountered many healthy ecumenical cells in the body of Christ!"

But the committee reported also that covenants between Episcopal and Catholic parishes all "seem to be fragile; and where the preparation is hasty, the chances for continual life and success of the covenant are further reduced."

Concerning Anglican-Roman Catholic marriages, the committee said its earlier report on that subject "reflected a history of insensitivity on the part of many of the clergy toward Anglican-Roman Catholic couples in their preparation for marriage and in their life situation which followed. The couples' frustration was further increased by their concern for an appropriate religious education for their children, for which the two churches do not yet seem to have a workable solution."

The committee said it "has never received a systematic and direct response to its work" from the Catholic or Episcopal

bishops of the United States, "or from any level of ecclesiastical authority. Such a response could well open up new areas for internal dialogue, advancing the ecumenical movement by causing each church to clarify its own understanding and intentions."

In its report on Anglican-Roman Catholic baptisms, the committee discussed the nature of baptism, the notion of "ecumenical baptism," the benefits of joint baptismal instruction and its relationship to the sacrament of confirmation, intercommunion and religious identity.

In a section of the report on baptism titled "The Church and the Churches: Universal Yet Denominational," the committee said, "The reality of baptism as an initiation into a given church or denomination should not obscure the greater reality of initiation into the body of Christ. An effort to preserve and protect denominational identity should not impede inevitable reconciliation of all denominations into the one communion of communions. Yet this initiation into the local church is necessary for our personal identification as Christians, lest we be lost in the totality of the universal church."

Language Termed Obstacle

Edinburgh, Scotland (NC) — Language and the different meanings Catholics and Presbyterians attach to the same words or phrases are an important factor in differences between the two churches, said a Scottish dialogue commission May 17.

"Key words and forms of expression, instinctive to one side but unfamiliar to the other, can render mutual understanding difficult, and even conceal areas of agreement in underlying meaning and intention," said a common report issued by the

joint commission on doctrine of the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland and the Catholic Church in Scotland.

The commission has been meeting twice yearly since November 1978.

"The better we comprehend each other's language, the clearer it becomes that, without betraying our past, each of us can appropriate insights and emphases of the other," the report added.

It said that the recognition of "the role that language plays" in Catholic-Presbyterian differences was "one very

positive fruit" of the commission's discussions so far.

The report outlined basic areas of agreement on the doctrine of the church.

"We are agreed, that the church is the body of Christ, existing with him at the meeting-point of the unseen and the seen, of faith and experience," it said.

"Vertically incorporated by the Holy Spirit into union and communion with Christ, her being, like the grace of God by which she lives, is a 'mystery,'" it added.

Visit Changed Ecumenism

London (NC) — "Things will never be quite the same again" since Pope John Paul II's ecumenical visit last year, said Archbishop Robert Runcie of Canterbury, head of the Anglican Communion, May 22.

During the pope's visit to England the two religious leaders met and prayed together at Canterbury.

"It's changed the atmosphere very much in terms of Christian unity," added Archbishop Runcie.

Archbishop Runcie commented on the historic Canterbury meeting at the end of a BBC television documentary reviewing the papal visit to Great Britain a year ago.

He said people all over the world had seen two leaders of different Christian churches sharing in a service which emphasized their common bond in baptism and their commitment to face the future together.

"If we can remember our origins and remember what God is calling us to do to make a better world, and we forget a bit about the arguments that have happened in between, then there is really hope," the Anglican leader said.

Among concrete results

of the meeting he cited recent talks in Rome involving representatives of the British Council of Churches, British Catholic leaders and Vatican officials, and the "new agenda" for Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue.

When Pope John Paul and Archbishop Runcie met, they formally established a new dialogue commission with a mandate to try to overcome all remaining obstacles to Catholic-Anglican unity.

Archbishop Runcie summarized the Canterbury meeting with a comment he heard during a recent trip to New Zealand: "It was one of those religious events which outflanked a great deal of talk."

Senate Unit Approves Tax Credit Bill

WASHINGTON (NC) — The Senate Finance Committee, by a vote of 11-7, approved a tuition tax credit bill May 24.

The bill, backed by President Reagan and Catholic school representatives, faces a challenge in the Senate from opponents who say the measure will take money and talent from public schools.

The credit would be for half the tuition a parent pays to send a child to a non-public elementary or secondary school. The maximum credit of \$100 would go into effect July 1 and would be increased to a \$200 maximum in 1984 and a \$300 maximum in 1985. No credits would be available for parents with incomes of more than \$50,000 a year.

A similar bill died in the Senate last year.



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