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Catholics, Lutherans: Salvation Only in God

Washington (NC) — God alone "forgives sins and makes us truly righteous," says a landmark Catholic-Lutheran agreement on justification issued last Friday.

"Our entire hope of justification and salvation rests on Christ Jesus and on the gospel whereby the good news of God's merciful action in Christ is made known," the joint statement declares. "We do not place our ultimate trust in anything other than God's promise and saving work in Christ."

The 21,000-word document which climaxes in that joint affirmation is the first such agreement by any major dialogue group on justification, the central doctrinal dispute of the Reformation. It is the product of five years of work by 20 theologians of the U.S. national Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue.

It was released to the press simultaneously by Lutheran offices in New York and Catholic offices in Washington on Sept. 30, two weeks after the group made its final revisions of the statement at a meeting in Milwaukee. The full text was published

in Origins, the documentary service of NC News Service.

The Catholic and Lutheran authors of the document, who include some of the leading American theologians in the two traditions, said that they still had "remaining differences on theological formulations." But they said they had reached "fundamental consensus" on the central doctrinal issue.

Where their common affirmation is accepted, they said, "Lutherans and Catholics can recognize each other as sharing a commitment to the same gospel of redemptive love received in faith."

In light of their shared affirmation, the theologians questioned whether any remaining differences on the doctrine of justification "need to be church-dividing." While acknowledging still-unresolved differences, they attributed them to matters of emphasis or to different thought structures used in approaching the issue, rather than to essentials of belief.

At the heart of the 16th-century dispute over justification is a central question for followers of Christ in every age: How are sinful human beings

saved? How are they freed from sin and made just in the eyes of God?

In jointly declaring the radical dependence of humans on God's totally free mercy and promise, the theologians rejected views which would ascribe to Catholics a position whereby human beings can earn or "merit" salvation by their own actions.

They likewise rejected traditional Catholic caricatures of the Lutheran belief, which would ascribe to Lutherans a view that good works flowing from faith are totally irrelevant to God's saving plan.

At the same time, in an unusual feature of the new document, the theologians on both sides agreed on a series of strengths and weaknesses in the Catholic and Lutheran traditions and suggested that each tradition could learn some valuable lessons from the other.

In speaking of differences in approach between the two traditions concerning the merit, for example, the theologians commented, "Both Lutherans and Catholics hold that, thanks to the inner renewal that comes from justification, the justified can, do, and must perform good works."

Lutherans, they said, fear that "Catholic ways of thinking and speaking about merit can lead to a legalism that derogates from the unconditional character of God's justifying word." And Catholics, they said, "admit that merit has often been preached in a self-righteous way bordering on legalism."

But both sides agreed that merit, rightly understood as bringing to fruition "what God's grace has initiated," is a part of the teaching of both Catholics and Lutherans — even though Lutherans would tend to use different terms and "the two sides have difficulty in finding a common language."

In a common "Declaration" concluding their agreement, the two sides declared their shared, total reliance on the gospel, saying, "We are willing to be judged by it in all our thoughts and actions, our philosophies and projects, our theologies and religious practices."

They viewed their new agreement on justification, faith and the gospel as a culmination of all the work their dialogue group has done since its inception in 1965.

Rest Stop

A truck carrying a 32-foot statue of Mary makes a stop in LaCrosse, Wis. The statue was being moved from Philadelphia to Santa Clara, Calif. (NC Photo)



Father Kelly Dies, Renown Educator

Funeral rites were celebrated this week for Father Leonard A. Kelly, the pastor emeritus of Church of the Assumption in Fairport who became nationally recognized for his pioneering work in Christian education. Father Kelly, 78, died Sept. 30, 1983.

Mass of Christ the High Priest was celebrated Monday night, with Mass of Christian Burial Tuesday, Oct. 4, at Assumption.

Known in both religious and civic circles as "Father Tim," Father Kelly in recent years served as associate pastor of St. Ambrose Church, his name listed in the official directory immediately below that of the

pastor, Father James Marvin.

The son of John T. and Anna Anderson Kelly was born Feb. 8, 1905. He attended St. Augustine's School, St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries, and Niagara University, from which he took a master's degree in education.

He was ordained Sept. 14, 1930, and returned to St. Augustine's Parish as assistant pastor until 1933, when he was assigned to the faculty of Aquinas Institute, a post he held for four years.

He then served a year as assistant at Old St. Mary's Church, and, in 1938 was named chaplain and pro-



FATHER KELLY
fessor of religion at Nazareth College.

He served as a chaplain to the U.S. Navy 1941-1945, 20 months of that time in the South Pacific.

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Pontiff Opens Synod

General absolution may be an issue, Page 16

Vatican City (NC) — "Turning from evil and addressing good... is a possible thing for man," proclaimed Pope John Paul II as he opened the sixth general assembly of the world Synod of Bishops Sept. 29 in St. Peter's Basilica.

The pope preached and presided at the opening Mass, which he celebrated with the synod fathers — 45 cardinals as well as 150 archbishops and bishops and 10 superiors general of religious orders.

About 10,000 persons attended the Mass which was offered in several languages, including Latin, German, Spanish, English, French and Polish.

The pope delivered his brief homily in Italian. In it he spoke of the history of conflict between good and evil in the world, citing both the struggle of the angels at creation and the division

between good and evil which individuals feel within themselves.

"It would be very difficult to find a more fundamental theme for the work of the synod: A more evangelical theme. More apostolic. A more urgent theme," he said.

The month-long meeting of representatives of the world's bishops is devoted to the theme of "Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church."

In his homily the pope stressed the potential for conversion and reconciliation for individuals who open themselves to God's grace.

Noting Christ's call of men and women to conversion, he commented: "This calling testifies that turning from evil and addressing good — in its fullness which is God — is a possible thing for

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