

# JUSTIFICATION

## Catholics, Lutherans Reach High Point in Dialogue

By Jerry Filteau  
NC News Service

The new U.S. Catholic-Lutheran consensus on justification climaxes nearly two decades of work by a dialogue group that is ranked among the most scholarly and advanced in the world.

The national dialogue, founded in 1965 and co-sponsored by Lutheran World Ministries and the Catholic bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs, already had a long list of achievements before the justification agreement. These included:

- Agreements on the Nicene Creed, baptism and the Eucharist in 1965, 1966 and 1967 respectively, before most bilateral dialogues between Catholics and other Christian faiths had even begun to reach agreements on doctrinal issues;

- A consensus on the Eucharist and ordained ministry in 1970 which was the first of its kind and has served as a reference point for other bilateral dialogues that subsequently addressed the issue;

- Consensus statements on papal primacy in 1974 and on papal infallibility and teaching authority in 1978, which were also firsts that blazed the trail for other dialogue commissions.

- As offshoots of the official dialogue itself, three jointly authored theological books which serve as landmarks for ecumenical scholarship: "Peter in the New Testament," "Mary in the New Testament" and "Righteousness in the New Testament."

"I think the results speak for themselves. I don't know of any other dialogue that commands the respect from historians, ecumenists and theologians that this one does," said Father Carl Peter, dean of the Catholic University of America's School of Religious Studies and a member of the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue, since 1972.

"This dialogue has been on the cutting edge. It has broken new ground," said the Rev. Joseph A. Burgess of the Lutheran Church-USA's Division of Theological Studies, who is currently on six other national Lutheran dialogues with other faiths in addition to the Lutheran-Catholic one.

Another Lutheran on the dialogue, George Lindbeck, professor of theology at Yale Divinity School and Lutheran co-chairman of the of-

### Father Kung Claims Pact Is His Own 'Justification'

By John Dash

Ithaca — Father Hans Kung, the controversial theologian who was stripped of his faculty to represent Catholic doctrine by Pope John Paul II, feels "justified" in his work by the recent agreement between U.S. Catholic and Lutheran theologians on the subject of justification.

It was through a theological reassessment of the Catholic approach to the idea of justification that the Swiss-born Father Kung first came to prominence in the late 1950s.

Father Kung, nevertheless, no longer enjoys the sanction of the Holy See on his theological writings and teachings. The one-time theological adviser to the fathers of the Second Vatican Council was formally chastized by the pope after many embattled years in which "Paul VI personally protected me" from enmity in the theological community.

Father Kung, however, told the Cornell Catholic Community Oct. 2, "In the Church, the strength of the Gospel of Jesus Christ will prove to be stronger in duration than all human inability, faint-heartedness and superficiality — will prove to be more vigorous than our own laziness, foolishness and resignation."

Father Kung spoke at Cornell University, at a symposium commemorating the 500th an-

niversary of Martin Luther's birth, and at Masses for the campus Catholic community.

His address at Mass was a homily on a text from the Gospel of Luke (17, 7-10) and was entitled "How to Persevere."

Anyone expecting a firebrand at Cornell, would have been disappointed. Rather, a soft-spoken priest carefully selected his words, speaking English with far greater facility than he claimed to be able to do.

Nor does Father Kung look tired or beaten. He merely looks calm, younger than his 55 years, secure in something other than being at the pinnacle of fame in the theological world. And he has begun to speak from that sense.

His homily was directly linked to his own life, its visions and its defeats.

And in conversation following the homily, he said that the recent agreement on the historical sore point between Catholics and Lutherans over justification represented a personal justification of his own early theses.

Father Kung described in his homily the euphoria of 1963, a period when John F. Kennedy was president of the United States, when Pope John XXIII was the pontiff who convened the Second Vatican Council, when the European nations were decidedly pro-American, and when Moscow was

purging itself of Stalinism.

It was also a year, he said, when the hopes pinned on such phenomena were dashed with the deaths of Kennedy and John, "when the men who carried our hopes, who were our hopes, died."

Ultimately, he said, "It was a year of illusions."

"But, infinitely much was accomplished, and not only in the Catholic Church."

Yet, from that time on, he said, the spirit of reform and new beginnings faded. "Internally, Rome itself became more and more closed."

Father Kung said he is challenged by friends who have left religious life, who have left the Church in the aftermath of that promise, leaving him pondering the question, "Why and how does one persevere? Why not give up the vision of your youth?"

"There are good and general reasons to stand firm," he told his audience, listing among the reasons that "one should not betray the visions of one's youth when out of fashion," and from a sense of "basic moral obligations."

But the Christian, he said, has further reason for perseverance.

In the Christian economy, he said, neither success nor failure is of ultimate importance, witness the agony of Jesus, the crucifixion.



FATHER KUNG

And, because, even in the Church, "Clocks don't run backwards."

On a personal level, Father Kung said he is blessed with health, a sense of humor, supportive friends and self-confidence; and he has come to realize that "human achievement and failures are not ultimately important."

"I believe the deciding factor is that I do not despair — never despair. I have an unshakeable confidence in God, an unshakeable faith that I shall overcome. I am justified by my faith and confidence."

He said that at the end of his life he will face his creator not with his books, nor his intentions, but with the prayer, "May God have mercy on me, a poor sinner."

He said that even in their readily reached agreement on the Nicene Creed 18 years earlier, dialogue members were aware that there were underlying questions of differing thought forms. Participants had "a sense of papering over differences," he said.

What they learned, said Froehlich, was that "these thought structures are not necessarily church-dividing, while in the 16th century they were church-dividing... To me this is significant."

The implication for him, Froehlich said, is that "we are now at level where our communality may have to be expressed differently. What our churches need to do is to live together, not just think together."

Saying that the dialogue process is "far ahead of the grassroots," he added, "All that will naturally be some decades hence, but it must be said now."

### Heady Days Are Gone, But Progress Continues

Gone are the heady days of the late 1960s and early 70s when every new ecumenical agreement drew splashy headlines and excited discussion.

But the American Catholic and Lutheran scholars who have just reached a major new agreement on justification — a central issue that split Lutherans from Rome more than 450 years ago — are not disheartened by the apparent ecumenical doldrums today. Instead they see the drive for church unity as a strong, living force within their churches.

They view their own new agreement as a significant contribution to church unity, not as dramatic as some earlier agreements but in some ways more far-reaching.

The period of high optimism and avid enthusiasm for ecumenism that accompanied the Catholic Church's serious entry into the Christian unity movement with the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) has disappeared, they said. Also gone, however, is the kind of bitter opposition to ecumenism which that enthusiasm used to provoke.

Instead, the dialogue participants said they see a deeper, more sustained and more realistic interest in and commitment to church unity.

### Text of the Declaration

Washington (NC) — Here is the text of the common declaration that concludes a 21,000-word agreed statement on justification by faith released Sept. 30 by the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue.

Thus we can make together, in fidelity to the Gospel we share, the following declaration:

We believe that God's creative graciousness is offered to us and to everyone for healing and reconciliation so that through the word made flesh, Jesus Christ, who was put to death for our transgressions and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25), we are all called to pass

from the alienation and oppression of sin to freedom and fellowship with God in the Holy Spirit. It is not through our own initiative that we respond to this call, but only through an undeserved gift which is granted and made known in faith, and which comes to fruition in our love of God and neighbor, as we are led by the Spirit in faith to bear witness to the divine gift in all aspects of our lives. This faith gives us hope for ourselves and for all humanity and gives us confidence that salvation in Christ will always be proclaimed as the Gospel, the good news for which the world is searching. This Gospel frees us in God's sight from

slavery to sin and self (Rom. 6:6). We are willing to be judged by it in all our thoughts and actions, our philosophies and projects, ourologies and religious practices. Since there is no aspect of the Christian community or of its life in the world that is not challenged by this Gospel, there is none that cannot be renewed or reformed in its light or by its power.

We have encountered this Gospel in our churches' sacraments and liturgies, in their preaching and teaching, in their doctrines and exhortations. Yet we also recognize that in both our churches the Gospel has not always been proclaimed, that it has

been blunted by reinterpretation, that it has been transformed by various means into self-satisfying systems of commands and prohibitions.

We are grateful at this time to be able to confess together what our Catholic and Lutheran ancestors tried to affirm as they responded in different ways to the biblical message of justification. A fundamental consensus on the Gospel is necessary to give credibility to our previous agreed statements on baptism, on the Eucharist and on forms of church authority. We believe that we have reached such a consensus.