

**Greetings for the City of Augsburg's Ceremony
on the occasion of the signing of the
"Joint Declaration on Justification"
30 October 1999**

I am very happy to convey to you the greetings of the World Council of Churches. This I do all the more gladly, as I can speak to you in my own language, and also as a Lutheran pastor and a German Protestant university teacher who cannot go along with the public objection expressed by many of his colleagues. Hence I am happy that I can be a witness to this significant act of signing the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Being a witness is in line with the role of the World Council of Churches which does indeed function as a pioneer but is not on its own account a party in inter-church discussions regarding doctrine or in negotiations on church communion.

It is important for further ecumenical developments too that this act can take place in Germany, and here in Augsburg, before the eyes of a public with a critical interest. Permit me to explain this briefly.

First of all, *in Germany*. The separation of the churches in the wake of the Reformation began here and was passed on from Germany to the whole world. Hence it is important that the process of healing too should start where the separation began. The Joint Declaration is not least a product of the intensive ecumenical and theological discussion which has been carried on here in Germany between Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians for more than fifty years.

Secondly, *here in Augsburg*. This city's name is linked most intimately with the phases of the ecclesiastical disputes in the sixteenth century. This is where in 1518 the disputation between Luther and Cardinal Cajetan took place. The Protestant Estates of the Holy Roman Empire in 1530 submitted the *Confessio Augustana* to the Emperor Charles by way of offering a Confession for reunion. In 1555 the first attempt at a settlement was undertaken in the religious Peace of Augsburg. This became the model for the later principle of the Augsburg Parity, as finally set forth contractually in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, marking the city's life for the next century and a half. Consequently Augsburg stands for an attitude of mutual respect for the two traditions, and at least brought about a practice of "reconciled diversity" in the city's life, such as finds expression in the annual Augsburg Peace Festival (the *Friedensfest*). Augsburg once before, in 1971, became the location for an important ecumenical event in the form of the ecumenical meeting at Pentecost. Meanwhile we are preparing in Germany for an ecumenical *Kirchentag* in Berlin in 2003. May the City of Augsburg's *genius loci* go with us in these preparations.

Lastly, *before the eyes of a public with a critical interest*. The Reformation in the sixteenth century was a public event with considerable political, social and cultural effects. We live in a different age. But the message of the gospel entrusted to the church is still a public message. For instance, the doctrine of justification certainly does not

replace the gospel; it is the criterion intended to safeguard the correct exposition of the gospel. Hence the place for this act too is in the public, with all the critical discussions - and including the press.

Thus it is good when those who try today to live in the spirit of the gospel can, so to speak, look over the shoulder of those who will be signing the Joint Declaration here in Augsburg. They can and should hold us and the participating churches to the commitments contained in the Joint Declaration. The issue, of course, is not only about the annulling of the repudiations and doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century, but also about the commitment to proclaim the gospel together as the message of the grace of God which liberates because it is unmerited. The public, both in the churches and in the world can expect that the consequences of that which is to be signed tomorrow will become evident in the demeanour of the churches, both in their dealings with each other and in their cooperation in shaping a humane culture. May the Spirit of God guide us in our attempts to honour this commitment.

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary
World Council of Churches