



Statement of a Consultation

Justification and Justice: A Meeting of Lutheran Theologians of the Americas

A Lutheran Consultation on Justification and Justice in the Americas met from December 7-14, 1985, at the Lutheran Center in Mexico City at the invitation of The American Lutheran Church Division for World Mission and Inter-Church Cooperation and its director, Dr. Mark Thomsen. Twenty-nine official participants and about 35 staff and visitors representing many Lutheran churches and theological faculties from nine countries in North, Central, South America, and the Caribbean attended. Theological papers and responses were presented on the following topics: Justification in the Americas; The Biblical Roots of Justice; The Viability of Luther Today; Interpreting the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms; Dependence, Liberation, and Justification; and Pastoral Dimensions of Liberation. Dr. José Míguez Bonino, a Methodist and professor emeritus at ISEDET, the United Protestant Theological Seminary in Buenos Aires, Argentina, gave the keynote address to the conference on the subject of "The Biblical Roots of Justice." Dr. Robert Marshall from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina, USA, was the respondent.

The discussions were intense, at times difficult, and the range of questions was broad. How can the practice of justice be grounded in the gospel of justification by faith? Are the poor and oppressed the special friends of God who teach the church to hear the word of God in the Bible? Where and how is the Kingdom of God present in the world? What do Christians have to say to the governments and political systems of the world, especially when the policies of one nation or group oppress another and often do so in the name of God? Does God's justification confront and affect people differently in various historical, economic, social, and political situations? What are the connections between exploitative economic systems and racial and sexual discrimination? How can pastoral action for liberation take place in local congregations and other ministries of the church? Is the heritage of the Reformation relevant and useful in the struggle for justice?

In dealing with such questions, the consultation discovered a significant difference in approach. On the one hand, there were presentations and contributions which took a classical point of departure from the Scriptures and the Confessions, seeking to make a careful distinction between justification and justice. On the other hand, there was a strong emphasis on the concrete experi-

ences of oppressed classes, races, and women and the actions to overcome their oppression as a point of departure for theological reflection, seeking to show the interdependence of justification and justice. These two approaches were not closed to each other. Although the differences in interpretation were remarkable, the participants were able to learn from one another, to value the

variety of contributions, and to discover common commitment to the cause of justice.

Within this diversity of concerns, participants were united in the conviction that God has given us the treasure of the gospel in Jesus Christ to be shared with the world. In this gift, we find our freedom as Christians. The God who justifies us in Christ calls us to do justice. In the midst of economic dependence, militarism, poverty, and other structures of death, we discern the signs of the kingdom of God among the oppressed and the impoverished struggling for life and liberation. Here it is impossible for Christians to be neutral. All who proclaim the word of God must also identify and challenge the forces of death and destruction which defy the kingdom of God. We affirm our Lutheran understanding of Christian vocation to direct us to serve the neighbor and to engage in the struggle for the transformation of society. God is at work to overcome the demonic forces which breed suffering and death in our personal lives, in the church, and in society.

In faithfulness to this responsibility, we call upon our churches and others of good will to:

1. Support the Contadora process to bring peace in the region of Central America.
2. Support the self-determination of the sovereign countries of Central America and the Caribbean and oppose all foreign military intervention in these nations. In particular, to continue to challenge the financial and military support of the USA to the "contra" forces in Nicaragua in order that the Nicaraguan peoples may have the possibility of working out their own political solutions.
3. Support the reemergence of the democratic processes within the countries of Latin American so that by means of legitimately constituted states and the full participation of the people these countries may determine their own destiny.
4. Become aware of the stranglehold that international economic systems have on Third World nations and the overwhelming burdens placed upon these nations by their huge national debt problems and excessive interest rates, and to work toward economic solutions which would be just to Latin American and Caribbean peoples.
5. Work for the social, political, and economic liberation of women within society, recognizing that in every situation of oppression, women are at an even deeper disadvantage.
6. Repent for the exploitation and destruction of Indian peoples and their cultures and observe the 500th anniversary of the coming of the European Christian missionaries to the Americas by celebrating Indian culture and history.
7. Identify forms of oppression within the church itself and in its life and mission, in particular the continuing discrimination against women and racial minorities.
8. Develop resources for congregational ministries which will equip members for dealing with issues of justice in society.

We also would counsel the theological schools of our churches to provide for the continuation of the dialogue between faculties, to encourage exchange of resources, students, and faculty. It is our further counsel that the agenda for a subsequent consultation be established at the initiative of the Latin American representatives.

The conference was interspersed with a tour of Mexico City, the observation of the tent villages in the areas of earthquake damage and the hovels which house families in the city dump, a conference with local leaders on Mexico's economy and the problems of reconstruction, and

visits to neighborhood ministries and base Christian communities.

Throughout the week, worship was led by Ms. Bonnie Jensen (executive director of the American Lutheran Church Women), Rev. Daniel Trejo (president of the Mexican Lutheran Church), Dr. Medardo Gomez (president of the Lutheran Synod of El Salvador), Rev. Hector Vasquez (pastor in Corpus Christi, Texas, USA), and Dr. Gerhard Cartford (ALC missionary and worship consultant, Lutheran World Federation, Buenos Aires, Argentina).