Examining the significance of the Lutheran-Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*

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Introduction

The 16th century proved to be a period of unrest for the Catholic Church. During this century a disagreement over many ecclesiastical issues divided the Catholic Church and created a 400-year feud within Christianity. Justification, how sinners can be and are declared righteous before God, served as one of the issues, if not the key issue, in this debate. Prior to this Reformation, no official doctrine existed for justification. However, the events of the Reformation led the Catholic Church to construct its doctrine in the form of condemnations and counter-Reformation actions. The reformers that came to be called the Lutherans formed their doctrine in a continual explanation of a series of propositions.

Both groups made mistakes during this period, and misunderstandings were common. However, for 400 years, these mistakes and misunderstandings guided both churches, continuing along a line of defiant separation. The churches came into the 20th century separated and unchanged. Nonetheless, that century of ecumenism provided a perfect atmosphere for the Lutherans and Catholics to discuss the Reformation. In the 1960s the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)[1] and the Roman Catholic Church met to discuss the events and the doctrines that divided the Catholic Church.

As one can imagine, arduous is the task of dialogue in the theological and ecclesiastical realms after so many years of silence. Making it even more difficult, the world had changed in that long span: the rise of many nations (including the United States), the fall of others, devastating wars—the landscape has since changed. In light of

[1] The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is an assembly of Lutheran churches with 128 member churches representing 58 million of the 61.5 million Lutherans worldwide. The LWF works in the name of its

this new landscape the churches quested to understand the events and each other's doctrines. Through their colloquy, the two churches anticipated finding common ground and beginning a new relationship together as friends instead of rivals. The resulting dialogues accomplished just that.

On October 31, 1999, officials from both church bodies gathered in Augsburg, Germany for a historic signing of the Lutheran-Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. This *Joint Declaration* spells out the consensus achieved in the dialogues. This document also sets goals for the future relationship of the Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church.

In this thesis, I intend to expound the history of the relationship of the two churches, beginning with the events of the Reformation leading right up to the signing of the *Joint Declaration*. The history is important to this thesis because without that context, the *Joint Declaration* loses its meaning, and the significance of the document cannot be understood. The Second Vatican Council of the mid-20th century stimulated worldwide Lutheran and Catholic dialogues. Therefore, I will discuss the Second Vatican Council and amplify its significance. This will be followed by a brief study of the *Joint Declaration* text, examining its stated purposes, accomplishments and goals. In so doing, the relationship of this document to its Reformation history will become obvious.

The thesis culminates in a chapter exploring the meaning of the *Joint Declaration*, where I argue that this document is clearly significant in the historical, theological, practical and ecumenical concerns of both churches. Finally, I will expand the thesis

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member churches in such areas as ecumenism and humanitarianism. *The Lutheran World Federation*, 12 April 2000, www.lutheranworld.org.

beyond the past and present and envisage what can and should be done because of this *Joint Declaration.*

On a simple level, this thesis is an exploration of the Lutheran and Catholic relationship with regard to the doctrine of justification. This relationship is most important because the Reformation was one of the most significant events in all of Christian history and it is the beginning of the Lutheran churches. On a more specific level, this thesis seeks to understand how this document fits into that history, what the document means in light of that history and what it can do for the future. I will elaborate the meaning of this *Joint Declaration* for this Lutheran-Catholic relationship, with regard to their history, their present and their possible future. By the end of this paper, the reader should understand the history of the two churches and the origin of their division. This should explain the significance of the very existence of the *Joint Declaration* and how this document will affect the relationship of the Catholic and Lutheran churches.

Chapter One: Reformation Era History

The purpose of this first chapter is to create a historical context within which this *Joint Declaration* fits and to which it speaks. By the end of this thesis it will be imperative to understand this Reformation history so that one can see the need for a document such as the *Joint Declaration.*

The Catholic Church removes Martin Luther from its order

The conflict started in the early 16th Century when the Catholic monk Martin Luther discovered through dedicated study and interpretation of the Bible that Catholic teachings differed from biblical theology. At the time, the Catholic Church taught, among many other things, that the Christian could encourage God to grant him/her justification by doing good works and paying indulgences to the church. Luther believed that the Catholic Church, by this teaching, was imprisoning the souls of its parishioners to the continual effort of working to advance their own salvation by attaining the merit of Christ through good works. Luther thought that the gift of Christ on the cross was enough for attaining salvation and justification as long as the believer had faith. He taught that nothing Christians did could effect the grace of God for justification. This teaching angered the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church's teaching was as much for practical as theological reasons. The Catholic thought that a follower of Luther's teaching would not perform works of charity if God did not reward them in some way. The Catholic Church feared the moral laxity and a decrease in good character of her followers if they adhered to this teaching. Luther, on the other hand, believed that the works carried out in the hopes of attaining

justification were impure and empty. Luther believed that the Bible said the person was justified continually and that good works came after—not before—justification. Luther claimed that his teachings were purely biblical and that the Catholic Church had swayed from that criterion in its teachings.

In order to begin a serious scholarly discussion about the Catholic teachings and the Bible, Luther nailed a set of 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenburg, Germany, justification being one of many topics included in the theses.[2] Luther sought to have a scholarly discussion about the Catholic teachings, in a hope that the Catholic Church would reform her ways to adhere more closely to the biblical teachings.[3] However, the Catholic Church took his theses to be a revolt against it. Angered by Luther's action, Pope Leo X (1513-1521) issued a papal bull demanding that Luther retract from his teachings. Luther refused. This set the spark of the Reformation burning.

Despite the Pope's bull, the Catholic Church wanted to understand Luther's teaching and his complaints and analyze them against the precepts of Catholic Church. Two years after the bull the Pope commissioned a group of theologians to study thoroughly Luther's teaching. Upon completion of its work, the committee recommended that the Pope issue another bull condemning the teachings. In his famous bull *Exsurge Domine*, Pope Leo X condemned Luther's teachings and threatened his excommunication from the Catholic Church, both of which were devastating at the time. The Roman Catholic rule was the overarching power in Europe. However, Luther again did not recant and a year later, the Pope officially excommunicated Luther. He labeled Luther as a heretic and called his

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[2] H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, ed., *Justification by faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 166.
[3] Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation, Vol. 3, "Pelagianism." (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 238.

teaching pagan. This ended any hope Luther had of reforming the Catholic Church. Every move he and the Lutherans made after *Exsurge* only created further division between them and the Catholic Church.

Discussions to reunite only cause further split

Political strife surrounded the Holy Roman Empire at this time. The Catholic excommunication of Luther and the resulting disunity concerned Emperor Charles V. The Turks militarily threatened the safety of his kingdom. Fearing weakness in the face of the mobilized Turks, Charles V called for a Diet at Augsburg, Germany in hope that the Lutherans and Catholic Church could reconcile and unite in time to fight. Thus, the move to reunite the Lutherans to the Catholic Church grew out of political and military—not ecclesiastical—concerns.

Luther was not invited to the Diet of Augsburg because of the earlier imperial ban issued against him. Therefore, Luther chose Phillip Melanchthon to draft a confession of their beliefs to be presented at this Diet. This was the first time the Lutherans officially wrote out their beliefs about God and against the Catholic Church's teachings, creating the first statement of Lutheran doctrine. This draft, which came to be known as the *Augsburg Confession*, covered justification, the sacraments, church authority and the freedom of the Christian's will. After Melanchthon's presentation of the *Confession*, the Roman Church produced their confutation of the document. Their refutation laid out the refutations of the Catholic Church against the beliefs outlined in the *Augsburg Confession*. Both the *Confession* and the Catholic confutation were brief. Both groups

went away from Augsburg, the Lutherans further joined and the Catholics more angered, but both far from the intended unity.

Melanchthon felt cheated that he was unable to thoroughly defend his *Confession* so he authored a much more detailed work defending the theology of the Lutherans called the *Apology* to the *Augsburg Confession*. Prior to Augsburg, no true "doctrine" on justification existed. The events at Augsburg forced the Lutherans to define their beliefs on the idea of justification, thereby creating their doctrine. This gave a solid base on which the two groups could continue to disagree and argue.

One last attempt was made to unite the Catholic Church with the reforming Lutherans. Again, the attempt was made with political interests. Emperor Charles V called together a special Diet at Regensburg.[4] The Emperor appointed equal teams of Lutherans and Catholics, each consisting of three theologians, two princes and two jurists. They debated the dividing issues and came to a consensus on justification. However, the Pope and Luther (again not invited) examined the results and determined the Regensburg consensus did not reflect the beliefs of either church. Again, the attempts by Charles V at creating political unity through theological discussion failed.

Catholics condemn Lutherans and Lutherans form official doctrine

Pope Paul III (1534-1549) acted to crush any hope of immediate dialogue between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church. He called for a Catholic council to meet at Trent beginning in 1545.[5] The council met for 18 years in broken sessions. The discussion devoted entirely to justification took seven months and was a direct response

[4] Ibid, 32-33.
[5] Ibid, 33-34.

to the teachings of Lutherans and other dissenters. This session produced the *Decree on Justification*, which labeled all beliefs that went against the Roman Catholic Church, especially the Lutheran teachings, anathema. Anathema is an act of cutting off or separating from the trunk, in this case being the Catholic Church.[6] At Trent, then, the Catholics expounded their belief on the idea of justification, thus creating their doctrine, just as the Lutherans had at Augsburg. Luther died before this *Decree* was handed out, but Lutheranism did not die with him. Instead, the Lutherans gathered all of the documents produced during their intense 60 year debate over the issues and joined them in one official book in 1580 titled the *Book of Concord*. The *Book* represented the official teachings of the Lutherans. Central to the *Book of Concord* were Melanchthon's two great contributions, the *Augsburg Confession* and its *Apology*. As it stood, then, at the end of the 16th century, the Lutherans were split from the Roman Catholic Church and no attempts were being made at reunification.

The condemnations formed at the Council of Trent and the refutations published in the *Book of Concord* not only solidified the separation of the Lutheran church from the Roman Catholic Church, but also quieted any possibility of further discussion over the divisive issues—until the latter half of the 20th century.

[6] John Reumann, "Justification by faith: the Lutheran-Catholic convergence," *The Christian Century*, 22 October 1997, 942-45.

Looking forward

This chapter has established the background necessary to comprehend the significance of the *Joint Declaration*, the final goal of this thesis. The next chapter fast-forwards 400 years to the 20th century, the century of ecumenism.

It will review the beginning of the ecumenical era, going through the Second Vatican Council era and leading up to the drafting and acceptance by both churches of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. In later chapters, the document itself will be analyzed in light of the history of the Reformation and Second Vatican Council eras. After this analysis, I will explore the various meanings of the document and end the thesis with a look at the possible future implications of the accord.

Chapter Two: Second Vatican Council Era

The purpose of this chapter is to identify reasons the Lutheran-Catholic dialogues began and how they started. This discussion will create the framework necessary to understand what prompted the talks and the topics of such discussions. It is necessary to show how the shift of theological and practical attitude of religious tradition worldwide created the atmosphere necessary for this accord to take place.

Ecumenical spirit of the 20th century leads to Second Vatican Council

Looking back, the dialogue at Regensburg was the last joint discussion over Reformation issues for 425 years. The 20th century brought a new atmosphere for all churches to interact with other faith traditions. The events of this century leading to the Second Vatican Council and the Council itself proved to be catalysts for Lutheran-Catholic dialogue and the accord that is the topic of this thesis.

The modern ecumenical movement started with the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910, at which ecumenical missions were discussed.[7] From this conference, an international committee for mission work was created. In the years that followed, many national committees were formed to promote ecumenism and work toward Christian unity. In 1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC) was formed from many of these national committees. Despite representing a large number of the world's Christian population, the Roman Catholic Church refused to send observers to WCC meetings because the Council did not follow Catholic tradition. However, the events of

[7] E. A. Livingstone and Cross, F.L., eds. "Ecumenical Movement," The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church." (New York, Oxford University Press: 1997), 528.

the early 20th century created an atmosphere of ecumenism that was to grow in the later half of the century.

Through the church renewal prompted at the beginning of the century, the hermeneutical approach to the Bible changed for the Catholic Church. Hermeneutics is the body of principles that determine the interpretation of a text for a group. Through hermeneutics a church is able to reconcile tradition which is often unchanging with contemporary experience.[8] With the advent of increased ecumenical awareness a new hermeneutic emerged for the Catholic Church. This did not begin to effect the church, however, until the middle of the century under the papacy of John XXIII. Both this ecumenical renewal and the change in biblical hermeneutics would affect the changes the Catholic Church made in the middle and end of the 20th century.

Pope John XXIII, in the spirit of ecumenism, felt it was important for the Catholic Church to begin talking with other faith traditions.[9] He compelled Catholic leaders to do so, hoping that with the change in biblical hermeneutics, agreements and understandings could be reached. The Pope, the ecumenical atmosphere and the change in hermeneutics prompted the Catholic Church to review its history and ponder its future and discover the potential for worthwhile and meaningful dialogue with the churches that split during the Reformation.[10]

Just prior to calling for a second Vatican Council, the Pope created the pontifical office of Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity to promote an ecumenical spirit within

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[8] Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, "Hermeneutics." *Dictionary of Theology*. (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 208.
[9] George A. Lindbeck, *Dialogue on the Way: Protestants Report from Rome on the Vatican Council* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), 188.
[10] Anderson, *Justification by faith*, 43-44.

the Catholic Church and to begin dialogues with other church communions.[11] The first task of the Secretariat was to select observers to attend the Third Assembly of the WCC in New Delhi in 1961. This move ended a thirteen-year refusal to accept the validity of the WCC's actions. The second task of the office was to invite non-Catholic observers to the Second Vatican Council. Within two years, Pope John XXIII altered the face of Catholicism by participating in religious efforts organized outside the Catholic Church and by opening the Catholic Church to the outside world of Christians and non-Christians alike. These moves signified a renewed attitude that made the future Roman Catholic-Lutheran discussions possible.

Council calls for increased ecumenical efforts by the Catholic Church

This Second Vatican Council opened in 1962 with the invited non-Catholic church officials present to observe the proceedings. Surrounding the Council was an atmosphere of "renewal, modernization and ecumenism."[12] This new atmosphere was the result of modern biblical scholarship, contemporary theology, and renewed commitment to the Bible as a result of the hermeneutical change. The focus of the Council was many-fold, but most significant for this thesis was the attention paid to ecumenism. The Council determined, under the direction of Pope John XXIII, that the Catholic Church needed to renew itself and revitalize the tradition. In so doing, the Church would feel more comfortable in working toward Christian unity, one of the goals touted by the WCC. In

[11] *The Holy See*, Roman Catholic Church, 3 February 2000, available www.vatican.va.
[12] John H. Armstrong, *A View of Rome: A guide to understanding the beliefs and practices of Roman Catholics* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995),106.

order to make this move official, the Council adopted the *Decree on Ecumenism*, which became official on November 21, 1964. [13]

The Catholic Church endeavored—with observers from non-Catholic traditions present—to make it clear that they were serious about working towards Christian unity. The opening line in the *Decree on Ecumenism* reads, "The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council."[14] The Council defined manners in which this restoration could occur: engaging in useful dialogues with the other churches, praying for Christian unity, and teaming with other churches to serve the community. Beyond calling for dialogue, Vatican II also called for all Catholics to submit to a renewal of the heart, making the Catholic Church more Bible and Christ centered. The Council created a prayer for Christian unity and encouraged common prayer with the separated traditions.

In the *Decree on Ecumenism*, the Catholic Church admitted some fault for the division of the Church during the Reformation period. "Communities came to be separated...with the Catholic Church...often enough, men of both sides were to blame."[15] Thus, Vatican II, with the *Decree on Ecumenism* and this admittance of participating in the split of the Church, aligned everything in order for talks to ensue with the Lutherans. This again solidified the possibility, and perhaps the inevitability, of a future active relationship between the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches.

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[13] Ibid, 197.
[14] Rev. J.L. Gonzalez, ed. *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1966), 193.
[15] Ibid, 196.

Ecumenical dialogues between Catholics and Lutherans formed

Several events surrounded Vatican II which were highly significant to future dialogues over justification. First, the Lutheran World Federation held its Fourth Assembly (1963) in Helsinki. At this Assembly, the LWF's Commission of Theology presented the results of its decade-long study and research of the doctrine of justification. These efforts and their results served as the basis of the future international dialogues between Lutherans and Catholics.

Just after the *Decree* was promulgated at the Council, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States established a Commission on Ecumenical Affairs. The USA National Committee of the LWF was finishing talks with the Reformed and Presbyterian churches and promptly proposed similar talks with the U.S. Catholic Commission on Ecumenical Affairs. These talks began in 1965, making it the first official Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue regarding doctrine and dogma in the 424 years since the Diet at Regensburg. The dialogues this time were not arguments or debates, but friendly and open discussions.[16] They were the forerunners of the talks that would formulate the *Joint Declaration*.

Using these United States talks as a model and information from the LWF's Fourth Assembly, a commission was set up in Germany by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, under the new name Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), and the LWF.[17] This commission was established to examine confessional differences between the Catholics and Lutherans in light of contemporary biblical theology. This dialogue established a methodological approach to analyze the doctrine of

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[16] Frank Imhoff, "Signing of 'Joint Declaration' significant for ecumenical movement" *Worldwide Faith News,* 14 June 1999.

justification and how it has played a part in the history of the two traditions beginning at the Reformation:

1. Against whom is a given doctrinal condemnation directed?
2. Was this condemnatory pronouncement a correct rendering of the target position?
3. Does it still apply to the position adopted by today's partner?
4. If it does, what importance and what significance does the remaining difference have?[18]

As will be shown in the next chapter, these questions, and the answers proposed to them, made a tremendous impact in the drafting of the *Joint Declaration.*

This committee issued a report in 1972 called *The Gospel and the Church*, more commonly known as the *Malta Report*. Through this report, the commission announced that they had reached a "noteworthy and far-reaching consensus."[19] More specifically they said, "a consensus is developing in the interpretation of justification."[20] Later, in 1993, the same dialogue produced a report called *Church and Justification*, which spelled out that consensus. The consensus in this document is almost exactly the consensus found in the *Joint Declaration.*

These events in the 1960's and 70's determined both content and structure of the dialogues used to create the *Joint Declaration*. These events, directly related to Vatican II

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[17] Reumann, *The Christian Century*, 943.
[18] Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, eds. *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 8.
[19] Andre Appel and Jan Willebrands, eds. "Malta Report 1972," Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level," ed. by Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer. (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 170.
[20] Ibid., 174.

and the spirit of ecumenism throughout the world, spawned further efforts by both churches worldwide.

In the spirit of Vatican II, Pope John Paul II visited Germany in 1980 to celebrate the 450th anniversary of the *Augsburg Confession*. This visit bore fruit in the formation of a Joint Ecumenical Commission consisting of Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed and United church leaders. The job of this commission was to explore the possibility of closer relations between the churches. That commission published *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?*, outlining the past condemnations and the remaining theological and practical problems between the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation. Because of efforts to understand each other and renewed historical appreciation and biblical insights, the mutual condemnations are no longer valid today. Thus, the study and the discussion prompted the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans to consider declaring null and void today the condemnations of each other originating at that time, contributing greatly to the final purpose of the *Joint Declaration*.

The United States Lutheran and Catholic talks continued, being especially active from 1978-1983. This dialogue also produced several reports, its penultimate being focused solely on the doctrine of justification. It was published in 1985 and contained a common statement approved by both the Catholic and the Lutheran national committees, saying that the two communions had a working consensus, agreeing that the foundation for justification was the free and abundant grace of God.

Both churches move to preserve the accomplishments of the dialogues

Upon review of the accomplishments the dialogues, the LWF Standing Committee for Ecumenical Affairs made a proposal to record them in an official document. "Renewed common listening to the goodness proclaimed in the Bible, and the reception of insights of biblical, theological, and historical study, led to a significant convergence in the understanding of the justification of the sinner by God's grace, through faith in the saving act of Christ."[21] The Catholic Church seconded the proposal and discussions on the proper procedure for such a move ensued.

In 1994, the LWF and PCPCU appointed a group of theologians to write a single document outlining the consensus regarding the doctrine of justification that had been reached worldwide between the Lutherans and Catholics.[22] The first draft was completed in 1996, revised and re-issued again in 1997. This last revision was the first to be officially submitted to the LWF and the Vatican. This version, with a few changes, is the current *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.*

The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* was signed in 1999 on the day known by Lutherans as Reformation Day, October 31. The signing took place in Augsburg, Germany, 482 years to the day after Luther started the Reformation in Wittenburg.[23] Augsburg was important because of what it meant to the Reformation and because equal numbers of Lutherans and Catholics reside there.[24] The document was signed by eight LWF and two Catholic officials. This is the first time ever that a truly

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[21] Lutheran World Federation-Genveva, "Action taken by the LWF Council at its meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 17 June 1998.
[22] Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, "Presentation of the Vatican Sala Stampa, 25 June 1998," copy from *The Holy See*, www.vatican.va.
[23] Frank Imhoff, "Focus on the signing of the Joint Declaration in Augsburg" *Worldwide Faith News*, 8 October 1999.

ecumenical document has been agreed upon and signed through a joint process involving Roman Catholics and Lutherans.[25]

Looking back at the importance of the Vatican II

Looking back, the effects of Vatican II cannot be overemphasized. The Second Vatican Council represents a key turning point in the ecumenical efforts of the world and of the Lutheran-Catholic discussions. None of the events after Vatican II listed above would have happened without the ecumenical goals set there. The air of Christian and Catholic renewal, modernization and ecumenism established by the Second Vatican Council and the times that followed have been key in revitalizing Catholicism worldwide and in the Catholic Church's working openly towards Christian unity.[26] Leading to this convergence on justification was a renewed common listening to the biblical witness and the insights received by theological and historical study.[27] It is important, while discussing the *Joint Declaration*, to remember the individual events leading up to the document. Each contributed to the final document and is a testament to the potential of ecumenical dialogue today and in the future.

Finalizing this document was not without its problems, and no one would claim full and complete agreement with its every letter. Church scholars and general church members question the validity of the *Joint Declaration* as a response to the controversies stemming from the Reformation. They ask how this document is significant for the

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[24] Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko, "Statement at Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Press Conference, 11 June 1999," copy from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, www.elca.org.
[25] Frank Imhoff, "Signing of the 'Joint Declaration' will be a historic bridging" *Worldwide Faith News*, 4 August 1999.
[26] Lutheran World Federation-Geneva, "Action taken by the LWF Council at its meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 17 June 1998," LWF Standing Committee for Ecumenical Affairs, copy from the LWF-Geneva, www.lutheranworld.org.

churches today. A group of 165 German theologians wrote a letter claiming that the conclusions in the proposed *Joint Declaration* do not represent a consensus.[28] In the published 1997 report before the ELCA Assembly, the faculty of Luther Seminary called for a delay in signing the document so that it could be thought out more and revised. Hence, this document has not been received unanimously by all churches and institutions cooperating under the LWF.

One can now understand the significance of the late 20th century events to the start of the dialogues and in the forming of this accord. I turn next to the document itself. The last two sections of this thesis will uncover what this *Joint Declaration* means for the churches and the world today, leading into what it might mean for the future of Christianity.

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Richard Nyberg, "Protestant theologians object to the Lutheran-Catholic accord (German theologians)," *Christianity Today*, 15 June 1998: 42, 12.

Chapter Three: The Joint Declaration

In this chapter I intend to provide both an overview of the entire document and a description of the important aspects of the *Declaration*. From these I will ascertain its accomplishments, goals and importance.

Consensus by the two communions on the doctrine

The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* intends to record the consensus reached during the dialogues of the prior 30 years. Those dialogues were possible because the two churches had come to new insights regarding their history, biblical studies, ecumenism, theology and dogma.[29]

It is easy to assume that the document ends the discussion about justification between the two churches. However, this is not the case, as both churches agreed the time was right for a break in the discussions, during which this document could be formulated. "The time has therefore come to take stock and to summarize the results of the dialogues on justification so that our churches may be informed about the overall results of this dialogue with the necessary accuracy and brevity, and thereby be enabled to make binding decisions" (Paragraph 4). Thus, the *Joint Declaration* is a report to the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church, so they may know what is happening in this ecumenical endeavor.

[29] Paragraphs 7 and 13.

Accomplishments stated in the document

The *Declaration* makes three main points about the relationship between the Lutherans and Catholics established during these thirty years of dialogue.

1. They have come to an agreement on the fundamental truths of the doctrine of justification.
2. The remaining differences are acceptable.
3. The mutual condemnations from the 16th century do not apply to the understood teachings found in this document.

The first point is highlighted most. The following phrasing is used five times in the document.

> The present Joint Declaration has this intention: namely, to show that on the basis of their dialogue the subscribing Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ…it does encompass a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification… (Paragraph 5).

This paragraph emphasizes the "common understanding" and the "consensus on basic truths" achieved in the thirty years of dialogue.

One of the questions identified in the last chapter was the importance of any differences existing beyond a consensus. The second point speaks directly to that question. "In light of this consensus the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis in the understanding of justification described in paragraphs 18-39 are acceptable. Therefore the Lutheran and Catholic explications of justification are in their difference open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding

basic truths" (Paragraph 40). Hence, the remaining differences should not hinder the renewed friendship of the Catholic and Lutheran churches and should not be impediments to this or any following accord.

Thirdly, the remaining differences are not the basis for further or continued condemnations. This point again is in response to the questions posed by the German Lutheran and Catholic dialogue of the 1970's. "The corresponding doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century do not apply to today's partner" (Paragraphs 13 and 41). However, both churches recognize the seriousness of those condemnations. "Nothing is hereby taken away from the seriousness of the condemnations related to the doctrine of justification..." (Paragraph 42). Of course, we cannot erase the condemnations from history.[30] "...they remain for us 'salutary warnings' to which we must attend in our teaching and practice" (Paragraph 42). Both churches clearly want to avoid a regress to the events and attitudes of the Reformation. However, the fundamental purpose of the *Joint Declaration* is to put in writing the agreement, which is to overcome the tensions and divisions.

Dignity of ecumenism preserved in structure of the document

The *Joint Declaration* has what I would call an ecumenical structure. It is arranged in such a way that the doctrinal statements agreed to in each section are displayed in paragraph form. Within those sections, then, a paragraph is devoted to the Lutheran and the Catholic interpretation of the particular doctrinal idea. Thus, each theological section is comprised of three distinct paragraphs. The theological sections covered in the consensus are labeled as follows: Human Powerlessness and Sin in Relation to

Justification; Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous; Justification by Faith and through Grace; The Justified as Sinner; Law and Gospel; Assurance of Salvation; and The Good Works of the Justified. The *Declaration* does not claim to include all the aspects of the doctrine of justification, but for these a consensus has been developed, and they are most important to the doctrine for both churches.[31] This structure allows for clear understanding of what the consensus is and what each church thinks about the consensus and the doctrinal idea.

Following the main body of the document is the *Appendix*, the *Official Common Statement* and the *Annex*. The *Common Statement* is the document actually signed by the dignitaries in Augsburg during the celebration of the *Joint Declaration*. The *Appendix* and *Annex* further outline contentions and explicate positions more so than in the main body. The three additional parts of the document are necessary and important to the *Declaration*.

Connection to the Council of Trent and the *Augsburg Confession*

Much of the *Joint Declaration* can be found in the documents created at Trent and in the *Book of Concord*. The following paragraphs will show the connections of this accord to those documents.

At Trent, the Catholics believed that "none of those things which precede justification—whether faith or works—merit the grace itself of justification."[32] The *Joint Declaration* agrees that "whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith

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[30] Cardinal Cassidy, "Presentation of the Sala Stampa."
[31] Paragraph 5.
[32] Rev. J. Waterworth, trans, *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent*, (Chicago: The Christian Symbolic Publication Society, 1848), 36.

is neither the basis of justification nor merits it" (Paragraph 25). Hence, on this point the teaching in the *Declaration* is no different from that espoused at Trent. However, at Trent, the Catholics also stated that "faith cooperating with good works increase that justice which they have received through the grace of Christ."[33] This too is affirmed. In the Catholic explication portion of this section, the Catholics write, "According to Catholic understanding, good works, made possible by grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, contribute to growth in grace, so that the righteousness that comes from God is preserved and communion with Christ is deepened" (Paragraph 38).

In the *Augsburg Confession*, Melanchthon wrote that "good works should and must be done" (Article 20).[34] Melanchthon later continues that we do so because it is God's will, not to merit justification. In the agreed upon portion of the *Joint Declaration*, the Lutherans and Catholics wrote, "Christ has by his teaching and example expressed God's will which is a standard for the conduct of the justified also" (Paragraph 31). Therefore, this agreed upon teaching is no different from the *Augsburg Confession*. In that same paragraph, the Lutherans and Catholics agree that they "confess that God's commandments retain their validity for the justified." At Trent, the Catholics said that though Christ died for our sins and we are therefore inherently forgiven, we Christians are "not exempt from the commandments."[35]

Thus, the *Joint Declaration* not only comes to agreements, but also allows for the clear and stated differences from which neither church can move without compromising their foundational theologies. Statements in this *Joint Declaration* can be found in

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[33] Ibid, 37

[34] Theodore G. Tappert, trans, The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 45.

[35] Waterworth, *Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent*, 38.

Reformation era documents produced by both groups. Thus, the doctrine of justification is still derived from the doctrines espoused during that time. This *Joint Declaration* clarifies the doctrines of both churches and serves to illuminate the consensus discovered and now embraced. But truth be told, much of what is said in this accord was said by both churches in documents from the Reformation.

Catholics and Lutherans set goals for their future relationship

At the end of the *Joint Declaration*, the Catholics and Lutherans set goals for the application of this agreement and for their continued dialogue. This is an extremely important element in the *Joint Declaration's* significance. By setting goals, both churches show that the document is not mere semantics, nor is it just for display. This *Joint Declaration* is a serious endeavor of ecumenism and will work to unite the churches in a continuing and renewed friendship.

The first goal is of practical significance. "Our consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification must come to influence the life and teachings of our churches. Here it must prove itself…The Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church will continue to strive together to deepen this common understanding of justification and to make it bear fruit in the life and teaching of the churches" (Paragraph 43). How this can be done will be examined later in this paper.

In order to create the potential for practical influence on both churches, the accord needs to be translated into the common language of parishioners. "Lutherans and Catholics will continue their efforts ecumenically in their common witness to interpret the message of justification in language relevant for human beings today, and with

reference both to individual and social concerns of our times..." (*Common Statement*, Paragraph 3). Again, this topic of language will be covered in the final chapter.

Both churches make it clear their intent of breaking off the dialogues was to formulate this accord, not to end the dialogue forever. "The two partners in dialogue are committed to continued and deepened study of the biblical foundations of the doctrine of justification" (*Common Statement*, Paragraph 3). This dedication to the continued discussion on this doctrine also shows that all was not covered, discovered or agreed upon with regards to this doctrine. More work is to be done.

Both churches agree that in addition to further talk about justification, other topics must be discussed. "There are still questions of varying importance which need further clarification. These include, among other topics, the relationship between the Word of God and church doctrine, as well as ecclesiology, authority in the church, ministry, the sacraments, and the relation between justification and social ethics" (Paragraph 43).

The *Common Statement* reveals that this *Joint Declaration* is a significant step toward the much larger goal of full communion. "Continued dialogue is required...in order to reach full church communion, a unity in diversity, in which remaining differences would be 'reconciled' and no longer have a divisive force" (*Common Statement*, para3). How possible this movement is, neither church knows.

The fact that it sets definitive goals for the close relationship of the Catholic and Lutheran churches signifies that both churches are devoted to a lasting partnership and continued ecumenical efforts. The next section will elaborate on the meaning of the document in areas of ecclesiastical concern. The final section will seek possible effects of the document to the future of the two churches and all of Christianity.

Chapter Four: The Meaning of the Joint Declaration

The goal of this chapter, as is the goal of the entire thesis, is to show how significant this accord is in the web of history and the churches. The previous three chapters provide the information necessary to understand the points made in this chapter.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko predicted that the world was going to look at this accord curious about which church had to give the most ground and which church won the debate over justification. He sought to dissuade these thoughts and curiosities in his presentation of the LWF response to the proposed *Joint Declaration* in 1999.

> These days we appear not to be able to understand that a victory can be won without one of the parties ceding to the other. The process of the *Joint Declaration* has not had this competitive character. Rather, it has been a process of reconciliation based on the common heritage we share: the biblical witness of God's righteousness, in other words, His free grace given to us in Christ.[36]

Thus, we must be unconcerned with who won and be more concerned about what this means for our churches. Many questions should be asked about the meaning of this document. Who won, the Catholics or the Lutherans? What does this *Joint Declaration* do and not do? And most importantly, of what significance is this *Joint Declaration* and the process to devise it? This chapter answers these questions while evaluating the significance of this document in four areas of ecclesiastical concern: history, theology, practice and ecumenism. The next four sections will be devoted to an analysis of these.

There are two manners in which the *Joint Declaration* is significant. The first I call the existing significance. This accord is significant by its mere existence, both in what it says and in what it resulted from, in other words, the preservation of the significant dialogues between the Lutheran and Catholic church. This existing significance is not in the realm of what it does or will or can do, but in what it says and what it represents. The existing significance of this document is its historicity and its theological meanings.

The second manner in which the Joint Declaration is significant is its potential active significance. The accord is significant because it has the potential of doing something, whether it is in the relations of the Lutherans and Catholics or in its influence in other interdenominational discussions. Thus, the potential active significance is its practical influences and ecumenical significances.

History

The most obvious significance this document has is in the historical nature of the relationship between Lutherans and Catholics. It helps put an end to the long-standing strain felt between the two communions. Although, the *Joint Declaration* may not be as important as the *Decree on Justification* at the Council of Trent and the *Augsburg Confession,* in a historical timeline, it deserves equal space. This section gives reason for this.

The *Joint Declaration* preserves a renewed dialogue about the conflicts of the past after a 400-year silence. Since Regensburg, the two communions had not officially or directly talked about their differences in an open manner with the intent of coming to a

[36] Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko, "Statement at Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Press Conference." 11 June 1999.

realized friendship. The *Joint Declaration* preserves the historic discussions that achieve this goal.

The *Joint Declaration* is historic because it makes the condemnations of that time invalid for this time.[37] The anathemas from Trent and the condemnations found in the *Book of Concord* do not apply to the churches today and their teaching on justification through the *Joint Declaration*. We cannot, of course, go back and erase the condemnations from history. However, this *Joint Declaration* declares them invalid for today's teachings on justification. Thus, the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans now understand the doctrine of justification in modern theology and make new vows to be friends in ministry to God. The erasing of the anathemas and condemnations makes this possible. Prior to the Reformation they were united, since the Reformation they have been divided. However, with this document, they are united in goals and foundation and can be united in practical matters of the church.

The process and the resulting documents exhibit the obligation both churches have in looking at their past relations objectively and utilizing their past relationship to forge a new friendship. The key issue here is that both churches *do* look at their past relations and *do* forge new friendships. The *Joint Declaration* leads to this but does not provide an outline or prototype for how this is to occur. They have both come to grips with the past and are ready to start a new history, not of vicious disagreement, but of accepting alliance.

Another historical importance of this document is that it not only preserves the past and current efforts at dialogue, but it also provides for future dialogue and ecumenical efforts by both traditions. Without this written in the actual document, many Catholics

and Lutherans might take this to be the end all in the dispute and discussion over justification. However, both churches do not see it this way. The two churches may have needed a "clause" like this in the document so that they continued along with talks over justification. This mentioning of future dialogues also prods for future discussions over other issues, all of which can be quite fruitful for both churches.

In 100 years, a person looking back at the history of the rift between the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans must pay attention to this document. Depending on how the churches react and move in response to this document, these events could prove as important on the Catholic-Lutheran timeline as the *Augsburg Confession* and the Council at Trent. This reaction and response will be discussed in the final chapter.

Theology

The theological significance of this document must not be overlooked. However, unlike the historical significance, the theological meanings of this document are not as clear and well defined and can be debated more seriously by scholars. But a fairly broad range of theological meanings is as follows.

The *Joint Declaration* does not change the theologies of either the Roman Catholic or the Lutheran church. Instead, it focuses on clarity of theology, preventing the wide range of misinterpretation found throughout history. The Lutherans and Catholics, through this document and through their dialogues, confirm that their positions in the Reformation era were built on differences and not on the common ground each could find. This prefaced the construction of theologies and church practices that were based against each other and served to create further contentions between the two. Both churches recognize this as a

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[37] Ibid.

poor way to determine the theologies and practices of their churches. With these dialogues, the two churches have found their common denominator of theology and have worked and will continue to work from that common theology. This common denominator is the free grace given as a gift of Jesus Christ, God's son, on the cross. This should be the model for future dealings between all churches.

As this document establishes, Catholics and Lutherans base their faith and their doctrine on the grace bestowed upon them by God and the experience of Jesus Christ. They agree that justification is by the free grace of God alone and relies completely upon the goodness and sacrifice of Christ. I reiterate that this belief is not new, nor is it a theological concession by either side. Through these dialogues both churches came to understand that and made it the basis for the current agreement.

In addition to discovering their similarities, the document identifies their differences. In the *Joint Declaration* the Catholics and Lutherans do not condemn each other all over again for these differences. Instead they rejoice in their consensus and recognize the contentions, declaring them acceptable.

Under the new interpretation and new insight, the condemnations do not apply to the doctrines agreed to in the *Joint Declaration*. Some would say then, that if the condemnations are valid for the 16th century but are not valid heading into the 21st century, the *Joint Declaration* must declare a new doctrine of justification. This is not true and the *Joint Declaration* makes that explicit throughout. The Lutherans and Catholics have come to a new understanding of their doctrines of justification and have sought that understanding through a new light of biblical and spiritual renewal through the ecclesiastical lens of ecumenism. As was shown earlier, the doctrine in the current

accord matches closely the doctrines formed in documents of the Reformation era. Thus, it is a new understanding, it is not a new theology.

Lutherans and Catholics now, both in word and in practice, celebrate each other as friends and allies in theological matters as they have been for many years in practical matters. The dialogues between Lutheran and Catholics and the renewed ecumenical attitude at Vatican II are a result of a modern worldview and a change in biblical hermeneutics. This change is important because differing hermeneutics was the reason Luther disagreed with the Catholic Church. This accord can be attributed to the Christian change in atmosphere regarding ecumenism and biblical hermeneutics and the Catholic Church embracing both so that the Lutheran-Catholic dialogues were made possible.

Despite the great historical significance of the *Joint Declaration*, one must be ever mindful that what it actually accomplishes is limited. Not only does this accord not resolve all the issues relating to the doctrine of justification, but it also does not resolve all the other controversies stemming from the Reformation. On the other hand, to this end the *Joint Declaration* was not aimed. The dialogues attacked some of these issues but the current accord solely discusses justification and it is not meant to symbolize any current consensus had on any other issue. This *Joint Declaration* speaks only to the consensus reached on the topic of justification. These dialogues never intended to solve all the problems from the Reformation and this accord never intended to record all that was discussed in those dialogues. However, this accord forms a great foundation for that to occur.

Practice

Most scholars and regular churchgoers wonder at the practical meaning of the agreement. Some doubt if there will be or can be any. However, both churches feel that if the *Declaration* does not have any practical significance within the churches, it has failed as a true ecumenical document. LWF President Bishop Christian Krause declared that, "The signing of the Declaration is a step that must lead to further steps in the way the churches live in actual practice, and live with one another."[38] The *Joint Declaration* itself says, "Our consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification must come to influence the life and teachings of our churches. Here it must prove itself" (Paragraph 43). The document's practical significance depends wholly on how the churches respond to it or use it. If they do nothing, it means nothing. If they utilize it, it will become most significant.

One thing the document does not do is lay a foundation or framework for how these influences might show themselves or precisely what the reaction should be in our churches. Bishop Krause says, "From the sharing of spirituality and social-ethical responsibility more bridges will develop."[39] Surely Catholics and Lutherans have worked together in social ministry within their communities. This *Joint Declaration* encourages *more* of this to happen. This document creates a framework for a continual and hopefully more visual working friendship.

Certainly, ecumenical documents have been formed before without any significant influence on the churches involved. In light of this, many believe this ecumenical agreement will fall to the same fate. However, because church leaders know this trend, I

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[38] Imhoff, "Singing of the 'Joint Declaration' will be a historic bridging."
[39] Ibid.

think it imperative that Lutheran and Catholic leaders not let that happen to this *Joint Declaration*. We must learn from the past and change it if need be. In this situation, the traditional results of ecumenical pacts need not to be followed.

Another practical result of the Joint Declaration might be both churches coming up with a language that will make the doctrine more intelligible for common parishioners. This is certainly a reasonable and necessary goal. An interesting note, this is one of the complaints Luther had against the Catholic Church, that its teachings and theology were not in the common language. If religious traditions bring their beliefs and their talk about religious issues to a language that is more comprehensible for the seeker, this might encourage a greater quantity and quality of participation in the religious lifestyle, certainly a goal of all churches.

How this document can prove itself in the life of the church through its parishioners remains to be seen. Implementation of the document's ecumenical principles lies in the hands of church priests and pastors, and in synodical and diocesan leaders. These people hold the power to give this *Joint Declaration* meaning among our congregations. If church leaders do not allow this *Joint Declaration* to change the way they operate with, against, and because of the other, this *Joint Declaration* will have lost much of its potential impact. Thus, the document's practical significance depends wholly on how the churches react. If they do nothing, it means nothing. If they utilize it, the practical implications of this document will be its greatest strength. For though theology and history are hugely important, any practical significance that affects the larger population in their everyday life is much more significant than any other. A more specific elaboration will be provided in the next chapter.

Finally, the remaining contentions will not prevent the Catholics and Lutherans from someday entering into full communion.[40] "It is my hope that the Catholic Church may now be able to agree to such guest participation as in the Lord's Supper and the Eucharist as we have been extending to them for years." said LWF President Bishop Christian Krause.[41]

This *Joint Declaration* is a valuable tool for the future relationship between the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans worldwide.

Ecumenism

The real selling point of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* is its ecumenical meaning. "It must be considered without any doubt an outstanding achievement of the ecumenical movement and a milestone on the way to the restoration of full, visible unity among the disciples of the one Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Said Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, President of the PCPCU.[42]

The agreement was founded on dedicated and time consuming dialogue between the two divided denominations. It is a result of a new attitude by the Catholic Church and an openness of the Lutheran church to reconsider a 400-year disagreement. The dialogues occurred with an objective view of the past and carried out in grande ecumenical style. The *Joint Declaration* means that ecumenical efforts do not have to be empty efforts. By empty efforts I mean without results. The ecumenical dialogue between the Catholics and Lutherans resulted in this accord. Regardless of the potential or actual significance of it, the ecumenical efforts of the churches produced something. The *Joint Declaration* proves

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[40] Rev. Dr. Noko, "Statement at Joint Lutheran-Catholic Press Conference."
[41] Ibid.

that ecumenical efforts are not for nothing, as some would argue. The mere existence of a consensus, and one that was signed and celebrated (as opposed to Regensburg), is significant evidence that this ecumenical effort was fruitful. This *Joint Declaration* is a symbol of things that can be done through persistent ecumenical work. Later it will be surmised what this process and document might lead to in the future. This *Joint Declaration* is proof of the substantive value of ecumenism in the world today. Ecumenism can be quite fruitful. The next step for the churches worldwide is to prove that ecumenism is necessary and that all people of all faiths should seek with vigor to come to ecumenical accords such as this one.

If this document and the consensus it represents eventually influences the churches in the way I advocate in this paper, it will show that ecumenical risk-taking is especially rewarding and worldly meaningful. Worldwide faith traditions have disagreements to which an agreement can be made much in the same fashion as this one. This *Joint Declaration* will serve as an example for those situations. The document also says that itself is not the end of this relationship, nor the end of the efforts of either church to strengthen their friendship and bond with future talks over past and current disagreements.

Some are confused as to whether this *Declaration* says the churches no longer remain divided. This is far from the case. The *Declaration* does not join the Catholics and Lutherans as one faith, because it does not represent a consensus on the entire doctrine of justification, nor on all aspects of its discord. Rather, the *Joint Declaration* is simply recognition of a consensus on some basic tenets of the doctrine and a recognizable and

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[42] Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, "Presentation of the Vatican Sala Stampa." 25 June 1998.

acceptable set of continued differences.[43] Through the document, each church recognizes the other's validity in the experience of faith and places value on the other's work in the Christian world. Each church accepts the other's differences and promises to continue being friends rather than enemies in doing God's will.

Further, the *Declaration* hopes that the dialogue between the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans might serve to move us toward visible unity, doing the will of God as displayed in the Bible.

Summary

After discussing the meaning of the *Joint Declaration* is the context of history, theology, practical matters of the churches and ecumenism, one should see the importance of all that has been covered in this thesis thus far. In the Reformation era the two churches split over a conflict in church teaching and action. This conflict eventually boiled over, causing the Catholic Church to send the Lutherans away and condemning their teaching as they left. The disbanded Lutherans formed their own official church, growing over the last 400 years despite the Catholic Church's condemnations. For these 400 years, the two churches had no official relationship and no effort was made at reconciliation. However, the 20th century arrived in which the church scene changed and an era of ecumenism took over, affecting both the Lutheran and Catholic churches. The Second Vatican Council founded the official Catholic dedication to ecumenism, which manifested itself soon after in dialogues with the Lutheran World Federation. Discussions and decisions from these dialogues blossomed into what we have now as the Lutheran-Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. One cannot comprehend the

[43] Paragraph 40.

meaning and significance of this *Joint Declaration* without first establishing an understanding of the past relationship and the renewed attempts at friendship. The Second Vatican Council, the work of the LWF, and the work of the Catholic and Lutheran officials throughout the world must not be overlooked as one of the chief reasons this document exists. After gaining an appreciation for this history, the work that went into the accord, and the document itself, one can only look forward to what this might mean for the future Lutheran and Catholic relationship and for Christianity around the world. Now we understand how important this *Joint Declaration* is to the concerns of the church. Again, this chapter and the previous three lead into the final chapter. This final chapter will look at how this Declaration can and should affect this future, in light of the churches' histories and the current accord.

Chapter Five: The future beyond the Joint Declaration

This chapter opens the *Joint Declaration* to the future to a look beyond the current agreement to what that agreement might do for both churches and for Christianity as a whole. In thinking about the future influence of the *Joint Declaration*, one has to think of the possibility that the accord may fail to affect the two churches in any way. Certainly this is possible. If this is the case, the failure rests on the practical and ecumenical implications of this document—the potential active significance—and not the theological consensus reached. However, even that has come under question by many Lutherans throughout the world. Theologians in Germany wonder if the *Joint Declaration* actually represents any consensus and if it has any serious meaning for either church. Seminary professors in the United States and in Europe sent a letter to the Roman Catholics saying that this document, though signed by the LWF, is not binding in any form to the Lutheran churches. Without a doubt this true and a fact that the Lutheran churches have to overcome to make the achievements of this accord affect the church in a positive manner. Less than a year after the consensus was signed, many efforts are being made to increase public and academic apprehension as to the significance of the consensus. The consensus has already been reached and the dialogues are a success in that manner. But in the way of influencing the operations of both churches, this accord could be a failure. Thus, I urge all in positions of influence to make this *Joint Declaration* affect the operations of the churches.

However imminent the failure of this document to affect the churches in some opinions, no one can deny the potential influences it might have on the two churches. I

think the potential significances of this accord to both churches are realistic and depend only on the effort of church leaders and not on any other forces. This document can influence an even more positive relationship between Catholics and Lutherans and in their relationships with other denominations, in their teaching within their churches, ecumenical efforts throughout the world and in working towards visible Christian unity.

Roman Catholic-Lutheran relations

In order to speak of a future beyond the *Joint Declaration* it is important to establish that this document will not be the endpoint of that dialogue nor the endpoint of the ecumenical efforts of both churches. The *Joint Declaration* itself says it is the fruition of a daring and hearty dialogue and can lead to many more healthy discussions between the two traditions. The *Joint Declaration* has in mind further Christian ecumenical goals beyond those by and between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. What can it lead to in the third millenium?

Both churches identified justification as positioned "in an essential relation to all truths of faith."[44] Thus, the two churches should engage in further discussion using this agreement on justification as the foundation for future findings of consensus whether it be on church authority, communion, or the like. It is hard to say whether continued talks will be easier on account of the accord or more difficult because of what this *Declaration* says already. Talks may be easier to do in the future because the *Joint Declaration* provides a foundation on which future talks can build, but it may be more difficult because what consensus could be had between the two churches may have already been reached by this accord. In other words, there may not be other areas of agreement with

regard to the doctrine of justification. Nonetheless, this discussion needs to continue and be renewed continually since both churches consider justification to be central to all facets of faith.[45] Continued discussions over justification might and should lead to other topics of derision between the Catholics and Lutherans.

Two topics that might be discussed in the near future are papal primacy and transubstantiation. These are two topics, again stemming from the Reformation, which need to be discussed. Perhaps there is room for consensus on these issues as well, due to modern biblical scholarship and a century of ecumenical enlightenment in the 1900s. Even if there is not room for consensus, there is definitely cause for discussion over these matters. These future discussions should happen in much the same way as the previous dialogues. However, the churches face a different foe in these discussions, and that is perhaps the lack of vigor both churches may have for these ecumenical efforts. We are now far removed from Vatican II and the erupting energy from that Council may have spent itself in discussing justification. The future dialogues may lack the encouraging atmosphere that served them well after the Second Vatican Council. However, both churches can overcome that obstacle if they both embrace the current accord and utilize it in their teachings. This topic is the focus of my next section.

Following the March 1998 tornado in St. Peter, MN, First Lutheran Church of St. Peter opened their doors and their hearts to the Catholic Church of St. Peter who had lost their sanctuary. Not long after the two denominations began sharing the Lutheran building and worship space, the church sign was changed—albeit temporarily—to read First Lutheran Catholic Church. Perhaps this will someday be a reality where the

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[44] Paragraph 18

Lutheran and Catholic churches overcome those divisive 16th century issues and become a joint church, reverting back to their relationship prior to the Reformation, but that is far from reality in this document. The *Joint Declaration* is a step that moves the churches closer to the possibility of such a move if such a move is found to be of good practice in the many years to follow. However, the example illustrates the kind of partnerships that might and should result on account of the *Joint Declaration*. Surely, not anytime soon, if ever, will the churches become completely united. This relationship now is like two boys who attended rival high schools, then ended up at the same college. At the high school level, they are still enemies. But at a college level and beyond, they are friends.

The *Joint Declaration* could have social service implications for both churches. Catholics and Lutherans already have a good record of joint social service action, but this *Joint Declaration* can influence ever-increasing efforts in this area. Surely the Lutherans can benefit from the increased resources of the Catholic Church. The churches teamed for social service may be able to do more for respective communities in the way of food and clothing drives, funding homeless shelters or soup kitchens, and raising awareness of community social disease and poverty concerns. Teamwork devoted to this end creates benefits for both churches and the communities to which they belong. I imagine a Lutheran congregation with enough people interested in sponsoring a Habitat for Humanity home, but not having the capital to do so. In teaming up with the local Catholic parish, they are able to monetarily support the building, have increased volunteers to do so, have an opportunity for wholesome interdenominational fellowship, and create a

[45] "[The doctrine of justification] stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith, which are to be seen as internally related to each other" (Paragraph 18, The *Joint Declaration*).

visible unity that both churches want to achieve. The benefits of teamwork to social service are limited only as far as the imagination goes.

Teaching within the churches

As was mentioned earlier, the Catholic goal of creating a language through which this doctrine and the agreement can be communicated is a viable and important goal. Perhaps this goal of making church doctrine and belief into the common language is the greatest practical potential of this agreement. Doing this may take the form of publishing a small pamphlet or even a small book explaining the history of the division, the doctrine of justification, and the *Joint Declaration.* The *Joint Declaration* is an official document to which publications can refer and from which ideas and content can be derived. Officials from both churches might interpret this doctrine and others into forms that can be preached, so that important doctrine is understood and embraced by the general parishioner. This would be true for all churches and their beliefs and understandings of other denominations.

This *Joint Declaration* presents a great opportunity for both churches to educate their parishioners, young and old, on the basis of their beliefs and their understandings of other Christians. Adults need to be caught up on the education about the churches and both churches should begin teaching children while they are younger. Adult education might be in the form of joint Catholic-Lutheran forums in which Catholics and Lutherans learn about each other from each other. This encourages greater actual friendship and interaction. Lutheran Sunday School students might be invited to Catholic weekly education classes and vice versa. These are possible and plausible reactions to the *Joint*

Declaration. For the children in upper levels of Christian education, confirmation and above, teachers should teach the history of the churches. This is more difficult for the Catholic congregations because they have a much longer and more storied history, but it is something that seems necessary in light of the accord and the general population's failure at understanding their own history.

Both churches should now teach its members about the Reformation, and what it meant and means to Christianity and the their church faith. The churches should take this opportunity to renew interest and involvement in the church through reminding parishioners what the two churches believe and advocate how those beliefs should affect the daily lives of those parishioners. The churches should highlight the differences in the two teachings of justification and explain why the differences that exist are acceptable, and why they are acceptable now but not back then. Much of what the church believes theologically is not passed down to the believers. This leads back to the language issue. This should be the case no longer because of the vast resources that can be created out of this dialogue experience. Education will advocate for greater visible friendship in Christian service with the two churches and any more Christian denominations.

Lutheran and Roman Catholic ecumenical efforts

This *Joint Declaration* should lead both churches to continue the ecumenical efforts that began with Vatican II. According to the Vatican's webpage, dialogues are currently happening between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, Coptic Orthodox Church, Malankara Church, Anglican Communion, LWF, World Alliance of Reformed Churces, World Methodist Council, Baptist World Alliance, Christian Church (Disciples

of Christ), and some Pentecostal groups.[46] The Catholic Church should continue these talks, with the goal of reaching accords much like the *Joint Declaration*.

The *Joint Declaration* is also important for Catholic relations other communities coming from the Reformation.[47] The Lutherans need not be special cases in this ecumenical task. Just as the Catholics sought a consensus and agreement about the past in an act of reconciliation with the Lutherans, so must the Catholic Church do with the other churches born out of the Reformation.

The Lutheran church is also involved in ecumenical dialogues with other traditions. The Lutherans have drafted documents for each of their discussions declaring the points of agreement. The Lutherans are talking with the Episcopal Church (*Called to Common Mission*), the Moravian Church (*Following our Shepherd into Full Communion*), the Orthodox church (the *Aleppo Statement*), the Reformed churches (*A Formula of Agreement*), and the Catholic Church (the *Joint Declaration*).[48] Most of these discussions seek to join the churches in full communion, which has actually occurred in two of these cases. This also is a future goal of the Lutherans in their talks with the Catholics. The *Joint Declaration* should serve as a model for current dialogues that are not working or future dialogues that have not begun. However, this model may not be sufficient for all possible dialogues but it can be used as an object of read ecumenical results, thereby giving reason for finding a way for dialogues to work.

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[46] Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Holy See*, 3 February 2000, available at www.vatican.va.
[47] Cardinal Cassidy, "*Presentation of the Sala Stampa.*"
[48] Department for Ecumenical Affairs, *Evangelical Lutheran Church of America*, 3 February 2000, available at www.elca.org.

Worldwide Ecumenism

The vision of the *Joint Declaration* with regards to worldwide ecumenism is for the formation of more interfaith alliances transglobally, churches getting together to meet the outreach needs of their communities. The power centers of these faiths should respond to this *Joint Declaration* by coming together to talk about God and reach common grounds of understanding not on a scholarly level, so that they might enjoy each other's fellowship. Ecumenism is a global need and global reality. This *Joint Declaration* has worldwide effects. Discussions on justification first began in the United States immediately after the promulgation of the *Decree on Ecumenism* at the Second Vatican Council, which then spurred dialogues in Germany. The signers of the *Joint Declaration* represented many countries. Thus, one can see the global effects of both the *Joint Declaration* and ecumenical efforts as a whole. Successful ecumenism between Christian denominations can affect the efficiency of worldwide missions. The missions of the Christian church depend wholly on cooperation and resources, both of which can be increased by ecumenical success.

This *Joint Declaration* shows that faith traditions do not have to agree on everything in order to be friends and join together for the good will of the community. Lutherans and Catholics should respond to this accord in such ways as finding common ground with other denominations and joining together with other traditions for social service even though beliefs and practices may not be the same, or even agreeable. Ecumenical possibilities abound throughout the world today. If we train our people to think and act ecumenically, the more effective ecumenical goals and actions of the church will be. This training begins in the church and in the home. Begin promoting ecumenism in early

childhood education, in weekly worship services, through church bulletins and newsletters, by official decrees and in community interaction. By doing so, ecumenical fervor will not die. The *Joint Declaration* gives us the opportunity, especially for Lutherans and Catholics, to continue that mindset and giving it to our parishioners.

Christian unity

The end of the *Joint Declaration*, asks "the Holy Spirit to lead us further toward that visible unity which is Christ's will."[49] Visible unity is important both for the images the two churches create in the communities and for the members of the two churches. With visible unity, both churches have a greater potential for joint work in the communities and with other church traditions.

The ecumenical work being done in the world brings us closer to true Christian unity. United Christians or Christian unity could mean two different things. First, it could mean a type of Christianity where we are all the same and we all agree in our beliefs, or at least agree to disagree on some things and work together as one large team. The second meaning of this is where a majority of Christians combine efforts to fight immoral behavior, war, poverty, and worldwide suffering. This option would not have to be one "Church," but it would be an open and communicating church, much like the Lutheran World Federation is for the submitting Lutheran churches. The second option is more realistic in the view of events of today, but perhaps the first can happen a long ways into the future. This Christian united church would have the ability to fight a good battle with the evils in this world by uniting hearts, hands, voices and capital more forcefully against social crime, personal degradation, moral fallout and ethnic cleansing. Sure, some of that

work happens today, but not to the extent it could. Unity means faith traditions between which there are open communication lines, no feuds, some inter-tradition community programming and joint worship.

Christian unity throughout the world might come together to tackle social problems. A united Christian church might be able to combine monies to help combat child abuse, or malnutrition in third world countries, or gang-related activity. A unified Christian voice can speak to social calamities in the world and can contribute to the funding of efforts against them. In Ethiopia, thousands of children starve to death every week. A unified Christian organization, representing all Christians throughout the world can forcefully contribute to the saving of these children and making conditions better for the people of Ethiopia. One or two churches can contribute to this cause, and they currently do, but a unified Christian organization may make a much greater impact.

In some countries around the world, children have no access to Bibles or any other religious materials. Some churches and organizations sponsor mission trips to provide Bibles for these children and to preach Christianity. The significance of these efforts is mixed, but from a united Christian "church," Bibles and other Christian materials can be distributed in much greater quantities and affect a much greater population.

In the United States we have kids walking the streets of our large towns, having no home to go to and no parental guidance to give them the moral and ethical support they need. Churches throughout this country contribute as much as they can to help these kids out and prevent this situation. If the efforts and money were combined to one central organization representing all these denominations, these kids could be assisted with clothing, shelter, food, school supplies, and religious instruction.

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[49] Paragraph 44.

Certainly each denomination does great Christian work in their communities to fight hunger, homelessness and abuse, but we can all be more successful in these endeavors if we pooled our resources together to tackle the social problems of this country and throughout the world together, representing worldwide Christianity.

Habitat for Humanity is a Christian organization that has grown to make a worldwide difference, combining faith traditions around the globe despite beliefs or religious practices to participate in providing for God's children throughout the world in their poverty. Habitat is the leading organization in combating housing deficiencies throughout the world. Habitat utilizes a unity in goals and mission among a broad-based group of individuals and groups, Christian and non-Christian and secular alike to make a statement against worldwide housing poverty. A Christian united church can do to and for the religious good of the world. A Christian united church can make a significant impact on secular matters, but also in the form of Christian missions throughout the world. Perhaps someday the result is one single Christian church, however far off that may be. The *Joint Declaration* is a step in this direction and any move in this direction is a good one. Christian unity of the past has meant destruction, submission, domination and control. This need not be the case of future unity. Christian unity developing from efforts that formed the *Joint Declaration* can mean goodness, love, mercy and grace.

Rev. Noko summed up the entire significance of this document towards the goal of Christian unity, "The Joint Declaration is one small contribution towards building the unity among us for which Christ prayed, and for which he died."[50]

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[50] Noko, *Statement at Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Press Conference.*

Need for active response to the Joint Declaration

Whether this *Joint Declaration* has any significance at all depends wholly on both churches' response to the document. If both churches neglect its meaning or ignore it altogether, the document loses all significance and the 30 years of dialogue are mute when it comes to practical matters. But if both churches embrace the document and allow it to affect their teaching and the their relationship to each other, the *Joint Declaration* will be one of the most significant documents for both the Lutherans and the Catholics in the 20th century. This success depends wholly on the leaders of both churches.

Priests and pastors must find ways to include the doctrine and the new accord in their preaching and teaching. They are perhaps in the greatest position to raise awareness of the new accord and the new relationship between Catholics and Lutherans. They need to capitalize on such opportunities as Reformation Sunday to discuss the Joint Declaration and push for ecumenical work with the other denomination.

Catholic and Lutheran theologians must discuss how to create a language with which to present this to the normal parishioner, and anyone else interested in religious theology. The language used now to talk about justification is too complex for the traditional Catholic and Lutheran. Make it simple and easy to understand so that members of both churches can embrace the doctrine and the consensus reached and can help in spreading that teaching.

Local Lutheran and Catholic parishes need to unite to do community service and continue to create a greater visible unity. They need to be open about their new friendship and make it grow so that the effects of the *Joint Declaration* are not lost on this generation but are passed down to future generations.

The success of this document depends wholly on action and those members and leaders of each Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches to make the document affect the way the bodies operate. Without action, this *Joint Declaration* dies. Therefore, I encourage all pastors and all priests and all church leaders to look at ways they can make this document mean something in their parishes and in their organizations so that one of the greatest ecumenical achievements made at the end of the 20th century does not die early in the 21st.

Conclusion

While living in the moment, it is hard to realize what may be important in the future or how significant an event will be. This is so with the *Joint Declaration*. One hundred years from now we hopefully will look back and realize all the wonderful things that came from or because of this accord. We will look at the Second Vatican Council and realize how integral that Council was in the formation of the dialogues and the current agreement. Certainly, back then we didn't realize all that was to come because of the decisions made at that council.

Certainly, though, we cannot now know the magnitude of the future significance of this accord. However, we can make good guesses as to the impact and significance this document will have in contemporary times and the near future and we can make assertions as to what we would like to see happen in the same time frame.

Through this paper, I have shown that the *Joint Declaration* is a significant document and that the extent to which the significance is true depends in part on how it is both received and utilized by Lutherans and Catholics. The document does occupy a substantial spot on the Lutheran-Catholic relationship timeline. The document clears up misunderstandings from the Reformation and defines the consensus and continued differences Catholics and Lutherans have in their theologies. The remaining significances will not be realized in their entirety until years have passed and we are able to look back and make determinations about what this *Declaration* did and did not do. The extent to which the accord is significant in practical and ecumenical matters depends on the leaders of both churches. I have offered suggestions as to how this document might influence

both of the churches and officials from both churches declare that the Joint Declaration must have its effects in the operations of both the Catholic and Lutheran churches.

I provided a detailed historical and brief theological background for which to understand the significance of the fact we achieved a consensus in these discussions. Through the background and context, one should be able to understand the meaning of the *Joint Declaration*, what it means and what it does and might signify.

I emphasize again that the effects of this document have not been fully realized and cannot be for many years. These effects not yet realized depend on the Catholic and Lutheran church leaders for them to become real. The theologians and church high officials have done their work to produce this document. They should be continuing discussions, both over justification and other topics that served to split the Catholic Church 450 years ago. The rest of the work as a result of this accord belongs to lay and rostered leaders.

This *Joint Declaration*, if it is received and utilized by both churches, may lead to worldwide and other ecumenical Christian effects. These may be far-reaching ideals, but this Declaration is one step towards making that ideal a reality.

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