



International Lutheran Council

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Ecumenical Greetings to the LWF Council

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ!

I bring you the greetings of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) and I thank you very much your warm invitation on your Council meeting here in Wittenberg.

In the headline of my greetings I put the well-known word coming from St. Pauls letter to the Romans, chapter 3, 28: **"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith (alone) apart from observing the law. "**

I had a conversation with an artist. We were standing in his studio, looking at what I thought was a finished work of art, but on which he kept working. I asked him: "When do you think you'll be done?" Surprisingly he answered: *"Never. I won't ever be finished with it. But at some point I'll just stop working on it."*

Martin Luther was such an artist.

The ordinary Christian today tends to think: *"At some point God will be satisfied, perhaps when I have treated my fellow man well, when I worked harder than I had to, after I prayed, when I donate a generous amount for the needy -- and even though I may not have the time to take care of my mother, then at least I will sacrifice my money liberally so that I will no longer have a bad conscience."*

At this point a person like Martin Luther never ceased to think or ask questions. *"If God is just and righteous, how can he be satisfied with what I do, like the taxation office to which I submit my charitable receipts? And in regard to faith, how can God, who is the Light of the World, be satisfied with the darkness in my heart? - No way!"*

Around 1515 Luther was busy with his Lectures on Romans. And already the first chapter, Roman 1:17, caused difficulties: "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith."

You probably know all about *genitivus subjectivus* and *genitivus objectivus*, something that really helped Luther to understand that **"God's righteousness"** is not the righteousness which God has, but - according to the objective genitive - it is the righteousness that counts in the sight of God.

And then he comes across this in the whole Letter to the Romans, in the third chapter, and in the fifth. **"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith (alone) apart from observing the law.** (Rom 3:28).

Luther in the original: *"Thus it is God's righteousness that justifies and heals us. And these words have become evermore pleasing to me. The Holy Spirit granted me this insight - while I was on the toilet in the tower."*¹ Just imagine, while on the toilet! God's ways can be very unusual.

From that very hour this was clear: Not our charitable donations give us peace with God, but it is Christ Jesus. And I do not get peace because I help the needy and assist the refugees, but it is Christ Jesus. My political involvement does not soothe my Christian conscience, only Christ does that.

"At some point I'll just stop working on it" - and let God finish things. In these light I see your theme: **"Grounded in God's love"**

Dear Brothers and Sisters, on these place it should be not silent that we deal with some frustrations and conflicts between LWF and ILC member churches. Among others for that reason we install an annual meeting invited by the LWF's General Secretary and ILC Executive Secretary. These year we come together in February here in Wittenberg and we identified some theological questions for being helpful to discuss in further meetings: in example the understanding of Holy Scriptures. Do they contains the word of God or they are the Word of god. So we continue to discuss "Hermeneutics as it relates to the unity of the Church."

I want to inform you, that the ILC on its World Conference in 2015 recognized with gratitude and thankfulness the Dialogue paper "From Conflict to Communion". The ILC presented "Statement of the International Lutheran Council on the Document 'From Conflict to Communion' Lutheran—Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation 2017." The question was asked what is the next step? Does the ILC desire to make an agreement with the LWF-PCPCU similar to how the Methodists joined the JDDJ by presenting their own statement, which offered their distinctive perspectives? The ILC was pleased by the offer of the LWF to consider this possibility. Next steps were agreed upon on how to approach this possibility.

Dear Sisters and Brothers, my God show us his way for coming closer together in the ellipse with two focal points: truth and love – love and truth. God be with you and your Council meeting!

In Christ + 
Bishop Hans-Jörg Voigt D.D., ILC-Chairman

¹ these quotation comes from the Tabletalks