

Lutheran–Roman Catholic Agreement on Justification: Suggestions for Talking about God Today

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Abstract: The recent agreements between Lutherans and Roman Catholics on the doctrine of justification was hailed as perhaps the most significant breakthrough of the modern ecumenical movement. This article looks briefly at the issues at stake on both sides and how these have been addressed in the Joint Declaration. Working with comments from Avery Dulles and Jürgen Moltmann, it argues that the Joint Declaration is important for the future orientation of the doctrine, in particular as an example of discourse about God. While recognising that each ecclesial family has and will retain its distinctive way of speaking about God, it is argued that for the sake of our common humanity we also need a common discourse. In what should be a challenge to both Protestants and Roman Catholics, it is proposed that such a discourse must be a sacramental discourse.

THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BETWEEN the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church was signed on 31 October 1999. The Declaration claimed to articulate a common understanding of the doctrine of justification, and to show that the remaining differences in the explication of the doctrine were no longer the occasion for condemnation.¹ In a Preface to the Declaration the signatories requested “that common and deepening ecumenical reflection be continued on the biblical message of justification and its meaning for the churches, for the life of individual persons, and for human society”.² I take this to mean that they not only thought of the Joint Declaration in terms of the division caused by the sixteenth century doctrines of justification expressed in the Augsburg Confession and the Council of Trent, but as well had in mind the relevance of a common doctrine for the future. I also take their request

1. Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2000) § 5.

2. Joint Declaration, § 6.

to mean that they saw this not only in terms of their two church families, but also as providing a way of speaking about God in the human community.

I speak deliberately here when I refer to a way of speaking about God. The doctrine of justification is a way of speaking about God – indeed Lutherans would claim that it is the fundamental way of speaking about God. Whatever the ecumenical tensions that may be inherent in that Lutheran claim, the point is that the doctrine of justification speaks about God as a God at work in the world and in the lives of human beings.

The Joint Declaration has attracted a lot of comment. Some people have been enthusiastic about it; others, on both sides, have been wary or even disapproving in their comments. It is not my intention to examine it closely in this study. Rather, I will use two theologians who have reacted to it as my interlocutors in a conversation about God. One, the Roman Catholic Avery Dulles, offers some helpful thoughts on how the Roman Catholic Church could sign a declaration that he believes does not measure up to all of the concerns of the Tridentine doctrine.³ The other, the Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann, claims that, successful and all as the declaration may be, it does not lead to a common future, and that a common doctrine on justification is still to be worked out.⁴ I believe that it is possible to argue that the Joint Declaration has paved the way for a common discourse about God today and for the future. However, I will argue that important elements of any future discourse have not yet been included in the conversation.

THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

The Joint Declaration is concerned in the first instance with the two doctrines of justification that were formulated by Lutherans and Catholics in the sixteenth century. While there might be two doctrines of justification, there was really only a single, common pastoral problem. This was evident in the selling of indulgences, in the Medieval practice of the sacrament of penance, and in Luther's efforts to deal with his own troubled conscience and his crisis of faith. Faced with what must have been the terror, not only of sin and guilt, but also of sickness and death, people sought consolation from God and from the church. The Catholic practices no doubt provided consolation to those who availed themselves of them, and mediated a God who forgave sin and transformed the hearts of people, freeing them to live a life marked by charity (love)

3. Avery Dulles, "Two Languages of Salvation: The Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration", *First Things* 98 (1999), 25-30.

4. Jürgen Moltmann, "The Justification of God", *Theology Digest* 49 (2002), 15-20. The German original of this article appeared as "Die Rechtfertigung Gottes", *Stimmen der Zeit* 219 (2001), 435-42.

and good works. Luther's doctrine of justification, while stressing that they could do nothing to merit God's grace, gave them the assurance that through faith in Christ God would forgive their sin. Phrases such as *sola gratia* and *sola fide* were just as much pastoral phrases as they were doctrinal phrases. They spoke clearly about God to a people whose primary experience was of the depravity of humanity, offering them consolation and the assurance of salvation.

Both Lutherans and Catholics formulated their respective versions of the doctrine of justification as much out of the context of this common pastoral need, as out of a suspicion of each other's teaching. Indeed, mutual suspicion led to mutual condemnations. These suspicions may seem trivial to a casual observer today, but their seriousness can be gauged from the fact that they have kept Christians in the west divided for four centuries. The suspicions have shaped the way that both Catholics and Lutherans have thought and talked about God, and consequently, how they think and talk about humankind. The basic suspicion Lutherans have of Catholics is that Catholics, because they speak of co-operating with God's offer of grace, in fact see justification as a human achievement. According to the Lutheran confessions, justification is the action of God alone, and is received by faith through grace. The basic suspicion Catholics have of Lutherans is that Lutherans understand God's act of justification as simply the imputation of the merits of Christ, with no inner renewal or transformation of the person. According to the Catholic teaching, the faithful are made intrinsically righteous in justification and thereby enabled to do good works.⁵

THE JOINT DECLARATION

The Joint Declaration claims that the mutual condemnations no longer apply to each other's teaching. Nevertheless, it concedes that the respective doctrines of justification will always be important in regulating the way we speak about God.

Nothing is thereby taken away from the seriousness of the condemnations related to the doctrine of justification. Some were not simply pointless. They remain for us "salutary warnings" to which we must attend in our teaching and practice.⁶

5. Dulles, "Two Languages of Salvation", 25, expresses this in four basic questions: (1) Is justification the action of God alone, or do we who receive it co-operate by our response to God's offer of grace? (2) Does God, in justifying us, simply impute to us the merits of Christ, or does God transform us and make us intrinsically righteous? (3) Do we receive justification by faith alone, or only by a faith enlivened by love and fruitful in good works? (4) Is the reward of heavenly life a free gift of God to believers, or do they merit it by their fruitfulness and good works?

6. Joint Declaration, § 42.

This article of the Joint Declaration is implicitly indicating that the ecclesial family where people have received the faith and had it nurtured influences the way they talk about God. In other words, there is a distinctively Lutheran as well as a distinctively Catholic discourse about God. Even a consensus on the doctrine of justification will not, and, I believe, should not do away with those distinctions.

The Joint Declaration, however, also sets out to offer a common discourse that is not at odds with the discourse of either ecclesial family. This is found specifically in chapter three, which presents the common understanding of justification. It has very carefully settled on a formula that addresses the mutual suspicions, and assures each side that the doctrine is being faithfully transmitted. While the language seems to me to be more akin to Lutheran than Catholic formulations, it is nevertheless presented as a common formulation offered for reception by both churches, thereby becoming normative for future discourse about God. The key article is n. 15.

In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.

Dulles claims that this formulation "is in perfect accord with the Augsburg Confession and with the Decree on Justification of the Council of Trent" and that "it dispels some false stereotypes inherited from the past".⁷ We can note that the final part of this article is presented as a confession, and thus in some sense it states the scope and limits of Christian belief, without going into a theological explanation of it. It is also obvious that Christian belief about God and the work of God is couched in the context of the Trinity. This would seem to take it beyond the formulations of the sixteenth century. So, while the saving work of Christ is re-iterated and its total sufficiency affirmed, there is also a statement that the work of Christ is received as a gift of the Holy Spirit. In the act of being justified – that is accepted by God – a person receives the Holy Spirit, who abides in their heart renewing and transforming them, and giving them the power to do good works.

The references to the Holy Spirit here and elsewhere are significant in a statement that epitomises the theological concerns and sensibilities of

7. Dulles, "Two Languages of Salvation", 26.

the church in the west. They show that the Joint Declaration represents a way of speaking about God that takes us a long way beyond the language and theology of the sixteenth century. It is in fact the result of a genuine exchange of gifts taking place in many dialogues between ecclesial families. While the Reformers' phrase *solus Christus* retains its validity, it is now to be understood in reference to the work of the triune God.

Further, when we take the Joint Declaration as a whole, especially chapter one on the biblical message of justification, we recognise that the Declaration is the result of common insights arising out of new ways of listening to the word of God in the Bible. Clearly the sixteenth century Reformers' doctrine made strong appeal to the Pauline doctrine of justification. Here in the Joint Declaration we recognise deeper insights into the Pauline doctrine – insights that remind us of Paul's awareness of the work of God in Christ and through the Spirit, and that speak not just of the death of Christ, but also of his incarnation and resurrection. We notice, for example, a broader view of Pauline justification in the statement that "the justified live by faith that comes from the Word of Christ (Rom 10:17) and is active through love (Gal 5:6), the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23)".⁸ We also need to acknowledge other places where justification is presented in images not found in Paul: notably, the synoptic references to the Kingdom of God,⁹ and the Johannine sense of the gift of new life.¹⁰ In summary, then, while the basic concern of the Joint Declaration is the sixteenth century dispute, it has nevertheless opened up a new discourse about God. This, it would seem, is a richer discourse, which has the potential to develop into a common Christian discourse.

CRITICAL INSIGHTS FROM TWO THEOLOGIANS

From here on I propose to consider the critical comments made by Dulles and Moltmann, and then offer a third comment of my own. At first sight the comments of Dulles and Moltmann may seem unrelated, but I hope it will be evident that both their comments relate to my own.

Avery Dulles

Despite his strong statement that chapter three of the Joint Declaration is in perfect accord with the earlier doctrinal statements of both churches, Dulles is highly critical of the explication of various aspects of the doctrine in chapter four. In particular he raises questions about human co-operation in the preparation for and reception of justification;

8. Joint Declaration § 12.

9. See Joint Declaration, § 9.

10. See Joint Declaration, § 8; Annex to the Official Common Statement, § 2E.

about whether justification consists of interior renewal and sanctification; about whether after justification we could still refer to the person as a sinner; and about whether a person can, after justification, merit the increase of grace and reward of eternal life. On each of these questions Dulles concludes that the statements in chapter four fall short of what is demanded by Trent.¹¹

It becomes clear, however, that the purpose of his article is not to undo the achievements of the Joint Declaration, but to seek to explain how the Roman Catholic Church could still sign it despite its failure to address all of the anathemas of Trent. The answer to this conundrum has to do with the different ways that churches speak about God. He invokes a number of principles taken from Roman Catholic church teaching: the deposit of faith has been handed down in different ways in different places and cultures (UR 14); the deposit of faith is one thing, its theological formulation is another (GS 62); varying theological formulations must often be considered as complementary rather than conflicting (UR 17); theological dialogue must take account of the ways of thinking and historical experiences of the other party (UUS 36); and assertions that reflect different ways of looking at the same reality should not be treated as though they were mutually contradictory (UUS 38). From these principles he draws the conclusion that

What seems to be surfacing is a willingness to acknowledge that we have here two systems that have to be taken holistically. Both take their departure from the Scriptures, the creeds, and early tradition. But they filter the data through different thought-forms, or languages.¹²

Dulles goes on to characterise Roman Catholic language as analytical, heavily indebted to Greek metaphysics, and ever seeking to give an explanation. The language of Lutherans, on the other hand, he characterises as more confessional, seeking to address God and to give an account of oneself before God. In the light of these distinctions it is important to observe that the common language formulated in Joint Declaration 15 speaks explicitly in terms of confession.

From this brief survey of Dulles' reflections on the Joint Declaration I draw two conclusions. First, the most appropriate way to speak about God in contemporary culture may well be the language of confession.¹³ Secondly, the language of theology has a place in making the confes-

11. Dulles, "Two Languages of Salvation", 27-28.

12. Dulles, "Two Languages of Salvation", 29.

13. It is worth observing that in many places where Lutheran and Roman Catholic communities joined together to mark and celebrate the signing of the Joint Declaration, the occasion took the form of worship, incorporating texts from the Declaration in a confessional prayer form.

sional language explicit, even if – or perhaps especially if – the formulations are different. Dulles himself expands on this:

It is not enough to say that we have different frameworks of discourse. It is necessary to establish that Lutheran proclamation and Catholic speculation are both legitimate derivatives of the same gospel, and therefore compatible. Performative language cannot be unrelated to informative; the law of prayer must harmonise with the law of belief.¹⁴

Jürgen Moltmann

Moltmann's critique does not so much point to a weakness in the Joint Declaration as suggest that if there is to be a common doctrine of justification for our common future then more is needed. He advances his argument in three stages. First he argues that the disputes about justification in the sixteenth century were linked to the sacrament of penance. For this reason they dealt only partially with the question of God's righteousness and justice. They are partial because they see sin only in terms of human guilt and hence focus on the doer of evil rather than the victim of evil. They are partial because, with this focus on human guilt, there is little concern for God and how God is "justified" before human beings who cry out in accusing tones. Further, they are also partial because they focus on the passive receiving of God's grace and leave little room for the "hallowing" of the name of God and the justice of God.¹⁵

Secondly, Moltmann suggests that the sixteenth century doctrines were too narrowly focused on the Pauline doctrine of justification, and that this version of Paul was itself very narrow. Such a narrow view is inadequate for the contemporary world because it leaves us with a "juristic" theology. Moltmann proposes a broader biblical foundation for a future common doctrine of justification. It must include the whole of the New Testament witness, particularly the healing theology of the Synoptics, and also Old Testament ideas about the justice-creating and liberating righteousness of God. This approach, he maintains, will make it clear that the goal of the justifying righteousness of God is the kingdom of God.

The third stage of Moltmann's argument is perhaps the most challenging. In a sense he is asking us to do what the sixteenth century teachers did, and find a way of speaking about God that responds to the existential situation of our time. This means taking account of the cry of the victims of injustice, violence and falsehood. Theirs is a cry for God from their God-forsakenness. Their question is "How can there be a just

14. Dulles, "Two Languages of Salvation", 29.

15. Moltmann, "The Justification of God", 15-16.

God when human beings do not experience justice but only capriciousness?" It also means recognising the cry of the perpetrators of evil; theirs is a cry against God from their godlessness. They hope that there is no God and no divine justice. Finally, it means hearing those other cries that arise from social relationships, political structures, and historical accidents or destinies. All human beings find themselves experiencing these things in their daily lives. Moltmann argues then, that if we are to speak about God in such a way that our discourse will lead us to a common future, then we must speak about the justice of God:

To reject the question of God's justice means to be content with the unjust suffering of victims, the lawless actions of perpetrators, and institutionalised evil. Evil, then, is no longer called evil, injustice no longer injustice; lies are no longer lies, and suffering is no longer suffering.¹⁶

Here we have a call for a way of speaking about God that is directed not simply to individuals, but to the human community. Such a discourse will need to speak of a God who creates justice in the world. Moltmann demonstrates this by calling on the narrative of the Hebrew Bible, pointing out that "God's righteousness is creative, communal faithfulness in covenant, with his people and with creation".¹⁷ The constant image in the Bible is of the God who liberates prisoners from bondage, "executes justice for the oppressed" (Ps 146:7), establishes justice for the widow and orphan, and cares for the stranger. All of these images inform us of the real meaning of God's compassion, which is God's creating and saving righteousness. When Israel spoke of God in this way it demonstrated its "universal hope for the world". This was a hope expressed in terms of the promised Messiah who will "judge the poor with righteousness and decide with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isa 11:4), and of the new era of the spirit of God. This spirit will give life (see Ezekiel 37) and "bring forth justice to the nations" (Isa 42:1).

Other strands of the Hebrew narrative remind us that God is not simply seen in those acts that bring justice. God is also present where injustice is suffered. For Moltmann, the idea of God's indwelling presence in the people of the covenant is the foundation for speaking of God's justice-creating righteousness in the real divine presence with victims.¹⁸

16. Moltmann. "The Justification of God", 19.

17. Moltmann. "The Justification of God", 19.

18. Moltmann refers here to Isa 63:9a. It is helpful to note the full text (63:8-9): "For he said, 'Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely'; and he became their saviour in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them;

Moltmann is here proposing a discourse about God that keeps alive the narrative of God's justice-creating righteousness and enables it to reach concrete expression in the existential situation of humanity today. This will be a discourse that on the one hand makes the unjust just, and on the other hand calls the perpetrators of injustice to judgement. Moltmann expresses it like this:

When the unjust are made just, then God's righteousness in this world begins to be revealed. When the just God is already present with them, then with them the judgement of God begins in this violent and brutal world.¹⁹

A PROPOSAL FOR TALKING ABOUT GOD

Having considered both Dulles and Moltmann, I now propose to explore something that appears to be missing from both of them and largely from the Joint Declaration itself. Yet the impetus to consider it has come from examination of both their writings. I shall argue that authentic discourse about God – a discourse that has the power to lead us to a common future – must be a sacramental discourse.

Moltmann prompts me to this idea by his reminder that the sixteenth century disputes were largely connected with the sacrament of penance – though the direction I am now taking is not one that Moltmann would be likely to take himself. There is, however, one other point that Moltmann is making, which is relevant to my proposal. He implies that any discourse about God for today or for the future needs to be addressed to a people and not just to individuals. In suggesting this he appears to be arguing that the point of discourse about God is that it transforms people. This, as I hope to show, takes us into the area of "sacrament".

Dulles has helped clarify this idea of a sacramental discourse by his observation that there is a variety of discourses about God, and that the one that predominates in a particular ecclesial tradition or even in a particular culture may not be the best one with which to make a common statement about justification. He argues that the connection between these various discourses contributes to the eventual formation of a common discourse. He seems to point to a discourse that is broader than the analytical or informative, and to approve the performative discourse of the Joint Declaration. Here, I believe, Dulles and Moltmann, although coming from very different perspectives, reach similar conclusions about the role of a common discourse about God.

in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old."

19. Moltmann, "The Justification of God", 20.

Finally, the Joint Declaration itself prompts thinking along the lines of sacramental discourse when it speaks of faith as “God’s gift through the Holy Spirit, who works through Word and Sacrament in the community of believers”, and when it notes that justification “occurs in the reception of the Holy Spirit in baptism and incorporation into the one body”.²⁰ These references provide an opening to the idea that discourse about God can be performative. In this case the Holy Spirit is at work in the discourse, be it verbal or sacramental – the two are not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, such discourse is always communal in that it comes out of a people and creates a people.

To ward off a charge of making too many jumps, let me set up a framework which may allow this idea to become clearer. In the first place I am not concerned – initially at least – with the sacrament of penance, or for that matter any other individual sacrament. I am concerned with the whole question of the mediation of God whose righteousness creates justice. So when I speak about a sacramental discourse I am not speaking just about words or talk in the narrow sense of vocalising words, but of the whole range of communication that in fact creates the identity of a people. Every society is founded and survives on its foundational narratives, which transmit the knowledge and wisdom of the society; on its social rituals, which connect its members to each other both in the present and across time; and on an agreed ethic, which expresses its values and norms of behaviour.²¹

Here we are concerned with the creation of Christian identity. By Christian identity I mean what has been expressed in terms of the doctrine of justification by the Joint Declaration 15 as follows:

By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.

A paradigm of the framework I have in mind can be found in the Lukan narrative of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (24:13–33). There are three key moments in this narrative. The first is when the stranger meets the disciples on the road and explains the scriptures to them; the second is when, in the house, they recognise the risen Lord in the breaking of bread; and the third is when the disciples leave quickly and return to Jerusalem to give witness to the risen Lord. In Luke’s theology these three moments, which are repeated in short summaries in Acts (e.g., Acts 2:42–45), bring the Christian community to birth and give it its

20. Joint Declaration, § 16; § 8.

21. See Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995) 159–89; also *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001).

identity. So when I speak about a sacramental discourse I am referring to that complex discourse that includes the proclamation of the word of God, ritual gestures that draw the community symbolically (and really) into the justifying act of God in Christ, and a life lived in witness to the justice of God, which has been received and which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, manifests itself in an ethical life. In other words, these three elements are constitutive of sacramental discourse.

In this I am indebted to the Catholic theologian, Louis-Marie Chauvet. Chauvet argues that the three elements of the framework must be kept together if the whole discourse is not to become distorted. Working with narratives that speak of the appearance of the risen Lord, he points out that there is a tendency to want to find the risen Lord and see him and touch him. The point of the Emmaus narrative, on the other hand, is that the risen Lord is mediated in the community's proclamation of the word, ritual gesture and ethical life of witness. He is recognised in the breaking of bread but has already vanished from their sight.

My belief is that the same point can also be expressed in terms of the justification of God. There is a tendency to treat God's justice as a commodity to be possessed. Chauvet describes this as a "necrotic tendency": the tendency "to convert him, the "Living" One, into a dead body or an available object".²² He points out that this tendency becomes evident when one or other of the three elements of the framework becomes distorted. In the case of the proclamation of the word of God, the distortion manifests itself as a very narrow form of *sola scriptura*, without any interpretative hermeneutic. In the case of the ritual gestures, the distortion manifests itself in the interpretation and application of *ex opere operato* in a magical sense. In the case of the ethical life of witness, the distortion manifests itself in the way that orthopraxis becomes the sole criterion for orthodoxy.²³

These distortions, I believe, bear a great resemblance to the suspicions that Lutherans and Roman Catholics had for each other's doctrine after the Reformation. They were suspicious of a Word that merely imputed justice without re-creating those who heard it and received it. They were suspicious of human actions that seemed to suggest that justification was not totally the work of God but was a human action. They were suspicious of good works that merited justice and were not understood as God's gift. If, as the Joint Declaration suggests, we are to learn anything from the mutual condemnations, it may well be this: when any of these suspicions is discovered to be well founded, our discourse about God has become inadequate.

22. Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 174.

23. See Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 174-77.

In offering a brief formula to communicate a common doctrine of justification, the Joint Declaration has also opened up the possibility that this can develop into a genuinely sacramental discourse. I now propose to develop this briefly, using some of the classical ideas of sacramental theology.

Any future discourse aiming to develop out of the common confession of the Joint Declaration must be an *anamnesis*. By this I mean that it must present in some form or other the narrative of God's justice in the world. Presumably, this would be a proclamation of the word of God. It would not be offered, however, merely as an effort to recall a former age or the hope of an earlier people. It should address a word of hope to the people who hear it in their own existential situation. An *anamnesis* makes them present to the justice-creating righteousness of God. Any future discourse must also be an *epiclesis*. That is, it must be the communication of the Holy Spirit so that people are transformed. Finally, any future discourse must also be a discourse in action, a discourse that mediates God, at least in part, through the good works of the people. Such good works, undertaken by people empowered by the Spirit, will have the potential to express God's judgement on the world.

A SACRAMENTAL RITE?

One final point relates to Moltmann's comment about the sacrament of penance. The framework I have just presented may help us interpret the demise of the sacrament of penance in the Roman Catholic Church today. It seems to have lost its connection with the existential situation – something it obviously had in the sixteenth century. In other words, it no longer provides a credible discourse about God. Moltmann's critique of the practice in the sixteenth century indicates that it was too focused on the guilt of the sinner and did not address the pain of the victim. He calls for a presentation of the doctrine of justification that takes account of the victim, and that focuses on the whole of humanity and not just on individuals. I believe that it is possible to take this call seriously and to see how it would develop within the framework that I have been presenting. In other words, humanity today may well be in need of a ritual developed around the proclamation of the word and specific ritual gestures, which would lead to a change in ethical behaviour. Such a broad ritual would look very different to the sacrament of penance in the sixteenth century. It may well become a rich discourse about God for tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

My argument has been that we cannot talk about God in a monochrome way. I do not agree totally with Moltmann that agreed state-

ments between Lutherans and Roman Catholics do not lead us to a common future. The Joint Declaration has opened up many important directions for our discourse about God. It has shown us that when talking about God we are talking on many different levels, and that these levels are interconnected. In its dealing with the condemnations of the sixteenth century the Declaration has demonstrated both the tendency towards and also the danger of a monochromatic discourse about God. For this reason it is instructive for those who seek to talk about God.

I have further argued that the Joint Declaration opens up the possibility of considering that any future discourse about God should be a sacramental discourse (understanding "sacramental" here in the broad sense developed earlier, which includes word, ritual and ethics). This was not necessarily the intention of the drafters of the Joint Declaration. It would have been difficult for them to contemplate at the time and would probably have entailed pushing to the limit those more at home with Protestant language about God. However, I would maintain that I have been speaking about sacrament in terms very different from those used in medieval theology, terms which, when properly understood, go far to address the Reformers' suspicions. Such discourse may present a challenge to Lutherans and others inheritors of the Reformation tradition. But it is also a challenge to Roman Catholics because it asks them to engage in a sacramental discourse different from that to which they have, for many centuries, been accustomed. The development of a common discourse about the justifying righteousness of God is an ongoing task. It will be greatly assisted by the kind of patient dialogue that gave us the Joint Declaration.