

**Lutheran World Federation Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg
21 –31 July 2003**

“For the Healing of the World”

Greeting address by Cardinal Walter Kasper

Brothers and sisters in our common Lord Jesus Christ !
Dear friends !

It is my privilege as President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to greet this tenth Plenary of the Lutheran World Federation, and this means to me: to greet so many good friends.

I.

When we met last time in Hong Kong, it was prior to the Joint Declaration on Justification. Problems, doubts and critics foreshadowed difficulties, but a clear decision was made. And so we signed the Joint Declaration in Augsburg, and we not only signed it, we rejoiced and celebrated, because, thanks be to God, we could reach – not the final goal – but an important milestone in the pilgrimage to full unity. The stumbling block, the doctrine with which the Church stands and falls – as Luther wrote – was removed.

Though open questions remain, our relations since Augsburg have found a new quality and have reached a new intensity. As a Catholic, I affirm you: We did not only sign, we now stand behind this signature, we take it as a starting point from which we want to go ahead towards a common future. We extended our hands to each other and we are not willing to let go again. Thank you Bishop Krause, thank you Ismael Noko, thank you Sven Oppegard for this fellowship and friendship.

II.

This time we meet after the Joint Declaration. So it is time to look forward and ask ourselves: Where we are going now? What are the next steps? and what is the final goal after all ?

I think the theme of this 10th Plenary, “For the healing of the World”, gives a hint for the answer. There is no doubt, our world needs healing, healing from the wounds of injustice, of war and terrorism, of divisions, of lies, lack of truth and confidence, loneliness, a sense of meaninglessness, hopelessness, and all together: wounds of sinfulness and godlessness. To all these bleeding

wounds the Christians' answer is nothing other than the message of justification.

Since the Joint Declaration we were often confronted with the objection: Who still understands your message on justification? Who still cares about these old controversies? Are they not irrelevant? And we have to admit: The question how I can find a merciful God, is for most of our fellow human beings no longer the question. But this does not mean that justification has become meaningless. What justification means is exactly what is asked for in the aforementioned questions, anxieties, desires and hopes. Justification is God's answer to it. But it is now up to us to translate this answer in the language, in the context and in the dealing with the problems of today.

The Joint Declaration is not a text which we have written and published once for all, such that we could now be happy to have got rid of the problem and simply store the text on a bookshelf. The Joint Declaration must not remain a dead letter and must not become the secret of specialists and experts; it must come to life in our respective communities and over all, in our hearts. This message is needed even more now than during the 16th century. So, after Augsburg, this message should and can become our common message and our common witness to the hope which is within us.

What we have reached must bear fruits in joint co-operation. For ecumenism is not an end in itself. Our Joint Declaration too is not an end in itself. Together we have to heal the wounds of our world and – not the last – of our own divisions in order to be more able to heal the wounds of humankind.

III.

How can this happen ? Since Augsburg we were not lazy. Several steps were taken. Many others are still necessary. One touches the core and the heart of the ecumenical movement: Spiritual ecumenism. Without spirituality the ecumenical movement becomes merely an academic affair, where "normal" Christians cannot follow, where they feel excluded and finally frustrated; or it becomes a soulless activism, the business of an endless series of conferences, symposiums, gatherings, meetings and ever new documents which nobody can read. We need a spirituality of unity and communion, which is also a spirituality of prayer, of forgiveness, of reconciliation and mutual acceptance of each other. If this is to be more than indifference about our differences, then it requires conversion and the opening of our hearts. There is no ecumenism without such conversion and renewal.

To the measure that we are living and working together, growing in communion in one faith and one spirit, to the measure that we are able to heal the wounds of our own divisions, to that degree we will be more convincing and credible witnesses of reconciliation. Otherwise we will be told: “Doctor heal yourself !” As long the Church of Christ bleeds out of the wounds of our divisions our service to the world cannot be fully convincing and effective. There cannot be a choice between spiritual and secular ecumenism. Jesus prayed on the eve of his death “that all be one that the world may believe.”

IV.

Spiritual ecumenism is not a substitute for concrete ecumenism. On the contrary. The healing of the wounds of our still remaining division arises with still greater urgency as we face the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation in 2017. This may seem to be still a long time away. But if it is to be an anniversary where we can give account on our unfortunately separated history and speak of our hopefully common future, then we must prepare ourselves in time.

What will we tell the world on that occasion, what will we say then to our young people about the meaning of the Reformation in the 16th century, and what about its meaning for our time and for the future ? Will this anniversary only look back and become an occasion for a new confessionalism – unfortunately a temptation, we have to mach today – or will it not also and even more look to the future and be an ecumenical impulse, what so many urgently expect ?

With these questions we touch on a fundamental problem: What is our ecumenical goal ? What is the unity of the Church all about ?

As I understand it, the Reformers did not want to build a new Church; they wanted to preserve the continuity of the Church of all centuries, they wanted to renew the one universal, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. But the communion is broken in the 16th century for many reasons, reasons both theological and non theological, with fault on both sides and to the detriment of both sides. In different ways, we are both wounded by our divisions. But what has failed in the 16th century could it not be healed today, under totally new constellations and in view of new common challenges ?

I was extremely happy when I listened to what Bishop Krause and Dr. Ismael Noko had to say on communion. Indeed, the understanding of the Church and the unity of the Church as *communio*/communion indicates the direction we

should go and should be the ecumenical idea (Leitvorstellung) at all. There is a common basis, a chance, but a need for further serious theological and ecclesiological clarification as well. Therefore, for us the theological dialogue is fundamental in order to reach full communion and eucharistic sharing.

No blueprint for the future is possible. We are not the masters of history, neither of our own history nor of that of the Church. This is alone in the hands of God's Spirit, and he is always good for a surprise. I am convinced: the Holy Spirit who initiated the ecumenical process will bring it to an end, in spite of all difficulties and all obstacles. Probably the way will be longer than we expected. But God's Spirit is faithful; in him we can trust. So let's move ahead, with patience and with courage as well, with faith, with love and with hope. May God bless us and make us a blessing for one another and a blessing for the healing of the world.