

Society for Ecumenical Studies

Together for Europe

Stuttgart, 9-12 May 2007

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Background to Stuttgart 2007

On 31st October 1999, the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* was signed by the Roman Catholic Church and the World Lutheran Federation, bringing centuries of separation over this particular aspect of salvation theology to a close. The Joint Declaration includes the encouraging statement that, through insights of recent biblical studies and modern investigations of the history of theology and dogma, 'the post-Vatican II ecumenical dialogue has led to a notable convergence concerning justification, with the result that this joint Declaration is able to formulate a consensus on basic truths concerning the doctrine of justification. In the light of this

consensus, the corresponding doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century do not apply to today's partner.' At the same time as the signing of the Declaration, a powerful meeting of Catholic and Protestant/Evangelical communities took place at the Ottmaring Ecumenical Centre nearby. The following year, a meeting of church leaders in Rothenberg initiated a process of reconciliation, repentance and forgiveness for the divisions of the past. On December 8th 2001, a celebration was held in the Catholic Cathedral of Munich, called 'How else, if not together?' These events, and other ecumenical initiatives, resulted in the first *Together for Europe*, held in Stuttgart on May 8th 2004, attended by 9,000 participants, 50 bishops from various churches and a number of politicians. Members of 170 Christian movements and communities made a pact of mutual love according to Christ's message in St John's Gospel: (John 13:34).

Stuttgart 2007

The second *Together for Europe* was held 9-12 May 2007. Leaders and members of over 180 churches and organisations gathered together in a spirit of reconciled diversity in an atmosphere of unity and Christian love. The congress was organised by a number of groups including Alpha, YMCA, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Focolare, Schönstatt and Cursillos in Christianity. It took the form of a full programme of talks and forums, enriched by inspiring contacts and enlightening conversations at the personal level which added to the spirit of fellowship of the meeting. There were many accounts how two or three people, with a desire to serve God in a specific way, had grown, through the work of the Holy Spirit, into international networks of service and prayer. There were many encouraging messages given and speeches made by leaders of churches and Christian organisations. Each message affirmed the importance of love and mutual respect, a unity in the diversity of our different churches and organisations, with the common goal of bringing the light of the Gospel through prayer and social action into an increasingly secular continent moving away from its spiritual roots. Among the organisations represented from the United Kingdom and Ireland were the Maranatha Community, the International Ecumenical Fellowship, Companions of Sts Margaret and Columba, Equipes Notre Dame, Mothers' Prayers, Chemin Neuf, Alpha and Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Particular areas highlighted for action were the family, economy and work, the cities, help for

the poor and marginalised, politics and culture, the environment and the potential for a greater sharing of the wealth of Europe: 'Eurafrica' became a new word.

Cardinal Kasper of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity in Rome, spoke of a new spirituality of communion, 'a new way of being church' and of putting a heart and soul back into Europe. **Brother Franziskus Joest** of Jesus-Bruderschaft gave an inspiring talk about the unity of the Triune God as that which reconciles diversity among us and Christ as the one through whom God reconciles the world to Himself. He affirmed that human beings are created in the image of God and for relationship with God and that, in the Trinity, we may see the unity of the church as already present. **Chiara Lubich**, founder of the Focolare movement spoke of a renewed revelation of God in our souls, a response to God's love which changes lives and bears witness to Christ in the world. She spoke of the stirrings of a new culture of communion and a new humanity, emerging to bring remedy to the suffering of a confused world of many secular doctrines where ethics struggles to keep pace. **Andrea Riccardi** of the Community of St Egidio addressed Europe's political past, highlighting some of the follies of nationalism. He spoke of how both churches and countries now need one another and that, beyond the boundaries of Europe, there is scope for a greater sharing of European wealth. Greetings of good will and support were sent by many including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Jacques Delors, Angela Merkel, Mary McAleese, Bartholomaios I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Cardinal Tarcisio, Vatican Secretary State and Dr Samuel Kobia, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. It was clear throughout that relationship and a spiritual unity were seen as being more fundamental than dialogue or discussion around our theological and doctrinal differences. This is no doubt a message to inspire and enrich the future work of our society.