

## Justification and sanctification

**Prague V, Geneva, Switzerland, February 13-17 1998**

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[A working paper](#)  
[Areas of agreement](#)  
[Areas needing further discussion](#)  
[Context and communication](#)  
[What next?](#)  
[List of participants](#)

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### **A working paper**

"Prague V" is the shorthand designation of a consultation held at Le Cénacle, a meeting centre in Geneva, Switzerland, from February 13 to 17 1998. It continued a series of consultations held in 1986, 1987 and 1989 in Prague, Czechoslovakia, and in late 1994 in Geneva. Participants in the first three meetings were representatives of communions which understand themselves as belonging to the First Reformation - Waldensians, the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, Moravian Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*) and the Hussite Church - and to the Radical Reformation - Hutterian Brethren/*Bruderhof*, the Religious Society of Friends, Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren.

The first three consultations led to a sense of unity of heritage and compatibility of witness among these church fellowships, enabling them to contribute together to ecumenical conversations on pressing theological and contemporary issues. Among the many foci of discussion were shared heritage and eschatological grounding as well as Christian faith and economics.

The theme of "Prague IV" in Geneva in 1994 was the meaning and implications of the Sermon on the Mount (a theme which emerged in the first three consultations), but a shift in approach was marked by the purposive broadening of the discussions to include representatives of the Magisterial Reformation - the Lutheran and Reformed communions - alongside those from the First and Radical Reformations. Also present were representatives of the Baptist, Methodist and Roman Catholic traditions.

"Prague V," attended by members of all the above-mentioned denominations (with the exception of the Hussite Church), was sponsored jointly by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Warc) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Its focus was "Justification and Sanctification", a theme which has been in the forefront of Lutheran-Reformed discussion in recent decades, leading to the *Leuenberg Agreement* (1973) and the *Formula of Agreement* (1997-8) between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and three Reformed churches - the

Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ. The recent *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1997) issued by the LWF and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and now in the process of reception by the Lutheran and Roman Catholic communions was received with great interest by participants and recognized as having significant implications.

The programme included interpretations of justification and sanctification by members of the participating churches. It gave attention to African, Asian and Western perspectives and also examined the theme in relation to current threats to survival. The crowded schedule did not permit extended dialogue following these presentations. Nevertheless, areas of agreement can be identified, as well as areas demanding more discussion to discover convergence or divergence.

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### **Areas of agreement**

We are encouraged by a number of convergences that invite us to continuing dialogue. There was general agreement among the participants that:

1. Justification is received from God, not achieved by human effort. It establishes a new salvific relationship between God and human beings and a new communion among human beings.
2. Justification and sanctification are held together in the unity of the Christian life.
3. Justification takes place within community and has significance both ecclesiological and ethically.
4. Justification frees us to respond to the challenges of the world in faith, without arrogance and without despair.
5. Every generation needs to restate the message of salvation in a way that responds to the peoples of that day in their various cultures and contexts.

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### **Areas needing further discussion**

1. While there was agreement on a basic definition of justification (see previous section above, no.1), some called for further consideration of its implications for society and the whole of creation.
2. We discovered that the term "sanctification" covers a range of themes variously emphasized in our communions - "evangelical obedience", "personal and social transformation", "good works", "holiness" and "Christian perfection". The relation of these to each other (as well as to justification) would be a fruitful topic for further joint exploration in the tradition of the Prague consultations.
3. Since justification takes place within community, ecclesiology and ethics need more developed discussion.
4. Justification and sanctification need to be explored in historical perspective, in relation to such topics as election, calling, and perseverance, and also in theological and eschatological perspective.

5. In our consultations we have focused primarily on interdenominational differences in understanding, to the comparative neglect of cross-denominational differences in understanding. As we are called to respond to today's challenges, more attention needs to be given to emerging convergences and divergences within our communities.
  6. We need to explore more intentionally what it means to be an inclusive community, hearing and being transformed by voices that have been excluded or marginalized.
  7. In relation to the diverse religious traditions in which many Christians live today, we need to explore the implications of our discussion with other faiths.
  8. We recognize the need to focus on what difference theological understanding makes to the way we live, both as individuals and as communities in society.
  9. Not all of our traditions represented in the Prague consultations express the process of salvation in terms of "justification" and "sanctification". Therefore the different modes of talking as well as the interrelations between matters of fact and linguistic expression deserve careful investigation.
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### **Context and communication**

In this fifth consultation, there was more sharing of the faith community contexts from which we come, and there needs to be still more of this in future meetings. We have not finished the task of comparing our traditions, but we recognize the need to go beyond this. This requires a different method from exchanges between experts, so that we may reach results that may be communicated to our faith communities.

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### **What next?**

We affirm that the Prague conversations should continue. We recommend the publication of the papers from this consultation and the appointment of a small continuation committee in order to resolve questions of future theme, structure, and method.

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### **List of participants**

#### **February 13-17 1998**

Barbour, Hugh  
USA (*Society of Friends*)

Birmelé, André  
France (*Lutheran*)

Brockwell, Charles  
USA (*Methodist*)

Broz, Ludek  
Czech Republic (*Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren*)

Campi, Emidio  
Switzerland (*Waldensian*)

Dieter, Theodor  
France (*Lutheran*)

Durnbaugh, Donald  
USA (*Church of the Brethren*)

Falconer, Alan  
Switzerland (*Presbyterian*)

Finger, Thomas  
USA (*Mennonite*)

Halama, Jindrich  
Czech Republic (*Moravian*)

Harder, Gabriele  
Germany (*Mennonite*)

Heron, A.I.C.  
Germany (*Presbyterian/Reformed*)

Ijspeert, Marianne  
The Netherlands (*Society of Friends*)

Lindberg, Carter  
USA (*Lutheran*)

Macek, Petr  
Czech Republic (*Baptist*)

Mathis, Peter  
Great Britain (*Hutterian Brethren*)

Meier, Klaus  
Great Britain (*Hutterian Brethren*)

Meyer, Lauree Hersch  
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Miller, Larry  
France (*Mennonite*)

Mortensen, Viggo  
Denmark (*Lutheran*)

Njoroge, Nyambura  
Switzerland (*Presbyterian*)

Opocenský, Milan  
Switzerland (*Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren*)

Pang, Chong Chee  
Singapore (*Lutheran*)

Park, Seong-Won  
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United Kingdom (*Society of Friends*)

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Sawatsky, Walter  
USA (*Mennonite*)

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Czech Republic (*Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren*)

Vischer, Lukas  
Switzerland (*Reformed*)

Wicks, Jared  
Italy (*Roman Catholic*)

Winzeler, Peter  
Switzerland (*Reformed*)