

Cross from Salvador that is Christian sign of unity is dedicated at Ecumenical Centre



18 January 2018

A Salvadoran Cross that is now an icon of Christian unity was dedicated and placed in the World Council of Churches' Chapel in Geneva, Switzerland on the first day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The 2-metre high cross from Salvador has become known as the Lund Cross from the Swedish city where Lutherans and Roman Catholics met at the end of 2016 to commemorate the 500th Reformation anniversary.

“On behalf of the World Council of Churches, we receive this cross as a gift of communion,” said World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit at the ceremony.

“May the historical step that it symbolizes reminds us that Christ’s cross transforms our conflict into communion, and we are reconciled as one creation, joined by the one spirit of God and Creator. Behold the life-giving cross.”

A sign of continuous commitment with the one ecumenical movement the Lund Cross was created for that joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation in Lund and Malmö, Sweden, on 31 October 2016.

The week of prayer for its part is traditionally celebrated between 18-25 January, between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul.

In the southern hemisphere, where January is often a vacation time, churches often find other days to celebrate it, for example around Pentecost, which is also a symbolic date for unity.

Salvadoran artist Christian Chavarría Ayala

Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in his 18 January sermon in the chapel spoke on the message of the cross which is the work of Salvadoran artist Christian Chavarría Ayala, a man who has lived in the shadow of death squads in his country.

In his sermon, Koch reminded those in the chapel that the cross was present during the signing of a Lutheran-Catholic Joint Statement signed by Pope Francis and Bishop Munib A. Younan, who was Lutheran World Federation President (LWF) on that historic day.

“God’s reconciliation with us as human beings, takes place on the cross. Martin Luther rightly placed the message of the cross at the heart of his Reformation and in so doing challenged us to set our eyes on the gravity of the cross,” said Koch.

“When we receive the gift of reconciliation from God, we are also called and obliged to proclaim God’s reconciliation and to work for reconciliation, with the authorisation of Jesus Christ himself,” he explained.

Also present at the service was Tveit, his LWF counterpart, Rev. Dr Martin Junge; Rev. Dr Kaisamari Hintikka, LWF assistant general secretary for Ecumenical Relations and director for the Department for Theology and Public Witness; as well as other leading ecumenical dignitaries from Geneva.

Koch noted that according to human logic the cruelty of Jesus’ death should have meant revenge to the bitter end, to restore the world to order once more.

“But on the cross God showed that the only ‘revenge’ that he knows is his uncompromising ‘no’ to violence and vengeance and his absolute ‘yes’ to reconciliation as far as it can reach.”

Ayala said the cross was given to him by God. He estimates he has made more than 130,000 crosses, which have travelled to 109 countries. His symbol of Christian unity hangs in the offices of bishops, politicians and former presidents in North America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia and the Vatican.

The cross depicts the Triune God’s creative, reconciling and sanctifying work. At the base of the cross, the hands of God hold all things together.

The LWF’s Hintikka in her sermon during the dedication of the cross ceremony, saw in the cross the common journey of Lutherans and Catholics through shared baptism and the discussion on how the two traditions see their future together.

“Our response to the call of Christ to be one, our wish and prayer to follow that call – to gather around the same Eucharistic table. And yet, acknowledging that we are not yet there. So much already, but not yet.”

50 years of dialogue

She said, “During the 50 years of dialogue, we Lutherans and Catholics have shared many gifts and learned to see one another with new eyes.”

Hintikka said, “There is no reconciliation without renewal. To be reconciled, we need to change. Change our habits, our convictions, attitudes, teachings – yes even our teachings – relationship to ourselves, to our neighbour, to God.”

Dedicating the cross LWF’s Junge said, “In gratitude for the Lutheran and Catholic Joint Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in Lund, Sweden, we present the Lund Cross to the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva.

“May it be a sign of hope that we share, as we leave behind our conflict and turn towards our common future.”

