

Reform and renewal: from conflict to communion then and now

SJTI Conference on 500th anniversary of the Reformation

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St Joseph's Theological Institute will hold its fourth academic conference from 20 April 2017 – 22 April 2017 at our Cedara Campus.

This year we have chosen to examine the theme of the Reformation given that this is the 500th anniversary year. The theme of religious conflict which underlies reformation history also carries with it ongoing attempts to find the unity promoted by Jesus: “that all of them may be one” (Jn 17:21). This injunction has empowered the ecumenical movement in the Church. A foundational process was the work that led to the *Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on Justification* in 1999 and the unanimous adoption of the Declaration by the World Methodist Council in 2006.

From Conflict to communion is the theme of the “Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017”. However we believe that this theme is also a metaphor for many of the struggles that are going on in South Africa and beyond its borders today. This is because it can also be applied to the Church’s response to the current context of hopelessness seeking hope within the social conditions of Africa today.

Africa today

We are witnessing today a certain sense of disillusionment amongst some of the peoples of Africa. Migrations are growing out of the northern half of the continent where poverty, conflicts and Islamist militancy continue, to the European “nirvana”. In the South a certain disillusionment is growing as recent elections and violent service delivery protests have shown. The turmoil in Zimbabwe and South Sudan reflects even greater signs of this hopelessness and frustration as does the never-ending unemployment and lack of progress in economic development. We are living now in an increasingly more sombre time than recently. Protest, violence and migration to perceived better places are signs of human disempowerment amongst frustrated poor people. Here is a situation in need of a mission to reform and renewal.

The call to reform and renewal

In the first year of his Pontificate Pope Francis characterised the reform needed today in these words:

“Every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling... Christ summons the Church as she goes her pilgrim way... to that continual reformation of which she always has need, in so far as she is a human institution here on earth” (Evangelii Gaudium 26).

How does our African context meet the theology of the reformation and what solutions can empower in its mission? In the same document Francis writes:

“I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. “Mere administration” can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be “permanently in a state of mission” (EG 25).

SJTI Conference theme

The Conference theme will be ***FROM CONFLICT TO COMMUNION THEN AND NOW.***

A number of papers will deal with the theological issues around reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics. Others will propose pastoral approaches to moving from conflict to communion in our societies. There will be a variety papers on these themes from a number of Christian speakers.

The conference will be at our SJTI campus. The Conference Fee is R200 per person which includes morning and afternoon tea. Students (with Student ID card) pay a reduced fee of R50 per person.

Other practical details are available on this webpage. For more details email

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