

The Church of England's General Synod has welcomed signs of "convergence" between churches on key doctrinal differences which divided Christians for centuries in the wake of the Reformation.

Members of the Synod, meeting in London, backed a motion supporting further reconciliation between Roman Catholic and reformed churches as Christians around the world commemorate the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation and celebrating the "rich spiritual blessings" the Reformation brought to the Church of England.

Moving the motion, the Bishop of Coventry, the Rt Revd Christopher Cocksworth, Chair of Faith and Order Commission, said: "The 500th anniversary of the Reformation, which began with Luther's courageous insistence that salvation is not for sale, invites every Christian to join with the whole church to be renewed in the grace of God and share the astounding news of God reaching out to the world, running to meet us in Christ and embracing us into his life by the Spirit with an infinity of love that lifts us into the full stature of our humanity and raises us into the joyful responsibility of being human."

In a paper distributed to Synod members ahead of the debate, Bishop Christopher also noted that one legacy of the Reformation in England had been a "threefold division" between Anglicans, Roman Catholics and "dissenting" protestants.

"The Church of England, for all our fondness for boasting of tolerance, still bears a heavy burden in terms of the persecution of Christians whose response to the Reformation was at variance with the national church," he wrote.

"It therefore has a particular responsibility for ensuring that the commemoration of the Reformation Anniversary this year can be an occasion of healing and for growth in unity between the churches in this country."

In a joint statement earlier this year, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, spoke of the need to "repent of our part in perpetuating divisions".

Although the origins of the Reformation are complex, Martin Luther's protest against indulgences and other church practices, in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517, is regarded as the trigger for the period of upheaval across Europe from which protestant churches, and ultimately Anglicanism, emerged.

One crucial dividing line between churches for centuries were disagreements about salvation.

But more recent dialogue between churches led to a joint declaration by the Roman Catholic Church and World Lutheran Federation in 1999, setting out broad agreement on the doctrine of justification - or the forgiveness of sins.

The declaration, which was affirmed by the Anglican Communion last year, asserts that people are saved "by grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part".

General Synod supported a motion "welcoming signs of convergence between the churches on the doctrine of salvation".

The motion also commends initiatives during the anniversary year "to foster mutual understanding and reconciliation between churches, for the sake of our deeper renewal in the grace of God and our ability to share the gospel of salvation with all the world".

An amendment, moved by the Revd Angus MacLeay of Rochester, added that Synod gave thanks for the "rich spiritual blessings that the Reformation brought to the Church of England".

## Notes to editors

The statement by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York can be read [here](#).

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, 1999, can be read [here](#).

The Bishop of Coventry's paper can be read [here](#).

### Facts about Reformation anniversary:

- There are around 80 million Lutherans in the world today, around 200,000 of which are in the UK. However, the influence of the Reformation stretches far beyond the Lutheran church, with around 800 million Protestants worldwide.
- The 500th anniversary celebrations are being funded in part by the German government, recognising that the impact of the Reformation went far beyond the Church. For example, Luther's translation of the Bible into German had an enormous impact on the German language.
- A Playmobil figure of Martin Luther is [the best selling Playmobil figure of all time](#), selling 34,000 figures in 3 days
- A bus telling the story of the Reformation is travelling around Europe - it started in Geneva in November 2016, and finishes at Wittenberg in May 2017. It visits 67 cities in 19 countries, including Liverpool (21 Feb), Cambridge (23 Feb) and London (25 Feb).

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