

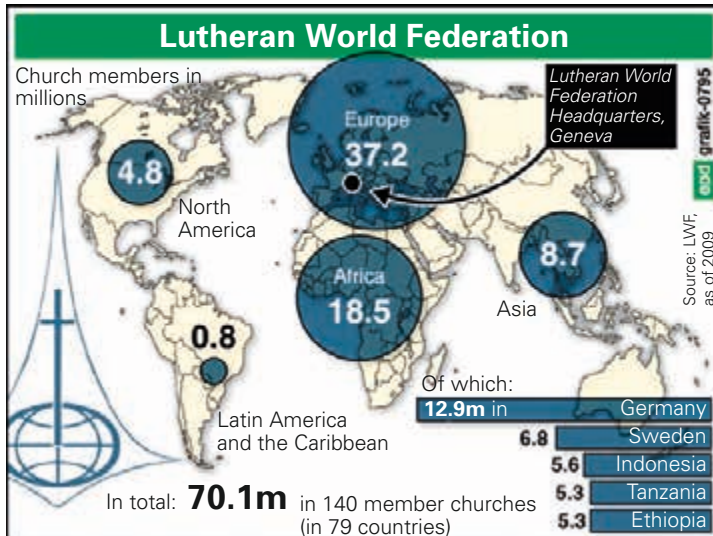
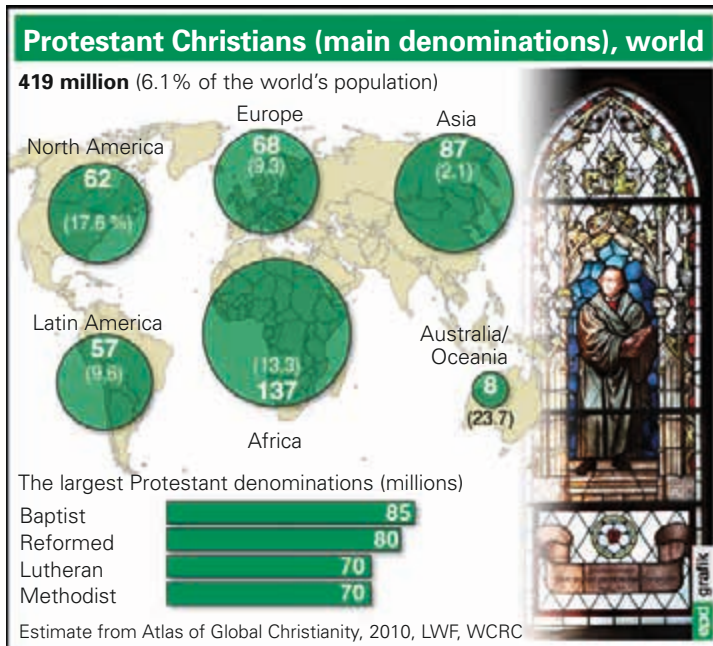
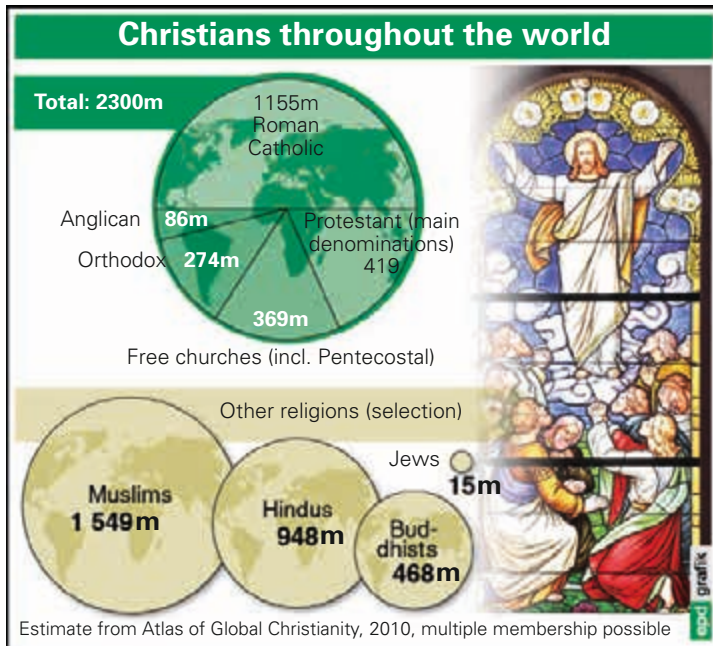
AM ANFANG
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PERSPECTIVES 2017

Writings on the Reformation





Hosting sisters and brothers from around the world



Photo: Evangelical Church in the Rhineland

Dr. h.c. Nikolaus Schneider

Dear Reader,

Today, over 400 million people are brothers and sisters in our multi-branched global Protestant family. As we are characterized by a diversity both of confession and tradition, Protestantism has had to learn to appreciate this pluralism as an opportunity and not as a threat to its own identity. This is an ongoing process even in Germany, where we are thankful for a country without denominational strife. As tolerance is indeed never something we are born with, we need to continually relearn it and work together to strengthen it further.

It is my wish that the 500th anniversary of the Reformation will serve to bring into focus what unites us and what we have in common. This publication thus showcases a wide variety of voices, inviting you to hear them in all of their diversity.

All of the articles have one thing in common: 1517 as a symbol of new beginnings and the ever fascinating narrative of Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses on penance to the door of Wittenberg's Castle Church. This was a new beginning for an entire generation of Reformation men and women, and one which continues to touch people today. Then, as now, the Reformation was anchored in faith; and it remains a matter of the heart. The Reformation changes people in the midst of their lives, leading people from fear to the freedom that Christians enjoy and to new beginnings as we go out into the world.

In 2017, we wish to be hosts in Germany and Europe to a gathering of people who have been touched by this Reformation message. And everyone is invited to join in: Brothers and sisters of other denominations and churches; societal groups that are aware of being inspired by the Reformation; but also skeptics and critics are invited to be a part of an expansive celebration of the Reformation in times of societal change. The 2017 anniversary will move beyond festivities that are exclusive to a particular church, and beyond movements that would depict Luther as the hero of a particular nation.

Let us join together in sharing this newly discovered freedom and responsibility of each individual person before God, regardless of any particular secular or church institutions, with the consolation and strength of the Gospel of a merciful God, and grounded in faith.

I am looking forward to it!

Nikolaus Schneider

Council Chairman of the
Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)



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Nikolaus Schneider

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Protestant in 2012 – An expedition through Germany

Five hundred years after the Reformation, the Protestant churches now find themselves in the midst of major change, whether this involves dwindling numbers of parishioners, older congregations, or a greater range of diversity. What does this all mean for these congregations and their pastors? **Kathrin Klette** delved into these questions in her journey across Protestant Germany, with three stops.

Katharina Stoodt-Neuschäfer is a pastor in Königstein, Hesse. The size of her congregation has remained nearly unchanged during her tenure there.



Rev. Thomas Bachmann has started an experiment in Hallbergmoos, Bavaria, which he calls “new wine in new wine-skins”. His goal is to get non-churchgoers more excited about faith.



With their backs against the wall: Being a pastor in Saxony-Anhalt

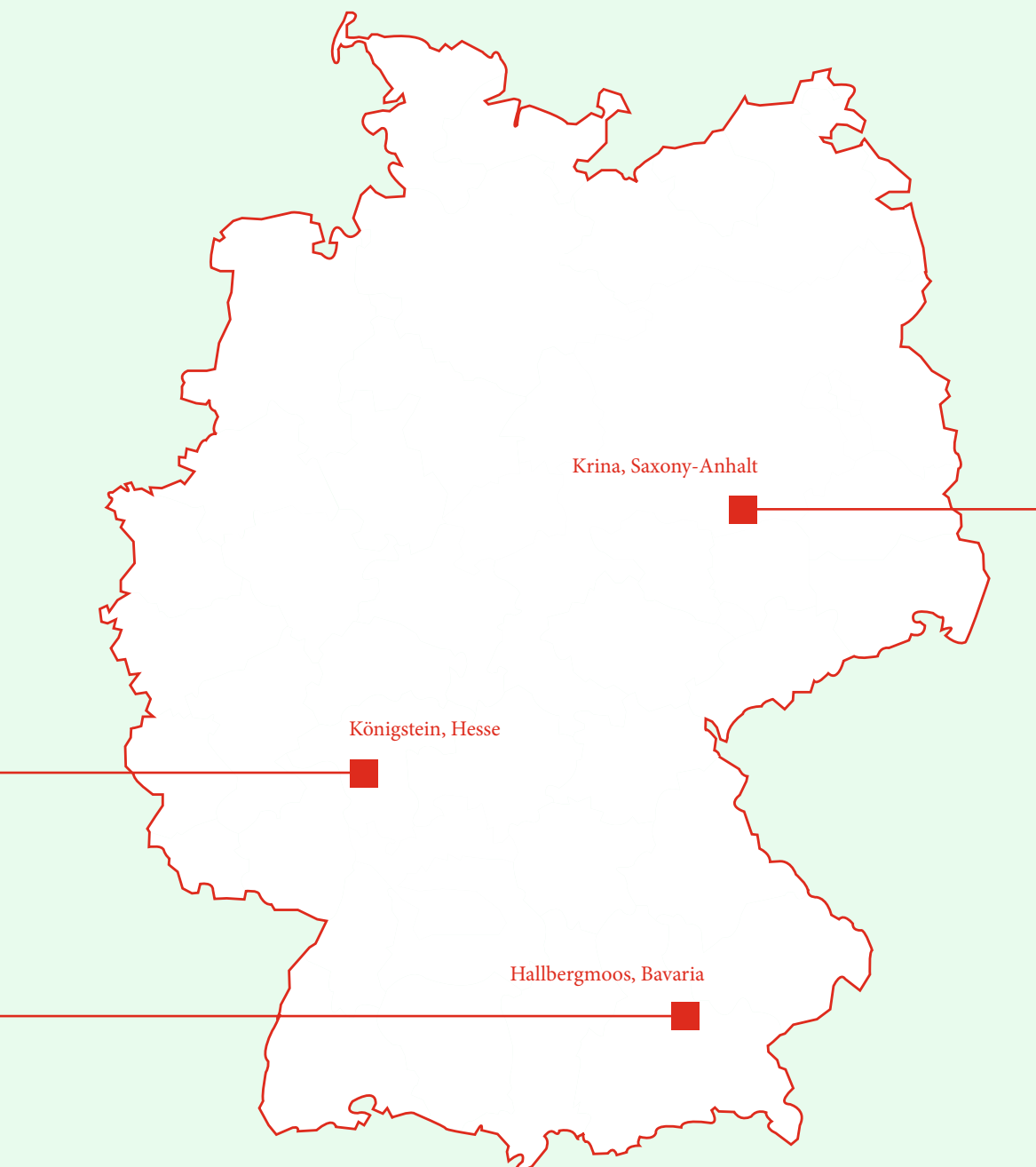
It is twelve noon at Schenkenberger’s in Schköna, in the eastern German state of Saxony-Anhalt. People wait for their lunches at three of the four tables inside, as potatoes fry in the background. When Pastor Albrecht Henning arrives, he knocks on each table in the traditional German pub greeting and chats with the people there. Then he orders his schnitzel with a side of vegetables from Silvia Schenkenberger, who runs the butcher’s shop and bistro.

The pastor then places four pieces of paper on the Formica table, with careful notes about all sorts of things: numbers of baptisms, weddings, funerals, and parishioners for each year since he was named pastor in Krina, in the Wittenberg church district. His twentieth anniversary there in 2017 will coincide with the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, two big reasons to celebrate, one would think. It could, however, be a rather sad year for Pastor Henning. “If everything continues as it

has been, the number of parishioners will fall below a thousand in 2017, and that would of course be quite dramatic,” he says as he straightens his metal-rimmed glasses. The thoughtful 44-year-old father of three children is tall and slim, and appears in a white shirt, black vest, and trekking sandals.

Glancing at his notes, Henning points out that the congregation was in fact still 1220 strong. And yet, the anti-church stance of the German Democratic Republic had left its mark on the region. Of the 60-square-kilometer parish’s 6700 people, most are not affiliated with any church. And the area he covers includes nine places of worship: in addition to Krina and Schköna, this includes smaller places named Rösa, Gossa, and Schlaitz. Few villages in the Dübener Heide area east of Bitterfeld in fact have more than a thousand inhabitants. The population has also been growing increasingly old, and many young people move out of the area right after graduating from school. But as Henning puts it, “this development cannot be stopped in the East; we just need to live with it.”

Photo: p. 6 above: epd-bild/Thomas Rohmke; below: epd-bild/mck; p. 7: epd-bild/Steffen Schellhorn



Albrecht Henning loves being a pastor, even as membership numbers dwindle at his congregation in Krina, near Bitterfeld in Saxony-Anhalt.

The church has in fact become less central to people's lives, and those of children and young people in particular, having to compete with other recreational activities. The "Church Mice" children's group in Schlaitz, for example, lost nearly half of its membership a few years ago as a dance workshop was started at the same time in nearby Bitterfeld-Wolfen, which many clearly preferred. As Henning explains, the hardest thing for him was to see the list of people who had officially left the church, a list that often included young people he had just confirmed a few years earlier.

While Henning sometimes follows up on situations such as these, he has been doing so less and less. As he puts it, he cannot always assume that he is welcome at all. Rarely does he now even get called to bless people on their deathbeds. This, he explains, also has to do with people's current attitudes towards death, however. They would rather just call the doctor and the undertaker instead of keeping people at home for one last day and night.

The church has to adjust for social and demographic changes all across Germany, and also needs to adapt to people who know nothing of faith and the church or who seek the answers to their spiritual questions outside the official churches.

In 2006, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) published a discussion paper entitled *Kirche der Freiheit* ("Church of Freedom"), detailing strategies that could allow the church to remain vibrant into the 21st century despite all of its challenges. The paper focused on areas which included sharpening religious identity and choosing fields of endeavor as well as remaining flexible and gearing oneself toward the outside world.

Pastor Henning has also read the "Church of Freedom" paper, but does not think that it is of much relevance to his own work. And but should he actually be doing? While Henning baptized an admittedly large number of children this past year, 21 in total, he explained that families often came home to visit grandparents just for baptisms, having often



moved far afield to find work in places such as Munich and Switzerland. Albrecht Henning does not see himself as a missionary and does not want to feel that he has to butter people up.

Henning cites Axel Noack, the former bishop of the Church Province of Saxony, who said that we need to take people's decision seriously not to attend church. And, as Henning finds, it is better to resist the pressure to try to grow the church against the trend, something that is in fact recommended in the aforementioned EKD paper: "There is already enough pressure in our society. Resisting that can also be liberating."

Henning is not, however, someone who is easily defeated, but more of a person who takes matters into his own hands. The pastor had, for example, all of the churches in his area refurbished. As he explains, that too is how to build a congregation.

By 2 p.m., Henning is standing in front of the old sexton's house in Rösa, a village of 880 with cobblestone streets and ancient trees. The house is complete with a mustard-colored base, wine-red bricks, and olive-green windows – and all newly restored. Once Henning unlocks the wooden door, the floors creak beneath our feet as we smell the lingering odor of

paint, but the parish hall to the left of the door is already fully furnished: floorboards, a black piano, red and white striped cushions on simple wooden chairs, and a chandelier with wooden figurines of schoolchildren. "This is our pride and joy", Henning says, spreading his arms out toward the room. "The churches and the old buildings are one of my passions. We need to maintain them, if only out of respect for those who came before us."

Being a pastor is Henning's dream job – but a dream that demands a great deal of him. Ministry in Germany's rural East is a job with no breaks, requiring continuous availability. Henning is constantly on the go, attending to baptisms, weddings, funerals, confirmation classes, parish newsletters, a variety of women's groups, the four parish councils that he runs, a choir, a monthly Bible study, and a youth group. This is topped off each Sunday, of course, by two or three church services. Henning's workdays are often not over until ten at night, and still much remains unfinished. The pastor spends a great deal of time in his car as well.

While Henning's congregation is quite small – it is also remarkably active and vibrant. When it was time to renovate the church tower in Krina, the costs were estimated at 140,000 euros, of which the congregation was to

Whenever he has the chance, Pastor Henning likes to stop and chat with his parishioners.



cover 15,000. Henning had a decorative card printed and delivered to all of the area's households with an accompanying letter. In the end, the people contributed a total of 29,000 euros, many sensing a connection to the church even if they were not believers themselves. Local people also founded an association to renovate the late Romanesque church in the hamlet of Hohenlubast, a small part of Schköna, which numbers a mere 760 people. And yet, a total of 140 squeezed into the small church for the concert of a visiting Gospel choir invited by the association this past December.

The women's group meets at 3 p.m. in Krina. Three rollator walkers stand in front of the church, and the aromas of homemade strawberry and *Bienenstich* cakes mix with that of coffee to fill the parish hall with its low paneled ceiling and orchid-lined windows. Henning leads the group in singing birthday songs for Mrs. Schramm, Mrs. Broder, and Mrs. Herrmann before planning a bus trip to Tyrol. A total of 23 women and one man are on hand this afternoon – nobody is particularly strict about that sort of thing if someone is lonely. In any event, 24 people between 55 and 90 years of age combine for a large number of people in this part of the world and at this time of day.

Detlef Pollack knows, in great depth, the state of the church in eastern Germany as it used to be and as it is today. The 56-year-old professor wrote his post-doctorate *Habilitation* thesis on the "Church in organizational society: Change in the social situation of the Protestant churches and alternative political groups in the German Democratic Republic". Pollack, who now teaches sociology of religion at the University of Münster, is of the view that "if grandparents and parents are not religious themselves, their children will certainly not be so." In his studies, Pollack discovered that people without a church affiliation in western Germany, most of whom did grow up in affiliated families, are much more open to questions of faith than their non-affiliated counterparts in the East, who are often the second or third generation without ties to a church. Pollack deems there to be two areas of endeavor that are crucial to the future of the church: work with children and youth, and family work. As he put it: "Adults often draw closer to the church through their children."

Protestant church life is still in good shape in the Hills of Taunus

How this does fact occur can be witnessed 330 kilometers southwest of Krina, in the wealthy suburbs of Frankfurt am Main. Rev. Katharina Stoodt-Neuschäfer's town of Königstein im Taunus is a completely different world, and a very affluent one at that. It is a world of the historical old town's well-kept timber-frame houses and cobblestones, of nearby castle ruins, and of country houses and villas with ample surrounding acreage.

Katharina Stoodt-Neuschäfer is 54 years old and has served as a pastor for the past 15 years in the town of 16,000, designated as a *Luftkurort*, an official spa town, for its healthy air and climate. The surrounding Hochtaunuskreis district leads all of Germany in purchasing power, with any number of bankers, business consultants, and lawyers living in the area. The center-right Christian Democratic Union is the second strongest faction in district politics, following only a local-interest organization. Even the pro-business Free Democrats, a smaller party on the national scene, received more votes than the center-left Social Democrats, a major national force, in the most recent local elections.

Pastor Stoodt-Neuschäfer keeps her dark grey-streaked hair short and wears pointed black velvet high-heeled shoes. Her congregation, the town's Immanuel Church, has 2450 members, just as many as it did ten years ago. Between 50 and 90 people attend services at the Neo-Gothic church regularly, usually filling all of the wooden pews. The congregation's choral school alone teaches 140 children. So what kinds of problems might such a place actually be facing? One can wait a long time before hearing an answer to that question, often receiving the response instead: "But this is paradise."

The parish hall, known as the *Herzogin-Adelheid-Stift*, is currently under renovation. The project is expected to cost 70,000 euros with the congregation supplying 17,000 euros itself. The amount was raised within a week, with a total of 50,000 euros finding its way into the parish account. "Even I was taken by surprise," Stoodt-Neuschäfer exclaimed.

It is Thursday just before 9 a.m. and the pastor is on her way out of the parsonage, built in 1908 in the style of a Swiss chalet. The house has whitewashed walls, a black gable, and petrol blue window shutters with geraniums in front of the windows. The garden gate creaks behind Stoodt-Neuschäfer as she makes her way to her first appointment. The congregation runs two preschools, and the pastor happens to personally assist the one located at Heuhohlweg 22. It takes her only ten minutes to

The church can remain vibrant if it invests in its children. The Protestant kindergarten in Königstein is a perfect example of how this can work.

pass through the town's Spa Park to a preschool building with a certain resemblance to a medieval castle, featuring a tower and a staircase for a bridge. The pastor is greeted at the door by Gudrun Gastreich, who runs the facility, and Filou, the school dog.

It is a bright and friendly place with hammocks, wicker furniture, and herbs growing for the kitchen. A full day of daycare for children under three years of age costs 345 euros, and 255 euros for children over three. The facility has its own cook, and today's dish is filet of fish with spinach, rice, and yoghurt for dessert. Signs reveal the names of the children – Elias, Rhea, Vincent.

Pastor Stoodt-Neuschäfer's day, however, begins with a death. A 33-year-old mother wants to speak with her. Her 52-year-old husband had died the night before of a cerebral hemorrhage, following a period of coma. Her five-year-old daughter had yet to learn of her father's death, believing him to be sleeping. The mother asks Stoodt-Neuschäfer what she should tell her. The pastor takes her aside to another room. And when they return, the mother heads straight for home. What is Stoodt-Neuschäfer able to suggest? She says that she recommended telling her daughter that her father is now sitting on a cloud and watching over her. Even though this contradicted Christian teaching, she adds, it was easier for children to understand. "We need to speak with children differently than with teenagers, and with teenagers differently than with adults," she explains. The parish's parents appreciate her for this type of advice as well.

She enters the preschool tower, complete with windows and doors down to the ground. The children painted an underwater seascape on the walls, and the lamps look like portholes. "Children, last time I told you the story of St. Elizabeth," she says. And today, the story continues: Elizabeth rides down from her castle into the valley where she happens upon children who need food and clothing. The vibrant pastor completely embraces the story: When Elizabeth rides her horse, Stoodt-Neuschäfer drums on her thighs, when Elizabeth is cautious, she moves on tiptoes. She raises her eyebrows, purses her lips, holds up her index finger, and asks what we can do when we get hungry like the poor children in the story. One blond boy suggests "going to a restaurant".

Gundrun Gastreich, who runs the preschool, is a hands-on woman with blond hair. When asked about any possible problems, she just laughs at first and says: "None at all! And if yes, they are the small problems of luxury." Mothers could sometimes be difficult when they complained that supposedly not enough organic food was used or that there were no Chinese lessons. Some expected their children to be able to start primary school early – diapers and all. The sense of competition is already palpable there at preschool. "Everyone's kid is expected to be better than the others. They are like funnels with everything being poured into the top," Gastreich says. Over a lunch of linguine, scampi, and salad at a local Italian restaurant, Stoodt-Neuschäfer explains that people sometimes just threw their money at problems. She knows of children who are given 50 euros of pocket money instead of the expected 10 euros on church trips, adding that "they sometimes lack a sense of how much it is actually worth."



But even Stoodt-Neuschäfer has ten-hour days, and even she works to the point of exhaustion. In the evening, she sits on the sofa of the parsonage living room, on the first floor, where she lives with her husband, also a pastor and a classicist. Both play music, and they have both a grand and an upright piano. Their living room wall is also replete with books, including the complete works of Goethe, Thomas Mann, and Brecht.

The pastor does not put much stock in newly developed "modern" approaches. She refers to contrived attempts to make up for lost membership as an unwillingness to come to terms with the loss. For her, ideas of the sort are all just "frivolous", whether it is the massive national Protestant *Kirchentag* conventions, the mobile Plexiglas church set up at the 2010 state gardening fair, or the church's annual distribution of blessing cards at the state's largest shopping center.

In Königstein, people meet each other on the street or in the supermarket and get into conversation. And sometimes, Stoodt-Neuschäfer explains, people ask: "Do you actually have an office hour?" She calls that being "unintentionally present". Children greet her on the street, and she knows them all as well, whether it is Antonia shooting by on a scooter, or Matthias just shuffling past a bus stop. It is all about having the time and al-

Photo: epd/bild/Thomas Rohmke



ways providing quality, whether in religion classes, church services, or pastoral care. Stoodt-Neuschäfer takes a great deal of time for it all.

A religion workshop starts at the *Adelheid Stift* parish hall at 7 p.m. and 14 women are on hand, nearly half of them Catholic. When asked why, they say that they just are happier there. The topics for discussion this evening are “Help, my parents are getting old!” and “Female figures in the Bible”.

So why does a place that has everything else even need religion to begin with? The women say that it is about the transmission of values. One mother, an Austrian woman with short brown hair and a green sweater, talks of how Stoodt-Neuschäfer spoke about responsibility in a sermon. The Austrian woman had to think of her 14-year-old son, who often misplaces things – his sunglasses and even his bicycle. After the sermon, she and her husband thought about ways that they could teach their son more responsibility. They wrote five things down that he had to think about on a regular basis – and he had not lost anything else since, she added, with the words: “Some sort of answer is always found in the end.”

Hallbergmoos is just south of Munich Airport, 420 kilometers to the southeast of Königstein. And it is there that Rev. Thomas Bachmann has begun an experiment in reaching non-churchgoers – and indeed using a “modern” approach.

Daring to experiment in Hallbergmoos

It is Sunday in Hallbergmoos, and Thomas Bachmann has just return from his vacation on Crete with a tan. The 46-year-old with brown stubble and laughter lines now has a chain hanging from his wrist, which, as he explains, is supposed to be reminiscent of Greek komboloi prayer beads: The red bead is the bead of love, the black is the bead of the night, and the white ones are beads of mystery. Bachmann ordered his chain in the EKD shop. While the pastor views himself as a missionary-charismatic pastor, he is cautious about using such labels.

Hallbergmoos is a town with bright white semi-detached houses. Around 10,000 people live in a relatively young place, with an average age of 38 years. Among the residents, 1,070 are members of the Protestant church, 4,341 are Catholic, and 4,249 are not affiliated with any church. But how can the church win that group over?

Your love is amazing

Your love is amazing,
Deine Liebe trägt mich,
steady and unchanging,
festigt und erhebt mich,
your love is a mountain,
sie ist wie ein Felsen,
firm beneath my feet,
auf dem ich sicher steh.



Photo: epd-bild/Michael McKee

Featuring contemporary music and links to people's everyday lives, Pastor Thomas Bachmann's services in Hallbergmoos, Bavaria are true celebrations for one and all.

Bachmann has two grown children, and began his career as a half-time pastor in Hallbergmoos. He, too, read the "Church of Freedom" paper and adapted it to write up his own concept on growing a new congregation. The new concept, entitled "New wine in new wineskins", focuses on accessibility, with less traditional liturgies, modern music, and sermons that are relevant to people's daily lives. The Bavarian church was impressed by Bachmann's ideas and employed him for another half-time position in 2010 – this time specifically for his missionary activity.

The pastor received second prize in the 2012 *Worauf wir stolz sind!* ("What we are proud of!") contest run by *chrismon*, a Christian magazine in Germany. And yet, Bachmann is somewhat embarrassed when asked about this particular success: "You need to continually justify yourself," he says – especially due to his half-time position.

It is now 11 a.m. and Bachmann throws a cassock and his patterned green liturgical stole over his dark blue jeans and white shirt. Around 80 people have assembled for the service in the new parish center, which was consecrated at Pentecost. The center is bright and inviting with whitewashed walls, any amount of glass, light wood, and chrome chair legs.

The congregation has just finished the song "Everyday", in German translation, accompanied by a modern band: Maria and Renate, Bachmann's wife in fact, are the singers, Ramona plays the keyboard, and Bachmann plays guitar himself. In the back there is an electric drum set. The song text is projected onto the wall next to the wooden cross, superimposed in a Powerpoint presentation on pictures of sunsets and hands cupped together into a bowl. Now the song is over, and Bachmann heads over to the lectern and picks up the microphone. His voice soft and gentle, he tells everyone that he is happy to see them there again.

Bachmann's style reflects a strong American influence. He spent time as a paratrooper at Fort Bragg, North Carolina in 1987. While he was there, he attended a Baptist church and, for the first time, as he now explains, he was able to buy into a preacher's message. He was then an intern at a free church in Houston, Texas, and between 1998 and 2001 was the co-pastor of Munich's Vineyard congregation, part of a movement emerging from the Jesus People Movement in California, as the church's website explains.

Every first Sunday of the month, Bachmann conducts an alternative form of service with separate ministries that provide for children of various ages. And following the service, everyone shares a meal together, as community is of central importance here.

Bachmann explains that he does not wish to persuade anyone to come to faith or to join the church. But he also adds: "It doesn't help me if people don't join." The title of the pastor's sermon today is "Jealousy doesn't get you very far." While a sacristan reads the story of Cain and Abel, Bachmann folds his hands in front of his guitar, closes his eyes, and tilts his head back. They then sing "Your love is amazing", a bit of a rock tune, and catchy in any event, and one comes away with the sense of the service being a true celebration. During the "Hallelujah" refrain, most of the congregants stand up and clap. Then, in his sermon, Bachmann lists ex-

amples of people we can be jealous of, whether popular coworkers or rich neighbors. He says: "If you want to have bad feelings because you are doing too well, you can just think of someone who is doing better." Many in the congregation laugh; that sort of comment plays well here. After the service, the congregants all remain together in the foyer. Coffee in Thermos cans is available at three bistro tables decorated with pink and red tulle. Bachmann walks up to the people, patting them on the shoulder, shaking their hands. He is conspicuously informal with everyone and prefers to be called "Tommy".

Only this summer, Bachmann's project contract was extended for two more years – and the people are quite ready to contribute toward keeping him there. Between 2010 and 2012, they in fact donated a total of 20,000 euros, and the same amount will be matched in the next two years. On July 31, a local weekly advertising paper celebrated this with the headline "The Pastor Can Stay!" But he has some skeptics as well.

Reinhold Henninger has been the head pastor of the area, Neufahrn parish, for 17 years. He becomes a bit reserved on the telephone when it comes to Bachmann's concept, explaining that it is all a very sensitive process. A few days later, Henninger submits a written statement instead.

The first issue, he writes, was Bachmann's dependence on donations. Henninger sees a possible danger in generous contributors gaining particular influence. There has also been some unrest among colleagues on the issue, and not everyone is happy with the special course taken in Hallbergmoos, which has made it easier for Bachmann to do all the things that the others would also like to do – but which they are not able to due to the size of their parishes and all the connected responsibilities.

Another issue, he adds, is the modern form of the church services. The Bavarian church published a new hymnal in 2007 – but how much of this Lutheran treasure trove was being put to good use there? And furthermore: "Will the presence of new arrivals to church services translate into their hands-on participation in the parish as well?" Henninger writes that there are plans for a long overdue factual analysis of Bachmann's concept in the near future, and that he is very thankful for this.

There is an electrical junction box right outside the new Emmaus Church in Hallbergmoos, with two graffiti-covered doors. Whoever it was who did it had given some thought to the future of the church, but not so much in terms of a goal or concept as a general direction. The petrol blue picture of Jesus' head is accompanied by three bright red lines in English: "Remember: Jesus is not a noun but a verb!" ◀

Kathrin Klette is a member of the 9th graduating class of the Evangelische Journalistenschule (Protestant School of Journalism) in Berlin

The bronze Luther Monument, the work of Johann Gottfried Schadow, has stood in Wittenberg's market square since 1821.



Placing Luther on a pedestal

Protestants have been celebrating the Reformation for four centuries, and their celebrations do much to reveal changes in the zeitgeist and the church **By Friederike Lübke**

It was six in the morning and still dark on October 31, 1817 when the bells rang soundly from the towers of the old Nikolaikirche, Katharinenkirche, and all the other Protestant churches of Frankfurt am Main. This was undoubtedly enough to rouse the people of the town, roughly 40,000 in number, from their slumber. The first worship services and communion would begin there exactly two hours later at 8 a.m. In the neighboring Duchy of Nassau, there were even firecrackers and fireworks. In 1817, the anniversary of the Reformation was celebrated for the first time on a grand scale in Protestant areas by the middle classes and not just by the nobility and the elite.

The celebrations were, above all, for the man who launched the Reformation in 1517 with his 95 theses, Martin Luther. As the face of the Reformation, he has been the subject of such tributes since 1617.

The history of Reformation jubilees began with a crisis. A hundred years after the Reformation began, the spread of Lutheranism had lost its momentum, and the Holy Roman Empire was divided in an unstable peace into Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic regions. In early 1617, the Lutheran duke and elector John George I of Saxony received a politically delicate dispatch. The University of Wittenberg asked for permission to celebrate the memory of its former lecturer Martin Luther. The duke agreed and made the commemoration obligatory for all of Electoral Saxony. The worship services and sermons were, however, all prewritten and prescribed in detail and provided as a recommendation to other Protestant regional rulers as well. They did not want any trouble with the Catholics.

At nearly the same time, the Reformed Elector Palatine, Frederick V, suggested a joint celebration for Reformed and Lutheran Christians. Frederick V was a member of the Protestant Union, composed of Reformed and Lutheran sovereigns and towns in the southern part of the Empire. Frederick V sought to improve the position of the Reformed and to strengthen the alliance, while he personally aspired to the Bohemian crown. Whereas the parties did not agree on a common celebration, they did decide on a common day of celebration, Sunday, November 2.

In the end, the Reformation was celebrated in 1617 in nearly all of the Protestant territories of the Holy Roman Empire, and members of the Protestant Union and others following its lead all celebrated together on the first Sunday in November. Electoral Saxony and other areas inspired by its example all celebrated for a full three days, beginning on October 30. As far as we now know, the celebrations only involved church services, in which pastors gave thanks for Luther and prayed for God to maintain the church. One of the sermon passages chosen was Daniel 11, about the downfall of the tyrant in the end times, with the interpretation involving opposition to the pope and the church's self-image as the true Church. Not long after the Protestant's plans were announced, the pope, in turn, proclaimed a Catholic Holy Year. And only a year later, in early summer 1618, the devastating Thirty Years' War broke out in Bohemia.

As Wolfgang Flügel, an expert for Reformation jubilees and a researcher with the Society for Reformation History of the University of Halle-Wittenberg explains: "Competition and crises were decisive in the realization and content of the 1617 celebrations." The historian Heinz Schilling speaks of "confrontation for the sake of preserving one's own identity". Both researchers have good sources for their findings. The anniversary worship services can be reconstructed from sermons and publications, which have been compiled after each jubilee, beginning with the original centennial celebrations, all to be evaluated later by historians and theologians. As Flügel sees it: "The feeling in all of the anniversary writings is that, if we have already been around for 100 years, we will be around for another 100 years."

The first jubilee set trends in motion, with the main focus on the figure of Martin Luther early on. The publication of the 95 Theses also took hold in collective memory as the beginning of the Reformation. "This was, however, not an explosive, revolutionary event, as it was depicted later," says Schilling, a recent author of a new Luther biography, even as he still understands the reasons for celebrating October 31: "It was the first domino to fall. He set a movement in motion that could no longer be stopped." This moment was, however, later embellished. As Schilling explains, "the ridiculous images of Luther with a hammer are a 19th-century myth." It is now a matter of dispute whether Luther even published his theses in Wittenberg at all. If they were in fact nailed to the door of the Castle Church



**Luther and Bismarck
adorning a postcard
marking the
Reformation's 400th
anniversary in 1917**

Before 1817 would come around for another centenary, however, Europe would change fundamentally both in political and social terms: It was the Era of Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Napoleon was already under close supervision on the small island of St. Helena, and the Congress of Vienna had reordered the continent just two years earlier. The old Holy Roman Empire was now replaced by the German Confederation with its 35 principalities and four free cities.

On the Sunday before Reformation Day 1817, a nine-page historical overview of the Reformation and Luther was read from the pulpit throughout Württemberg. And on Friday, October 31, the text was even longer to match the heightened celebrations. In Tübingen, for example, the town council and its citizens formed a ceremonious procession to the church in the morning, and in the evening, over 400 students paraded through the town carrying torches. The procession to church in Heilbronn was described with the words: “Peter Luther led the way, a local guildsman belonging to the Luther family in Mansfeld, carrying upon a white satin cushion a beautifully bound copy of Luther’s translation of the Bible [...] and accompanied by two church administrators and two young school-teachers. Upon entering the church, the Bible was placed on the altar next to the cup, with a bust of Luther in the center. Canvas paintings of Luther and Melancthon hung from the two main columns in front of the altar.” (Cit. from Meding, Wichmann von: *Jubel ohne Glauben? Das Reformationsjubiläum 1817 in Württemberg*, pp. 137f.)

there, however, then it was more likely to have been done by an assistant than by the theology professor himself. In the 1617 sermons, the posting of the theses is not even mentioned, as Wolfgang Flügel discovered.

One hundred years later, in 1717, the Reformation celebrations were planned from above as well, and once again the sensibilities of Catholics were to be taken into account. In January of that year, the “Solider King”, Frederick William I, Elector of Brandenburg and King in Prussia, set October 31 as the day for the celebrations in his territories, even before the Corpus Evangelicorum, set up in 1653 as the body in charge of religious affairs, had any say in the matter. It is likely that he sought to avoid a major celebration that might incense Catholics and the Catholic Emperor Charles VI. The Berlin court did not celebrate the occasion as the king himself was Reformed. By 1717, Reformation Day had become a matter for Lutherans alone in large parts of the Empire.

Catholics and Protestants did, however, continue to compete with each other, and Protestants had just lost an important member of their flock when Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony converted to Catholicism in order to become the King of Poland. His subjects were, however, permitted to maintain their own denominations. As it was prohibited, by imperial edict, to compose inflammatory writings against Catholics, old ones were sometimes simply reused from 1617, as many theologians were quite opposed to the positions of their rulers.

The sermons for the day that were collected and published by the theologian Ernst-Salomon Cyprian continue to focus on the legitimation of Protestants and the question of who constituted the true Church. Most preachers were not able to answer this particular question without insulting the others. Many Pietists criticized the tenor of the celebrations, with the prorektor of the Pietistic University of Halle, for example, raising his concerns about reducing the Reformation to Luther alone. Perhaps due to these Pietistic influences, very little celebration seems to have taken place in 1717 outside of church services, but this would change a century later.

The commemorations were no longer driven solely from the pulpit, and an increasing number of people participated in preparing the celebrations, and new enduring images would emerge such as that of Luther before the doors of the church. Commemorative coins with Luther’s portrait were now also made available, while the plinth was put in place in Wittenberg for the Luther Monument on October 31. When this was completed on November 1, 1821, according to a design by Johann Gottfried Schadow, it was the first statue of a commoner on German territory. To this day, tourists can photograph Luther as he stands there alone on the pedestal, holding a Bible in his hands and appearing to gaze off into the distance.

Even Goethe, who was already 68 at the time, is reported to have drawn up a design for a Luther monument, as Hartmut Lehmann explains in his article on Martin Luther and October 31, 1517. Goethe also endorsed having a day to commemorate both the Reformation and the defeat of Napoleon at the recent Battle of the Nations near Leipzig, as a celebration of humanity for everyone to share. Students and professors had a similar idea when they gathered on October 18, 1817 at Wartburg Castle and raised their glasses to Luther and the German nation.

A century later, the Reformation and national pride would be linked even more closely together. It was not in fact planned that way from the beginning, as the 400th anniversary of the Reformation was to be an international celebration, but the First World War would change everything. By 1917, the Germans had already been through the Battle of Verdun and a winter of hunger. The prospect of days dedicated to the cohesion of the embattled nation was therefore all the more welcome. There was a sort of “truce” between the denominations in Germany after Kaiser Wilhelm II said “I now only know Germany”. There was some disappointment nevertheless when, right on October 31 of all days, the Protestant Chancellor Georg Michaelis resigned after a short stint in office and his successor, Georg von Hertling, was Catholic.

Photos: left: Stiftung Lutherdenkstätten in Sachsen-Anhalt, right: Wartburgstiftung

One hundred years after the extensive celebrations of Martin Luther in the 19th century, one can only imagine what would have happened in 1917 if there had been no war. Instead, a celebration in Wittenberg was first postponed and then cancelled. The anniversary was still marked in words and images, with publications ranging from theological and historical tomes to somewhat lighter fare and even books for young girls with titles like “Why I love Luther”. Others planted Luther trees or wrote and sang Luther songs.

As Wolfgang Flügel explains, “the war was a disaster for Reformation celebrations”. It was, moreover, not only disastrous for the celebratory plans but also for the interpretation of the occasion. The focus was chiefly placed on the “German Luther”, who was praised for his courage and tenacity. The anniversary shifted in meaning from a means of Protestant self-assurance to the national celebration of a great German figure. While other voices were also to be heard, they formed a minority. Whether it was intentionally linked or not, Lessing’s play “Nathan the Wise” was performed at Berlin’s *Königliches Schauspielhaus* (“Royal Theatre”) on October 31. The 1917 anniversary would also begin a new Luther renaissance, with thousands of people making the pilgrimage to Luther’s Wittenberg after the war.

Further celebrations marked Luther’s 450th and 500th birthdays in 1933 and 1983, for which first the Nazi regime and later the East German government each made extensive use of Luther for their particular ideologies. The historian Heinz Schilling explains that “Luther was a paragon for three quarters of the German population; he was taken whenever a guiding figure was needed.” Luther could not be made responsible for this as one would have to understand him, like all historical figures, in the context of his own time. “But all anniversaries are linked to current interests,” Schilling said. He added that “we tend to feel superior to the past and say that we would do things differently, but I’m afraid that 2017 will be just the same.” Wolfgang Flügel is more optimistic, however. “The question always remains what Luther means for our own time. The more modern a society is, and the more pluralistic and diverse it is, the more pluralistic its interpretations will be as well.” ◀

Friederike Lübke is a member of the 9th graduating class of the Evangelische Journalistenschule (Protestant School of Journalism) in Berlin

The Bishop of Thuringia, Werner Leich (left) and East German leader Erich Honecker in front of Wartburg Castle in 1983. The GDR’s ruling party laid claim to Luther’s legacy for its own purposes upon his 500th birthday.



Eckhard Naumann (SPD) has been the mayor of Wittenberg since 1994.



MAYOR ECKHARD NAUMANN (SPD) ON THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE 2017 REFORMATION JUBILEE

“Wittenberg has never undergone such dynamic change”

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation will be celebrated in 2017, and Lutherstadt Wittenberg will be at the center of the celebrations, where it all began. Jens Büttner spoke with Mayor Eckhard Naumann (Social Democratic Party – SPD) about the high density of pastors in his town, about “Luther fatigue”, and the actual plans for 2017.

What is the status of Luther and his heritage in Wittenberg today?

Naumann: I think that we are treating the heritage of the Reformation with respect. Those whose role it is to manage this heritage are working closely together. The people of Wittenberg themselves are proud of their city and its renowned son. In a poll conducted by ZDF [German television network] a few years ago, Lutherstadt Wittenberg came in third place since thousands of people from Wittenberg named the Castle Church as their favorite place. Is that not an affirmation? And the name Lutherstadt [“Luther Town”] reminds us time and again of the town’s history. The people of Wittenberg therefore have a certain self-confidence that makes this relatively small town special. But there are of course those who sometimes remind us that there are in fact other things besides Luther as well.

What is the significance of the town in terms of its historical heritage?

Naumann: The Reformation and the figures of Luther, Melancthon, and Cranach are part of the global heritage. And the town is something like its curator – it does not belong to us, but we take care of it. And on the particular occasion of 2017, we of course would like to present this treasure particularly well and would like to come through as good administrators who are equal to their task.

What is the town doing specifically to prepare for the anniversary?

Naumann: The idea of the Luther Decade was partly developed in the town. We all understand that the town and all of us would be completely overwhelmed if we were to begin preparing for the anniversary only a year in advance. We need several years just for the infrastructure alone. This is combined with the fact that the 500th anniversary of the Reformation is a topic with many facets that have an effect on all areas of society. The Decade therefore prevented the burdens and expectations from crashing down on us all at once. The infrastructural preparations of course include getting the monuments of the Reformation into a condition appropriate to the anniversary and making sure that the town’s infrastructure is in shape, from parking spots and street signs to event sites.

How have the people of the town been receiving the numerous Protestant theologians who have been coming to Wittenberg now – supposedly there are now over 50 Protestant theologians among the 3,500 residents of the town center?

Naumann: I don’t know if there are that many. You can’t recognize the theologians on the street since they are just people and don’t walk around with halos. They do bring an active and intellectual potential to the town. I have yet to hear anyone say that we had too many pastors here. Wittenberg certainly does have an unusually high number of pastors per capita – in other places, pastors care for 20 congregations and here there are many more of them. But they have tasks with a national and international reach, while they are based in Wittenberg. This reflects the increasing number of church institutions in the town.

What do the people get from the preparations for Luther 2017 – what sorts of activities can be observed in civil society, the region’s economy, etc.?

Naumann: Bringing everything up to the latest standards and maintaining them is a great task, especially as 80 percent of our population does not belong to a church. We have now been able to do this, though, in a number of ways, including citizen forums, construction site tours, and web-based information – and the “Luther’s Wedding” town fair, in particular. That is something along the lines of a “hands-on Luther”, in which a large number of town groups have played an active role. The people here then come to realize that they are not expected to be confessing Christians. There is also a growing understanding in the town that this place is important to many people around the world for religious reasons. From craftspeople to cultural and sports organizations, there have been numerous activities and a growing interest in playing an active role in preparing for the years of the Luther Decade and for 2017, and to contribute to their promotion.

How are the specific preparations for 2017 going?

Naumann: Until the early 1990s, Wittenberg was just one place among many for the EKD and the regional churches. Every so often people would emphasize that Luther did not rail against Rome just so that we could create a Protestant Rome. There was, however, a change in this feeling as the Reformation anniversary began to approach and in the understanding that Wittenberg was looked at as having a completely different significance from outside than from within. In specific terms, we are renovating the Castle Church, and the Castle is being expanded to include a seminary. There will also be a reception center for the Castle Church as a world heritage site as well as a research library dedicated to the history of the Reformation. A new building will be used for the seminarians while the *Stiftung Luthergedenkstätten* (“Luther Memorials Foundation”) can use the Augusteum building. We will also have a new town museum. The town’s history will then be presented on an equal footing with Reformation history. The train station will of course also be refurbished and new parking spaces will be created. I think that Wittenberg has never undergone such positive dynamic change.

How have the representatives of church and state been working together?

Naumann: These immense changes are only possible because of the unusually productive cooperation among the EKD, the Union of Evangelical Churches (Reformed and United churches in Germany – UEK), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the individual regional churches, local participants, the federal government, the state government, and the town itself. The Holy Spirit certainly played something of a role as well. You can’t just organize all that. As is the case for all major projects, there can be much euphoria and optimism early on only to give way to the struggles of each individual challenge. I do hope that the Holy Spirit does not leave us.

In what ways are you working together with other Luther centers such as Eisleben, Eisenach, Erfurt, and Mansfeld on the preparations for the anniversary?

Naumann: We have worked together with the other Luther memorial sites for a long time and in a variety of ways. As the 500th anniversary of the Reformation has begun to enter into people’s awareness, there has been an increasing amount of interest on the part of other towns to work together with us. There is now, for example, a new network of “Towns of the Reformation in Brandenburg” such as Treuenbrietzen, Jüterbog, and Herzberg. And there are of course the traditional ties to Eisleben, Erfurt, Eisenach, and Torgau. While acknowledging the importance of the other sites, I would like to stress, however, that Wittenberg is the central location for the 2017 Reformation anniversary.

Has Luther 2017 already become a concrete factor for tourism?

Naumann: Yes, but we can’t quantify it since visitors are not normally asked whether they came because of Luther, just to see the lovely town, or for other reasons. Our tourism experts have, however, reported an increase that they had not expected. This affects town tours, restaurants, and sleeping accommodations. This has also been reflected clearly in the town’s appearance and in church services. Our churches have had increasing numbers of visitors from elsewhere in services and concerts. For several years now, the American organization Wittenberg English Ministry has been providing four services a week for tourists over six months each year.

Are most tourists expected to come in 2017?

Naumann: It is up to our ability to sensibly even out numbers of visitors over time. It is our goal to extend people’s interest in Wittenberg as much as possible. That is why the topical years of the Luther Decade are especially positive in

that they lead us continually closer to the Reformation anniversary. In 2017, there will first be an event linked to the Protestant *Kirchentag* event followed from May through October by the EKD’s “World Reformation Exhibition” project in Wittenberg for global Protestantism. Highlights will extend throughout all of 2017 but also beyond even that. We are now already making sure that many construction sites also serve as “showcases” where people can already see something happening.

Is there a danger of the years of expectations raised in the course of the Luther Decade then being disappointed by the relatively small town?

Naumann: I’m not worried about that. We don’t want to raise expectations for a particularly large event to take place here on October 31, 2017. And we’ve also come to discover how many resources and reserves this small town still has to offer. What I am now a little worried about, however, is that we still don’t have a large parking lot where even a thousand cars can park. But we’re working on it.

The Protestant *Kirchentag* is planned for Berlin in 2017 and will be followed by a major outdoor event in Wittenberg. What can the town imagine for that in particular?



I hope the Holy Spirit does not leave us.



Wittenberg's Luther House was built in 1504 as an Augustinian monastery. Luther began residing there in 1508.



Naumann: It is supposed to be a big closing event with participants from both the *Kirchentag* and from throughout the region. The fields south of the Elbe River are planned to be used for it. We are convinced that we will be able to manage the logistics especially as Wittenberg has an excellent rail connection on the Berlin-Leipzig line. That will not overtax the town and its resources either. The *Kirchentag* event will take place in spring 2017 to be followed by the 95-day World Protestantism Exhibition in Wittenberg, and then by the actual 500th anniversary of the nailing of the Theses at the end of October.

What will remain in Wittenberg of Luther 2017?

Naumann: The experience of a great year will remain, in which the whole world comes to Wittenberg. The Reformation emerged from this small town to move out into the world, and now the world is coming back to Wittenberg. It will be great if a lot of people can share this experience. Secondly, I hope that Wittenberg and its people have the feeling that they were good hosts – without any scandals or unpleasant situations arising. And for the months and years after 2017, I hope that the 500th Reforma-

tion anniversary process is not just put back on the shelf but that awareness for the Reformation, its effects, and its messages, and an interest in thinking it through at the site remains alive into the future. And I hope, and I should have perhaps said this first, that this town inspires people to live and work here, to remain here or to come back later. The institutions and enterprises that are already here, or which will arrive here by then, will play a central part in all this, together with all of the additional people who will be coming to the town. ◀

Jens Büttner is the editor-in-chief of the eastern German office of the epd Protestant news agency (*epd-Landesdienst Ost*).

In the beginning was God's word – "Perspectives on the 2017 Reformation anniversary"

The introduction of a declaration draft on the focal topic of the Evangelical Church in Germany 2012 Synod

A long process of development comes before any official EKD Synod declaration ("Kundgebung") is approved and released. In the case in question, a preparatory committee appointed by the Synod presidium worked on the text for seven months. This included four all-day sessions at the church office in Hanover, and numerous telephone calls and e-mail exchanges with drafts before a final version could be presented to the presidium. On November 5, the text was finally introduced to the Synod plenary by the chairman of the committee, Provost Horst Gorski. This was followed by a passionate debate within the synod. The text was subsequently revised with their suggestions, and the new text was again submitted to the plenary by the chairman of the committee on November 7. The Synod discussed the new text and made more changes, although these were now minor by nature. This finalized declaration was then approved unanimously – with no abstentions – by the Synod.

Even such a brief overview of this process gives us an idea of what a particular type of text the EKD Synod declaration constitutes. It represents as wide a variety as possible of views and movements from within German Protestantism, and is particularly crafted to address all who may be interested with in the church and the public at large. The reception of such a paper, for example, in congregational groups, or even its use in confirmation classes requires a sort of translation and didactic preparation. It can therefore be useful to know more about the preparation process and the thoughts and questions that arise in those discussions. Such a product of a complicated procedure, but one with the goal of being received by a broad audience, does indeed run the risk of appearing opaque in terms of both language and thought. Questions can arise such as why is it written in one way and not another, or why certain aspects were chosen from all possible aspects to be discussed and others not.

The committee chairman provided the synod with help in this regard through his introductory address. It is our hope that the following edited version of the address, which adds further details from the subsequent synodal debate, can help the readers of this publication to understand these "theological thoughts" as well.

[– The editors]

Introduction

"In the beginning was the word" – in the beginning of the world was God's word. At the beginning of our work there was also a word, and perhaps it was a word suggested by the presidium, but maybe it just emerged itself: Halftime! We are halfway through the Decade leading to the 2017 Reformation Jubilee. This provided a clear scope for our task: It was not about a declaration on the Reformation Jubilee! We cannot already run out of steam five years before the actual date! Instead it is a sort of halftime whistle, a midway call for us to use the next five years to move toward the jubilee together. It is a call that should push us somewhat against the grain, to introduce and hold open new questions and thoughts, and which should invite and encourage us to reflect together on all that is important to us about the faith of the Reformation.

In the preparatory committee, we began with an informal survey among the people around us, whether family members, friends, neighbors, or colleagues: What do you expect from the Reformation anniversary – if you expect anything at all? What emerged, among all the diverse individual answers, was a large, common mass of expectation that the reformational aspects of

the Reformation would be brought to the fore, and in a way in which we can share it with anyone, and with our children in particular; in a way that makes it clearer what it means to be Protestant; and in a way that expresses some of the joy of being Protestant – without however creating our own identity through the exclusion of others.

It very soon became clear to us in our discussions of the survey results that if we wished to achieve this goal we would have to go into things at a profound level – biblically and theologically. We would have to dig into what really matters. This has to be less about issues of organization and church politics, but we instead need to delve into the depths of our background. We need to explore the origins of the Reformation as a penitential movement, and to seek out its theological impulses, to absorb them, and to ask what these impulses can speak to us today and touch our hearts just as directly as they evidently did back then.

This is how the declaration draft presented here took on the form of "theological impulses", which is unusual for a synod declaration and therefore also longer. They are to become theological impulses that are less like fast food and

more like a solid meal – a text that demands time and attention. We need to move away for a moment from the busy activity of our times and focus on the depths of our heritage, and then invite the church and the public at large to join us, think with us, and to celebrate with us in the end. That is why the text concludes with an invitation. The synod's message should be: We are inviting you! We are passing along God's invitation to draw nearer to Jesus Christ and his message of salvation. And we invite you to celebrate with us a joyous and reflective jubilee!

Upon these considerations it became clear that the text would somehow have to begin with Luther's 95 Theses, as that is indeed where the beginnings of the Reformation movement are to be found. This holds true notwithstanding the historical question, and one which is not entirely resolvable, of whether the theses were in fact nailed to the door of Wittenberg's Castle Church on October 31, 1517. In terms of its historical influence, this collective memory has indeed remained in place and has gained an unimaginable power over the past five centuries. Especially for those who are not involved with the church, the image of Luther pounding a notice into the door of the church is often the first thing they think of when it comes to the



Hamburg Provost Horst Gorski speaks during the introduction of the declaration draft at the 2012 EKD Synod, convening at Timmendorfer Strand.

Reformation. It would not make sense for us not to place this event at the beginning and at the center of our considerations.

We even made an attempt at writing the Synod declaration strictly as an interpretation of the 95 Theses. It became clear to us, however, that this would not work out in that – and this was a helpful observation in itself – the 95 Theses did in fact have limitations in terms of penitential theology and in that the text was in some ways more of a pre-Reformation text. The view remained, nevertheless, that a declaration on the Reformation anniversary would have to at least build upon the first and best known of his Theses. It was indeed with Luther's theses on penance – notwithstanding all predecessors such as Jan Hus – that this world-changing movement would begin.

What should, however, be the content of the message? We were rapidly caught up in a peculiar dynamic: Whenever we thought we had expressed a message clearly, counterarguments would arise, and vice-versa. One committee member helped us with the remark that “one can always fall off either side of a horse.” We became aware of the fact that it was the dynamics of the subject itself that emerged in our dis-

cussions. The faith and theology of the Reformation appeared to be unsuited toward being solved like a simple arithmetic equation and reduced to a common denominator. They are perhaps so suited to real life because they do not simply resolve tensions but describe people as beings living with – and enduring – all their inconsistencies before God.

This led to the idea of placing each of the theological impulses into different categories with opposing pairs such as: “fear of death and living hope”; “pious and political”; “failure and reconciliation”; “truth and love”; and “community and participation.”

There were other areas of tension that we attempted to reconcile, however not as overt categories but within the topics themselves that run through and provide shape to the text as a whole: Which comes first the Law or the Gospel, God's love or his wrath? Is it the call for penance or God's promise of love? We placed penance at the beginning of the five chapters, but sought also to anchor the call to penance in grace, as relates to Peter's miraculous fish catch: Just as Peter trusts Jesus fully, telling him “if you say so”, so too can we take a risk on penance and repentance.

Furthermore, how are we to come to terms with both the “light” and “shadow” sides of the Reformation? The suggestion was made for the synod to apologize for Luther's writings against the Jews. But how can someone in fact apologize for a historical figure? It did seem to us to be both possible and necessary, however, to speak of the guilt and injustice and to distance ourselves from them. The relevant passages in the 4th theological thought and in the final section belong together.

The text was intentionally left incomplete. In terms of the workings of the synod, this developed from the wish to allow for an opportunity to make additions to the text for both the plenary conference of the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK – consisting of the Reformed and United churches of Germany) and the general synod of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD), both of which, as part of a linking agreement, meet at the same time or nearly at the same time as the EKD Synod. The declaration was also to serve as an invitation to continue to work together, i.e. to continue on the text for the next five years, not only at synod meetings but everywhere, in church congregations, groups, circles, individuals...



We chose five as the number of the impulses since it seemed, symbolically speaking, to be the least round of our choices: 3, 4, 7, 12, 144,000 would all be numbers that stand for completion. Five practically “calls out” for further expansion ... just as the five breads of the famous miracle turned into more. The three questions of where we come from, where we are, and what we hope for are meant to lead us into an open-ended thought process, and without it becoming a kind of constricting straitjacket. We have come to see how this structure can help us find our way and how it can invite us to join, contribute to, and build on this thought process.

Without a doubt, one particular characteristic of the present text is the understanding of Protestantism as part of the Enlightenment heritage. We are aware that this is a historically sensitive point, as it is not about presenting a historically correct description of intellectual history, but instead about placing ourselves today within the framework of the Enlightenment. It is indeed our view that our faith today is inseparably connected to reason, freedom, tolerance, and non-violence, even if – or indeed because we in fact know that this was not always the case throughout the course of history. Protestantism is a form of Christianity that has taken on this Enlightenment heritage in this way. The clear words in our text regarding a faith that values this heritage can indeed provide an important contribution toward framing the role of religion in our society in, for example, the public discourse that followed the legal ruling against circumcision and the film that insulted the Prophet Muhammad. It thus seems to us to be of particular significance

when, for instance, Wolfgang Huber speaks of religions cleansing themselves of the spirit of violence as being a necessary consequence of their histories.

In the course of the synod’s discussions, the synod’s *Kundgebung* declaration text grew increasingly specific and “political”. The synod recalled that the reformers were in fact both “pious” and “political”, and sought to outline “penance” and “repentance” in specific terms, for example, in promoting the development of other forms of growth. The UEK plenary conference saw importance in connecting the message of justification by faith alone with the kinds of performance pressure that plague many people today.

In the final section, entitled “The Reformation continues”, certain messages are presented that may well sound somewhat lofty and difficult to understand. This part of the text in fact shows a shift in both form and language, and deals with topics involving “church politics”, the place of the anniversary in the context of the global community of Protestant churches, and ecumenical relations, and those with the Roman Catholic Church in particular.

As part of the aforementioned “linking agreement” of the synod meetings, the VELKD General Synod was addressed by Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation. In his speech, Junge introduced the idea of the Reformation as a “global citizen” and reminded the churches of Germany that they were not only the starting point for an impulse but that this impulse had also come full

circle, returning to Germany and enriching us with experiences from all around the world.

Another address was held by Kurt Cardinal Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. He presented the Vatican’s position that only the Roman Church was the “apostolic” church, which, as guaranteed by the papal office, stood in an uninterrupted tradition dating back to the original apostles. Meeting this challenge, the synod self-confidently established that the Protestant churches were just as “apostolic” as they were; like the apostles, they were true witnesses to the Gospel, praying for one another, and extending hospitality to one another. This clarification, furthermore, did not exclude an invitation to the Roman Catholic Church to celebrate the anniversary, but indeed explicitly included it.

We should also recall that the 2017 Reformation celebrations will in fact be the first jubilee in which the Protestant churches will join together in pulpit and altar fellowship. It would take the Leuenberg Agreement, concluded in 1973 among most Protestant churches, to make this possible.

One thing is missing – and I am surprised at this now – and that is a lack of any talk of humor! Or should Protestantism perhaps be humorless? I am particularly surprised at this because the work of the committees, which involved the representatives of the various offices and the presidium, was full of humor and generally had a light tone even during more difficult phases! It would therefore actually have been a likely choice to also write something about humor and the inner lightness that emerges from God’s love. Wouldn’t it be great if people would say of us Protestants: They take their cause seriously, just not themselves ...! ◀

Provost Dr. Horst Gorski, Hamburg, was the chairman of the preparatory committee for the 2012 EKD Synod.

Provost Gorski introduced the draft of the Declaration (“*Kundgebung*”) on November 5, 2012 at the 5th meeting of the 11th Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany at Timmendorfer Strand on Germany’s Baltic coast.

Theological thoughts in the run-up to the 2107 Reformation Jubilee

Declaration (“Kundgebung”) of the 11th Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany at its 5th meeting in 2012

“In the beginning was the word...”

“Simon answered, ‘Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.’ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.” (Luke 5:5–6)

One venture can change everything: “Yet if you say so.” Simon Peter and the other fisherman trust in Jesus’ word. And that changes everything: The catch, the day, life itself.

Christians have made this venture throughout the ages, trusting in nothing other than Jesus Christ and his word.

1. Fear of death and living hope

Where do we come from?

“Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said ‘repent’ (Matt. 4:17) willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.”

(Thesis 1 of Martin Luther’s 95 Theses)

The Reformation begins with this very venture. Caught up in fear and in search of the God of mercy, the monk Martin Luther was dismayed at the state of his church. He recognized the errancy of the mere repetition of pious words and of the granting of grace through the sale of indulgences. God’s love cannot be bought and sold!

Luther instead had one hope: Solus Christus, Christ alone – the word of God that was in the beginning, became human, and in which all is renewed. With his 95 Theses, Luther sought to rouse people from their slumber and draw them into a dispute, and quite a public one at that. It was this invitation that he nailed to the door of Wittenberg’s Castle Church on October 31, 1517.

Penance is repentance, a turning around that God’s love brings about in us. The fullness of this love transforms entire lives, hopes and fears, deeds and inactivity. It places people, in the sight of God, before the choice of how to shape their lives.

With his call for penance, Martin Luther set into motion a powerful movement of liberation. God seeks to free people from their inner narrowness and from their self-aggrandizement, their tendency to wish to be like God and thus to behave like the devil.

This, God’s love, can also become a place for people to feel at home. Secure in God’s love, people are free from themselves, free for God and their neighbors, and free for a life of hope. The net is full – without us having to do anything for it.



Synod member Steve Kennedy Henkel presents a short video on the main topic of the 2012 EKD Synod meeting at Timmendorfer Strand.

Where do we stand?

At home in God’s love, we trust in the miracle of the fish catch. God can change everything. This promise continues to apply to all those today who may have existential fears or fears of death, to all who are caught in a crisis of meaning, and all who are under daily pressures to perform, who are anxious due to their own limitations, or angry about the injustice and violence of the world. Freed from the pressure of having to rely only on themselves in these circumstances, faith keeps our contemplation of God alive and encourages us to take on responsibility for our neighbors and for the world.

Chancellor Angela Merkel took part in the discussions at the 2012 EKD Synod on the 2017 Reformation anniversary. With her are EKD Synod Chairman Nikolaus Schneider (2nd from r.); EKD Synod Praeses and Bundestag Vice President Katrin Göring-Eckardt (r.); Prelate Bernhard Felmborg, Plenipotentiary Representative of the EKD Council to the Federal Republic of Germany and the EU (l.); and Jochen Bohl, the Bishop of Saxony (2nd from l.).



Yet, for many people, God is no longer an issue. Our words no longer speak to them – something we cannot just simply gloss over.

What do we hope for?

We hope for people to turn to a life centered on God – and thus on their fellow people as well. We hope that many, in the midst of their darkest hours, will find trust in God and allow his love to provide their lives with new direction. Even as people often act more like wolves toward one another, we will not give up hope that God’s love can transform them to treat each other humanely as fellow human beings. “In summary: we are to be human and not God” (Martin Luther, in a 1530 letter to Spalatin).

The Bible is the foundation that supports us – it is upon this ground that we find our answers. The Gospel, rediscovered by Martin Luther, frees us to believe, to hope, and to love.

2. Pious and political

Where do we come from?

“That we are recognized as disciples of Christ as we love one another just as Christ loved us, therein lies the Law and the Prophets, the true and proper worship ...” (Huldrych Zwingli, in his draft for Berchtold Haller’s closing address, 1528)

The disciples trusted Jesus Christ in the midst of their daily work. They witnessed the miracle that their nets were full despite their own unsuccessful labors. People continue to hope for such a miracle today, the midst of their toil, as laborious it can be and as unsuccessful it can seem.

The spirituality of the reformers is anchored in God’s word yet geared toward everyday life. It is pious while being passionately political in its commitment to people’s welfare.

Church music and particularly congregational hymns saw a renaissance hitherto unknown. Worship service does indeed occur in service to and thanksgiving for God’s word, but also in service to one’s fellow people. “Work as though in prayer; pray as though at work.” (Martin Luther) Struggle and contemplation, work and its salutary interruption are all parts of a whole: God set limits to our daily toil by instituting pauses in the course of each day and a day of rest.

Where do we stand?

Worship service is the source of Christian life. It entails a focus on God’s word, while there is distraction elsewhere; community while there is loneliness elsewhere; and stillness while there is noise elsewhere. Among the strengths of Protestant worship culture are the joyous cele-

bration of the Eucharist, the vibrant preaching of the Gospel, and music and song. In Protestant worship culture, people serve God through their hearts, voices, and hands, and are provided with a spiritual home.

Daily life is also a challenge to faith. The different Reformation movements have all brought forth a clear ethos of daily living, each in a different way. They have worked for a just organization of the community as impressively demonstrated by the diverse social work of the church, its public statements on social issues, as well as the diaconal services of companies and agencies, and in church parishes. We will continue to maintain this tradition as well.

What do we hope for?

We hope for the continuation of Protestant worship as a way of praising God with all our senses and not to reduce him to narrow intellectual terms. We rejoice in the richness of Protestant spirituality.

The achievements in terms of education, career, and domestic life brought forth by the Protestant ethos all require strong spiritual foundations. These foundations can also lead to approaches to repentance in connection with the social and political problems of our times such as the development of alternative forms of growth.

3. Failure and reconciliation

Where do we come from?

“What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own, but belong — body and soul, in life and in death — to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.” (From the 1st question of the Heidelberg Catechism)

How do I come to a merciful God? Not only were the Reformers preoccupied with this question, as this was in fact the central issue in the lives of many people in the closing decades of the Middle Ages: How can I be saved when my life is so full of failure and sin?

Our net is full, as the disciples saw. God grants his love in specific ways. The understanding of the futility of our own actions transforms into an experience of fullness. At the center of all the reformers’ theology lay the words *pro me* – “for me”. The discovery that Christ died and was resurrected “for me” in particular was the answer to their central question; nobody could save themselves through their own efforts. Only because God forgives our failure and sin, can we be reconciled with God and with ourselves.

Where do we stand?

The question of reconciliation and justification has remained, even if in a different sort of package. We experience this question today in our search for the meaning of life, our pursuit of our life goals and yearnings, in our struggle for recognition and approval, and in our quest for happiness. The experience has remained the same: Life is still fragmental. There is no perfect life; and nobody can give their own lives meaning on their own. Success and accomplishment are beyond us. They are not founded on continual performance and striving for limitless growth. The message of the cross and resurrection casts light, in the face of eternity, on the dark and unreconciled aspects of human life.

The basic Christian theme of God’s reconciliatory act in Jesus’ death on the cross has never been self-explanatory, and gives way to doubts and questions in the minds of many. The Bible itself presents a variety of interpretations of the death of Christ, although they all involve the same mystery of God’s will to offer grace in Jesus Christ.

What do we hope for?

We see the Luther Decade and the preparations for the 2017 Reformation anniversary as an op-

portunity to continue to work together on the central topic of God’s reconciliatory act in Jesus’ death on the cross, and we invite all Christians, of whatever denomination, to join us in meeting this challenge for our times. We also invite everyone else to begin to approach for themselves the mystery of salvation through Jesus’ death and resurrection and to discover the broad horizon of Christian hope in an eternity with God. We hope that the path to the 2017 Reformation anniversary is connected to a new beginning toward proclaiming this message to all in a manner that is powerful but clear.

All throughout the world, irreconcilable wounds are being created and rifts formed. Reconciliation must not however replace the “discernment of spirits”. We hope to make a contribution toward the analysis of injustice and conflict and thus toward reconciliation on the basis of true dialogue.

4. Truth and love

Where do we come from?

“Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.” (John Calvin, Institutes, 1:1)

What is a human being in the eyes of God? Why would God fill human nets? What should people believe, what should they do, and what will save them? There was a debate back then over the truth behind these questions.

Religion deals with existential questions – the most personal, ultimate question of life. That is why religion never ceases to instigate a struggle over truth. Those who have the courage to place all their hope in their faith are in danger of losing their respect for other religious convictions. When truth and love come into opposition with one another, faith grows intolerant.

The reformers were indeed faced with this danger as well. They were enthusiastic and inspired by their liberating discovery and demanded freedom of conscience for themselves. This enthusiasm would, however, also have a darker side to it. This included Martin Luther’s tirades against Jews and the peasants of the German Peasants’ Uprising as well as the persecution of dissidents, which went as far as the execution by burning in 1553 of Michael Servetus in Geneva. While tolerance was a birthright of the Reformation, it was often lost soon after its birth. Free churches, and peace churches in par-

ticular, would be the ones to spread the ideas of tolerance and freedom of conscience.

The reformers valued reason, alongside the Bible, as a God-given source of human wisdom when it came to how to act. They thus supported education and laid the foundations for the Enlightenment that would come later in Europe. The reformers’ successors would, however, often be the ones to battle the spread of the Enlightenment.

Where do we stand?

The churches of the Reformation take on the responsibility for shaping our world by contributing to efforts for peace in the world with the understanding that religions have a potential for reconciliation and peace. That they cleanse themselves of the spirit of violence is a necessary consequence of their histories.

The churches of the Reformation can also contribute their experience to the heritage of the Enlightenment. They recognize that it is now no longer possible to connect with this heritage without being aware of the “dialectic of Enlightenment”, in which the Enlightenment can end up in a “divinization” of the human alongside the simultaneous contempt for the human dignity of individuals or entire groups of people, and in a boundless esteem for reason with its supposed purposive rationalities which are no longer subject to critical reflection. Should people be able to do everything that they can? When does responsibility come into play in setting boundaries to freedom – perhaps when it comes to the artificial alteration of genetic material, financial behavior, or the use of natural resources?

We are aware of our indebtedness to the achievements of the Enlightenment in the face of a continued fascination with inhuman ideologies, whether this involves increased fundamentalism among religions or a disenchantment with reason that is occasionally to be observed in areas such as culture, education, and politics.

What do we hope for?

We hope that our efforts as Protestants help to counteract the seductive power of doctrines of political salvation and racist ideologies. Having experienced despotism and dictatorship, we strongly oppose all forms of inhumanity and extremism.

We hope to deepen our dialogue with other denominations and religions. We bring a faith to

this dialogue that holds the Enlightenment heritage in high esteem, one which understands God and a God of love and freedom.

With regard to research and science, we seek a dialogue with all who make efforts to understand and shape our world. If reason and faith are God's gifts to humankind, there cannot be a fundamental opposition between the two. There can, however, certainly be limitations to human understanding. Recognizing this fact grants us humility.

5. Participation and community

Where do we come from?

“For whatever issues from baptism may boast that it has been consecrated priest, bishop, and pope...” (Martin Luther, Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, 1520, cit. in J. H. Robinson, ed. *Readings in European History*, 1906)

Anyone who has been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ holds a share in all the tasks of the church. God shares with everyone in his fullness. All who are baptized are called to bear witness to and proclaim the Gospel in word and deed. Impulses have emerged from this basic concept in terms of communications, education, and emancipation.

The use of the printing press to distribute theological ideas and translations of the Bible by Martin Luther and other reformers, the promotion of schools, and the founding of new universities, along with the participation of laypeople in church bodies, have all been decisive in the practical realization of the “priesthood of all believers” in the development of the churches of the Reformation.

“The great benefits of book printing cannot be expressed in words. By means of this invention, the Holy Scriptures are open to all tongues and languages and can be spread everywhere; all arts and sciences can be preserved, increased and passed on to our descendants.” (Martin Luther in his *Table Talk*)

Where do we stand?

“Speaking together, acting together, leading together” – this describes the structure of the Protestant church according to the declaration of the 2007 EKD Synod in Dresden. Participation is a basic concept of the Reformation, and the basis of all just participation lies in educa-

tion and individual responsibility, matters that are advocated by Protestant Christians.

What do we hope for?

We hope for our society to be such that just participation is guaranteed for all with nobody left behind. The concept of the priesthood of all who are baptized entails strong impulses in terms of communications, education, and emancipation. We seek to take on the challenges of the Internet as a medium for the communication of the Gospel and new forms of pastoral care, along with efforts to promote education in daycare centers, schools, and universities, and to encourage people to become involved in church and society despite the prevailing trend of individualization.

The Reformation continues

The Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany encourages its member churches and their congregations to use the time through the 2017 Reformation anniversary for an intensive look into the main themes of the Reformation faith: What is reformatory about the Reformation? What does the justification of sinners mean for us and for the generation to come? How does faith touch my heart? In what ways can we bear our responsibility for the world?

Finding answers to these questions also involves coming to terms with our own shadows. Remembrance, clarity, and distance are required in response to times in our history when wrong decisions were made or disasters brought about. The message of reconciliation is first needed by those who proclaim it.

The Reformation has in fact become a global citizen. It belongs to everyone. In the course of 500 years it has spread across the world and become an intrinsic part of any number of countries and cultures. It has also returned to us in this way, showering us with the gifts of experience from around the world. We are looking forward to an anniversary that we can celebrate together with the churches in Europe and worldwide.

The churches of the Reformation are successors to the apostles and live out their apostolicity in their faithfulness to the Gospel, in prayer for one another, and in their hospitality. The 2017 Reformation anniversary will be the first jubilee celebration in which the Protestant churches will share table and pulpit fellowship in accordance with the 1973 Leuenberg Agreement.

The synod encourages the churches to highlight their growing commonalities but also to acknowledge any remaining rancor in their ecumenical discourse, whether among Protestants or with other churches. There is more that unites us than divides us. It is the common task of all Christians to proclaim Christ as Lord of the world for the 21st century.

The Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany invites everyone in churches and congregations, in the political world and society at large, East and West, North and South, to join us in the run-up to the 2017 Reformation anniversary to search for ways of peace and justice through the spirit of faith, love, and hope.

Welcome to the heartland of the Reformation! We are looking forward to all who will come and join us in seeking out Jesus Christ and his word, and in hoping, believing, and celebrating!

Timmendorfer Strand, 7 November 2012

Praeses of the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany
Katrin Göring-Eckardt

The members of the preparation committee for the focal topic of the 5th meeting of the 11th Synod can be found on page 146.

“In the beginning was the word – Perspectives for the 2017 Reformation anniversary”

Ideas from the General Synod of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) and the decisions of the conference committees of the plenary conference of the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK – consisting of the Reformed and United churches of Germany) for the discussions of the EKD Synod on November 5, 2012.



The General Synod of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) 2012 at Timmendorfer Strand met to discuss as its main topic “Lutheran churches moving forward: Approaches to the 2017 Reformation anniversary”. The Presidium of the General Synod (left to right): Dr. Annekathrin Preidel (associate member), Superintendent Philipp Meyer (1st Vice President), Prof. Dr. Dr. Wilfried Hartmann (President), and Rev. Dr. Carsten Rentzing (2nd Vice President). Pauline Villwock (associate member) is not in the picture.



The Reformation continues on...

It all started with a door. We all have an image in our minds of Martin Luther in his black monk's habit approaching the massive door of Wittenberg's Castle Church with a hammer to pound into it a large piece of ink-covered ornate paper. Luther indeed opened up new doors and new avenues with his Reformation view of a God who is directly approachable and available to humankind. We should take a page from this movement, seeking out ways to open new doors and venture upon new paths as we approach the 2017 Reformation Jubilee.

1. Doors to the heart

Martin Luther rediscovered the word that opens doors. He also knew how to express it in a way that moved the hearts of the people. The task of

translation remains with us to this day, and all forms of human communication need to be used to this end. The General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, Rev. Martin Junge, explained most strikingly how much the word can also be received in the “body language of the church”. For a long time, Protestantism had connected its focus on the word to a rejection of corporality.

God, however, became man in Jesus Christ: The word became flesh. God touches us and allows himself to be touched by us. The “corporality of the church” has included, from the very beginning, the sacraments, Baptism and the Eucharist, in which God draws nearer to the people. We encourage congregations to explore practices such as remembering baptisms, anointing of the sick, and sharing the peace.

2. Church doors

Luther did not wish to close any doors. History tells us, of course, that it did nevertheless come to division. We are thankful that some doors have now been opened, especially over the past 50 years. This includes the Leuenberg Agreement (1973), the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999), as well as the process of reconciliation with the Mennonites (2011).

The Reformation continues on today. For us, this means courageously opening up spaces in which coming together, engaging in theological discussion, and sharing the Eucharist can be

possible. It would also be an opportunity to re-discover and mark Pentecost as the ecumenical celebration of our common 2000-year tradition of faith.

3. Doors to the world

Martin Luther opened the door to modernity by a crack. He recognized that each individual is personally responsible before God and is to act on his behalf in affecting the world. This provided an important prerequisite for the later development of educational justice, social justice, and diaconal action into central Protestant values – even as this was also the effect of other societal processes. This was not only the case

for us in Germany but indeed for the churches of the Reformation all around the world. The Reformation has become a global citizen. And we are thankful for the ecumenical encounters, for the dialogue, and for the learning processes that have emerged from that. This is why we wish to celebrate the Reformation anniversary all throughout the world – trusting that God will open the doors for us to the future.



A Justification

1. The 2017 Reformation Jubilee is not only a celebration of the solidification of the identity of the Protestant Church but also an occasion to restate the message of the Reformation for everyone. This is about making a difference in our society with this message. And we must take into account that only that which is relevant to all people will contribute to understanding within the Church as well. This is, in particular, a test of our ability to speak about God in a comprehensible manner.

2. Thoughts of a merciful God have only seemingly passed from the human range of experience. Even today, we can observe numerous manifestations of an aggrieved conscience among us and in our midst:

- ▶ people breaking apart due to permanent (self-imposed) overexertion;
- ▶ the sense of having to justify oneself all the time;
- ▶ addiction to consumption as a way of establishing meaning in one's life;
- ▶ the pressure to create a perfect image for oneself in the face of one's own imperfection.

The human condition of overexertion can be understood as the expression of a distance from God. We need to delve into the theological dimension of these burdens. In pastoral terms, one must speak here of “sin” and “forgiveness”.

3. The motto of the Reformation anniversary “In the beginning was the Word” needs to be developed in its biblical sense: The bridge between fear and trust is Christ himself as is attested in Scripture. It was God in Jesus Christ who sought us out in our state of distance from him. Since then the words of Acts (17:27) apply: God is not far from each one of us. Because God justifies us in Christ, we are relieved of the entire burden of justifying ourselves. This message of justification helps us to experience ourselves as imperfect people to be accepted and “esteemed”. We thus learn to live with the fragmentary nature of our lives, and to affirm our own imperfection.

4. This orientation toward the human condition requires that we undergo a change in perspective. The question of why faith in fact “requires” the church is to be taken seriously and to be addressed. The church needs to be discovered as a

place in which the truth about people is spoken and endured. It is, however, especially the place in which the Gospel, God's affirmation of every human being, is experienced and received.

B Common priesthood

1. The doctrine of the common priesthood of all who are baptized was the key moment of Reformation theology in terms of social change. It constitutes the social dimension of the doctrine of justification.

2. This impulse encourages the structuring of life together in the church and society in such a way that allows for freedom to be experienced there. The institutional church and state organs are to be understood, in this manner, as institutions that guarantee freedoms and which require continued reforming to this end.

3. The church is viable for the future as it connects church life, life in society, and individual lives with the message of the Bible. As a community dedicated to the interpretation of God's word, the church seeks out and finds answers to the basic questions of life and coexistence.



Chair of the Presidium of the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK) and Bishop of Baden, Ulrich Fischer, with Deputy Chair Brigitte Andrae, President of the Church Office of the Evangelical Church in Central Germany (Magdeburg), at the 2012 annual meeting at Timmendorfer Strand on Germany's Baltic coast.

C Catechism

1. The goal of the common priesthood is the ability of all Christians to speak out. We provide information about the foundations of our lives.
2. We have a rich treasury of Reformation sources at our disposal, including the Heidelberg Catechism. It is our task to translate the message of these texts for today's world.
3. The Reformation catechisms excel in teaching us to question and provide answers that enable us to have faith and share it with others. These texts therefore continue to provide a means of passing on our faith today. Catechisms provide the opportunity to discover whether the messages of faith can transform into experiences in our own lives.

D Ecumenism

1. In the Evangelical Church in Germany, we will be celebrating, for the first time, the 2017 Reformation Jubilee in terms of the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973. The Leuenberg anniversary this coming year is a welcome occasion to highlight the Protestant ecumenism that was shaped at Leuenberg. The chance, established with the agreement, to worship together and to offer Eucharistic hospitality to all who are baptized, has opened up broad ecumenical horizons. This is the spiritual basis for us to work on our differences of doctrine and church form and to experience them as something that enriches us.
2. This entails that we can only prepare and celebrate the Reformation Jubilee together with the various Protestant churches. The ecumeni-

cal quality of the Reformation anniversary can only succeed if we, in the reconciled diversity of the Evangelical Church in Germany, have worked everything out with one another before meeting our ecumenical brothers and sisters, so that we can present a clear identity as the event's hosts. We therefore need a more extensive and specific agreement among the groupings of member churches and the EKD over the remaining preparation process and the realization of the Reformation Jubilee.

3. As the Evangelical Church in Germany, we can only mark the Reformation Jubilee in a manner befitting the occasion if we invite all Christians to celebrate with us. In preparation, we can dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church and look into the commonalities between the theology of the Reformation and that of the Second Vatican Council. This includes an esteem for the word of God, an emphasis on the freedom of conscience, and the participation of God's people and the common priesthood. In addition to this dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, our preparations will require a discussion with our Orthodox and Free Protestant brothers and sisters as well.

The Luther Decade: Uncertain perspectives

The Reformation Jubilee has long since begun with the ambitious “Luther Decade” program. Until the actual anniversary begins, there is enough time and space to delve not only into Martin Luther’s life and work but also the entire Reformation phenomenon in all of its different varieties and consequences through our own day. **By Katharina Greschat and Heinrich Holze**

We are still a few years away from the big 2017 Reformation anniversary with celebrations marking half a millennium since Luther published his famous 95 Theses on repentance and indulgences. Luther’s public impact¹ began with his theses, and every century that has since passed has been marked in its own particular way. While it is only 2011 as of this writing, the jubilee has in fact already begun with the ambitious “Luther Decade”, organized by a board chaired by the EKD Council Chairman together with state representatives and a top academic advisory board. In 1508, Martin Luther came to Wittenberg as a simple monk and priest of his church and as a still unknown theological teacher at the town’s newly founded university. The Decade bearing his name was officially launched in 2008 to mark the 500th anniversary of those events, cleverly demonstrating that the Reformation did not just begin overnight. This also allows for time to prepare for 2017, a year of particular importance.

Key topics

In the course of the nearly ten years leading up to the actual anniversary, there should therefore be sufficient time and space not only to examine Martin Luther as a person but the entire Reformation phenomenon in its various forms as well as its effects from the 16th century through today. This should serve as a means of appropriately observing and considering the Reformation’s wide variety of influences on theology and the church, society and politics, legal views and education, economic activity and artistic pursuits. Each year of the Decade has focused on one particular theme from the entire range described here. This began in 2009 with the thematic complex “Reformation and Confession”, which also marked the 500th birthday of John Calvin, the Geneva reformer. Last year featured the relationship between “Reformation and Education”, on the occasion and within the framework of the 450th anniversary of Philipp Melancthon’s death.

This year’s focus will lie on “Reformation and Freedom”. As in previous years, 2011 will also feature a virtual deluge of events, placing all who are interested before an embarrassment of choices, including exhibitions and concerts, conferences, worship services, readings, town festivals, award ceremonies, hiking the new Luther pilgrimage route, or perhaps just a stroll through the Luther Garden and visits to other Luther-related sites and tourist attractions. This does not therefore involve any particular predetermined viewpoint, but constitutes a diverse mix reminiscent of the well-frequented “Markets of Possibilities” at the Protestant *Kirchentag* festivals, which seek to involve, stir up, and energize those in attendance.

The Luther Gnome controversy

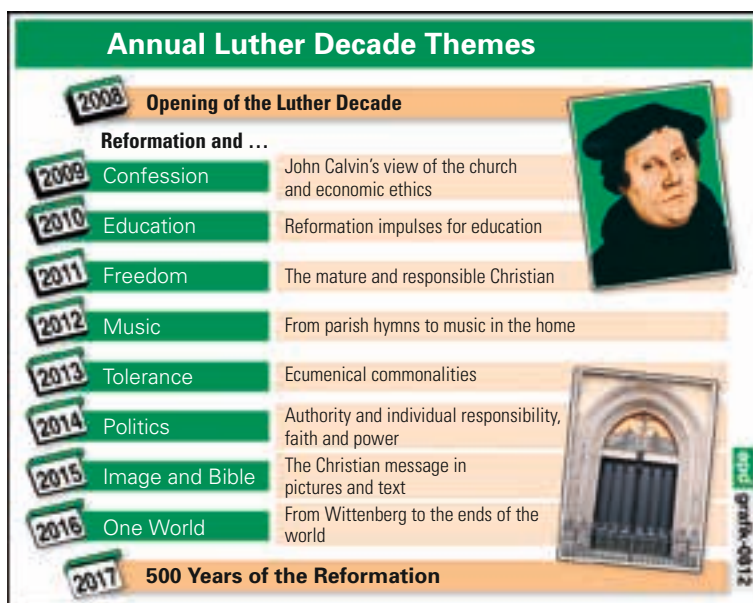
One could, however, also see how stirring things up can soon lead to a heated debate. There was indeed great uproar over an installation by the artist Ottmar Hörl, which was placed at the Wittenberg Market Square from mid-August through mid-September 2010, entitled “Martin Luther – Here I stand...” During the absence of the 1821 Luther Monument by Johann Gottfried Schadow, which had been in urgent need of repair, the square was completely blanketed with 800 plastic miniature replicas of the monument, colored crimson, dark green, cobalt blue, and black. This would indeed cause quite a stir, and people came in droves to Wittenberg to see it. The concept of the project’s initiators, that “Luther should be there for everyone to touch, to walk through and around, to photograph, and especially to talk about”,² seemed to have become a great success. The gnomes, serving to represent Luther, originally priced at 250 euros, are now being sold for 300 euros each, with a bronze version available as well, even if none such had been exhibited in Wittenberg. Critics – and most predominantly the former human rights activist and Wittenberg theologian Friedrich Schorlemmer – saw this as a pointless spectacle and a cheap public-

ity gag. Schorlemmer was vehement in his words against what he viewed to be a tasteless “sale of indulgences with plastic figures”,³ as he raged with media skills no less sophisticated than those of the exhibition’s defenders: “Oh you poor reformer, long since sliced up between a cult of heroism, political instrumentalization, and denigration. And now cheap marketing!”⁴

This artistic venture made unexpectedly big waves, and not only in the small town of Wittenberg, which again leads us to the question of what exactly should be the main content of the anniversary celebrations. What does this miniature ambassador for Luther seek to tell us? What do these colorful little “gnomes” have to say, which according to the organizers have now even found their way to be displayed in places as far afield as Thailand and Dubai? So they are now all over the place – but now what?

In addition to the broad, expansive, and colorful diversity of the events, with something on offer for everyone, there is also a certain growing sense of puzzlement. It may well be great fun to remove Luther from his market throne and to bring him down to the level of the people, a hundredfold and in four colors. But has this at all helped people to develop their own understanding of Luther? Did those who came to Wittenberg last year to see the “gnomes” feel compelled to look further into the matter later? Have those people, who have put a gnome in their yards, bathrooms, or wherever, thought more about Luther’s significance for the Reformation or for the Reformation’s effects that continue on into our own times?

One thing would already appear to be clear, however: The vast array of events and thematic years, planned as a means of providing opportunities to think about the significance of the Reformation in the context of liberty, tolerance, political responsibility, and the media and their global reach, has all underscored the fact that



The motto of the Luther Decade reads “Luther 2017 – 500 Years of Reformation”. Each year, the Decade draws attention to the main views of Martin Luther. 2012 will focus on the significance of the Reformation for music, while 2013 will primarily look into the Reformation and tolerance.

the commemoration of 2017 and October 31, in particular, is not designed to be an overblown pompous occasion.

Ultimately, the events are organized to connect with as many people as possible. But, in the end, what syntheses should emerge from the Decade, which has of course been conceived as a preparation for the actual anniversary? How can this historic event be shaped and celebrated in an academically responsible manner that is not only well suited to the present but which can also provide a link forward to the future?

These questions have been met with a range of different expectations and indeed with some very particular hopes as well. The present issue of the *Berliner Theologischen Zeitschrift** [“Ber-

lin theology journal”] seeks to present several of these expectations, submitted in a variety of contexts, as a means of encouraging an ongoing and hopefully also fruitful discussion. (...)

Prof. Dr. Katharina Greschat, Chair for the History of the Church and Christianity (Early Church and Middle Ages) at the Faculty for Protestant Theology of the Ruhr University Bochum.

Prof. Dr. Heinrich Holze, Professor for Church History at the Faculty of Theology, University of Rostock (since 1995)

Source: *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 1/2011: *Ratlos vor dem Reformationsjubiläum 2017?*, pp. 9–13. The paper is provided here, slightly abridged, with the kind permission of the *Evangelische Verlagsanstalt*, Leipzig.

* The full BThZ publication can be ordered online at www.eva-leipzig.de/. Two other articles in this reader were taken from the issue.

- 1 On the recently rekindled discussion on the verity of the hammering of the theses cf. J. Ott / M. Treu, *Faszination Thesenanschlag – Faktum oder Fiktion*, *Schriften der Stiftung Luthergedenkstätten in Sachsen-Anhalt* 9, Leipzig 2008.
- 2 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* no. 16 of 25 April 2010.
- 3 *Leipziger Volkszeitung* of 14 August 2010.
- 4 *ZEIT* no. 34 of 19 August 2010. (...)

c.1370 REFORM EFFORTS IN ENGLAND

The Oxford professor of theology, John Wycliffe, pushed for church reforms and translated the Bible into English. Proclaiming that authority was possible only through God’s grace, Wycliffe was declared a heretic after his death.

c.1180 PRE-REFORMATION MOVEMENT

Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant from Lyon, had the Bible translated into the language of the people. Waldo founded the Waldensian movement, which suffered massive persecutions in the Middle Ages. The Waldensian tradition remains active today.

1415 COUNCIL OF CONSTANCE

Jan Hus was burnt at the stake at the Council of Constance. The Czech theologian sought a church that was close to the people with sermons in the people’s language and a Eucharist with bread and wine.

Who does the Reformation belong to?

In Germany, the Reformation Decade is (still) known as the Luther Decade. This specificity makes the 2009 Calvin anniversary year seem like the hors d'oeuvres before a meal that will leave no room for a Zwingli anniversary in 2019. It is indeed unclear as to what is even meant by "Reformation". **By Serge Fornerod**



Reliefs of reformers John Calvin (left) and Ulrich Zwingli at the world's largest Luther monument in Worms.

2017 and 2019 . . . As the 500th anniversaries draw nearer, one question is becoming remarkably topical: "Who does the Reformation belong to?" But, as the 2009 Calvin anniversary already demonstrated, it was, first and foremost, a matter of presenting to the people of Geneva – and other French-speaking Christians – part of their misunderstood history in an unaccustomed new way, a history otherwise congested with false information, clichés, and prejudice. On that occasion, we were also able to rediscover the global reach of Calvin and his influence in areas far beyond theology in the narrow sense of the word. Many people the world over suddenly began to refer to Calvin. It would thus emerge that the Reformation, above all, is a multifaceted movement with numerous areas of focus, revolving around the meaning of life, the unity of the church, and the social efficacy of the Gospel. It was, in particular, the global echo with regard to the heritage of Calvin that moved the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches in 2009 to proclaim: "Without Calvin, the Reformation would have remained German".

Well, since the preparations for "Luther 2017" are in full swing in Germany, it may well make sense to seriously consider the question asked above – not least with a view to the 500th anniversary of the beginning of Zwingli's activity to be celebrated in 2019. If we look into how the people running the events in Germany have been planning everything, we can observe two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, there is a trend toward focusing only on Luther and his life. 2017 then becomes the culmination of the Luther Decade, with the Calvin Year constituting a sort of hors d'oeuvre at best, with no room left for a Zwingli anniversary to be marked in 2019 – as if time were to stand still in 2017. The global dimension will only be given play in 2016, while the ecumenical program originally planned for 2013 has now instead been replaced by a year of tolerance.

The other tendency involves a focus on the message of liberation, rediscovered and renewed by Luther, and on its meaning, which today's church also needs to rediscover, just as it, however, also struggles with a multivalent,

international, and polycentric understanding of the Reformation. Despite all of the efforts and promises of the representatives of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) with regard to a possible "Reformation Decade", however, "Luther 2017" and "Luther Decade" remain the official names in use. Over the next few months, it should emerge more clearly as to what the German organizers, churches, and state in fact plan to celebrate together and what place will be afforded in the process to the other churches with roots in the Reformation.

What is the Reformation?

The situation highlights the lack of clarity that prevails when it comes to the interpretation of what "Reformation" means both historically and for our day. While some focus solely on Luther himself, others see the Reformation as a process with extensive influence on the thought, culture, and history of Europe. And while for Catholics it involves a drama and division that persists today, Protestants dwell both on the beginning of a long series of subdivisions into denominations along with the beginning of their own institutional and theological identity. This, in accordance with the Protestant self-conception, involves an accountability only to God. Protestants, however, all too readily omit fifteen centuries of Christian history and traditions.

In traditional terms, the Protestant church is portrayed as "the Catholic Church that went through the Reformation". But it is in fact, first and foremost, "not Catholic" or more specifically speaking "not Roman". Notwithstanding historical realities, we can discern here two opposing and fixed institutional points of view. The Protestants ignore the continuity between the thought and writings of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin and the late Middle Ages, from which they all emerged. They also ignore, however, the continuity that the reformers, of whom they so often speak, had with other reform movements within the Catholic Church of their time, whether they were successful or not. In turn, the Catholic Church forgets that the Reformation also contributed to its own process of

Photos: p. 34: epd/bid/Andrea Enderlein; p. 35: epd/bid/Rolf Zöllner

change. Change that was negative in terms of becoming increasingly “Roman” and less “Catholic” as a reaction to the movement, but also positive in terms of developing positions and deepening views, of which several ultimately made their way into the Second Vatican Council, at least in part.

Celebrating the Reformation is the most ecumenical of tasks

Modern historical research has shown the extent to which we are captives of ideas and imagery, even of denominational mythologies, all of which were formed in the second half of the 19th Century. One example for a lack of clarity with regard to the definition the Reformation can be seen in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, which was signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican in 1999, and later by the World Methodist Council. If the Reformation was really about the doctrine of justification, then why has this declaration not involved any major progress in terms of ecumenical dialogue?

While it is true that the Reformation led to the founding of the churches known as Protestant, it is wrong to conclude from this that they now all follow the aims of the Reformation. The Reformation is, first and foremost, a movement that aims for church life to be in agreement with its source, the Gospel. In this vein, the Protes-

tants will be taking the easy route if they settle for the Reformation’s “message of protest” and no longer work toward a revitalized interpretation of the Gospel for today. Celebrating the Reformation now can only mean reinterpreting the Gospel for the church and the world of today. And this is, by definition, the epitome of ecumenical endeavor.

To what extent can the celebrations provide new impulses for the Swiss churches in 2017?

From this perspective, it needs to be a common and pressing concern for all of the Swiss churches to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in a post-denominational or inter-denominational spirit. The churches in Europe need new ideas. Reform is particularly necessary for their vision of the future and the main content of their message – with structural reform only of secondary importance. As European society has grown pluralistic and multicultural, the search has become all the more crucial for the meaning of life, its justification, and ways to coexist in society. It is more important to discover our common spiritual treasures than to stubbornly cling to things that divide us. Protestants also need to practice self-criticism. And those who pride themselves in their openness when it comes to ecumenical issues – how have they responded to the documents of theological consensus and compromise of the Com-

munity of Protestant Churches in Europe and the World Council of Churches? What is the state of the dogmatic federalism of our regional churches? Has not our idle complacency with regard to our numerous internal boundaries and the continuation of our internal situation at the cantonal and local levels been enshrined, for a long time, as an infallible dogma in the name of federalism and respect for local diversity, but one which testifies more to a sort of provincialism than authenticity?

Yes, even the Protestant Church in Switzerland is in need of the Reformation. The church belongs to the Reformation and not the other way around. Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli were seekers – on a quest to explore the Gospel, not to found a new church. ◀

Serge Fornerod (Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches) is responsible for external relations and is in charge of the Reformation jubilees.

Source: Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, sek-bulletin 1/2012



c. 1450 INVENTION OF THE PRINTING PRESS

Johannes Gutenberg invented moveable type, thus laying the technical foundations for the rapid spread of Reformation writings.

31 October 1517 LUTHER'S 95 THESES

His criticism of the practice of indulgences and his experience in taking confessions led Martin Luther to publish criticism of the church in the form of his Theses. In Thesis 7, he established that it was not the sacraments per se, but faith alone that justified us before God. Luther was subsequently accused of heresy.

The Reformation was a European movement

Scandinavia did not undergo as radical a change in the Reformation as did Germany. In Sweden, Catholic bishops simply changed confessions, as **Stephanie Dietrich** explained in an interview with **Silke Römhild**. The two spoke just before the 2012 EKD Synod meeting at Timmendorfer Strand.

You are German, but have lived in Norway for many years and work there for the Norwegian church. How did this all happen?

When I was 21, I wanted to go abroad for a year. I studied in Neuendettelsau, which offered an exchange program with Oslo. And I liked it there a lot. At the time, career opportunities for theologians in Germany were rather limited. In Norway, on the other hand, at some point the bishop in charge of the church approached me to tell me that things were different there and that I was very welcome to serve in the Norwegian church. And so I took the exam there and stayed on. I worked, among other things, as an assistant at the MF Norwegian School of Theology, in the external office of the Church of Norway in charge of ecumenical affairs, and have now been at the Faculty for Diaconal Studies for four years.

You are a member of the Synod preparatory committee on the central topic of “Perspectives on the 2017 Reformation Jubilee”. How have you been following the preparations underway here in Germany from a Norwegian perspective?

It is interesting for me to see how central and important the Reformation event and jubilee are in Germany. It is impressive to see the enthusiasm put into the preparations! At the same time, I sometimes have had the impression that people are perhaps not always aware of the fact that the Reformation was a European movement that did not only take place in Germany or center solely on Martin Luther’s reformative discoveries. There were reformations all throughout Europe in countries such as Switzerland and France. There were in fact already

reform ideas within the Catholic Church of the time and in churches such as the Waldensian Church, even before the era of the great reformers. A great deal was “brewing” in terms of politics and the history of ideas. Germany is a very important country when it comes to the Reformation – but not the only one.

What are your hopes for the 2012 EKD Synod?

With its topic, the EKD Synod should bring about new impulses with regard to what it means today, as churches decisively influenced by the Reformation, to come together as a church time and again. I hope that the Synod members carry new impulses from the meeting back home to their congregations and to their various situations and contexts. What does it mean for a church to renew itself both in the Reformation era and today? Hopefully we will be able to make people aware that the Reformation entails ever renewing the relevance and viability of our churches, and not only preparing for a great celebration – as nice as that may be – but thinking about what it means for our lives together and for the community and society in Germany and around the world. How can we embody the church for each other and for the people around us today? What does it mean today to be the body of Jesus Christ here at the local level, in Europe, and throughout the entire world?

In what other ways can the 2017 celebrations include the international perspective?

A hundred years ago, Martin Luther was celebrated as a hero. This time around, we want to do things differently. We need to think about

how the Reformers struggled for the church to be the place on earth for the truth of the Gospel to reside. We have to honor this and we have to focus on what is ahead. What will it mean to be the Church of Jesus Christ in 100 or 120 years? What does it mean to embody the church for one another in the community? Today, the Gospel is proclaimed and shared both with and without words. I think that the diaconal witness is just as important for our churches as is the witness in proclamation. We have much to learn in that regard. And how do Christians treat each other around the world? The majority of the world’s churches reside in the Global South, something that has not always been clear to us here in Europe. The celebration can therefore also remind us that the church has always had to change and evolve – back in the Reformation era and today.

In Germany, people are discussing whether there should be a Reformation memorial or Reformation celebration. What do you think?

I think it should be both! The Reformation was not as radical a change in Scandinavia as it was in Germany. Generally, the clergy were retrained for the Lutheran confession. In Sweden, for example, Catholic bishops just became Lutheran bishops. Norway and Denmark had Lutheran superintendents installed. This shows us that, while the Reformation entailed a fundamental renewal of the church, a certain continuity still prevailed. That is why there is such an awareness: We are the church in Norway, which, although decisively changed by the Reformation, is not a new church. This awareness does much to sustain us and of course also influences our understanding of the Reformation.

“ A hundred years ago, Martin Luther was celebrated as a hero. This time around, we want to do things differently. ”

“ Germany is a very important country when it comes to the Reformation – but not the only one. ”



What can we in fact celebrate together in 2017?

In 2017, we can celebrate the way the fathers and mothers of the Reformation preceded us in their search for truth and search for the renewal of the church – and how we can follow in their footsteps together. And we are searching for the answers to fundamental questions together. That is in fact a major topic in our preparations for the Reformation Jubilee as well: the liberating message of the Gospel, justification by faith alone. We see how we are confronted by exceedingly large demands in today’s world, whether placed on us by others or indeed by ourselves. This is where the message of justification is liberating, in that it says: You are not justified before God by what you do or what you have but because you belong to Jesus Christ. This frees

us to live, and to live successful lives. That is a dimension that we can transfer to today’s society well.

We hope for consolation and answers from the church that people cannot provide themselves.

Yes, the church can provide consolation. Norway was strongly affected last year by the terrorist attacks of July 22. The people were shaken to the core. The shock of the cold-blooded murder of so many young people hit hard and has made very clear how important solidarity and community are, and indeed common resistance to totalitarian thought and fundamentalism of any kind. For many people, the church was a place of refuge under these circumstances. Right after the terrorist attacks, people of all

denominations and even all religions gathered in and around Oslo Cathedral. That was the place to go. After July 22, embodying the church means standing together and consoling and bearing affliction together – all while prophetically advocating as Christians against injustice and for democracy. As the church of the Reformation, we can and should be doing both. ◀

Stephanie Dietrich is a professor at the Institute for Diaconia and Leadership, Diakonhjemmet University College, Oslo, Norway. She is an ordained pastor of the Church of Norway, was Vice President of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) until 2012, and is head of the Church of Norway’s theological committee.



**1521
DIET OF WORMS**

The Diet of Worms demanded that Luther recant his Theses. He refused, and asked that his Theses instead be refuted in writing and through reason, stating: “I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.” The Edict of Worms placed the imperial ban on Luther.

**1520
THREE MAIN WRITINGS OF THE REFORMATION**

Martin Luther’s writings put an end to the distinction between laypeople and clerics as, in Luther’s view, all baptized Christians were members of the clerical estate. Luther also reduced the number of sacraments from seven to three: Baptism, the Eucharist, and Confession. Luther developed his doctrine of justification in On the Freedom of a Christian.

**1522
SEPTEMBER TESTAMENT**

During his time at Wartburg Castle, where he took refuge from the pope’s persecution, Luther translated the New Testament, which became known popularly as the “September Testament”. The first practical reforms were implemented in Wittenberg, doing away with the celibacy requirement, mass services, and the veneration of images.

The legendary posting of the Theses had its own reception history

A history of the Reformation Jubilee¹ By Wolfgang Flügel

The Reformation launched by Martin Luther on October 31, 1517 was more than just a religiously motivated event that caused long-term changes in theology and the church. It also had a relevance beyond the scope of religious matters. Protestant piety has indeed shaped social structures, patterns of cultural perception, academic disciplines, and traditional patterns of behavior. At the same time, it has also responded to changes in these areas. Protestantism has thus possessed an interpretive strength in a constantly changing world.²

One paradigmatic example of the Reformation influence contributing, *extra muros ecclesiae*, to the institutional character and to the stability of social structures, can be seen in a cultural practice that emerged in the Protestantism of the 16th century and that continues to be a part of the basic repertoire of the culture of memory. This is the custom, within the constraint of round numbers, of contemporizing a key event of one's own past as an identity marker, while presenting the intervening period of time as evidence for its stability and suitability for the future. That is, in short, the custom of celebrating a historical anniversary.³ The success of this custom began with the Reformation anniversaries. These anniversaries and the spread of this Protestant construct are of interest here. The focus thereby is on those interrelationships that exist between centenary celebrations and the culture around them: How do Reformation anniversaries interpret the world around them and, in turn, how does the mechanism of celebration react to changes in the world?

1. The invention of the historical jubilee as a cultural effect of the Reformation

Unlike its use in modern speech, in the 16th century, the term "jubilee" did not refer to a historical commemoration but to an aspect of salvation history, namely the absolution of sin.⁴ Not originally tied to any particular interval of time, this tradition began with the introduction of the Holy Year in 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII.

Later, the original 100-year pattern was gradually shortened until a 25-year interval was established in 1475, which still prevails today.

For this construction to become available for use in historical commemoration, it first had to be separated from its religious significance. This process was driven by the universities. A first clue can be found in the matriculation register of the University of Erfurt. The page for the Summer Semester of 1492 is not only extraordinary in its appearance but also bears an allusion to the centenary: "In secundo centenariorum primus monarcha". Other universities have similar indications. A stained glass window, for example, at the University of Basel, features the year 1560, which is both the year the window was created and the 100th anniversary of the university's founding. There is no evidence, however, for centenary celebrations. The necessary detachment of the jubilee from the holy would indeed have been a serious encroachment upon the pope's prerogative of interpretation, one which could only be ventured outside the Catholic world. This was done by the Protestant universities of Tübingen and Heidelberg, which celebrated their 100th and 200th anniversaries – respectively, and both a year late – in 1578 and 1587. Soon thereafter in 1602 and 1609, the two Saxon universities of Wittenberg and Leipzig followed suit along with other universities. This established the historical jubilee as a phenomenon of the elite within the context of the Protestant university culture of remembrance.

2. The Reformation Jubilee of 1617 and its impact

During the 1602 university jubilee, the theologians of the University of Wittenberg held up the Reformation as a second, prestigious founding act for their alma mater. It is therefore not surprising that these professors also began the first known initiative for a Reformation jubilee to take place across the Empire, thus transferring the jubilee mechanism to other events.⁵ On March 27, 1617, the *Oberkonsistorium*, the

highest Saxon church authorities, asked for permission to hold a "primus Jubilaeus christianus" at the university on October 31, 1617.⁶ The reason they gave for this was that the improvement of the church began with "Martin Luther at this university," with which the university was thereby promoted to the birthplace of Protestantism and virtually to a place of significance in salvation history, as a new Jerusalem.

John George I, Elector of Saxony, approved the plans and ordered, along with it, a jubilee celebration throughout the land to follow the formal model of high church holidays. His detailed specifications covered the three-day duration of the event, the number of celebratory church services as well as the pericopes, hymns, and prayers to be used. No explanation, however, was given for the hundred-year period! Apparently, this number had been firmly established, if by nothing else, as a reflection of the turn of the century in 1600.⁷

But why was this concept expanded in this way? The expansion demonstrates a reaction to a political situation that was seen as a crisis in Electoral Saxony in particular. Since the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church had gone on the offensive in opposition to Protestantism. At the same time, the Protestant camp split into a Lutheran part and a Reformed grouping, which was not recognized under imperial law. Lutheranism fell behind in this regard as well, whereby Electoral Saxony remained ambivalent on the matter. While it remained a major Lutheran center, it tried to pursue its political interests by working together with the Catholic imperial house. This led to Electoral Saxony losing its leading role within the Protestant camp. On the one hand, the Lutheran imperial estates observed this behavior with great suspicion, on the other hand, the Calvinist Electoral Palatinate gained influence as the leading power of the Union, a Protestant military alliance, which Electoral Saxony did not join. While the Saxon populace was not directly affected by the situation, it did lead to a sense of crisis, fed also by

the epidemics and failed harvests frequent in the years around 1600. Theologians connected this to the perceived crisis in Lutheranism and interpreted it as God's punishment for human wrongdoing.

In this situation, the Reformation jubilee served both the Elector and the *Oberkonsistorium* church authorities as a means of responding to the crisis. For John George I, it was, firstly, an instrument to shore up the power of the state. By decreeing the jubilee as the holder of the summepiscopate and by participating in it himself, he was able to demonstrate his denominational adherence. Secondly, by sending the jubilee plan to all of the Lutheran imperial estates to imitate, he granted himself the prestige of being the protector of Lutheranism, while also aiming to increase the influence of Electoral Saxony at the imperial level. This gained additional significance in view of the competition with the Electoral Palatinate, especially as Frederick V, Elector Palatine, also had called for a Reformation commemoration at a Union gathering on April 11, 1617.

The *Oberkonsistorium*, for its part, used the Reformation jubilee as a means of enhancing its denominational identity: it was essential to inculcate in Lutherans a sense of the Reformation's significance within the framework of salvation history and to ignite their religious zeal. Penance and prayer were to move God to refrain from punishment. The theological interest of the theologians corresponded here with the political interests of the elector. Since penance was seen as a means of avoiding punishment, it had to have retroactive influence on the elector when he offered his subjects penance with the jubilee.



Relief by Ernst Rietschel of Dresden at the world's largest Luther monument in Worms. Beginning in the middle of the 19th century, a private organization collected donations from the entire world for this commemoration of Luther's courageous appearance at the 1521 Worms Reichstag.

Although the idea of penance emerged from a negatively interpreted situation, it stood in contrast to a second level of interpretation of the jubilee. Its primary objective was to praise God for the Reformation, which God brought about through Luther as his instrument,⁸ and to thank God for his protection of Lutheranism against what was then 100 years of continual attacks on the part of its enemies. The term *Jubelfest* [something like "festival of rejoicing", transl.], which replaced *Jubiläum* ["jubilee"] in nearly all of the sources of the era, alludes to the act of joyful celebration as the appropriate form of gratitude.

The denominational jubilee thus picked up where church celebrations involving praise, prayer, and thanksgiving left off, which were traditionally conducted throughout the land subsequent to the passing of times of danger. The centenary celebration could also be justified with allusion to the model of King David's thanksgiving celebrations, and in contrast with the papal indulgence jubilees, which were viewed as a perversion of the Old Testament jubilee years.

1524–1525 PEASANTS' WARS

Luther responded to the demands of peasants for the end to serfdom and for a reduction in their payments with his Admonition to Peace, in which he criticized both sovereigns and peasants, although his criticism of the peasants would grow subsequent to further uprisings. He was convinced that they had no right to invoke scripture to further their demands. The wars ended with the peasants being routed in 1525 at the Battle of Frankenhausen. Thousands perished.

13 June 1525 THE MARRIAGE OF LUTHER AND KATHARINA VON BORA

Katharina von Bora, a nun, had already fled to Wittenberg from her monastery in Grimma. After marrying Luther, she would run their household and bear his six children.



3. The long-term cultural effect – expansions of the historical jubilee

The 1617 Reformation jubilee represents the blueprints for a tradition that has continued uninterrupted in 1717, 1817, and 1917⁹ to the present and – as one may optimistically assume – on into the future. This reflects a cultural impact of the Reformation on the culture of remembrance, which will be examined in the following. The focus will be placed on the expansion of the jubilee idea both within and outside the Protestant churches, as for example documented in the increased number of events and groups of people involved in the organizational process. This was also connected to an opening up of the Reformation jubilee to external cultural influences. Lutheran jubilee culture thus became an indicator of social conditions and of Protestant representation in society.

3.1. New occasions – new interpretations

New threads of tradition have arisen in jubilee culture since the 17th century as further events were deemed worthy of celebration in different regional and denominational contexts. Lutherans, for example, celebrated the anniversary of the Augsburg Confession (1630) in the midst of the Thirty Years' War, in imitation of the centennial celebrations of 1617, while states such as Electoral Brandenburg and cities such as Hanover commemorated, for the first time, the introduction of the Reformation in their particular territories (1539 and 1533, respectively). While these celebrations were conducted to overcome times of crisis, as was already the case in 1617, in Saxony, the jubilee of religious peace in 1655, following the Peace of Westphalia, for example, strengthened the apotheosis of the dynasty in question. The development of the Reformation jubilee into a court celebration, at least in Saxony, would however come to an abrupt end when the Saxon dynasty converted to Catholicism in 1697 and 1712. While the sovereigns maintained their right to call for celebrations, they were no longer able to serve as patrons of denominational Lutheran jubilees. This resulted in the centenary celebrations in Saxony reflecting a balance of interests between the Lutheran initiators and Catholic sovereigns, and they were thus the expression of a social and denominational status quo, and to be understood as a symbol of mutual recognition.

Lutheran jubilee culture developed, additionally, new facets with the concept of commemorating the anniversaries of the reformers themselves. Luther was indeed the first historical figure whose achievements were featured in a



Statue of the reformer Philipp Melancthon in front of the Stiftskirche in Bretten.

personal jubilee. Following isolated predecessors such as those in Berlin in 1646 and Erfurt in 1746, the anniversaries of the births and deaths of Luther and Philipp Melancthon – as well as those of John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli – have been a part of jubilee culture and bourgeois personality cult since the 19th century. One could say that the burghers appropriated the reformers!

Luther was already portrayed as a spiritual hero in the centenary commemorations of 1746, as someone who brought about Protestant freedom in the name of God. Linked to allusions to his services to the church, an active Christendom was promoted, in which each profession

has a role to play in the divine world order. The idea emerged clearly of an active fulfillment of one's duties in harmony with God, which ultimately points toward the popular ideas of the value of work and efforts for the common good, which would emerge in the following decades. In the end, the commemorations reveal the normalizing and guiding function of Protestantism in the formative phase of the bourgeoisie.¹⁰ The jubilee marking the 400th anniversary of Luther's birth in 1883 transmitted a variant of this construction.¹¹ In the 19th century, a multifaceted image of Luther was pieced together: as an important theologian, as an ideal citizen, as a somewhat conservative *pater familias* with an idyllic family life – which then seemed under

threat by the consequences of industrialization – and as a trailblazer for German freedom, before the background of the unification of the state under the sign of Protestantism.

The previous canon of German Lutheran events worthy of a jubilee celebration was completed in the second half of the 1920s.¹² On a nearly annual basis, 400th anniversaries were celebrated for events such as the burning of a papal bull directed against Luther, the translation of the New Testament, and the “invention” of the Protestant church hymn. In this culmination of jubilee activity, German Lutheranism sought to compensate for losses it had undergone. This included, firstly, the cancellation of an international Protestant festival in 1917, the planning for which had begun in early summer 1914 [sic!], and for which Protestants had been expected to come from the United States, Canada, Australia, and other European countries.¹³ Secondly, the culmination included a process of recovery and new beginnings. This had become necessary as Protestants, who had been structurally tied to the monarchic order through the summeepiscopate, lost their old constitution with the fall of the Empire.

Just as an international Reformation celebration had been planned for 1917, it is indeed the case that the practice of celebrating Protestant jubilees had long since moved beyond the borders of Germany. Even the 1617 Reformation jubilee had found an echo in England, when a translation of the Electoral Saxon jubilee order was published in London a year later.¹⁴ We unfortunately do not know whether this directly encouraged a new Anglican jubilee culture. We do, however, know of the jubilee culture reflected in the centennial celebration of the Synod of Uppsala (1693), when Sweden’s Lutherans affirmatively connected the Reforma-

tion and their particular nation. Contacts with Germany may well have provided for the transmission of the jubilee idea. Axel Oxenstierna, chancellor of Sweden and university chancellor in Uppsala, for example, had been in Wittenberg as a student for the 1602 university jubilee, and King Gustav II Adolf had reached the Pomeranian coast with his army just in time for the Augustana Jubilee in June 1630.

It was German immigrants who would bring the jubilee idea to the United States, including Justus Henry Christian Helmuth and Frederick Henry Quitman, pastors who had studied at the University of Halle, and who organized the first known historical jubilee in North America, the 1817 Reformation jubilee. As most Lutherans in the United States were of German origin at the time, this served as a kind of bridge between the Old and New Worlds: This making present of the Reformation was aimed both at the ethnic and religious roots of church members, two bases of identity for migrants, while also holding up their American home, as part of a type of civil religion, as a new “promised land”, which Lutheran piety had helped bring about.¹⁵

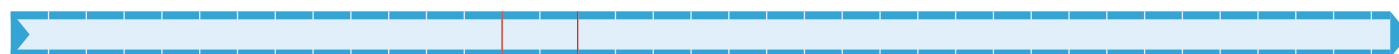
While these developments within Protestantism demonstrate the high adaptability of the jubilee concept to the conditions of the time, the most important cultural effect of Protestantism on commemoration culture is perhaps the secularization of this mechanism, i.e. making it available to non-church institutions. Those involved in pioneering and spreading this custom included theologians, who had already begun to celebrate their wedding anniversaries and anniversaries of their tenure in the 17th century, as well as Lutheran book printers with university ties such as Timotheus Ritzsch in Leipzig. Members of this profession saw the printing press, invented around 1440, as critical

to the spread of the Reformation, and since this was hardly mentioned in the centennial celebrations of 1617 and 1630, they initiated a printing jubilee in 1640. The decision to transfer the jubilee idea to municipal life was ultimately made in the cultural context of these learned Protestant citizens, as was the case in the town of An-naberg in the Erzgebirge region, which was the first town that is known to have celebrated the anniversary of its founding, which it did in 1696.

The cultural influence of this Protestant invention is clearest, however, in its adoption by the Catholic Church under the pressure of denominational competition. The first to do so were, of all groups, the Jesuits, who had been the loudest in their polemical denunciation of the Lutheran centennial celebrations of 1617 and 1630. They would themselves celebrate the 100th anniversary of their order’s founding in 1640. Other orders and bishoprics would follow in the second half of the century, frequently comparing the relatively new Protestant church with their own history, which often stretched back a thousand years, with all the prestige that this involved. The Catholic adoption of this phenomenon is particularly remarkable in that the church had its own jubilee tradition – the Holy Year, last celebrated in the year 2000 – which had little to do with the new Protestant invention.

3.2. The expansion and development of the Reformation Jubilee

At the same time that the jubilee idea gained traction beyond its roots in the Reformation Jubilee, it also grew within that tradition. This process, focused on groups of supporters and jubilee productions, demonstrates the level of participation of the populace in public life as well as the “embourgeoisement”¹⁶ of jubilee culture.



1527

REFORMATION IN SWEDEN

King Gustav I introduced the Reformation to Sweden. Two theologians played a major role in this, the brothers Olaus and Laurentius Petri, who had been students of Luther and Melanchthon in Wittenberg.

1529

2ND DIET OF SPEYER

When the changes introduced through the Reformation were to be rescinded to end the impasse between Catholics and Protestants, the six Protestant sovereigns protested in response. This would lead to the term “Protestant” as a description of supporters of the Reformation.



The painting (photo: 1999 Lutherhaus exhibition in Eisenach) depicts Katharina von Bora and Martin Luther with their children. Philipp Melanchthon sits to the left.

Because Lutheran jubilees could only be decreed by the sovereigns of the realm, the opportunities for the involvement of the populace were limited to the productions of the jubilee, which had increasingly become an area of urban communication and public activity. In this process, the center of celebratory activity expanded from its “core area”, i.e. the churches, to the entire urban area, demonstrating forms of orchestration that the urban celebratory culture had adopted from the court. One example of this was the procession leading to the special jubilee service. While this was limited in the 17th century to the sovereign and his officers, certain elite town officials, and the universities, it gradually developed by the 19th century into a procession in which a large portion of the populace could take part, albeit in a predetermined social order. This corresponded with an increase in participation in the jubilee organization on the part of citizens’ associations and festival committees in addition to the local clergy.

With the spread of these processions, temporary festival ornamentations found their way from inside churches into the public urban sphere. In addition to emblematic symbols on residential buildings, with which people were able to make statements on the Reformation and their own contemporary situations, there

were also, at times, fireworks, as in Wittenberg in 1755. The crowning moment of these orchestrations would come with the Luther celebrations of 1883. This was dominated by groundbreaking ceremonies for Luther churches and Luther monuments, the historical processions that were so popular among the burghers of the time with their historical costuming and especially lighting. By far the largest expense, for example, at Dresden’s 1883 centenary celebration was in fact the lighting of the town’s Frauenkirche church, costing 10,000 of the budget’s 18,000 marks in total.¹⁷ Within the boundaries of cultural Protestantism, burgher representation and confession to Lutheranism came together to form a symbolically charged blend, as reflected both in these orchestrations and in the gifts given by many to the church, such as altar furniture and portraits of the reformers.¹⁸

Within the history of Reformation jubilee culture, the centenary celebrations of 1917 constitute a break from the past in terms of orchestration. Due to the war, a flood of publications replaced any more elaborate forms of celebration. There was indeed no reason for great celebration in light of the cancelled international event and the consequences of the war, which had been increasingly affecting the civilian population since the famine during the winter of 1916–1917. Spirits were similarly low for the

400th anniversary of Luther’s death in February 1946, less than a year after the end of the Second World War. The physical hardship of the time along with the key issues of guilt and the current significance of Lutheran theology all combined to favor a “silent” celebration of the occasion.¹⁹ It did not become easier to find answers once the Anglo-American reception of Luther, in particular, but also that of Thomas Mann, problematically drew a direct causal line from Luther to Adolf Hitler.²⁰ The sense of guilt that has affected the German Lutheran self-image ever since was indeed reflected in the Reformation Jubilee marking the 450th anniversary of the publication of the Theses in 1967 and the 500th anniversary of Luther’s birth in 1983. Both occasions were marked with ambivalence: While on the one hand, many, especially West German representatives of the Protestant churches, were uncertain as to what and whether anything should be celebrated at all in view of the (partial and temporary?) Catholic opening up to Protestantism in the Second Vatican Council and in the shadow of Luther’s words about the Jews. On the other hand, academic conferences, exhibitions, and films all placed Luther’s Reformation in the public limelight – no matter what the particular points of focus may have been.

3.3. Limitations

Up until that point, the Lutheran jubilee culture had been described as something that automatically led to an affirmative success. This impression is, however, false, as demonstrated in the following example of the centenary celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Luther’s birth in 1983 as orchestrated in the German Democratic Republic (GDR – East Germany).²¹ The analysis of the failure leads to the question of the preconditions required for a historical jubilee to be able to prove its stabilizing force.

It would seem to be a matter of course for the Protestant churches in the GDR to make present their own history with a historical jubilee. Their goal was to stabilize their self-image in face of the difficult situation for Christians in the GDR, and to bring about a more tolerable relationship with the atheistic state. An explanation is, however, necessary to understand how the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) as the Marxist ruling party also carried out its own Luther jubilee in 1983 – after both the party and the churches had already marked the 450th anniversary of the Reformation with a centenary celebration in 1967. Plagued with a chronic lack of acceptance, the party used these centenary celebrations in an attempt to cast itself as a tolerant

Photos: above and below: epd-bild/Norbert Neez

regime, both domestically and abroad, and as a means of bringing the people of the GDR, who had tired of the party's propaganda, back under its rule. It would seem that at least some circles within the SED leadership recognized that the Communist view of history was inadequate for this, thus leading to an attempt to establish a nationally-tinged tradition with regard to the territory of the GDR.

Nearly all of the sites of the Reformation were found within that territory, and yet the SED fell into a trap with the Luther jubilee: Since Luther and the Reformation were indicative of an institution that the SED saw as its main ideological opponent, both were painted with a negative brush through the end of the GDR. With the aim of reducing the influence of the church on society, the SED had schools and the mass media propagate the Communist thinkers' traditional view that Luther was a lackey of the rulers and a traitor to the peasants.

Allowances were made only for the Reformation, which, beginning in the 1960s, was interpreted more positively by leading GDR historians as an early bourgeois revolution and therefore useable for the official historical viewpoint – even if this was questionable due to the gutting of its Christian core.

According to this point of view, honoring Luther in the GDR necessarily required his radical reinterpretation. This is documented in an article entitled “15 Theses about Martin Luther”, which appeared for the first time in the SED magazine *Einheit* in 1981. Its publication instilled a small hope in many East Germans that the SED had begun to tolerate social pluralism at least within a limited framework. This correlated with the fact that the SED allowed the churches a good amount of freedom in the

preparations of their Luther jubilee as the SED depended on collaboration with the churches in order to achieve their own goals with regard to commemorating Luther. Beneath the surface, it may have played a role that the churches threatened to cancel their own centenary celebrations in 1967 due to the major obstructions put in place by the SED.²² The churches also threatened to make the SED's obstructions known internationally, thus casting a negative light on the party. The SED was able to avoid this only by making last-minute concessions.

The departure from the SED's traditional view of history suggested in the “Theses,” and the official cooperation of the state with the churches in the preparations for the jubilee led to unrest among many SED party members at all levels of the hierarchy. Afraid that the absorption of new values could weaken the SED's claim to absolute power, these members refused to accept the new view of Luther maintained by only a small portion of the SED.

These conservative circles within the SED instead demonstrated that they were by no means ready to allow for values such as tolerance or equality for dissidents, which they had wanted to demonstrate by honoring Luther. This appeared in the continued disadvantages for Christians in the public sphere and in the state's harsh treatment of the (church) peace movement. Thus, instead of being reached in this way, non-party members were instead put off by the contradiction between everyday policies and the symbolism inherent to state jubilee events along with the acceptance showed for the church jubilee for reasons of propaganda. This was particularly the case as Christians, who had been skeptical from the beginning about the state plans for a jubilee, felt a sense of confirmation for their negative attitude toward the SED. The state's

Luther jubilee could not achieve much despite any elaborate productions involved.

As a means of bringing its own followers back closer into the fold, the SED leadership, furthermore, competed with itself with a last-minute counter-event in opposition to its own Luther jubilee, calling in autumn 1982 for a Karl Marx Year to mark the 100th anniversary of his death in 1983. This signaled a return to old patterns of ideology and behavior. The people reacted with a saying that became as popular as it was subversive: While Luther celebrated his 500th birthday, Marx had been dead for 100 years. One could not express the failure of the SED in 1983 in words of greater clarity. There was much more talk of Luther than of Marx, and party members and non-members had become equally suspicious of the SED leadership; instead of the SED gaining the trust of Christians, the churches gained social influence as an oppositional factor through their jubilee's focus on contemporary grievances and their ability to remove themselves from state cooptation. The jubilee thus demonstrated with great clarity how little social acceptance the SED's political order in fact enjoyed.

4. Understanding of time

The categories of “past” and “future” used in the historical jubilee have, as social constructions, gone through a process of development.²³ This therefore leads us to one final question of the changes that have resulted for the jubilee mechanism.²⁴

The very first Reformation Jubilee in 1617 already had a retrospective point of view, lacking the optimism of a long-term intramundane perspective for the future. Responsible for this was the fact that theologians placed interpretative authority in the Bible with regard to their

1530

DIET OF AUGSBURG

At the Diet, Emperor Charles V was presented with the Augsburg Confession. Luther was not on hand, however, due to his ban, so Melanchthon led the negotiations instead. The document was meant to lead to an agreement with the Catholics, but they refused. In the end, the Protestants would leave the Diet without any agreement being reached. The Edict of Worms went back into effect and Luther remained under the ban.



present and were therefore able to frame the Reformation, in a causal connection, as a divine act of salvation. This, however, also means that they saw all of the apocalyptic signs of Revelation as being fulfilled in the Reformation. Due to this immanent eschatological expectation, the centennial celebrations of 1617 aimed at an encouragement of the Lutherans of the time to keep to their faith in the interest of their own salvation. The 1617 Reformation Jubilee thus had a theological-motivated memorial character.

A new course was marked by the incipient shift from a concept of time based on theological models to a natural-philosophical view. This was reflected, for example, in the (failed) initiative of Paul Hofmann, the dean of the church district of Torgau, to commemorate the Book of Concord with a centennial celebration in 1680. Hofmann argued that 1680 not only marked 100 years since the book's completion, but also 125 years since the religious Peace of Augsburg, and 150 years since the presentation of the Augsburg Confession. With this summary of various time periods, Hofmann, without knowing it, reflected the ideas of thinkers such as Isaac Barrow and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, for whom time moved in strict, unbiased, and never-ending regularity. The individual moments form continuous sequential points on a line, and can therefore be further divided arbitrarily. This conception of the mathematical qualities of time – and perhaps also the pietistic hope for better times – opened an avenue for the establishment of an intramundane perspective for the future within the historical jubilee.

It was decisive in this context that, by the 18th century, Lutheranism had reached its second century and the centenary celebrations in 1717, 1730, and 1755 constituted symbolic repetitions of earlier celebrations. This rhythmatization along with the positive comparison of the celebrants' present with the state of Lutheranism during the celebrations of the previous century led to the wish to follow suit in the future. This was further supported by the idea of a positive line of development in 1755, following a stretch of time since 1717 and 1730 that people personally remembered to be so favorable that they concluded that Protestantism would continue to come to no harm in the future. It was now less the biblical record and more one's own history that took on an interpretive authority for a future to be viewed as positive.

This adaptation of the view of the future formed the decisive foundation of the modern



Wartburg Castle in Eisenach, where Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony hid Martin Luther under the alias of “Junker Jörg” from 4 May 1521 to 1 March 1522.

understanding of jubilees, which had taken on its final form during the 1830 Augsburg Jubilee, at the latest. It was new that the timelines reaching back to the past and forward to the future were divided into two time layers of different reach. While, for example, Luther memorabilia publically presented at the celebrations embodied the 16th century, the descendants of Luther who were invited to be guests of honor symbolized how Luther continued to live on, and thus the continuity of Lutheranism. A second time layer, moreover, lay atop the first, one which only reached back 100 years, but which was interpreted in an immediate way, as some people were in fact able to remember back to the Augsburg Confession Jubilee of 1730 themselves. This period of time matches the trigenerational horizon of transmission, the collective memory that is of great importance to the functioning of a society. In contrast, looking back at the Reformation century corresponds with a reactivation of the cultural memory of Lutherans, which is crucial for the stability of group identity.²⁵

The jubilee communities reflected both the future and the past in a sort of mirror image. This is personally tied to the future through the lifetimes of subsequent generations: Even once the

jubilee community of 1830 had long since passed, the generation of their grandchildren was celebrating the 1930 jubilee. The monuments put up during the centenary celebrations of 1830 form a bridge that upholds the continuity of the jubilee idea into the future. This proceeds further, and seemingly infinitely, on to the Reformation jubilees of the 21st and 22nd centuries, the future occurrence of which was assumed by the 19th-century celebrants. A concept of time lies at the heart of the historical jubilee, through which the continuity and stability of the celebrating institutions can be signaled into the future.

The Protestants here achieved, in a discourse conducted among the church elite, the maintenance of the existing idea of centenary celebrations without the traditional Catholic connotations, while adding to it and bringing about its popularity among the people in the entire German-speaking Protestant world during the 1617 Reformation Jubilee.

Although not yet focused on the future when first popularized, the Reformation jubilee, as spread by Protestants throughout their life contexts, developed into a successful model of historical remembrance.

Photos: above: epd-bild/Gerhard Seifert; below: epd-bild/Horst Wegner

Summary

In the 16th century, Protestant universities celebrated the first historical jubilees to mark the anniversaries of their founding. It was in accordance with this model that the Theological Faculty of the University of Wittenberg celebrated the first Reformation Jubilee in 1617. Protestant sovereigns would follow this model and introduce similar centenary celebrations within their territories. In doing so, they made the jubilee tradition popular in the non-academic world as well. This article explains the emergence, spread, and development of Reformation jubilees from the 17th century through the end of the 20th century. ◀

Dr. Wolfgang Flügel, *Kulturhistorisches Museum Magdeburg* (Cultural Historical Museum of Magdeburg)

Source: *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 1/2011: *Ratlos vor dem Reformationsjubiläum 2017?* pp. 28–43. This paper is provided here with the kind permission of the *Evangelische Verlagsanstalt*, Leipzig. The full BThZ publication can be ordered online at <http://www.eva-leipzig.de/>. Two other articles in this reader were taken from the issue.

- 1 F. Schorlemmer, *Ein Wort – ein Hammerschlag*, in: V. Joestel, *Luthers 95 Thesen. Der Beginn der Reformation (Das Tagebuch Europas. 1517)*, Berlin 1995, 7f.
- 2 Cf. H. Homann, "Kulturprotestantismus" – zum Problem moderner Religion, in: J. Bergmann/A. Hahn/Th. Luckmann (eds.), *Religion und Kultur*, KZfSS. Sonderheft 33 (1993), 167–190: 179.
- 3 Cf. W. Müller, *Das historische Jubiläum. Zur Geschichte einer Zeitkonstruktion*, in: idem. (ed.), *Das historische Jubiläum. Genese, Ordnungsleistung und Inszenierungsgeschichte eines institutionellen Mechanismus (Geschichte: Forschung und Wissenschaft 3)*, Münster 2004, 1–75.
- 4 For this chapter cf. idem, *Erinnern an die Gründung. Universitätsjubiläen, Universitätsgeschichte und die Entstehung der Jubiläumskultur in der frühen Neuzeit*, *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 21 (1998), 79–102.
- 5 For this chapter cf. W. Flügel, *Konfession und Jubiläum. Zur Institutionalisierung der lutherischen Gedenkkultur in Sachsen 1617–1830 (Schriften zur sächsischen Geschichte und Volkskunde 14)*, Leipzig 2005, 25–84.
- 6 For this and the following: *Theologische Fakultät Wittenberg an Oberkonsistorium Dresden*, 27 March 1617, *Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden*, Loc. 1891, fol. 1.
- 7 Cf. J. Burkhardt, *Die Entstehung der modernen Jahrhundertrechnung. Ursprung und Ausbildung einer historiographischen Technik von Flacius bis Ranke*, Göttingen 1971; A. Brendecke, *Vom Zählschritt zur Zäsur. Die Entstehung des modernen Jahrhundertbegriffs*, in: S. Richter (ed.), *Comparativ. Leipziger Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte und vergleichenden Gesellschaftsforschung 10* (2000), no. 3, 21–37.
- 8 On the Luther images cf. H. Bornkamm, *Luther im Spiegel der deutschen Geistesgeschichte. Mit ausgewählten Texten von Lessing bis zur Gegenwart*, Göttingen 2nd ed. 1970.
- 9 Cf. the articles in: ZKG 93 (1982).
- 10 Cf. M. Maurer, *Die Biographie des Bürgers. Lebensformen und Denkweisen in der formativen Phase des deutschen Bürgertums (1680–1815) (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 127)*, Göttingen 1996, 205ff.; M. Hettling, *Bürgerliche Kultur – Bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System*, in: P. Lundgreen (ed.), *Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des Bürgertums. Eine Bilanz des Bielefelder Sonderforschungsbereichs (1986–1997) (Bürgertum. Beiträge zur europäischen Gesellschaftsgeschichte 18)*, Göttingen 2000, 319–339.
- 11 Cf. H. Düfel, *Das Lutherjubiläum 1883*, ZKG 95 (1984), 1–94; G. Maron, 1883 – 1917 – 1933 – 1983. *Jubiläen eines Jahrhunderts*, in: G. Müller/G. Seebaß (ed.), *Die ganze Christenheit auf Erden. Martin Luther und seine ökumenische Bedeutung*, Göttingen 1993, 188–208.
- 12 Cf. *Acta sonstige Luthergedächtnisfeiern 1920–1924*, *Evangelisches Zentralarchiv Berlin (folgend EZA)*, B3/410.
- 13 Cf. *Aktenkonvolut Reformationsjubiläum 1917. Vorbereitungen Mai 1912 – Juni 1916*, EZA (s. Anm. 12), 1 A2, 431, *Blatt 59 vom 17. Juni 1914*.
- 14 Cf. [John George I], *The Duke of Saxony his jubilee: with a short chronologie. Both shewing the goodness of God, in blessing the Gospel of Christ, since Luther first opposed Popes pardons*, London 1618.
- 15 Cf. W. Flügel, *Deutsche Lutheraner? Amerikanische Protestanten? Die Selbstdarstellung deutscher Einwanderer im Reformationsjubiläum 1817*, in: U. Sträter (ed.), *Spurenlese. Martin Luther und die Reformation im historischen Jubiläum*, Leipzig [with the publisher].
- 16 Cf. J. Burkhardt, *Reformations- und Lutherfeiern. Die Verbürgerlichung der reformatorischen Jubiläumskultur*, in: D. Düding/P. Friedemann/P. Münch (eds.), *Öffentliche Feste in Deutschland von der Aufklärung bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, Reinbek 1988, 212–236.
- 17 Cf. *Kostenübersicht, Stadtarchiv Dresden*, RA, B.I. 80, Bl. 207.
- 18 Cf. H. Homann, *Religion in der "bürgerlichen Kultur". Das Problem des Kulturprotestantismus*, in: R. Ziegert (ed.), *Protestantismus als Kultur*, Bielefeld 1991, 67–84. I would like to thank Dr. Frank Schmidt, head of the art service of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony for information on the foundations.
- 19 Cf. F. Lau, *Der lebendige Luther. Zur 400. Wiederkehr des Todestages Luthers am 18. Februar*, in: *Die Union. Zeitung der christlich-demokratischen Union Deutschlands, Landesverband Sachsen* of 16 February 1946.
- 20 Cf. U. Simeon-Netto, *Luther als Wegbereiter Hitlers? Zur Geschichte eines Vorurteils*, Gütersloh 1991.
- 21 Cf. R. F. Goeckel, *The Luther Anniversary in East Germany*, *World Politics* 37 (1984), 112–133; the volume edited by H. Dähn/J. Heise (ed.), *Luther und die DDR. Der Reformator und das DDR-Fernsehen* 1983, Berlin 1996; M. Roy, *Luther in der DDR. Zum Wandel des Lutherbildes in der DDR-Geschichtsschreibung (Studien zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte 1)*, Bochum 2000.
- 22 First the SED refused to allow most visitors from Western countries to enter the GDR, cf. R. Mau, *Der Protestantismus im Osten Deutschlands 1945–1990*, Leipzig 2005, 91. Secondly, the SED obstructed church celebrations, cf. Church secretary Hans Seigewasser, letter to the Leipzig District Council, 23 June 1966, *Bundesarchiv (BArch) DO 4/2428*. Thirdly, the SED tried to leave the impression that the churches shared its view of the Reformation, cf. Bishop Johannes Jänicke, letter to head of the CDU in the GDR Gerald Götting, 5 October 1967, *SAPMO-BArch DY 30 J IV 2/2J/2703*.
- 23 Cf. L. Hölischer, *Die Entdeckung der Zukunft*, Frankfurt 1999; R. Koselleck (ed.), *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik*, Frankfurt 2000; R. Wendorf, *Zeit und Kultur. Geschichte des Zeitbewusstseins in Europa*, Opladen 3rd edn. 1985.
- 24 Cf. W. Flügel, *Zeitkonstrukte im Reformationsjubiläum*, in: Müller (ed.), *Jubiläum* (see note 3), 77–99.
- 25 Cf. J. Assmann, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität*, in: *ibid./T. Hölischer (ed.), Kultur und Gedächtnis*, Frankfurt 1988, 9–19.

1536 PUBLICATION OF CALVIN'S INSTITUTES

Modeled after Luther's Catechism, John Calvin published his *Institutio religionis Christianae* (Institutes) in Basel, which would become the most important book of doctrine for the French-speaking Reformed Church.



1536 WITTENBERG CONCORD

The Wittenberg Concord was meant to resolve differences in the interpretation of the Eucharist between Luther's followers and Swiss theologians who supported Zwingli. Differences included the issue of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

1536 INTRODUCTION OF THE REFORMATION IN GENEVA

French preacher Guillaume Farel was instrumental in bringing about the French-speaking Reformation. Farel preached in Basel, Metz, Strasbourg, Lausanne, and Geneva, which introduced the Reformation in 1526. This was implemented by John Calvin, who reorganized the Geneva church according to a strict church order that was introduced after five years, despite strong opposition.

The Word is the trademark of Protestantism

Sermon on the occasion of the induction of Margot Käßmann as the Special Envoy of the Evangelical Church in Germany for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee **By Margot Käßmann**



Margot Käßmann was installed as the Special Envoy for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee by EKD Council Chairman Nikolaus Schneider (right) on 27 April 2012 in Berlin's Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church.

Dear congregation,

Have you already forgotten some of the “un-words” of the year? [A list of individual “un-words” were read to begin the sermon, transl.] Since 1991, the Association for the German Language (*Gesellschaft für die deutsche Sprache*) has chosen one word each year for this dubious honor. If you look at the list from the first years, the words conjure up clear imagery: The euphemistic use of *Kollateralschaden* (“collateral damage”) to characterize the deaths caused by the

NATO bombing in the Kosovo War, the cynical description of people who are unable to work as *Wohlstandsmüll* (“prosperity waste”), and the bankers’ condescending use of “Peanuts” to describe large amounts of money. These are words that demonstrate the power of language, and words that stand for an often inhumane attitude. This holds true for the most recent “un-word” for 2011: *Döner-Morde* (“Döner murders” referring to recent neo-Nazi attacks on ethnic Turks). ...

“The Word” is, however, also a trademark of Protestantism. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that all of the upcoming Reformation Jubilee projects are to be tied together under the umbrella brand “In the beginning was the Word”. I must add, if I may, that “umbrella branding campaign” is not exactly a lovely turn of phrase either... Word skills, word power, Church of the Word – many connect this with the Reformation, with Martin Luther as the reformer, and with the churches of the Reforma-

Photo: epb/Andreas Schaezel

tion. I will begin by looking into the biblical origins, then the effects of the Reformation, and finally the scope of the concept of the Word.

1. In the beginning

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” (John 1:1-4)

That is how the Gospel according to John begins. There is no Christmas story with a manger as in Luke, no wise men from the Far East search for the son of a king as in Matthew. It was just the Word. And this was IN the beginning. It is with the very same words that the Hebrew part of the Bible begins, the beginning of the Bible itself: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The order of light and darkness, land and water emerged from chaos. The Word said: “Let there be!” And there was! God’s Word creates life, creativity, the ability to form. It was with this Word in the beginning of creation, that the ability to live was created, a living environment for plants, animals, and people.

John the Evangelist is very clear about beginning with the creation, and views, in the prologue to his gospel, Jesus, the Son of Man, as God’s new creation.¹ Unlike the other evangelists, John does not offer a beginning to the story of Jesus, does not provide a family tree, and does not tell of his birth. His origin lies with God himself. “God, who speaks through Jesus,

is none other than the one whom is described in the beginning of the Jewish Bible as the creator of the heavens and the earth.”² In Jesus’ words, his life and death, we can perceive God himself, experience him, and meet him. This is how life and light come into the world, even if that has remained difficult to understand through today. When Christians are asked what God is like, they join people of the Jewish faith in being able to praise him as the creator, as they take into account the accounts of the Father in the Hebrew part of the Bible. When they are, however, asked who God is, they can defer to Jesus himself. He described God as a loving father, a caring shepherd, and a kind vintner; as the one with whom Jesus struggled as his death came near, but to whom he entrusted himself in his death as he did in his life and beyond. There was no other God than that of Judaism! Jesus the Jew called him “Abba”, Father; and had a particular image of a God of tenderness and power, love and mildness.

It may seem strange to us to describe Jesus as the Word of God. At the time of John the Evangelist, however, this manner of speaking was known from philosophy and from wisdom literature in particular. In the latter, wisdom, known as Sophia, is seen as the mediator of creation. It is certainly decisive, however, that God as spoken of in the Bible is not an absent, silent, unfathomable ruler of the world, nor is he a diffuse force of being. God speaks and expresses himself. And he does not do so in Jesus for the first time, but it is in fact already God’s Word that brings about life in the original creation. Or as Psalm 50 tells us: “Our God comes and does not keep silence”.

2. Reformation

John’s prologue continues: “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God...” (John 1:9-12). Jesus Christ was thus the light for all and not only for many. All who believe in his name can become God’s children. And this is indeed not a path toward a loss of personal autonomy but a path of encouragement. This is not about an opium used to numb existential fears or fears of death, but about the strength to face life, offer resistance, bear suffering, and challenge rulers and authorities! The light illuminates all people and gives each individual the opportunity to become God’s child, to understand, ask, and grasp for oneself.

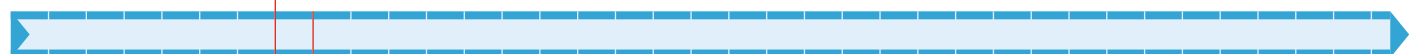
These are central concerns of the Reformation! I am fascinated, time and again, at how important education was for all of the reformers. “The Word” – that indeed stands for being able to think, reflect, ponder, and understand, and for being permitted to question. How often, through our own day, has religion been accused of following an attitude of: “Don’t question, just believe!” Fundamentalism, whether of the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or Hindu varieties, does not appreciate education and enlightenment. One central message for the Reformation Jubilee opposes all forms of fundamentalism, and that is: “Think for yourself!” This means being subject to no one in terms of conscience: free of dogmatism, religious constraints, and authori-

1539 DENMARK, NORWAY, AND ICELAND

When Christian III introduced the Reformation to Denmark, Norway, and Iceland with a new state church, the old bishops were either removed or banished, the properties of the Catholic Church were confiscated, and the schools reorganized.

1540 FOUNDING OF THE JESUIT ORDER

Ignatius of Loyola dedicated himself to spiritual practices with the goal of submitting fully to the will of God. He would soon find followers, and the Jesuit Order was subsequently founded and recognized by the pope. The loyalty of the Jesuits to the pope would make them into an important instrument of re-Catholicization.



ties of faith. And yet, this also means being subject to all, being responsible for one's community, and being called to a commitment to all of God's creation. It is perhaps one of the most important contributions of the Reformation that it involves an informed faith, a faith that seeks to understand and is permitted to ask questions, even when it comes to the book of the Christian faith, the Bible.

A few years ago, I gave an interview to the editor-in-chief of *Runners World*. Interestingly, it became clear to both of us during our conversation that the Protestant faith and sport fit together well: running as a spiritual experience; body awareness as part of creation. Years later, Frank Hofmann wrote a book entitled *Marathon zu Gott*, "Marathon to God".³ In it, he describes his own way back to faith as a long struggle, a challenge, in which he had to push the intellect that had once moved him away from faith "back in the other direction".⁴

I think that is great: Following this premise of the Word, the Reformation faith shows that we do not have to shut down our minds in this secular age, but can also use it in order to believe. When I think of the 2017 Jubilee, that is one of the central messages for me. Luther then becomes less of a consoler for the Germans or a national hero, as he was depicted in commemorative celebrations in the past, but, along with those around him, a thinker who can hold faith and intellect together, and defy fundamentalism in precisely this way, whether it is religious or ideological in nature. Perhaps that is the central message for 2017: faith not as a moral authority but as a radical freedom to engage with the world.

Luther, in his letter to the "Christian Nobility of the German Nation", called for schooling for everyone. Melancthon was a passionate teacher, and has been known as the "teacher of the Germans" due to his efforts at university reform. Martin Bucer is regarded as a church teacher as well, by Lutherans and Reformed alike. Huldrych Zwingli learned Greek in order to be able to read the New Testament in the original text edited by Erasmus of Rotterdam. Zwingli also owned 100 books, a large number for the time, and founded a Latin school in his parish in Glarus in 1510. And John Calvin founded his College in Geneva, from which the Reformed educational movement would spread to many parts of Europe!

The Word and indeed words thus lie at the core of Reformation thought – being able to read for

oneself and study Holy Scripture in one's own language or in the original language of the texts. Understanding, thinking, and forming one's own opinion: all of that was revolutionary. And perhaps we need to say that 25 years after the introduction of commercial television [in Germany] it is once again revolutionary today! Who even reads anymore, let alone the Bible?

Very well, some people find Christianity in its Reformation varieties to be difficult for precisely this reason, and especially difficult to communicate in such a media-based world. Where will we wind up if everyone can look into things themselves and make up their own opinions? Then there can be no clear answers anymore. In our days of Twitter and blogs, there is indeed no way of being sure of what people are thinking and concluding, never mind who lies behind all the comments. But this is the price that the churches of the Reformation have to pay. Diversity and freedom are their foundations. They have long since demonstrated that the Word is not constricting but indeed opens things up for one's own questions, thoughts, interpretations, and opinions. Not anonymously, however, and not without standing up for one's own word, freely, self-confidently, and by name. And it should in fact be one's *own* thoughts. And yes, that also has the potential to be political, provocative, even one-sided. And, in this way, very Protestant...

3. Flesh

The introduction to the Gospel of John then continues: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

This has always been important to me: The Word does not remain aloof or overly intellectual, but is lively, close to our everyday lives, and allows room for emotion. There are now entire books that lament the passing of intellectual Protestantism. They seem to think that they have lost it. And they think: That's what happens when women are ordained...

According to all that we know, however, John the Evangelist was indeed a man. And it was plainly clear to him: The Word has come alive in our midst! A person in the flesh, Jesus was born in a way that can truly not be intellectualized. He had feelings, was swaddled as a baby, learned to walk, read, cried, laughed, loved. We cannot only hear but also see, taste, touch, feel...

The Reformation is by far not as hostile to the body as many would like to think. We only need to look at Cranach's portrait of Luther, and we do not see an ascetic by any means! He liked to eat and drink and his table talks are still read and enjoyed today. And he, with his wife Katharina, liberated sexuality and family from the pall of inferiority in comparison with a life of celibacy. Luther could indeed be quite coarse in his speech but always anchored in real life! An overly strict Protestantism has forgotten this all too often.

The spirituality and sensuality of Protestantism has come alive in song from the very beginning. Luther's hymns have done more to spread Reformation thought than many of his writings, and Paul Gerhardt permitted Reformation theology to sing with all we have, while Bach would become for many a "Fifth Evangelist".

I became keenly aware of this when Hanover hosted the EXPO in 2000. The beginning of the event dragged on disappointingly and Birgit Breuel, the commissary general of the World's Fair called me to ask if we in the Hanover Church could not liven up the EXPO Plaza on Pentecost Sunday. This was in fact no problem at all: Protestant choirs and Protestant trombone choirs are everywhere to be found! Highly dedicated Protestants who make their congregations and church gatherings what they are, can fill a place like that with life and zest in just a few moments. An ecumenical dimension was added through Roman Catholic participation and Anglican Archbishop Tutu as the preacher: "And the life was the light of all people." That day, spirituality indeed went from being an abstract term to a vibrant experience in the midst of a place that had no aura of churchliness at all.

The center of the bodily character of Protestantism, however, lies elsewhere: in the theology of the cross! As the theologian Michael Welker wrote in his latest book on Christology, it radically opposes "forms of religiosity that disregard God's confrontation with suffering, misery, and the manifold self-endangerment of the world and of humankind."⁵ The theology of the cross is probably one of the reasons why Protestantism is viewed to be so adverse to life's pleasures. Who likes to think about suffering, dying, and death, especially in a fun-loving society, in which sociologists have observed a gradual "carnivalization"? It is, however, in fact this type of theology that is viable. It does not have to ignore suffering, it can tolerate periods of silence, and it has the strength not to merely say that "everything will be fine" and instead not

turning away but enduring it alongside others whenever life is marked with desperation, worry, or even death.

Theology requires sensuality, words that become flesh in tones, touches, colors, and images. One such image is for me the picture entitled “Aunt Marianne” now on display in the Richter exhibition at the *Neue Nationalgalerie* (New National Gallery) here in Berlin. The picture simply fascinated me from the start: Such a gentle pose of a young girl and a small child, blurred like so many of Richter’s pictures. But then I read Jürgen Schreiber’s book “Ein Maler aus Deutschland” (“A painter from Germany”). Richter painted his Aunt Marianne, the younger sister of his mother, without knowing how she had become a symbol of the horrors of the Nazi euthanasia program. This pretty, open-hearted, and clearly intelligent young woman was diagnosed with schizophrenia at the age of 20. This was followed by her hospitalization, a terrible time of suffering in different institutions, her forced sterilization, and her being gassed in the end...

Marianne Schönfelder, who went to the High School for Girls in Dresden was – like many other youngest daughters – the apple of her parents’ eyes. She became a victim of an ideology that preached a doctrine of “German blood and cultural heritage”.⁶ They used terms such as “valueless life”, “useless consumers”, and “boarders” living among the “master race”. Marianne’s picture stands for a destruction that words are scarcely able to express. It took a long time for Gerhard Richter to realize that his father-in-law, whom he so often painted, SS *Obersturmbannführer* Heinrich Eufinger, had been responsible for forced sterilizations and had performed hundreds of them himself. Richter was 73 when he grasped what it was that he painted when he

was 33:⁷ a picture that now worth so many words; a picture that tells a story – movingly; but a picture that also critically challenges any uncritical reception of Luther that glossed over his terrible and inhuman statements about Jews in a lethargy of conformity, when resistance was what was needed.

Whether you are visiting Berlin today, or in fact live here, I can highly recommend the exhibition. The insights that Richter’s pictures open up, like those of other great artists, allow us to experience how word becomes flesh again and again. This is particularly the case for “Aunt Marianne”. This is why I can understand that Luther does not count the commandment against imagery among the Ten Commandments. The idea behind “not making an image” is too complex for it to be allowed to involve a real disdain for or even the destruction of images!

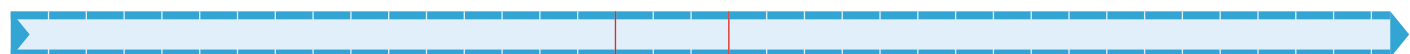
The word became flesh – after all of the words. The word became flesh and we are able to bear looking at pictures like that because we believe, as Christians, that ideology and its words, superficial statements of concern, and the deceptions of fundamentalism have less power than that word that became flesh, which we see dying on the cross. God is there. God suffers there with him – with you – with me. He suffers with the humiliated and hurt, the suffering and the dying among humankind.

And because Christians experience and recognize this word, they stand up time and again to humiliation, destruction, and to words that degrade others. In Jesus’ name – Amen. ◀

Prof. Dr. Margot Käßmann is the Special Envoy of the Evangelical Church in Germany for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee.

Source: Sermon at Berlin’s Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, 27 April 2012 upon the induction of Margot Käßmann as the Special Envoy of the Evangelical Church in Germany for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee.

- 1 The New Testament scholar Klaus Wengst writes: “He is apparently quite aware of starting with the beginning of his Jewish Bible, with the creative word of God, which he can identify with Jesus since a creative act of God occurs in him as well”. Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*, THKNT Stuttgart 2000, p. 39.
- 2 Wengst, *ibid.*, p. 46.
- 3 Frank Hofmann, *Marathon zu Gott*, Gütersloh 2011.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 5 Michael Welker, *Gottes Offenbarung*, Neukirchen 2012, p. 135.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 7 *Cf. ibid.*, p. 164.



1542

FOUNDING OF THE ROMAN INQUISITION

The Roman Catholic Church used the Inquisition in its external fight against the emerging scientific view of the world and in its internal struggle against reform efforts.

15 March 1545

BEGINNING OF THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

Under the leadership of Pope Paul III, the Council of Trent was meant to find answers to the challenges of the Reformation. The seven sacraments, for example, were reaffirmed: Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, Eucharist, Marriage, Holy Orders, and the Anointing of the Sick. The Council of Trent did not conclude until 1563.

Intended identification

Historical remarks on the ecclesio-genic function of the 2017 Reformation Jubilee, with a look at Lucas Cranach's altarpiece in the Town Church of Wittenberg – dedicated to the memory of Helmar Junghans. **By Johannes Ehmann**



Reformation altarpiece in Wittenberg's Town Church of St. Mary's by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553). The altarpiece was created in his Wittenberg workshop around 1540 and was consecrated in 1547 in the Town Church.

1. A problem

One Friday in September 2008, a vehicle, not unlike a clunky farmer's cart, rattled down the streets of Wittenberg, once the seat of power and university town of Electoral Saxony. High atop the one-horse carriage sat three men – each made recognizable by their clothing in their apparent historical roles: a professor of theology, a diminutive monk, and the driver. With some knowledge, one can recognize the prominent members of the regional church in

this procession. The cart did not indeed rattle along alone, but was accompanied by all sorts of people, occasionally cheering *Hurra* or (the not particularly apt) *Jubel* (“cheer”). Every now and then the cart comes to a halt, and the town is explained to the youngest of the three – it is the monk – who then himself explains, spiritedly and as if prophetically, what would one day, and rather soon in fact, be taking place there in Wittenberg. At one of the *stationes historiae*, a group of perhaps 8 to 10-year-old girls

performed a song that was apparently quite new for the town at the time, Luther's “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, written in 1529) – and all following the old melody, which no normal person can actually sing, although the girls did their very best.

What was happening here? People were playing, performing, contemporizing – it was the opening program for the Luther Decade, 2008–2017.

It was indeed in 1508 that Luther arrived in Wittenberg, a monk coming to what would be his main place of activity as a reformer. And this is expected to hit home with the people of Wittenberg – and does – even if the arrival of a monk around the year 1508 would have left the people of a German town entirely cold. There were already enough monks around so that the arrival of yet another would have done little to attract attention.

So there we have it, the rearrival of Luther in 2008, exactly 500 years later. The show offers a glimpse of how the Luther Decade was to unfold – media-oriented and attractive to tourists – through the 2017 celebration of the posting of Luther’s theses (an event that has recently been reopened to historical discussion¹). There is nothing to be said against these plans. But the question still remains: What will actually be celebrated in 2017? Of course it will involve the posting of the 95 Theses and thus the ignition, or at least initiation of the Reformation. But what will that in fact be celebrating? The commonly heard shorthand “2017” may indicate to us that the preparations for the jubilee have already been irreparably inundated by a kind of

promotional slang. The question then remains and the problem only gets worse: What will in fact be celebrated in 2017? And what should in fact be celebrated? What can be celebrated? And what can be celebrated if the endpoint of the arc of the Luther Decade is to be the remembrance of the posting of the 95 Theses, a particular historical date – and perhaps the only date of the Reformation present in today’s collective memory. This implicitly refers to two dimensions, those of time and of meaning, which brings us back to the basic categories involved in the historical jubilee.²

An analysis of the event described above can help in discussing this question: There is (1.) an occurrence in time that, in its staging, has a clear quality of a staged event: Luther the monk comes to Wittenberg. This occurrence implies (2.) an agenda that requires an interpretation and which has indeed become the subject of interpretation: From atop the vehicle Luther sees the new Leucorea university building and hears what is perhaps his best-known hymn – before either was actually created. What are needed are (3.) the reception of the event and agenda, which attain greater impact through

the media (with live television and radio). The spectacle as a whole is also expected to provide (4.) identification and the formation of identity – and with a view to the future (i.e. 1517/2017 and beyond). Whoever celebrates anything is also celebrating themselves or not at all.

The event is clear-cut with identification as an intended result. But what about the agenda and the meaningful reception of what is to be depicted? What are the plans? What is being hoped for – and what is not?

In 2008, the renowned Göttingen-based historian Hartmut Lehmann deemed the plans of the various institutions for the Reformation jubilee to be “so far unclear. One could, however, surmise that it is, for some, primarily an academic look into Luther’s life and work, while the state of Saxony-Anhalt sees it as an attempt to make the region’s best-known son even better known and to have as many Lutherans from around the world already begin to follow in the Reformer’s footsteps through the poor German state during the Luther Decade.”³ Nothing has fundamentally changed since his analysis – if perhaps only a few nuances.⁴

1555
RELIGIOUS PEACE OF AUGSBURG

The Augsburg Diet approved an indefinitely valid religious peace between Protestants and Catholics until such time that the church would be reunited. From this point forward, the principle would pertain of *cuius regio eius religio*, with each sovereign determining his region’s denomination on behalf of his subjects.



18 February 1546
LUTHER’S DEATH

Martin Luther died in Eisleben, his place of birth, where he was on hand to take care of inheritance disputes. He was buried three days later in Wittenberg’s Castle Church.

Is the jubilee really only of academic interest? Should the agenda simply be left to the universities? Is it (independently) viable as an event to promote the economy and best left to marketing strategists? In Lehmann's deeper and more penetrating words: "What does Luther still have to say to the Germany of 2017, a secularized and religiously pluralistic society, and a society in which Protestants active in churches form a minority, a minority that is further divided among conservatives and progressives, between Evangelical groups that trust in a strict Biblicism and progress-minded movements that promise social justice along with the protection of creation and world peace?"⁵

Lehmann does not give a direct answer to this himself. We should probably not expect one. Instead, he connects the very sense of having a Reformation jubilee with five thematic areas that need to be resolved, all of which come into focus as being centered on and particularly laden with problems: Luther and the Baptists, Luther and the Pope, Luther and the tolerant humanists, Luther and the Turks, and Luther and the Jews. It is beyond all doubt that each of these topics rightly requires further research and demands a willingness to repent on the part of the church. It is, however, to be questioned whether a focus solely on this list of topics corresponds with the concerns (agenda!) of the Reformation, whether this means a focus solely on Martin Luther as a person or a hermeneutically appropriate approach to the individual topics. Amazingly, Lehmann in fact looks first and foremost at surrogates and derivatives of Protestantism. The theological experiences and primary decisions made by Luther and other reformers are not even the subject of criticism – but worse! – are not even mentioned there. Lehmann's question, "What can Luther 2017 say to us?," goes unanswered by Lehmann himself as he no longer even asks the question "What did Luther 1517 (and later) have to say?" – indeed rather astounding for a historian renowned for church history.

What is it all about for the Protestant Church, however, which appears surprisingly infrequently in Lehmann's work as the institution involved in the planning? What should it be about for the church when a historical construal apparently no longer suffices to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation within a broad social consensus? The agenda and reception of the event remain open as long as the orchestration of the jubilee does not involve a message that refers to the causes and the objectives of the Reformation as a new perspective

and (subsequently) a reshaping of the church that one would later refer to as Protestant. It is my first assertion, which I will support in the following, that this is possible for a historical jubilee. This is connected to a second assertion that the new agenda of the church can be identified with a look at Lucas Cranach's altarpiece in Wittenberg's Town Church – and in such a way that a jubilee message can be constructed for 2017.

2. The Wittenberg Altarpiece

A small number of facts need to be mentioned in appreciation of the altarpiece in order to then be able to describe its iconography in an adequate manner. It is a three-panel altarpiece, encompassing four images: three retables and a supporting predella. The middle image depicts the scene of the Last Supper, and must thus be viewed as a Christ-centered image. It is remarkable that it does not show the scene of institution but in fact the point at which Judas reveals himself as a traitor – with the involuntary move of his hand toward the equally traitorous moneybag. One of the disciples is turning quite visibly towards the cupbearer; and Cranach used the face of Luther, or indeed "Junker Jörg", in the 1520s for this disciple. Even if the research⁶ accepts that the middle picture was perhaps already completed in the 1530s, this is in that case to be seen as an anachronism. Carelessness should, however, be excluded here – it is more likely that Luther, who was asking for wine, is underscoring the necessity of celebrating communion in both kinds (a position throughout Protestantism), as Luther did himself in the Formula Missae of 1523 and the German Mass of 1526.

To the sides of the middle picture and below are images, which can be categorized as reformer-centered pictures. On the left, we see Philipp Melancthon in the midst of baptizing, while on the right Johannes Bugenhagen is to be seen, who as a parish pastor is taking a confession, the ministry of the keys, binding and loosing (in accordance with Matt. 16:19). Unlike the middle picture, the baptism and confession are clearly localized within the Wittenberg Town Church itself. This holds true as well for the image presented in the predella. The congregation thus not only recognizes its own church space, in which they are present themselves, not only the pulpit, crucifix, and wall decor; they can also recognize the reformers who, in the midst of their congregation, carry out – or carried out – their ministry. Martin Luther had in fact died 14 months before the altarpiece was installed.

The year 1547 is often forgotten in the annals of history: On the day the altarpiece was installed, April 24, 1547, Wittenberg Parish was under considerable duress. The town was under siege and other small towns had already been overrun. On the day of the altarpiece's dedication itself, the decisive battle of the Schmalkaldic War was being fought near Torgau and Mühlberg, only some 60 kilometers away. This led to a victory for the Kaiser and a catastrophic defeat for the Protestants. The exact date of the altarpiece's consecration is, however, not fully sure. If indeed the dating of the consecration was affected by a pious legend, this would only augment its significance. This is because Wittenberg Parish installed its new altarpiece at a time when the worldly power of the Catholic Kaiser achieved its – if merely apparent – victory over the Protestant cause, with a touch of "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom. 8:31). Nevertheless, the Wittenberg stronghold would capitulate on May 19, 1547.

Even if we take several months into account for its completion, the altarpiece is still the product of times of great uncertainty for the future of the Protestant Church. Its imagery is there to console, to increase the confidence of the congregation, and to build up and preserve Protestant identity, i.e. to ensure its future. And actions are being depicted there: people are baptized, receive communion, sins are forgiven and kept, sermons are held. It is in this that the Protestant Church unfolds.

If this initial characterization of the altarpiece is accurate, we must also recall the arrival of Martin Luther the monk (1508/2008) as described above: an event that was transformed into an interpretive agenda. The performance was meant to teach but also to cheer and uplift, and to promote reception in general. The goal was to foment an identity with a view to the beginning Decade, and thus the imminent future.

If we transfer this structure to the images of the Wittenberg Altarpiece, we are able to observe that the church was depicted there as an event in time. The content to be interpreted was developed by mutually acquainted reformers in service to Christ and his congregation. It is meant to be received by the congregation as it gazes upon the centrally positioned altarpiece. The recipients see the same things that are happening in the church during the service: They hear the sermon, take part in the acts of baptism and communion, experience binding and loosing in the confession. Of course, they also expect

rience more: assurance and confidence in coming to terms with contingency, and thus the future.

The main acts of a Protestant church service, i.e. baptism, communion, confession, and proclamation, are of course not a novelty in the iconography of the Wittenberg altarpiece. False interpretations are indeed also possible. One such interpretation could arise in viewing in the iconography a reflection of Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession, which states that the church, as a gathering of believers, is founded in the pure proclamation of the Gospel and the ministry of the sacraments. If this interpretation were to hold true, would one not have had to have designed the altarpiece differently, as perhaps a depiction of Christ crucified in the middle and depictions of baptism and communion in the two side panels?

Another, in my opinion, untenable interpretation was provided by Thomas Packeiser in his study of Cranach's Wittenberg altarpiece. In this interpretation, the depiction of Bugenhagen and the ministry of the keys points to the "range of sacraments which by 1547 had long since been expanded again" – following the emphasis placed on having only two sacraments in the 1520s.⁷ This, however, apparently confuses the terms *sacramenta* and *notae ecclesiae*. It would seem a better idea to look into the congregation's written documents, which do exist, to understand Cranach's program of imagery for the "foundations of Wittenberg Parish" (Jung-hans),⁸ something that has not yet been done: In the "Wittenberg Reformation. 1545",⁹ a church order issued two years before the dedication of the altarpiece, we can read as a sort of preamble: "Proper Christian church governance lies chiefly in these five parts:

- ▶ Firstly, in a pure and proper doctrine which God has given, revealed, and ordered to the Church;
- ▶ Secondly, in the proper use of the sacrament;
- ▶ Thirdly, in the maintenance of the ministry and of obedience to the pastors, as God wishes the ministerium evangelii to be maintained, and himself powerfully maintains;
- ▶ Fourthly, in the maintenance of proper discipline through the ecclesiastical court or clerical jurisdiction;
- ▶ Fifthly, in the maintenance of the required studies and schools;
- ▶ Sixthly, physical protection and adequate remuneration are needed."¹⁰

The effectuations of the church order reveal no. 1 as a type of overview for the subsequent stipulations. No. 6 describes the external responsibility of the authorities for the church. The heart of the text, nos. 2–4, closely reflects the iconography of the Wittenberg altarpiece, i.e. sacraments, ministry, and church discipline. The important no. 5 (university and school) only appears not to be addressed but is provided with the foundations of education within the mandate of parents to provide a Christian upbringing.

3. The reformers as interpreters and means of interpreting the church as an event

It remains controversial as to whether Philipp Melanchthon performed baptisms himself. He was a theologian and not a pastor. If he did baptize, it was not something that likely happened very often. This does not weaken the message, however, which is to be differentiated from the actual person of Melanchthon. Thus it may have played a role that there is also a Philipp in Acts 8, who teaches and baptizes. Melanchthon's of-

ten relentless struggle with the so-called Baptists may have also played a role in this matter. I would like to support the proposition that the picture of Melanchthon baptizing recognizes him for his comprehensive theology of baptism, which, on the one hand, insolubly links baptism and congregation, while, on the other hand, points the way from baptism to communion and to a disciplined Christian life (*pietas et eruditio*). It is Melanchthon who time and again stresses and justifies the necessity of infant baptism as in his German Loci, which Luther had known but which was not printed until 1553:¹¹ "It is [1.] indeed certain that the promise of eternal life belongs to the children. And the same does not belong to those outside the Church, as there is no salvation there. It follows that one must baptize the children into the body of the Church and make them into members of the Church.

[2.] Numerous children must become part of the Church. It is certain that the name of Christ must be invoked over them and they must be baptized. [...]

[3.] The children need to have their sins forgiven as they carry with them the greatest misery of human weakness and innate disobedience. [...] It follows that one owes it to the children to share forgiveness through baptism with them."¹²

Baptism is thus incorporation into the body of the congregation as well as a promise of the forgiveness of sins – for the children as well, and in particular. The iconographic proximity of the oversized baptismal font as a small circle in respect to the large circle of the congregation of the communion is hardly coincidental. Indeed, what begins in the small circle, singularly and definitively, i.e. the salvational community of Christ in acceptance and forgive-



Martin Luther Monument on Wittenberg's Market Square. The Town Church of St. Mary is in the background.



Photos: p. 54: epc-bild/Noibert Neetz; p. 55: epc-bild/Thomas Seeber

ness, is continued in the large circle of the congregation of the communion.

But that is not all. Melancthon himself summarizes it all and connects paternal acceptance, Christian faith, spiritual justice (Christian life), and parental nurturing: “The parents shall prudently consider the named causes to awaken their own faith, which is that they were also adopted by God through their baptism, as God promised them in their [!] own baptism, He, the eternal father of the mediator Jesus Christ, should be merciful to you, save you for the sake of his son Jesus Christ ... and should grant you his Holy Spirit to awaken new justice and eternal life in you. And as the parents regard their own [!] baptism, so should they also value the baptism of children, thanking God that he receives the children into his Church and mercy. [...] And in this faith, that God receives the children with certainty, parents should call upon God for the children, entrust them to God with proper and earnest prayer, and then, as they learn to speak, to teach them to call upon God and the Lord Christ and constantly raise them in and accustom them to the doctrine of the Gospels.”¹³

The incorporation of the children into the congregation and the previous reception of their parents are both anchored in baptism and are the foundation not only for the pious discipline of the children but also for the identity of the parents as their educators.

Christ is the central figure of the main retable. The congregation finds its own center in the depiction of the communion – with Christ presiding over it. The greatest dynamics can be seen in the group surrounding Jesus: Judas the traitor, Peter the inquiring (“Lord, is it I?”), and

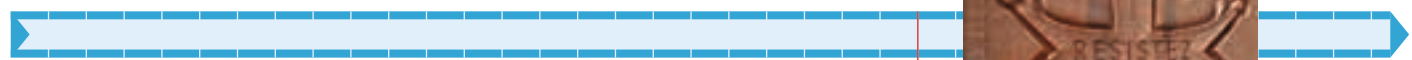
John who is simply with his Lord – in particular proximity. We have already looked at the guest asking for wine (“Luther”). The depiction of the communion cannot, however, be seen as a classical picture of the reformers. It is instead an inviting Christ himself who appears as giver and as gift (with a view to the slaughtered lamb as well). Or to exaggerate somewhat: Jesus is to be viewed as a reformer himself inasmuch as the reproduction of the original supper can be seen as wholly connected to his original act.

Johannes Bugenhagen looses and binds, and the congregation watches its town pastor as he carries out the ministry of the keys. A penitent person receives absolution, while another remains with his sin. He slips away angry and scornful – not bound by some sort of church police, but by his very own sin. His hands rest on his “codpiece”, at the time a vivid expression of virility. The codpiece of the stubborn man and Judas’ moneybag in the Last Supper retable are quite similar. The connection between sex and money is readily apparent.

The confession retable is brimming with content: One can hardly image a confession like the one observed there taking place in the midst of the congregation like that. Bugenhagen appears like a mechanic who works levers with strength and assuredness. This impression is also assuredly not coincidental, as it opposes the idea that the importance of the pastor is limited to individual pastoral care alone. Bugenhagen is more than that: leader of churches, writer of church orders, and cyberneticist. The congregation knew that penance, confession, excommunication, and absolution are all part of every church order. The congregation surely also knew that their pastor, who was so often away from them, had created nearly all of the church orders in

northern Germany. And it was Bugenhagen himself, who made individual confession a prerequisite for communion in his church orders, but who then progressed to forming the Christian congregation through marriage law, pastoral remuneration, and the establishment of schools and poorhouses.¹⁴ No area is without importance if it can in some way serve doctrine and confession. As Thomas Kaufmann put it: “the confession ... defined the doctrinal fundamentals of the publically practiced worship service within its area of validity. [...] All ... regulations that are made in Protestant church orders – on ministry, worship services, church law, schools, pastoral salaries, etc. – were based in sound doctrine. The elucidation of sound doctrine, however, aimed *eo ipso* at the preservation of the ministry.”¹⁵ The confession retable indeed invoked baptism and communion, but above all pure doctrine as proclaimed to the congregation in the interpretation of God’s word. The basis of it all is thus the proclamation of the Gospel.

The preaching Luther of the predella is probably the altarpiece’s best known image as it is extremely incisive with regard to Luther’s view of preaching between the Scripture and its Christological interpretation: Luther’s left hand rests on the Bible, while his right hand points to Christ on the cross. While the image of Luther appears static, movement does appear in the depiction of Christ on the cross. Jesus’ loincloth blows in the wind – away from the preacher toward the congregation. The wind blows wherever it chooses – as does the Spirit. But it here that the Spirit chooses to be! This stands for perfected spiritually driven communications between a preacher and the congregation in a simple worship service and simple sermon culture: Preaching the word is the salutary teach-



23–24 August 1572
ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S DAY MASSACRE

The massacre marked the peak of violence against Protestants in France, with thousands murdered. Protestant Christians in France fought in the French Wars of Religion (1562–1598) for recognition of their religious beliefs and for political influence.



ing of those in the congregation who are called to this ministry. The relationship of the sermon with the acts that it is based on and which it depicts is mutual.

Proclamation provides access to baptism, communion, and the Christian life. Sacraments and everyday life, in turn, require an interpretation if they are to interact fruitfully.

The images of the Wittenberg altarpiece thus all depict acts, whether complete or still underway. Each of the images involves witnesses who are not just “there” but see, taste, and hear, and who can now testify to one another what God has done and continues to do on their behalf. The godparents, the disciples, the penitent ones, and the listeners to the sermon all become corporeal identification figures especially as many of the members of the congregation were quite well known.

The Cranach altarpiece thus describes the congregation as an event, as the Church in the process of being and becoming. The actors (reformers) interpret one another. It is thus, first and foremost, about the historical relationship between:

- ▶ Baptism and upbringing (education);
- ▶ Eucharist and community;
- ▶ Confession and life in accordance with God’s order;
- ▶ Proclamation and doctrine as the basis of church action.

Based on this description, I would like to present a case for 1517 being the historical basis of the agenda behind all this. If 2017 is to be celebrated as a historical jubilee, it will first have to be geared toward this historical program. The plausibility of the jubilee indeed lies in whether an agenda that is suited to our day and can be supported in our contemporary world can be derived from these historical understandings.

**4. Parenthesis:
Studies in Reformation history**

With certainty, the discipline of theology in terms of church history (and systematic theology) is especially needed when it comes to understanding the historical agenda. And we must certainly not only think of conferences but also and especially of university education. Many have observed how examinees often demonstrate that they perhaps have come into contact with (only) one of Luther’s works during their years as a student (and then only in

excerpts) – let alone any of Melanchthon’s works beyond the Augsburg Confession and the “Instructions for the Church Visitors”, or some of Zwingli’s and Calvin’s basic writings. It does not look any better when it comes to the general swing of Reformation history, which should indeed be seen as basic examination material. Whether as a result of von Ranke’s major history of the Reformation or just as a cheap method of keeping material to a minimum, the Reformation begins in 1517 and ends in 1555 with the Peace of Augsburg. Everything else – if not simply negative – is relegated to being a history of confessionalization (which is somehow felt to be “unpleasant”). Even the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 would seem to be rather unattractive for examinations as it falls beyond the beginning of the new era (which can at most be viewed as a sort of turning point).

Perhaps – and one would hope – this is only a sign of transition. For one thing, students have also been coming to the understanding that the teaching of the historical foundations of their own church could be viewed as part of one’s mission in a society in which the cultural memory has long since lost these foundations. There is, moreover, in my opinion no doubt that a whole series of excellent studies has recently emerged in the discipline of (church) history, which can promote historical understanding. They only need to be acknowledged.

5. 1517–2017

Events – agendas to be interpreted – reception – creation of identity: These areas were mentioned above to be the object of interpretation and analysis and were then applied first to a contemporary event and then to a historical altarpiece as a document of the Reformation agenda. This was connected with the attestation (by Hartmut Lehmann) of a hitherto unclear agenda for the upcoming 2017 Reformation anniversary and the recommendation of thematic areas which could be recognized and serve as a means of clearing away the (historical-ethical) debris to reveal a Reformation that is compatible with modernity – if one is to be had. Even as the EKD’s planning for 2017 – as can be recognized in the annual themes – has already begun to gain more clarity, it remains for me primarily a matter of researching derivative matters, i.e.

- ▶ reflections of the Reformation in the field of education;
- ▶ reflections of legal culture including the constitution based on liberal principles;

▶ and even reflections of the freedom of conscience as an adumbration of what it would develop into in the following centuries: freedoms of opinion, research and teaching. This is not because these matters are without significance but because a Reformation jubilee can only be conceived, planned, and celebrated based on what was once the central event itself: the congregation as it occurs with its externally and internally effective acts: Sermon, Baptism, Eucharist, and the order of Christian life. The Protestant Church is indeed celebrating itself here, what some may however see as being in some way un-Protestant. Regardless of the question however of how a jubilee can be celebrated without emotional or at least mental participation, the celebration of the Reformation must neither devolve into an uncritical apotheosis nor into the product of a partly ignorant “event culture” at the expense of real topics. Protestant piety is a piety of penance and this emerged from the abuses that were addressed in 1517 in an essentially theological and not only palliative manner. Can a church that speaks of the joy of penance and of repentance – not as the product of struggle but as a gift – can such a church afford to play down the joy experienced by the recipients of this gift?!

In 1986, no less a figure than Wolfhart Pannenberg¹⁶ attempted to develop Christian theology on the basis of Protestant penitential piety, touching on Eucharistic piety, baptism, and sanctification in the process toward theologically responding to and taking responsibility for the modern-day question of true self. It is not surprising that he became stuck in the process on the basic matters also addressed by Cranach’s Wittenberg altarpiece. Pannenberg’s study, however, has scarcely shown any recognizable long-term impact.

Must this be understood as a sign that pastors can be observed to be among the most critical when it comes to the upcoming jubilee – as those who have felt the least that this jubilee could strengthen their identity and that of the congregation? Very little is likely to be accomplished through moral appeals. Ecclesiogenic plausibility can only be derived through areas of content that are relevant and effective with regard to people’s lives. The iconographic program of the Wittenberg altarpiece – and possibly other images – is of relevance here as well in that it points to the lifelines of the Protestant Church since the Reformation – education,

community, order, and doctrine – and connects these back to their biblical foundations. Each of these requires explanation after 500 years, but each can indeed be explained. This opens up a basic church methodology that serves to affirm the Protestant Church, while urging it to consider, self-critically and programmatically, the four areas of its essence and activity, i.e.:

- ▶ baptism and education;
- ▶ collected (Eucharistic) congregation and ecumenical church community;
- ▶ forms of piety and ethics, the inner order of the church, and external social efficacy;
- ▶ theological doctrine and a discourse on the meaning of religions and worldviews in personal responsibility.

Lucas Cranach's altarpieces convey their own messages with a unique voice. If their historical message is to be perceptible, we would need not only to describe the visual message of an altarpiece but a road would also have to be paved for the future of the historical study and research of the Protestant Church. Beginning in 1517, a specific form of church became an event, a snapshot of which thirty years later (1547) I have attempted to describe. It becomes visible here, at the center of the worshipping community, what the Protestant Church is founded on, and what strengthens and guides it.

Is then an answer possible to the central question of the symposium: Who does the Reformation belong to? I think so. Not in the sense that the Reformation belongs to the Protestant Church – as an inalienable possession – but in the sense that the Protestant Church only exists if it emerges, i.e. if it is geared toward the actions of the Reformation congregation. Put more succinctly: The Reformation does not be-

long to the Protestant Church but the Protestant Church belongs to the Reformation – and does so still and again today! ◀

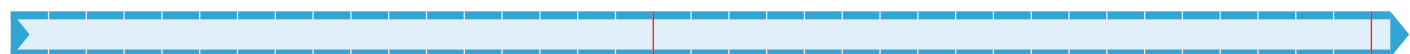
Prof. Dr. Johannes Ehmann,
Theological Seminar of the University
of Heidelberg

Source: The original German version of this paper is to appear next year in: Günter Frank/Volker Leppin/Herman J. Selderhuis (eds.), *Wem gehört die Reformation? Nationale und konfessionelle Dispositionen der Reformationsdeutung* (Herder-Verlag Freiburg i.Br., 2013). It is provided here with the kind permission of the publisher.

- 1 Cf. the articles of the publication: Joachim Ott, Martin Treu (eds.), *Luthers Thesenanschlag – Faktum oder Fiktion*, Leipzig 2008 (Schriften der Stiftung Luthergedenksstätten in Sachsen-Anhalt 9).
- 2 Cf. the articles of the publication: Winfried Müller (ed.) with Wolfgang Flügel, Iris Loosen, Ulrich Rosseaux, *Das historische Jubiläum. Genese, Ordnungsleistung und Inszenierungsgeschichte eines institutionellen Mechanismus*, Münster 2004 (Geschichte: Forschung und Wissenschaft 3). In this publication, Wolfgang Flügel in particular deals with the description of the construction of time in the Reformation jubilee, *ibid.* 77–99. This includes the apt description (101) of the historical jubilee: "Its essence lies in that, with its help, the respective institution [...] contemporizes the key events of its own past in celebratory form. Very often this involves the founding event, which is evocative and thus is filled with meaning for the present, from which possible future validity is also derived. Jubilees contribute toward the creation and stabilization of collective identity."
- 3 Hartmut Lehmann, *Die Deutschen und ihr Luther*, Frankfurt Allgemeine Zeitung no. 199 of 26 August 2008, 7.
- 4 Cf. *idem*, *Unterschiedliche Erwartungen an das Reformationsjubiläum*, BThZ 28/1 (2011), 16–27.
- 5 Cf. *wieder Frankfurt Allgemeine Zeitung* 2008. I cite Lehmann as an example of current views. A discussion of his perhaps excessively generalizing observations cannot be provided here.
- 6 On the Wittenberg Town Church altarpiece cf. Thomas Packeiser, *Pathosformel einer "christlichen Stadt"? Ausgleich und Heilsanspruch im Sakramentsretabel der Wittenberger Stadtpfarrkirche*, in: Andreas Tacke (ed.) with Stefan Rhein and Michael Wiemers, *Lucas Cranach d. Ä. Zum 450. Todesjahr*, Leipzig 2007 (Schriften der Stiftung Luthergedenksstätten in Sachsen-Anhalt 7), 233–275; Doreen Zerbe, *Bekenntnis und Memoria. Zur Funktion lutherischer Gedächtnisbilder in der Wittenberger Stadtkirche St. Marien*, *ibid.* 327–342; also: Albrecht Steinwachs, *Der Reformationsaltar von Lucas Cranach d. Ä. in der Stadtkirche St. Marien, Lutherstadt Wittenberg*, Spröda 1998.
- 7 Cf. Footnote 6, esp. 236. The *particula veri* of Packeiser's statement lies in the uncontroversial meaning of repentance, confes-

sion, and the ministry of the keys as they also are expressed in their reedition in the Lutheran catechisms (in contrast with the first edition of the Small Catechism of 1529) and the sixth main part (between Baptism and Eucharist).

- 8 Cf. Helmar Junghans, *Martin Luther und Wittenberg*, München/Berlin 1996, 118.
- 9 Wittenbergische Reformation. 1545, in: Emil Sehling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts I/1*, Leipzig 1902, 209–222. The church order was signed by Luther, Bugenhagen, Cruciger ("Creutziger"), Maior, and Melancthon ("Melanthon").
- 10 *Ibid.* 209.
- 11 Philipp Melancthon, Heubartikel Christlicher Lere. *Melancthons deutsche Fassung seiner Loci Theologici, nach dem Autograph und dem Originaldruck von 1553*, ed. by Ralf Jenett and Johannes Schilling, Leipzig 2002.
- 12 *Ibid.* 327.8–30.
- 13 *Ibid.* 328.16–32.
- 14 Cf. e.g. the Pomeranian Church Order (1535): Johannes Bugenhagen, *Die pommersche Kirchenordnung. Text mit Übersetzung, Erläuterungen und Einleitung*, ed. by Norbert Buske, Berlin 1985.
- 15 Thomas Kaufmann, *Das Bekenntnis im Luthertum des konfessionellen Zeitalters*, ZThK 105 (2008), 281–314; 219f.
- 16 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christliche Spiritualität. Theologische Aspekte*, Göttingen 1986 (KVR 1519).



25 June 1580
BOOK OF CONCORD

The Book of Concord appeared in Dresden 50 years after the publication of the Augsburg Confession. The volume included the three creeds of the Early Church, the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, and the Large and Small Catechisms. 86 Imperial Estates and nearly 10,000 theologians signed the confession.

1598
EDICT OF NANTES

The Edict of Nantes ended the persecution of Protestants in France, who were granted a civil status equal to that of Catholics. Calvinism would subsequently gain in societal influence in the country.

Ecumenism and contemporizing the Reformation – a broad and complex subject

A contribution on the topic of “Who owns the Reformation?”¹ By Theodor Dieter

The question of who history belongs to clearly presupposes that there is in fact such a thing as the ownership of the history of historical events and that this claim to ownership can be challenged. The question was indeed raised of “who owns the history of July 20, 1944?” when it was announced that the story would be turned into a Hollywood picture with Scientologist Tom Cruise in the role of Stauffenberg, and was in fact to be filmed in the original places.² And when Steven Spielberg began to shoot his film “Munich”, one journalist asked: “Who owns the history of the attack on the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich? Is it the director who brings it to the screen or the woman who lost her husband in Munich?”³ Accepting that a historical event can in fact belong to anybody would thus seem to depend on whether that person has been primarily affected by the event, but also on whether he or she knows or believes to know, better than others, the individual or individuals who played a role in that event. As has been reported, the widow of one of the Munich victims phoned the director when she heard about the film project; he, however, was unambiguous about his disinterest in having a conversation with her. The woman was outraged. A filmmaker wanted to present to millions of viewers the events that had caused her family such unbearable pain, but was not at all interested in hearing what sort of person he was from the woman who knew one of the victims best! Who owns this history – the woman so affected by it or an artist who makes films? The woman seemed to be under the impression that she was being dispossessed and that the story that defined her life was to be taken from her.

Is there such a thing as a claim to ownership when it comes to history, or more specifically, to particular historical events? And what exactly can this entail? Is it about a prerogative of interpretation, about the last word on how things are to be construed? Is it about having a

monopoly on the narrative or at least the monopoly on a particular perspective on the story?

History can only be or become owned if it is remembered. This remembrance, however, also includes the narratives in which past events are remembered. Memory, one could say, is the present of the past. When memory changes, the past is present in a different way and, in a certain sense, another past is then ultimately present.

This is quite peculiar: We cannot change the past itself. Even when, in the Late Middle Ages, the idea of God’s absolute power was expanded so far that only the principle of contradiction was a limit to it, contemporaries remained mostly of the opinion that not even God could change the past and undo things that have happened. This does not, however, apply to memory. Even if past events are unchangeable, the memory of the events is surely not. What touches us, however, is not a landscape of history frozen in exalted immutability, but in fact the past as it is remembered. The question thus arises as to whose task it is to recount history, what is the right perspective, and which are the appropriate methods. And there can be a variety of interests, so that we remember history in different ways. It can therefore easily come to a clash of narratives or of interpretations. History thus seems to belong to those who have the right to recount it, or those who are able to prevail in their claims to depict it.

The question of “Who owns history” has yet another meaning, however. In its day, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) claimed to uphold and continue the tradition of the foremost humanistic movements in German history, while portraying the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) more in the light of Nazi traditions. The fact that certain aspects of history were to belong to the GDR was therefore linked to its claims to have been continuing those as-

pects. This was meant to establish its claim to ownership. As such, there cannot only be claims to ownership with regard to history but also denials of such ownership. There are certain parts of history that one may not wish to own because one does not want to belong to them. It is indeed connected to the self-definition of groups, societies, and states that they insist on the ownership of a certain history, with positive connotations as they view themselves as the heirs to a tradition while asserting the right to realize in their present day whatever was of value in that part of history that they claimed for themselves.

Who owns the Reformation? This is an ecumenical topic since individual churches have different and, at times, contradictory relationships with the Reformation. Here, too, it is about narratives that recall the past and about the struggle over what is recalled and how, and it is also about the dispute over who can lay claim to the continuation of which aspects of remembered history, or who can be taken to task for that in a negative sense. This will be illustrated in the following four areas of concern.

Mennonites and Lutherans

First area of concern: When the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession was celebrated in 1980, the Mennonites were invited to participate as members of the Council of Christian Churches in Germany. The Lutherans were celebrating, with joy and thanksgiving, that with the Augsburg Confession, the Protestant faith was proclaimed in an impressive fashion before Kaiser and Reich, and that it still bore inspirational and normative power 450 years later. The Mennonites, invited as they were, were not however sure what they would be able to celebrate there. They knew the Augsburg Confession and that it included five condemnations of the Anabaptists, whom the Mennonites view as their spiritual predecessors.⁴ The Lutheran

leaders were surprised to be asked by the Mennonites whether they should be celebrating their own condemnation. They were not aware that the Mennonites took the condemnations in the Confession very seriously and linked them to the persecution of their ancestors. This surprising confrontation with a particular aspect of the Augsburg Confession led to years of conversations on these issues, in France, Germany, and in the United States.

In 2005, a study commission was launched by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Mennonite World Conference to summarize the results of the three national dialogues. This was to lead to the compilation of a common text in which Lutherans and Mennonites stated their positions on the condemnations in the Augsburg Confession on behalf of the churches of the Lutheran World Federation and the Mennonite World Conference. In the course of their discussion of the controversial theological problems involving baptism and the relationship between Christians and the state, objections repeatedly emerged with regard to the history of persecution with the Mennonites viewing the dogmatic condemnations of the Anabaptists in the Lutheran confessions as inseparable from their own persecution in the 16th century and later. The working group hence decided to put the aforementioned theological topics on hold and to investigate the persecutions and the history of the relations between the Anabaptists and the Lutheran temporal authorities and theologians in the 16th century. This resulted in the first joint Mennonite-Lutheran history of the relations between the two groups in that century.⁵

Lutherans ask for forgiveness

Time and again, the Lutheran participants experienced shock and shame in their work on the study commission as they learned to view the Lutheran position from the Anabaptist point of view. Luther and Melancthon provided a theological justification for the persecution and killing of Anabaptists – thus contradicting their own earlier, better views as in Luther’s 1523 writing on the the limits of obedience to civil magistrates, *Von weltlicher Obrigkeit wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei*. The Lutherans on the commission came to the understanding that they could only deal with this history appropriately if the Lutheran side were to publicly acknowledge and show remorse for the transgressions in question, and to ask for forgiveness. They recommended precisely this to the Council of the Lutheran World Federation, which responded with an in-depth discussion on the different choices they had in taking a public position on the matter, ultimately adopting a statement asking the Mennonites for forgiveness. At the 2010 LWF General Assembly in Stuttgart, the Lutherans did so publicly in a document stating that today’s Lutherans have a “deep sense of regret and pain over the persecution of Anabaptists by Lutheran authorities and especially over the fact that Lutheran reformers theologically supported this persecution. Thus, The Lutheran World Federation, A Communion of Churches wishes to express publicly its deep regret and sorrow. Trusting in God who in Jesus Christ was reconciling the world to himself, we ask for forgiveness – from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers – for the harm that our forebears in the sixteenth century committed to Anabaptists, for forget-

ting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries, and for all inappropriate, misleading and hurtful portraits of Anabaptists and Mennonites made by Lutheran authors, in both popular and scholarly forms, to the present day. We pray that God may grant to our communities a healing of our memories and reconciliation.”⁶

In their response to this request, the Mennonites offered their forgiveness to the Lutherans in a most moving manner.

Who owns the history of the persecution of the Anabaptists? Protestants have not generally made any claims to its ownership, as it is indeed quite a dark history, one which they preferred to allow to be forgotten. Does the history belong to the Mennonites? They have often seen it this way, passing down the memory of the persecution to their children in the *Martyrs’ Mirror*.⁷ As the descendants of the victims, they hold ownership of 16th-century Anabaptist history. With the process of remembrance underway, the Lutherans have begun to recognize that this history does belong to them as well, and that they bear the responsibility to maintain an appropriate memory of the acts that their predecessors were guilty of perpetrating. It is also important, and especially so, for the Mennonites to appreciate that the painful history of the relations between Anabaptists and Lutherans in and after the 16th century does not belong to them alone. The one-sided ownership of the difficult history was indeed overcome by Mennonite and Lutheran theologians working together on the matter. In doing so, both the Lutherans and Mennonites, learned to acknowledge the com-

1618–1648 THIRTY YEARS’ WAR

The Second Defenestration of Prague triggered the beginning of the Thirty Years’ War. This began with struggles between the Protestant Imperial Estates and Catholic sovereigns. The war would soon take on continental proportions, with issues of power and reasons of state playing a major role.



1619 SYNOD OF DORT

The Doctrine of Predestination was made obligatory throughout the Calvinist world at the Synod of Dort. The doctrine stated that God elected people long before their birth – or not. Worldly works had no influence on this.

plexity of the circumstances in which the Lutheran authorities acted and the Lutheran theologians passed their judgments; they took more clearly into account the multifacetedness and significant tensions among the views of the reformers on the Anabaptists. Luther and Melancthon did not, for example, only write their 1536 opinion on dealing with the Anabaptists,⁸ but Luther strongly emphasized in his aforementioned *Von weltlicher Obrigkeit* that secular authorities were not competent to address heresy, since it was a matter of God's word and thus a concern for the bishops, and that a theologian such as Johannes Brenz generally followed Luther's views on authority with regularity. They were confronted with the 404 Articles prepared by Johannes Eck's for the upcoming Diet of Augsburg, in which he depicted the Lutherans as veiled Anabaptists, a claim against which they defended themselves in the Confession.

In these discussions, Mennonite theologians also had a look at the history through the eyes of the others. It was, however, of importance in the efforts of the commission that these observations, made in an attempt to explain and contextualize the actions of the Reformation theologians and authorities, did not mean to excuse them. Not attempting to use explanations and historical context as a means of excusing oneself made it possible to appreciate that the history belongs to both churches.

One-sided claims to ownership and competing narratives and interpretations can be resolved, even if differences of perspective remain. Historical work was absolutely necessary to this end. Also of importance, however, was the willingness to continually return to taking on the perspective of the others in the course of several years of dialogue, and to recognize their rights, their strengths, and their weaknesses. This was a most particular situation, in which the question of "Who owns the Reformation?" was addressed in a surprising new manner. The reconciliation in Stuttgart by no means implies a solution to theological differences with regard to baptism; but it does make it possible to tackle these questions in an open manner. In 2012, an official "dialogue" on the topic began, a dialogue that involves, for the first time, the participation of Catholics, Lutherans, and Mennonites.

Catholics and Protestants

Second area of concern: How can Catholics and Protestants share the memory of the Refor-

mation together? It is well known that the first connection that Protestants make with the word "Reformation" involves the Gospel, certainty, and freedom, while Catholics first think of church division.⁹ Even as the term "reform" has positive connotations for them, "reformation" has a negative undertone instead. This is the reason why some have said that Catholics can join together with Protestants in a Reformation commemoration but not in the celebration of a Reformation jubilee. How could Catholics indeed celebrate the division of the church? In fact, how can even Protestant Christians celebrate this division in 2017? One can only celebrate the good things that people experience, and the division of the church certainly does not belong to that category.

Certainly, there are Protestant theologians for whom the rejection of Rome and the Pope are part of the essence of Protestantism, and who would rather not have Catholics involved in the 2017 commemoration and contemporization of the Reformation. These voices might explain that the ecumenically minded people who would like this to happen have not taken the relevant lessons from church history if they think that it is possible to have a Protestant Christianity without negating Roman Catholicism. "The opposition to the Roman Church and its legal-institutional foundations are a constitutive moment of what one can term the 'unity of the Reformation' [...]. In view of the considerations on the 'ecumenical dimension of the Reformation Decade', it is nothing other than an act of historical and scholarly honesty to indicate anti-papalism and anti-Romanism as constitutive elements of the Reformation and as major elements of the Protestant identity."¹⁰ This remark is on target as a historical assessment. If such a historical observation is transformed into a judgment on the essence of Protestantism, this constitutes a metabasis *eis alio genos*, i.e. a shifting of categories and thus a false conclusion. In any case, it is impossible to come to such a judgment without extensive additional arguments.

Defining Protestantism as it is in this quote, however, entails serious problems. A definition that primarily involves the negation of something else has the disadvantage that its own qualities change when the qualities change of that which is being negated. Or if one wishes to avoid that, one must contrafactually distance oneself from a fixed view of the other even if this no longer corresponds to reality. This is quite unreasonable and not particularly prom-

ising in psychological terms.¹¹ More than anything else, however, it contradicts the dignity of Protestantism to define it solely through a negative. Saying that something is "Evangelical" in the sense of being Protestant, moreover, entails that it corresponds with the Gospel or "Evangelium" – and such a definition cannot be framed in an exclusive manner, but is in fact open and inviting to others.

The Leuenberg Agreement

The ecumenical dimension of the events of 2017 confronts Protestant Christians and churches with the challenge, 500 years after the beginning of the Reformation, of thinking through their self-image as churches of the Reformation and counterparts to the Roman Catholic Church, but also the relationships of Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches among themselves. With regard to the Reformation Jubilee, the churches cannot avoid the question of their position and understanding of ecumenism. Does the Reformation belong to the Protestant churches in such a way that they have to carry on the controversies of the Reformation era? This has not in fact been the case in the relations among the Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches since they declared communion among their churches in the 1973 Leuenberg Agreement. Why should the old divides with the Roman Catholic Church remain unchanged as the aforementioned church historian would seem to prefer?

Catholics and Protestants should, whatever the case, take those things seriously that they themselves teach about the church. Both stress that the church is the body of Christ, of which the Apostle Paul had to say: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." (1 Cor. 12:26). This is indeed encouraging as it builds up the church and is to be taken seriously in terms of defining the church. If Protestants, however, rejoice at how the reformers opened up the Gospel to them with such clarity and power, can Catholics do anything else but rejoice along with them? Both are indeed members of the same body. They are, as the Second Vatican Council established, bound together through the ties of baptism.¹² To recapitulate: The Protestants celebrate the Gospel, as it was revealed to them, but not the division of the church; the Catholics must therefore not fear that they would be celebrating this rift if they were to take part in the 2017 Reformation anniversary celebrations.

The celebrations are not about church division

Paul’s words, conversely, also entail a call for the Protestants to sympathize with the feelings of their Catholic sisters and brothers over the painful division of the church, as they themselves will surely also experience the pain of division within the body of Christ. Paul thus challenges both Catholics and Protestants; he challenges them to rejoice together and challenges them to share the pain over their division. 2017 cannot be limited to celebration and rejoicing but must also lend expression to the mourning and pain over the church rift. With a view to all that is to blame for this division, the Reformation Jubilee should also include a confession of guilt. This would also be quite appropriate as the Reformation itself began with the 95 Theses, the first of which states: “Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying, ‘Repent,’ wanted the entire life of believers to be a repentance.”¹³

For Catholics to join in the celebration indeed requires there to be something positive in the Protestant churches, providing grounds to celebrate. They could not possibly celebrate if there were only the negative of division; but then Protestants would not be able to celebrate either. The decisive ecumenical question is thus whether the good that Protestants celebrate can also be perceived and recognized as good by Catholics. The Second Vatican Council has however paved the way for this to happen. The Council is known for having recognized “elements of sanctification and truth” to exist beyond the boundaries of the church that is led by the Pope. It established that “some and even very many of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church”

and itemizes these elements as “the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and visible elements too.”¹⁴ The Council also speaks of “many liturgical actions of the Christian religion”, which among the divided brothers “can truly engender a life of grace in ways that vary according to the condition of each Church or Community. These liturgical actions must be regarded as capable of giving access to the community of salvation.”¹⁵

This acknowledgement does not however only involve individual elements and actions within the communities but also the “separated churches and communities” themselves: “For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation”. This is a nearly sacramental view of these communities.¹⁶ The Council, moreover, established that Catholics “must gladly acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren. It is right and salutary to recognize the riches of Christ and virtuous works in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ, sometimes even to the shedding of their blood. For God is always wonderful in His works and worthy of all praise.”¹⁷ So what, one might ask, prevents Catholics from joining their Protestant brothers and sisters in rejoicing over that which God granted these communities – these churches – through the Reformation?

The catholicity of the Catholic Church

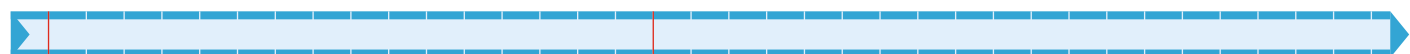
The question of celebrating together involves nothing less than the catholicity of the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches. In light of these excerpts from the Council, Catholics would not be taking their catholicity seriously were they not to celebrate in 2017.

Conversely, Protestant Christians would not be taking their catholicity seriously if they were not to invite Catholics to celebrate with them while also allowing for space to express their own pain over the division as well as that of their Catholic brothers and sisters. Churches that are not aware of their catholicity and do not take this seriously are only ecclesial communities. An individual church can only be Church if it has an awareness of its catholicity and expresses it in an appreciable way. 2017 involves a challenge to the churches to develop this awareness further, with the appeal: Roman Catholics should be more catholic! And the Protestant Christians should be more catholic and live in a more catholic manner!¹⁸

Third area of concern: If celebrating involves joy over something positive that people have received, one needs to identify and name the positive in question. This positive includes, in particular, the convictions and practices that both churches share in common, and ultimately that which these convictions reference and is present within them: The Gospel of Jesus Christ. The extent of the common ground shared by the Catholic and Protestant churches has long been obscured by mutual polemics, and ecumenism is the attempt to dig out this common ground out from underneath the polemics. Two relevant observations can be made that are closely tied to the question of “Who owns the Reformation?”

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

The first observation: In many of the discussions on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,¹⁹ one particular objection has been quick to emerge with regard to the assertion that there is a consensus among Catholics and Protestants on the doctrine of justification:



1633

CONDEMNATION OF GALILEO GALILEI

Galileo remained true to his view that the earth revolved around the sun – even under torture. He was sentenced to life-long imprisonment by the Roman Inquisition.

1648

PEACE OF WESTPHALIA

The Peace of Westphalia put an end to the Thirty Years’ War, allowing for each sovereign to decide on his own church. The Religious Peace of Augsburg was thus recognized. Calvinists were also given an imperial status equal to that of Lutherans and Catholics.



“Service of Repentance” on July 22, 2010 in Stuttgart’s Alte Reithalle, the site of the Eleventh Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany: From left to right: LWF General Secretary Ishmael Noko of Zimbabwe, President of the Mennonite World Congress, Danisa Ndlovu of Zimbabwe, and LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson.

What is in fact special about the Protestant Church if we accept agreement in the doctrine of justification? And, is there then another justification for the existence of the Protestant Church? This reaction was heard very frequently on the part of Protestant Christians, whatever their educational level. It was a reaction that could often be heard before anyone even read the text and therefore did not in fact depend on the content of the declaration itself. It would seem that these people understand the doctrine of justification as the sole unique characteristic of the Protestant Church. Perish the thought that it should be lost as such a unique trait! The doctrine of justification, the teaching of how sinful human beings are justified before God and through God’s grace, has thus turned into a doctrine of justification for the existence of the Protestant Church. According to this logic, one can no longer hope that other churches share the doctrine of justification. Even if one must be careful in speaking of the “intention of the Reformation”, one can surely say that it was Luther’s intention that as many Christians as possible come to faith in Christ, who saves people in his mercy, and that they can hope for salvation through him alone. Such an attitude therefore directly contradicts what Luther had aimed for. This does not mean that there may not have been other reasons to reject

the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, but this is a particularly frequent position.

Who does the doctrine of justification belong to?

The question is now: Who does the doctrine of justification belong to? If Protestants jealously guard their ownership of the doctrine and use all of their reasoning powers to magnify any differences to the Catholic understanding of grace, they cannot honestly invite Catholics to celebrate the Reformation with them. We should indeed underscore that we are not calling for people to overlook or steamroll the differences that exist. But there are, one can say, two main options: we can either emphasize and focus on the commonalities among Christians or emphasize the differences. There is a simple test for this: Are we happier about commonalities discovered between the denominations or about differences that would justify further division? This is about making a basic decision for one of the two options; one can come up with arguments for either, but they do not entirely explain the option chosen. Whether 2017 offers grounds for Protestants and Catholics to celebrate together also depends on which of these two basic options one opts for and how one follows up on the choice theologically.

The second observation: One of the most controversial questions in the discussion of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was that of *simul iustus et peccator*, in which critics established a fundamental difference between the Catholic and Lutheran understandings of sin and justification. There are of course real reasons for this.²⁰ At the same time, people have accused the Joint Declaration of not taking into account the findings of the most recent research on Paul. It is the opinion of a majority of exegetes today that Luther’s view of *simul* has no basis in Paul. This conflict between Luther’s interpretation of Paul and modern exegesis in this matter does not seem to have made any of the critics of the Joint Declaration reconsider the issue, as far as I can tell. And yet it does indeed present a challenge in terms of ecumenical theology. In view of this, one can and indeed must ask the question of what is in fact meant by “Scripture alone” (*sola scriptura*) and whether one can in fact set this in opposition to tradition, as is often the case, or whether Luther’s interpretation has not itself already become a tradition that goes beyond Scripture.

One cannot only show that this is the case but also that Luther had good reason to move past Paul so that the view that Luther did not conform with Paul’s opinion does not repudiate

Photo: epd/bid/Norbert Neetz

Luther himself. For this, one must however also be willing to rethink the relation between Scripture and tradition. This consideration, which can only be presented here very briefly, involves the task of working on the problems of recent research on Paul in contrast with Luther's interpretations. In doing so, the correlation with the Catholic view of the relationship between Scripture and tradition will appear in a new light. There is an alternative here: Either one can view the *simul*-related difficulties in the Protestant-Catholic discussions over the doctrine of justification as evidence for the impossibility of coming to a consensus, and move no further; or one can understand this as a theological challenge, involving both work on the difficulties within Lutheran theology itself as well as the enabling of ecumenical rapprochement or even common ground.

Both observations should illustrate that any Reformation jubilee that is to be celebrated ecumenically requires common theological effort – theological endeavors that follow the primary choice to seek commonalities among any differences and then to work on such differences. This work would then hold the promise of revealing enough common ground that a celebration of this common faith would be possible.

Reformation – of relevance today

Fourth area of concern: In 2017, everything will depend crucially on whether the Protestant churches can make it clear that the reformers' main concerns continue to motivate people to live with God and to provide an orientation for this way of life. Thies Grundlach, in an article printed in the *Ökumenische Rundschau*, expresses the view that the Reformation "belongs to those who speak of it in such a way that it is relevant for today."²¹ Grundlach explains that essentially, "the primary moment in the Refor-

mation's breakthrough, which is to be recounted and contemporized, can be presented in a three-fold model: Turning from fear – Turning to God – moving out into the world. As we now live in highly individualistic times – something that the Reformation movement had a hand in itself – we also need to find individualized paths to a Reformation understanding. Generally speaking, anybody from any milieu, educational background, or existential situation can view his or her story of liberation within the framework of these three steps. Luther's path is to be understood as a type of existential archetype for all paths of liberation, against the background of a sort of 'biblical grammar' of liberation from bondage and death. The triad of 'Turning from fear – Turning to God – moving out into the world' moves a basic anthropological experience into a spiritual-theological light of healing and hope, liberation, and redemption. Individuals can recognize themselves within this triad as this path describes a universal grammar of liberation in a Christian perspective."²²

Gundlach sees how strange Luther's understanding of the meaning of "God's righteousness"²³ has become for our contemporaries and that it requires communicative efforts if its significance for today is to be revealed. He attempts to bring it up-to-date by generalizing Luther's Reformation breakthrough as an archetype. If it is an archetype, one can then explain how all people are affected by his breakthrough, while the question arises, however, of whether the unique nature of this breakthrough – and that which makes Luther strange to us today – is in fact lost in the process. Even Augustine and Ignatius of Loyola, among countless others, could "view their own story of liberation within the framework of these three steps." This must in fact be the case if it is to be "a type of existen-

tial archetype for all paths of liberation". But Luther was – like most of his contemporaries – someone who derived his concept of one's relationships to oneself, to the world, and to God from Holy Scripture.

The fear that plagued Luther involved a particular view of God and his understanding of certain foundational biblical passages. Liberation could therefore only derive from a new understanding of the relevant parts of the Bible. Therein lay, however, differences between Luther's time and our own era. We do not see our lives in the light of the Bible with the same matter-of-factness that Luther and his contemporaries did. A new interpretation of certain biblical passages could therefore not have an impact similar to that which Luther describes in his famous prologue to the 1545 edition of his Latin writings, which we can use as a convenient example.²⁴ Any solution to this problem brought about by generalizing Luther's experience into an archetype merely skirts around the great difficulty of communicating to our present day world the forces that motivated the reformers. Using the model of archetypes will eliminate any specific details, the communication of which is precisely the challenge at stake.

It is furthermore difficult to see how this archetypal interpretation can be compatible with Luther's primary views. Gundlach speaks of the individual history of liberation that anyone can view within the "triad", and of the "universal grammar of liberation in a Christian perspective". If we take as an example Luther's 1517 disputation, later referred to as his "Disputation Against Scholastic Theology", what we see is more of a case of a universal grammar of unfreedom launched against Late Scholastics such as Gabriel Biel, Pierre d'Ailly, and William of Ockham.²⁵ What is archetypal here are people

From 1674

FRAGMENTS BY AN ANONYMOUS WRITER

Between 1774 and 1778, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing published excerpts from a work of strong biblical criticism. This included the idea that the beginnings of Christianity were based on a fraud perpetrated by the disciples. This would lead to a serious controversy, in which theologians refuted Lessing's theses.

who seek their own in everything²⁶ and, only through grace, are freed of their fixation on themselves.²⁷ The acting of grace does not allow itself to be made into an archetype; it is an occurrence that is tied to the proclaimed word and the sacraments. Grace comes about; grace is not an archetype.

A worldwide festival of Protestantism

The generalizing triad of “Turning from fear – Turning to God – moving out into the world” does not only insufficiently speak to the specifics of Luther’s views, but it has also been specifically claimed as denominational property. “The Reformation jubilee and its preparations should, from the perspective of the Evangelical Church in Germany, not become a ‘Luther festival’ but a global festival of Protestantism, out of which have emerged Lutheran and Reformed, United and Free Church traditions. All of the churches, denominations, and cultures influenced by the Reformation should be invited in line with the principle that, in 2017, all should come to Wittenberg since they all come from there’ (Nikolaus Schneider).”²⁸ If this triad is indeed an archetype, however, why have not all Christians and churches been invited? Gundlach rightly emphasizes that Luther was not the founder of a church but a finder of the Gospel and that the spiritual roots of the Reformation churches do not begin with Martin Luther but with Holy Scripture and the Church Fathers. Why do we then hear that “a great beginning is to be celebrated” in 2017? Of course, much did begin in 1517, very much in fact, and Protestant Christians are thankful for it. And yet, if Luther was a discoverer of the Gospel, we cannot be celebrating a “great beginning” in 2017 but instead the “great beginner” and his name is not Martin Luther but Jesus Christ.

While Gundlach, on the one hand, generalizes Luther’s views into an archetype, he also mentions, on the other hand, the four *solas* of the Reformation (grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, and Scripture alone). It is impossible to see, however, how both can be compatible with one another, the archetype and the exclusive claims of the *solas*. This *complexio oppositorum* shows how difficult it is to contemporize the Reformation. If elements of the Reformation are to be contemporized in a shorthand manner, we must also answer the question of whether we are in fact contemporizing the intended subject; this also entails an ecumenical problem as this shorthand approach is followed with the expectation of receiving general acceptance due to its generality, while, on the

other hand, it is the subject of denominational specificity.

The problem with these shorthand expressions came to the fore in the discussion on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification as well. Time and again, the question was to be heard: Who among our contemporaries can really understand what the theologians of the time were arguing about? The following was often used then to express the significance of the doctrine of justification at the time: The gist of the doctrine was that people do not depend on their achievements but instead precede them. The dignity of each human being precedes anything they do, whether good or bad, and is granted by God and therefore independent of anything they do or is done to them.

The then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger addressed this Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and its meaning for people today in a talk held in 2000. While he of course agreed with this priority of people above their works, he emphasized that this had nothing to do with the doctrine of justification “but this is the human metaphysics present in creation faith, the ontological foundation of human dignity, independent of belief and unbelief, confession and status, as it simply comes from the creator and honors an individual before all of his deeds and achievements. There can be absolutely no difference between the denominations in this point of the recognition of common human dignity and much agreement can be found in this with non-Christians as well.”²⁹ If the gist of the doctrine of justification is to be found in what is presented here as a contemporizing shorthand expression, there would not only be a *magnus consensus* but even a *maximus consensus* in this matter. One needs only to think of the first article of the German Constitution: “Human dignity is inviolable!” This attempt to contemporize the doctrine of justification “must be viewed as failed as this is by no means the content of the doctrine of justification. A doctrine of justification in which sin and judgment, judgment and grace, Christ’s cross and faith do not figure is not a doctrine of justification.”³⁰

It is quite remarkable that a Roman Catholic cardinal needs to remind Protestant theologians about what the doctrine of justification involves! One must unfortunately say that nothing attests more clearly to justification being forgotten than the attempts at contemporizing it that have been made in so many ways. The test is always whether Jesus Christ has a constitutive place in what is said about God and hu-

mankind. One can sometimes have the impression that Jesus Christ has become a stranger in the Church – it is indeed difficult to convey an understanding of Jesus Christ – he in whom God became man at a particular time and place! He is not an archetype; he is a historical person from whom we are separated by historical distance, and whose work and message has been transmitted to people through the Church.

What is the Reformation message today?

“The Reformation belongs to all who speak of it as being relevant for our present day.” The major task lies in not just speaking of the Reformation in a way that is of particular relevance to the present but also in addressing the Reformation itself and not of something else. We cannot presume to know what the Reformation message is today. It would be an important step to admit this openly and honestly to each other and then to use all our strength to find a convincing answer to this question. That would be a theologically responsible path for the 2017 preparations. Certainly, one can allow one’s attention to be grabbed by the many impressive events along the way; this will not, however, answer the basic question of what the Reformation message is for today. Catholics and Protestants are indeed faced with the same difficulties in this regard: The greatest treasures of their traditions often go forgotten or seem unreachably far away from us in all of their antiquarian loftiness. But the Gospel has come down to the people in these very traditions. 2017 will present an ecumenical challenge *par excellence*, one of Catholics and Protestants working together toward the rediscovery of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for today, while taking aboard the inspiration of their fathers and mothers in faith – not in opposition to one another as has so often been the case in the past, but helping and learning from one another. Then the Reformation would really belong to everyone. ◀

Prof. Dr. Theodor Dieter,
Director of the Institute for
Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg

- 1 **Source:** The original German version of this paper is to appear next year in: Günter Frank/Volker Leppin/Herman J. Selderhuis (eds.), *Wem gehört die Reformation? Nationale und konfessionelle Dispositionen der Reformationsdeutung* (Herder-Verlag Freiburg i.Br., 2013). It is provided here with the kind permission of the publisher.
- 2 Cf.: Ch. Hikel, *Wem gehört die Geschichte des 20. Juli 1944? Die Debatte um "Operation Walküre"* (www.zeitgeschichte-online.de/portals/_rainbow/documents/pdf/hikel_walk.pdf).
- 3 Cf. J. Arntz, *Spielberg und die Witwe*, in: *Berliner Zeitung*, 8 December 2005.
- 4 Cf. CA V; IX; XII; XVI; XVII.
- 5 Lutheran World Federation / Mennonite World Conference, *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ. Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission*, Geneva/Strasbourg 2010. The Lutheran side was chaired by Prof. Gottfried Seebass (Heidelberg), who had to resign for health reasons in 2007 and unfortunately passed away in 2008. He was succeeded by Prof. Timothy Wengert (Philadelphia). The Mennonite co-chair was Rev. Rainer Burkart (Neuwied, Germany).
- 6 www.lwb-vollversammlung.org/uploads/media/Mennonite_Statement-EN_02.pdf
- 7 The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians who baptized only upon confession of faith, and who suffered and died for the testimony of Jesus, their Saviour, from the time of Christ to the year A. D. 1660 [...], by Thieleman J. v. Braght, Aylmer, ON; LaGrange, IN 2005 (reprint of the 6th edition of 1870). This first appeared in Dutch in 1660. The first German edition was printed in 1748–1749 in Pennsylvania.
- 8 Cf. *Healing Memories*, 125–131 (Appendix A: "That the Civil Magistracy Is Obligated to Apply Physical Punishment Against the Anabaptists: A Few Considerations from Wittenberg (1536)")
- 9 The Catholic theologian O. H. Pesch described it as follows: The start of the Reformation with the thesis on indulgences was "an original theological departure that, including its effects with regard to the criticism of churches, remained fully within the legal limits of the time, and nobody was taken more by surprise than Martin Luther as this forced him into a conflict, in which the entire church with its highest representatives was to be found on the opposing side. Many, nevertheless, who were not and did not in fact become unqualified supporters of Luther, still followed this new start with great hopes. That was indeed characteristic of this: This was not a repetition of powerless demands for reform as earlier, but the conditions of the church were in fact traced back to a profoundly false form of piety and a highly problematic but dominant Late Medieval theology. The criticism of this added force to the demands for reform – and Luther's were in fact very measured – as they no longer were based on moral accusations but fundamental theological reflection. And yet, the result was church division [...]. Is it then surprising if the average Catholic view is one of 'the Reformation' as a disaster. And is it surprising if this view also affects the assessment of Luther? With his Reformation theology, he indeed triggered this development, leading up to the disaster. Even in our ecumenical era, many Catholics still ask why he did not give up and leave his concerns to God, and the assessment of him to history. [...] The events soon seemed to confirm all fears as to what the public societal result of Luther's teaching of 'justification by faith alone' would be. We need think only of the Peasants' War, public unrest, and vandalism at the hands of semi-educated readers of the Bible, the confiscation of church property by the regional sovereigns without using it to finance new church institutions, the brutal expulsions of monks and nuns from their monasteries, and preparations for war everywhere to protect or fight the Reformation. In this, the interests of politics and faith were inextricably mixed, culminating in the great Schmalkaldic War, in which the Kaiser prevailed but – because the Pope betrayed him in an alliance with France – could no longer return to the status quo before the Reformation began. He subsequently abdicated and left the government of Germany to his brother Ferdinand, who was forced to accept the religious peace of Augsburg in 1555. [...] What reason are Catholics supposed to have to approve of this chain of events?" (idem, *Die Reformation in katholischer Sicht – Zustimmung und Anfragen*, in: G. Frank/A. Käuflein (eds.), *Ökumene heute*, Freiburg 2009, [125–159] 137–139).
- 10 Th. Kaufmann, *Das schwierige Erbe der Reformation*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of 14 November 2011, 7.
- 11 Boundaries and self-differentiation are of course parts of the self-image of a community; but these should be secondary in character; and to ensure that they are appropriate, they need to be tested and verified again and again; they cannot thus simply be viewed as permanent structures.
- 12 Cf. *Unitatis reintegratio* 1.3
- 13 *Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimarer Ausgabe) 1; 233,10f.
- 14 *Unitatis reintegratio* 1.3.
- 15 *Unitatis reintegratio* 1.3.
- 16 "Iis [Ecclesiae et Communitates seiunctae] enim Spiritus Christi uti non renuit tamquam salutis mediis" (UR 1.3) The 1943 encyclical "Mystici corporis" used the same verb (*renuere*) in establishing that the spirit of Christ "rejects dwelling with the grace of sanctification in the members that are fully severed from the body" (H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, no. 3808).
- 17 *Unitatis reintegratio* 1.4.
- 18 While actually superfluous, we should stress that "catholic" does not mean "Roman Catholic" here but "universal, encompassing all who believe in Christ" or "the body of Christ as viewed and taken seriously in its entirety."
- 19 Lutheran World Federation/Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Official Common Statement. Annex to the Official Common Statement.*
- 20 Cf. on the use of the phrase "Simul justus et peccator" the study by W.-D. Hauschild, *Die Formel "Gerecht und Sünder zugleich" als Element der reformatorischen Rechtfertigungslehre – eine Entdeckung des 20. Jahrhunderts*, in: Th. Schneider/G. Wenz (Hg.), *Gerecht und Sünder zugleich? Ökumenische Klärungen (Dialog der Kirchen 11)*, Freiburg/Göttingen 2001, 303–349.
- 21 Th. Gundlach, *Was bedeutet aus der Sicht der EKD das Reformationsjubiläum?*, in: *Ökumenische Rundschau* 61 (2012), (64–69) 65. [Italics deleted] Dr. Thies Gundlach is the Vice President of the EKD Church Office.
- 22 *Ibid.* 66.
- 23 In retrospect, Martin Luther described his Reformation views in the prologue to the 1545 edition of his Latin works: "I had conceived a burning desire to understand what Paul meant in his Letter to the Romans, but thus far there had stood in my way, not the cold blood around my heart, but that one word which is in chapter one: 'The justice of God is revealed in it.' (Rom. 1:17) I hated that word, 'justice of God,' which, by the use and custom of all my teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically as referring to formal or active justice, as they call it, i.e., that justice by which God is just and by which he punishes sinners and the unjust. But I, blameless monk that I was, felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn't be sure that God was appeased by my satisfaction. I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. [...] I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: 'The justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written: "The just person lives by faith."' I began to understand that in this verse the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. I began to understand that this verse means that the justice of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive justice, i.e. that by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: 'The just person lives by faith.' All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light." (Translated by Bro. Andrew Thornton, OSB, 1983, Saint Anselm Abbey).
- 24 See previous fn.
- 25 Cf. WA 1; 224,13–16: "It is true that man, who has become an evil tree, only wishes and does evil. It is wrong that free will can decide the opposite; it is indeed not free but bound." WA 1; 225,1f.: "Man cannot by nature wish that God is God; he rather wishes that he is God and God is not God".
- 26 Cf. Th. Dieter, *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles*, Berlin/New York 2001, 80–107.
- 27 Cf. WA 1; 225,17–21.
- 28 Gundlach, *op. cit.*, 67.
- 29 J. Ratzinger, *Wie weit trägt der Konsens über die Rechtfertigungslehre?*, in: *Communio* 29 (2000), (424–437), 426.
- 30 J. Ratzinger, *ibid.*



1675 PIA DESIDERIA

Philipp Jakob Spener was one of the main representatives of Pietism. In his *Pia Desideria* he called for a gathering of the pious within the Protestant Church to be an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, a small church within the church. His program for reform included a focus on inner piety, hope for better times for the church in the world, and a reform of theological education.

Perspectives for the Reformation Jubilee

Academic Advisory Board for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee



Clausthal-Zellerfeld's Market Church (Church of the Holy Spirit), consecrated in 1642 in the midst of the Thirty Years' War, is Germany's largest wooden church.

Preface

In the present "Perspectives for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee", the board sees "Luther 2017 – 500 Years of the Reformation" as "a solid basis for further preparations for the 2017 Reformation jubilee". The "Perspectives" have succeeded in providing a precise academic understanding of the Reformation in its contexts and goals, and to describe the effects that it has had from the 16th century to today. This touches on the Reformation's changing influence in church and theology, society and politics, education and music, but also what at times have been violent struggles based on denominational differences.

The "Perspectives" provide an academic foundation for an ecumenical dialogue and for the annual topics during the run-up to the celebrations. The Academic Advisory Board is to be thanked for its work on the project, with the wish that "Perspectives for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee" is widely circulated and well received.

Dr. h. c. Nikolaus Schneider, Chairman of the Board of "Luther 2017 – 500 Years of the Reformation" (Chairman of the EKD Council)

Introduction

The preparation of "Perspectives for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee" meets the expectations for

a basis to bring about an appropriate Reformation Decade and Jubilee program that takes into account current societal, church, and religious contexts in Germany and Europe, in connection with the cause of the Reformation, as anchored in the historical context.

The Perspectives were prepared by the members of the Advisory Board as a team and unanimously adopted. We hope for a broad reception and discussion within the church and society at large.

Prof. Dr. Dr. Johannes Schilling, Chairman of the Academic Advisory Board for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee

1. The Reformation is an event of significance to world history. The epochal changes that the Reformation brought forth have reverberated all throughout the world. Its repercussions are therefore not of merely national relevance but also of European and global relevance.

2. The effects that the Reformation brought about have been viewed and assessed variously from different points of view. The preparation for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee is an opportunity and challenge to enter into discussions and, as much as possible, processes of mutual understanding with regard to the different perspectives on the Reformation and its effects.

3. In giving way to the western Church breaking up into a number of denominations, linked together in contradiction and commonality, the Reformation brought about religious-cultural differentiation and plurality as a European characteristic.

4. This differentiation, in a world that reacted to religious opposition with violence, was not the only cause, but together with other factors, helped lead to denominational wars and conflicts, the effects of which carry on to this day.

5. At the same time, this development forced Europe to develop means of peaceful coexistence, and later even cooperation among the separate and antagonistic denominations, and to create a life together in tolerance and mutual respect despite all exclusive claims to truth. This development began with the religious Peace of Augsburg of 1555, founded in the idea of “peace through separation” – a concept that cannot provide a permanent solution but which allows for initial moves toward peaceful coexistence in difficult situations. Further developments have shown that peace among denominations and religions is a decisive precondition for societal peace.

6. The Reformation did not only change theology and the church in a fundamental manner. Protestantism, which emerged from and is indebted to the Reformation, has also played a role in the shaping of all areas of private and public life, social structures, and economic behavior, cultural patterns of perception and mentalities, as well as legal ideas, scholarly concepts, and artistic forms of expression.

7. The Reformation took on such comprehensive historical meaning as an event, which was, at its core, religious in nature: It was about the relationship of human beings with God, themselves, their fellow people, and the world, a relationship that it formed in a fundamentally new fashion.

8. The Reformation, in a new way, discovered how, justified by Christ alone, a person stands directly before God. It saw the identity and value of such a person founded solely in God’s recognition, independent of natural disposition (gender), social status (class), individual fortune (success), and religious achievement (merit). The Reformation thus acknowledged freedom as the essential characteristic of such a person.

9. In that the Reformation understood the church, in line with the concept of the priesthood of all baptized, as a community of all of its members without a hierarchy, and only acknowledged differences of function within the church to be legitimate, it brought to bear the freedom of human beings accepted by God.

10. The Reformation saw the love of one’s neighbor and the fulfillment of community responsibility as an integral consequence of God’s acceptance. Martin Luther’s double proposition (in “On the Freedom of a Christian”, 1520) lends particular expression to how one’s relationship to God and to one’s fellow humans belong in-

separably together: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all”.

11. From the Reformation point of view, all of this pertains due to faith: In faith, a person is accepted by God and is thus free. The specific statements of the Reformation about the human being, human freedom, and responsibility has, however, developed a dynamic (which was not even always appreciated by the Protestant churches themselves), which in the course of the centuries has had an effect, well beyond the church and Christendom, on the Western world – and beyond. This applies in particular to the areas of culture, science and education, law, politics, and the economy.

12. That human beings stand directly before God entails that they understand what they believe and can therefore render an account of their faith, as from a Reformation viewpoint, Christians are called to maturity and responsibility. It was therefore a central concern of the Reformation that the Bible be translated into the languages of the people and that sermons become an essential part of worship services as an interpretation of Scripture in one’s own responsibility. The Reformation thus turned into the creative force behind the literary language of many different peoples. And it brought to the fore a special relationship between Protestantism and language and the word. This was reflected in poetry and literature, initially within the church but later also in the wider scope of a secular culture that took on a life of its own.

13. This basic belief in being a responsible Christian led to the Reformation’s interest and focus on education: Faith is to be an educated faith, and catechisms are instruments for a learning that leads to understanding faith. There should be schools everywhere to raise Christians who are also citizens of the world.



1695

GLAUCHA SCHOOL FOR THE POOR

August Hermann Francke, a Pietist, opened a school for the poor in Glaucha, which would develop into a boarding school, an orphanage, and the other institutions of the well-known Francke Foundations.

POSITIONS

This focus on education led to the introduction of compulsory schooling for all and educational participation in Protestant areas, which would develop into a common feature of the Western world.

14. The Reformation's demand and support for a mature responsibility for Christians would result in a situation in Protestant countries, and in Germany in particular, in which the Enlightenment, despite any tensions, did not find itself in an antagonistic opposition to faith and the church, but more of a productive discourse. The Enlightenment's call for "man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity" is thus to be understood as the development of the Reformation view of human unrepresentability, now of course without the Reformation's reference to God.

15. The position, founded in faith, of people standing directly before God precludes political institutions from obtaining a grip on people's faith. This principle, which is the deepest foundation for the Reformation's call for a clear distinction between church and state, provides the basis for the modern development of the fundamental freedoms of religion and conscience. Such a distinction between church and state, motivated in this way and dedicated to the protection of freedoms of religion and conscience, has however not been adequately maintained in many instances throughout the history of Protestantism.

16. The understanding of the church as a non-hierarchical community of its members was, except for a few marginal groups, not a political model for the entire society, but was even resisted and rejected as such. And yet, once having been proclaimed for the church itself, the idea of radical political equality was a decisive step on the way to democracy. It is no coincidence that this would develop and evolve in numerous countries with a Protestant tradition (Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark/Norway/Iceland, Sweden/Finland, United Kingdom, United States).

17. The priesthood of all who are baptized was given liturgical expression as church hymns, a form of the proclamation of the word. The Reformation thus laid the foundations for a vast and diverse musical culture of increasing significance. The numerous forms of worship music, vocal and instrumental, which remains a particular characteristic of Protestant Christianity today, have had an reach well beyond the confines of the church.

18. The service to one's neighbor and to society, established by the Reformation as a consequence of Christian freedom, resulted in a new formation of a social order and system within Protestantism. It thus became a concern for the entire congregation to take care of social problems (hospitals, care for the poor) – with these Reformation impulses becoming a starting point for municipal social responsibility in the modern world.

19. The understanding of profession as a particular spiritual calling, which had previously been applied to monastery life, was expanded to all areas of life – the activities of all Christians in their place in the world were now seen as professions to be used to serve God, all with the same spiritual precedence. This belief, that the entire world of work is a proving ground for the Christian life, unleashed a hitherto unknown economic dynamic.

20. In view of these diverse findings, we need to establish, as we approach the 2017 Reformation anniversary, the relevance that the Reformation has had for various areas in our present culture, well beyond the fields of church and theology, and to investigate their potential to provide insight in a time of individualization, pluralization, and globalization. This interpretation for our times is the true task of a historical jubilee and contributes to the maintenance and further development of the identity of modern Western-oriented culture in light of the imprint of Protestantism on this culture.

21. The maintenance and further development of modern Western-oriented culture can only occur today if two things are brought to bear: that which is common to all Christianity and the particular identity of the denominations – i.e. confessional differences and ecumenical commonalities.

22. The religious world is changing profoundly; Western societies are moving toward a situation that is multicultural and multireligious if this is not already the case today. In this state of affairs, it is helpful to bring to bear the views that have emerged through the contrasts and cooperation of the Christian denominations.

23. A feeling for that which is common to all Christians has grown in view of the plurality of religious and worldview orientations. This has transpired while the individual forms have maintained their particular significance: In the global perspective of a single Christendom and beyond, the wish has emerged for a recognizable and identifiable home. ◀

Source: Academic Advisory Board for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee. Wittenberg, 2010

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The Reformation is the normative centering on Jesus Christ

What is it that we wish to celebrate 500 years later? **By Christoph Marksches**

First question: What is reformational about the Reformation?

1. Preface: We need to be cautious when it comes to repeating much too familiar phrases or narrowly following the spirit of the times.

We often like to describe the “reformational” aspects of the Reformation with phrases that chiefly derive from the reflections of the systematic theology of the 19th and 20th centuries. The history of Reformation jubilees shows how a vast majority of attempts to discover these aspects have been tied to the times. In the spirit of the times, there have now even been deconstructivist and anti-essentialist theses maintaining that the Reformation’s anti-Catholicism was in fact the content that held it together and that



Close-up of the Martin Luther Monument at Wittenberg’s Market Square: Luther holds his German translation of the Bible.

one can actually only speak of reformations (Kaufmann/Wendebourg). This is all not particularly helpful when it comes to expressing what exactly is reformational about the Reformation in a way understandable to all (like Luther who drew from the spoken language of the people, without however limiting himself to it). The careful reading of Reformation texts is

always useful and helps to ascertain what transformed a theological and church reform of the 16th century into the Reformation – in a manner somewhat more resistant to the prevailing trends. Research into Reformation history has also convincingly documented that there was a narrow focus on Luther in the early (singular) Reformation (Moeller) and therefore a certain,

12 May 1722 MORAVIAN CHURCH

Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf founded the Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine, also known as the Moravian Church. Zinzendorf was influenced by Spener and Francke, and sought to realize the *ecclesiola in ecclesia* on his estate. Although the church held its own worship services and maintained its own structures from the beginning, it continued, at first, to maintain contact with the local Protestant church.

but not exclusive, concentration on Luther the person would appear to be appropriate. Ultimately, a comparison of the Reformation in Wittenberg, Zurich, and Geneva provides all sorts of points of fundamental agreement, which, among other things, have been reasserted and explained with all the connected consequences in the Leuenberg Agreement. This makes the inclusion of many men, and especially of many women of the Reformation in the preparations for the jubilee so promising and exciting.

2. The Reformation is more than the phrases “justification by faith alone” and “sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus.”

One needs to understand that the actual problem with the celebration of the Reformation Jubilee on October 31, 2017 is not the lack of historicity concerning the posting of the Theses (Leppin), but the practically pre-Reformational character of the 95 Theses themselves (Brecht). If we wish to understand what Luther himself saw as the essential core of his theological discovery, we must not fixate on his preface to the 1545 edition of his Latin works, but must take his entire theological development into account, including, for example, his short tracts on the sacraments, leading to his 1520 Prelude on the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, but also his major disputations of the 1530s. One also needs then to analyze the texts of the reformers of Zurich and Geneva, independently of the Wittenberg Reformation. The well-known phrases can be highly misleading as one example can demonstrate here: *Sola gratia* could have also easily been coined in the High Middle Ages within a particular form of Scholastic theology of grace and the framework of its gradualist concepts (Hamm).

3. The Reformation begins with the understanding that the proclamation of God’s word as God’s word provides what it promises.

If we observe Martin Luther at his theological work, it emerges that his Reformation theology only finds its completion once he, after his detailed analysis of the church’s sacraments, understands how God’s forgives sin and how justification comes about in specific terms: through his word, which as the word of creation also brings about the reality that it promises. As with the word of promise in the sacraments, the word of spoken proclamation brings about this promised reality. The most succinct phrasing of this connection derives, incidentally, from a Reformed confessional statement: *praedicatio*



View from Jüdenstrasse of Lutherstadt Wittenberg’s All Saints’ Castle Church

verbi divini est verbum divinum, “the Proclamation of God’s Word is God’s Word” (Confessio Helvetica Posterior). It is not an objection to this interpretation of Reformation texts that it has been revamped in the 20th century by a particular theological movement, the same that we have to thank for the Theological Declaration of Barmen (in opposition to Bernhard Lohse). More simply: Being Protestant, according to the

reformers, follows from the Gospel. Or with a small change to the slogan of the 2017 campaign: “In the beginning is always the word.” People cannot add anything to this renewed divine act of creation, nor can they play an active role in it, but can only allow it to happen and be content. And the forgiveness of sins and acceptance by God is neither an exclusively legal act nor a theological fact that we first need

Photos: p. 70: epd/bild/Rolf Zöllner; p. 71: epd/bild/Andreas Pöge

to understand before we can believe it (as if Reformation Christianity were only something for the educated classes) – God’s acceptance and forgiveness of sins is a completely new creation of the human being, as is demonstrated in a confident and joyous life of faith. The Reformation leads to a way of life that can be felt in every fiber and dimension of human existence. According to Luther, the ultimate crucial test of this faith is dying with confidence and not fearing the powers of this world.

4. The Reformation is a normative centering on Jesus Christ and his role in faith.

Different mediators played a central role in the gradualist thinking of the Middle Ages, in which active cooperation was expected on the part of believers after God’s grace set things in motion or followed up decisively on initial efforts: saints, a saintly life, pious organizations, and church institutions. The Reformation removed all such mediating agencies between people and God. While pastors and bishops (now including women as well) have been granted a role by the entire congregation with the help of the Holy Spirit, they are not particularly enabled representatives of Christ before the congregation; pious efforts are not able to improve human standing but are entirely the natural fruit of Christian faith or they are nothing; and one can live an exemplary life as a Christian in the midst of our everyday world – and not just in monasteries and religious communities. Once all of these mediating agencies have been removed, our sight is free for the One who restored the human relationship with God: Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God.

5. The Reformation accords each Christian with freedom and mature responsibility.

As the word of God in the spoken proclamation of the Gospel creates its own space even among infants and those who are unable to speak for themselves, it requires no particular agencies to provide its interpretation such as an infallible church office of doctrine. Every Christian is a free individual and beholden to nobody in matters of faith, but all instead require Scripture as the text, through the proclamation of which God’s word emerges, so that people are addressed with clarity. All who have been baptized are hence priests and bishops, even if not every person can actually carry out this ministry. Lines (if not always absolutely direct ones) lead from this theological insight to the modern values of a democratic society such as freedom of thought and speech, which however in Reformed Protestantism and in the so-called “left wing of the Reformation” (partly for merely political reasons) have been more strongly stressed than in many parts of the Lutheran Protestantism. As we can now say today, groups such as these have understood the Reformation better in this instance than did the classical reformers.

6. The Reformation, however, also addresses Christian guilt, lack of freedom, and ties to the powers of this world.

Any attempt to describe the reformational aspects of the Reformation that avoids the terms sin and guilt, terms that have become difficult for us, will ineluctably fail. The Reformation is indivisibly tied to the – as many would say: pessimistic, but in reality: realistic – anthropology

of the Augustinian tradition of the interpretation of biblical texts, one which both Luther and John Calvin supported. Human beings are “lacking creatures” who would rather be God themselves than give honor to their creator; the individual and societal consequences of this primary sin of arrogance are fatal and cannot be overlooked. The Reformation has thus by no means solely drawn a picture of free, mature, and responsible people but has also connected the obvious defects of the social order to sin and guilt. This anthropological foundation of Reformation theology has been latently discomfiting in the modern era; this sort of stance, however, leads to a problematic abridgement of the Reformation message. Only when the dialectic anthropology of the reformers is fully explicated can theology and the church supply the particular contribution “to a vibrant and active further development of democracy” as the “Reformation Jubilee project group” expects from them (internal position paper no. 3). One must, however, make it clear that any theological expression on the topic of sin and guilt requires a particular sensitivity as, for example, theological gender research has made clear. We are most likely only on the way to the new, liberating, and emancipating language that Dietrich Bonhoeffer already anticipated in May 1945.

7. The Reformation is thus not simply to be equated with modernity but is “more modern than modernity”.

We can neither one-sidedly emphasize the Reformation’s aspects that conform with modernity, nor can we one-sidedly focus on those that are critical of modernity. Modernity has gladly

11 April 1727

BACH’S ST. MATTHEW PASSION

Johann Sebastian Bach’s St. Matthew Passion premiered in Leipzig. The renowned Thomaner Boys’ Choir still sings Bach motets three times a week at Leipzig’s St. Thomas Church, where Bach was himself the cantor.



received the libertarian pathos of the Reformation, bereft of its dialectic, while the anti-modern movements of the modern era have underscored, by contrast, the pessimistic aspects of Reformation anthropology, focusing on its references to sin and guilt. In both instances, Reformation Christianity has been tied, fully one-sidedly, to certain educated classes of bourgeois society or even to particular tendencies within these classes, thus providing needless impetus for the common view of it as a grave, seldom joyous, and overly intellectualized Central European form of Christianity. It is of particular importance to present the Reformation as it viewed itself – as a legitimate part of the one catholic Church, which we speak of every Sunday in our confession of faith. The church of the Reformation is not an establishment of the early 16th century that is now celebrating its 500th birthday, but a legitimate interpretation of the one holy Church, whose birthday can be traced back to the Pentecost event in Jerusalem, the “catholic Church that has gone through the Reformation”. More succinctly: The Reformation belongs neither to the Late Middle Ages nor solely to the Modern Era, but lies “between the eras” and can thus also be termed “more modern than modernity” as it is not confined to the modernity of the Modern Era.

Second question: What do we wish to celebrate after 500 years?

8. We should not celebrate a simple declaration of guilt for the division of the Western Church but also not an idealization of this division...

The call made time and again by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church to mark the Reformation anniversary in particular as a declaration of guilt for the division of the Western Church is problematic, if for no other reason, as it would correspond with a papal theory of the deterioration of theology: If Protestantism is the religious incarnation of the deleterious modern process of individuation at the cost of society, the central blame for the division of the Western church is entirely one-sided, as was described by Benedict XVI as the individuation of Protestant theology and church. There are, accordingly, Roman Catholic Church tendencies that would stress, in the run-up to 2017, the “pluriverse” of Reformation communities (Przywara) and the discontinuities of form as in the theology of the pre-Reformation church; there is good reason to counter this trend. Ultimately, the dogmatization processes

of the Roman Catholic Church since the Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council, including the dogmas of the 19th and 20th century, have done at least as much to widen the rift and mark differences to the one pre-Reformation Christian Church. There cannot however be a response in which the division of the Western church, “breaking up into a number of denominations, linked together in contradiction and commonality” is viewed only positively or even to be celebrated as “religious-cultural differentiation and plurality” (Perspectives of the Academic Advisory Board, no. 3). The numerous problems now facing multi-denominational couples and families speak against this. There should thus be a sober and honest admission of guilt but also a thankful avowal of freedom for which the church has the Reformation to thank.

9. ... a Reformation jubilee after nearly 100 years of the ecumenical movement ...

After nearly a hundred years of the ecumenical movement, one could of course no longer celebrate the Reformation jubilee only in German or within the triangle connecting Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg. We need to take interest in how Lutheran and Reformed faith is expressed around the world and what Christians from other parts of the world have been discussing in their descriptions of the reformational aspects of the Reformation – just as it was phrased in the theses laid out by the “Reformation jubilee project group” of the German government: “Germany is inviting the world to celebrate the 2017 Reformation jubilee together in our country” (no. 9). During the Reformation Jubilee it must indeed become quite clear that we are celebrating within the context of a global ecumenical movement. We must be thankful for progress made, as in the common understanding of the doctrine of justification, but must also be clear when it comes to delineating any remaining, painful differences. The Reformation was meant to be a reformation of the entire church, and after 500 years, this aim, despite its failure at the time, cannot simply be reframed to limit itself to a part of the church. It would thus be desirable to seek out Roman Catholic Christians who would like to join in the celebrations even if their church leadership is not particularly keen on celebrating itself. Ultimately, it should also become clear during the Reformation celebrations that we are celebrating the first major Reformation jubilee following the Leuenberg Agreement, i.e. after overcoming the divisive differences of doctrine

among the Protestant churches some forty years ago. This agreement should continue to be used as a model for a broader ecumenism into the future.

10. ... after the experience of the Holocaust ...

We can also not celebrate the Reformation jubilee without acknowledging the role that the theology of individual reformers, and Martin Luther in particular, had in the massive destruction of European Jewry in the 20th century and in its terrible precursors. The theological clarifications reached since 1945 with respect to Judaism, as sufficiently represented in the relevant passages of the constitutions of the EKD member churches, must be understood as a genuine part of our contemporary interpretation of Reformation theology, and must be explicated as such. We must also make it clear again, in this regard, that the celebration of the Reformation jubilee cannot occur as a mere uncritical repetition of certain Reformation phrases (and post-Reformation phrases about the Reformation) and can certainly not consist in the repetition of Reformation views on “papists, Turks, and radicals”.

11. ... a Reformation jubilee without fear ...

The Reformation faith leads to a joyous and free certainty for the faithful. In face of drastic uncertainties for individuals and entire societies in unsettling times, this constitutes both an opportunity and a problem for any presentation of the reformational aspects of the Reformation: Can Protestant proclamation be experienced in a way that uplifts, consoles, liberates, and frees people of fear? Can it encourage people to be able to serve their neighbors and society with gladness? Is it possible to relate the hunger for spirituality, security, and for God to these experiences? Because the Reformation message makes people happy and free in the deepest core of their existence, the Protestant church can celebrate a Reformation jubilee without fear and thus serve to alleviate fear itself. Within the church, that means, in particular, that one can celebrate without fears of dwindling membership numbers, of a loss of power and stature, or indeed of apathy or aggressive criticism – but also without a fear-driven dissociation from other denominations and religions, and from a plurality of world views and freedom of conscience. This also implies, however, not being afraid of possible changes in the traditional German relationship between church and state, but also not being afraid of enjoying this rela-

tionship, as long as it lasts as it is, as a means of carrying out necessary tasks in a proper balance of cooperation as partners. The message of free grace, which allows all fear to vanish, means in particular, however, celebrating a Reformation jubilee where it is plainly visible that the church is not a part of the cartel of public fear mongers, but instead encourages a sober analysis of the times. Such an analysis lies in the tradition of the great work towards differentiation that characterizes the Reformation theology of the 16th century (e.g. God and humankind, works and the person, law and Gospel, church and state: Ebeling).

12. ... a joyous yet proud Reformation jubilee ...

The celebrations should effectively affirm that forgiveness and acceptance makes people happy and helps them again, in a complex world, to find strength for the difficulties of everyday life. There is no reason against explicating the effects of the Reformation for the political order and culture of our country, Europe, and indeed the whole world in a manner in which non-believers can also gain a sense of access to the Reformation jubilee (inasmuch as the theological center of the Reformation can be articulated in a manner that is as clear and unabridged as it is understandable and fresh). The concepts are well known: The Reformation and education, the Reformation and the modern history of freedom, the Reformation and democracy and the modern constitutional state, the Reformation and literature, the Reformation and music, and indeed the Reformation and language. The Medieval church was limited by the Reformation to a part of the system of society and this healthy tendency towards a self-limitation of claims to religious dominance and valid-

ity is also a major cultural achievement of Christianity.

13. ... a Reformation jubilee that invites both individuals and the society as a whole to repentance and which is moved by the Gospel to repent, as well as ...

Unlike the many political speeches that link change both in society and in individuals to preconditions, Reformation proclamation invites us to be encouraged to simply make a new start at any given time and without preconditions. In the Reformation Jubilee, one should ensure that the Reformation invitation to repent cannot be mixed up with a political appeal for change, and that repentance can also consist in doing nothing for once, in silence and prayer. This kind of encouragement to repent also serves to alleviate fear and uplifts people from their downtroddenness, helping them to stand on their feet again. This focus on the topic of “repentance” also makes it possible to uphold the long-standing traditional date of October 31, 1517, which will be commemorated in 2017, for solid theological reasons and not just as a matter of convention.

14. ... a Reformation jubilee that makes it clear that the Reformation must continue on.

Since the Reformation continues on and the church itself is never, as it were, quite “finished”, there are not only past changes to be celebrated during the Reformation jubilee, but one must ask joyfully and courageously: What sort of Protestant church do we wish for the next hundred years? What sort of Protestant churches does the society around us wish for, and what do other Christians, other religions, and non-religious people want? Do we not have to also

ask self-critically whether we, in some ways, are not in fact pre-Reformation churches ourselves (Gundlach)? If we could progress just as joyfully and serenely as we do energetically and courageously in the processes of reform within the church towards bringing about a “church of freedom”, we would be able to celebrate a Reformation jubilee that seeks to take the reformational aspects of the Reformation seriously. ◀

Prof. Dr. Dres. h. c. Christoph Marksches,
Professor for Early Church History (Patristics)
at the Humboldt University Berlin

Source: Theses for a seminar day for the EKD Council, 2 June 2012

24 May 1738

JOHN WESLEY'S CONVERSION

Wesley traveled through Great Britain to preach following his conversion experience, calling for people to follow Christ in their own lives. Wesley had already founded a student organization together with his brother, which was given the nickname “Methodist”, a term originally meant to deride the pious life and strict rules that the group supported.

What is reformational about the Reformation?

If there is to be a central idea that summarizes the character, goals, and message of the Reformation, it is the rediscovery of the Gospel **By Johannes Schilling**



The first complete edition of Luther's Bible translation into High German, 1534, with wood engravings by MS (monogram), at the permanent exhibition, Luther House, Wittenberg.

What is reformational about the Reformation? We are faced with a task that can hardly be more demanding, perhaps only to be exceeded by the question of the essence of Christianity itself. But the question of what is reformational about the Reformation is almost the same, for the Reformation is in fact a new understanding of the Christian religion and Reformation theology is a reformulation of Christian theology.

In the following essay I will focus on Luther, not only because of a shortage of time. We are indeed moving towards the Quincentenary of the Reformation, the central figure of which would

appear to be Martin Luther and in fact it is his Wittenberg Reformation that is marked by this anniversary.

It will soon become clear whether the speakers agree in part or as a whole – we do not in fact know what the others have written. If we do not agree completely, then we need to determine the degree to which there can be a plural understanding of the Reformation without descending into arbitrariness. The Reformation was indeed, not unlike Christian theology and the church in general, a diverse phenomenon.

What, then, is reformational about the Reformation? Answer: the rediscovery of the Gospel.

1. If there is to be a central statement on the character, aims and message of the reformation it is this: the reformers saw themselves as rediscovering the Gospel itself, for themselves and for others. Rediscovery is not a new discovery, and they did not discover anything that was not actually there already. It was not about finding new worlds but about the one word of God. And so they did not view their churches as new churches but as the 'true old church'¹ as Luther

put it in 1541. The church lacked nothing: it had the Baptism and Eucharist, ministries of proclamation and the keys, the creed of the early church, prayer, authority, and marriage; and the church suffered for the sake of the word and exercised patience.² These are the characteristics of the church, the *notae ecclesiae*.

But what is the Gospel? Luther provided a definition of the Gospel in the introduction to his “Wartburg Postils”, a work that is valuable also in other respects. In his “Short lesson on that which one might look for and expect to find in the Gospels”, Luther explains that there is only one Gospel, witnessed by the different authors. This one Gospel “is and should be nothing other than a discourse or narrative about Christ, ... nothing other than a chronicle, history, legend [meaning here a story to be read aloud] about Christ, who he is, what he did, said, and suffered ... For to put it succinctly the Gospel is a discourse about Christ, which states that he is God’s son who became human for us, who died and rose again, and was set as Lord above all things”.³

This Gospel is something to be communicated. In the year of “Reformation and Music”, I would like to recall the prologue to the Babst Hymnal of 1545, parts of which can still be found in the introduction to our Protestant Hymnal today. “Sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord all the earth. For God has cheered our hearts and minds through his dear son, whom he gave for us to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. He who believes this earnestly cannot be quiet about it. But he must gladly and willingly sing and speak about it so others also may come and hear it.”⁴

It is in response to God’s addressing them that Protestant Christians sing and speak the Gospel with love and zeal. At the consecration of Torgau’s Castle Church in 1544, Luther succinctly expressed the **communication of the Gospel** from a Reformation perspective – we could also call this the event of worship but that is limited to the specific purpose of that particular “house”. According to Luther the only thing that should happen in the house is that “our dear Lord speaks to us himself through his holy word, and that we respond to him through prayer and sung praise.”⁵

The Reformation, as we have said, **involved the rediscovery of the Gospel**. Once this is so defined, we can go on to explain that the Reformation was thus, according to its own understanding of itself and in its reception and impact through history, a call to a cause, or not really to a cause, but rather a **call to God in Jesus Christ**.

2. The 2017 Reformation Quincentenary is the result of the cultural memory of Luther’s posting of his Theses on October 31, 1517. From 1527 at the latest, Luther and his supporters were aware of the special nature and historical dimensions of this event that had taken place ten years earlier.⁶ **With the publication of his 95 Theses, Luther did not seek to set up a beacon but to engage with the question of the truth of the Christian faith and of care for his church**. Of course, just as we cannot have an “objective” historical view of the Reformation but need to deal with it as a construction, constructively and constructingly, it cannot only be a question of the facticity of the “posting of the Theses” as the initial event of the Reformation

but rather about the nature of this “posting” as an event.

The interest that this event attracts is often misdirected. One may ask, did he nail the Theses or didn’t he? The most important question should however be: What did Luther have to say in his 95 Theses? – As my reply to this I give the text of the first thesis: “Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when he said [‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near’], willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.”⁷

For Luther’s contemporaries, it was necessary to explain what was not meant by this: “This word cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance, i.e., confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests.” And Thesis 62 crucially defines this further: “**The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God.**”⁸

Allow me to spend a few more moments on Luther’s first Thesis, in which he refers to the beginning and middle of Jesus’ public proclamation. If the whole life of believers is to be repentance, this is a matter of *metanoia*, of turning toward God. This is a task for all Christians or rather one should say: This is a gift from God to all believers.

If we are to define the reformational aspect of the Reformation, we need also to say: **This reformational aspect derives not from a contradiction or opposition to the Roman Church, but from God’s word**. The fact that in the course of the Reformation it also came to a pluralization of the churches of Europe – while there had never in history actually been a unity

4 July 1776

THE US DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

The Declaration, drawn up by Thomas Jefferson, later the 3rd President of the United States (1801–1809), was signed by 55 delegates at the Congress meeting in Philadelphia. The new republic would support state neutrality in matters of religion with “no religious test” for political office.

of churches throughout all of Christendom – is perhaps a consequence of the Reformation, or perhaps only a side-effect, depending on one’s particular theological assessment or position.

The Reformation, in any event, does not derive its identity from its opposition to the Roman Church, but from its own self-image of the church as a *creatura verbi divini*, as the creature of God’s word – “tota vita et substantia Ecclesiae est in verbo Dei”⁹ Luther explained in 1521 – **“The entire life and substance of the Church consists in the word of God”.**

The message of justification is regarded as the centerpiece of Reformation faith and theology. How can this difficult yet necessary topic be communicated to people today in a manner that they can appreciate? The justification of human beings involves nothing less than God’s love, as granted in Christ, or to express it differently, it is about the love of Christ.

“In summary: We are to be human, and not God”, Luther wrote to Georg Spalatin in June 1530.¹⁰ The **distinction between God and humanity** is the necessary underlying distinction made in theology, from which all other distinctions follow. And God’s incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth liberates people once and for all from the madness of needing to be or wanting to become like God. This distinction can only be understood accurately if God is understood in his righteousness as the merciful God who meets people who are distant from him, to grant them his righteousness and thereby make them free – free before God, free for themselves, and thus free for concern for their neighbors and fellow human beings. The doctrine of justification, which describes the way God acts toward people, is thus at the heart of the Reformation.

3. The Reformation anniversary, ladies and gentlemen, is an event that will gain the attention, in line with its significance, of the entire German public and will reach well beyond our country as well.

The manner in which the message of the Reformation is conveyed to people appears to me to be of great importance (if not indeed utterly crucial) under the prevailing circumstances. Much attention should be paid to the new media in this regard.

One problem in today’s media society appears to be, however, that the message and the medium are confused. The Reformation benefited

from the new media of its day, but the media also made Luther into its own instrument, so that he himself was forced to object: “What is Luther? The doctrine is not my own and I also was not crucified for anyone.”¹¹ Luther expressly did not view himself as a new bringer of salvation, but he was nevertheless made into one. This may have occasionally been of help to the message but the messenger fought against this, and for good reason, distancing himself from this false impression.

The coming Reformation anniversary is not directed against anyone or anything, for the Reformation was not the fruit of human efforts but was brought about by the Holy Spirit. Reformation, the renewed formation of the church, can be seen by Christians only as a work of God, regardless of the service that they themselves are called to perform.

The coming Reformation anniversary is therefore not a celebration for Protestants in which they should stress the Protestant faith and church in contrast to or even at the expense of other Christian churches. We are not, however, ashamed of the Gospel Reformation – and indeed there would be no justification for this.

If the Reformation anniversary is to be properly celebrated, it has to bring out the reformational aspects of the Reformation in a manner appropriate to our own times. Church historians, more than anyone else, are aware that it must not be turned into a sort of “medieval market”, and nobody should come forward as a Luther *redivivus*.

The Protestant churches are celebrating the rediscovery of the Gospel. The Reformation is indeed in its origins and at its heart a religious event. The Christian faith is understood and taught in a new way in the Reformation: According to the insight of the Reformation, Christianity is founded on a faith in God’s salvation for people and the world in Jesus Christ, a faith derived chiefly from the word of God. This Gospel, literally the “good news”, continues to have an effect down to the present as people continue to experience its liberating message. **As the Gospel applies to all people of all denominations, the anniversary can be celebrated in an ecumenical spirit.**

It could also be a positive sign for the adequacy of the celebrations if they do not meet with approval everywhere. While we should seek out a *magnus consensus* due to the good news, whenever the message is met with opposition, it is

perhaps precisely at that point that it is fulfilling its purpose properly.

The Reformation’s deep potential for freedom has always rightly played an important role throughout the history of its effects on the world. **The Reformation was and remains a call to be free, anchored in the call to freedom in the Holy Scriptures.**

The question of the essence and effects of Christian freedom is usually met with an allusion to the double proposition at the beginning of Luther’s “On the Freedom of a Christian”, and that is right and just. But this freedom needs to be interpreted for each life situation: even Luther repeatedly redefined his understanding of Christian freedom, accordingly. This comes to the fore especially in his 1522 work “On the monastic vows” (*De votis monasticis iudicium*), which gains its authenticity and strength in particular from the link he makes between theological reflection and his own life story in a sort of lived theology or, in other words, an existential theology attested to by his own life.

In his engagement with the question of the binding effects of vows, Luther defined the nature of Christian freedom (“naturam liberatatis Christianae”) as follows: “The Christian or Protestant freedom is thus a freedom through which the conscience is freed from works; not that none occur, but that one does not rely on them. ... Christ made the conscience free of works by teaching through Gospel not to rely on works but only to place hope in his mercy. A faithful conscience thus depends, in complete freedom, on the works of Christ alone.”¹²

4. What separates us from the 1917 Reformation anniversary?

“Tis All Saints’ Eve, as vesper bells ring, a monk moves through students, peasants, squires by torchlight.

Young monk! – But he prayerfully unpacks his scroll, and nails ninety-five theses to the old house of God.

The din is strong, a splendid sound through the silence of the nearby towns, Herr Tetzl timidly shuts his indulgence case.

The wave rolls powerfully down to the Alps, swelling forth to the Tiber, as the Vatican and St. Peter’s tremble.

The saints' remains stir in the catacombs, the news reaches heaven, and the angels begin to cheer.

And thus towns, countries, epochs, heaven is moved anew, as a man nails the theses of God to the church door."¹³

These verses [translated without their original rhyme – transl.] written by the minor poet Rudolf Kögel, who died in 1896, was published in 1917 in the anthology entitled *Martin Luther im deutschen Wort und Lied* ("Martin Luther in German word and song"). Your reaction says it all: A century – and what a century it was – separates us from texts of this sort, from their mentalities and visions, and from their harmless power. We should indeed leave these images behind and free the Reformation Quincenary from the reception history of its prede-

cessors as far as possible. It is not easy to free ourselves from the power of imagery, but perhaps we can succeed through the word. That would indeed be in the spirit of the Reformation.

Prof. Dr. Dr. Johannes Schilling, Director of the Institute for Church History of the Theological Faculty at Christian Albrechts University, Kiel, and chairman of the Academic Advisory Board for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee.

Source: Address, provided here in full, held on the seminar day of the EKD Council in Wülfinghausen, June 2, 2012. The notes provide source citations. The author wishes to thank Dr. Carolinne White for her critical reading of the English translation.

- 1 D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar 1883–2009) [in the following: WA] 51, p. 487.
- 2 WA 51, pp. 479–486.
- 3 WA 10 I 1, pp. 9, 11–20.
- 4 WA 35, pp. 476f.
- 5 WA 49, pp. 588, 15–18.
- 6 Luther's letter to Nikolaus von Amsdorff. 1 November 1527. WA. Briefwechsel 4, pp. 274f. no. 1164.
- 7 "Dominus et magister noster Iesus Christus dicendo. Penitentiam agite. etc. omnem vitam fidelium penitentiam esse voluit." – Text and German translation of the Theses: Martin Luther, *Lateinisch-deutsche Studienausgabe Band 2: Christusglaube und Rechtfertigung*. Hrsg. von Johannes Schilling. Leipzig 2006, pp. 1–15.
- 8 "Verus thesaurus ecclesie est. sacrosanctum euangelium glorie et gratie dei" (ibid.).
- 9 WA 7, pp. 721, 12f.
- 10 WA. Briefwechsel 5, pp. 413–415 no. 1612. 30 June 1530.
- 11 WA 8, pp. 685,6f.
- 12 Martin Luther, *Freiheit und Lebensgestaltung ...* Göttingen 1983, pp. 124. Original Latin: WA 8, S. 606,30-607,1.
- 13 *Martin Luther im deutschen Wort und Lied. Gedanken und Gedichte deutscher Männer aus vier Jahrhunderten. Eine Festgabe zum 400-jährigen Gedenktage der Reformation. Zusammengestellt und eingeleitet von Gustav Manz*. Berlin: Verlag des Evangelischen Bundes 1917, pp. 171.

A fundamental difference between the Christian churches lies in the understanding of the church – and particularly in the question of what is to be understood as church unity under the prevailing circumstances of the modern era. The Catholic ecumenist Johanna Rahner reveals commonalities in her historical perspective on dissent.

Ecclesiology: a basic difference

Much that was taken for granted by medieval theologians with regard to the plurality of church structures and variety of liturgical form, simply disappeared from the Catholic world due to the post-Tridentine pressure toward uniformity, damaging the identity of Catholicism. This pressure toward uniformity would reach its height and comple-

tion with the First Vatican Council. It took the Second Vatican Council to break with this trend and to connect with traditions lost in the aftermath of the counter-Reformational Catholic push for identity, traditions that are better able to provide a response to Luther's ecclesiological concerns.

Prof. Dr. Johanna Rahner, Chair for Systematic Theology Institute for Catholic Theology University of Kassel

Source: Address on "The Catholic Church – a church of the Reformation? The Second Vatican Council and Ecumenism", held at the Forum St. Peter, Oldenburg, October 2012



1781

KANT'S CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON

For Immanuel Kant, enlightenment was "man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity". Kant's Critique of Pure Reason constituted a turning point and the beginning of modern philosophy.



The 2017 Reformation Jubilee – a major opportunity for our country!

Minister of State **Bernd Neumann** underscores the significance of the Luther Decade for the entire country

The Reformation has had a deep influence on our country. Convinced that this is the case, the federal government, the individual states, and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) have all been working together on the preparations for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee. Since 2011, we have, for example, contributed five million euros annually toward various events throughout the country and for the maintenance and renovations of important Reformation sites. This should combine for a total of 35 million euros in special funding through the anniversary year of 2017.

The Reformation paved the way for the modern world

The tasks of state and church in the preparations for the Luther Decade and the 2017 Reformation Jubilee are fundamentally different: The religious dimensions are of less importance to the state than are the historical, sociopolitical and cultural significance of the Reformation. The Reformation indeed paved the way for the modern world: It promoted the formation of an image of humanity anchored in a new Christian idea of freedom. This moved the focus to the development of individual responsibility and decisions of conscience.

The Enlightenment and human rights – as well as modern-day democracy – were decisively influenced by the Reformation. Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into German was crucial to the development of a uniform written language and opened up a hitherto unimaginable degree of access to education for large segments of the population. The movement did, however, also have darker aspects if we think of Luther's anti-Judaism, his lack of understanding for the concerns of peasants, and the division of the church and the subsequent religious wars with their catastrophic results. We must not close our eyes to these aspects, which will therefore also come under focus.

The federal government and parliament (Bundestag) have recognized the event's significance

for the country as a whole and the opportunities connected with this. In a cabinet decision made on February 20, 2011, the federal government determined that it would actively participate in the preparations and planning for the jubilee alongside the churches, states, municipalities, and civil society groups. In my capacity as the state minister for culture, I was tasked with the coordination of the federal measures for the preparation and implementation of the Reformation Jubilee.

In a cross-party motion entitled "The Reformation Jubilee in 2017 – a world-class event", the German Bundestag expressed its expectations for the participation of the federal government in the celebrations. The government will thus receive the express support of the parliament in reaching its goals.

As many people as possible should be able to participate

With its participation, the federal government recalls that the Reformation is a part of the intellectual roots of our society and opens up a major opportunity for the vibrant and active further development of democracy. The Luther Decade and the Reformation Jubilee make it possible to have an understanding of our society's fundamental values such as the freedom of opinion and speech, the significance of religious tolerance, and the value of having a common language. We need to make use of this opportunity. The federal government will play a cultural and political role in the preparation of this process through its support of a wide variety of events seen to be in the national interest, ranging from exhibitions and concerts to cultural education projects, symposiums, and conferences, at the national and international levels. As many people as possible – regardless of their religious convictions and worldviews – should be able to take part in the Luther Decade and Reformation Jubilee.

I would also like to address the "Ökumene jetzt!" ("Ecumenism now!") campaign that nu-

merous prominent Christians have recently signed on to: The preparations for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee seem like a good occasion to intensify the dialogue among the denominations. From the beginning, I have felt that it would best if the jubilee, whenever this appears appropriate, be carried out in an ecumenical spirit together with the Catholic Church and other religious communities. This provides the unique opportunity to join together to think over the origins of the Reformation, its sometimes painful history, but also our commonalities on the way forward to the future. In this context, I find it an encouraging sign that the EKD has invited the Catholic Church to play a role in planning the Reformation Jubilee. There have already been numerous dialogue contacts between the two denominations within the framework of the Luther Decade. There has been talk together about an ecumenical Bible congress in 2015 as well as about joint plans for the "Reformation and Music" year of the Luther Decade in a more interdenominational endeavor. I encourage both churches to continue to move forward along this path. The Luther Decade and the 2017 Reformation Jubilee will prove to be a success if, after the celebrations have all passed, one can conclude that the Reformation Jubilee was more than just a celebration of Protestantism. The goal is much more to present Germany as a hospitable nation, open to the world, and as a religiously and denominationally harmonious country that is strengthened in its identity. ◀

Bernd Neumann A member of the Bundestag for the Christian Democratic Union since 1987, Neumann has been Minister of State at the German Chancellery and Representative of the Federal Government for Culture and Media since 2005. Neumann, born in 1942, represents his home district in Bremerhaven. He is married with two children.



State Minister for Culture Bernd Neumann at Berlin's culturally oriented Church of St. John the Evangelist on 27 October 2011 for the presentation of the campaign "Luther 2017 – In the beginning was the Word".

1789

FRENCH REVOLUTION

The French Revolution began with the storming of the Bastille on July 14. The Revolution would signal the end of the absolutist state and the beginning of the French Republic.

Challenges in the run-up to the Reformation Jubilee

An interjection of church history **By Thomas Kaufmann**

The Protestant churches in Germany stand, as they view themselves, in the same tradition as the Reformation. This cannot be seriously doubted either. References to the Reformation and to “Reformation theology” play a mostly prominent role in their way of life, discussions of currently valid confessional foundations, within the context of ecumenical understanding and strategies in confessional politics, and in connection with theological-ethical statements on the burning questions of our day. Against the background of such notorious traditionalistic political allusions to the Reformation, it is not at all astonishing that it was the EKD that took the surprisingly early initiative to introduce a “Decade” as a means of preparing the Reformation Jubilee. It is beyond the scope of my own knowledge whether and the extent to which one has explicitly spoken of the Reformation as a “difficult heritage” in this context.

EKD Council Chairman Huber, in his opening address of September 2008,¹ spoke to topics that have been traditional areas of Luther critique – the Peasants’ War and Luther’s political ethics as well as his relationship with Judaism – and also added a number of remarks that aimed at gaining distance from Luther’s “Commentary on the Expansion Aspirations of the Ottoman Empire”.² Huber otherwise left no doubt, however, that he continued to believe in the currency of certain master narratives such as that of the modernizing influences of the Reformation leading to the modern understanding of profession, democracy, and modern views of freedom, economics, and tolerance. As reflected in the omissions of the EKD Council Chairman, it is not the “Reformation heritage” per se that is viewed as “difficult”; instead it is more a few, surely not unimportant, but indeed not exactly central matters that are seen as problematic, while the “Reformation heritage” as a whole serves as a productive reference point, one that can even be used with regard to questions of today’s Protestant self-image and view of the world. Not dissimilar are the “Perspectives”³ published by the “Academic Advisory Board for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee”, in

which the Reformation is viewed as the starting point for the processes of differentiation and pluralization that strongly influenced and fundamentally and lastingly changed all areas of “private and public life, social structures, and economic behavior, cultural patterns of perception and mentalities, as well as legal ideas, scholarly concepts, and artistic forms of expression.”⁴ The goal of defining the aims, oriented toward the present, of the Reformation Jubilee thus lies in establishing “the relevance that the Reformation has had for the various areas of our present culture, well beyond the fields of church and theology, and [in investigating] their potential to elucidate in a time of individualization, pluralization, and globalization”.⁵ A basis has been formed for festive optimism, seeing how the Reformation’s relevance for our day is presupposed in this document, as it was by Huber, and has been made plausible through an eclectic mix of classical modernization themes; any focus on the “difficult heritage” would thus seem to be quite inopportune.

Historiographical evaluation of the Reformation

From my view of the contemporary historical research on the Reformation, the Reformation appears today in a much different light than it did as depicted by the literary jubilee propagandists of the past. A few highlights will have to suffice in the following; it will become apparent that my points are meant as an implicit commentary on the “Perspectives”:

1. Within the scope of the international and non-denominational research on the Late Middle Ages, Reformation, and the Early Modern Era, there has been a great need to firm up the periodization of the Reformation and its historiographical evaluation. A singular application of the Reformation continues to dominate in German-language research, one which, following the older, Protestant-dominated historiography dating back to Leopold von Ranke, highlights the theologically induced changes to church and society that were initiated by Luther, which led to the formation of Protestant church



Luther’s room at Wartburg Castle, Eisenach.

entities free of the pope. By contrast, a more plural view of the Reformation has been established in the Anglo-American discourse. This pluralization of “European” or “German Reformations”⁶ aims either at the specific Reformation processes in each individual country of Europe, or they intend to depict the developments in the different religious-denominational formations – i.e. in Lutheranism, Roman Catholicism, and the radical non-conformist or Baptist-spiritualist Reformation – as phenomena that are principally of equal value, priority, and originality. The pluralization of the definition of the Reformation generally corresponds with a polyvalent description of the society, culture, and church system of the Late Middle Ages, i.e. as an open system that allowed for a variety of developments that would be borne out in the different “Reformations”. The idea that the Reformation was founded in a profound crisis of the corrupt papal church, an idea unabatedly widespread outside of academic research on the Reformation, and one which is anchored in the historiographical traditions of the Reformation Era itself, is no longer tenable in this form. Today, modern Tridentine Ca-

tholicism also seems to be less of a reaction to the Reformation, i.e. a Counterreformation, than a renewal movement, which emerged from the historical depths of Late Medieval spirituality. In contrast with the social-historical typologies of various reformations – those of towns, peasantry, nobility, and the knighthood – carried out in German historical accounts of the Reformation since the 1970s in particular, which have generally presumed the historical priority and influence of the developments that began with Luther, the pluralization of the concept of the Reformation, in the sense presented here, is connected with the tendency to depict the individual “reformations” as relatively autonomous, and thus not to be genuinely derived from the narrative of event history linked to Wittenberg. This pluralization poses a challenge to the historical consistency of the term, as the Reformation’s epochal character is placed in question. This applies even in light of the influential comparative research on confession-alization, which only begins to note stable change in the late 16th century with regard to the socio-historical long-term effects of the three Christian denominational variants. This trend has been chiefly supported by Heinz Schilling, who acknowledged the historiographical “loss” of the Reformation.⁷ “The” Reformation is generally understood by most today – and especially outside of Protestant church history circles – as quite important, but only as one element within the broad period of transition from the Late Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era. The Reformation Jubilee will, from this perspective, be involved in a dilemma of periodization, as it presupposes a traditional epochality, tied to a debatable starting date, the “nailing of the Theses”, which itself is highly controversial. The danger seems well founded that the Reformation could appear to those who are distant to Protestantism as a particularistic phenomenon

of denominational identity forming, and indeed seems well justified by the current historiographical situation.

Reformation research – Luther research

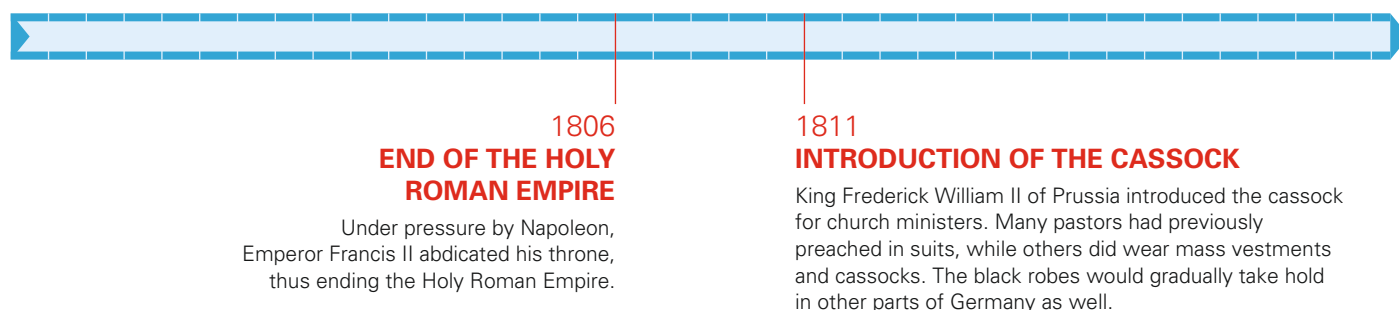
2. Another difficulty with the Reformation “heritage” emerges from the methodological approach to the Reformation, which has yet to be clarified within Protestant theology. The research on the Reformation within the discipline of church history that investigates, in close contact with the general discipline of history, the Reformation within the broad scope of all its manifestations, regardless of particular theological preferences, stands directly alongside “Luther research”, the chief concern of which is to understand the Reformer’s theology in its development and essence. This Luther research continues to be carried out in a methodological relationship, introduced during the “Luther renaissance” at the latest, with efforts in systematic theology, and sometimes also practical theology, towards the contemporization of Luther’s theology. This is generally not conducted in connection with research on the Reformation in the discipline of general history. The Reformation Jubilee confronts Protestant theology with a problematic diversity of methods, which has yet to be discussed adequately, and which is essentially a problem of the competing claims of dogmatic and historical efforts.

3. The task of academic historical research lies chiefly in distinguishing supposedly straightforward historical circumstances. Stagings of memorial culture, on the other hand, are based on simplifying constructions of meaning that contemporize past events in their significance for the present. One should not harbor any illusions about the ensuing tensions and oppositions of interest. Unlike other eras, our contem-

porary culture – not least against the backdrop of the Reformation and Luther jubilees of the 20th century – is extraordinarily skeptical when it comes to grand claims upon past events for the sake of current interests. Dorgerloh’s subtly advanced idea⁸ of bringing into play German unity as a new field of experience for a jubilee that is to be celebrated globally also remains problematic. Regardless of all national Protestant interpretative pathos, the Reformation indeed founded in Germany a history of a denominationally divided national culture, and launched or perhaps accelerated an era of European conflict of historical proportions. For a Protestant theology and church, which, as it were, emerged from the university in the course of the Reformation, and which, like no other Latin European varieties of Christianity, has been nourished from its connection to the academic culture of reflection, it cannot be seen as a solution to celebrate a Reformation jubilee that does not interact with the academic discourses about its historical foundations.

Luther is not the Reformation

4. Luther is not the Reformation, as central as the figure of Luther is to the chain of events that led to deep-rooted changes in the traditional church system. The impulses set into motion by Luther and the Wittenberg Circle were received in quite a variety of ways and transmitted within theological, political, and cultural traditions, leading to independent interpretive forms of a Reformation Christianity that is pluralistic itself. Normative interpretations of the Reformation that focus strongly on Luther, with particular theological content, such as the doctrine of justification, as the pivotal elements of the Reformation processes, do not do justice to the original complexity of the Reformation developments. Reference to the priesthood of all believers and to Holy Scripture as normative con-





The controversial art installation with 800 differently colored Luther figures in Wittenberg during the *Erlebnismacht* event on August 14, 2010.

The Wittenberg *Rathaus* (town hall) and St. Mary's (Town) Church, where Luther preached, can be seen in the background.

cepts also emerge as highly complex in light of a synchronic analysis of theological history. The deep theological rifts within the Reformation camp arose in the form of irreconcilably different interpretations of biblical texts. The opposition to the Roman Church and its legal and institutional foundations, on the one hand, form a constitutive moment of what one could term the “unity of the Reformation”. In view of the ideas revolving around the “ecumenical dimension of the Reformation Decade”;⁹ it would be, in my opinion, nothing but an act of scholarly integrity to name anti-Papalism and anti-Romanism as constitutive and formative elements that drove the Reformation and thus as major marks of Protestant identity throughout history. The semantic shift between a Reformation and Luther Decade, in any event, points to a simplistic level of discourse with regard to the question of “unity and diversity in the Reformation”.

Interpretive traditions

5. As a German Protestant theologian who would like to approach the Reformation Jubilee with an awareness of historical responsibility, it is a good idea to be aware of the earlier interpretive traditions that continue to influence the public image of the Reformation and Luther – especially in Germany – to this day. This does not only include glorifying depictions and fictions produced for the masses as in the recent Luther film; this also particularly includes views and stereotypes such as “Luther as a down-to-earth son of peasants”, “Luther as the creator of the Early High German language and the first

translator of the Bible into the language of the people”, and – going much further – the “Reformation as the end of the Middle Ages”, the “Reformation as a milestone in the history of freedom” and – qua the “Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms” – as an epochal step toward the autonomization of rational human and state-political norms and rationales of action with regard to religious and church paternalism; and lastly: the Reformation as the decisive beginning of a history of tolerance and – qua priesthood of all believers – as an important impulse for the democratic developments of the Modern Era. The attractiveness of these ideas and stereotypes is plain to see: They push the Reformation closer to ideas, values, and attitudes that are important and dear to us and which enjoy broad social acceptance. The difficulty lies, however, in the fact that practically none of these views and stereotypes stand up to historical research. They have as much to do with the historical Reformation and Early Modern Era as do most of the “Luther and Reformation memorial sites” with the 16th century:¹⁰ These are retrospective constructions of tradition with regard to the myth of the Reformation’s origin, which have served and continue to serve to legitimize certain current interests. Even if some of these views and stereotypes may have a historical core, as historical buildings certainly do as well, we have always been confronted with them within a package of interpretation and appropriation that projects false plausibilities and suggestions of modernity. Differentiating among these views and stereotypes, however, would – it seems – dispense with the very points

that seem to allow for an effective mass-media approach to communicating how the Reformation deserves to be remembered and borne in mind – while of course solidifying the significance of those who would like to be seen as the official representatives of this heritage. Should one then cease to earn public “points” with these stereotypes and views just for the sake of a temporary gain such as historical integrity?

6. We need not provide any further explanation for why accommodating certain public expectations is not a serious option for a scholar. The Reformation heritage does, however, become a “difficult” one when it is tied to expectations that it is not able to fulfill. A large portion of these expectations and projections arise from the separation of aspects that can be contemporized and applied to our present day from the primary contexts of the Reformation’s reception history. This can be illustrated in the following example:¹¹ Luther, in his famous 1523 writing “On Secular Authority”, lent his express support for fighting religious and theological deviances and heterodoxies solely with spiritual weapons, and not with the physical force of the sword. He thus placed himself in clear opposition to the “Constantinian concept” that had prevailed since the introduction of the heresy law of the Empire in late antiquity. It is well known that Luther’s stance on this issue changed entirely in the course of the creation and establishment of Protestant church structures. The idea that different religious or denominational confessions can coexist within a single political system of rule was completely beyond him and a majority of his contemporaries. That would have been incompatible with the canonical view rooted in the old Roman tradition that religion was the most important *vinculum societatis*. Escaping from the “difficult heritage” of the Reformation by placing the “earlier” Luther on a pedestal while distancing oneself from the “later” Luther

would not do justice to the ability of the pre-modern socialization of religion to affect mentality, and would be historically inaccurate. The unabatedly “medieval” orientation toward a doctrinally homogenous *corpus christianum* indeed served as the precondition and means of the secular authorities to permanently establish a politically protected Reformation as guaranteed by the imperial law on religion. The historical success of the Reformation was based in a legal and political system of order and rule that was intolerant both in its structures and its principles. We can see, however, from around 1530, how the Protestant opponents of an authority-driven Reformation process, now pushed to the sidelines, appealed to Luther’s own treatise “On Secular Authority” in their opposition to him and other proponents of a magisterial Reformation. The “Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms”, it would thus appear, developed their historical impact not within the evolving Lutheran churches but in divergent Protestant milieus. One must bear in mind this complex finding when addressing the issue of the conditions of “tolerance” during the Reformation era. The example may also be seen to illustrate that one is faced with greater difficulties when looking at the complex Reformation heritage from a “Lutherocentric” point of view than from a “panoptic” perspective that dispenses with any fixation on the “canonical” reformer. It is not least due to the research on Reformation history over the past several decades paying considerable attention to the massive corpus of pamphlets that it is likely to be easier today than in has been in the past to analyze the stances and positions of the leading reformers within the scope of the discourse of their time, and thus to understand them better historically. This is tied to an opportunity to come to understand the far-off and strange Reformation era as a laboratory of constellations of

religious culture and society, beyond the alternative between denominational identification and moralizing distance.

7. From the points illustrated here, a number of tentative thoughts can be asserted with regard to the upcoming jubilee:

a) An instrumentalization of the Reformation commemoration for particular goals related to church politics cannot be a serious option from the point of view of a church historian. This could only be possible at the cost of oversimplifying contemporizations of certain aspects of the complex Reformation heritage and would not serve to better our understanding of the Reformation but would instead serve the legitimization of current interests masked as a sort of traditionalism. Others should decide whether the interlinking, proclaimed by the EKD, of the so-called “Church of Freedom” reform process and the Luther or Reformation Decade is beyond such suspicion. As a thinking form of religion, productively tied to scholarly theology, it goes without saying that critically minded Protestantism needs to work on its historical heritage in close cooperation with pluralistic and critical research.

b) The primary historical result of the Reformation, the development of institutional alternatives to the Roman Catholic Church system, legally protected and stabilized by the secular authorities, did not meet with the original hopes and expectations of a universal Reformation of the Western church. From this perspective, the Reformation was a failure. A number of major points of criticism have retained their validity which Reformation theologians had aimed at the Roman Catholic Church. This includes the hierarchical relationship between clergy and laity, the discrediting of marriage – a

biblically legitimate way of life – for its principal officials, an authoritarian principle of tradition that can be activated at any time, and a tendency toward sacral and hierarchical self-absolutization – in today’s Roman Catholic Church – despite all impressive *aggiornamentos*. There cannot therefore be any reason for triumphalistic attitudes based on this alone. One should thus frame the upcoming Reformation Jubilee in a clear discontinuity with the centenary celebrations since 1617, when Protestantism chiefly celebrated itself and its historical existence.

c) Running counter to the claims to a “Reformation theology” evoked both by the Luther renaissance and dialectical theology, one must fully recognize that Protestantism, since the 16th century, has gone through fundamental changes that would have it seem incorrect to describe the “Reformation” or individual aspects of its doctrine as irreversibly normative for Protestant Christianity. The recent normative claim made in an EKD press release that “real change” emerges in our church “from the hot core of the Reformation”,¹² insinuates that “the Reformation” is a sort of static available resource and not perhaps the result of our own constructions and appropriations. This, however, ignores the fact that we “have” the Reformation only in and through the process of communicating a 500-year history of Protestantism that links us to it just as much as it divides us from it. We also need to be aware of the considerable and irreversible theological differences dividing us from the Reformation. These differences are fundamental in nature especially with regard to our treatment of the Bible and the differences between historical-critical exegesis and the Reformers’ interpretation of Scripture. At the center of the problem of “Luther and the Jews” also lie Christological interpretations of the Old Testament, which are obsolete according to

1814/15

CONGRESS OF VIENNA

Following the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon, new borders within Germany and Europe were established at the Congress of Vienna. Forces of liberal reform were generally held in check, with monarchy continuing to dominate as a form of government.

1817

CALL FOR PROTESTANT UNITY

On 27 September 1817, during the celebrations to mark the 300th anniversary of the Reformation, King Frederick William III called Lutheran and Reformed Christians in Prussia to take communion together and to join one another in a “revitalized Protestant Christian Church”.



Stained glass windows at the Wiesloch Town Church with portraits of the reformers Martin Luther (1483–1546, left) and John Calvin (1509–1564).

modern exegetic standards. It would be worth every effort if we were to use the Reformation Jubilee as an opportunity to bring into clear focus the basic significance and the theological consequences of the differences between the biblical interpretations of the reformers and modern exegeses. A historically radicalized form of this hermeneutical question should thus be placed on the theological agenda.

d) The monopolistic model used in the Reformation-era socialization of religion, in which religious and theological alternatives were notoriously execrated and marginalized, stands in basic opposition to the conditions of religious inculturation in tolerant modern-day constitutional states. The achievements of the Modern Era with regard to religion and law are not to be seen as the direct consequence of the Reformation but as the result of a complex legal and political constellation; a unique and ultimately permanent pacification of the conflict between denominations in the old Empire was brought about through the religious Peace of Augsburg and the Peace of Westphalia. The Early Modern conception of imperial religious law, which both limited and suspended Protestant denominational claims to truth, was affirmed by the Lutherans from 1555 and the Reformed churches from 1648, while the idea remained paramount in an influential strand of pre-modern Catholicism that any relativization of claims

to truth or peace settlements with heretics was unacceptable. The heritage of the Reformation cannot indeed be had without these complex legal and political contexts.

e) Such major aspects of Reformation theology as its understanding of freedom and the priesthood of all believers are part of the Reformation's historically unresolved traditions. From the mid-1520s, any lay involvement within the Protestant church was the nearly exclusive privilege of the *praecipua membra*, i.e. the political magistrates. Protestantism owes its historical survival to its deep and notorious bonds with the state. With regard to freedom and the priesthood of all believers, the Reformation heritage is thus less of a treasure to be guarded as a resource in the politics of tradition, which has been used under certain historical conditions, and the examination of which is our task today.

f) Within the scope of the religiopolitical and religiocultural challenges of our time, a distanced retrospective on the Reformation would seem helpful, as it reveals that the invocation of a "Christian West" in opposition to Christendom's archenemy, the Turks, constitutes an ideological chimera of modernity. In the Reformation era, denominational opponents – and in fact enemies – were viewed as just as terrible as the Turks. They indeed "Turkified" each other,

and accused one another of secretly cooperating with them. And the Protestants used the Ottomans' military pressure on the Hapsburgs to unabashedly gain religiopolitical advantage. My thesis of "no Reformation without the Turks"¹³ is meant as a challenging idea in our views of the Reformation.

g) Strong interaction between the church and theology has been characteristic of a Reformation initiated from a university by a professor of theology, which has also influenced the later history of Protestantism, especially in Germany. The institutional conditions for academic theology in Germany,¹⁴ strengthened last year by the Council of Science and Humanities, now offer unique opportunities to cultivate this relationship between theology and the church, and to further develop this in a manner suited to the religiocultural and religiopolitical challenges of our time. The Reformation Jubilee could provide a chance to think through the ways in which this can happen.

A difficult and sophisticated heritage

The 2017 Reformation Jubilee offers both opportunities and challenges. Unlike the generations that have passed since 1617,¹⁵ we cannot deal with the task before us in a naïve manner – even in the face of certain improper claims and questionable interpretative choices. The

Reformation indeed constitutes a difficult but also sophisticated “heritage”. Such an inheritance tends to be indivisible – one can either embrace it in its entirety or not at all. With regard to the Reformation this means more than just coming to terms with certain “dark sides”, i.e. topics in which our views today are profoundly different than the views and attitudes of the Reformers. This means overcoming an approach to the Reformation that continually places it in its historical context and focuses on its alterity and otherness – not as a means of ridding ourselves of it but of understanding its complexity and inconsistency.

Only touching the “hot core” of things leads either to the danger of burning oneself or of only discovering that which one has always had and known. Historical work on the Reformation opens up the opportunity to become aware of that which divides us from it and what we have since learned, such as that the Bible is an entirely human word within a specific time and world; that Jesus of Nazareth was deeply influenced by the plural Judaism of his time; that the messianic prophecies that the Reformers discovered in the Old Testament generally do not stand up to historical-critical inquiries; that a certain amount of doctrinal and interpretative diversity do not destroy but can in fact enliven a church; that it is not desirable to have an alternative to a general freedom of religion, guaranteed by the state; and that the Bishop of Rome would not seem to be the Antichrist foretold by certain biblical traditions.

And lastly: With respect to the theological and religious substance of Christianity, the Reformation has developed new insights or has expressed them in a new language, and giving these up would entail the self-abandonment of Christianity: that the God witnessed in the Bible and called Father by Jesus loves his creatures unconditionally and is appropriately honored when one meets him in faith; that the incarnation of this God constituted the turning point in Christian existence and reveals its meaning in the word, i.e. in human acts of communication; that the Christian faith needs to be adopted personally and serves the affirmation and formation of personal identity; that a human society of Christians who generally enjoy equal rights, and which serves to uphold faith, is reasonable and desirable; and that the Christian faith deserves to be articulated, not in a manner at odds with the times and the world, but using the means of reason and within the scope of competing claims to truth in our time and our world. ◀

Prof. Dr. Thomas Kaufmann, Chair for Church History, Georg August University, Göttingen

Source: Address to the leading EKD clergy, August 2011

- 1 Wolfgang Huber, Eröffnungsvortrag, in: *Luther 2017 – 500 Jahre Reformation, Jahrbuch 2008*, pp. 22–28.
- 2 *Ibid.*, pp. 24.
- 3 500 Jahre Reformation – Luther 2017. *Perspektiven für das Reformationsjubiläum*, Geschäftsstelle der EKD in Wittenberg.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 7, Th. 6.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 10, Th. 20.
- 6 Thomas A. Brady, *German Histories in the Age of Reformations, 1400–1650*, Cambridge 2009; Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, Chichester 2010; Scott H. Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization*, Louisville, London 2004; also with international influence: Heiko A. Oberman, *Zwei Reformationen – Luther und Calvin – Alte und Neue Welt*, Berlin 2003.
- 7 Heinz Schilling, *Reformation – Umbruch oder Gipfelpunkt eines Temps des Réformes*, in: *idem., Ausgewählte Abhandlungen zur europäischen Reformations- und Konfessionsgeschichte*, Olaf Mörke and Luise Schorn-Schütte (eds.) (*Historische Forschungen* 75), Berlin 2002, pp. 11–31.
- 8 “Whereas the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s birth in 1983 had to be celebrated separately in East and West, in 2017 we will be able to celebrate a Reformation Jubilee in Wittenberg and throughout the world together for the first time in global church community.” Stefan Dorgerloh, *Zehn Jahre sind keine lange Zeit...*, in: *Jahrbuch 2008*, as in fn. 2, p. 5.
- 9 This is the subtitle of a recently published article by Friedrich Weber, *Konfessionalität und Ökumene. Zur ökumenischen Dimension der Reformationsdekade*, in: *Ratlos vor dem Reformationsjubiläum 2017? Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 28, 2011, pp. 106–119.
- 10 Elucidating this: Martin Steffens, *Luthergedenkstätten im 19. Jahrhundert. Memoria – Repräsentation – Denkmalpflege*, Regensburg 2008.
- 11 On the following: Thomas Kaufmann, *Luthers Judenschriften*, Tübingen 2011, pp. 146ff.
- 12 EKD Press Release no. 223/2010, cited in Weber, *Konfessionalität*, as fn. 9, p. 107.
- 13 Thomas Kaufmann, *Kontinuitäten und Transformationen im okzidentalen Islambild des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, in: Lothar Gall – Dietmar Willoweit (eds.), *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Course of History: Exchange and Conflicts [Schriften des Historischen Kollegs Kolloquien 82]*, München 2011, pp. 287–306, here: 306; cf. more comprehensively: *Idem.*, “Türkenbüchlein”. Zur christlichen Wahrnehmung “türkischer Religion” in Spätmittelalter und Reformation [FKDG 97], Göttingen 2008, here esp. pp. 62; 66ff.
- 14 Empfehlungen zur Weiterentwicklung von Theologie und religionsbezogenen Wissenschaften an deutschen Hochschulen [Drs. 9678-10], Jan. 2010.
- 15 Cf. Thomas Kaufmann, *Reformationsgedenken in der Frühen Neuzeit*, in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 107, 2010, pp. 285–324.

1822

FIRST PROTESTANT DOGMATICS

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, a liberal theologian based primarily in Berlin, published the first work of doctrine for all Protestants. For him, religion was no longer to be viewed in terms of knowledge and understanding but as a “feeling of absolute dependence” that every person can experience if they are open to it.

The Reformation: Denominational, post-denominational, ecumenical?

Theses on the Reformation and Reformation Jubilee **By Volker Leppin**

For Protestants, remembering the Reformation means remembering the Gospel of Jesus Christ – and thus the common basis of Christian proclamation.

Luther is known for not wanting to be celebrated himself; for him it was all about the message of Jesus Christ. The Reformation involves the task of seeking out our common basis in the Gospel and to discover and correct both our own flaws and those of our ecumenical partners. All of this can only occur, however, in an awareness that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is greater and broader than any narrow denomination. Open minds will recognize that the history of Roman Catholic doctrine from Trent through the Second Vatican Council also constitutes a learning process in which the church's commitment to Scripture is more clearly differentiated from the accretions of tradition than it was in the 16th century. Issues, however, continue to be unresolved such as the basis used in Roman Catholic doctrine for there being church agencies that can infallibly decide on binding doctrines: as we turn back to the Gospel, only it itself can be infallible, and no human and no human agency. Protestants must articulate with hermeneutical clarity how this infallibility of Scripture can still be expressed in the face of enlightened criticism, but the solution can neither lie in giving up scriptural truth claims or in delegating the question of truth to human authorities.

The course of the Reformation led to the polarities that characterized the Latin Church of the Middle Ages being institutionally solidified in denominational churches.

The East-West schism, which was anchored in developments that began long before the symbolic year of 1054, already led to it being diffi-

cult to speak of there being one single Church. This would become a full social, historical, and thus also theological reality as the result of the Reformation. Whereas the 15th century had been remarkable for its polar tensions between different views of Christianity, the 16th century led to different views of Christianity no longer being able to be contained within one church but instead being institutionalized in different churches. Even if we back away from viewing these differences as being founded in fundamental dissent, it remains clear that each of the churches laid claim to the maintenance and imparting of Christian truth, all while leading, however, its own singular and particular existence. This is a view that even Catholic theology cannot in fact simply circumvent, and the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council constitutes an important step toward the theological examination of this insight. Conversely, the Protestant camp cannot just be blithely content with the continuation of its own particularity but is also faced with the task of investigating whether the unity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot perhaps also be met with a unity (not uniformity) of church affairs.

The coexistence of several different denominational churches means that Western Christianity has not succeeded in proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ to the world with one voice.

The connotations of the Reformation that involve the division of the church play a major role in Roman Catholic collective memory. From a Protestant point of view, it is not this aspect that is decisive but the rediscovery of the Gospel of our undeserved grace from God. And yet, even for the Protestant faith, the shortfalls of the church become visible when dissention

between churches prevents them from taking communion together. This would indeed also mean that the understanding has not been reached on the true doctrine of the Gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments that would make it possible to join together in Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession which states that “it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church”.

The limitations of the denominational churches that emerged from the Reformation evoke the task of making progress by growing together in our understanding of the Gospel.

The history of the Protestant churches is also marked by errors that show how an understanding of the truth of the Gospel is not something that one party can enjoy while others do not, but that it is something that needs to be recaptured, time and again. Learning, however, also involves listening to the other side in an open willingness to possibly learn more than what one has already attained oneself. Learning from one another is thus the actual task of ecumenical discourse, which also expresses in humility that human understanding will, time and again, prove too small to understand the truth of God. In connection with the Reformation, we can think of the last page that Luther wrote. Before writing his famous last words, “We are beggars: this is true.”, Luther jotted down that one could only understand Vergil's *Georgics* after living five years as a peasant and shepherd, and Cicero only after working in politics for twenty, while to understand Holy Scripture one would need to run a congregation for a hundred years together with the prophets. We can only attain such a level of experience, unreachable in a sin-

gle human lifetime, if we learn from our counterparts in ecumenical dialogue.

The remembrance of the Reformation can provide an opportunity for common efforts to proclaim the Gospel.

If, in light of all this, the denominations see themselves called to understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ together and through the message of the Reformation, the chance can arise for the Reformation Jubilee not to be just an opportunity for another attempt to promote a single denomination, as in the 1617 celebrations, but also to provide an impulse for a new means of proclaiming the Gospel together. In a time in which people not affiliated with a church form a plurality in large parts of Germany, this is

surely the most important task that Christians can tackle together.

In the early 21st century, a Reformation Jubilee can only be celebrated properly with an ecumenical scope.

Even if it is likely that Protestants will have an easier time than Catholics in finding the positive aspects of the Reformation quincentennial, such a common remembrance of the Reformation can perhaps also lead to a sense of joyful togetherness among their Roman Catholic partners as well. The currently oft mentioned “Reformation remembrance” within Catholic circles is indicative of the same fearfulness as the occasional Protestant saber-rattling. Not

only a remembrance is on the 2017 agenda but indeed a jubilee, which provides both major denominations with the opportunity to experience joy in a better understanding of the Gospel. The continued lack of church unity has led to the celebration being chiefly a Protestant one, but the task of proclaiming the Gospel can only be met if ecumenical partners are invited to join in the celebrations. A jubilee that only looked backwards would only miss the point: 2017 can however make good sense if it is the beginning of new and natural ecumenical efforts. ◀

Volker Leppin, Professor for Church History at Eberhard Karls University, Tübingen.

Source: Volker Leppin, *Der Blick auf die Reformation: Konfessionell, postkonfessionell, ökumenisch?*, in: Günter Frank/Albert Käuflein (eds.), *Ökumene heute*, Freiburg u. a.: Herder Verlag 2010, 80–102. Presented here with the kind permission of Herder Verlag.

1848

FRANKFURT CONSTITUTION

The text of the constitution was prepared by the National Assembly, which convened in Frankfurt’s St. Paul’s Church following the March 1848 Revolution. On the topic of churches, the constitution stated: “Each religious community is to order and administer its own affairs, while remaining subordinate to the general laws of the state.”

1867

RHINELAND-WESTPHALIAN INSTITUTION FOR EPILEPTICS

Friedrich von Bodelschwingh would rename the institution Bethel in 1874, Hebrew for “House of God”. Its motto was “work instead of alms”, and it focused on the furnishing of working and living spaces.

Controversies surrounding the Reformation

Address at the academic memorial for church historian
Prof. Dr. Gottfried Seebass (1937–2008)¹ By **Christoph Strohm**



Ferdinand Keller, Entrance of Pallas Athena in Heidelberg, 1886

The fruit of many years of teaching and research, Gottfried Seebass brought to print a comprehensive depiction of the Reformation era.² At the end of his November 2005 preface, he wrote: “This volume is dedicated to my three daughters, who after reading this will perhaps be able to understand even better that one can dedicate one’s lifelong interest to this particular segment of church history.” It is thus appropriate to place the subject of the Reformation at the center of this academic memorial for Gottfried Seebass.

The following considerations are meant to provide a few indications as to how it is necessary and worthwhile to dedicate oneself to research on the Reformation today. One might object

that the great reformers will in fact soon have been researched sufficiently after many decades of concentrated work. And one can ask critically why Reformation history has been allotted such importance at the university faculties of Protestant theology, with professorial chairs dedicated to the subject. This takes us straight to the “controversies surrounding the Reformation.”

1. An initial set of problems

A glance at the picture on the wall of the University of Heidelberg’s Old Aula suffices to reveal the presence of the Reformation there. The image was created to mark the 500th anniversary of the university in 1886 and depicts the entrance of Pallas Athena as the protector of the

sciences with important Heidelberg University scholars.³ The choice of scholars portrayed there is quite revealing. From right to left we see, standing directly behind the chariot, the reformer Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560), the first university magister Marsilius of Inghen (c. 1335–1396), the Bishop of Worms and prominent chancellor just before the beginning of the Reformation, Johann von Dalberg (1455–1503), Hebrew scholar Sebastian Münster (1488–1552); above in the background, leaning on the railing: the chemist Leopold Gmelin (1788–1853) and the ophthalmologist and surgeon Maximilian von Chelius (1794–1876), the jurist Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–1694, son of a Lutheran pastor), the humanist Rudolf Agricola (1444–1485, regarded highly by Melancthon

thon and 16th century humanists), in front wearing a neck ruff, French jurist Hugues Doneau (1527–1591, arguably the most important early systematist of civil law, who fled from France in 1572 in the aftermath of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of Protestants), jurist Friedrich Justus Thibaut (1772–1840, whose father came from a family of Huguenot refugees), historian Friedrich Christoph Schlosser (1776–1861, who began his academic career as a theology student and who was briefly a candidate for church ministry), theologian Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583, chief author of the Heidelberg Catechism), Thomas Erastus (1524–1583, a professor of medicine, but not depicted among the other illustrious figures for his medical research but because, as the personal physician of Elector Frederick the Pious, he was a lay theologian and member of the church council as well as a leading figure in the transition of Electoral Palatinate to Reformed Protestantism).

The painting reveals an amazing preponderance of Protestants among the Heidelberg University scholars depicted. This can be explained, first of all, by the fact that the 19th-century Grand Duchy of Baden had a Protestant-oriented university in Heidelberg and a Catholic-oriented university in Freiburg, each with the corresponding theological faculties. The 1886 painting, moreover, brings to the fore the predominant Protestant culture of the German Empire, founded in 1870 under Prussian domination; this was also visible in the black-white-and-red flag of the Empire in the foreground. In addition to the Protestant predominance in the picture, the dominance of the humanities is also remarkable. The two representatives of the natural sciences can only be seen in the background. These two observations are particularly significant when compared with the current

university “hagiography”. This can indeed be seen now above the staircase leading up to the university's Old Aula, where photographs are on display of Nobel laureates, who were “produced” at the University of Heidelberg, all revealing anything other than the dominance of the humanities or a Protestant orientation. On the contrary, only representatives of the natural sciences and medicine are to be seen there.

As representatives of the humanities, however, church historians cannot of course respond to this with the comment, both sentimental and wrong, that “everything used to be better”. They need instead to interpret the visible changes expressed here – as well as the consequences that this has for the research and study of Reformation history. Two entirely contradictory conclusions could be made. One could, in view of the deep changes and the connected loss of significance, conclude that it is no longer reasonable to conduct and finance the same level of university research on the history of the Reformation (and that it is no longer worthwhile to spend one's life energy on it). One could, however, also come to the entirely opposite conclusion: Due to this rapid change, it is all the more important to conduct research on the significance of the Reformation and the denominations for the church and society. Indeed, many of the country's elites no longer know the difference between the Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic denominations, simply because that now only play a marginal role in their life contexts. One cannot, however, understand history or the development of our own culture without knowledge of the Reformation and the characteristics of the denominations, as the picture in the Old Aula impressively demonstrates. Or, in one example, we cannot adequately understand the important civil law system, and basis for the development of Western

law, developed the Reformed refugee of faith, Hugues Doneau, without looking into the basic worldview and confessional choices that had had an effect on him. There is, however, no unanimity in today's research on the specific cultural effects of the Reformation, or of the Lutheran and Reformed denominations in comparison with Roman Catholicism. Yes, the question in fact remains whether the individual denominations have had any specific cultural effects at all. Much needs to be clarified to this end, and there will be heavy debates to be had on this in the years to come.

2. Resolving and transforming traditional controversies

Some debates involving the Reformation have changed considerably over the past decades. This includes, in particular, the polemically contested dispute over Luther as the destroyer or renewer of Christendom, which featured in the discussions of Protestant and Catholic church historians for centuries. Following the lead of Joseph Lortz, several Catholic church historians, and Erwin Iserloh and Otto Hermann Pesch in particular, have published prominent studies, beginning in the 1960s, on the interpretation of Luther. Luther's theological concerns were recognized here inasmuch as they were placed in the context of the reform efforts of the Late Middle Ages. This did much to stimulate further research into the roots and contours of Luther's theology, and it is therefore all the more regrettable that the stream of Catholic research on Luther is now in danger of drying up.

It is currently Volker Leppin, a student of Seebass, who – following on Heiko A. Oberman and Berndt Hamm – has now been conducting the most prominent work on Luther's late medieval roots. In his Luther biography, which ap-

1871

GERMAN KAISER ASCENDS TO THRONE

Following the Franco-Prussian War, which was fought “for God and fatherland”, Emperor William I, or Kaiser Wilhelm, was crowned Emperor of Germany in Versailles.



The scholars behind the chariot in the 1886 painting dedicated to the 500th anniversary of the founding of the University of Heidelberg, located in the university's Old Aula (from right to left): Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560, philologist and theologian), Marsilius of Inghen (ca. 1335–1396, first university magister), Johann von Dalberg (1455–1503, Bishop of Worms and university chancellor), Sebastian Münster (1488–1552, Hebrew scholar), [above: Leopold Gmelin (1788–1853, chemist), Maximilian von Chelius (1794–1876, ophthalmologist and surgeon)], Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–1694, jurist), Rudolf Agricola (1444–1485, humanist), Hugues Doneau (1527–1591, jurist), Friedrich Justus Thibaut (1772–1840, jurist), Friedrich Christoph Schlosser (1776–1861, historian), Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583, theologian), Thomas Erastus (1524–1583, professor of medicine).

peared in 2006, his subject appears as more of a wavering reformer. The beginnings of his discovery of the righteousness of faith lie in a new understanding of the late medieval doctrine of repentance. Leppin also emphasizes the great significance of the vicar general of the German Congregation of Augustinians, Johann von Staupitz, for Luther's Reformation thinking. Any Luther biography that appears in the coming years leading up to the Reformation quinquennial in 2017, will have to grapple with this interpretation.

If old debates have thus changed, new ones have now joined them as well. I will name just one example now, which we will be engaged with in the years to come. In 2003, Diarmaid MacCulloch, professor of the history of the church at the University of Oxford, presented a monumental depiction of the European Reformation. Its translation into German, published in 2008 and since joined by further translations into Dutch, Italian, and Hungarian, is over 1000 pages long. MacCulloch expressly makes the claim of offering a depiction that is free of all religious and dogmatic and especially denominational prejudice. In fact, however, considerable value judgments and the subtle effects of denominational influences do come to the fore there, as is so often the case when emphasis is placed on scholarly objectivity.

Two problematic primary choices in the publication will be discussed here. Astoundingly, MacCulloch's argumentations solely involve theological and mentality history in his book, despite his express rejection of religious and

dogmatic assessments. The placement of the Reformation into socio-historical contexts, which has become a standard in German-language research on the history of the Reformation, is completely absent in the book. Fifty years ago, in 1962, the Göttingen-based church historian Bernd Moeller wrote, in his book *Reichsstadt und Reformation*, of the close connections between the spread of the Reformation and the self-identity of the free imperial cities. This trailblazing and influential investigation of the subject goes unmentioned there, as does the recent German-language research on confessionalization, which we will still come to. A second major choice that left its mark on MacCulloch's large tome is clearly reflected here: German-language sources and literature are only evaluated to a very limited degree. Instead, the Reformed Anglican background of the author influenced his choice of the sources and the secondary literature that he chiefly used. He only partly fulfills his claim of providing a depiction of Protestantism in all of Europe. In view of his own Reformed Anglican background (and his limited use of German-language sources and literature), he is not able to adequately depict and explain the particular nature of the Lutheran confession and the dynamics of the Reformation that emerged in Wittenberg. The Reformation thus becomes more British and more Calvinist-Reformed. The historiographical development requires particular attention as this book is indeed no isolated case. We can observe a similar situation in the major depiction of the history of Reformed Protestantism, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism*, written

by the Geneva-based American historian Philip Benedict. Relatively few pages are dedicated there to Electoral Palatinate as a bastion of Reformed Protestantism within the Empire through the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, or to Brandenburg, an emerging Central European power, led from 1613 by Reformed electors (and later kings). The focus of the Reformation thus shifts toward Western Europe or to Britain and across the Atlantic.

It is not only the dominance of English and the disappearance of German and French as languages of scholarship that have led to a significantly altered picture of Reformation history, but also specific decisions regarding research policy. MacCulloch had the means to take several years in Oxford to produce a monumental, internationally oriented depiction of Reformation history. Support for German research over the past several years has been moving in another direction. Following the model seen in the natural sciences, "clusters of excellence" are now also being supported for specific areas of endeavor. There will therefore be no corresponding monumental and international depiction of Reformation history any time soon that adequately takes into account German-language sources and German-language research.

3. The most important challenge to today's research on Reformation history

The most important current challenge, as I see it, is the establishment of the confessionalization paradigm in the research of the early modern era. Since the 1980s, the Freiburg-based historian Wolfgang Reinhard and the Berlin-based historian Heinz Schilling have developed the concept of confessionalization as a means of describing the equally formative roles played by the emerging major denominations. The Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic confessions all contribute here in the same way to the formation of early modern territorial states and of early modern society in general, while taking on their own characteristic forms within this context.

Three major symposiums in 1985, 1988, and 1993, in which the different aspects of the Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic confessionalization processes were examined, have led to a broad discussion. The symposiums were organized by *Verein für Reformationgeschichte*, the association for Reformation history that had Gottfried Seebass on its board beginning in 1983; one of the symposiums was run together with the *Gesellschaft zur Herausgabe des Corpus Catholicorum*.

The confessionalization paradigm has guided and driven the research of Reformation history like no other theoretical construction over the past few decades. Not much has remained from the greater affiliation of Protestantism to modernity and the corresponding greater significance of Protestantism for modernity, as was laid out in 1906 by the Heidelberg theology professor Ernst Troeltsch in a famous address to the German *Historikertag* historians' congress in Stuttgart. Frankfurt-based historian Luise

Schorn-Schütte, elucidating the "understanding that corrected Troeltsch's primary assumption", went on to say: "[...] there is no confession that has an intrinsically 'modernizing' effect. Lutheranism as well as Catholicism and Reformed churches have, depending on the specific historical situations, allied themselves with political forces that have either sought to bring about change or to conserve things as they were. Lutheranism as well as Catholicism and Reformed churches were all able to act to drive modernization just as they were able to slow modernization. The political effects of the confessions have thus been contingent and not intrinsic!"

Even if we can concur with this when it comes to the formation of territorial states, the different effects of the various confessional milieus in specific areas of culture is quite clear to see. One need only take into account the dominance of Protestant authors among the early representatives of German-language poetry in Germany, spiritual music in Lutheranism, or even the visual arts of Baroque Catholicism. Martin Heckel, moreover, explained from the perspective of a historian of law, at the three aforementioned symposiums on confessionalization, that it was in fact the conflict among the mutually exclusive confessional claims to truth that led to the strengthening of secularization. It meant that jurists had to lay the legal foundations for the peaceful coexistence of the denominations in the Empire, thus limiting their unconditional religious claims to truth. Two questions are thus of particular relevance with regard to today's research on Reformation history: How can we more precisely describe the relationship between confessionalization and secularization at the onset of modernity? And: What can methodical and reliable evidence show us in the different cultural impacts of the confessions on specific areas of culture?

I will use one specific example to illustrate the relevance of these questions but also the difficulties that exist in answering them. Carl Schmitt, in the context of his theory that all the concise concepts used in modern state theory were secularized theological concepts, cited a sentence that has gained some renown: "Silete theologi in munere alieno" ["Theologians, be silent on matters that do not concern you!"].

This sentence comes from *De iure belli*, the 1598 work of the Italian jurist Alberico Gentili that was surely the most important piece on international law before *De iure belli ac pacis*, written by Hugo Grotius 27 years later. The essential basic choices made in later international law were, however, already decided in Gentili's work such as the diplomatic immunity of ambassadors and the rejection of the use of fighting false religions as grounds for war. Like Donneau, Gentili was a Reformed refugee of faith. Alberico Gentili fled from the Inquisition in Italy in 1579 with his father and his brother Scipio – another famous jurist – escaping via places such as Tübingen and Heidelberg to Oxford, where he was Regius Professor for Civil Law until his death in 1608. Gentili's call for "Silete theologi in munere alieno" was quite unusual in the early modern era. This expressed a concept of primary importance in the development of international law, that the dispute among theologians over unconditional religious claims to truth should be limited or mitigated. Even as we use the term with great caution, one can still speak of a secularizing dimension, inasmuch as human coexistence was to be relieved of the potential of unconditional religious claims to truth that lead to conflict.

Remarkably, this sentence has a clear confessional context, as Gentili often referred to Reformed theologians in his legal writings such as

1874

INTRODUCTION OF CIVIL MARRIAGE

Prussia introduced civil marriage in 1874 and Chancellor Otto von Bismarck extended it throughout the entire German Empire. A marriage was subsequently only legally valid once it was performed before an officer of the municipality. This resulted in limiting the power of the churches.

John Calvin, Theodor Beza, and Petrus Martyr Vermigli, whom he describes with clarity as “nostri theologi”. Gentili also justified this statement in his book, *Disputationum de nuptiis libri VII*, published in 1601, with basic considerations of biblical interpretation. In this 800-page tome, we read that canon law is to be fully replaced by Roman law even when it comes to matters of marriage. Gentili came up with the idea here that theologians were responsible for the understanding of the first tablet of the Ten Commandments, i.e. those commandments that involve one’s relationship with God, while jurists were responsible for that of the second tablet, i.e. those commandments that regulate coexistence among people, ranging from the commandment to honor one’s parents to the one prohibiting false witness. While theologians could have something to say about the second tablet, they would not have authority over the jurists in that regard.

Jurists, he added, had particular interpretive abilities such as that of distinguishing between different forms of theft. We must keep in mind that Gentili also saw laws that regulated interpersonal matters and indeed the work of jurists as being bound to the word of God. One cannot therefore speak here of secularization in terms of the dissolution of religious bonds; and yet, more weight was in fact placed on the logic of legal argumentation. This is indeed reflected in the sentence “Silete theologi in munere alieno!”, which Gentili employs to illustrate his aim of limiting through international law the conflict of unconditional religious claims to truth.

Two specific basic decisions of the Reformation come into play here. First, there was a significant upgrading of the secular authorities through the differentiation of the two kingdoms or regiments – in contrast with the clerical, and particularly papal paternalism – which was connected with an increased importance of civil law. Second, Luther’s principle of the priesthood of all baptized entailed that all who qualify could understand the main content of the Bible through the action of the Holy Spirit: “For whatever issues from baptism may boast that it has been consecrated priest, bishop, and pope [...]” Non-theologians and non-clergy are thereby given considerable credit in terms of their ability to interpret the Bible, a trend that is even stronger in Reformed Protestantism than in Lutheranism. In contrast with the Lutheran Reformation, in which the ministry of proclamation, carried out by theologians, was (again) at the center of things, a variety of ministries emerged in Calvinist-Reformed Protestantism, in which

presbyters and deacons have a similar status to that of pastors. One interesting observation supports there having been a confessional background to Alberico Gentili’s sentence, which was so remarkable for the early modern era: Examples of such confidence among jurists in their Bible interpretation skills, even in conflict with theologians, can be seen for other Reformed jurists such as Johannes Althusius, but not, as far as I can discover, within either Lutheran Protestantism or Tridentine Catholicism.

Do we need to conclude from this that primary Reformation and Reformed decisions have made a significant contribution to the development of international law, especially as Hugo Grotius, often cited as the founder of international law, came from a Reformed background and soon emerged as a theological author?

This is, however, refuted by the fact that other Reformed theologians and jurists, while placing more emphasis on civil law at the cost of canon law, did not entertain the limitation of confessional claims to truth through international law. Twenty years before Gentili’s publication on international law, moreover, the French jurist Jean Bodin, in some ways in a similar manner, had already sought to limit, with his propagation of state sovereignty, the endangerment of the state’s monopoly on violence seen in confessionally anchored unconditional claims to truth. And for Bodin, we can only assume that he turned to Protestant thought early on. The most recent research, lastly, has stressed the significance of late Spanish Scholasticism in the development of modern natural and international law. This includes the designation of the Spanish Dominican theologian, philosopher, and jurist Francisco de Vitoria (ca. 1492–1546), founder of the Salamanca School, as the “father of international law”.

There has yet to be a truly comparative analysis that explicates the potential of the different denominations for the development of the international law that we take for granted today. For now, we can only determine that the Protestant principle of the priesthood of all baptized and the connected belief in an ability to interpret the Bible, independent of church office, played a role in inspiring Alberico Gentili to develop his arguments on international law. It is, in any event, hardly imaginable that a Catholic jurist of the second half of the 16th century would make us of the phrase “Silete theologi in munere alieno!”, if for no other reason than because the foremost representatives of late Spanish Scholasticism were all clerical jurists.

4. Conclusion

Any historian has to rethink the power of the orientation of his or her interpretation of history. A church historian, who is not only a historian but also a theologian, does this consciously with a focus on the question of what ideas can possibly be gained for the current shape of theology and the church. The considerable advances made since 1886 in terms of respectful and self-evident ecumenical cooperation must not end in relativism. The heritage of the Reformation thus remains reflected in an impulse toward the vigorous upgrading of the ministry of the baptized at the expense of those who are especially consecrated and, as we have seen, the impulse for the self-confident claim of jurists to be able to interpret the Bible better than theologians in certain places. At the same time, however, it is indeed also possible for today’s Reformation-oriented Christianity to learn from today’s Roman Catholic Christianity – in light of the considerable erroneous developments of its own history and of the completely new challenges that have emerged since the early modern era.

All of this needs to occur in an awareness that the significance of the differences between the Christian confessions is on the wane in the face of today’s challenges. This includes, in particular, the distinction, now taken for granted in Western Christianity, between spiritual and secular power, church and state, and religion and justice, something that is not in fact at all to be taken for granted in other civilizations. It is within this context that we also need to evaluate the results of any further research into the confessional and worldview-related roots of international law at the onset of modernity.

I hope that, in my explorations of these questions on research into Reformation history, I have done justice to the tasks that Gottfried Seebass passed on to us of the younger generation. In the conclusion of his overview of the Reformation in the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, he provides a virtual legacy in the following sentences: “It can surely be said that the Reformation has been perceived in today’s scholarly interpretation in a manner that is more suitable than earlier and, to a large degree, de-ideologized. One must, however, also reflect on how an understanding of the Reformation, from the perspective of its own time and in connection with a variety of aspects and issues, derives its validity and its function for society as a whole primarily from its being a counterpart to an ideologized perception of history and various historical conceptions that have always been in

play. The question, however, arises of whether this function of historical scholarship involving criticism of ideology and providing enlightenment [...] is also able to be fulfilled when such historical conceptions and an ideologized understanding of history are nearly no longer present in a society that is increasingly pluralistic and which now scarcely understands its own historical background. In such a state of affairs, a historicizing enlightenment can give way to the appearance of historical arbitrariness and can tend to encourage an attitude of disinterest in the chief influences of the past and a lack of comprehension of their significance for the present. Such considerations do not, for example, imply a demand for the creation and communication of a uniform view of history, but for the task of making our own present, as linked into a cultural memory, somewhat more transparent and understandable, taking into account a wide range of approaches and issues, and in the awareness of the temporariness of any understanding of the past.”

Summary

The iconography of the 1886 painting in Heidelberg’s Old Aula shows – in complete difference to today’s university hagiography – a predominance of Protestant scholars and the humanities. In light of the clear decrease in the visible effects of the Reformation, the question arises of the task of today’s research into Reformation history. What is now needed is a critical reflection on the historiographical consequences of the Anglo-American dominance in surveys of the Reformation era. The question needs to be answered, especially in view of the establishment of the confessionalization paradigm in scholarship on Reformation history, whether the three major denominations have had different effects on culture. This can be discussed well using the example of the develop-

ment of modern international law in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. ◀

Prof. Dr. Christoph Strohm is a professor for Reformation history and modern church history at the University of Heidelberg.

A comprehensive list of footnotes is not provided here. For this, cf. the **source** of this article: *Evangelische Theologie*, vol. 71 no. 6, pp. 414–427; used here with the kind permission of Gütersloher Verlagshaus.

1 Address at the academic memorial for church historian Prof. Dr. Gottfried Seebass (1937–2008) on 4 June 2010 in the Old Aula of the University of Heidelberg.

2 G. Seebass, *Geschichte des Christentums III: Spätmittelalter – Reformation – Konfessionalisierung (Theologische Wissenschaft, 7)*, Stuttgart 2006.

3 This was painted by Ferdinand Keller (1842–1922). Keller was a student of Johann Wilhelm Schirmer and Hans Canon at the Karlsruhe School of Art and taught at the State Academy of Fine Arts, Karlsruhe from 1873 to 1913 (cf. R. Bellm, *Art. Keller, Ferdinand*, in: NDB 11, Berlin 1977, 434f.).

1908

FEMALE THEOLOGY STUDENTS

Women were admitted as students of theology beginning in 1908, but were at first not permitted to take church examinations. After graduating, they could work as teachers, parish assistants, and in various diaconal roles.

In common responsibility

Questions on the 2017 Reformation Jubilee –

Lifted up by what we have in common **By Gerhard Ludwig Müller**



This fresco in Bretten's Melanchthon House shows Emperor Charles V accompanied by secular and spiritual nobility as he receives the Augsburg Confession from humanist and reformer Philipp Melanchthon.

When, on April 4, 2010, Wittenberg's Castle Church hosted the ceremonies to mark the 450th anniversary of the death of Philipp Melanchthon, I held an address as Chairman of the Ecumenical Commission on behalf of the German Bishops' Conference. There, I was able to speak of Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon as the "dual leaders of the church movement that emerged from Wittenberg" and of

Luther's Small Catechism and Melanchthon's Augsburg Confession as "outstanding confessional documents of global Lutheranism."¹

The ecumenical dialogue has, for many years, been held in the spirit of solidarity in a common faith, one which does not cover up things that divide us, but which provides us with the impetus to delve deeper into the truth of the

one Church of Jesus Christ. The signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999 was not a one-off event that was to have brought things to an end, but instead was more of a beginning of even more ecumenical will and a greater degree of trust in one another: Frequent strife and mistrust has been replaced by a common commitment to the faith in God's son who became man, in

Photo: epd/bild/Norbert Neetz

whose spirit we strive toward the unity of the one visible Church.

There remain, nevertheless, seemingly unresolvable and divisive matters, which need to be viewed by church leaders not as a barrier but as a theological field of endeavor. Who would have thought, 50 years ago, that the ecumenical dialogue would lead to a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and that commissions would convene in a regular exchange at the national and international levels? Measured against the years of strife, it gives us hope to see how the atmosphere has changed in such a relatively short period of time and what results have emerged from discussions, with a significance for the ecumenical movement in the coming years that cannot not be overestimated.

We must particularly emphasize our commitment to areas in sociopolitics and ethics, which, while not always without their tensions, center on a common witness to the Christian view of humanity and the consequences that result from that. It is our common ground here that is fruitful, and which brings us closer to our goals. Unlike the events that led to the church's division in the 16th century, we now have nearly ideal conditions for an objective theological basis. In their efforts, the Catholic Church and the churches and communities of the Reformation tradition can exchange with one another in freedom and without external pressure or po-

litical influence, transforming the polemics of earlier centuries into a dialogue carried out in mutual respect. The Reformation commemoration can become just such an opportunity that focuses on the differences that are to be overcome. But, and this must be said here, a few things still need to be taken into consideration to give the jubilee an ecumenical touch.

2017 – a commemorative year

The 2017 Reformation commemoration and the Luther Decade before it are opportunities for Protestant Christians to look back at the Reformation event, 500 years ago, and to reacquaint themselves with the new departure connected to this. One must not forget, however, that the Reformation began with the division of the Western Church, so that the thorn of separation linked to it persists today, with our ecumenical efforts focused on overcoming this. It is therefore difficult for the Catholic side when 2017 is discussed as a “jubilee” or a “celebration”. “Reformation commemoration” seems to be a more appropriate expression.

For a Protestant, whether Calvinist or Lutheran by background, this event is viewed as a breakthrough of the Gospel as the result of Reformation insight, and thus as a positive historical event. For Catholics, the years 1517 through 2017 stand for the loss of the unity of the Church, as anchored in the will of Jesus Christ. Despite all distinctions made with regard to the

historical and theological facts, in the end it is about varying views of the church, ministry, and Eucharist, which, in their individual developments, have turned into seemingly insurmountable differences. This can perhaps be relativized somewhat and placed in its historical context, from the Protestant side as well, as the reformers did not ultimately want a new church, but sought to bring about renewal within the one Church. The congregationally oriented church within the structures of regional churches was thus viewed, from this point of view, as a continuation of the true Church – in a reformed and renewed manner in line with the Gospel – which the Roman Catholic Church would be expected to join as a hitherto unreformed segment of Christianity with a visible personal principle of unity, the pope. Catholic theology cannot share this assessment. With the Reformation, decisive elements of the Catholic understanding of the church and sacraments were lost or forgotten, thus marking a division that cannot simply be rescinded through a harmonization that is apparently only functional in terms of structure or terminology. The 2017 Reformation commemoration should therefore also encourage reflection among Protestant Christians as they come to terms with the historical realities of 1517, and apply changes that resulted from the Reformation to our own day.



1927

FIRST FEMALE MINISTERS

In their role as a *Vikarin*, women were able to conduct services but were not permitted to administer the sacraments, and not allowed to marry. Their role would only change in the course of the Second World War. In the absence of their male colleagues, they advanced to lead the spiritual lives of their communities.

Not an occasion for a one-sided push for identity

The way that Reformation commemorations are conducted therefore also puts our ecumenical cooperation to the test. Over the past years and decades, we have become reliable partners in dialogue, with much becoming second-nature to us to such an extent that we no longer truly appreciate it. It would therefore be regrettable if the Reformation commemoration were to increase tendencies towards enhancing individual identities and not serve as a chance to come together to mark the Christian heritage that links us. The opposite of raising one's identity over the other is however not the erosion of specific Catholic and Protestant characteristics but their inclusion into the largest common whole, in legitimate diversity within a fundamental unity. It would be desirable for the organizers of the Reformation commemoration to accentuate the ecumenical dimensions within the program. It would lead to considerable irritation within the Catholic Church if the 2017 commemoration would only serve to rekindle the Reformation concerns of the 16th century – in an anachronistic retrospective that sparked all the familiar prejudices and polemics, just as if there had not been any declarations on the question of whether the condemnations of the 16th century really pertain in today's phase of dialogue.

An ecumenical movement of strong identities must not provide an occasion for renewed alienation or an embellishment of existing differences. The "identity" that needs to be sought is Jesus' will for the one Church. Without wishing to diminish the legitimate desire of the Reformation churches to present their own history and themes, this must not happen at the cost of Catholic Christians, who would then appear to be the wing of Christianity with less of an affiliation to modernity.

We have more in common deep down, so that we can in fact bear those things that divide us. The occasionally criticized ecumenical approach involving convergence and consensus, which has been put to use often and successfully in dialogue documents, has martyrological roots. We should remain aware of our common resistance to the social Darwinist view of humanity of 20th-century totalitarian regimes. This will presumably be the great challenge that we will have to face as Christians in full responsibility before God and humanity. The depth of these roots were demonstrated by the resistance figures Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Alfred Delp, who sacrificed their lives for their beliefs and

their undeniable loyalty to Christ as martyrs. This affirmation of the single savior Jesus Christ also serve as the basis for the doctrinal texts and confessions of the church: Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (1937) and the Bar-men Declaration (1934).

I have already explained elsewhere² that the so-called "New Atheists" believe to have discovered only "madness" in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, while proclaiming the impossibility of a rational belief in the existence of a God and questioning the human ability to find truth, and thus questioning – with much more extensive consequences – the dignity of each individual person. This dispute is not only about the invocation of achieved commonalities or extant common principles of faith. In a serious encounter with a movement that rejects and often fights against Christianity, the fruits of ecumenism must first be rediscovered and readapted, spiritually and theologically, to be able to employ them in common statements on biological, economic, and political ethics, making it possible to have a significant influence on society.

Ecumenical opportunities for the Reformation commemoration year

The question thus arises as to the tangible opportunities to strengthen the ecumenical dimension of the Reformation commemoration. It would mean a great deal if we could come to a common interpretation of the Reformation and its reception history, just as we were able to join together in recognizing Martin Luther as "a witness to the gospel, a teacher in the faith and a herald of spiritual renewal". Different Catholic-Protestant projects are already underway for the Reformation commemoration in this vein.

The Institute for Ecumenical Research of the Lutheran World Federation in Strasbourg and the Johann Adam Möhler Institute in Paderborn have begun a new international project together for the 2017 commemoration to grapple with and provide commentary on Martin Luther's theses on indulgences. The initiative will already provide scholars, students, and all who are interested with significant results in 2013. One can only welcome such comprehensive efforts on an event that had so much impact on the history of the church and our country. It would be desirable for the preparations for 2017 if other projects would follow this model as a means of understanding the historical context of the late Middle Ages and to reach an objective interpretation of the events based on the results. The Reformation commemoration can

only be seen as a true ecumenical opportunity for the focused consideration of the common foundations of our faith, foundations that were not indeed destroyed by the 16th-century division, once objective reflection has replaced any possible return to a one-sided glorification of Martin Luther or, conversely, a complete rejection of Luther, and once space is provided for the results of the numerous dialogue commissions and theological research.

The next seven years would then certainly be "an indicator for the state of ecumenical relations" in Germany.³ It will be decisive whether people want to make use of old denominational clichés to advance their own positions using controversial theological topics or whether serious theological work carried out in meetings and discussions, as have become the standard in ecumenical work, will continue to be established as guidelines for the future. This work is indispensable. The seriousness of the topic drives our efforts, and not just a fast demand for a Eucharistic communion that would seem to leave all differences behind, which would impede ecumenical efforts instead of leading to a sustainable ecumenical movement focused on the future. Spiritual ecumenism is oriented, in its depth, toward unity in truth and the unity of the Church.

Ecumenism can never be a one-way street. For Catholics, the jubilee is an opportunity to have an intensive look into the religious figure of Martin Luther, his times, his theology, and his Reformation concerns. If the Evangelical Church in Germany places the ecumenical dimensions of the Luther Decade and the 2017 commemoration on its agenda, this can also entail particular aspirations and responsibility, especially when the proclamation of our common faith is to move into the foreground.

A call for missionary ecumenism

From its beginnings and from Jesus' call for his disciples to go out into the world to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to baptize (Matt. 28:19-20), Christianity has viewed itself as a missionary community of faith in Jesus Christ.⁴ The salvation that they found in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the son of God, in the midst of history, is universal and thus meant for everyone.

In our questions about the 2017 Reformation commemoration, we need to recall that Christians, while they are depicted as adherents of different denominations before the state and society, are theologically in fact, through their

confession of faith and common baptism, all part of the one Church of God, which is moving towards regaining its full – visible – unity through the action of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore important not to cling to the status quo. The missionary dimension will always lead us forward so that we come closer to unity in the visible church, as prescribed by God, if we orient ourselves toward the mission and will of Jesus and carry out the tasks he has given us with a sense of responsibility. Ecumenical dialogue is not about converting others to our point of view. Our goal must instead be that all Christians turn together to Christ, who, as the head of his church, is the founding point of departure (in his will) and its enduring center. The more we allow ourselves to be driven, in ecumenical dialogue, by the fulfillment of his mission, and are connected to him as the head of the body that is the church, the faster we will grow together into a unity of faith, even as we have yet to attain full visible unity – as all of us should “come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

Summary

Over the next few years, the ecumenical discourse will focus intensively on the 2017 Reformation commemoration. Beyond any focus on denominational identity, the objective theological and historical commemoration of the year 1517 can contribute to a realignment of ecumenism if we can establish promising forms of encounter and discussion for the future. ◀

Archbishop Gerhard Ludwig Müller,

previously Bishop of Regensburg, was named Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith by Pope Benedict XVI on 2 July 2012.

Source: *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 1/2011: Ratlos vor dem Reformationsjubiläum 2017? pp. 120–126. Used with the kind permission of the Evangelischer Verlagsanstalt (Leipzig)

- 1 G. L. Müller, *Würdigung von Philipp Melanchton aus katholischer Sicht*, in: *Evangelischer Pressedienst epd* (ed.), *Dokumentation* no. 18 of 27 April 2010, 10–11: 10.
- 2 G. L. Müller, *Der gegenwärtige Stand der Ökumene weist in die Zukunft. Von Stagnation kann keine Rede sein*, in: *Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken, Salzkörner. Materialien für die Diskussion in Kirche und Gesellschaft* vol. 15. no. 5 of 30 October 2009, 2–3.
- 3 R. Zollitsch, *Zur Zukunft der Ökumene. Perspektiven aus der Sicht der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz*. Address within the *Ökumene heute* series in Karlsruhe on 26 March 2009.
- 4 We recall here the signing of the mutual recognition of Baptism in Magdeburg on 29 April 2007.

1932

“GERMAN CHRISTIANS”

The “German Christian” movement was founded in 1932 by a group of pastors, parishioners, and theologians. Many of its members were also members of the Nazi Party and held Nazi views of race and nation. One of the group’s goals was that of “racial purity in Christianity”.

Do Catholics have anything to celebrate at the 2017 Reformation Jubilee?

The Catholic view of Luther has been corrected after centuries of polemics **By Joachim Wanke**



Ten years after the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church: A festive ecumenical worship service on October 31, 2009. Depicted here is the concluding blessing of the leading clergy at the time: The Lutheran Bishop of Bavaria Johannes Friedrich, Methodist Bishop Walter Klaiber, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and Curial Cardinal Walter Kasper, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Ishmael Noko, and the Bishop of Augsburg Walter Mixa (from left to right).

My answer is: No. We Catholic Christians can and wish to commemorate the Reformation. We want to try to understand it better, its active figures, its leading ideas, its historical impact. But we do not wish to celebrate 2017. Can one celebrate the lost unity of the Church?

This does not preclude Catholics from being able to participate in parts of individual commemorative initiatives with a view to 2017. This Catholic participation will, however, depend on the character of the Reformation commemoration in question. Is it a festive celebration, meant to boost the individual denominational

identity in connection with the events of five centuries ago – or is it a commemoration that will seek to open up avenues toward a reunification of Christians?

Any recollection of the events that occurred 500 years ago will not unfold in a vacuum. I will begin by looking at the spiritual context in which the Reformation is currently planned to be commemorated, and will then continue with short considerations as to how this can take on an ecumenical dimension as well.

1. The current scope of the Reformation commemoration

1. Reformation commemoration in the face of a shift in the religious scope

If the significance of the Reformation for today and beyond is to come into focus, we must also take into account the completely changed scope of religion in our times.

Luther was a *homo religiosus*, through and through. His message was received in a situation in church and society that was formed by a pre-established notion of God. It was not the

existence of God that was a matter of discussion, but the relationship to God. Or more precisely, it was about bringing to bear again the basic message of the Bible of the priority of unearned grace above any religious works, a message that had been overshadowed by late medieval piety practices.

Things are much different today. The discussion is not about any particular features of the Christian creed of faith but about belief in God in general. Are we all alone in the world – or do we really have an ultimate counterpart, a mysterious THOU, who has a name and even an interest in us minute creatures in the midst of the immense cosmos.

If anything, it is this question that is being discussed today. This relates to the first article of faith: “I believe in God.” Many people feel that they are no longer able to say this, with reference to Enlightenment thought, Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity, Marxism-Leninism, but even less so in light of the terrible events in recent history or their own bitter life experience. To be sure, beyond any clearly defined and militant atheism, which has been quite vocal in recent years, another milder agnosticism has come to the fore, one that is sometimes even has a warmer stance toward religion. Still, considerations that were undoubtedly the source of impassioned and at times excited debate for Martin Luther and his contemporaries no longer have any meaning for most people today.

The recently held theological discussion between Catholics and Protestants on the doctrine of justification illustrated this well. For the secular public, most of this was incomprehensible theological jargon and interesting, if at all, for the tactics of the churches and their representatives, and the tensions both within and between churches that could be glimpsed from that.

Our world is indeed a different one now – which makes it hard to explain to the Protestant movement what it actually protested against in the first place, and to Catholics why they continue to be stuck on such old concepts as those of the Council of Trent, i.e. the rejection of Reformation views (or what people hold to be such views), which have left their imprint on Catholicism over the past four centuries.

2. Reformation commemoration in the face of a church division that is bad for everyone

It is well known that Luther did not want a new church. He wanted to reform the church, and was indeed a “Catholic reformer”. Erfurt was the town where “Luther was still Catholic. We may well assume that Luther also wanted to remain so even after 1517. We can recognize this even in his later crude and polemical writings such as “Wider Hans Worst”. Luther wanted to lead the church back to its origins. The Second Vatican Council, 450 years later, rehabilitated Luther’s aims, giving them a place of honor again within the Catholic Church.

At the time, Luther’s concerns for reform were not met with an appropriate level of understanding within the church and theological authorities, whether in Germany or in Rome. Luther’s primarily spiritual concerns were, moreover, repeatedly displaced by issues of political power. The Catholic image of Luther has now been corrected after centuries of polemics. We need only think of the 1983 statement of the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission entitled “Martin Luther – Witness to Jesus Christ”, marking Luther’s 500th birthday, in which Luther was “honored in common as a witness to the gospel, a teacher in the faith and a herald of spiritual renewal”.¹

We must observe that every demarcation against a position viewed as false bears the danger of narrowing oneself in the process. Or put more succinctly: doctrinal dogmatizations and demarcations mask any complementary aspects of truth. Since Luther, Catholicism has become poorer. This may come as a surprise, but I am in good company as this papal quote from the 1995 encyclical *Ut unum sint* illustrates: “we are aware, as the Catholic Church, that we have received much from the witness borne by other Churches and Ecclesial Communities to certain common Christian values, from their study of those values, and even from the way in which they have emphasized and experienced them.”²

All churches are made poorer by church division. Efforts toward church unity are therefore

1933

HITLER’S SEIZURE OF POWER

The “Enabling Act” of March 24, 1933, placed the entire power of the state in the hands of Adolf Hitler, thereby circumventing the German Parliament. The “German Christians” subsequently won church elections with a two-thirds majority. With the exceptions of Hanover, Bavaria, and Württemberg, “German Christians” took control of Germany’s regional Protestant churches.



During his September 2011 visit to Germany, Pope Benedict XVI held an ecumenical service of the word at Erfurt's Augustinian Monastery with representatives of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) (sitting at the altar, Nikolaus Schneider, Chairman of the EKD Council, and the Pope; speaking at the lectern, EKD Synod Praeses and Vice President of the German Bundestag Katrin Göring-Eckardt).

also a hope for the overcoming of historically precipitated situations that have involved such impoverishment and one-sidedness. Could the Reformation Decade and the manner that it is organized boost such hopes?

3. Reformation commemoration and future discourse among world religions

In the near future, the heritage of the reformers will have to be put into a new intellectual language influenced by the dialogue among world religions. We are currently witnessing the dramatic overtures of a new round of meetings of the major religions, which has now been set in motion by those who would instrumentalize Islam for their blind hatred of the West. But even without the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, religions and cultures that had previously mostly been limited to their own particular geographic areas in the world, have been moving into close proximity with each other in many places.

If Christianity wishes to have a voice in the upcoming discourse among world religions, the tune of Christianity will have to be able to be heard and identified clearly. The ecumenical movement within Christianity, which has left its

mark – praise God – on the past century, will take on a new and unexpected dynamic. The alienation between the churches of Eastern and Western Europe, which already began with the church schism at the end of the first millennium, and the ongoing trend of division into further Christian communities, which began with the Reformation and continues to our day, has to – and will – give way to a movement of reconciliation among the churches and church communities. Could the upcoming jubilee contribute to a greater theological uneasiness at the use of the word “church” in the plural? This is a makeshift usage that must not take on permanence.

The survival of Christianity in the recently begun 21st century will depend on convincingly answering the question of mutual recognition and eventual agreement in our various ways of being Christians and being Church. That the unity of Christendom to be attained will not be a monotonous and uniform sort of unity but a unity in diversity, with different historical, cultural, and theological qualities, is an entirely different matter. This does not need to be discussed in greater depth here.

My concern is, however: Do we even want this type of unity? Is the Leuenberg Agreement re-

ally still a process moving toward greater unity or is it – phrased somewhat more polemically – an alibi for stagnation, for a lack of will to change, and for ignoring real efforts towards unity involving the faith and order of the churches?

The other major religions will only take Christianity seriously as a discourse partner in a coming meeting of world religions if it makes its own characteristics recognizable within its own clear contours. This, from my point of view, expressed here succinctly, lies in its ability both to present a faith in God as a claim to truth in response to critical thought and – not only in relation to the Asian religions but also to Judaism – to establish that the Christian access to God rests solely on the reality of the Johannine Jesus: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). A belief in God that has an answer to rational thought, and the message of incarnation (“And the Word became flesh”, John 1:14) are, for me, two basic pillars of Christianity, above all denominational peculiarities. The question will have to be asked whether we can come to fundamental understandings within the different “Christendoms” beyond the current ecumenical move-

ment that is founded in denominational difference. The ecumenical movement among Christians will, I am strongly convinced, gain considerable momentum through the upcoming discourse among the world religions! Can 2017 provide impetus for this?

4. Reformation commemoration in face of a society distant from Christianity

Lastly, I would like to make mention of the task of creating a new missionary presence for the Christian churches in the eastern states of Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt, the very land of Luther. We recall the impressive address on this topic held by Eberhard Jüngel at the 1999 EKD Synod in Leipzig.

We therefore come full circle from my first observation: While we are faced today with the question of God's existence, it is presented as a question of that which is human, indeed of the common future of all human beings. For me, we would be taking on Luther's heritage if we were to bear this in mind, to seek out coalitions in the creation of such a future, and to participate together in bringing this about.

Western German cultural Christianity and eastern German separation from Christianity and the church combine for an interesting mix. I believe that there is a greater willingness to hear the message of the Christian faith in the East than the old West. Once something becomes completely strange, it can become interesting again. This old bit of wisdom would seem to apply in this particular case as well. Of course, this demands a deepened willingness to learn on the part of Christians and churches. We must again become able to inform others, just as Luther was in his time, but in a way suited to the lives and problems of people today.

I would like to adapt a statement made by Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, who said that "the liberal, secularized state [lives] from requirements that it is not able to guarantee itself."³ This applies, by analogy, to the churches as well, and ultimately to the one Church of Jesus Christ as a reality believed and affirmed in the Christian creed. The Church cannot "guarantee" itself, but is a reflection of the Gospel. The Church is there for the Gospel, for the sake of the Gospel. The Church is – metaphorically speaking – not the melody itself but only its resonance chamber. It can and must allow the Easter song to be heard that comes from God alone. That is the life of the Church and its task – no more and no less. Allowing the Gospel, which is our support and our mission, to resound in this way would constitute a "spiritually sustainable" Reformation commemoration.

2. What could lend an ecumenical character to the Reformation commemoration?

My expectations are modest ones. It is my wish that the alienation between us does not grow in the coming years. We should send out small signals – but honest ones. We should not demand things of one another but invite one another to do what we can together and what brings us together with a good conscience in these decade years. And that seems to be more than one would think at first glance.

One should also think strongly about involving other churches and especially those communities that are connected to the Reformation heritage. The involvement of the churches of the Council of Christian Churches in Germany has not always been a source of joy for our two churches but their spiritual heritage belongs to

the fullness that is "Catholic" and "Reformational", whose essential elements must not be allowed to be lost. We must take the fact seriously that there is more that connects us than divides us deep down, if perhaps not necessarily on the surface of our divided Christendom. John Paul II expressed this himself in his encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut unum sint* (no. 22). The current Pope Benedict XVI, when he was still the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, wrote in a 1986 letter to the *Theologische Quartalschrift* journal based in Tübingen that we had to "make the unity that exists operative". How can this occur? I have limited myself again to four thoughts in the following.

1. The Reformation commemoration should help strengthen the unity that exists – a unity that has been received, granted, realized, and achieved – to reinvolve this unity, and to focus the actual life of the church even more on the Gospel.

This impulse has two aims: For one thing, the painstaking ecumenical theological efforts need to continue. The Decade must not become an excuse for taking time out from ecumenical discourse among experts. Despite occasional protests against "consensus ecumenism", there is a promising path forward toward differentiated theological consensus, which pursue complementary views on the "mystery of Christ". The "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" attempted just this in exemplary fashion. After such a short period of time, we cannot say anything serious and conclusive about its long-term effects. Similarly, other controversial topics need to be worked on further, particularly the question of the nature and form of church ministry as a "necessary service to the Gospel that is necessary for salvation" and as a service to the Eucharist, which constitutes the Church.

1934

BARMEN DECLARATION

Gathered as the "Confessing Church" in Wuppertal-Barmen, university professors, leading theologians, and others raised their voices against the "German Christians". At this "Confessional Synod", representatives of the Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches agreed for the first time on a common theological declaration.



Festive worship service at Wittenberg's Castle Church to launch the Luther Decade on September 21, 2008. Depicted here: Chairman of the EKD Council, Bishop Wolfgang Huber, President of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Bishop Mark Hanson, and the earlier EKD director for the Luther Decade, Stephan Dorgerloh (from left to right).



For another thing, today's generation should be informed about the gains made in the agreements made in dialogue work thus far. Harding Mayer is well known for his suggestion to prepare "in-via declarations" together to prevent the theological memory of churches and our gains so far from being forgotten. The time of the Decade would provide a good opportunity for this as a kind of binding remembrance of the insights gained between the Malta Report and the Lima Declaration on the character of the Lord's Supper/Eucharist in being constitutive for the church. We are currently working toward making this into a subjective religious celebration meant to uplift.

The Reformation Decade should, from the beginning, become a sign of the willingness of the churches to seek their own repentance and penance. The Reformation and Counterreformation have brought about endless suffering over the course of generations. This should not be glossed over. I could imagine that there could be a public sign of Protestant-Catholic reconciliation in 2017 with regard to this guilt-ridden history.

2. The Reformation commemoration should renew and strengthen the trust between the churches.

In my practical experience, "trust-building measures" are important in ecumenical work. We need to expect that any ecumenical convergence will be prone, time and again, to reversals due to human weakness and inattention but also through real faults. In order to get through such phases, we need a stockpile of trust, which cannot be left for such critical phases, but which needs to be built up beforehand.

This stockpile of trust also includes the willingness to be forthright in bringing things to the fore that could be troublesome or even irritat-

ing to one's ecumenical partners such as pushing one's discussion partners to do something that would not be possible according to their own convictions. There is of course more to exhausting those opportunities for cooperation and a common witness that are already possible today.

In practical terms, I can imagine sending an ecumenical signal, perhaps in 2015, the Decade year dedicated to the Bible, especially as we Catholics will also be marking the 50th anniversary of the Council document *Dei verbum*.

3. The Decade is an opportunity to uncover that which links us in faith before the discussion among world religions to come.

I still regret that the 2000 *Dominus Jesus* document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith became an ecumenical stumbling block through its lack of ecclesiological references. The actual aim of the document could have been shared by all of us in the ecumenical movement: Jesus Christ and his work of salvation are the decisive fundamentals of our faith. Such a document, addressing all from the perspective of scripture and the tradition of faith, and expressed in a comprehensible manner, would be an important contribution to the dialogue among world religions, the importance of which I have just alluded to. Could Protestantism not also publish its own *Dominus Jesus* text in 2017, which we Catholics would be happy to approve?

Photo: epd/bild/Hanno Gutmann

There have already been occasional dialogue groups together with Muslims, Buddhists, and representatives of other religions, most of which have been put together in an ecumenical manner. We should not leave it to representatives of the right-wing margins of Christianity to determine our topics of daily discussion. Ultimately, the topic of “faith and reason”, which the pope has so persistently addressed, is a topic that requires urgent common focus – also with regard to ethical questions such as the substantiation of human rights and human dignity. External questions and viewpoints can help us to discover the characteristics of our Christianity and to bring this into the discussions among religions.

4. The Decade is an impulse for an intensification of a public missionary presence, guided by the spirit of representing “the many”

I would like the Decade to speak less about Luther and more about that which moved him: the Gospel of our Lord. Let us leave it to others to hold the candle for progress and a questionable human freedom. The Church was never promised the status of being a majority church. It is instead our task to speak of repentance and the way of the cross. But it should be a “church of leaven”, a community aspiring to God’s Kingdom, people who hold open God’s heaven above society, a throng of people in prayer, praying as representatives “of the many” before God.

I look at our miserable church reality in Thuringia. It is not the dwindling numbers that scare me. What we need is the “humble self-confidence” of having a task as Church, in which we cannot be represented by others. Christians need to work for “thanksgiving to be increased” in Thuringia and elsewhere as Paul wrote in his letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 4:15), thus re-

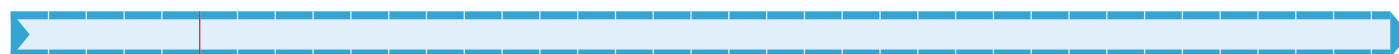
stating the sense and aim of his apostolic efforts. The churches can do this only together – and not in opposition to one another. Opening up a perspective on God to the people of our land, proclaiming and witnessing to them that they live by the grace of God – that would, in my view, be a shorthand manner in which I could surely invoke Martin Luther in the coming years of the Decade – even as a Catholic bishop.

Again: Have Catholics anything to celebrate during the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation? I would like to weaken my apodictic “no” from the beginning. We all could have something to celebrate in 2017 if the commemoration contributes toward us connecting more deeply with our Lord and thereby with each other. ◀

Bishop Dr. Joachim Wanke was appointed by Pope John Paul II to be the bishop of the newly founded Diocese of Erfurt on July 8, 1994.

Source: Revised version of an address held in Eisenach on June 23, 2010, at a meeting of the EKD Council and the leading clergy of the EKD member churches in Schwerte on January 28, 2011.

- 1 Copy in: *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung*, ed. by H.Meyer, vol.II, Paderborn/Frankfurt a. M. 1992, 444–451, here 445.
- 2 Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint_en.html
- 3 E.-W.Böckenförde, Die Entstehung des Staates als Vorgang der Säkularisation, in: Böckenförde., *Recht, Staat, Freiheit. Staatstheorie und Verfassungsgeschichte*, Frankfurt a.M. 1991, 92–114, here 112.



1945

FOUNDING OF THE EKD

Representatives of 28 regional churches met in Treysa in August 1945 to establish a tentative structure for the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). This stressed the independence of the churches and did not establish a creed. The EKD was run by a council of twelve, taking lessons from the Nazi era. The first chairman was Theophil Wurm with Martin Niemöller as his deputy.

Catholic Theses for the 2017 Reformation commemoration

Published for Reformation Day 2012¹ by Bishop Gerhard Feige



Gerhard Feige, President of the Commission for Ecumenical Affairs of the German Bishops' Conference since late September 2012, presents an opening address to the 2011 EKD Synod in Magdeburg.

1. Without a doubt, the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's Wittenberg Theses – whether he actually “nailed” them in 1517 to the door of the Castle Church or “mailed” them as letters – is an occasion to have a particular look into the event.

This particularly involves the Protestant Churches of the Lutheran tradition, but also other Reformation Churches as well. Upon their initiative, in 2008 the “Luther Decade” was opened in Germany to prepare for the “Reformation Jubilee”. The concept and its implemen-

tation were thus a chiefly Protestant affair. But as the Wittenberg Reformation is also part of the history of the Catholic Church, it has been invited by the Protestants to join in the celebrations of the 2017 commemorative year and to participate in some of the preceding Decade initiatives. In principle, this does not seem impossible, and yet it depends on the character of the events in question. Catholic Christians surely can and want to deal with the Reformation and its impacts in a constructive and creative way, but they consider the resulting division of the Western Church to be tragic and do not – or at least not yet – feel able to mark this in cheerful celebration. Official representatives

of the Catholic Church therefore mostly avoid the term “Reformation Jubilee” and rather speak of a “Reformation commemoration” – following the liturgical description of October 31 in the Lutheran tradition.

2. What was the reason for the Wittenberg Reformation and what effects has it had? What were its causes and what are its consequences? How are we to interpret it as a whole and in its individual parts? This does not only involve denominational prejudices but also divergent scholarly opinions.

Photos: p. 104: epd-bild/Norbert Neetzr, p. 105: epd-bild/Oliver Hauptstock

Is the Reformation in the end – as Ulrich Ruh recently “exaggerated” – the “Fall of Man” or an event of salvation, the destruction of church unity or the launch of a more convincing way of being Church? Or, to put it differently: Can the division of Western Christendom be seen as a success of the Reformation or perhaps in fact a manifestation of its failure so far? With regard to its intellectual, cultural, and socio-historical effects, many current statements appear biased and unconvincing. It would be extremely helpful if a common understanding of what happened could be reached across denominational lines. Fortunately, the Ecumenical Working Group of Catholic and Lutheran Theologians in Germany (“Jaeger-Stählin Circle”) has embarked on such a project. The Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity have even announced an upcoming joint statement on the significance of the Reformation. [The text was published on 17 June 2013.]

3. Regardless, it is deplorable that a history of separation and alienation with enormous consequences was caused.

The Reformation and Counter-Reformation led to polemical and violent conflicts. Originally spiritual and theological concerns were exploited for political purposes. Countless people were killed in the wars of confession. Typically Catholic and Protestant milieus emerged from this, while flight, expulsions, and mobility would lead to a denominationally mixed population and to new problems. It often became a problem how majorities treated their minorities. Up to the present time, individual Christians – especially in denominationally mixed marriages and families – and entire groups have suffered from the division, as confessional hardening has caused painful conflicts, and people continue to mistrust and wound one another at times. This should not be ignored or glossed over, but should be acknowledged and examined. In 1965, Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras were able to announce after intensive preparatory work that the reciprocal excommunications of 1054 between representatives of the Churches of Rome and Constantinople were removed “both from memory and from the midst of the Church” to be committed “to oblivion”. Is it not now time to strive for a “purification of memory” or “healing of memories” in the Cath-

olic-Protestant relationship as well to send out a concrete sign of repentance and willingness to forgive, of conversion and reconciliation? In the official discussion group formed by representatives of the German Bishops’ Conference and the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany considerations are being made to open up just such a process of reconciliation. On the congregational level as well, it could be helpful to examine the specific local history of Protestant and Catholic Christians with all of their conflicts and positive experiences, to share them with one another and to spiritually reflect on them.

4. The Protestant Churches and the Catholic Church are no longer as they were in the 16th century, but have developed further over the centuries. While both raised their own identities in opposition to one another in the post-Reformation phase of confessionalization, thus becoming poorer and narrower, as “children of their times” they often had to walk a tightrope between secularization and detachment from the world.

1948

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Only a few years after the end of the Second World War, an assembly of 147 delegates from Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox churches met in Amsterdam. Willem A. Visser’t Hooft was named the WCC’s first general secretary. The goals of the new organization were to help churches rebuild after the war, to advocate for refugees around the world, and to speak out against apartheid and racism.



Enlightenment and Restoration, state churches and social democratization did not unfold without leaving their mark on the Churches. Not everything that is now seen as being typically Protestant (e.g. synods) harkens back to early Lutheranism, and much for which the Catholic Church was criticized in the Reformation era (e.g. the “sale” of indulgences) is no longer valid. Contrary to some still existing denominationalist clichés, these changes should be acknowledged once and for all for the sake of the truth. Important concerns of Luther have found their way back into Catholic awareness and church life through the Second Vatican Council and its reforms. This includes, for example, the vision of the church as the “people of God”, the understanding of church offices as ministries and the profound conviction of the common priesthood of all believers, but also the great significance placed again in the word of God and Holy Scripture, the use of the language spoken by the people in liturgy, and making the “lay chalice” fundamentally possible. As the Catholic Church, in the course of the Council, expressly spoke of being an *ecclesia semper reformanda* – i.e. a church ever in

need of renewal – it has not become a “church of the Reformation”. One might say, however, – as the Jesuit publicist Mario von Galli stated in 1962 – that the Church has left behind the “Counter-Reformation” to enter into a “Co-Reformation”.

5. Understandably, Protestant and Catholic Christians have viewed Martin Luther for centuries from opposing points of view – in academic research as well – either glorifying or demonizing him. At times, he was even nearly forgotten or suppressed in Protestantism. Since the early 20th century, however, a new view of Luther has emerged.

This change first began in the world of Protestant academic research with both the figure of Luther and his work being viewed in a more sober light, taking into account all limitations and negative effects. In addition to his biblical and patristic roots, research discovered how much he was also anchored in medieval tradi-

tions, influenced by Catholic reform movements and late medieval mysticism and order theology. As a result of such nuanced points of view, even Catholic research soon began to develop more objective interpretations of Luther and his concerns. Unlike earlier polemics, there was an increasing awareness that Luther’s original intent was not to divide the Church but to renew it radically from its biblical origins in a reform from the head to the members of the body of the church. It remains uncontroversial, however, that Luther was not just a spiritual person but also had a rougher side and was prone to contentiousness. The responsibility for the tragic developments of the time, however, lay with all who were involved. The most positive recognition of Luther to date, jointly expressed in 1983 by Protestant and Catholic theologians in an official international top-level commission, saw in him “a witness to the gospel, a teacher in the faith and a herald of spiritual renewal”. Even Pope Benedict XVI during his 2011 visit to Erfurt emphasized the deep passion of Luther in his search for God throughout his entire life, and the focus of his thinking and entire spirituality on Christ. Luther could

Confirmands assemble in front of Wittenberg’s Castle Church on Reformation Day 2012. For over ten years, hundreds of confirmands have marked the beginning of the Reformation in Wittenberg each October 31.



Photo: epd-bild/SebastianWillnow

therefore also challenge Catholics theologically and existentially.

6. With a view forward to 2017, it is not all only about questions of faith and theological convictions. A large number of “non-theological” factors also play a role: within and among churches, at local and national political levels, culturally and economically.

Different agents with very different interests and expectations have a part in the preparations and most certainly will be involved in the commemorative year itself. Among them, in addition to the Lutheran World Federation, the EKD and individual regional Protestant churches, are the eastern German states of Sachsen-Anhalt, Thuringia, and Saxony, the most important Luther towns – and Wittenberg in particular – with their significant Luther commemorative sites, some universities, faculties, and institutes, as well as numerous tourism boards, travel agencies, hotels, and restaurants. The tourism industry has placed particularly high hopes in being able to market the memory of Martin Luther and the Reformation. Much of this has the great support of leaders in the political arena and society, with occasional odd ties drawn between the Protestant church and the state. Some see – perhaps too critically – the danger that the Reformation commemoration is being too strongly influenced from outside the church and could be reduced to populist superficialities. Many initiatives and plans may well be justified. But with all that is going on, it is not always easy to figure out what 2017 is actually about. It would

be good for the Protestants to put things in a clearer light.

7. In eastern Germany and beyond, the debate is no longer about specific questions as to how we are to understand God and his work and what sort of relationship, founded in the Bible, we are supposed to have with him – as it was in Luther’s time – but actually about whether there is even a God in the first place.

The intellectual-historical and the religious contexts have changed substantially since the century of the Reformation. Many people today – whether Catholics or Protestants – have no particular knowledge of the Christian faith in the form in which it is transmitted in the church and view it as being distant from reality. They are “religiously unmusical” and do not understand what all this could be good for in their lives. A “forced secularity” has taken root. Other contemporaries are not only interested in material things and worldly matters but do indeed seem to be seeking more, as trends toward “spiritual tourism”, for example, illustrate. And some do discover the Christian faith and have themselves baptized. It is within this context that Jesus’ prayer in the Gospel of John (17:21-23) for the unity of his disciples, “that the world may believe... (and) know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me”, has taken on even greater urgency for all Christians. Who among our neighbors who seem so resistant to religion, or who are perhaps seekers themselves, can understand why we are divided? This state of af-

fairs is, in any event, counterproductive, and poses a challenge to approach 2017 more ecumenically, with a view perhaps to a future process of healing.

8. What has already been planned or is already underway? There are a number of specific ecumenical ideas and plans alongside the intention to come to as much of a common Protestant-Catholic interpretation of the Reformation as possible, both within Germany and internationally, and the impetus in Germany for an official process of reconciliation.

The Johann Adam Möhler Institute in Paderborn has for instance joined with the Bensheim Institute for Inter-Confessional Research to prepare a publication on “What we believe as Christians” to describe what we have in common. The Johann Adam Möhler Institute and the Institute for Ecumenical Research of the Lutheran World Federation in Strasbourg are also working on a Catholic-Protestant interpretation and commentary on Luther’s 95 Theses. Under the aegis of the Commission for Ecumenical Affairs of the German Bishops’ Conference, a documentation is being put together of important texts which bring to light the ecumenical opening of the Catholic Church and the progress made in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, in connection with the upcoming Reformation commemoration. Promoted by the Catholic side, an academic symposium on Martin Luther and the Reformation will take place in Erfurt in September 2014, to be organized by the Catholic Theological Faculty of the Univer-

10 December 1948 HUMAN RIGHTS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted at the General Assembly of the United Nations in Paris. The 30 articles of the declaration continue to serve as a common orientation and ideal for nearly all nations today in the worldwide struggle for the protection of human dignity. The declaration is not, however, binding in international law.



The General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Martin Junge (right), and Curial Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, sit together at a press conference during the 2012 General Synod of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) at Timmendorfer Strand on the Baltic.

sity of Erfurt and the Johann Adam Möhler Institute. The German Bishops' Conference has also suggested holding a congress on an ecumenically significant biblical topic in 2015 – to mark the “Image and Bible” annual topic of the Luther Decade and the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei verbum*. The German dioceses, lastly, are hosting ecumenical worship services in their respective cathedrals on November 21, 2014 to mark the adoption and promulgation of the Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* at the Second Vatican Council 50 years prior. This spiritual sign will also once again clearly express, in light of the upcoming Reformation commemoration, that the Catholic Church is irreversibly committed to continuing along the ecumenical path and to strive for complete unity in faith. Of course, such initiatives do not only provide a framework, an outline, or an impulse to grapple with past events and developments; they are also meant to bring the present into focus and to build up the courage needed to meet today's challenges in a creative manner.

9. How can this be expressed in a special manner? In the face of all self-reflection and tendencies toward building up one's own identity, it would surely be calming for both Catholics and Protestants to view one another more in the light of Jesus Christ, and to speak, without jealousy, about what they appreciate or perhaps even admire about each other, and what special gifts we recognize in the others in which we see the impressive work of the spirit of God.

In doing so, we will surely also see things that are Catholic in the Protestant Church and Protestant in the Catholic Church, things that we have preserved, have rediscovered in cooperation with and in opposition to each other since the Reformation, and have received from the others to our own enrichment. In this connection, Luther would seem to be a hinge between the two, despite all the controversy. Such insights, which can sometimes surprise us, and trust-building statements can encourage us as

individual Christians and as Church in its actual form to join together in focusing our lives on the Gospel with greater awareness and intensity and to renew ourselves through Jesus Christ as the foundation of our faith and the source of our salvation. This appears to be urgently necessary and was indeed the central concern of the Reformation. Without turning back towards Christ, we will scarcely be able to gain credibility or plausibility which is necessary to fulfill our mission in the world to any degree. As Pope Benedict emphasized in Erfurt – “our primary ecumenical service at this hour must be to bear common witness to the presence of the living God ...”. This should encourage us as well to enter into a more intensive dialogue with our contemporaries, to wish to understand how they think and feel, and to speak the people's tongue as Luther did in his days, “spelling out” the Gospel anew, and bringing it to life in our own lives. If the most important aim of the Reformation commemoration were to be deepening our bonds with Jesus Christ, who was crucified and is risen, as well as our bonds with one another, to proclaim our faith in greater community and unity, thus providing a sign of hope

to all the world; if it is to be – as Praeses Nikolaus Schneider put it – “a jubilee of Christ”, ecumenically open Catholics might be able to imagine not only holding some sort of punctilious and polite address in 2017, but even joining in the celebrations and especially in ardent prayer.

10. It would, lastly, be desirable not to limit the ecumenical aspect of the Reformation commemoration to the Lutheran and Catholic Church but to broaden the scope to include other churches and Christian communities, especially within the framework of the Council of Churches in Germany (ACK).

Many of them have indeed also been formed by the Reformation heritage, or challenged by it, and mostly have been linked to the Protestant and the Catholic Church for a long time, either bilaterally or multilaterally. It is indeed nearly self-evident that this be taken into consideration. As globalization progresses and different world religions and cultures come closer together, the need has intensified for a common Christian self-reflection. Into the future, Christianity will only be able to be taken seriously as a discourse partner among major world reli-

gions if it can present its variety of traditions, churches, and denominations in a more unified manner, and express the basic convictions specific to Christianity in a more symphonic and distinctive manner. In this regard, the 2017 Reformation commemoration and ecumenism within Christianity are now, in the early 21st century, in a fully different context than has ever existed before. ◀

Bishop Dr. Gerhard Feige is the Bishop of Magdeburg and President of the Commission for Ecumenical Affairs of the German Bishops' Conference.

¹ Many ideas and clarifications I owe to the following publications: W. Kasper, *50 Jahre katholisch-evangelische Ökumene. Persönliche Erfahrungen und Reflexionen*: KNA-ÖKI no. 6 (07 February 2012) I-VIII; H. Lehmann, *Unterschiedliche Erwartungen an das Reformationsjubiläum 2017*: BThZ 28 (2011) 16-27; C. Marksches, *Wie katholisch ist die evangelische Kirche? Wie katholisch sollte sie sein?*: KNA-ÖKI no. 17 (24 April 2012) I-XII; G.L. Müller, *In gemeinsamer Verantwortung. Anfragen an das Reformationsjubiläum 2017*: BThZ 28 (2011) 120-126; U. Ruh, *Reformation heute*: HerKorr 65 (2011) 595-597; N. Schneider, *Mündlicher Bericht des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland "Ein Haus aus lebendigen Steinen"* (Ms.) 2011; W. Thönissen, *Katholische Zugänge zu Luther und der Reformation*: BThZ 28 (2011) 95-105; J. Wanke, *Reformation damals – Kirche heute. Überlegungen zum 500. Reformationsjubiläum 2017 aus katholischer Sicht* (Ms.), 2010; idem, *Haben Katholiken am Reformationsjubiläum 2017 etwas zu feiern?* (Ms.) 2011; F. Weber, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil und die Ökumene. Beobachtungen aus der Sicht eines Protestanten*: KNA-ÖKI no. 9 (28 February 2012) I-XII; idem, *Konfessionalität und Ökumene. Zur ökumenischen Dimension der Reformationsdekade*: BThZ 28 (2011) 106-119.

1950

ADMISSION OF GUILT IN PERSECUTION OF JEWS

The 1945 Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt did not directly address the crimes against Jews. It was only at the 1950 EKD Synod in Berlin-Weissensee that the EKD officially and expressly spoke of guilt with regard to these crimes in its “Statement on Sins against Israel”.

Grounding in a transient existence: What is being celebrated in the 2017 Reformation Jubilee

By Thies Gundlach

He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of compassion.
(Psalm 111:4)

I. *Wohnen im Gewoge und keine Heimat haben in der Zeit – living in turmoil and having no home in time* (R. M. Rilke)

When not only the Reformation churches in Germany, Europe, and around the world, but all of society prepares for the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation on October 31, 1517, society will be staging the origins that provide it with meaning, its legendary beginnings, so to speak. Commemorative culture indeed has something to do with framing one's own identity: Who we are, where we come from, what we wish to be, and what is important to us. These basic existential questions are explored in commemorative celebrations, interpret and bring about reassurance and clarification, and lead to hope. In today's multireligious, pluralistic, and highly individualized society, there is of course no longer just one origin legend that defines and touches all people equally. Neither the 500th anniversary celebrations of the discovery of America in 1992 nor the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution in 1989 were able to unify a sense of origin. Nor will the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation in 2017 speak to all social groups similarly, even as it does speak to a very large portion of today's (global) society: 23.5 million people are members of Protestant churches in Germany, and their Roman Catholic brothers and sisters have also been influenced by the Reformation indirectly. Some 660,000 people in Germany live from their work for the Evangelical Church in Germany, its member churches, and diaconal agencies, while 1.1 million Germans work for the church on a voluntary basis. And there are nearly half a billion Christians of Protestant varieties around the world. And since the Reformation influenced all Christian churches, one can assume that there is much more widespread interest in this event of the century. Modern society has been coming to understand an essential part of its intellectual roots through this

central historical turning point in its history, going beyond any purely commercial or functional identity. Commemorative culture satisfies a deep need "to link our fleeting existence with the imperishable chain that winds through all generations of mankind". (Friedrich Schiller: "Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte?" / "What is universal history and why does one study it?", inaugural address as Professor of History in Jena of 26 May 1789). And the more dynamic an era becomes in terms of change, the more commemorative culture it needs, as "the shrinking of the present" (Hermann Lübbe) leads to an increase in commemorative celebrations, and the number of sites and dates of remembrance increases with a rise in insecurity of identity. The plausibility of the Reformation Jubilee for today's society thus lies in a sort of "blessing of memory": It does the entire society good to remember and contemporize basic aspects of its origins and development, since this makes the present comprehensible and mitigates fear of the future. And as the Reformation involves such central topics as human dignity, the understanding of freedom, education and social responsibility, cultural identity and religious competence, a Reformation commemoration that is able to strengthen society will also result in one that is less fearful, more self-confident, and more optimistic.

II. *Who does the Reformation Jubilee belong to?*

Martin Kähler, a well-known Protestant theologian from Halle, published an influential book in 1892 entitled *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* ("The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic-Biblical Christ"). In his book, Kähler developed his thesis – understandable especially in the context of the discussion of his time of research on the life of Jesus and the vigorous presence of the historical-critical method – that it was not the historical Jesus, however he was to be identified in particular, who had such a strong historical impact, but the Christ, as he was described in the gospels. The historical Jesus thus never played a real role in the history of faith as,

from the very beginning, it was the narratives circulating about this historical person that mattered. It is only logical that a few decades later, in the New Testament theology of Rudolf Bultmann, the historical Jesus did not figure into any theological presuppositions but only "that of his having come". Equally understandable is hence the development of the discussion between Bultmann and his student Ernst Käsemann on the significance and relevance of the historical Jesus for the Christ of the narrative. The insight was decisive, and remains so today, that it is not historically accurate knowledge but narrative history that forms the image of the past.

There is a comparable basic problem in Reformation history as well: Of course, the story of the Reformation and the people involved in it are much easier to understand historically and to accurately reconstruct, but the categorical insight remains valid that only the *Reformation narrative* has had a historical impact and not the supposedly correct historical facts. One could therefore phrase it similarly: The *so-called reformational breakthrough and the historical beginning of the Reformation*. Of course it is of great interest for the jubilee preparations to see how historians come to an understanding on the Reformation and its original representatives, which systematic theses they postulate for the interpretation of the events of the Reformation and the conclusions they make. It is, however, to be expected that these discussions do not lead to any clear conclusions. But the *narratives* of the Reformation beginnings do not at all depend only on what the research considers to be historically verifiable but also on the things told today that touch hearts, make people think, and influence our actions. One can thus say: *The Reformation Jubilee belongs to those who recount the Reformation in such a way that it becomes relevant to our present day.*

Traditionally, the Reformation narrative has generally stood for the emergence of the modern world. Whether one thinks here of the individual freedom of conscience or the participatory "priesthood of all baptized", whether one



At the Wittenberg house of the Theologian and educator Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560): The exhibition centers on his books, letters, addresses, and opinions.

bears in mind the sort of proclamation that strengthens the congregation or the translation of the Bible that left its mark on the language, and whether remembering the call for universal education or the powerful idea of freedom – whenever we look back we see the origins of our own present. This view of the Reformation as a departure that has led to our own day is surely also the reason for the state, society, and the churches of the Reformation to view October 31, 2017 as a singular occasion – a “world-class event”, as the German *Bundestag* put it. And although it has long been a matter of controversy among historians whether that date actu-

ally saw Martin Luther nail his Theses to the door of Wittenberg’s Castle Church or not, October 31, 1517 has become a symbolic date for the departure from the uniform world of the Middle Ages to our particular present (whether real or assumed), and is celebrated each century as such a beginning. One always marks for particular attention those events from the wide choice of historically dated occurrences that are currently viewed as especially relevant and of future importance. Whereas the 17th century, just before the Thirty Years’ War, was in need of a Luther who was true to his confession, the early 19th century sought out a Luther who

could unite a country; and while the GDR of 1983 required an early bourgeois revolutionary, the West looked for a Luther who loved liberty.

The expectation – or even demand – that one celebrate the Reformation Jubilee in a historically correct manner, distancing ourselves from zeitgeist and contemporary interests, can therefore nearly be viewed as naïve. This will indeed not be much different in the 21st century – if perhaps not quite as blatantly so in the face of all our recent historical knowledge. The century will also tell of “its” Luther and stage “its” Reformation commemoration; leaving the zeitgeist behind will only be possible at the cost of leaving many people behind who would not otherwise understand any of it. Anyone who could actually remember Luther “outside of time” and “purely historically” would never be able to reach those in the present. One can therefore only be thankful if the beginning of the Reformation unfolds and is reflected as the beginning of a path to the present, and that it is shown to be a foundation for the present and suited to the future. The state, civil society, and the Protestant Church should therefore under no circumstances mark this more or less uncontroversially historical date alone. To mark this date, they should not *eliminate but interpret the origin narratives and founding legends that continue to be so influential today.*

III. A great beginning and not just a great beginner

The narrative of the start of the Reformation has undergone a sort of process of compression in which many other achievements of the Reformation, whether real or imagined, are tied into the present, regardless of the fact that this can involve historical events being *anachronistically intertwined that occurred at different times in the past.* The Reformation Jubilee stands for

1958

FIRST ORDAINED WOMAN PASTOR

After the Gender Equality Law that went into effect in Germany on July 1, 1958, three regional churches followed suit by allowing women to be ordained as ministers. The first duly ordained woman, Elisabeth Haseloff, began her service with a special ministry in Lübeck.



Sign at the base of the Luther Monument at Wittenberg's Market Square.

the rediscovery of the Gospel, for the courageous revolt against Rome and sovereignty before Kaiser and Reich, for the 1520 writings on freedom, for the translation of the Bible, for the discovery of the “priesthood of all baptized”, for universal education, and many other things, but also for Luther’s animosity toward Jews, for his terrible comments on the Peasants’ Wars and the brutal denominational wars, etc. One can say that *narratives of the valuable achievements of the Reformation are just as popularly connected with 1517 as is their shadow side*. As well and good it is that the positive consequences of the Reformation are highlighted during the 2017 Reformation Jubilee, it is also necessary to provide a historically correct and honest narrative of the dark sides of the movement. One must not hush up the shameful sides of Luther and the other reformers; they form a central part of the commemorative culture.

This is why 2017 will be cause for a celebration of a great beginning for the Evangelical Church in Germany, but not solely one of a great beginner, even if one cannot strictly distinguish the two. It was indeed only in the 19th century that the Reformation narrative began to speak of Martin Luther the “hero”. The memory of a new beginning turned into a kind of celebration of a “Protestant apostle”. The 2017 Reformation Jubilee is not, however, supposed to become a “Luther celebration” but a global celebration of the Reformation and its children’s children down through the centuries; all churches, de-

nominations, and cultures influenced by the Reformation are welcome to come to Germany to join in – in accordance with the principle that all are to come to Wittenberg in 2017 because they “all came from there” (Nikolaus Schneider). One could say that Martin Luther along with the other great Reformation teachers are in fact welcome at the 2017 celebrations: Huldrych Zwingli, Philipp Melancthon, Johannes Bugenhagen, John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, and Martin Bucer, as well as the women of the Reformation such as Katharina von Bora, Katharina Zell, Ursula von Münsterberg, Elisabeth of Saxony, but also the Reformation’s children’s children, including Philipp Jacob Spener and Johann Sebastian Bach, August Herman Francke and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Johann Gottfried Herder and Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, Johann Hinrich Wichern and Johannes Brahms and many others. While they all traveled their own paths, they all saw themselves as being rooted in the Reformation. And this broad approach makes it possible to welcome the children’s children of the Reformation’s cultural effects to the 2017 celebrations. With their Reformation narratives, one is confronted with the task of distinguishing between past lines of development that, with a certain plausibility, are *directly* tied to the Reformation, and developments that are only indirect consequences of the Reformation (and at times in opposition to the denominational churches) such as ideas of tolerance, human and other fundamental rights. These lines of develop-

ment, direct and indirect, form the historical setting, within which the Reformation narratives can contribute to the anchoring of “our transient existence”.

IV. Reformation and religion

In a 21st-century Germany that is as secular as it is multireligious, the discussion of specific denominational traditions presents a particular challenge. One can indeed neither deny the religious foundations of all the reformational events since 1517 without also denying the roots and foundations of the dynamics in the Reformation, nor can one make the Reformation Jubilee into a jubilee of “throne and altar”, in which the church and state celebrate their unique connection. *In our individualistic present times, the deep religious structures can only be contemporized in terms of individual relevance*. One can and should only make the attempt – legitimate in terms of mission – to develop the basic view of the Reformation in a way that touches and is grasped by individuals. The Reformation and all those involved were concerned, at the time, with their souls and God’s judgment, fighting for their lives not in this world, but their eternal lives. Much of the intensity of the disputes can only be understood in this context; for them it was about everything, comparable perhaps only with the issue of physical health today. For this reason, the Protestant Church, in its approach to the jubilee, will be continually returning to its existential *three-fold path to freedom*:

“Turning from fear – Turning to God – moving out into the world”. Principally, anybody from any milieu, educational background, or existential situation can view his or her story of liberation within the framework of these three steps. Luther’s path can be understood as a type of existential archetype for all paths to freedom, leading from inner liberation to an external responsibility for one’s fellows. The triad of “Turning from fear – Turning to God – moving out into the world” moves a basic anthropological experience into a spiritual-theological light. Fear is indeed meant here as a basic theological experience – taking into account the ideas of the theologian Sören Kierkegaard – that

every person can and must have. And every individual today can find ways to be liberated from fear as this path speaks of a universal experience from a Christian perspective, teaching us to understand liberation as a gift and event but not as an achievement or accomplishment. And because this involves an experience of liberation that can unfold its freeing effects even in a society reeling from choices and performance pressure, the Protestant churches can speak of a Reformation *jubilee* in 2017 and not just a Reformation *commemoration*.

The Reformation movement is – just like Martin Luther and the other reformers of his time – a critical but indeed inner-Catholic movement. Luther the monk did not want to found a new church or new denomination, but sought to change the conditions, from top to bottom, within the one, holy, apostolic church. The original intentions of the Reformation as a re-discovery of the Gospel are connected neither to a division of the church nor an excommunication from the Catholic Church. As this is the case and because the Christians of the Reformation tradition in Germany wish to remember and celebrate the particular potency of that era's movement of turning back to Christ, the 2017 Reformation Jubilee is not suited to be staged as an anti-Catholic event. Any anti-Roman tone would indeed attest to a weakening sense of identity; when one is sure of oneself, one does not need to distance oneself from others. This self-assuredness does not, however, exclude, but in fact includes the opportunity for Protestantism to come to understand which points of the Reformation's criticism of Roman Catholic theology serve a false sense of identity and which points still have yet to be addressed in full. Nor is every current criticism of Rome there to serve a false sense of identity, as they

can indeed be the expression of important differences that remain today.

500 years later, the churches of the Reformation view themselves as catholic churches that have gone through the Reformation. Their spiritual roots begin not with Martin Luther or John Calvin and do not end with the confessional statements of the 16th century, but are anchored in the experience of Pentecost, in Holy Scripture, and the creeds of the Early Church. They recognize in the medieval formation of the Catholic Church of the West their origins in

and culturally open manner, as it does not belong to Protestant (or indeed Lutheran) Christians or churches alone, but to all Christians. It is there to recall the contribution of the Reformation to the spiritual experience of Christendom, and constitutes a reformational contribution to an “ecumenism of gifts”. Beneath the official level, the Roman Catholic view of Martin Luther has often been that of a “teacher of faith”. At the same time, Luther officially remains a convicted heretic in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Protestant churches are counted among the heresies. The

At the Luther House's permanent exhibition in Wittenberg: Martin Luther's hymn “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott” (“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”) in the Joseph Klug Hymnal of 1533.



common with the Roman Catholic Church. The commonalities among the denominations, which are so often emphasized, are founded in a 2000-year common history. The 2017 Reformation Jubilee and the years leading up to it are to be planned in an international, ecumenical,

expectations are high for a correction of these Roman Catholic judgments on the way to the 2017 Jubilee. ◀

Dr. Thies Gundlach is a Vice President of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) Church Office.

1958

ACTION RECONCILIATION SERVICE FOR PEACE

Action Reconciliation was founded at the 1958 EKD Synod. In the conviction that the first step toward reconciliation had to be made by those who bore guilt and their descendants, the founders asked that “the other nations, who suffered because of us, will allow us with our hands and with our means to do something good in their countries”.

2017 words: “External views” on the Reformation Jubilee

On September 2, 2012, the Evangelical Church in Germany invited prominent guests to Berlin’s St. Elisabeth Church. There, the panel, including writers Moritz Rinke and Navid Kermani, offered their “external views” on the 2017 Reformation Jubilee. Journalist **Carolyn Emcke** began with her interesting opening remarks.



Carolyn Emcke, freelance publicist and international correspondent for DIE ZEIT

Nikolaus Schneider, Katrin Göring-Eckardt, ladies and gentlemen – thank you for inviting me to speak to you today; I must say that ever since I accepted your invitation, I began to wish I hadn’t.

That is the reason why I already began to count my words as I collected by thoughts and wrote them down, 54 [numbers do not correspond exactly in English – transl.] until now; I put them together slowly as if on a string, the 2017 words that I hoped would provide you with an “external view”, and if you should wonder as I speak about my using a particularly flowery language with ornate garlands of words and an inflationary use of adjectives, then you know why ... 101.

I am in no way qualified to speak here, I have no deeper understanding of the contours of Reformation theology, and cannot tell you anything about the *iusticia dei* that you couldn’t express better yourself; the significance of the dispute over indulgences, Luther’s doctrine of sin and grace: for me to discuss all that here and now would be quite unseemly.

And still I was invited here, and I did accept the invitation perhaps only because it expressly asked for an “external view”. I will provide precisely that by beginning my address with the question: What does “external view” actually mean?

1. How “external” am I? Outside as opposed to what “inside”? I if was called to provide an “external” view, am I looking into something? What is that? Christianity? The Protestant Church? Faith? Myself?

Unlike Navid Kermani, I have had no theological training. I can therefore imagine that my comments will seem further afield than his, and that Navid, as a Muslim researcher of religion is more “internal” than I am.

What’s more, I officially left the church several years ago, which was an act, by the way, that was easier to carry out than cancelling a subscription to the *tageszeitung* [a German cooperatively owned newspaper], there were no questions about morals, no pleading or begging, not even an invitation to have a conversation at Berlin’s Protestant congregation. Only, as I’ve

learned in the years since, leaving the Protestant Church does not change, fortunately or unfortunately, anything about my own struggle with it, my doubts about belonging remain, just as my metaphysical certainty remains like a last piece of indestructible binding twine. (Jan Skácel)

So what is this twine that remains, that refuses to be dissolved?

If there is one Protestant manner of thinking in which I could ponder this, it would be that of radical self-questioning: Only by questioning myself, and not anything or anyone else, but only by looking into myself could I decide whether I can really can provide an external view.

I grew up as a Christian – but not in the church. The Bible was not read aloud in our home, we did not say grace, and we didn’t go to church on Sunday. We sang together at home every night before going to sleep, and we loved – sometimes too much, sometimes with no reason, and sometimes bordering on self-abandonment, but always as if it were the most natural thing in the world and without expecting anything in return.



The audience listens attentively to the panel in Berlin's St. Elisabeth Church.

children, grandchildren, friends, acquaintances, as well as complete strangers. And there was no "inside" or "outside" in this confidence, and my mother would never have understood many of today's controversies about Islam, because belonging to a common community and humanity went without saying for her, and because the differentiation between "us" and "them" was so foreign to her. I inherited a way of living without fear from her, the ability to accept what we do not control, to tolerate what we do not have a grip on, love and faith along with sickness and death.

When I say that I grew up as a Christian, it had nothing to do with any institution or theological canon, but – and I imagine that it is the same way for many others as well – it had to do with people. When I think of the things that are generally connected to Christian values – mercy, love of one's neighbor, empathy – it has nothing to do with the sermons that I have heard, but with people: my mother and my grandmother. 538.

The faith of my childhood was, firstly and lastly, the faith lived by those two women, without doctrine or confession; when I think of the more quiet nature of my mother and the feistier nature of my grandmother, I would say that this faith was not even a particularly verbose one, not doing much in terms of defining itself or what it asks of itself or of us, and not making much of itself at all. And they may have not even been able to specify their Christian origins, but they lived in the metaphysical certainty of those who feel loved and accepted.

If I were to describe what my conception of God's love was in my childhood, I would say that it was the grace of being cared for that shone through my mother, and the confidence of being accepted despite all of my small flaws

and weaknesses, failures and inabilities. Could my mother have raised me so freely without Luther, and without the Reformation's far-reaching shift of the concept sin and mercy?

And of even greater importance to my later life, both my grandmother and my mother lived in trust, a trust of God, I would say, even if they both never said as much; and this trust translated into a confidence in their everyday lives, not so much in themselves, but in other people,

From left to right:
 Carolin Emcke,
 the director Jürgen
 Flimm, Social
 Democratic politician
 Walter Steinmeier,
 and EKD Synod
 Praeses Katrin
 Göring-Eckardt



1961

ORTHODOX CHURCHES JOIN THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

At its 3rd Assembly in New Delhi, the International Missionary Council and Orthodox churches joined the World Council of Churches.



Publicist and author
Moritz Rinke

It is not rational, it is not even a real thought. It just is.

In addition to people, there are also the old stories that still form the repertoire from which my associations, my thoughts, my verbal images all take form today; they are the old stories that did not find their way to me as God’s word, but as world literature, and just as stories that move, confuse, annoy, and soothe me, stories that have formed my views on hate and friendship, vengeance and kindness, treachery and loyalty, and which especially brought about images for all of these experiences and values that never disappear: the burning bush, the mess of pottage and sheep’s clothing, the long hair that cannot be cut, the belly of the whale, of course, the writing on the wall, and the gift of interpreting what scholars cannot decipher, the word “shibboleth”, the dream of a ladder...

All of these images and stories have left their mark and persist as if they were real memories of individual experiences; they are passed on like a loaf of bread, from which everyone breaks off a piece, and they never stop nourishing me. The biblical figures and their experiences, their fates and even the rhythm of their speech are living contemporaries for me, and they are neither religious idols nor literary characters, but members of my family like other deceased great aunts, or friends one would talk about anyway.

I once described it like this: The first time I travelled to Iraq, I found myself at one point next to a strange muddy green river, where I never had been before, and felt as if I had finally come home: It was the Tigris. In the middle of the war, I absolutely wanted to go to Mosul no matter how dangerous it was, because I wanted to see the old gate to the town of Niniveh. Abraham had departed from Ur in today’s Iraq when he set off on his journey.

Was the country of Iraq foreign to me, a land I had never seen before? Did I feel like an outsider? No.

The old stories are not just stories but shaped my ability to find my way. The figures’ pains, hopes, and failures, all that educated me, first esthetically and morally, and only then religiously.

So why, one might ask, did I leave the church?

Because throughout all the years, during all my travels to Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Gaza, Haiti, Lebanon, and Bolivia, other influences, other images and stories have come into the mix. And nearly without even knowing it, I have ultimately lost the sense of exclusivity, the idea of “inside” and “outside”. Through my travels, my familiarity with other stories, associations, and connections has grown, and with it the boundaries have been blurred between that which is mine and that which is other – not because I no longer knew where I came from, and not because I had lost my old associations, but

Author
Navid Kermani



Photos: Andreas Schaefer

because the assertion of my own difference, my own particularity, as true it may have been in terms of my history and biography, suddenly seemed to me to be porous and unreal.

Something was no longer right, when people asked me about my religion somewhere out in the world. They connected that with a particular set of practices and convictions – and that was no longer right.

Whether that still keeps me in the community, I do not know. How much inclusion is necessary not to feel antagonistic and how much exclusion is needed not to be arbitrary, I cannot decide.

But it would be my first suggestion to discuss just that. 1489.

I now have 538 words to go to think about, in the second section, what I value in Luther. When remembering the Reformation, I find it indispensable to speak of both the ability to doubt and the obligation to provide reasons.

2. Doubting and justifying

Others admire Luther’s courage, steadfastness, willingness to stand up for what he believed, and others praise the certainty with which he defied all threats. I am more impressed by what came before all this: his willingness to doubt all previous practices and convictions. I am less moved by him nailing his Theses, his public gestures, or his sure argumentation skills, than I am by the things that made all that possible: his ability to question previous certainties and to submit church traditions and theological convictions to critical analysis.

If there is something of a theme to the Reformation for me, if something is to remain exemplary about Luther, then it is his gift to doubt, to scrutinize cultural and religious practices for their validity, not to be satisfied with things as they are but to ask how things should be, what is written – and if I may add this as well – what should have been written. If I can wish something of the Protestant Church and of you, if I can wish something it would be that this self-critical doubt of one's own tradition would return, and that you would ask yourselves what theological dogmas and what cultural practices it would be good to free ourselves from today as well.

If one other thing touches me about the story of Luther, if I am enthusiastic about one thing (despite his misogyny, his hatred of Jews, and anger toward the Turks...), it would be his relentless demand for reasons. From the beginning of the dispute over indulgences, in his November 1517 letter to Johannes Lang, Luther makes his interest clear in discussing his theses; on October 12, 1518, the first day of his hearing with the Roman legate Cajetan, as he was supposed to recant his errors, Luther did not only demand that they name his mistakes but also that they be refuted (Reinhard Schwarz, *Luther*, p. 73). In his June 1519 dispute with Eck and in the question of the pope's primatial authority, Luther sought to found his own position in proof and evidence, and did not accept his excommunication as a heretic or divider of churches, as he simply demanded that his critics justify their claims.

A famous book by the American philosopher Thomas Scanlon is entitled, *What we owe to each other*. What we owe to each other morally – no matter whether we are believers or non-believers, members of the same denomination or not – is that we provide reasons that others

“ The 2017 celebrations will hopefully include a good deal of spectacle. What Herr Luther brought to the world needs to be celebrated. There needs to be a celebration in Wittenberg! ”

Jürgen Flimm

“ I would wish that over the coming years through the Luther Year there will not be years in which Luther is historicized and shut into a museum, or used for television evenings and perhaps refilmings of his life story, but that this will instead serve to spur on theological and intellectual debate. ”

Frank-Walter Steinmeier

can at least follow; what we owe to each other, as others might phrase it, is that we can provide justification for our own actions; what we owe each other, as I would phrase it, is that we tell others a story that they can understand.

A history of the Reformation would thus be one that is able to provide reasons for why it is not complete, why doubt must be a virtue of believers, why things are not convincing if we cannot explain them to others, and why we should stop thinking in categories of what is “internal” and “external”, as the inside and outside are often in flux. 2008 words – that went fast. All that is left to say is: Thank you very much. 2017. ◀

Dr. Carolin Emcke is a publicist and an international correspondent for DIE ZEIT (in places such as Israel, the West Bank, Pakistan, Egypt, Iraq, and the United States).
www.carolin-emcke.de

Source: “2017 Words – Outside Views on the Reformation Jubilee, a forum”, September 2, 2012 at Berlin's St. Elisabeth Church



Political scientist
and philosopher
Rainer Forst

The 2017 Reformation Jubilee

Plans and statements from the regional churches



“We wish to be good hosts”

The Evangelical Church in Central Germany is approaching the 2017 Reformation commemoration in the midst of a most peculiar situation. Just as the church celebrates the most important names and sites of the Reformation, Central Germany remains one of the areas of Europe with the lowest rates of church affiliation.

The Evangelical Church in Central Germany is approaching the 2017 Reformation commemoration in the midst of a singular situation. On the one hand, the church is connected with important places for the Reformation such as Eisenach, Erfurt, Mansfeld, Eisleben, Wittenberg, and Torgau, but also Jena (Lutheran university after Wittenberg), Magdeburg (historically known as “Our Lord God’s Chancery”), and Halle (Francke Foundations). Important Reformation figures are also connected to Central Germany including musicians such as Bach, Handel, Rickart, Telemann, and Walther, as well as theologians who were central to the international spread of the Reformation such as Agricola (Finland), Bugenhagen (Denmark), and Mühlberg (USA). The ECCG is therefore a destination for many, from both within Germany and around the world, who are in search of their confessional roots. On the other hand, Central Germany is one of the most “de-churched” parts of Europe, although there is an increasing interest in the church and church activities such as schools and pre-schools, church building and diaconal associations, worship services in public areas, and church music,

without however anything being necessarily tied to church membership.

For the Protestant church, celebrating 500 years of the Reformation in Central Germany in this peculiar situation especially means:

1. We wish to be good hosts. This means welcoming numerous visitors from Germany and around the world, but also all the people who live in towns and villages near the churches. The “Lutherfinder” project, a church guide for children and youth, is part of that.
2. We wish to discover and present our regional history. This includes the diverse history of the Reformation with its inspiring aspects but also its darker sides.
3. We wish to connect with the issues facing people today, bringing the ideas of the Reformation to the discourse of our whole society and thus join others in discovering the relevance of Reformation thought. The *Luther Denkwege* project has become known for this in the ECCG and beyond.

4. We wish to ask how much we are the Protestant church ourselves, which approaches to the Reformation continue to thrive among us, what has been cast aside, and what needs to be discovered anew. The question of the priesthood of all baptized, as well as the ability of the faithful to express themselves, play a central role in this.

5. We wish to join with our sisters and brothers in the Roman Catholic Church and the Council of Christian Churches in Germany in looking into what it means to be a Christian today, to dismantle our mutual prejudice, and to recognize and acknowledge each other’s histories since the 16th century, something that no longer divides us today.

The ECCG has taken on a new working structure to this end: The church council, the convention of “ephors”, the bishop’s convention, and the synod have all been looking regularly into these questions. There is a network of important Reformation sites, but also cooperation among those in charge of the Reformation Decade in all church circles.

Lutherfinder – training to be a Luther Decade host

Evangelische Erwachsenenbildung Thüringen (EEBT) is offering its *Lutherfinder* training program in cooperation with Erfurt's Augustinian Monetary, to train participants in topical seminars and excursions so that they can play an active role during the 2017 Luther Decade as, for example, tour guides in towns with a Luther tradition. Forty participants are currently enrolled, while more are welcome anytime,

with the events occurring periodically. The seminars cover Martin Luther and his times from theological and cultural-historical perspectives as well as the pedagogical and methodical instruction of participants. Excursions round out the program for the Luther towns of Erfurt, Eisenach, Weimar/Jena, Schmalkalden, Wittenberg, and Torgau. There are also plans for training workshops and excursions for young people 15 years and over, beginning in 2012.

For further information, please contact:

Anja Ruffert (training coordinator),
Evangelische Erwachsenenbildung
Thüringen (EEBT),
Allerheiligenstraße 15 a
99084 Erfurt, Germany
Tel. +49-361 2224847-13-0,
+49-176 24917659
a.ruffert@eebt.de, www.eebt.de

There is a small leadership team to coordinate the variety of activities, to represent the ECCG in the relevant bodies, and to work on the cooperation with the federal and state governments as well as with the EKD, LWF, CPCE, and ecumenical partners.

With a letter on March 21, 2012 to the presidents of the German Protestant *Kirchentag*, Bishop Dr. Dröge and Bishop Junkermann extended a formal and official invitation for all to attend the 2017 *Kirchentag* (a major gathering of Protestants from across Germany and be-

yond) event to Berlin, Wittenberg, and Central Germany. The particular format of a *Kirchentag* taking place across a region – in addition to and at the same time as the traditional *Kirchentag* event in Berlin – was described in the letter as follows: “A *Kirchentag* as usual’ in Berlin with a joint closing event in Wittenberg (and possibly a ‘thematic center’ in Wittenberg) and with a joint closing church service in Wittenberg both for participants in Berlin and throughout the region. This could include events all throughout the Central German region, particularly in the towns of the Reformation (such as Magde-

burg, Eisleben, Torgau, etc.; but also Eisenach can be included, in our opinion). The congregations and towns there would be able to host those who do not wish to go to Berlin but who instead would like to come into conversation about faith today with Christians and non-Christians in a smaller arena and in a region marked by forced secularity,¹ about the appropriation of the Reformation today, and the connected discoveries and achievements, flaws and mistakes.

28 August 1963

MARTIN LUTHER KING: I HAVE A DREAM

Martin Luther King proclaimed his dream of equality and freedom before a crowd of 250,000. King was at first an active church minister like his father and grandfather before him. He set aside his ministry in 1960, however, to dedicate all of his time to the civil rights movement, travelling through the country and speaking out against racial segregation and for non-violent protest. Martin Luther King received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, four years before his assassination.

We will begin the year with the preparations of this Reformation commemoration, which is intentionally anchored in the local region, in which all Christians and as many other people as possible can join in a conversation about the (research of the regional) history, and about the issues of life and faith that touch them today. Discussing these topics, presenting the many treasures at hand, and sharing with participants

from the other churches of Germany and from around the world should develop into a long-term Reformation commemoration for our congregations. We hope that this will lead to invigorating impulses for our church life in our particular situation as well as impulses for how we will meet the responsibilities of our new constitution, for example, in regard to the conciliar ecumenical process for justice, peace, and

the integrity of creation as well as the Jewish-Christian dialogue and other interreligious discourse. In our preparations we can build on the experience of earlier regional *Kirchentag* events (during the GDR era) as well as our own biennial campaigns.” ◀

1 Which is also the title of the latest study on the sociology of religion by the Leipzig-based researcher Monika Wohlrab-Sahr.

Luther *DenkWege*

The *DenkWege zu Luther* (“thinking trails to Luther”) project is a national German project for the education of young people in the run-up to the 2017 Reformation Jubilee in areas of philosophical, cultural, and religious interest. The program is run by the Protestant Academies in Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt. The seminars focus on reformers and humanists alongside philosophers, writers, and artists from the Renaissance through today as discussion partners for the questions young people now have about life. There, we philosophize together about freedom and conscience, God and faith, politics and morals, happiness and trust, truth and tolerance.

With a view to the Luther Year topics of the “Reformation and tolerance” in 2013 and the “Reformation and politics” in 2014, particularly controversial ideas and effects of the Reformation are in focus. There are also particular plans over the next two years for an international youth seminar in Kreisau/Krzyzowa, Poland on politics and religion as well as for “seminars on the go”. The latter is geared toward young people and adults who would like to travel the historical paths of the Reformation contemplatively and philosophically. The *DenkWege* offers one-week seminars for schools, vocational schools, and extracurricular youth groups, with a focus on cultural, philosophical and religious education. Important places in Reformation history and centers of humanist activity are covered in the project.

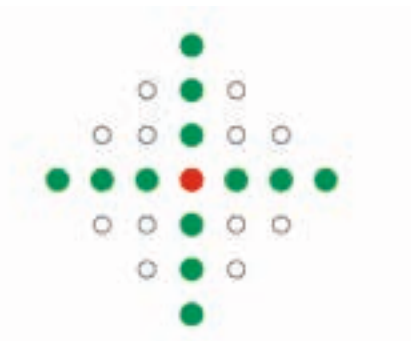
This is also tied to publications for youth education on topics such as “Reformation and freedom” and “Reformation and tolerance”, which can be downloaded from the project website throughout the country. A team of qualified youth trainers is developing and accompanying the seminars.

DenkWege zu Luther is cooperating with the Working Group on Education and Schooling of the Steering Committee for the Preparation of the 2017 Reformation Jubilee. The project is receiving support from the Representative of the Federal Government for Culture and Media, following the relevant decisions of the Bundestag and the states of Saxony-Anhalt and Thüringen. The project is also receiving support from the Evangelical Church in Central Germany and the Evangelical Church in Germany.

www.denkwege-zu-luther.de
 Evangelische Akademie
 Sachsen-Anhalt e.V.
 Carsten Passin, philosophical practitioner
 Project manager *DenkWege zu Luther*
 Schlossplatz 1d
 06886 Lutherstadt Wittenberg, Germany
 +49 34921 60323, +49 3491 4988-11
passin@ev-akademie-wittenberg.de
www.junge-akademie-wittenberg.de



Evangelische Akademie Thüringen
 Dorothea Höck, Pastor
 Philosophical practitioner
 Director of studies / project office
DenkWege zu Luther
 Zinzendorfplatz
 99192 Neudietendorf, Germany
 +49 36202 984-0
hoeck@ev-akademie-thueringen.de
www.ev-akademie-thueringen.de



Evangelical Lutheran
Church of Saxony

Luther 2017 – 500 years of the Reformation

Plans and Perspectives

Report of the church office at the autumn 2009 Synod Meeting

Each year, the church office reports on its work at the autumn meeting of the Synod. As was the case in the previous year, this occurs in the form of a working report or thematic report, as in the present report on plans and perspectives for “Luther 2007 – 500 years of the Reformation”. Bishop Pohl opened the Luther Decade for Saxony in Zwickau on October 31, 2008. There have subsequently been regular reports to the church office on the development of the program. This report describes the current state of affairs and is meant to encourage further initiatives and preparations, both within our church

and in cooperation with municipalities, educational institutions, and the state of Saxony. This all focuses on which spiritual impulses, central theological points, special topics and tasks our church should pursue during the Luther Decade in preparation for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee.

The motto “Luther 2017 – 500 years of the Reformation” makes it clear that not only an historical commemoration is needed, as it is also about the effects of the Reformation and its impulses affecting how we shape our present and future. The Reformation Jubilee needs to be prepared and celebrated in a manner that is ecumenical and open to the future and to the world.

With both the broad and the personal in view

The Reformation is an event of importance to world history. It brought about epochal change, affecting Europe and the entire world. The Reformation changed the church and theology from their foundations. From the beginning, and ever since, it has had an impact on private and public life, social structures and economic behavior, and everyday culture, but also on music, visual arts and architecture, education and schooling, and forms of individual and communal social responsibility and the social system.

10 June 1969

FEDERATION OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHES IN THE GDR

In the aftermath of the division of Germany and the building of the wall in 1961, the EKD could no longer remain a unified body, leading to the founding of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR in 1969. The Federation nevertheless supported the “particular community among the entirety of Protestant Christendom in Germany.”



On 1 November 2009, church dignitaries symbolically planted the first 25 trees of Wittenberg's new Luther Garden. From right to left: The former President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity Walter Cardinal Kasper (Vatican), Bishop of Bavaria and Presiding Bishop of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany Johannes Friedrich, and the Methodist Bishop Walter Klaiber.

At its core, the Reformation is a renewal of the Christian faith, moving the Gospel of Jesus Christ – and with it our relationship to God, to ourselves, and to our fellow human beings and the world – back into the center of things and in a new way. The Reformation thus took on a scope of influence beyond the realm of the church into society at large, including the educational system, influence that continues today and beyond. The results of this influence also includes the emergence of our church in the region and the development of a cohesive territorial state of Saxony.

The Reformation also brought forth forms and developments of faith and spiritual life that touch people deeply, that have been formational in being a Christian in the community of our church and which have proven useful in the face of the necessities and challenges of our time.

At this crossroads of relevance to society at large and power to shape people's personal lives of faith, this thematic report is focused on three areas of focus:

1. Ideas, with a view to the future, of the Reformation and Lutheran theology for the lives of Christians and the congregations of our church;
2. Perspectives for global and local ecumenism;
3. Perspectives for common activities for the church and society at large in Germany and Saxony.

1. Ideas for the lives of Christians and the congregations of our church

The Reformation brought about the rediscovery of an original understanding of faith. Insights into faith, experienced as liberation, led to a new understanding of life and the world. This was not, however, a matter of the creation of new inventions. Instead, the reformers derived their insights from the original meaning of Holy Scripture and from a continuity with the church, which was in need of reform. While traditions and customs were dismissed that occluded the center of the faith, both old and new forms of Christian life were accentuated that led directly to the clarity and light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Luther Decade entails an opportunity and a need to look more closely into the particular way of being a Christian and to derive from these ideas how to be a Christian in our time, and how to approach current and future tasks in shaping the lives of individuals and the community. We will first focus on what characterizes being a Christian in the sense of the Lutheran Reformation. This will give way to suggestions for people's personal lives and recommendations for the congregations of our church with regard to the plans and designs for church life in the years to come. The scope of this report will limit this to only certain examples.¹

1.1 The precedence of the Bible as a normative foundation

Being a Protestant Christian centers on the biblical tradition. Holy Scripture as the word of God is the normative source, one which gives

life to faith and upon which the church is founded. The Reformation can thus also be described as a Bible movement.

1.2 The precedence and clarity of confession to Christ

Luther and the reformers moved the proclamation of and confession to Christ to the center of things. The core of this involves the view of the cross of Christ as a sign of his unconditional, selfless giving of his life for the salvation of human beings. Accepting this is the challenge and gift of faith.

1.3 The precedence of the gift of salvation before one's own works and ethical challenges – God's acts precede us

Since human action, with its successes and failures, is ever ambivalent and ambiguous, God displays his overarching mercy in accepting human beings as they are, or even better: although they are as they are. Our last futile attempt to justify ourselves is preceded by God through the mission and acts of Jesus Christ, which liberates us to be free human beings. It is up to us not to close ourselves off from Christ and to remain in fellowship with him. We can then be free from worry for ourselves and our own salvation and thus free to care for our fellow human beings and for our lives together in the world. Once at peace with God, we can contribute to peace among others. As God preempts our own concerns, Martin Luther was able to write his famous doublet in "On the Freedom of a Christian" (1520): "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."

1.4 The primacy of baptism and the Lord's Supper as an effective gift of God

It is fundamental to the Lutheran understanding of Christian baptism that, as a human act in accordance with Christ's commandment, it is an effective act. In baptism, God affirms his promise and commitment to the baptized – before any opportunities, demands, or demonstration of efforts or works. In the Lord's Supper, Christ delivers himself over as a gift. It is the personal appropriation of his giving of himself, sealing a new community in the face of all that separates human beings from the purpose they are given, from their fellows, and from God.

1.5 The reformers' clarificational and orientational distinctions

The distinction between Law and Gospel is essential to Lutheran theology and to being a Christian. This distinction brings to the fore that, for the sake of God and one's fellow human beings, nobody can escape from God's will and the protection of life – while God ultimately promises his mercy and care.

The Lutheran "doctrine of the two kingdoms" helps us to renew, time and again, our distinction and delineation between the spiritual and the secular. It allows suitable space for reason and objective arguments, and shows when faith is genuinely needed and when it is reason that is required, thus preventing clericalization and overreach. This puts the Christian faith where it should be, a place in which it is irreplaceable and needs to be asserted as a matter of course.

1.6 The priesthood of all believers and the ministry of proclamation

In view of the freedom of the individual and the immediacy of each human being to God, with no need for priestly mediation, Luther and the reformers, following the biblical witness of the Old and New Testaments, shifted their focus to the priesthood of all believers, anchored in the baptism shared by all. At the same time, the ministry of proclamation is understood as a commandment and mission of Jesus Christ, in which individuals within the church are given this task so that the word is proclaimed "in the name of all" and the sacraments administered, and so that all Christians are equipped and strengthened for witness and service.

1.7 The Lutheran understanding of the church and the bonds among the individual congregations

The Lutheran understanding of the church is based on the community of faith, which is called forth through the word of God. Luther did not wish for a new church. He wanted that the church become new. This occurred in that what were at first individually emerging Protestant congregations joined together to subordinate themselves to God's commission and concern so that an inner cohesion and solidarity could come about. This orientation of congregations toward community is characteristic of the Lutheran understanding of the church.

This overview provides examples for what is decisive to being Christians and the church from the standpoint of the Lutheran Reformation. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear, however, that many of these insights of faith and forms of spiritual life are common to all Chris-

tians. They are part of the common ground shared by all churches of the Reformation, including Reformed and United churches. On the other hand, we can also recognize what is "typically Lutheran" and what is particular in its accents and emphases to the life of our own church.

- ▶ We can name, as an example, the *theology of the cross*, that is characteristic of Luther's theology and piety, which runs counter to any ideas of spiritual success, preempts any idea of an elite congregation of "better people", and provides resilient foundations in the face of both success or failure;
- ▶ as well as the *allocation of the priesthood of all Christians and the ministry of proclamation*, alongside other ministries within the congregation.

These central points of theology give way to practical tasks to be carried out within the congregation. It would thus be good to adopt those ideas derived from the Reformation into the work of the congregation, sermons and lessons, educational events, church groups, and youth work – and not to do so haphazardly but with an awareness of what it entails.

Martin Luther's Small Catechism, as a summary of the key points of the faith, and the Large Catechism, as a guide for preaching and congregational leadership, form a treasure trove of magnificent discoveries. Over the past several weeks, the EKD has been distributing a special publication for Reformation Day 2009 with a focus on work with children and youth to mark the occasion.²

The recommendations for the implementation of the EKD Impulse Paper "Church of Freedom" and the EKD's annual topics during the Luther Decade can provide a helpful basis for a look into these topics (see Appendix II).

16 March 1973 LEUENBERG AGREEMENT

Nearly all of Europe's Protestant churches signed the Leuenberg Agreement, subscribing together to the view that a common understanding of the Gospel is possible in the face of the critical questions involving their understandings of the Eucharist, Christology, and predestination.

Intensive theological work in cooperation with historians and other researchers will serve to prevent there from being any heroization or ideological appropriation of Luther – as has been the case during previous Luther jubilees. We need to also turn our attention, without prejudice, to the difficult and painful aspects of Reformation history and Martin Luther's life. A differentiated point of view is necessary as a means of uprooting clichés and supporting an objective assessment of matters such as the relationship between Luther and Müntzer, Luther's commentary on the Peasants' War, as well as his earlier positive remarks about Jews and subsequent aggressive comments on Jews during his later years. It is important that discriminating views are adopted in our congregations and in public discourse, in the media and at informative events.

2. Ecumenical perspectives, local and global

2.1 We have been able to enjoy reliable and growing ecumenical relations in connection with the Luther Decade, both locally and worldwide. We are all connected within the *Lutheran family of churches* via the Lutheran World Federation, a communion of churches representing 68 million Lutheran Christians worldwide, and linked to it through the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation (GNC/LWF). In the run-up to the Reformation Jubilee, the 2010 Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Stuttgart and the Pre-Assembly Youth Conference in Dresden will also delve into the topic of the Reformation commemoration. An organizational center for Germany and for international Lutheran partners has now also been set up in Wittenberg (Wittenberg Center of the Lutheran World Federation; kasch@dnk-lwb.de). Upon the suggestion of the Lutheran World Federation, a Luther Garden with 500 trees will also be planted in Wittenberg with the generous support of the city. Churches from around the world are invited to take on sponsorship of a tree. The Church in Saxony also announced its sponsorship of a tree on November 1.

We will be in conversation with our partner churches in Tanzania, India (and Myanmar), and Papua New Guinea, via the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society in Leipzig, on what Reformation impulses are of particular importance to them. The theological and congregational work of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) will also be informed by the Luther Decade.

2.2 Local cooperative ecumenical work plays a role in the overall theological dialogue and church contacts. The Luther Decade thus provides our church with the opportunity to expand on its existing links and contacts. This has involved, most prominently, the *Moravian Church (Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine)*, especially as the path to the Reformation taken in Upper Lusatia, which has only been part of Saxony since 1635, will play a particular role in the Reformation commemoration. In their conversations with the church office, Moravian representatives, who described themselves as the “other children of the Reformation”, signaled their interest in joining us in cooperation.

2.3 John Wesley, the founder of the global Methodist Church, had a personal conversion experience in 1738 while reading Luther's preface to the Letter to the Romans. The Reformation Jubilee can help to intensify the commemoration of our common roots in the Reformation and to expand our pulpit and altar fellowship.

2.4 In our relations with *Baptist churches and congregations*, the injustice will also have to be addressed in the course of the Reformation Jubilee that Anabaptists and their movements had to face. Back in 1996, following a preparatory service of repentance, the VELKD signed a declaration of altar fellowship with the German Mennonite Churches (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden in Deutschland – AMG*). A similar agreement is currently being discussed by the Mennonite World Conference and the Lutheran World Federation.

It is to be hoped that future discussions with Baptists will bring about a new assessment of distinctive differences with a view to the churches' Reformation origins. As has recently been the case in discussions among Baptists and Lutherans in Bavaria, we would like for Lutherans and Baptists to “recognize both understandings of baptism as different but legitimate interpretations of the one Gospel”.³ It is our wish that this would end the practice of rebaptizing those who have already been baptized in a Lutheran church. And it is to be hoped that discussions of the Lord's Supper, and the understanding of church and ministry can lead to agreements in the face of current differences.

2.5 It will be our task to approach our ecumenical partners within the framework of the Luther Decade. This also includes contacts with the *Roman Catholic Church*.

It is remarkable how intensely Catholic theologians and bilateral working groups have already

begun to look ahead to the 2017 Reformation Jubilee. In doing so, they have been building on the joint theological efforts made from 1981 to 1985, which culminated in the document *Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend?*, specifying the points in which the mutual denunciations of the 16th century are no longer valid. The Saxon Church Synod announced its approval of this in its 1995 common statement of the Arnoldshain Conference and the VELKD and GNC/LWF. The tenth anniversary of the Official Common Statement (OCS) of the Joint Declaration (JD) was marked a few days ago in Augsburg.

Editions of important Reformation-era writings, such as Luther's 95 Theses and Pope Leo X's papal bull against the errors of Luther and his followers, with commentaries by Protestant and Catholic theologians, are in planning for the next several years. We need to redouble our efforts to transmit the results of ecumenical research and agreements to the congregations and to focus on the changes that have occurred both among Catholics and Protestants since the Reformation era. It has thus emerged with clarity in which points today's Catholicism differs from the Roman Church of the Reformation era, thus excluding any inappropriate polemics. The significance of the indulgence and its reinterpretation in Roman Catholic theology and piety, as well as its importance with regard to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification will continue to be a crucial topic to be addressed in common efforts.

The Luther Decade and the Reformation Jubilee should constitute an opportunity for continued work on overcoming current differences, for example, with regard to table fellowship, easing conditions for interdenominational marriages, and special ecumenical Sunday services. The Reformation Jubilee and the Luther Decade will also provide an opportunity for Protestant and Catholic Christians to turn to their common roots, especially with a view to the medieval forms of piety that can be recognized in the churches of Saxony as well. Common Bible study, common prayer, mutual visits, and the joy of ecumenical community can help to reduce any existing prejudice and to continue along a path of discovery together.

2.6 In our relationship with the *Orthodox churches*, it will be a worthwhile task to pick up on and develop unfulfilled impetus from initial contacts dating back to the Reformation era between Wittenberg and the Orthodox churches (especially with Moscow). One should

The members of the Luther 2017 board following their meeting at Wartburg Castle on June 6, 2011 (from left to right): Mayor Matthias Doht of Eisenach, department head for the German Federal Government's office for culture and media, Premier Reiner Haseloff (CDU) of Saxony-Anhalt, Premier Christine Lieberknecht of Thuringia, EKD Council Chairman Nikolaus Schneider, Wartburg Castellan Günter Schuchardt, and Member of the Bundestag Christian Hirte (CDU).



note, however, that the image of humanity in Reformation theology and the Reformation understanding of God will also be a matter of interreligious dialogue. There are now also Muslim theologians who have done their studies in Germany and who have shown interest in Martin Luther's theology.

3. Perspectives for activities for the church and society at large in Germany and Saxony

There are numerous Reformation commemoration sites and sites dedicated to the work of Martin Luther and other reformers within the territory of today's state of Saxony, which formed the focal point of the Reformation together with the states of Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt.

Saxony is tied to events and understandings that were decisive for the Reformation and which continue to have an effect today: The 1519 Leipzig Debate brought to a clear light the differences to the papacy and the old Catholic Church.⁴

The 1523 Leisnig Public Chest Ordinance for municipal support for the poor served to develop important foundations of Protestant social ethics.

The high view of the conscience, with Luther's admonition to follow one's own conscience and not to act in opposition to it, were recorded impressively in letters on the events in Frauenstein and Neuhausen, Saxony.

In a 1542 letter on the subject of the Wurzener Feud, Martin Luther set down a few fundamentals for Protestant ethics of peace. Reforma-

tion ideas emerged from Saxony that would resonate throughout the world. This would become quite visible, for example, in the region of Lusatia.

With its particular history, Lusatia was formed by both Reformation and Counterreformation movements with special church structures and organizations in both Protestant and Catholic congregations through the 20th century. Protestant and Catholic congregations existed there side by side, and grew more cooperative, drawing nearer to one another in the course of the ecumenical process.

As the home of both Protestant and Catholic Sorbs, Lusatia, in addition to the largest cities of Saxony and the mining areas of the Ore Mountains, was a primary area of immigration for Protestant refugees of faith ("exulants") from

1982

LIMA DOCUMENT

The study on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry was prepared by a commission for faith and church order, examining the commonalities and differences among the churches of the Reformation. Despite remaining differences, the Lima Liturgy allowed Protestants, Anglicans, and Orthodox to celebrate the Eucharist together.

Bohemia and Moravia. Links to Silesia (in today's Poland) and Bohemia (now in the Czech Republic) played a major role there. A large number of German emigrants, whose descendants now live in America, remain strongly aware of their origins in this region, and continue to cultivate this awareness today.

Since the Reformation era, the arts, and music, visual arts, and architecture in particular, enjoyed a remarkable upswing with a broad impact, featuring outstanding works of local, national, European, and international importance. The Reformation continues to have a strong influence on the culture of Saxony, including the way the people live, feel, and go about their everyday lives. There is a sense in Saxony and throughout Germany that church and secular (state and communal) activities should be planned together. It is therefore an express joint concern of the church and the State of Saxony to cooperate on presenting a representative Reformation commemoration to be prepared beforehand within the framework of the Luther Decade.

These aims are connected to activities that have been initiated by Germany's parliament, the **Bundestag**, which has been carrying out the task since June 2008 of marking the 2017 Reformation Jubilee as an event in world history and drawing attention to the particular importance of the 500th anniversary of Luther's Theses for Germany from the perspective of religion, cultural history, and indeed tourism (most recently recorded in *Drucksache* 16/13504 of 14 May 2009).

The **Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)** and **Germany's Federal Government** have formed joint bodies to prepare and plan the Luther Decade and the Reformation Jubilee, including prominent representatives of other denominations. Both a Luther 2017 office (www.luther2017.de) and an EKD office have now been opened in Wittenberg. The EKD Council Chairman is also the Chairman of the governing board for Luther 2017 – 500 Years of the Reformation, with Germany's Interior Minister serving as the Deputy Chairman. The Academic Advisory Board has also developed theses for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee, with a plan put in place for Luther Decade thematic years. This forms the basis for our plans in Saxony (see Appendix I).

The **German states of Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia, and Saxony** have begun carrying out plans drawn up by representatives of the state governments and the Protestant churches of the

region. Working groups on specific topics have been formed across the states, with other states beginning to join the groups as well.

The state of **Thuringia** features sites of Luther's early years, connected with his **emergence**, including his schooling, studies in Erfurt, and his time at Wartburg Castle. **Saxony-Anhalt** prominently features Eisleben, Luther's place of birth and death, and of course Wittenberg as the main place that Luther was active as a reformer. Within **Saxony**, there is a concentration of places with a particular significance for the *results, consolidation, and continued effects* of the Reformation. This includes, for example – even after the conversion of Elector Frederick Augustus I – Dresden as the most important Lutheran seat of government and residence in Germany, and Dresden's Frauenkirche (“Church of Our Lady”) as an outstanding Protestant church building, linked with other characteristic Protestant church buildings in Saxony such as in Schmiedeberg, Forchheim, Carlsfeld, Klingenthal, and Grossenhain.

3.1 Task-specific joint working groups in Saxony for the Luther Decade

The Saxon State Ministry for Science and Art – with the participation of other state ministries – and in cooperation with the Saxon Church Office, have formed the following task-specific working groups:

3.1.1 A *working group* was formed to address the *participation of cities and municipalities*, focusing in particular on the challenges of international and national *tourism*. Informational material is to be produced for tourists from Europe and other continents in cooperation with the municipalities and tourism associations, featuring a **map** of the Saxon sites that played an important role as the Reformation emerged, took hold, and continued to have an impact. From a touristic perspective, particular expectations are made with regard to Saxony as a “cultural destination.” In cooperation with museums, libraries, and archives, Luther Decade events are to be linked in accordance with their global, European, national, and regional appeal, and offered as part of the growing concept of “*spiritual tourism*” (**calendar**, see www.luther2017.de).

A Luther hiking trail is now also being prepared, with a western leg leading from Wittenberg via Bad Dübren, Eilenburg, Leipzig, Borna, and Altenburg to Zwickau, and an eastern leg from Zwickau via Glauchau, Penig, Rochlitz,

Leisnig, Grimma, Wurzen, and Torgau back to Wittenberg. This Luther trail will connect with existing Luther trails in Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia. There are also plans to link this with the “*Spiritual tourism in Saxony*” Project (Technical University, Dresden).

3.1.2 The *working group for exhibitions* is to coordinate (topics, dates) exhibitions with a local, regional, and international appeal. There are plans for a traveling exhibition on the Reformation, which can be supplemented at each presentation venue.

3.1.3 The *working group for schooling and education* (Saxon team in the interstate Working Group for Schooling and Education – Luther 2007) is drawing up initial plans in cooperation with the Saxon State Ministry for Education and Cultural Affairs and the Saxon Church Office. The group is focusing on plans for 2016/17, the Melanchthon anniversary year (2010 Reformation and Education), a school network involving in particular the old state schools in Meissen, Grimma, and Schulpforta, as well as a network of different educational providers in Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia.

3.1.4 *The working group for music* is currently in development.

3.2 Regional working groups

It is to be expected that the current regional working groups in Torgau and Borna (Leipzig and Zwickau in planning) will be joined by other groups, as in Dresden, in Saxony's former mining area with its particular Reformation history, in the Vogtland region, and in Lusatia. Regional working groups, with the participation of municipalities, the Saxon Church, and connected churches, are needed by municipalities and churches for cooperative planning and activities among municipalities and churches, regional museums, and collections of national and international significance, libraries and archives, schools, research institutions, universities, adult education facilities, and artists. This is to occur in close cooperation with other partners as well such as Tourismus Marketing Gesellschaft Sachsen, those in charge of the particular cultural areas, tourism associations, and other interregional and local associations (e.g. museum and municipal organizations).

The cooperative planning will focus on areas that either emerge from the particular characteristics of the regions or which reflect the general content of the initiatives. It will make sense for church congregations to approach

their municipal and ecumenical partners to further this process. This all depends on our efforts and imagination for our church and congregations to be good hosts. We need to make use of the possibilities to present the Reformation and its impulses for individual lives, and for life in church and society, as open to the future and the world.

APPENDIX I

The thematic years of the Luther Decade through 2017: Points of particular interest for Saxony⁵

Thematic years will provide the Luther Decade with a structure and identity throughout Germany and in connection with European and international partners, providing the opportunity to take into account spiritual, ecumenical, and global dimensions of the Luther Decade along with expectations in terms of cultural history and tourism. The topics for each year should encourage church, state, and other agents to approach the same topics from different perspectives, thus allowing for a broad discourse. The topics should also encourage planning together among ecumenical partners, municipal and state institutions, and a wide variety of cultural and educational providers.

2010 Reformation and Education, Melanchthon Year

The 450th anniversary of Philipp Melanchthon's death (19 April 1560) has drawn attention to "Germany's teacher" (*praeceptor Germaniae*). Saxony's school system, in the School Ordinance of 1528 in particular, has Melanchthon to thank for important impulses. Anchored in humanistic educational ideals, he placed great

importance on the high quality of primary education as well as higher schooling through the university, in connection with basic religious knowledge as well. Melanchthon had a high standing as a political and theological advisor. Due to his deep knowledge of the people of his time, Melanchthon was asked for his suggestions concerning the appointment of important officeholders by both town magistrates and the court of the Electoral Prince.

This thematic year will focus both on the issue of educational participation and justice as well as the connection between faith and education. The June 2010 "Leipzig Debate" will focus on the "Reformation and Education", in cooperation with Leipzig's St. Thomas Parish (Lutheran), the University of Leipzig, its Theological Faculty, and the City of Leipzig. The Theological Faculty of the University of Leipzig will play a large role in the conference on the Wittenberg Reformation in March 2010 at the Leucorea Wittenberg, entitled "Philipp Melanchthon – a European reformer".

The Lutheran World Federation will hold its 11th Assembly in Stuttgart from 20 to 27 July, with a Pre-Assembly Youth Conference in Dresden from 11 to 17 July. The 250th anniversary of the death of Nikolaus Graf Zinzendorf will be marked in Herrnhut. Torgau is planning a festive event to mark the 480th anniversary of the March 1530 Torgau Articles, a precursor to the Augsburg Confession.

2011 Reformation and Freedom

Christians as mature and responsible people is a major topic of the Reformation. This is reflected in the priesthood of all believers, as founded in baptism. Baptism will therefore also be a focal point in 2011, building on impulses from the ecumenical declaration of mutual recognition of baptism signed in Magdeburg Cathedral in summer 2007. The Baptist move-

ments of the Reformation and the movement in Zwickau will also be in focus.

The German Protestant *Kirchentag* church event will take place in Dresden from June 1 through 5. The Via Regia exhibition in Görlitz will address the spread of the Reformation through publications along the historical route. The Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society in Leipzig will celebrate its founding 175 years ago as the first global Lutheran mission.

2012 Reformation and Music

The 800-year jubilee of Leipzig's Church of St. Thomas, with its renowned boys' choir and the heritage of Johann Sebastian Bach, includes major milestones in music history. The Reformation set in motion a broad and diverse musical culture, ranging from church hymns to internationally known classical masterpieces. The year will focus both on the increased importance of singing, the spread of the knowledge of Protestant hymns, and new congregational music, as well as tradition and innovation in choral music, and Germany's boys' choirs in particular (e.g. Kruzianer, Windsbacher Knabenchor, Regensburger Domspatzen, and the Dresdner Kappellknaben). Torgau will mark the 460th anniversary of the death of Katharina Luther and will also pay respect to the work of Reformation-era Lutheran composer Johann Walter. Another highlight will be the trombone choir festival in Zwickau and other events that center on the topic of the "Reformation and Music" in the region.

2013 Reformation and Tolerance

The 450th anniversary of the conclusion of the Council of Trent (1563) constitutes an important event in the history of Christianity, which encourages us to think about the maintenance of tradition and need for reforms. The 40th

1989

PEACEFUL REVOLUTION

On November 10, 1989, thousands stood atop the Berlin Wall and celebrated the opening of the border. Prayers of peace in many Protestant churches, and in Leipzig's Nikolaikirche (St. Nicholas Church) in particular, grew into peaceful demonstrations each Monday, with 70,000 people taking part on October 9, 1989.





A poster with members of the St. Thomas Boys Choir and the words “800 Years of the Thomana” can be seen adjacent to Leipzig’s Church of St. Thomas. The church is one of Leipzig’s two main churches and is known as a center for music, home of the renowned choir, and the final resting place of the church’s first cantor, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750).

anniversary of the Leuenberg Agreement will steer our focus toward mutual understanding among Protestants, after centuries of profound differences that emerged in the Reformation. That which is common to all Christians is to be emphasized within the diverse range of confessions, touching on the topics of identity and delimitation.

2014 Reformation and Politics

The Reformation, with its differentiation between church and state, is viewed as part of the process leading to the modern rights to religion and conscience. The topic of the right to resist, intensively discussed in the Reformation and ever since, also builds a bridge to the present. Authority and individual responsibility, faith and power, freedom of conscience and human rights are all topics inherent both to the Reformation era and to our own day, and which are deserving of being discussed widely in the church and society at large. 2014 will mark the 25th anniversary of the peaceful revolution in East Germany (1989). The year will also see the celebration of the 475th anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony. The introduction of the Reformation to the entire territory of Saxony is an occasion to consider hosting a Church Music Conference in Leipzig in 2014.

Torgau will mark the consecration of its Castle Chapel, Germany’s first Protestant church building, by Martin Luther on October 5, 1544.

2015 Reformation – Image and Bible

The 500th birthday of Lucas Cranach the Younger is an occasion to highlight the artist and the art of the Reformation era as a whole. The question of the risks and opportunities of

modern communications and media can also be discussed, especially as the Reformation is also often viewed as a media revolution (“no Reformation without the printing press”). Education through images – in an increasingly visual world – will also provide a central point of discussion.

Particular attention will also be paid in Saxony this year to the pictures of Lucas Cranach the Elder and Lucas Cranach the Younger, e.g. in Schneeberg, Ottendorf, Augustusburg, as well as the Reformation picture cycles and programs, e.g. in Markranstädt, but also the images on the ceilings and galleries of Saxony’s churches as a form of basic proclamation of faith. This year can become an occasion for church congregations to discover the witness to faith to be found in the centuries of images and visual artwork in their own churches as well, and to make the message available to those outside the church. The year will also mark the 300th birthday of the Hainichen-born poet Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, whose hymns feature prominently in our Protestant hymnal.

2016 Reformation and our One World (global connections – global challenges)

This year will pave the way for the international focus of the Reformation Jubilee, with one of the challenges being the task of making the global community of Reformation churches visible as represented by the Lutheran World Federation and the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Together with our partner churches, we will contemplate what the Reformation has meant and now means to them and to us. Leipzig will celebrate the 850th anniversary of its

St. Nicolai Church, and Torgau will mark the 490th anniversary of the founding of the first Protestant church choir by Johann Walter.

2017 Reformation Jubilee

The Jubilee year will be celebrated with major exhibitions, international congresses, major church occasions, meetings, festive occasions, and cultural and touristic events, featuring Luther and the global phenomenon of the Reformation as a whole.

APPENDIX II

Reformation ideas for the lives of Christians and the congregations of our church into the future

1 The precedence of the Bible as a normative foundation

Being a Protestant Christian is centered on the biblical tradition. Holy Scripture as the word of God is the normative source that gives life to faith and upon which the church is founded. The Reformation can thus also be described as a Bible movement.

The discussion of the appropriate interpretation of the Bible and knowledge of the convincing power of the word of God are signature features of Protestant Christianity. This demands, time and again, efforts toward a proper understanding the Bible and a translation of the biblical message into the language and experience of the reality of everyday life and the vernacular of the people.

Photos: above: epd-bild/Andreas Pöge; below: epd-bild/André Spolwint

Martin Luther's translation of the Bible is thus not only significant for the emergence of a standard German language but also for a way of being Christian that is oriented toward and inspired by the Bible.

► The challenge thus emerges for our church to engage with and discuss the Bible as a regular part of congregational activity for all age levels, including annual Bible weeks and seminars. Coming together to contemplate the Bible can also be helpful to pastors as they translate the biblical message in their sermons into a language that others can understand. In this connection, we can recall the words of Mark Twain about Scripture: "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand." The task is thus to help others to understand the main ideas of the Bible. The Luther Translation, with its vivid language and rhythms remains best suited to that end in German. Joining together to pray Psalm 23 in the language of the Luther Bible has indeed been a source of consolation and encouragement for many generations.

2 The precedence and clarity of confession to Christ

Luther and the reformers moved the proclamation of and confession to Christ into the center of things. The core of this involves the view of the cross of Christ as a sign of the unconditional, selfless giving of his life for the salvation of human beings. Accepting this is the challenge and gift of faith.

Since human endeavor, with its successes and failures, remains ever ambiguous and ambivalent, God reveals his all-encompassing mercy in

his acceptance of human beings. God precedes our last futile attempt at self-justification through Jesus Christ and his self-sacrifice on the cross, which frees us from our own paralyzing guilt and liberates us to enter into joyous, unencumbered, and unwavering service to others. Such a way of life is lived justification. This is also possible for those for whom the words "doctrine of justification" may seem strange and off-putting. This Christ-oriented piety relates to the cross of Jesus Christ, and encompasses the cross and suffering that we need to bear as well, strengthening our solidarity with the disadvantaged and suffering. Metaphorically speaking, the cross of Jesus Christ bears us with our own burdens, giving us strength to remain hopeful even in difficult life situations. It is not our own achievements and successes that are decisive in the end, but our fellowship with Christ as a reliable foundation in both happy and difficult times. This holds true in the face of both success and failure in our own lives and in the lives of our church and our congregations.

► The challenge remains of allowing this Christ-centered core of Christian faith to shine through in proclamation and teaching, in worship and praise, and through music, to make troubled hearts happy and whole again. The proclamation of Christ opens up, in this way, an eye for beauty and the necessity of protecting creation, and opens the door for the Holy Spirit to invigorate and fortify in many different ways.

3 The precedence of the gift of salvation before our own works and ethical challenges – God's acts precede us

Since human action, with its successes and failures, is ever ambivalent and ambiguous, God

displays his overarching mercy in accepting human beings as they are, or even better: although they are as they are. Our last futile attempt to justify ourselves is preceded by God through the mission and acts of Jesus Christ, which liberates us to be free human beings. It is up to us not to close ourselves off from Christ and to remain in fellowship with him. We can then be free from worry for ourselves and our own salvation and thus free to care for our fellow human beings and for our lives together in the world. Once at peace with God, we can contribute to peace among people. As God preempts our own concerns, Martin Luther was able to write his famous doublet in "On the Freedom of a Christian" (1520): "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."

Worship serves as an expression of this freedom, listening to the word of God and responding in song and prayer, confessing together our sin and celebrating the Lord's Supper as a reconciled community, before being sent forth into the world with God's blessings to carry out his commandments in peace.

Just as Luther described faith as "true worship", precedence must be given to us allowing God to act in us, to touch us, and to comfort, encourage, and move us. God's incomparable service to us provides us with orientation and strength for our own service to God and our fellow human beings in the daily rhythms of our continually changing world. This order of things in turn frees us from the tyranny of ethics and from high demands for us to achieve and succeed. It helps us to conduct our own lives as lives of gratitude to God and service to our neighbors.



Martin Kruse and Werner Leich sign the Loccum Declaration

EKD Chairman Martin Kruse (left), and Werner Leich, Chairman of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR, signed a document on January 17, 1990 that expressed the wish for both German states to grow together, with a united German Protestant Church after 21 years of division.

1991

CHURCH UNITY

Once Germany itself was reunified, the Federation of Evangelical Churches and the EKD were also able to reunite as well. The process began with the Loccum Declaration of January 17, 1990, and legal unity was achieved on June 27, 1991.

► There is therefore always the task, in terms of proclamation, of putting into words how God's gifts have precedence over any tasks that God places on us. Our own conscience thus remains free and comforted. The "maintenance" and sharpening of the conscience is therefore an indispensable part of proclamation, pastoral care, and teaching. The Christian view of humanity, as accentuated by the Reformation, is characterized by freedom and focuses on free action in free responsibility and with a commitment to God. The Reformation, in this way, emphasized freedom as the fundamental determination of what it means to be human, in terms of both private and public life. The Christian congregation can therefore develop into a place to experience and practice freedom. Encouraged by the recommendations of the EKD "Church of Freedom" Impulse Paper, we are faced with the task of making church services inviting, taking care that they "speak" directly to us and bring to life the center of the Christian message of God's demands and God's consolation.

4 The primacy of baptism and the Lord's Supper as an effective gift of God

It is fundamental to the Lutheran understanding of Christian baptism that, as a human act in accordance with Christ's commandment, baptism is an effective act. In baptism, God affirms his promise and commitment to the baptized – before any opportunities, demands, or demonstration of efforts or works come into play. In the Lord's Supper, Christ delivers himself over as a gift. It is the personal appropriation of his giving of himself, sealing a new community in the face of all that separates human beings from the purpose they are given, from their fellows, and from God.

Baptism is above all a gift and not the fruits of anyone's efforts, something that becomes manifestly evident in the baptism of infants and small children. The goal is a new and different life through baptism.⁶ In the Lord's Supper, the word of God and his promises can be seen and experienced. The congregation is reminded that it has been made into "one body" through Christ. Locally and globally, this cohesion entails commitment and encouragement for people on the way toward God's Kingdom with the fulfillment of all of his promises. In the confession, we publically confess sin without pinning blame on others, and receive the words of forgiveness. The Lord's Supper enacts and makes visible how guilt and sin can be overcome

through faith in Christ, and how new community is possible.

► The congregations are faced with task of actively extending the invitation to baptism and to ensure that the will of Jesus Christ is celebrated in accordance with the Lord's Supper. It is he who is the host, giving of himself fully in bread and wine. The task remains to allow to unfold the richness of the manifold aspects of the Lord's Supper in terms of teaching and proclamation, and to make these aspects visible in the form of the Communion liturgy.

5 The reformers' clarificational and orientational distinctions

The distinction between Law and Gospel is essential to Lutheran theology and to being a Christian. This distinction brings to the fore that, for the sake of God and our fellow human beings, nobody can escape from God's will and the protection of life – while ultimately God promises us his mercy and care.

The Lutheran "doctrine of the two kingdoms" helps us to renew, time and again, our distinction and delineation between the spiritual and the secular. It allows suitable space for reason and objective arguments, and shows when faith is genuinely needed and when it is reason that is required, thus preventing clericalization and overreach. This puts the Christian faith where it should be, a place where it is irreplaceable and needs to be asserted as a matter of course.

The distinction between *Law and Gospel* ensures that God's demands are not watered down, while the all-encompassing mercy of God may not be forgotten either. God's law is there to help his creatures live in responsibility before him and one another. As God's good gift, it is not a demand for people to achieve their own salvation, but instead shows them what they are before God, i.e. sinners. Jesus Christ bears and takes away sin as the standards of law so starkly show. This is the Gospel. Ignoring God's demands leads to a spread of indifference and laxity; losing sight of God's mercy leads to despondency, helplessness, and loneliness in the face of his demands. Instead: God gives to us before he asks for anything that would appear to be too expansive or difficult.

The distinction between the *two kingdoms*, or more accurately the two "realms" or "two ways that God rules", helps to ask with objectivity whether a biblical directive is present in a particular ethical or political question – or whether decisions need to be made in accordance with

the principles of (our God-given) reason. There are, for example, no Christian natural sciences, but Christian scientists, who, as Christians, uphold their responsibility in the issues of their science as well, e.g. with a view to the effects of scientific experiments and insights.

► Grappling with these "doctrines of distinction" helps us to participate in the public discourse on political and scientific issues. It also becomes apparent in this connection, that there are no parts of our lives that are godless or indeed far from God. This provides clear and helpful criteria that encourage individual parishioners and congregations as a whole to take on political and societal responsibility without however taking on more than they are able to bear.

6 The priesthood of all believers and the ministry of proclamation

In view of the freedom of the individual and the immediacy of each human being to God, with no need for priestly mediation, Luther and the reformers, following the biblical witness of the Old and New Testaments, moved their focus toward the priesthood of all believers, anchored in the baptism shared by all. At the same time, the ministry of proclamation is understood as a commandment and mission of Jesus Christ, in which individuals within the church are given this task so that the word is proclaimed "in the name of all", the sacraments administered, and so that all Christians are equipped and strengthened for their witness and service.

All believers are worthy of the priesthood, to be in direct communion with God and to be able to turn directly to God in prayer. All are worthy of the care, vocation, and mission of Jesus Christ who, in his Great Commandment proclaimed: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

The priesthood of all believers has thus emerged as a signature feature of Protestant Christianity and enables and encourages Christians to carry out spiritual service to and for each other. Gifts are honored and are to be implemented "so that the church may be built up" (1 Cor. 14:5 ff.).

At the same time, Lutheran theology establishes that the ministry of the proclamation of the word needs to be safeguarded, excluding any form of arbitrary competition. The ministry is placed in the hands of those who have followed the command of Jesus Christ and have been

“duly called” from within the church and who are willing and committed to work together in cooperation with other gifts and ministries in the congregation.

► One is therefore faced with the task of observantly discovering and supporting the spiritual gifts of the congregation, to nurture these gifts and help them to unfold, while also ensuring that the interplay of the different ministries also proves to be a service to one another. One must acknowledge that the support of volunteers is one of the most central tasks of those in full-time service.

7 The Lutheran understanding of the church and the bonds among the individual congregations

The Lutheran understanding of the church is based on the community of faith, which is called forth through the word of God. Luther did not wish for a new church. He wanted that the church become new. This occurred in that the, at first, individually emerging Protestant congregations joined together to subordinate themselves to God's commission and concern so that an inner cohesion and solidarity could go into effect. This orientation of congregations toward community is characteristic of the Lutheran understanding of the church.

Upon requests made to Martin Luther (e.g. from Leisnig and Zwickau), common worship forms emerged and common forms for weddings and baptisms, which continue to provide a basis today for new Lutheran orders of worship. The union of different local church con-

gregations brought about visitations (since 1528/1539), central decisions on theological education and ordination, and a common concern for proclamation and worship and the administration of sacraments in accordance with the Gospel. Important milestones included the 1528 publication on visitations, *Unterricht der Visitatoren an die Pfarrherrn im Kurfürstentum Sachsen*, the *Heinrichsagende* Church Order of 1539, and the 1580 Church and School Order for Electoral Saxony. This laid the basis for the Saxon Church's action in terms of spirituality and church law, which would later lead to the 1868 Church Council and Synod Ordinance, and the 1922 and 1950 Saxon Church Constitutions (currently revised as of January 1, 2008).

► In times marked by pluralism, it is now necessary to come together regularly in an awareness of the necessity and strength of standing and working together as the congregations of the church, as expressed in the doctrinal ordinances, worship orders, and ministry orders of our church. ◀

- 1 Cf. the more comprehensive and expanded practical suggestions with regard to these points in Appendix I.
- 2 In cooperation with the Federation of Protestant Youth in Germany (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Evangelischen Jugend in Deutschland – aej*): Download (in German): <http://kirche-im-aufbruch.ekd.de/publikationen.html>
- 3 *Voneinander lernen – miteinander glauben, Konvergenzdokument der Bayerischen Lutherisch-Baptistischen Arbeitsgruppe (BALIBAG)*, 2009, p. 18.
- 4 Cf. Helmar Junghans, *Die Leipziger Disputation, Amtsblatt 2009*, p. B 29 ff.
- 5 Following the “Thematic Years of the Luther Decade 2008-2017” determined by the board of the Luther Jubilee in May 2009.
- 6 “Trusting in the promise connected to baptism, the Evangelical Lutheran Church advocates decidedly for the baptism of infants and small children” (*Taufordnung* (Baptism Ordinance) of April 11, 2005: 1. *Grundsätze* (6); *Amtsblatt* 2005, p. A 78).

1992

FIRST LUTHERAN WOMAN BISHOP

Maria Jepsen was elected to be the world's first female Lutheran bishop in Hamburg's St. Michaelis Church (“Michel”). It would take seven years for her to be followed in Germany by Bishop Margot Käßmann in Hanover in 1999.



Protestant in 2004: Theses on Protestantism

Evangelische Kirche
der Pfalz
(Protestantische Landeskirche)

Resolution of the Synod of the
Evangelical Church of the Palatinate on May 7, 2004
(Long and short versions)



The historical picture of Theodor Veil (1824/25) captures the 1529 Speyer Reichstag. The painting, located in Speyer's Protestant Holy Trinity Church, depicts the Reichstag participants in the town's *Ratshof*, within sight of the cathedral. The 1529 Protestation in Speyer was one of the central events of the Reformation, when six princes and 14 free imperial cities protested before the Reichstag against coercion in matters of faith and conscience.

1. Preface

1. The **jubilee** celebrating the Protestation and the Memorial Church of the Protestation requires us to reopen the questions of the mission and heritage of Protestantism.

2. The legal protestation of a minority at the Speyer Reichstag of 1529 involved concepts that

remain incontrovertible for our thought today: commitment to God's word alone in questions of God's glory and our own salvation; the obligation to bear responsibility for our own persons; respect for the conscience. In the language of the 1529 *Protestatio*: "Each must stand before God himself and bear responsibility in matters of God's glory and our salvation."

3. The question of the substance of Protestantism cannot neglect the **changes** and shifts in the idea of what is Protestant. We need to take into account the epoch-making novelties of the **Enlightenment** and modernity. This connects Protestantism with topics such as: the rational critique of traditions; courage for modernity; truthfulness and tolerance toward other beliefs; further progress in gaining insight into truth.

Photo: epd/bid/Klaus Landry

4. In the **Palatinate Union Church**, the alliance of faith and reason has found its place in the Unification Document and in the first catechism in particular: “Finally considering that it is part of the innermost and most holy essence of Protestantism to courageously and continually progress, with unimpeded freedom of belief, along the path of well examined truth and genuine religious enlightenment...” (Unification Document of 1818). The Union Catechism explains in answer to Question 136 why the Palatinate Union Church is called “Protestant”: “Because it draws from the most noble right of rational men, to progress freely and fairly and with Christian courage in the understanding of well examined truth, eternally resisting all oppression of mind and all coercion of conscience, and upholding their unperturbed inner freedom of belief.” (Union Catechism of 1823).

5. In the **early 21st century**, we need to consider further changes and ruptures, and new forms of Protestantism. The mission of Protestantism cannot be delineated by a repetition of the traditional formulae of the 16th and 19th centuries. We have thus sought out new understandings in contact with numerous discussion partners. Of particular help was our contact with the Protestant faculties of the University of Mainz and the University of Heidelberg, with parishioners, and women and men in public affairs.

6. We also posed **questions concerning the Protestant Jubilee**, which were answered by individuals and groups both within and outside of our church:

- ▶ What do you see as the typical characteristics of Protestantism?

- ▶ What Protestant principles and strengths do you see to be particularly important for the future?
- ▶ With regard to which topics do you see “Protestant protest” as being appropriate for today, whether as an “objection against” and/or a “witness for” matters?

The wide variety of responses and contributions we received point to certain common tendencies.

7. Typical characteristics of Protestantism that were named included:

- ▶ inner freedom in our commitment to God’s word
- ▶ commitment to our own conscience
- ▶ simplicity of worship services
- ▶ democratic church structures
- ▶ the priesthood of all believers
- ▶ the limitation of institutional church mediation
- ▶ an awareness and sensitivity for social tasks and for justice
- ▶ raising and educating people to be responsible individuals

8. The following principles and strengths were viewed as particularly **“important for the future”**:

- ▶ being accepted by God regardless of works
- ▶ a strong emphasis on lay aspects and participation
- ▶ gender sensitivity and justice
- ▶ free expression of opinion in striving for the truth
- ▶ richness in diversity
- ▶ a willingness for continual change in historical continuity
- ▶ courage of our own convictions and critical abilities

9. A **“Protestant protest”** is viewed as particularly important with regard to the following matters:

- ▶ for the safeguarding of a life of dignity for all members of society
- ▶ for the signing of a European law on immigration
- ▶ for the protection of Sundays and holidays
- ▶ against experimentation with stem cells and genetic manipulation
- ▶ against globalization at the expense of poorer countries
- ▶ against the enslavement of people through inhuman working conditions
- ▶ against the imperative of maximizing profits at the expense of creation
- ▶ against an obsession with youth
- ▶ against an overly bureaucratic church and a disregard for the congregation as a “nursery of faith”

10. The **following theses** on Protestantism are to serve as more than a smallest common denominator emerging from questionnaires. The contributions and responses have been taken into account as much as possible. The theses provided, in concentrated form, **three daring ideas of the Jubilee year about what makes Protestantism important, which will now be addressed**. This includes matters involving the Bible, the Reformation, and modernity, with the respective risks and obligations. Lastly, the currency of the various theses will be examined, both positively in terms of bearing witness and critically in terms of raising objections and protesting.

31 October 1999

JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

The Lutheran World Federation, the Roman Catholic Church, and later the World Methodist Council, signed the declaration, which includes statements on the doctrine of justification that are acceptable to all parties.

2. A) Protestantism entails a freedom derived from God's word

11. The message of a God who leads us to liberty is a basic promise and experience for Israel in the Old Testament (Exodus) and throughout the entire **Bible**. Freedom is viewed as an act and gift of Christ in the New Testament. "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5:1). "The truth will make you free" (John 8:32).

12. **Luther's reforming efforts** culminated in the rediscovery of Christian freedom. "A Christian is a free lord of all things and subject to none" (*On the Freedom of a Christian*, 1520). Philipp Melanchthon summed it up: "Freedom – that is Christianity ("Postremo libertas est Christianismus", *Loci communes*, 1521).

13. Freedom, in this essential sense, is first and foremost an act of God in the person of Christ. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit and a characteristic of life in the Spirit of Christ. This freedom is afforded and asserted as a challenge through the **proclamation of the Gospel**. It is therefore tied to and borne out through God's word.

14. Christian **freedom** was and always remains **endangered** by the culpable separation of human beings from the basis and aims of their lives. Protestantism, especially as oriented toward the Reformation, is aware of the abuse of freedom and self-inflicted lack of freedom; Protestantism must acknowledge the long shadow of non-freedom found throughout its own history.

15. The call to freedom is also, in accordance with God's word, a **call to responsibility**: This leads to a love in service, empathy, and cooperation, and in the fight for justice and mercy for others. Christian freedom has thus always had political and social consequences, without however being reduced to this alone. "A Christian is a dutiful servant and subject to everyone" (Luther 1520).

16. Protestant freedom entails a witness:

- ▶ for a responsible way of living on the basis of the Gospel
- ▶ for the opening of church (leadership) offices to women
- ▶ for a holistic process of upbringing and education that enables people to form their own judgments and does not only serve economic usefulness
- ▶ for communications that lead to a struggle for the truth without oppression
- ▶ for the safeguarding of Sundays and holidays

17. Protestant freedom entails objection and protest:

- ▶ against authoritarian rule that takes away people's responsibility and freedom
- ▶ against the uprooting and deprivation of rights of people, justified as objective practical constraints
- ▶ against the demand for unlimited career mobility at the expense of home and family
- ▶ against experimentation with stem cells and the manipulation of human genetic material

B) Protestantism entails the protection of the individual

18. As much as **Jesus Christ** aims at the renewal of the entire people of God, he also places importance in individual people and their suffering, longings, and quest for life. Luther's translation of Matthew 16:26 makes this focus on individual people particularly clear: "What would it help a man if he were to gain the entire world and took damage to his soul?"

19. **The Reformation began with a single monk's** new view of the Gospel center of the Bible; the Reformation encourages a new respect for the individual conscience and relationship with God. Inalienable individual rights are thereby strengthened, also with respect to the power of the church institutions and hierarchy.

20. This attention paid to individual people is founded in the acts and word of God, who looks upon everyone with mercy, and on the disadvantaged, weak, and small in particular. The act of salvation is indeed aimed at the easily overlooked individual. The Enlightenment was linked to a new emphasis on the individual, the subject. **Schleiermacher** even stated that Protestantism "makes the relationship of the individual to the church dependent on his relationship to Christ", while Catholicism conversely "makes the relationship of the individual to Christ dependent on his relationship to the church" (*The Christian Faith* 1830² § 24).

21. This emphasis on the individual, however, was and remains full of **risk**. Protestantism has often fallen short of its own aims and lost itself to powers at the collective and national level. Time and again, people have the tendency to retreat from their responsibility to society and to become consumed by their individualism. Faith is, however, a personal but not private matter.

22. Even from a Protestant perspective, individuals and their personal faith are geared toward a view of **society** that is founded in the Gospel. The Church is more than an external institution or organization but, as the "people of God" and "body of Christ" and "communion of saints", is a gift of God, which is made possible and strengthened through personal faith, while the Church, at the same time, relies on the participation and service of all who are baptized.

23. Protestantism entails the defense of the individual as a witness:

- ▶ for an unimpeachable royal and priestly dignity before God
- ▶ for the maintenance of a life in human dignity for all members of society
- ▶ for the value and protection of life as it begins and as it ends with death
- ▶ for the high value of plurality of faith, from a common basis in God's word.

24. Protestantism entails objection and protest:

- ▶ against encroachment by collective forces of the state and society on one's personal responsibility for faith
- ▶ against a confusion of individuality and egoistic arbitrariness
- ▶ against an understanding of a church that is infallible in terms of doctrines of faith and conscience
- ▶ against oppressive working conditions and the destructive dismantlement of the social system

C) Protestantism embodies the courage to live in the times

25. A new era was introduced with the Gospel of **Jesus Christ**. As Jesus summarizes his message in the Gospel of Mark: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15) and those who belong to him in faith will be led into a new life: "So if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

26. The **Reformation** therefore looked critically into church traditions as to whether they stand up to the pure and new word of God. Starting with the Enlightenment, Protestantism began to directly tackle the question of whether the proclamation and form of the church were suited to the times and whether new answers would be needed from the critique of modernity (Lessing and Kant).

27. Protestantism has opened itself up to the **project of modernity**, daring to embrace alli-

ances of faith and reason and to permit critical questions. Protestantism has sought a faith suited to the times instead of only repeating traditional formulae.

28. Protestantism therefore **dares** something that it has not always been able to live up to. The danger was and can be the submission of the Gospel to the “zeitgeist”; the reduction of the historical heritage and the loss of memory, resulting in being captive to that which is supposedly fashionable.

29. Having the courage to move with the times, in the sense of a missionary faith, cannot involve making a particular moment and its demands into an absolute. The **Gospel requires a cultural memory** and critical work on Christian tradition as a whole. The Gospel calls for **active hope** that cannot simply accept today’s misery and suffering. “Moving forward together” is, for us, a major quality of being Church.

30. Protestantism entails the courage to live in the times as a witness:

- ▶ for questions asked from the perspective of faith about contemporary life and vice-versa
- ▶ for continually new critical assessment of traditions
- ▶ for work on a Church ever in need of reform, i.e. the *Ecclesia semper reformanda*
- ▶ for Protestantism as a “project” in development, able to change and willing to reform, which recognizes its temporary nature in view of the hoped for Kingdom of God

31. Protestantism entails objection and protest:

- ▶ against an arrogant and complacent church
- ▶ against an overly bureaucratic church
- ▶ against spiritual stagnation that does not allow for a departure into God’s new world
- ▶ against the fragmentation of society into participants and marginalized
- ▶ against globalization at the expense of poorer countries
- ▶ against the imperative of maximizing profits at the expense of creation

3. Moving towards further work

32. The three theses selected here are undoubtedly one-sided and in **need of expansion**. One can rightfully point out that other types and aspects of Protestantism are missing and demand that they be taken into account. The selection here was made for the sake of brevity and clarity.

33. Freedom, the defense of the individual, and living in the times: emphasizing these three characteristics of Protestantism now does not involve a claim that they are now being adequately realized by our church. This historical inquiry, inasmuch as it is genuine, is met by **lacks and failures**. Recalling Protestant characteristics also means looking into a mirror as a means of facing the future anew with redoubled efforts.

34. The focus on Protestant resources needs to be understood within the **ecumenical context**. A form of Protestantism with a strong identity does not claim that it alone can offer a vibrant

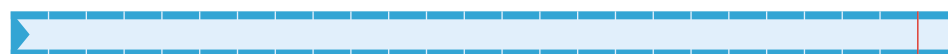
form of Christian freedom, respect for the individual, and a form of faith suited to the present. We engage with other Christian churches with great anticipation and attention and would like to return our focus to our dialogue with other religions.

35. The Synod affirms the intentions of these theses.

36. The Synod recommends that congregations and church districts conduct further work and development in the course of the jubilee year of 2004 and beyond. There are many opportunities to work on one’s own ideas and to publicly present Protestantism in all its diversity, particularly in the preparation for the Jubilee from 3 – 5 September 2004 (“Flagge zeigen” or “Showing one’s colors”) and in the already published collection of ideas.

Theses on Protestantism Short Version

The word “Protestant/Protestantism” is reminiscent of the 1529 Speyer Reichstag, where 6 princes and 14 free imperial cities “protested” against the majority decision to limit Protestant proclamation and doctrine as per Martin Luther. In subsequent centuries “Protestant/Protestantism” has undergone many changes. We are convinced of the value of working, time and again, to prevent this historical heritage from being forgotten.



2003

FIRST ECUMENICAL KIRCHENTAG

The motto of the Ecumenical Kirchentag (national church gathering) in Berlin was “You shall be a blessing”. This was the first such joint undertaking of the German Protestant Kirchentag and the Central Committee of German Catholics. The Bible and belief in the triune God were seen as the foundations for the event. The two groups did not, however, officially celebrate the Eucharist together.



Our Synod therefore would like to emphasize three long-term concerns of Protestantism:

1: Protestantism entails freedom derived from God's word

God wishes to lead us people into **freedom**: the freedom to believe, to love, to hope – into the freedom to act responsibly. But freedom also requires commitment, foundations, and continually renewed strength.

We emphasize as Protestants: God's word is the indispensable source of freedom.

We therefore advocate:

- ▶ for a way of life based on the Gospel in responsibility and maturity
- ▶ for holistic processes of upbringing and education that enable people to form their own judgments and do not only serve economic utility
- ▶ for communications that lead to a search for truth in mutual respect
- ▶ for the public safeguarding of Sundays and holidays

We therefore also protest:

- ▶ against authoritarian rule that takes away people's responsibility and freedom
- ▶ against the uprooting and deprivation of rights of people, justified as objective practical constraints
- ▶ against the demand for unlimited career mobility at the expense of home and family
- ▶ against experimentation with stem cells and the manipulation of human genetic material

2: Protestantism entails the protection of the individual

Jesus Christ, whom we witness as savior to the world, saw importance in individual human beings. He spoke forgiveness for individual sin-ridden people and allowed them to experience God's unconditional love.

Respect for individuals is, however, placed in question, time and again, by us and by others.

We emphasize as Protestants: **Jesus Christ** is the **advocate and helper of individuals**.

We therefore advocate:

- ▶ for human dignity, inalienable and God-given
- ▶ for a church as a community in which the gifts of each and every individual are allowed to unfold

- ▶ for the high value of individual beliefs, founded in a common basis in God's word in Jesus Christ
- ▶ for the equality of women and men in church and society

We therefore also protest:

- ▶ against an understanding of a church that is infallible in terms of judging faith
- ▶ against an encroachment by collective forces of the state and society on one's personal responsibility for faith
- ▶ against a confusion of individuality and egoistic arbitrariness
- ▶ against oppression as is evidenced, for example, in inhumane working conditions and the destructive dismantlement of the social system

3: Protestantism entails the courage to live in the times

The Holy Spirit gives us courage to advocate for a faith that is suited to our times, a faith that addresses the problems of our day, that speaks the language of the people, and that seeks to successfully reach them.

But these efforts must not be allowed to merge into an attempt to adapt to the zeitgeist.

We emphasize as Protestants: We cannot give up our rootedness in the Gospel. The Holy Spirit is the **power of memory and of impulses for the future**. The Spirit provides us with presence of mind for our lives.

We therefore advocate:

- ▶ for a church that courageously bears public witness
- ▶ for a Protestantism in development, able to change and willing to reform, which recognizes its temporary nature with a view to the coming Kingdom of God
- ▶ for the continually new critical assessment of traditions
- ▶ for questions to be asked from the perspective of faith about contemporary life and vice-versa

We therefore also protest:

- ▶ against an self-centered and self-righteous church
- ▶ against the fragmentation of society into winners and losers
- ▶ against globalization at the expense of the weak
- ▶ against the imperative of maximizing profits at the expense of creation. ◀

Source: *Protestantisch 2004: Thesen zum Protestantismus*. Evangelical Church of the Palatinate, 10th Synod 2003–2008, 3rd Meeting, 6–8 May 2004.

Memorandum on the Union of the Palatinate

The Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Palatinate commemorated its roots in 1993.

The United Protestant Evangelical Christian Church of the Palatinate was founded in 1818, when Lutheran and Reformed Christians united 175 years ago, leaving their confessional peculiarities behind. By focusing on Holy Scripture, they laid the foundations for our church today.

We recall these beginnings in the light of the many inquiries made from within the church and from outside about our current forms of Christian, congregational, and church life. To meet the questions of our present, we read the Unification Document to see what forward-pointing dimensions lie within. We have therefore drawn up a basis for discussion – a memorandum – for anyone who wishes to think over the future path our church will take. We will address central issues that will provide a foundation for the future shape of the heritage, situation, and mission of our church. This memorandum is an attempt at finding a consensus that is currently possible, and will close with a short provisional conclusion. It is our aim to stimulate discussion and help lay the foundations for responsible decisions. We thus view this memorandum as groundwork for considerations and consequences involving the future shape of our church.

Each topical area is composed of three parts:

a) Founding of the Union in 1818: The first part relates to the statements and goals in 1818, at the time of the founding of the Union, as expressed in the Unification Document and other important early texts.

b) Situation: The second part illuminates our current situation in its own qualities and its proximity and differences to the beginnings of the Union.

c) Tasks for the future: The third part is meant to outline tasks that our church will be facing into the future.

1. Union Ecumenical opening

a) With the Church Union of 1818, the Reformation confessions of the Palatinate, which had long been painfully divided, agreed to a “true union” (Sect. 2 of the Unification Document). Lutherans and Reformed Christians declared that “In future, the Protestants of the Rhine Area wish to enter into a close and brotherly Union and remain henceforth the Protestant Evangelical Christian Church” (Sect 1. of the Unification Document).

b) Today, we recognize with gratitude that, for most of the members of our church, the unifica-

tion, indeed the fusion of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions in one Reformation church has become entirely second nature. Ecumenical agreements, moreover, and community among the denominations have become particularly intensive, particularly in our century. At the same time, however, we experience the continuing separation and fragmentation of Christendom, side-by-side with Roman Catholic Christians, members of the Orthodox and of free Protestant churches. We also live in the Palatinate together with people of other religions. We live in times marked by increased distance to Christianity and the Church, and of disconcerting new religious movements.

c) We affirm the 1818 unification as a motivation for new ecumenical work. In the spirit of the Union, we are committed to a community with all Christians as brothers and sisters. We wish to continue to seek visible unity as a diverse community in one faith and at the Lord’s table.

We view participation in the conciliar process for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation to be a necessary ecumenical task.

We are faced with the challenge of recognizing anew God’s eternal promise to Israel and its significance to the Church.

2006

CHURCH OF FREEDOM

There was much discussion in the 1990s about how the Church should develop in an increasingly secular society. The EKD Council published a discussion paper on the topic: “Church of freedom – perspectives for the Protestant Church in the 21st century”.



Bishop Wolfgang Huber of Berlin, then EKD Council Chairman, at a press conference to begin the 2007 EKD Congress on the Future in Wittenberg.

In opposition to xenophobia and fearful self-isolation, we are faced with the task of actively pursuing reconciliation in Christ. “He is our peace” who has broken down the hostility between us (Eph. 2:14), and who frees us to live together with people of different cultural and religious backgrounds in a respect for their rights and dignity.

2. Bible Source of the Gospel and a guide to life

a) The Union Synod saw “no other basis of faith or doctrinal norm than Holy Scripture alone” (Sect. 3 of the Unification Document). The previous points of contention between Lutherans and Reformed were “eliminated in following a view in line with the clear messages of the Gospel” (Sect. 4 of the Unification Document). The church union focused on Holy Scripture as the basis and center of both doctrine and action. The Palatinate Church thus viewed itself as Protestant and dedicated to the biblical Gospel (Question 137 of the Union Catechism), emphasizing the foundational precedence of Scripture before confessional texts.

b) The Bible remains, today, the strength of our church, providing life and unity. The proclamation and up-to-date interpretation of Scripture is therefore a central church endeavor. We engage with people who rediscover in the Bible their bread and guidance for life. On the other hand, the Bible has become an unfamiliar book to many church members, retreating from view as a basis of faith for individual lives and for the actions of the church. The Good News can give way to a number of arbitrary and life-negating precepts and implausible reports.

c) In the future, our church will continue to live from the love of God for the world, who took on human form for us in Jesus Christ, reaching people and providing them with strength and orientation. We therefore need to dedicate everything to providing many means of comprehension and access to the Gospel in the Bible, and would therefore like to encourage use of Bible by individuals and in groups.

3. Protestantism Freedom as a gift and a task

a) The Palatinate Union Church had a strong understanding of itself as Protestant, bearing not only in mind for our region the Speyer Protestantism of 1529; the inner connection to the freedom that Christ provides was also to en-

courage one to present eternal resistance to “all spiritual bondage as well as all coercion of conscience and to strengthen an “unperturbed inner freedom of belief” (Question 136 of the Union Catechism).

b) The connection between Protestantism and freedom characterizes the path of our church as a critical principle. The affirmation of Christian freedom is now effective beyond the boundaries of the church. We are able to recognize the Protestant options for freedom in the freedoms of conscience and opinion and in important basic constitutional rights. At the same time, we are able to see how Christian freedom is now under attack by many new threats. We are caught up in a drive for profit and consumption that has brought about globally oppressive dependencies. The large number of worldviews on offer can either lead us into the apparent freedom of arbitrariness or indifference, or back into the “refuge” of unchallenged assertions of belief. Our church, too, needs to look into where entanglements and dependencies on societal power games result in liberty being impeded.

c) We therefore reaffirm: As a Protestant church, we live from our encounter in Jesus of Nazareth of our God, who provides true liberation. He leads us to new beginnings, even when we fall short in our own culpability. He liberates us, freeing us to a double form of protest: positively to bear witness to him whom we have to thank for our inner freedom, for our certainty of faith, and for our liberality; critically to object to societal and mental tendencies toward bondage and to uncover our ideological promises of happiness.

We are dedicated to this “Protestantism of freedom” as a church and as individual Christians.

4. Synod Common search for truth

a) The Palatinate Union Church was synodal-presbyterian from the beginning, as signaled by the mixture of theologians and non-theologians at the 1818 Synod. Sections 14 through 17 of the Unification Document set down, under the heading “Church Constitution”, the tasks of the “Church Council or Presbytery”, the “Diocesan Synod”, “Consistory”, and “General Synod”. The legal framework accorded with the basic Protestant understanding of the priesthood of all believers: The truth of the Gospel does not come to light through the actions of the church or indeed state authorities, but emerges from

our common listening to the word of God, in an exchange of arguments, and rational consideration.

b) The synodal order created at the time was developed into today’s church constitution: “Presbyters and pastors (presbytery) govern together” the congregation and “therefore bear common responsibility” (Sect. 13 of the Church Constitution). The same applies to church districts and the regional church. The synodal and conciliar approach to decision-making often turns out to be difficult and to require a continual learning process. We recognize our being prone to making decisions in accordance with group interests and considerations of power. We cannot, however, meet the requirements of difficult orientation issues by putting an end to the synodal decision-making process and demanding that church decrees be made instead.

c) We continue to affirm, into the future, our church’s synodal-presbyterian constitution and are willing to develop it further. We see the best means of acting in accord with God’s will in a meeting of opinion, a joint struggle for truth, and in carrying out even painful conflicts in an objective manner. We trust, in the process, in the spirit, which Jesus promises will “guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13).

5. The people’s church Responsibility for all of society

a) The 1818 Church Union did not come about as a directive from above but was the result of broad participation and approval. This was a “people’s church” as it was supported by the vast majority of the Protestant population. 40,167 members of the Protestant congregations voted for the Union and only 539 against it.

b) This rootedness of the church in the people has remained throughout the history of our Palatinate Church. Our “people’s church” has, however, also gone through several crises. We are troubled by the numbers of people leaving the church. Many do not feel that the church supports them in their aims in terms of faith and life. The church has been met with mistrust and rejection as an institution. Many are in search of forms of living faith in communities beyond the institutional church. Still others go their own ways without any connections to community.

c) We wish to work and fight for our Palatinate Church to be experienced by many, into the future, as a church that is close to the people. We

do not wish to retreat into ourselves. We are indeed aware, through the Gospel, of our obligation to serve society and in public concerns. This includes proclamation and diakonia, pastoral care and education. At the same time, we wish to do justice to those who go their own ways in individual faith and in committed small groups.

6. Education Learning in the spirit of the Gospel

a) The Palatinate Union Church was the result of a many-layered learning process, and sought to set in motion learning processes of faith. The catechism and hymnal of 1821 aimed at taking into account the “teaching of faith” and “the exact needs of the education of young people” (Sect. 1 of the Unification Document). It was the will of the Union’s founders that “the education of religion and morals in accordance with Scripture and reason is to be maintained at all ... schools with great care” (Sect. 12 of the Unification Document). The Unification Document connects the demand for “genuine religious enlightenment” with a clear orientation toward the Gospel and the Bible.

b) Education is a precious good in the church as a community of learning. The biblical message of people being made in the image of God continues to influence today’s church educational programs in numerous areas. This is linked to social forces that strive toward education as an individual responsibility and work toward the further development of a more humane form of school. And yet, we view the high educational goals of the founding era with some

disillusionment. School and church would often seem to be alienated from one another. The question is often asked of the legitimacy of religion classes in state schools as indeed of the educational work of the church in general in today’s plural society. It is not easy for us to impart the foundations of our faith even within the church itself.

c) We underscore: The Gospel cannot be separated from processes of learning, teaching, and upbringing. Without demanding the church’s direct authority in the matter, we continue to view as indispensable the education that has arisen from the midst of the Christian tradition. We are committed to facing the educational mission of the Gospel with great energy and focus.

7. The path forward The strength of the hope granted in Christ

a) Following the turmoil of the French Revolution and long drawn-out wars, the founders of the Union saw an open and bright future ahead. They trusted that, with the Union, they were setting into motion the “joyful return to a new religious life”. They were convinced “that it is part of the innermost and most holy essence of Protestantism to move continually and courageously forward on the path of well-tested truth and genuine religious enlightenment” (Prologue to the Unification Document).

b) We are far away today from any untroubled optimism for the future. While technological and scientific progress do open up avenues to an open and peaceful future of opportunity, we

are also beset by tensions within our society as well as global threats involving environmental destruction, xenophobia, famines, and structural injustice. Many people, even within the church, see the future as dark and imperiled.

c) We therefore seek encouragement within the Gospel for a well-founded trust in the future. Beyond any secular slogans of progress and passive invocations of disaster, we commit ourselves, in the spirit of the Union, to a future world vouchsafed by God. In this way, we wish to continue to make creative use of the wealth of gifts in our community of men and women in all areas and at all levels. We wish to seek and try out new paths forward, including how to deal with power, and all in the freedom that we have as children of God. We are convinced “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39). ◀

Source: Memorandum on the Palatinate Union, issued by the Church Synod in Speyer on May 7, 1993, and adopted by the Synod in Kaiserslautern on September 17, 1993.



Festive church service to open the Luther Decade at Wittenberg’s Castle Church on September 21, 2008.

21 September 2008 LUTHER DECADE

October 31, 2017 will mark the 500th anniversary of Luther’s Theses. The Luther Decade leading up to this date is set to prepare people for the Jubilee with a wide range of information, events, and projects. Each year is dedicated to a particular topic; in 2013 it is the “Reformation and Tolerance”.



Photo: epd/bild/Rolf Zöllner

Portal of the Castle Church in Wittenberg

Martin Luther – The 95 theses

The 95 theses at the portal of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed at Wittenberg, under the presidency of the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and of Sacred Theology, and Lecturer in Ordinary on the same at that place. Wherefore he requests that those who are unable to be present and debate orally with us, may do so by letter. In the Name our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said *Poenitentiam agite*, willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.

2. This word cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance, i.e., confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests.

3. Yet it means not inward repentance only; nay, there is no inward repentance which does not outwardly work divers mortifications of the flesh.

4. The penalty [of sin], therefore, continues so long as hatred of self continues; for this is the true inward repentance, and continues until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

5. The pope does not intend to remit, and cannot remit any penalties other than those which he has imposed either by his own authority or by that of the Canons.

6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring that it has been remitted by God and by assenting to God's remission; though, to be sure, he may grant remission in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in such cases were despised, the guilt would remain entirely unforgiven.

7. God remits guilt to no one whom He does not, at the same time, humble in all things and bring into subjection to His vicar, the priest.

8. The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and, according to them, nothing should be imposed on the dying.

9. Therefore the Holy Spirit in the pope is kind to us, because in his decrees he always makes exception of the article of death and of necessity.

10. Ignorant and wicked are the doings of those priests who, in the case of the dying, reserve canonical penances for purgatory.

11. This changing of the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory is quite evidently one of the tares that were sown while the bishops slept.

12. In former times the canonical penalties were imposed not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.

13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties; they are already dead to canonical rules, and have a right to be released from them.

14. The imperfect health [of soul], that is to say, the imperfect love, of the dying brings with it, of necessity, great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater is the fear.

15. This fear and horror is sufficient of itself alone (to say nothing of other things) to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near to the horror of despair.

16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ as do despair, almost-despair, and the assurance of safety.

17. With souls in purgatory it seems necessary that horror should grow less and love increase.

18. It seems unproved, either by reason or Scripture, that they are outside the state of merit, that is to say, of increasing love.

19. Again, it seems unproved that they, or at least that all of them, are certain or assured of their own blessedness, though we may be quite certain of it.

20. Therefore by "full remission of all penalties" the pope means not actually "of all," but only of those imposed by himself.

21. Therefore those preachers of indulgences are in error, who say that by the pope's indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved.

22. Whereas he remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according to the canons, they would have had to pay in this life.

23. If it is at all possible to grant to any one the remission of all penalties whatsoever, it is certain that this remission can be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to the very fewest.

24. It must needs be, therefore, that the greater part of the people are deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.

25. The power which the pope has, in a general way, over purgatory, is just like the power which any bishop or curate has, in a special way, within his own diocese or parish.

26. The pope does well when he grants remission to souls [in purgatory], not by the power of the keys (which he does not possess), but by way of intercession.

27. They preach man who say that so soon as the penny jingles into the money-box, the soul flies out [of purgatory].

28. It is certain that when the penny jingles into the money-box, gain and avarice can be increased, but the result of the intercession of the Church is in the power of God alone.

29. Who knows whether all the souls in purgatory wish to be bought out of it, as in the legend of Sts. Severinus and Paschal.

30. No one is sure that his own contrition is sincere; much less that he has attained full remission.

31. Rare as is the man that is truly penitent, so rare is also the man who truly buys indulgences, i.e., such men are most rare.

32. They will be condemned eternally, together with their teachers, who believe themselves sure of their salvation because they have letters of pardon.

33. Men must be on their guard against those who say that the pope's pardons are that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to Him.

34. For these "graces of pardon" concern only the penalties of sacramental satisfaction, and these are appointed by man.

35. They preach no Christian doctrine who teach that contrition is not necessary in those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessionals.

36. Every truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without letters of pardon.

37. Every true Christian, whether living or dead, has part in all the blessings of Christ and the Church; and this is granted him by God, even without letters of pardon.

38. Nevertheless, the remission and participation [in the blessings of the Church] which are granted by the pope are in no way to be despised, for they are, as I have said, the declaration of divine remission.

39. It is most difficult, even for the very keenest theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the bundance of pardons and [the need of] true contrition.

40. True contrition seeks and loves penalties, but liberal pardons only relax penalties and cause them to be hated, or at least, furnish an occasion [for hating them].

41. Apotolic pardons are to be preached with caution, lest the people may falsely think them preferable to other good works of love.

42. Christians are to be taught that the pope does not intend the buying of pardons to be compared in any way to works of mercy.

43. Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better work than buying pardon.

44. Because love grows by works of love, and man becomes better; but by pardons man does not grow better, only more free from penalty.

45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a man in need, and passes him by, and gives [his money] for pardons, purchases not the indulgences of the pope, but the indignation of God.

46. Christians are to be taught that unless they have more than they need, they are bound to keep back what is necessary for their own families, and by no means to squander it on pardons.

47. Christians are to be taught that the buying of pardons is a matter of free will, and not of commandment.

48. Christians are to be taught that the pope, in granting pardons, needs, and therefore desires, their devout prayer for him more than the money they bring.

49. Christians are to be taught that the pope's pardons are useful, if they do not put their trust in them; but altogether harmful, if through them they lose their fear of God.

50. Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the pardon-preachers, he would rather that St. Peter's church should go to ashes, than that it should be built up with the skin, flesh and bones of his sheep.

51. Christians are to be taught that it would be the pope's wish, as it is his duty, to give of his own money to very many of those from whom certain hawkers of pardons cajole money, even though the church of St. Peter might have to be sold.

52. The assurance of salvation by letters of pardon is vain, even though the commissary, nay, even though the pope himself, were to stake his soul upon it.

53. They are enemies of Christ and of the pope, who bid the Word of God be altogether silent in some Churches, in order that pardons may be preached in others.

54. Injury is done the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or a longer time is spent on pardons than on this Word.

55. It must be the intention of the pope that if pardons, which are a very small thing, are celebrated with one bell, with single processions and ceremonies, then the Gospel, which is the very greatest thing, should be preached with a hundred bells, a hundred processions, a hundred ceremonies.

56. The "treasures of the Church," out of which the pope grants indulgences, are not sufficiently named or known among the people of Christ.

57. That they are not temporal treasures is certainly evident, for many of the vendors do not pour out such treasures so easily, but only gather them.

58. Nor are they the merits of Christ and the Saints, for even without the pope, these always work grace for the inner man, and the cross, death, and hell for the outward man.

59. St. Lawrence said that the treasures of the Church were the Church's poor, but he spoke according to the usage of the word in his own time.

60. Without rashness we say that the keys of the Church, given by Christ's merit, are that treasure.

61. For it is clear that for the remission of penalties and of reserved cases, the power of the pope is of itself sufficient.

62. The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God.

63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last.

64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last to be first.

65. Therefore the treasures of the Gospel are nets with which they formerly were wont to fish for men of riches.

66. The treasures of the indulgences are nets with which they now fish for the riches of men.

67. The indulgences which the preachers cry as the "greatest graces" are known to be truly such, in so far as they promote gain.

68. Yet they are in truth the very smallest graces compared with the grace of God and the piety of the Cross.

69. Bishops and curates are bound to admit the commissaries of apostolic pardons, with all reverence.

70. But still more are they bound to strain all their eyes and attend with all their ears, lest these men preach their own dreams instead of the commission of the pope.

71. He who speaks against the truth of apostolic pardons, let him be anathema and accursed!

72. But he who guards against the lust and license of the pardon-preachers, let him be blessed!

73. The pope justly thunders against those who, by any art, contrive the injury of the traffic in pardons.

74. But much more does he intend to thunder against those who use the pretext of pardons to contrive the injury of holy love and truth.

75. To think the papal pardons so great that they could absolve a man even if he had committed an impossible sin and violated the Mother of God -- this is madness.

76. We say, on the contrary, that the papal pardons are not able to remove the very least of venial sins, so far as its guilt is concerned.

77. It is said that even St. Peter, if he were now Pope, could not bestow greater graces; this is blasphemy against St. Peter and against the pope.

78. We say, on the contrary, that even the present pope, and any pope at all, has greater graces at his disposal; to wit, the Gospel, powers, gifts of healing, etc., as it is written in I. Corinthians xii.

79. To say that the cross, emblazoned with the papal arms, which is set up [by the preachers of indulgences], is of equal worth with the Cross of Christ, is blasphemy.

80. The bishops, curates and theologians who allow such talk to be spread among the people, will have an account to render.

81. This unbridled preaching of pardons makes it no easy matter, even for learned men, to rescue the reverence due to the pope from slander, or even from the shrewd questionings of the laity.

82. To wit: -- "Why does not the pope empty purgatory, for the sake of holy love and of the dire need of the souls that are there, if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a Church? The former reasons would be most just; the latter is most trivial."

83. Again: -- "Why are mortuary and anniversary masses for the dead continued, and why does he not return or permit the withdrawal of the endowments founded on their behalf, since it is wrong to pray for the redeemed?"

84. Again: -- "What is this new piety of God and the pope, that for money they allow a man who is impious and their enemy to buy out of purgatory the pious soul of a friend of God, and do not rather, because of that pious and beloved soul's own need, free it for pure love's sake?"

85. Again: -- "Why are the penitential canons long since in actual fact and through disuse abrogated and dead, now satisfied by the granting of indulgences, as though they were still alive and in force?"

86. Again: -- "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is to-day greater than the riches of the richest, build just this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of poor believers?"

87. Again: -- "What is it that the pope remits, and what participation does he grant to those who, by perfect contrition, have a right to full remission and participation?"

88. Again: -- "What greater blessing could come to the Church than if the pope were to do a hundred times a day what he now does once, and bestow on every believer these remissions and participations?"

89. "Since the pope, by his pardons, seeks the salvation of souls rather than money, why does he suspend the indulgences and pardons granted heretofore, since these have equal efficacy?"

90. To repress these arguments and scruples of the laity by force alone, and not to resolve them by giving reasons, is to expose the Church and the pope to the ridicule of their enemies, and to make Christians unhappy.

91. If, therefore, pardons were preached according to the spirit and mind of the pope, all these doubts would be readily resolved; nay, they would not exist.

92. Away, then, with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Peace, peace," and there is no peace!

93. Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Cross, cross," and there is no cross!

94. Christians are to be exhorted that they be diligent in following Christ, their Head, through penalties, deaths, and hell.

95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven rather through many tribulations, than through the assurance of peace.



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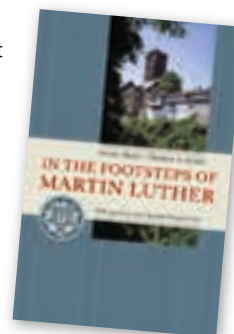
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Committee management:

Vice President Dr. Thies **Gundlach**,
Hanover

OKR Michael **Wegner**, Lutherstadt
Wittenberg

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Fax: 0049 (0)511/2796-707

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Project team at the EKD Church Office:

Henning Kiene, Antje Ernst,

Dr. Katharina Ratschko

Editorial staff:

Evangelische Journalistenschule

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with the Gemeinschaftswerk der

Evangelischen Publizistik gGmbH:

Dr. Thomas Schiller (coordination),

Oscar Tiefenthal, Reinhold Schardt

(final editing), Kathrin Klette,

Friederike Lübke, Claudia Maier

Text documentation:

Peter Bosse-Brekenfeld

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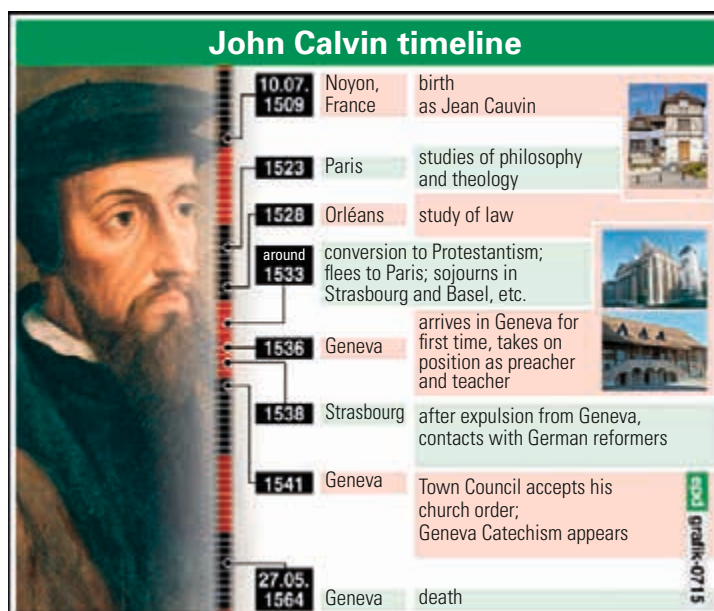
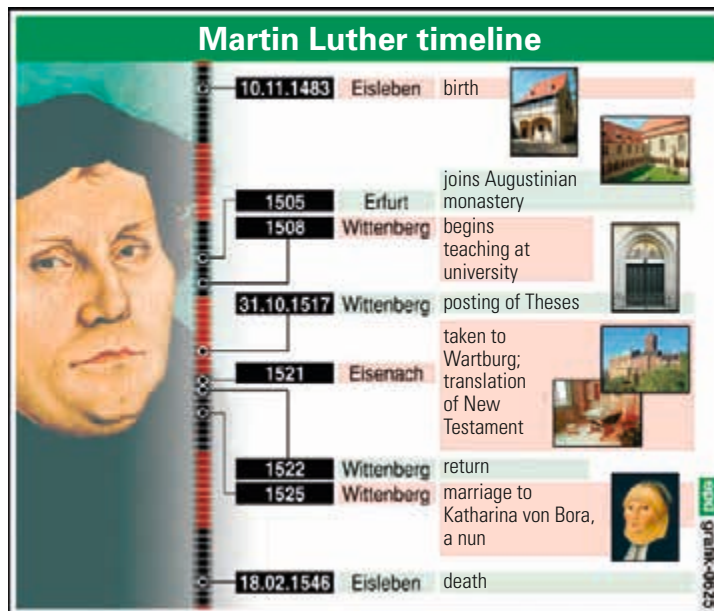
Germany

Tel.: 0049 (0)511/2796-0

Fax: 0049 (0)511/2796-707

E-Mail: versand@ekd.de

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