

500 YEAR REFORMATION

LUTHER2017

**Perspectives for the
Reformation Jubilee
2017**

Prefatory Remark

The Board of Trustees charged with the development of “Luther 2017 — 500-Year Reformation” sees in the accompanying “Perspectives for the Reformation Jubilee 2017” “a good basis for the further preparation of the Reformation Jubilee 2017.” These “Perspectives” provide a favorable position from which scholars, adopting the device of separate theses, may perceive the Reformation within its contexts and closely examine its goals. They are enabled to describe its effects from the sixteenth century into the present. In the process, its evolving influences on theology and church, society and politics, education and music may be articulated, along with the sometimes powerful confessionally grounded disputes that accompanied it.

By means of these “Perspectives”, the scholarly ground-work is laid for ecumenical discussion as well as for the shaping of the individual theme-years. The Scholarly Advisory Board is to be thanked for the development of these theses. We hope that the “Perspectives for the Reformation Jubilee 2017” attract notice and a wide dissemination.

Präses Nikolaus Schneider
Chair of the Trustees of “Luther 2017—500-Year Reformation”
Chair of the Board of Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland

Introduction

The work on the “Perspectives for the Reformation Jubilee 2017” responds to the need to provide a foundation that bears in view the matter of the Reformation and the leading standpoints in contemplating a suitable shaping of the Reformation Decade and the Jubilee. This undertaking takes into account historical origins as well as the present societal, ecclesiastical, and religious contexts in Germany and Europe.

The “Perspectives” have been collectively drafted and unanimously approved by the members of the Scholarly Advisory Board. We hope for their broad reception and discussion within church and society.

Professor Dr. Dr. Johannes Schilling
Chair of the Scholarly Advisory Board for the Reformation Jubilee 2017

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I.

01 The Reformation is an event of global significance. The epoch-marking changes that it produced had effects across all continents. What proceeded from it is therefore not just of national but of European and world-wide relevance.

02 The effects that the Reformation produced are perceived and valued from various standpoints. To those who adhere to these perspectives, preparations for the Reformation Jubilee of 2017 offer an opportunity and a challenge to engage, insofar as possible, in processes of mutual understanding of its results.

03 Inasmuch as the Reformation precipitated the breakup of the Western church and gave rise to contradiction as well as commonality among the leading confessions it produced, it made religious-cultural differentiation and pluralism into a signature of Europe.

04 This differentiation occurred within a world that reacted with violence to contradictions. Not exclusively, but together with other factors, it became a cause of religious wars and conflicts between the confessions. The consequences of these conflicts reach down to the present day.

05 At the same time, this development towards pluriformity compelled Europe to draft regulations that would govern confessionally homogeneous societies, and later on the coexistence of separate and contradicting confessions resp. confessional cultures. Tolerance and reciprocal respect had to be established even where confessions claimed exclusive truth for their beliefs. This process began with the Peace of Augsburg (1555).

II.

06 The Reformation fundamentally changed not only church and theology. More than this, the Protestantism that derived from and owed its existence to it took part in the formation of all private and public life, societal structures and economic transactions, and cultural patterns of perception and mentalities, just as it did concepts of law, scholarly ideas, and artistic patterns of expression.

07 The Reformation, an event of comprehensive historical significance, was nonetheless at its core religious in nature. It dealt with the relationship of the person to God, to himself, to his fellow human beings, and to the world. It defined these relations in a fundamentally new way.

08 In a new manner, the Reformation discovered the person as justified by Christ alone and standing immediately, without intermediaries, before God. It saw the identity and worth of this person entirely in his being recognized by God without reference to natural appurtenances (gender),

social status (class), individual wealth or competency (success), and religious achievement (merit). In so doing, it acknowledged freedom as an essential determinant of personhood.

09 The Reformation made effectual for our understanding of the church this freedom of the person whom God recognized: It defined the concept of the priesthood of all the baptized as a community of all its members, without hierarchical gradations. It held as legitimate exclusively differences in function.

10 The Reformation determined that love of neighbor and perceptions of social responsibility were the undetachable consequences of recognition by God. The conviction that the relationship to God and to one's fellow humans belong inseparably together found its classic expression in the double thesis of Martin Luther: "A Christian is a free lord over all things and subject to none. – A Christian is a servant in all things and subject to all." ("On the Freedom of a Christian. 1520.")

11 From the Reformation point of view, all this is validated by the power of faith: In faith the human being becomes the person who is acknowledged by God and who is thus free. The Reformers' specific statements about the person, his freedom, and his responsibility — which the evangelical churches by no means always welcomed — developed a dynamic that in the course of centuries penetrated far beyond church and Christendom into the entire Western world, and then even beyond it. This is particularly true for the areas of culture, scholarship and education, law, politics, and economy.

12 The idea that the individual stands in the immediate presence of God carries with it the conviction that that person understands what he believes and can give an accounting of his faith. In the post-Reformation view, the Christian is called to bear witness. For that reason, a central goal of the Reformation was to translate the Bible into the languages of the people, and to make the sermon, an separate excursus bound to Scripture, into an indispensable part of the worship service. In this way, the Reformation became for many peoples the creator of their formal language. The Reformation brought into being a specific relationship between Protestantism and the pronouncement of the Word. This impressed itself upon poetry and other literature, first of all within the churches,

but then also across the breadth of a secular culture that was becoming independent.

13 Out of the basic conviction that the Christian bears witness emerged claims to education and the Reformation's impetus to educate. Faith should be informed faith. Catechisms became instruments of learning that led to the understanding of faith. There needed to be schools in every place for the further formation of Christians, who were simultaneously people in the world. This impulse in Protestant territories toward education brought about the introduction of the general duty to educate children and to play a part in education. This feature became the common possession of the Western world.

14 The Reformation's demand for the furtherance of articulation by Christians had as a consequence that in Protestant lands, especially Germany, the Enlightenment developed, to be sure in tension with, but not in antagonistic opposition to faith and church. Rather, a productive debate took place. The Enlightenment's demand for "mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity" (Immanuel Kant, *What is Enlightenment?*) could be understood as the unfolding of the Reformation insight into each person's direct participation, although of course without the Reformation's connection to God.

15 The position that the individual places himself in faith directly before God excludes the possibility that political institutions can control people's faith. With this basic principle, the foundation of the modern creation of the essential rights of freedom of religion and conscience is laid down. The Reformation has its deepest grounding in a clear distinction between church and state.

16 The understanding of the church as an non-hierarchical community of its members was for the Reformation — disregarding some groups on its periphery — not a general social and political model. Indeed, as such, it encountered resistance. But once this principle was proclaimed for the church, the thought of radical equality in politics experienced a decided advance on its evolutionary way to democracy. This shows itself, and not by chance, in numerous nations that have been shaped by Protestantism (the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark/Norway/Iceland, Sweden/Finland, Great Britain, the U.S.A.).

17 The priesthood of all the baptized found liturgical expression in communal singing in the worship service, as the musical figure of the

preaching of the Word. The Reformation laid thereby the foundation stone of a great and varied musical culture of increasing significance. The numerous forms of vocal and instrumental music in the religious service up till today are characteristics of evangelical Christianity and extend their effects far beyond the sanctuary.

18 The conviction that the freedom of the Christian shows itself in the service of one's neighbor and society brought about a new configuration of the social body within Protestantism. Attending to social problems (as by means of hospitals and welfare for the poor) became a matter of concern to the entire community. Reformation impulses provided the starting point for communal social responsibility in the modern world.

19 The understanding of vocation in the sense of a special spiritual calling (as it had been applied to monasticism up till the Reformation) expanded to include all areas of life. The occupation of each Christian in his place now counted as a calling of spiritual rank, within which God could be served. This conviction, that the entire world of work was the preserve of the Christian life, released an economic dynamic that had not been known before.

III.

20 In view of these diverse findings, it is worthwhile, on the way to the Reformation Jubilee of 2017, to present the relevance that the Reformation possesses far beyond theology and church for the various areas of our present-day culture. We might inquire about its potential as an indicator in an era determined by individualization, pluralization, and globalization. Such consideration of the present is a genuine task of a historical jubilee. It makes a contribution to the preservation as well as to the further development of Western cultural identity.

21 The preservation and the further development of the modern Western-imprinted culture can only occur today if two lines of inquiry are drawn upon: What is the common Christian heritage; and what are the individual profiles of the confessions — ecumenical commonality and denominational difference.

22 The religious world presents profound changes. Western societies move in the direction of multicultural and multireligious relationships, if they are not already shaped by them. In this setting, the insights that have grown as a result of working out differences and in the give and take of the Christian confessions should be constructively applied in the present.

23 In the face of the plurality of religious persuasions and world-views, a sense grows for that which is shared by all Christians. At the same time, each respective profile retains its particular significance. From the global, total perspective of the “one Christendom”, a longing is expressed to have a culturally, but also a religiously, identified and identifiable home.



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