TRUSTING GOD IN NEW WAYS
"FOR INTO YOUR HANDS
I COMMEND MYSELF,
MY BODY AND SOUL,
AND ALL THINGS.
LET YOUR HOLY ANGEL
BE WITH ME,
THAT THE EVIL Foe
MAY HAVE NO POWER
OVER ME"

Martin Luther
DEAR READER,

31st October 2017 is the 500th anniversary of the publication of the 95 theses, which, as legend has it, Martin Luther nailed to the door of Wittenberg’s Castle Church.

In previous centuries, Reformation anniversaries have been celebrated in national and denominational isolation. We desire the impending anniversary of the Reformation to be marked by openness, freedom and an ecumenical spirit.

In 2017, we not only celebrate 500 years of Reformation, we also bring to mind the role that the Reformation played in the evolution of modernity. That which emanated from Wittenberg in the 16th century changed Germany, Europe and the world.

Since 2009, many of the number of Reformation themes have been traced through a series of thematic years in the Reformation Decade leading up to the anniversary. The trails of the movement reveal that it reached far beyond the Church and is— even to this very day— influencing society, politics and culture.

This EKD Magazine for the Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, which is in your hand, and which concludes the series of magazines produced during the thematic years of the Reformation Decade, thus reflects not only on the Reformation of the past, but it also means to provide ideas which impact future openings.

In 1517, in opposition to all authorities, Martin Luther ventured to challenge the then-established ideas about God, faith and the Church. He began to think about God, the Bible and religion in new ways. He embarked— as so many before him— on a quest to find God.

We mean to pick up this baton and run with it. On the occasion of the Reformation Jubilee in 2017, in an increasingly secular society, God himself is to be brought into our conversations.

It would be a wonderful signal for the world if 2017 could be a year of new beginnings towards a greater unity of the churches; if it became clear that we, as churches, want to appropriate the respective assets of our traditions to fulfill the one great task to deliver “the message of the free grace of God to all people”, as the Barmer Theological Declaration defines the commission of the Church in its 6th thesis. Whoever lives passionately within their own tradition has no need to find their identity in dissociation from others. On the contrary, being passionate within one’s own tradition can open up a wealth of sources which bring life to others.

Together, we can never lose God in the new ways, celebrate Christ and public.ly show that there is a message which is stronger than the daily messages of violence, destruction and suffering that we receive.

I would like to sincerely thank all the authors and all those who have worked on this publication.

I hope that this volume will be met with great interest, in general society as well as in church communities and educational institutions. To you, who are currently leafing through these pages, I hope your self to be tempted, wherever possible, to bring God, the Bible, faith, the Church and religion, into conversations in new ways.

Cordially Yours

DR. HEINRICH BEDFORD-STROHM
Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria and Chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany
I. TRADITION AND MUSEIFICATION

There are several central ideas connected with the anniversary of the Reformation in 2017:

a) Recent discussion seems to converge on the insight that the priesthood of all baptised Christians was not only historically innovative, but that it also had – and has – a long-term potential claim on the present. The modern concepts of participation and democratic participatory processes can be viewed as the great-grandchildren of the Reformation. Connected with this aspect of participation is an understanding of church that is able to distinguish between the office and the person; one which essentially understands the office as a function rather than as consecration. This approach, which is certainly compatible with modernity, allows an assembly of believers to be a church with a pragmatic and functional focus: both in the way that they organise themselves and how they distinguish between priests and lay people.

b) Furthermore, along with the Renaissance and its battle cry “ad fontes”, there is currently an emphasis on the educational momentum of the Reformation, which introduced the idea of the mature Christian and placed Scripture firmly as a springboard for the ability to read. By contrast with the unequal emphasis on the educational momentum of the Reformation, which introduced the idea of the mature Christian and placed Scripture firmly as a springboard for the ability to read. By contrast with the unequal

II. FAITH, FUNDAMENTALISATION, AND THE DIGNITY OF THE MODERN STATE

c) The central theological insight of Martin Luther – and all Reformers – was their faith in the justification of the sinner by grace alone; and not by works of the law. This insight established an idea of freedom that was so far-reaching that it was capable of influencing the modern history of freedom right up until today. Although modernity’s notion of freedom is markedly different from the Christian understanding of freedom, it is neither coincidental nor irrelevant that the theological analyses of the Reformation Day have always focussed on the doctrine of the justification of the sinner and the related four/five sola (sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, sola Christus, sola verba) as topics associated with freedom. Today, the inner freedom (of conscience), which was central to the Reformers’ way of thinking, is often viewed with suspicion, as this suspected “inwardness” can intimate secrecy. However, it is precisely the inner freedom (of conscience) of every Christian, independent of all outward circumstances and based solely upon God’s Word, which gave rise to the ideas that are relevant to our present-day understanding of human dignity and human rights. The freedom of a Christian is not the only source of the modern concepts of human rights and human dignity, but it is certainly an important one. This light should not be placed under a bushel, but rather, the discovery of the “insideness”, or interiority of faith, should be celebrated as an achievement.

d) We should not disregard those indications which attribute the evolution of the social fabric of our society not only to the fundamental insights of the Reformation, but also to the “co-evolution of its opponents” (Udo Di Fabio) – as it is referenced in confessional research. As a result of its confrontation with the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church also changed, and, together, both denominations developed a dynamic of differentiation which, despite the suffering it caused, had many notable constructive effects. The irreversible truth claims of the confessions and an inability to tolerate differing beliefs in a particular territory, led to the first European war, which lasted for thirty years and was waged in extremely vicious campaigns (which very soon followed political laws). However, it was this war which led to an understanding of the state and the constitution, and a separation of civil rights from religious rights, thereby allowing for individual freedom of belief and conscience and ushering in the concept of a religiously neutral state. The Reformation churches have as little cause as the Roman-Catholic Church to be proud of the emergence of the modern state from their will to mutual destruction. However, this unintended consequence of the Reformation can be perceived as part of the learning history of the denominations and allows us to direct other religions or ideologies towards this learning history of de-fundamentalisation; and to do so without a sense of superiority.

On the whole, however, this rather incomplete examination of the fundamental significance of the Reformation for the present time leaves me somewhat perplexed. Whilst it is nevertheless possible to trace the historical effects and highlight important historical nexuses relating to the Reformation, I cannot help but have the feeling that I am merely in a good museum: It is interesting to know that today’s ideas about participation, education, freedom or the rule of law have important roots in the Reformation, but so what? Perceptions of this kind stir up a sense of superiority.

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III. THE INNER FREEDOM, INDEPENDENT OF ALL OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES AND BASED ON GOD’S WORD

The Reformation can provide us with a model for this pursuit. In order to deal with present day fears, we need to embark afresh on a quest for God in new ways.
Foundations. However, are these impulses capable of provoking messages which are applicable for the 21st century? Is any of this relevant to your identity and mine, today; does any of it help construct a self-conception which goes beyond an act of simply commemorating and remembering?

II. The Hiddenness of God and the Assurance of Faith

So how can I move beyond the respectful remembrance of a Reformation which was once so impressive? How can the anniversary of the Reformation be relevant to me? Its cause and language being unfamiliar to many, its message of justification being largely incomprehensible and its framing within a museum-like culture rendering it merely a commemorative event, the actual relevance of the Reformation seems to become increasingly marginalised. In scrutinising the relevance of the Reformation today, we should not be too easy on ourselves: It is the central notion of the Reformation itself – the doctrine of the sinner who, in faith, is liberated by God alone, by grace alone, by Jesus Christ alone; which, increasingly rarely, seems to provide a powerful message for the 21st century.

a) In spiritually uncertain times, our Reformation churches can easily fall into a relevance trap and there is a tendency to highlight one’s own relevance and importance in order to counteract a proportionally growing indifference. One formulates theses about the values which one represents, or about the social capital which one provides, or about the charitable activities which one organises etc. Although our societies would be severely damaged if the churches withdrew from these responsibilities, such “diacronisation of relevance” cannot compensate for a weakening of faith. For the (useful) functions of a faith are not faith, but rather functions without faith, some meaningful actions or a plausible gesture may be apparent; but faith in God, hope in Christ and trust in Holy Scripture are last and only an external shell remains.

Therefore, looking forward to the acts of remembrance on 31st October 2017, the question arises as to whether the churches which are influenced by the Reformation can find their way back to a spiritual presence which is able to clearly reveal the driving force of all their actions. In my view, the central challenge for churches in 2017 lies in developing a spiritual power to convince; one which answers people’s yearning for God, their yearning for the holy, for spirituality and for an inner life. But how can we, today, give expression to the existential relevance of the insights of the Reformation?

b) When pursuing the relevant literature concerning Luther and the Reformation, we discover that this generation grew up in a very unsettled world and were involved in faith which, by a hyperactive, both in a spiritual and theological sense. The things of God were clearly defined; every one in great detail, and the clearly defined structure for the administration of each was just as prescriptive. The church was an indulgence, a saint, a side altar or a prayer sequence. When people doubted, when they experienced feelings of meaninglessness and encountered life’s sorrows, they were consoled with references to the future. Spirituality was strongly ritualistic. The world instilled fear in people – and people were also frightened of God. Even after almost a hundred years of queries, doubts and scepticism had passed, since the death of Jan Hus in 1415, the church still continued to react defensively. Around 1500, not least on account of the emergence of humanism, a profound unease in relation to academic activities and (scholastic) theology had developed. Even though at the time, examples of very sincere and wholehearted spirituality could be found (cf. observant monasteries), the compe­tition conflict and aversive places of pilgrimage with their inflationary ostentation of miracles, bizarre mega events, collection of absurd relics (e.g. “Jesus’ nappies”) and even more eccentric forms of indulgences – indicated a banalisation, commercialisation and trivialisation of spirituality, the one who thinks he can see a parallel to present times! Or, if there is some truth in the comparison, might our generation, 500 years after the Reformation, find itself once again in a situation similar to that of the times prior to the Reformation?

c) Within this context of fear, Martin Luther found himself dealing with a graced and trustful spirit: his quest for a gracious God: he rediscovered God as the God who is merciful in Christ. Luther’s specific response to this question strengthened the inner person, setting the soul free from the anxieties of economic decline, worries about environmental disasters, fears of constant acceleration, or these very elementary, timeless fears concerning love and faithfulness, friendship and fairness. This is not a superficial phenomenon, a manifestation of “German Angst” or suchlike, but rather, these are profound fears, as, for example, described by Annette Pehnt in her “Lexikon der Angst” (Encyclopaedia of Fear): Fears of silence and stillness, fears of inner conflict and emptiness, of an inability to love and subjugation in love. We are not speaking about abolishing fears, but rather about their refinement; in a sense, their baptism, so that they can rattle us, but so that we can learn from them.

d) So how do we enter into conversation with ourselves and society about these deeper dimensions? The anniversary in 2017 requires and deserves a discussion about the relevance of Reformation insights for an existential discussion about the existential relevance of Reformation insights. However, if, even in the 21st century, the healing power of the message, which is why the basic narrative (the meta-narration) of the anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 gives the assurance of faith, need to be rediscovered, celebrated and brought into the conversations of this society in new ways. It is this ever novel assurance of faith which is the secret of a person who fears and I will tell you your freedom in faith. For the (useful) functions of a faith are not faith, but rather functions without faith, some meaningful actions or a plausible gesture may be apparent; but faith in God, hope in Christ and trust in Holy Scripture are last and only an external shell remains. Therefore, looking forward to the acts of remembrance on 31st October 2017, the question arises as to whether the churches which are influenced by the Reformation can find their way back to a spiritual presence which is able to clearly reveal the driving force of all their actions. In my view, the central challenge for churches in 2017 lies in developing a spiritual power to convince; one which answers people’s yearning for God, their yearning for the holy, for spirituality and for an inner life. But how can we, today, give expression to the existential relevance of the insights of the Reformation?
For me, Reformation is inextricably linked to Martin Luther's translation of the Bible. Admittedly, my first experiences of this translation involved an illustrated Bible: The "Bibel in Bildern. Darstellungen von Schnorr von Carolsfeld mit begleitendem Text nach den Worten der heiligen Schrift" (Bible in Pictures, by Schnorr von Carolsfeld). All the images: the heroic protagonists of the Old Testament, the illustrations of stories in the Apocrypha and the New Testament in which Jesus was depicted — at times in a very tender way, and at others, looking decidedly combative — have remained with me, branded on my memory.

In my early school years, the texts of the Bible connected themselves with the illustrations drawn by Schnorr von Carolsfeld, and so emerged the image of a strong and powerful God, one who guides the destiny of people and determines what happens to them. I believe that, by this time, it had already become clear to me that this God was a God who was mysterious, a God who was at times unpredictable, but who was certainly not merely a "dear God".

This was quite challenging, and this is precisely the point I would like to make about "my" Reformation. With his translation of the Bible, Martin Luther challenged people. It was important to him that the whole Bible was published in German and could be read. In his Foreword to his translation of the Pentateuch, in 1523, he wrote: "There are some who have a small opinion of the Old Testament ... but Christ says, 'Search in the Scriptures, for they give testimony of me' John 5[:39]"; (WA DB 8, 10.1–9.16–20).

Luther reads the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament. For him, the whole of the Holy Scriptures become accessible through Christ and point to Christ. For Luther, it is perfectly clear that the Messiah promised in the Old Testament is the proclaimed Christ. This is not the place to discuss this hermeneutical approach. For me, it is important that the sola scriptura of the Reformation applies to the Old as well as to the New Testament, and also to the Apocrypha.

In his translation, what is important to Luther becomes obvious: for example, in his foreword to the 1528 edition of the Psalms, he chooses to steer clear of the wide-spread legends of the saints, the usual stories of their lives and the sufferings recounted of them. The "exempel bucher und historien" (books of examples and stories) had led to a situation in which the Psalms had been neglected and "ynn ... finßernis lag" (lay in such darkness) (WA DB 10/1, 98.6–8).

Through Luther's translation, the Bible regained its significance. The legends and stories, which for a long time had been all that was well-known about the Christian faith, gradually disappeared and through his translation of the Bible, Luther challenged people to engage with the awkward, uncomfortable and problematic traditions of Christianity. For me, this is an important aspect of the Reformation. It challenges the believer, as much as the unbeliever, to engage with the multifaceted and difficult foundations of the Christian faith. Nothing is to be hidden, nothing is to be kept from people's knowledge nor is it to be made agreeable for the sake of pleasing people. Reformation challenges us to personally engage with the roots of faith.

BY JÜRGEN-PETER LESCH
The Reformation can be seen as the starting point of a modern state which protects human dignity. However, our system of values which henceforth emerged needs to be continually developed further. In so doing, we can learn from the history of the Reformation.

BY UDO DI FABIO

500 years after the Reformation, which was an epochal event, the anniversary is an opportunity for society to interpret and define itself. It is for this reason that I would like to use this occasion to talk about the dialectics of the modern era within the spirit of the Reformation. [...] In terms of its significance in affecting change, regarding the worldview prevalent within the societies of its time and incorporating people's self-perception and their forms of communication, the Reformation follows closely behind – or is even on par with – the following three developments of history: the humanism of the Upper Italian Renaissance; the evolution of the printing press with its movable type; and the development of overseas trade. In reflecting on these events of the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe, one is also able to perceive a new era of violent upheaval, profound insecurity and religious wars. The new epoch was not a step into a fresh sense of harmony, but rather – even where it attempted to lead humankind out of its self-imposed immaturity by means of rationalism, rational law, and later the Enlightenment – it was deeply troubled by inner conflict. An adequate comprehension of the modern era can only be grasped if one does not recount it one-dimensionally – nor linearly, as a continuously progressing unfolding of theological history – but rather, it can only be fully understood when viewed as a process of the development of the conflicts and contradictions; in short: as dialectic. [...] If it had not been for the particularisation of the princely rule in the Holy Roman Empire, Luther would hardly have survived his rebellion against the Pope; it was owing to the new territorial sovereigns and territorial borders that he was offered protection in Wartburg Castle. In the history of thought, the Reformation stands for the dialectics of the modern era. When combined, a universally-founded insight into the freedom of faith and conscience and the egalitarian struggle against the organised clerical rule of the old church and its clergy, produce not only an opportunity to find ways to God and to an understanding of oneself, but also open up a new, previously unimaginable, contingency. And here begins the life-and-death struggle for the correct interpretation of Scripture. New life-worlds developed which connected the economic, political and every-day life of society with a particular doctrine of faith. However, these new experiences of communion also gave rise to a trenchant drawing of boundaries, exclusion, intolerance and violence.

The revolution of the Reformation, which spread across Europe, shaped several national-racial patterns, and also radicalised across the Atlantic to North America and the world, in set in motion a dynamic, without which even the very system of our constitution would simply not be comprehensible. The medieval fiction of a universal Christian community of faith painted a harmonious image of the world, granting the Catholic Church a monopoly of interpretation; whilst the reality often looked quite different. In contrast, the modern era began with a foundation of universal values; whether those of Erasmus of Rotterdam, those of humanism, or else those of Martin Luther and of the Reformation. These modern eras can only be grasped if one does not recount it one-dimensionally – nor linearly, as a continuously progressing unfolding of theological history – but rather, it can only be fully understood when viewed as a process of system of the conflicts and contradictions; in short: as dialectic. [...] If it had not been for the particularisation of the princely rule in the Holy Roman Empire, Luther would hardly have survived his rebellion against the Pope; it was owing to the new territorial sovereigns and territorial borders that he was offered protection in Wartburg Castle. In the history of thought, the Reformation stands for the dialectics of the modern era. When combined, a universally-founded insight into the freedom of faith and conscience and the egalitarian struggle against the organised clerical rule of the old church and its clergy, produce not only an opportunity to find ways to God and to an understanding of oneself, but also open up a new, previously unimaginable, contingency. And here begins the life-and-death struggle for the correct interpretation of Scripture. New life-worlds developed which connected the economic, political and every-day life of society with a particular doctrine of faith. However, these new experiences of communion also gave rise to a trenchant drawing of boundaries, exclusion, intolerance and violence.

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the modern age. With the greater understanding which comes with hindsight, this can only be understood as the co-evolution of something which is not both, categorically separate, and, at the same time, closely interconnected. Here is a piece of modern dialectics arising from the spirit of the revolution. This is also a bit of modern dialectics arising from the spirit of revolution. State and Church are separated, as stipulated by our constitution. Every sphere has its own territory to govern and shape, and each is respected by the other. In a religious and ideological respect, the state is neutral. This particular neutrality was imposed by the constitution, is not a simple indifference – a turning away and a closing down – but rather, it allows for a beneficent form of neutrality, suggesting this neutrality to the state. The state, advocated by constitutional law, recognises – for historical and systematic reasons – a specific corporateness that is regulated by public law. Thus, the federal republic state and the federal states are even able to support religious communities, provided that the states respect the requirement of neutrality and the principle of equality. Therefore, benevolent neutrality emphasises the formation of a separation of the two spheres, as separation does not mean the sectioning of all social and co-operative relationships in the same way that it does in laicism. This is a piece of dialectics of the modern age. One needs to understand the relationship between religious and political in the constitutional state as being similar; one which has many requirements and which always remains in tension so as to guard against any tendencies of a sheer dechristianisation, which would entail the loss of the separate spheres. This may take place in very subtle ways, for example, when either politics usurps religious morals, or else when religion begins to compete with the political system as a formative, policy-shaping power.

This self-restriction to consider only issues of faith, which is demanded of a secularised Church by the Reformation, and its insistence on freedom of conscience, have secular and legal consequences, whether or not it was Luther’s direct intention. When Luther demonstrated this to the Pope, his example caught on and provided a model for the modern age. With the greater understanding which comes with hindsight, this can only be understood as the co-evolution of something which is not both, categorically separate, and, at the same time, closely interconnected. Here is a piece of modern dialectics arising from the spirit of the revolution. This is also a bit of modern dialectics arising from the spirit of revolution.

State and Church are separated, as stipulated by our constitution. Every sphere has its own territory to govern and shape, and each is respected by the other. In a religious and ideological respect, the state is neutral. This particular neutrality was imposed by the constitution, is not a simple indifference – a turning away and a closing down – but rather, it allows for a beneficent form of neutrality, suggesting this neutrality to the state. The state, advocated by constitutional law, recognises – for historical and systematic reasons – a specific corporateness that is regulated by public law. Thus, the federal republic state and the federal states are even able to support religious communities, provided that the states respect the requirement of neutrality and the principle of equality. Therefore, benevolent neutrality emphasises the formation of a separation of the two spheres, as separation does not mean the sectioning of all social and co-operative relationships in the same way that it does in laicism. This is a piece of dialectics of the modern age. One needs to understand the relationship between religious and political in the constitutional state as being similar; one which has many requirements and which always remains in tension so as to guard against any tendencies of a sheer dechristianisation, which would entail the loss of the separate spheres. This may take place in very subtle ways, for example, when either politics usurps religious morals, or else when religion begins to compete with the political system as a formative, policy-shaping power.

This self-restriction to consider only issues of faith, which is demanded of a secularised Church by the Reformation, and its insistence on freedom of conscience, have secular and legal consequences, whether or not it was Luther’s direct intention. When Luther demonstrated this to the Pope, his example caught on and provided a model for the modern age. With the greater understanding which comes with hindsight, this can only be understood as the co-evolution of something which is not both, categorically separate, and, at the same time, closely interconnected. Here is a piece of modern dialectics arising from the spirit of the revolution. This is also a bit of modern dialectics arising from the spirit of revolution.
F rom the very beginning, we argued about how to mark 2017 in “the right way”: Whether we should celebrate or commemo-
rate the occasion, as a festival of Luther or as an event involving all Protestant churches; whether we should focus on the Evangelical churches or on
an ecumenical perspective, whether we should examine the situation in Germany or across the world; and whether we should concentrate on the churches or include the state, and so forth. As part of the dialogue, we also discussed territorial claims and inter-
pretational sovereignty. Originally, jubilees had a religious character: their roots reach back into the Old Testament with the year of jubilee, and, in 1300, they were an integral part of the introduction of the Holy Year by Pope Boniface VIII. These events ultima-
tely revolved around a yearning for salvation, but they also involved the key questions of life, namely those around a meaningful existence, self assurance and the desire to enrich one’s own existence with stories, as the historian Valentin Groebner once phrased it in an interview.1

One of the accusations levelled at the Church in regards to the celebrations of 2017 is: The Church is celebrating itself! The Reformation however was – and the anniver-
sary is – an occasion involving the whole of society. In 2007, the then Governor of Saxony-Anhalt, Wolfgang Böhmer, devised the idea of the Luther
Decade, which was then adopted by the then Chairman of the EKD Council, Wolfgang Huber. The Luther Decade was an event held jointly by the state and the Church. In 2008, a decision of the German Federal Parliament determined that, amidst all the historical occasions of Europe that had been informed by Christianity, the Reformation was a central event. The thematic years provided important cues, defined points of reference and marked out fields in which the Church and state, politics and economy, cultural institutions and civil society would and could encounter one another; high-
lighting where there was co-operation and – in the best case scenarios – where there was potential for mutual enrichment. It is this kind of breadth which should also characterise the year of 2017.

Can one learn from previous jubilees? 
The staging of events during previous jubilee cele-
brations often reveals more about the present than the Reformation of the 16th century. From the na-

tionalisation and heroisation of Luther in the 19th century to the nationalistic misrepresentation of the Reformer by the “German Christians” move-

ment; today, all these distortions fill us with shame. In 1883, celebrations of the 500th birthday of Martin Luther were conducted in each of the two German states, and both were greatly influenced by their competitive claims of ownership. In 1983, the GDR got into a veritable “jubilee trap” (Wolf-
gang Flügel) with its two-pronged strategy to cele-
brate both Luther’s 500th birthday and the 100th anniversary of Karl Marx’s death. The people of the GDR scoffed: “Luther is celebrating his 500th, and Marx has been dead for 100 years.” Today, our understanding is less influenced by the premise of two contrasting ideological systems than it is by the conditions set by a culture of pluralism, in which an exclusive prerogative of interpretation has become questionable. In 2003, according to the ranking of the ZDF-show “Unsere Besten – Die größten Deutschen” (The Best of us – The greatest Germans), Luther and Marx came in second and third, behind Adenauer who took first place.

As a Playmobil figure, Luther became a sales hit. How does this fit with the bigger picture? Luther in miniature is the top-selling Playmobil figure of all times. This is not the first time Luther himself, but such a centrali-
ing figure can be said to be a bricolage; a combi-
nation of several components of the Playmobil product range which are already in existence, in-
cluding the black cloak of Darth Vader. Playmobil models are somewhat robust and, even when he is moulded out of plastic, the Reformer is not easy to break! However, the fact that Luther even exists as a figurine demonstrates that, in addition to the moralising and patronising approach of previous jubilees, in 2017 there is another danger: that of flippant treatment of the topic; of infantilising history so as to make it play-material.

The figure is sold by the Nuremberg Tourist In-
formation Centre and the Federal German Parlia-
ment spoke of the Reformation jubilee as being a tourist event. Is this not a further trivialisation? Even in 1900, it was important to attract as many pilgrims as possible to Rome. The jubilee, as a tou-
rist event, has its charms. A journey to Wittenberg, Strasbourg or Geneva – to name but a few of the locations of the Reformation – is a journey into the past. In such locations, one encounters a history that is a part of our present and one which shapes our cities. This transformation is both a literal and figurative one, and history has not only shaped physical cityscapes but also ideas, mentalities, attitudes, cultural accomplishments, civil successes or ecclesial achievements. One can see how an historic legacy can change with some aspects being destroyed or lost, whilst others are reconstructed, complemented, restored or drawn into new con-
texts. Things not only change in their substance, but also in their meaning and function.

The Reformation took place in other places out-
side of Wittenberg. What are the implications for the jubilee? To begin with, the main focuses were Wittenberg, Luther and the posting of the theses. As the focus on one person, one place and one date is due to the significance of Luther himself, but such a centrali-
sation is not without its problems. In Switzerland, a criticism was voiced that by designating 2017 as a festival year, the Calvin year of 2009 would be rendered a mere Aperitif (aperitif), and would leave no room to celebrate the Zwingli jubilee in 2019. A turning point came in the form of the interna-
tional conference of the EKD and the Federation of Swiss Protestant churches (SEK) in Zurich, in 2013. Here, the perspectives of the German and Swiss churches were joined by the voices of the Anglican Church, churches from Scandinavia,
On the journey towards the Reformation jubilee, should the EKD forget Luther’s writings of 1523 and the centuries of tradition which have been guided by them, given that, in their time, they were so remarkable? When it comes to the politics of remembrance, it seems as though the Evangelical Church is renouncing its own history, and the EKD is about to aid the national socialists’ scheme to a late victory.

Joohannes Wollmann, “Die Evangelische Kirche verleugnet ihre Geschichte” (The Evangelical Church is Denying its History), FAZ on 31. 10. 2017

> representatives of the free churches and also by young churches from Asia. Rowan Williams, for example, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, attempted to determine a “Protestant” identity through a critical analysis of American fundamentalism and Europe’s Protestant liberalism. Jong Hwa Jong, the first Korean to be ordained in the United States.

PHOTO: NIKADA/ISTOCKPHOTO

In Zurich, Kurt Kardinal Koch spoke of the failure of the Reformation. What implications does this have for an ecumenical Reformation jubilee? Koch referred to the greater scope of the term “reform” as compared to the term “Reformation”. His polarising description of some medieval reform movements as being wholly positive is somewhat problematic and his only reference to the Reformation focuses on its failure, which is said to have led to a schism within the Church. It is true that the renewal of the Reformation needs to be described within its historical context of the innovations and traditions of the late Middle Ages. In so doing, the traditional Evangelical view of the Middle Ages is modified, as is the Catholic image of Luther. Therefore, a definition of the continuities may well open up an opportunity for ecumenical dialogue. The question of church unity remains difficult, however, as the ability to determine the relationship between legitimate diversity and visible unity is as controversial as it ever has been; – one cannot simply regard the Reformation as belonging to the paradigm of the schism, but must also see it as a development on the way towards “reconciled difference.” In 2017, an important milestone can be reached in Evangelical-Catholic relations, if we manage to succeed in celebrating together under the banner of ecumenical agreement, without losing sight of the historical losses caused by the Reformation. Connecting a “festival of Christ” with the process of “Healing of Memories” would be a step in this direction.

There is a history of hurt not only in relation to Catholicism, but also in relation to Judaism. Where does this have in 2017? In 2012, a recommendation was voiced at the Synod of the EKD that, in the thematic year of “Reformation and Tolerance”, the Evangelical Church should publicly distance itself from Luther’s pronouncements against the Jews. This led to an intense public debate about Luther’s hostility to the Jews. In 2014, the Academic Advisory Council published an informative guide which examined the relationship between the conflicting effects of Luther in 1523 and 1543 in response to the question as to how to treat the Jews. In 2014, the Synod of the EKD was the first to approve a declaration. In June 2015, the Evangelical Church in Berlin and the Education Department of the Central Council of Jews conducted a conversation around the key topic: the Jewish perspectives of Martin Luther. The discussion succeeded in shining a light on many points and continuities concerning Luther’s view regarding the Jews became clearer. For the Reformer, Jews were obdurate and subject to God’s wrath. His enmity towards the Jews coloured central points of his theology, such as the distinction between the law and the gospel, for example, as well as the promise and its fulfilment and Luther’s understanding of the Old Testament. Finally, whilst it is clear that while there is no simple line of causality leading from Luther to Hitler, the invoking of Luther’s statements as a legitimisation of hostility towards Jews cannot simply be denounced as a “misrepresentation”. In 2015, the Synod of the EKD-Synod in Bremen commented on this in a declaration: “Frei und engagiert – in Christus. Christlicher Glaube in offener Gesellschaft” (Free and Involved – in Christ. The Christian Faith in an Open Society).

PHOTO: RECHT/THOMAS FALCKENSTEIN

What are the cultural effects of the Reformation? The effects of the Reformation on the modern age have been carefully examined ever since the studies by Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch were first produced. Troeltsch held the opinion that the Reformation only contributed to the evolution of the modern age in an indirect way, through the form of Neo-Protestantism; and that this occurred rather unintentionally and in co-operation with other forces. The “Perspektiven für das Reformationssjubiläum 2017” (Perspectives for the Reformation Anniversary in 2017) produced by the Academic Advisory Council of the EKD for the Reformation Jubilee, was an attempt to outline the cultural effects of the Reformation. With great self-confidence, the authors emphasise the signification of the Reformation for a tolerant, liberal and democratic society. In 2014, the Chairman of the Academic Advisory Council, Udo Di Fabio, affirmed the significance of the Reformation for the central ideas of the modern age. (FAZ, 22.04.2014; see also his contribution in this magazine, pages 8–11). He means to develop an adequate approach between historical dissociation and monopolising constructs of continuity. It remains a source of controversy as to whether there are confessional differences amongst the cultural effects. Most historians today hold the opinion that the three main denominations each contributed equally to the formation of modernity. By way of contrast, Professor of Church History Christoph Stromh, in Heidelberg, points out that there is productive power in confessional controversies – a factor which had previously received little attention.

The same question is raised again, though in a different form – if one does not approach it from the historical angle of the evolution of modernity, but rather from the perspective of the significance of the Reformation for the present times. The EKD-Synod in Bremen refers to this in a declaration: “Frei und engagiert – in Christus. Christlicher Glaube in offener Gesellschaft” (Free and Involved – in Christ. The Christian Faith in an Open Society).

PHOTO: RECHT/THOMAS FALCKENSTEIN

What place does this have in 2017? Although there is no single answer as to the “right” kind of commemoration, we cannot relinquish the responsibility of asking questions concerning the appropriate form and shape of the Reformation anniversary. The turning point afforded by the 500 years seems to be somewhat arbitrary; Wolfgang Flagel spoke of the “pressure of the round number” in 2015. From 2017, what cannot simply ignore. Thies Gundlach explained this in a very vivid manner: He said that it is like the 100,000-kilometre-point on a car’s tachometer. Whilst, in reality, the first kilometre after the 100,000 mark is no different to the last kilometre before the delimiter, on reaching this indicator, one begins to think about the car, about the many journeys which it has made, about the dangerous situations it has been through and how much longer it will function. To take advantage of the opportunity which is provided by the anniversary, will involve invoking the diverse perspectives and horizons – as was done during the thirtieth years of the Luther Decade, and, at the same time, picking up the Reformation’s quest for God and the fundamental question about God – and pursuing them afresh. In so doing, the Evangelical Church would not only be acting in a manner that was entirely true to itself, but would also be making a contribution to a more humane society. It is our hope that, in this way, something of the incredible dynamism and breadth of the Reformation’s new beginnings will leap into the 21st century.

PHOTO: AMIBALU}

**Not only did the Reformation fundamentally change Church and theology, the Protestantism which emerged from it – and is beholden to it – helped shape the entirety of private and public life; and that applies to social structures and economic action, cultural patterns of perception and mentalities, legal conceptions, academic concepts and artistic expressive forms.**


**Ernst Troeltsch, Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt (The Significance of Protestantism for the Evolution of the Modern World), in: THEMEN UND DEBATTEN p. 14

**Website in German www.ekd.de/symposion_ bremen/beschlussreihe/15_04_ iv_8_beschluss_kundgebung_ schwerpunktthem.html**
Though the Anniversary of the Reformation

Dr Diarmaid N. J. MacCulloch, Professor of the History of the Church at the University of Oxford

The Reformation teaches us that only critical doubt will protect us from blind faith and fundamentalism

By Diarmaid N. J. MacCulloch

IT is a Protestant myth that medieval Catholicism was in such a bad state that all that was needed was to put a little finger on it, for it to collapse. Not so: Protestant Reformers destroyed a powerful, self-confident institution. That makes the Reformation and Reform theology so much more interesting. Only ideas and their independent power could so dramatically have brought down such a strong structure. So the Reformation was not caused by social and economic forces, or even by a secular idea like nationalism; it sprang from a big idea about death. An all-powerful God was the Lord of Death as well of Life: nothing of the intricate structure of intercessory prayer for the dead maintained by the late medieval Western Church could alter his decision, born of his own mercy and judgment. That is the thought that seized Martin Luther, inspired so many people in Europe, and brought down such an immense and powerful structure. That is the thought that seized Martin Luther, inspired so many people in Europe, and brought down such a strong structure. So the Reformation and Reform theology were not the religiously indifferent became Protestants, but rather those who like Luther who had believed passionately in the old Church’s road to salvation, and were then convinced that they had been cheated. White-hot Catholics became white-hot Protestants – that is why so many clergy of the old Church became leaders of the Reformation, for they suffered a double agony. Not only had they been cheated about salvation, but they had cheated others in their preaching and ministry. Now they must make atonement. Hence their deep bitterness against the old structure, and hence also the bitterness of those who fought back to defend the old structure. Since Luther’s struggle involved an attack on the power which the Church claimed to help people in gaining their salvation, it became a power struggle in a much wider sense.

More remarkable still was that behind Luther’s thoughts were two men centuries dead before his time: the Apostle Paul, and Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. It is impossible to overestimate Augustine’s importance to western Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant. Augustine read what Paul had written centuries before his own time, especially in the Epistle to the Romans, and an all-powerful God, contrasting with totally corrupt humanity. Augustine called a human being such as himself ‘a lump of perdition’. There is nothing that lumps of perdition can do for our own salvation. We need God to do it all.

Are western Christians all more or less now Protestants? Perhaps the most precious thing the Reformation left is something which Martin Luther may never have said: ‘Here I stand, I can do no other’. It was actually some years after his death that those words were first written down, but Luther ought to have said them, because they sum up something about being what a Protestant is. The idea became the central creed of the Enlightenment too. In the United States even the Roman Catholic Church is a church of individualists who make their own decisions. They do not listen to their bishops, particularly when the bishops lecture them against the use of artificial contraception. If you follow Luther’s supposed words, you stand alone, before your God, and ultimately you do not have the help of a tradition. You find your own matrix: that is the Western privilege and dilemma, the terrifying gift in being part of Western Enlightenment civilisation. Luther already knew that feeling of terror.

The curious thing is that this emphasis on individual decision contradicts various other hopes and aims which were dear to the Reformers. The Reformation tried to be certain about religion. Just like the Roman Catholic Church, it wanted a single truth, and its quarrel with Rome was that Rome had distorted that truth. There is a tragedy in laying down clear, firm patterns, which give people a sense of rootedness and value, because religious belief is always open to change, variety, nuance, subtlety.

Great religious leaders are very often temperamentally inclined to discount subtlety. But God is often just out of reach – Luther, indeed, often talked about a hidden God. Most religion has a representational quality; it does not provide clear answers.

Those who call themselves religious traditionalists tend to be those who do not know enough about their religious tradition, or who have edited out those parts which they do not like. Moreover, their proclaimed traditionalism too often turns out to be a tradition of saying no rather than yes. A proper traditionalism contemptuates the whole range of its past. It is happy to say that past Christians, and past Christian dogmas, were often as wrong as they were right. ‘Blind unbelief is sure to err’, sang the English hymn-writer William Cowper (1731–1800). Historians are likely to retort that blind belief has a record even more abysmal, and that clear-sighted doubt might be the most healthy state of all. That is history’s gift to the Church, and in a curious, topsy-turvy way, it is a gift that we owe to the Protestant Reformation. Let us be grateful for it.
"CRISIS" is one of the fundamental concepts used in the media to describe society, as well as a phrase commonly used to express the collective sense of the times prevalent at the beginning of the 21st century: Refugee, banks, Euro(pe), terror, climate — one could add any number of issues to the list, and all are described as crises. "Crisis management" involves a regular repertoire of reporting including the monotheistic discussion (at the expense of all other "crises"), the focus on the well-known and habitual hot spots, the inevitable expert discussion and the political action plan. The hyper-sensitivity of the thrill-seeking society in which we find ourselves, in turn, contributes to the uneasy, Hamlet-like feeling that our time, the world, and life itself, is out of joint. We often imagine our part in this and sense that "it is down to us to sort it out" (or else, given our collective narcissism: "It is down to us to sort it out"). Thus, critical situations first become a crisis, then a "culture of crisis"; and — in the end — an unavoidable disaster. Welcome to dystopia!

Clearly, we cannot reduce the above mentioned challenges, which are very real, to a mere problem of perception. Neither can we simply pass the (crisis) buck on to the media or some other section of society such as politics, the economy, religion or an individualistic lifestyle. What is to be criticised however, is the "crisis-hype", or an individualistic lifestyle. What is to be criticised however, is the "crisis-hype", which is presently employed as a reaction to a difficult situation.

Its characteristics include always regarding a current challenge as a culmination/turning point of a dramatic development. This is accompanied by a feeling of threat, in an emotional sense; by an information deficit (lack of clarity), in a cognitive sense; and by a particular pressure to make decisions or to act (pressure to provide a solution), in a processual sense. The daily routine has been disrupted, the ability to perceive, constrained (tunnel vision), and time, pressured ("it's almost the eleventh hour"). By way of contrast, the tried-and-tested political remedies and individual attitudes are marked by: factual sober-mindedness, historical consciousness, compassionate composure, circumspect decision-making and consistent action.

Within the context of the Reformation anniversary, the churches of the Reformation can make a contribution to this, simply by producing good theology. Towards this aim, I would like to present a few ideas which are open for modification and further suggestions:

- **Ultimately, the Old as well as the New Testament evolved as crisis-literature:** in the one, the exile had to be processed and mentally managed; in the other, one had to cope with the death of Christ or the delay of his return. It is now the task of Reformation theology to make accessible an alternative biblical "semantics of crisis", in which topics such as assurance in tribulation, a home in exile and hope against hope, are discussed. Reaching far beyond a simplistic "solution strategy", such discussions about biblical crises aim to develop an existential resisting power, which enables people to survive critical situations.

- **A biblical understanding never merely entails discussing technical details alone, but ultimately involves a personal way of discerning and discarding of alternatives (Greek: -krinein), and deciding who we want to be and who we do not want to be. I believe, for instance, that in society's discourse about refugees, the key statement is not the affirmative: "We can do this", but rather the question: "What kind of country are we living in, if we do (not) help people in their hour of need?"

One of the key concepts of an Evangelical understanding of crisis is "repentance", which is in line with the first of the 95 theses of 1517. It is about a leap of faith (metanoia) as a fundamental change of one's own thinking, desiring and acting. This occurs as a liberating — as well as confrontational — experience, which is not subject to one's own sphere of action. Theologically speaking, it occurs by faith, as a work of the Holy Spirit.

In the biblical stories, this change begins in the "desert", at the place of radical contemplation, of letting go and of concentration. This is the necessary, critical side of any crisis — which can even be critical of the lifestyle in which we engaged before the crisis. The constructive side of a crisis is not merely for God.

The constructive side of a crisis is not merely the arts, politics, the economy, religion or some other section of society in which we find ourselves, in turn, contributes to the uneasy, Hamlet-like feeling that our time, the world, and life itself, is out of joint. We often imagine our part in this and sense that "it is down to us to sort it out" (or else, given our collective narcissism: "It is down to us to sort it out"). Thus, critical situations first become a crisis, then a "culture of crisis"; and — in the end — an unavoidable disaster. Welcome to dystopia!

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EXPERIENCING GOD IN NEW WAYS

since 1972, the Evangelical Church has been gathering data, once a decade, about the attitudes, motivations and positions of church members; and also about those who are not affiliated to any particular denomination. These surveys of church members (Kirchenmitgliedschaftsuntersuchungen; KMU) generate and interpret data in response to a number of diverse questions including: What kind of connections do people have to the church as an institution? Which topics are considered to be religious? What influence do factors such as socialisation, age and education have on church affiliation?

The interpretation of the survey results is, of course, highly dependent upon the respective setting of priorities as they relate to overarching themes, theory and methodology. The concept of competition between two religio-sociological macro theories – one related to individualisation (in the sense of a change from traditional forms to new forms of practised religiosity), the other related to secularisation (in the sense of a decline in church affiliation and religiosity) – has, to a large extent, been superseded by more recent sociological patterns; and yet, it is nevertheless apparent in the analysis of the 5th, the most recent, survey.

In general, the results and interpretations of the survey reflect a pluralisation of dynamics which affects all sectors of society. Pluralisation, as a basic tendency, can be found on several levels of the present-day situation within the religious and ecclesial sphere: Whilst 2/3 of the population in Germany are still members of one of the two main established Christian denominations – it is obvious that, within this context, there is a tendency to move away from convictions that have been “inherited” from family and culture as a matter of course, and towards the following of a particular path out of individual choice and responsibility; and this movement is – at times – very diverse. This multi-layered pluralisation of the religious sphere is also marked by great regional differences: There are, as yet, substantial religio-cultural differences between east and west Germany. There is also a huge disparity between churches in the south and north of the country, between denominationally homogeneous regions and those where there is a mix of denominations; and also between urban and rural regions. It is noticeable that the cultural differences do not disappear; rather, they intensify; and this tendency can also be seen to be caused by political and economic decisions.

Given this backdrop, the developments within the established churches themselves appear to be, primarily, an expression of multifarious pluralisation. Since the 1960s, ecclesiastical organisations have been developing a large number of inter-parochial forms of socialising and working alongside the traditional local congregations. In addition, these ecclesiastical organisations have also begun to network with numerous other forms of organisations, in the field of education and cultural life, for example. In such a way, a multitude of “ecclesial places” have evolved, and many both feature and sustain a particular profile of spirituality.

In a setting that is influenced by the processes of pluralisation, the decline of religious practice and church commitment is very obvious. In the social groups that are marginalised and under-privileged (by society in general, as well as the churches), commitment to a church and involvement in a congregation are particularly rare. In such environments, it is rather the kinds of church activity which have a relevance to everyday life, or those which feature diaconal elements, that are met with interest. Commitment to – and participation in – a church institution are characterised by high conventionality and such practices being embedded in traditional family routines. It is most notable therefore, that it is in churches that advocate family-oriented lifestyles, where membership is stable. Those who live with children are not always actively involved in a church congregation, but will more regularly accept invitations to church services or paedagogical events put on by the institutional church. In addition, it is apparent that the intensity of religious communication is clearly higher than average.

Social commitment, including involvement with a church, has clearly intensified in recent years, and the evidence is borne out in the voluntary contributions of the interviewees. The findings of most surveys about the social capital associated with membership concur with this evaluation and the general approval of the reasons for church membership, as well as for church affiliation, have, in spite of the above-mentioned decline – increased substantially. Those who participate in churches are increasingly, even explicitly, positive about their affiliation. Another way of putting it would be: The reflectivity of church affiliation has increased.

Ultimately, it is obvious that transformation processes involving the practice of membership are already underway in many respects. Though (or because) statistical attendance of “normal” services is in further decline, perceived participation during Sunday morning services has increased enormously; and this is also the case for services which are typically Evangelical, such as the Reformation Day services. In addition, the different forms of commitment to the local church have further differentiated and changed in many ways. This is also true for the way church volunteers are perceived, and, in particular, the pastors: Alongside personal conversation, new forms of contact are developing: ones which are marked by a benevolent, but distant, attitude and very self-determined interactions, ones which, nevertheless, are still capable of generating a considerable feeling of allegiance.

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“THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE IN CHURCHES ARE INCREASINGLY, EVEN EXPLICITLY, POSITIVE ABOUT THEIR AFFILIATION”

Church in the Context of the Present Times

by Konrad Merzyn

INDIVIDUALISATION OR SECULARISATION?

PLURALISATION?

REV DR KONRAD MERZYN, Senior Member of the EKD Church Office, responsible for the Study and Planning Department and Head of the Project Office for the Reform Process.

PHOTO: KARL-BERTHOLD VÖRLE/ISTOCKPHOTO

FROM THESE FINDINGS, ONE CAN DEDUCE

Experience is the magic word of our times. Whoever emphasises experience pins their hopes on realism, familiarity, orientability and verifiability. Whatever we are experiencing is subjectively certain, and whatever experiences we undergo are inter-subjectively probable. It is the process of our own experiencing, and at times, our shared experiences, that make us who we are – either for better or for worse. In both cases, we are at the centre: without me, there is no experiencing, without us, there is no experience. And since for many of us, there is hardly anything that is important to us as ourselves, there is much to talk about when it comes to experiencing and experiences.

There are reasons as to why the desire to experience is quite so widespread today. Whenever the orientative power of tradition and social convention are on the decline, experiencing and experiences gain significance. Wherever there is technological and digital advancement in our home and work environments, it is possible to feel estranged from “real” life and, in such a setting, the yearning for experiencing and also for shared experiences grows. We want to see, feel, touch, hear, taste and smell. We want to feel that we are alive, and to experience just what that means. We want to have our own experiences and not merely to follow in someone else’s footsteps. We want to express our emotions and not merely with pre-formed emojis, but rather, we want to communicate with others, for real and in physical and bodily ways. In the end, it is only what we experience for ourselves that is important, and whatever is not based on our own, or shared, experiences, counts either for very little – or for nothing at all.

Experiencing experiences for yourself and replicating experiences are the cornerstones of our culture of authenticity. However, they also create problems. Whilst we may be certain of our own experiences, they do not guarantee truth, because anyone can be wrong. This is why critical thinking has to advance from subjective experiencing to inter-subjective experience. Opinions and claims are legitimate, as long as they can be replicated so that others can also experience them, by which means they are proven to be valid. Scientific assumptions have to be experimentally verified if they are to be considered well-founded insights. However, experiencing and experiences are often unrealisable desiderata. There are a multitude of life experiences which are never undertaken by many, and few are in a position to replicate the meticulous processes by which the experiential elements of our culture are scientifically examined and technically implemented. We remain ever-reliant on someone else’s experiences, precisely because we are not able to experience every experience for ourselves.

This also applies to our experience of God, about which there is so much talk today. We are told that God is to be sought in life, not merely as a notion, but as an experience, and that without encountering and experiencing him, all our talk about God is ultimately meaningless. This raises many questions – and not only for those who are not familiar with Life-Giver, be subject to our experience! Not to note that these ideas have not always been prevalent. Theologically, the concept of the experience of God became common in the 1960s, and it paralleled the rise in the culture of experience within our contemporary culture. Of course, before this time, there was a quest for God and a yearning for an experience of God. People are always thinking about God. Some may also have religious or spiritual experiences. Mystics strive for a cognition Dei experimentalis (experiential knowledge of God), or their own awareness of God; whereby they assure themselves of the truth of their faith, not in an intellectual capacity through arguments, but through an affective experiencing. But, do these count as experiences of God, and if they do, in which capacity?

From an analytical perspective, “experience” means “the experience of something as something”; thus, experience not only entails perceiving something as existing (being there), but it also involves having an understanding about something in a certain way (meaning). If something does not exist, it cannot be experienced; neither can anything that is not meaningful be experienced. Meaning (what is possible) and being (what is real) are always interlaced in an experience. Speaking about an experience of God, therefore, is ambiguous. Are we speaking about an experience of something divine, of gods or of God? Does the notion of “God” mean the one who is experienced as something in particular; does it mean something that is experienced as something, or does it mean the one, without whom it would be impossible to experience something as something? Obviously, the experience of God is an expression that is as ambiguous as the genitive in the expression itself. Is this an experience in which God is the object of the experience; is it an experience which God is experiencing; is it an experience initiated by God; or is it an experience in which people call something God and speak about it as such?

Every one of these interpretations raises even more questions. Can God, who is confessed in the creed as Father and Creator, Son and Redeemer, Spirit and Life-Giver, be subject to our experience? Is he not beyond anything that we might be able to experience? Does it make sense to think about God as the one who experiences something? Does one have to live in space and time in order to be able to be experiencing experiences? How might one discern when an experience has been initiated by God, and how would it differ from experiences that have not been initiated by God? If the notion of “God” expresses the very meaning of certain experiences, is it possible to speak about these experiences in another way? Does the notion of “God” express something which cannot be said in a different way; something which cannot be said in such a poignant way; or something which, when put into this word, is fraught with problems, and could be better expressed in a different way?

For a long time, the theological tradition has been reticent to speak about experiences of God – and quite rightly so. God is not merely an experiential phenomenon which ranks along—
It is not a special need that we need, but rather, it is the mode of experiencing – and our understanding of ourselves as we experience and understand each other, whether we understand the world as creation. Either everything is creation, or nothing is creation; and if anything is rightly understood as such, then everything should be understood as creation. When we understand ourselves as created will also understand everything else as being created, and whoever does not understand himself as such, will also understand nothing as such.

The discovery of this understanding is not an experience which we go through, but an experience to which we are subordinated, as it were, to the indwelling of the creation, the Creator is not experienced, rather, he is the mystery hidden within it; we cannot say of God, not speak of God as Creator, even if there were no reason, within creation, to do so. In the realm of experience within creation, the Creator is not experienced, but, as the world discloses itself to be creation, he becomes a subject for discussion. This is not always obvious, as the world does not immediately reveal itself to be God’s creation. “The heavens declare the glory of the eternal God”, but only for him who has ears to hear. The meaning of the world discloses itself in the place where there are people, but its meaning – as creation – is only apparent to those who have eyes, ears and heart are open to receive this message. In order to receive such a message, prior experiences of the world are not a prerequisite; what is necessary is God, in his world. Furthermore, even if we are God’s creation, the experience of the world discloses itself to us in the way in which we live, in different ways than we do in our daily life. We have to discover that the world, in which we find ourselves, is God’s creation; and we make this discovery by understanding that we are God’s creatures, living in the world, together with all the others, in God’s presence.

Experiencing and understanding oneself, rather than experiencing and understanding the world, are therefore the keys to discovering the world as creation. “I believe that God created me, as well as all that exists,” says Augustine, “As I understand my life, and the life of other things, I begin to perceive the defining insight we need.” Whosoever does not see himself as created will neither experience the world as creation, nor confess God as Creator. It is the special need that we need, but rather, it is the mode of experiencing – and our understanding of ourselves as we experience and understand each other, whether we understand the world as creation. Either everything is creation, or nothing is creation; and if anything is rightly understood as such, then everything should be understood as creation. When we understand ourselves as created will also understand everything else as being created, and whoever does not understand himself as such, will also understand nothing as such.

The old distinction between that which is holy and that which is profane, between that which is revealed and that which is not, that which is immediate and that which is secular, becomes obsolete, since God’s presence influences all spheres of life in such a way that people are liberated to take responsibility for shaping their own lives together with other people, who have themselves accepted the same responsibility. No one is closer to God than anyone else, because God is close to all of his own way. This is precisely what the Reformers reminded us of so emphatically. God is always ahead of all human action and not-no can lay an exclusive claim to it (not God alone, but the Spirit and where people hear his Word, they begin to understand themselves as created by God). Wherever this occurs, the self-understanding of such people changes – and the person of the new life – the person who is God’s creature but without living as such – and the person of the new life – the person who begins to live as God’s creature will, in their own way, become who he is, because God is being experienced, but rather, they are experiences of God because they relate to the redefinition of humanity’s self-understanding – and they themselves have already understood the relationship to the world – whereby God becomes comprehensible as the mystery of creation. Whoever begins to understand themselves as being created and the world as creation, will find different ways of dealing with themselves and others.

Christianity, it is said, owes its existence to a new experience of God, not an experience of a new God. There is no other God at the centre of Christianity than the one to whom Jesus and the Jewish people prayed. No other god deserves to be called God. This is not because people did not create other gods for themselves; it is because one does not need them. “I am the Lord, your God. You do not need other gods alongside me.” Whatever one can expect and hope for in (a) God, is promised to us in this God. Everything that is necessary is God’s presence. These are not phenomena like any others, but rather, an encounter with God’s Word and God’s Spirit is a self-interpreting event, through which people understand themselves in the light of God’s presence.

The WE ONLY LIVE AMONGST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD, BUT AMIDST GOD’S PRESENCE

WE CAN ONLY EXPERIENCE WHAT IS CREATED, BUT NOT THE CREATOR OF WHAT IS CREATED


Prof Emeritus Dr Dr. H. C. Dr. H. C. Ingolf U. Dalferth, Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Claremont Graduate University in California.
people not only experience God during worship services or when reading the Bible, but also in their private every-day lives, on their holidays, in their places of work, in the street, in particular locations and during special times of gathering together with others. These experiences are not always sought after because God also encounters us unexpectedly, surprisingly and overwhelmingly, as described, for example, by Dario Pizzano in his book “Excess” (Excess). There are clearly ways however, in which people can encounter God.

Initially, these are often paths which we take regularly, as we find it easier to forget ourselves and to open up to an encounter with God in familiar surroundings. The most important path is prayer, in which ever form it takes, because prayer is a conversation with God and an immediate encounter. In this, it is the whole person who prays, with their mind, soul and body.

The body is important: a person who is either distracted and wander from one topic to the next, too tired, too engrossed by the events of the day, or during a spiritual conversation with a person which includes the birth of God in the soul.

In order for this to occur, Eckhart advocated that the believer needed to empty himself or herself (of his or her own concerns), so that he or she could – either then or simultaneously – be filled by God. He illustrates the dynamics and the achievement of the birth of God in his philosophical considerations and numerous images including the birth of God in the “fortress” of the soul. In so doing, he does not shy away from using radical images which would have caused volatile reactions, in particular amongst the nuns: “To say that a man is a virgin does not at all take away from him any of the works he has done. Instead, this allows him to remain violently and free, without any obstructions between him and the highest truth, just as Jesus is majestically and freely in himself. […] If a man were to remain a virgin always, no fruit would come from him. If he would be fruitful, then he would necessarily have become a wife. Wife is the nobler name you can give the soul, nother even than virgin.” (Quint 159C). In a different sermon, he explains the mystical experience of God, which is the birth of God in the soul, using language which is audacious, even for today’s ears: “The Father gives birth to the Son in the soul in the very same way as he gives him birth in eternity, and in none other. […] Yes, I declare moreover, not only does God give birth to me as his Son, he gives birth to me as himself and as the very essence of himself, giving birth to me as his own essence and as his own nature. […] We are completely transformed into God and changed (2 Cor 5:18) […] God and I are one.” (Quint 185C).

In Meister Eckhart’s Writings

The Birth of God in the “Fortress” of the Soul

By Stefanie Frost

Dr Stefanie Frost, Secondary School Teacher at the Co-operative Comprehensive School Moringen.

A practical Instruction Guide for Encounters with God

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My Reformation began in a monastery. In the summer of 1987, the participants of a university seminar went to Münsterschwarzach for a weekend. We learnt how the monks there translated the Psalms into German in a way that had not been done before, so that they could be more easily sung with the traditional Gregorian psalm tones. And we were invited to sing along with them. In the monks’ choir. It was at this time, I realised that singing can be a form of meditation. One pays attention to the old words. Your ear and your voice know the tunes and follow them. You breathe in harmony with the other singers. And somehow, whilst you sing and breathe and sing, your heart hears the words anew.

Ever since that time, I have understood that it is possible to get involved with the texts of the Bible in very different and much deeper ways than by simply reading, speaking or hearing the words. If you entrust yourself to them, they change you. Take time for them, lots of time. Then, they themselves will do the rest of the Re-formation.

BY JOHANNES GOLDENSTEIN

EXPERIENCING GOD IN NEW WAYS

Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.

We will not hide from their sons, showing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD and his strength and his wonderful works that he has done.

PSALM 78:3–4 · JUBILEE BIBLE, 2000

E

xperience: a word like a Siamese twin. Experience means: hearing something, perceiving something, finding something out that I did not know before. A message, a piece of news; though I take note of it, I am still detached from it. And there are things that I experience in different ways. I undergo them and they become a part of me. Later, they become part of my experiences.

In other languages, people distinguish between these two aspects of the same word. It is only in our language that experience is such a Siamese twin. In the dictionary, we read: Experience (erfahren) is derived from ervarn, which means “to travel, to drive through, to pass through”. I embark upon a journey. I get to know something new and these experiences change me.

The Bible can be read as a journal of human experiences with God. And at its centre is the story of the journey of the people of Israel through the desert. In Psalm 78, this story is recounted once more as the story of Israel’s primal experience. It begins with a self-exhortation: We want to tell our children about that which we have experienced. They are to hear what God does for his people and how he encounters them in his unconditional love and care. However, they are also to be told that from the very beginning, God’s people have tried to go their own way, away from God. They need to be told so that they know how God begins all over again with people, time and time again; often deeply disappointed, but still untiring in his quest for relationship with them. I would like to speak about this. And do so in the hope that those who hear it will experience it for themselves: that this old story would become new; that it would become their story.

REV KATHRIN OXEN, Head of the Wittenberg Institute of Preaching and Homiletics.

BY JOHANNES GOLDENSTEIN

PHOTO: SEBASTIAN ARLT

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EXPERIENCING GOD IN NEW WAYS

INSPIRATION FOR A SERMON

PHOTO: WHITWORTH LIBRARY, MANCHESTER
He thought. So much! Martin Luther thought and thought. He followed God in his thoughts. And by thinking after God, he began to think in new ways.

“But how is this possible? In fact, is it at all possible to think God? And to do so in new ways?

“God works in mysterious ways” is a common expression in the UK and the particular catchphrase of a character in an English television series that is watched by the Queen; I also try to view it regularly. It is not only Inspector Barnaby who says such things, even in the Bible, there are “religious reservations” about the recognisability of a God who allegedly works in mysterious ways.

Ever since the resurrection of Jesus Christ, believers have thought differently. Jesus Christ provoked us to think God in new ways, indeed, not only to think God in new ways, but to think about him in the first place.

What, then, does thinking mean? Do we all think about the same thing when we think about thinking? And what does new mean? Does that which is considered to be old become obsolete, when something new occurs?

Let us remind ourselves: Once, thinking was a way of recognising, which meant to ascertain what (the case) may be; and this meaning of thinking is also not uncommon today. Ascertaining something however, is done by focussing on statements. Thinking God, in this sense, according to self-critical western thinking, seems to be an impossibility, since God is neither ascertainable, nor definable. Deus definiri nequit has been asserted time and time again in the metaphysical tradition of western thinking, claiming that the divine is ineffable and ungraspable (cf. John Damascene, De fide orthodoxa 1, 1). After all, God is beyond all that is expressible and comprehensible: “Beyond all things, how else might I praise you?” (Hymn by Gregory of Nazianzus, MPG 87, 567f). From this premise, a spirituality which, in its religious exultation, conceals God, becomes conceivable.

Inspired by Martin Luther’s way of thinking (but not only by his), I would like to point out that for theology (but not exclusive to this discipline), thinking means reflecting. Believers think along the paths which God has travelled.

On these paths, God has revealed himself as the beginner, who, even though he is also the completer, never ceases to begin: God is the eternal beginner, who voluntarily shows himself as such, so that believers can acknowledge him in assertions.

This involves having an insight into the need for the right kind of discernment. This involves discerning between God as the one who should be thought and our thoughts about God, which require theological self-criticism.

This involves discerning between the deus revelatus and his opus absconditum. Rather than applying Luther’s idea of the deus absconditus, it is here that I consider the notion of the hidden work of God to be most theologically appropriate.

This involves having an insight into the necessity to think about God in new ways, without detracting from what has been gleaned from earlier reflections. Instead, it means to experience more intensively. After all, God is a mystery, the mysteriousness of which is not eliminated through insight, but rather, it is intensified – and this is what distinguishes the mystery from an enigma. The more we think about God as the mystery of the world, the more mysterious he becomes. And the more mysterious he becomes, the greater the necessity to “think God in new ways”.

Preconsiderations, inspired by Martin Luther  BY EBERHARD JÜNGEL

PROF DR EBERHARD JÜNGEL DD was Director of the Institute of Hermeneutics at the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen, between 1969 and 2005.

PHOTO: SEBASTIAN ARLT
Between Reason and Spirituality: Schleiermacher’s Response to Ideas about God which were Prevalent during the Enlightenment

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was a German theologian and philosopher whose work was central to the development of modern theology. He was a major figure in the Young Germany movement and is often considered the father of modern liberal theology. Schleiermacher is best known for his early works on dogmatic theology, where he attempted to bridge the gap between reason and spirituality.

In his work “Between Reason and Spirituality,” Schleiermacher addresses the crisis of the idea of God in the 19th century. He contended that the absolutist, metaphysical approach to God that had dominated Western thought since the Renaissance had become untenable. The Enlightenment had exposed the belief held by many, that God’s existence could be proven through reason and that Christianity was merely a relic of superstition.

Schleiermacher argued that the traditional proofs of God’s existence were invalid, and that Christian faith is different from the kind of knowledge that can be based on reason. He emphasized that faith is a type of knowledge that is not derived from reason but rather is an act of the will, a decision to believe in something.

He proposed a new understanding of God, one that is not based on the separation of reason and faith, but rather on their relationship. Schleiermacher believed that God is a personal being who reveals himself to individuals, not as an abstract concept that can be understood through reason, but as the source of our morality, love, and knowledge.

Schleiermacher’s work was influential in the development of liberal theology, and it continues to be studied and debated by theologians today. His ideas about God and faith have had a profound impact on the way we understand and practice religion in the modern world.
The attempt to understand God by means of our intellect is doomed to fail. Only our hearts can know him.

By Horst Gorski

God cannot be captured by our thoughts. If he could, it would signify that he was an object of which humankind could take possession with their intellect. However, such an object would not be God. Immanuel Kant was the first to deduce this idea from an epistemological perspective, even though it had been thought about much earlier. As early as the Hebrew way of thinking, which we encounter in the Old Testament, there is an attempt to draw closer to God through means other than an intellectual grasping of him.

Adam “knew” Eve, and she became pregnant. In Hebrew, “knowing” simultaneously means “loving”. Hebrew thinking is not familiar with people being able to think about God. “I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord”, it says in Jeremiah 24:7. God is not thought about, but known – in the comprehensive sense of loving devotion. The same idea also recurs amongst the authors of the New Testament, who e.g. speak of knowing “fully, as I have been fully known” by God (1 Cor 13:12 a.o.).

Greek thinking in the tradition of Aristotle was the first to assume that God is one of the “realis”, an entity which the human mind can grasp and therefore prove intellectually. From this point of deduction, there began a long tradition which attempted to grasp God by means of the intellect. Not until the suppositions of Kant was it made irrevocably clear that our consciousness can only think according to its own terms. Our consciousness, so to speak, is only ever gazing at its own reflection. The idea of God is only possible as a conception of our consciousness. The ability to look behind it, and thus behind the “mirrors”, has not been given to humankind. At best, as Kant reckoned, one could conclude from practical reason that behind our conceptual world there had to be another, transcendent world. From this other world, one could deduce moral laws, and the originator of these laws must be a God.

God is not accessible to our thinking. Is this not depressing? Indeed it is, and yet, it is not the whole truth, since God can only be God, and not merely a part of this world, if he is all in all (Col 1:6). If he is all in all, because there can be nothing else outside of him, then, not only are we not far from him, but exceptionally close; namely in ourselves, we are a part of him.

This intricate entwining of God and the individual is also expressed in the Bible verses cited above: God himself gives us a heart which is able to know him. We know how to know him because we are known. God is thus accessible for us, because we are a part of him and because he has made himself accessible, both visibly and uniquely in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, there is a kind of “access of the heart” which enables us to draw near to God and this is much more than being able to think about him. It was Schleiermacher who said, so beautifully, that religion has “its own province in the mind” of every person. This is why we have an idea of our whence and whither – and not through our thinking.

This access of the heart is love. “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them” (1 John 4:16). Thus, our reasoning is brought full circle to the conclusion of Bernard of Clairvaux: that God can only be known in love.

We need, however, to think one step further, as, in the Bible, the individual and God are never thought of in isolation, but always alongside the equitable fellowship of people, one with another. Loving God means loving people.

Therefore, every theological statement involves turning towards people as well as towards God. God is known in our love for our neighbours.

How can theology be pursued as an academic science, even though God, as its object, is beyond our realm of reality? By Dirk Evers

Theology, in the original sense of the word, means to think God. After all, both God (= Greek theos) and the logic of thinking are contained within the term. However, we may ask the question: Is it at all possible to think God? Is it not the case that we must sense and feel him, rather than attempt to force him into a rigid conceptual corset? In Christianity, it is possible to ascertain that people have been thinking God at least since the time of the New Testament writings, as the life, message and destiny of Jesus of Nazareth make us think about God in a new way. Therefore, one of the key endeavours of Christianity, since its very beginnings, has been to pursue God in our thinking.

Thus, theology – as a way of taking responsibility in our thinking for our discourse concerning God – was in existence ever before
For the first time we will be celebrating together. Since 500 years of Reformation include changes, reforms and counter-movements in Europe and across the globe, it is our wish to think ecumenically today. With seminars given by the Catholic Scholarship Organisation Cusanuswerk, the Avicenna Scholarship Foundation and the Jewish Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich Org.

In order to do so however, it is crucial that we continuously distinguish between God himself and our thoughts, experiences and feelings about God; and also between God and our images of God and religious practices. Time and time again, we need to review how we think and speak about God, and expose it to the critical control of our thinking, so that we neither miss God, nor misunderstand him in our speaking and thinking. We need to reflect upon ourselves critically, in a way that is – for the most part – principally associated with the possibilities and limitations of all our thinking about God. We also need to engage in constructive discourse, so that, in the face of the ever new, and ever changing challenges of reality, and our perception of it – we prove to be proficient. This is precisely why there are good reasons to pursue theology as an academic undertaking in the universities; as it is in such places that critical and self-critical discourses are undertaken which shape how we understand ourselves and our reality. Theology has the task of reflecting upon the Christian way of speaking of God in this context, and to bring it to the table during such debates.

\[E N O U G H, C O N C E R N I N G M E.\]

There is a need to do so in every area of life and yet with an awareness of their faults and negative effects, the Protestant School 2017 will bring together students and PhD candidates from all disciplines and crossing boundaries and thoughts about partners from various fields of academic science, church and society.

The Summer School 2017 invites students and PhD candidates from all disciplines to discuss global challenges and visions with partners from various fields of academic science, church and society.

ByFriederikeGodicke

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In order to do so however, it is crucial that we continuously distinguish between God himself and our thoughts, experiences and feelings about God; and also between God and our images of God and religious practices. Time and time again, we need to review how we think and speak about God, and expose it to the critical control of our thinking, so that we neither miss God, nor misunderstand him in our speaking and thinking. We need to reflect upon ourselves critically, in a way that is – for the most part – principally associated with the possibilities and limitations of all our thinking about God. We also need to engage in constructive discourse, so that, in the face of the ever new, and ever changing challenges of reality, and our perception of it – we prove to be proficient. This is precisely why there are good reasons to pursue theology as an academic undertaking in the universities; as it is in such places that critical and self-critical discourses are undertaken which shape how we understand ourselves and our reality. Theology has the task of reflecting upon the Christian way of speaking of God in this context, and to bring it to the table during such debates.

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There is a need to do so in every area of life and yet with an awareness of their faults and negative effects, the Protestant School 2017 will bring together students and PhD candidates from all disciplines and crossing boundaries and thoughts about partners from various fields of academic science, church and society.

The Summer School 2017 invites students and PhD candidates from all disciplines to discuss global challenges and visions with partners from various fields of academic science, church and society.

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ByFriederikeGodicke
THE REFORMATION AS A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

In societies informed by non-Christian religions, the principles of the Reformation can prove to be very attractive

BY MARGOT KÄSSMANN

In my presentation, I portrayed the ordination of women as a characteristic hallmark of Reformation churches. Theologically, it is derived from the theology of baptism: Whoever is baptised is consecrated a priest, bishop, pope. The gender justice implied in this is a massive challenge to patriarchal societies. Lutheran theology claims that women have their own value in Church and society, which is, in no way, inferior to that of men. The lives of women who are mothers – those who become pregnant, give birth, raise children – in addition to those who are leaders or those who are childless, are also not of secondary importance, but rather, they are those who live responsible lives before God. For many women in today’s world, this is still a liberating message.

To my surprise, I was asked whether Luther’s critique of selling indulgences, in his time, did not necessarily imply our denunciation of corruption within church structures today. I had not seen this connection. Yet it is quite true: Playing the system, the conviction that ecclesiastical law is above state law, opacity and financial transactions of the biser kind, are still, to this very day, opposed to Luther’s theses concerning the indulgences. Power and transparency have to be synonymous!

“IN MATTERS OF FAITH AND CONSCIENCE, EVERY PERSON IS FREE.”

This principle of the Reformation means a great deal to Christians who find themselves in a minority in terms of religion. It takes strength to confess one’s own faith, if one’s family and background oppose it. Luther’s conduct before the Diet of Worms takes on an entirely different meaning, since it was very clear to him that the controversy was not a simple difference of opinion, but rather, that his life was at stake. The drama of the situation and the explosive power of the confession of one’s faith is barely noticed in countries that are so accustomed to religious freedom. It is important to make the persecution of Christians a subject for discussion, time and time again.

When asked how to deal with disputes amongst Christians, between religions and also between those with different political opinions, I pointed to the hospitality practised by Luther’s wife, Katharina von Bora. In addition, the table talks of the Reformer are legendary. In the discussions following my presentation in India, some of the participants were obviously irritated: Having fellowship around the table and across caste boundaries seemed problematic – there is clearly a great need for further conversations with regard to the relationship of church and caste!

Finally, during my presentation at the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, there were a particularly large number of people of the Buddhist faith present. In the subsequent discussion, the language used at the time of the Reformation proved to be of particular interest. A Buddhist and professor of computer sciences said that she envied the power of speech of the Church of the Reformation, which still had a relevance today. Buddhist texts and liturgies were not linguistically adapted to the 21st century and therefore, their relevance in everyday life is not easily recognisable; this has determined many young people. Of course, this response – seeing the relevance of the Reformation today – delighted me. It also showed me however, that we have an obligation, in each era, to implement afresh Luther’s principle of listening to what people have to say. We should not tire in doing so. Many times, a different context can throw a new, creative light upon old theological topics.

PROFESSOR DR DR H C MARGOT KÄSSMANN, Ambassador of the EKD Council for the Reformation Anniversary of 2017 and Chair of the Project Management for “Gates of Freedom – World Reformation Exhibition”
Whoever speaks about God should know what he is doing. He should know what he is saying. He should be well informed about what he is preaching, teaching, confessing or praying. It is not enough to disseminate experiences and ideas that one has read or picked up somewhere, if one does not connect these with a train of thought which can be reasoned, justified, challenged and substantiated with arguments. It can no longer be taken for granted that this method of teaching is common within Protestantism; perhaps it never could. After all, it is not easy; perhaps it is even impossible. However, how else can we expect to be taken seriously, if we do not even try to think about God. As a theologian, one is most likely to be taken seriously if one explains how “thinking about God” is both necessary and, at the same time, impossible. If a person means to better understand himself and his world, he will not find a way of circumnavigating the necessity of thinking about God or contemplating the possibility of there not being a God. How can he understand himself as an individual, if he cannot comprehend the context in which he lives? Thus, he proceeds to examine concepts such as “the whole”, “the unending”, “the eternal” and “the absolute.” Then he must ask the question: How can such terms be embodied in something which is alive; something which moves and answers? One would have to interpret these notions and call them “God”, demonstrating that “God” can be experienced and thought of as a reality which has been experienced before. It is natural that the basis of one’s own life however, cannot be grasped in this way. The “depth” cannot be fathomed, the “whole” cannot be possessed, the “eternal” is too far away, the “absolute” remains abstract. And yet, that which is behind all of these terms is present in a certain respect – not for everyone, but for oneself. Thinking about this being requires a specific language, preferably a language of wonder, petition, lament and thanks: a language of awe.

Pastor Dr Johann Hinrich Clausen,
Commissioner for Culture of the EKD Council, Berlin.
Originally from New Zealand, the Anglican chaplain Father Michael Lapsley joined the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and became a member of the ANC party. He preached against the regime during public events and was banished from the country in 1976. He continued to work for the ANC. In 1990, he lost both his hands and his right eye in a letter bomb attack, and his eardrum was also severely damaged. In 1998, after a long period of convalescence, Father Michael founded the so-called Institute for Healing of Memories in Cape Town. It offers support to the victims of apartheid in terms of emotional healing. The fundamental questions they need to answer are the following: What did you do? – What was done to you? – What did you fail to do? – How does one forgive? – Is it possible to forget the past?

Traumatic experiences, which burden the memory, need to be lifted, so that the healing processes might get under way. In the course of such a process, in spite of the problems of the past, which cause separation – and may have their origins in past generations – people can approach one another with all their inhibitions, seek reconciliation and experience it. In the second half of the 1990s, this method of reconciliation found its way into the peace building ministry of European churches. After all, it is the Holy Scriptures, in particular, which promote the great hope that, despite great sins and great suffering, reconciliation is possible, though it should not be taken for granted. That is to say: Sin does not merely refer to the one-off misdemeanours, but is an expression of a lack of inner peace with God and people, which needs to be addressed first. Thus, reconciliation does not take place because the sin and the suffering connected with the wrongdoing have meanwhile been forgotten, suppressed or minimised, but because God himself attends to the reconciliation. This is the fundamental experience of the people of Israel, which is realised in a special way in the proclamation and actions of Jesus, and which – through Paul – gain universal significance.

The Church Schism of the 16th century was one of the contributing factors of people being oppressed, persecuted, displaced and even killed on account of their differing confessions. These mutual injuries, perpetrated during the course of history, are still imprinted on the collective memory. In view of this “dark side” of the Reformation, an inter-confessional commission of the EKD and the Roman Catholic Church in Germany are currently working on clarifying the images and labels of the Reformation, which are still burdening us today, under the central theme: Healing of Memories. “Before God and before one another, we mean to articulate the wounds which are imprinted on our memories to this very day. If we succeed, the joint celebration of a reconciliation service in 2017 would be a clear pointer to the liberating and healing power of the gospel, and a great signal in the ecumenical world.” (Nikolaus Schneider)
2017 – A FESTIVAL OF CHRIST

In 2017, we celebrate a festival of Christ. The Reformation did not mean to found a new church, nor divide the old. It meant to renew the Church of Jesus Christ. The Reformers were desirous to freshly bring Jesus’ message to the forefront of people’s minds and, in this way, to place Jesus more at the centre of the Christian faith. However, it cannot be denied that, during the course of the Reformation, the unity of the western Church was fractured and a history of separation and estrangement ensued with dramatic consequences; which, to a degree, continue to have an effect today. For this very reason, there were – and are – a number of reservations within the Catholic Church towards an indiscriminate participation in the celebrations. 2017, however, will be the first centenary celebration of the Reformation with the opportunity to build upon good ecumenical relationships. This is an occasion – jointly – to tell the story, and also to articulate with honesty where we have hurt one another. In Germany the Catholic church and the Evangelical church intend to face this history through a process involving the “Healing of Memories”, which – amongst other events – will be expressed as a service of reconciliation. Amidst other initiatives, this will contribute to the overall composition of the festival of Christ, and will hopefully determine a tune which will prove to be of lasting significance, even beyond the year 2017.

With the intention to celebrate a festival of Christ in 2017, we can recall, in ecumenical fellowship, that which already connects us with one another. In spite of our differences, and the fact that we still live in separate churches, in Christ, we are already one. Through baptism, we have been made members of his body and have thus received a unique calling to unity. The festival of Christ in 2017 can prompt our following Christ together as disciples, endeavouring to understand his message, and allowing him to ask us: “But who do you say I am?” (Mt 16:15). In so doing, we fulfill the will of Jesus Christ, who, shortly before his death, prayed for the unity of all those who belonged to him, “that the world may believe” (John 17:21). Particularly as we live in a society in which faith in God can no longer be taken for granted, and in view of the challenges which all churches face, a festival of Christ can, more than ever before, be the impetus for us to give a credible testimony as to our shared faith; and to do so with one voice.

In so doing however, we must not forget that – ultimately – unity is given by the Holy Spirit, and is thus both, a gift and a responsibility. Celebrating a festival of Christ is an opportunity to pray together as churches with greater regularity, understanding each other’s journeys; and to discover new, ecumenical forms of spirituality. I indeed hope that after 2017, we will look back on the year and be able to detect that it has indeed brought us closer together; that it has enabled us to take further steps along the path towards the full, visible unity of the Church; and that it has provided us with new and encouraging inspiration for the future.

BISHOP DR GERHARD FEIGE, Bishop of the Bisthropolis of Magdeburg and Chairman of the Ecumenical Commission of the German Bishops’ Conference.

PETITIONING GOD IN NEW WAYS

WHAT AND HOW WE WILL CELEBRATE IN 2017
Theological Message of the Steering Committee of the Reformation Anniversary in 2017

RECOLLECTION
In 1517, the monk and theology professor Martin Luther published 95 theses on the system of indulgences within the Catholic Church. His criticism was targeted at the preaching and practice of indulgences, which were meant to free the sinner from purgatory through repentance and financial donations. Against this, Luther set the power of faith; trusting in God’s grace alone. In fresh ways, Luther made the Bible the spiritual standard and Christ the centre of life and hope.

He, and many others, hoped to give the Church a new direction. Instead, Luther’s theses became a catalyst, and lead to a process of religious fanaticism, tyranny and an incipient irreconcilable confessionalism, anti-Judaism, religious fanaticism, tyranny and an incipient over-emphasis on the individual. In reality, the truth is that our faith in the gracious God is freely given through willing encounter and a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Key ideas of the Reformation, such as the incorporation of the personal conscience, and the priesthood of all believers and all those baptised, became one of the foundations from which human rights and democracy, freedom, equality and companionship emerged.

PRESENT AND FUTURE TIMES
It is in this spirit that the Evangelical Church in Germany and the German Protestant Kirchentag (German Evangelical Church Convention) are inviting the general public to the Reformation Summer in 2017: The European Roadmap “Stories on the Road” leads through 68 cities in 19 European countries which have been influenced by the Reformation and its effects; in the “World Reformation Exhibition – Gates of Freedom”; churches and other organisations of civil society from all over the world, will present the impact of the Reformation from their diverse perspectives of life; in the Conframard and Youth Camps, young people will share with one another their views concerning life and faith; and, at the same time as the Kirchentag ‘on the Way’, the German Protestant church Berlin-Wittenberg is also inviting all those who wish to enter into a conversation with one another about life and faith to attend one of eight additional locations in and around Central Germany. During the big festive service in Wittenberg, we will publicly bring to mind and celebrate our faith in the triune God, and our joint responsibility for the world which ensues. Finally, by means of a joint ecumenical festival in the autumn, we wish to celebrate and commemorate the Reformation together in ecumenical breadth. By focussing on the centre of our faith, the good news of our salvation, which all churches face, a festival of Christ will prove to be of lasting significance, even beyond the year 2017.

With the intention to celebrate a festival of Christ in 2017, we can recall, in ecumenical fellowship, memories, which – amongst other events – will be expressed as a service of reconciliation. Amidst other initiatives, this will contribute to the overall composition of the festival of Christ, and will hopefully determine a tune which will prove to be of lasting significance, even beyond the year 2017.

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TEACHING CHRIST
(pasteur statue by Ernst Barlach, 1917. Saint Gertrude chapel in Gustrow)

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TROUBLING PERCEPTIONS

1. The Reformation aimed to reform the church by the power of the gospel. This rarely gave rise to a new way of regarding God, the church, and its mission. The free churches have been included in the anniversary celebrations. Here we are experiencing a new level of cooperation. The free churches are represented in the steering committee of the Reformation anniversary in 2017 and will contribute to the World Exhibition. In addition, they will participate in the Kirchentag (German Evangelical Church Convention), contribute to the academic discourse and will be present in many other projects. In many cases, memories are healing by sharing new experiences in the present. In 1990, the Baptists formally recognised and regretted their attitude of “superiority” and their disregard for the spiritual treasure which God has created in the Lutheran churches. Therefore they ask for forgiveness.

Pleading with God in a new way and seeking a new conversation with him in view of sin and personal temptation. The question can be placed in a broader context by asking the question: What will the relationship between the Evangelical Free Churches and the EKD churches, in general, look like during the anniversary year – and how will this be communicated to society? The public service “Healing of Memories”, which will take place in March 2017, is specifically conducted only in a bi-confessional manner between the EKD and the Catholic German Bishops’ Conference. The participation of the Evangelical Free Churches has not, as yet, been considered. Thus far, a joint planning process has been unthinkable for the EKD. We still have a fair stretch of the journey to go.

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“Simul iustus et peccator”: At once righteous and a sinner

BY ATHINA LEXUTT

We are familiar with the phrase “Simul iustus et peccator”, which translates to “at once righteous and a sinner”. It is a concept that has its roots in the philosophy of Martin Luther and has been influential in Christian theology. The phrase encapsulates the duality of human nature, where an individual can be both good and evil simultaneously.

Luther’s use of the phrase was significant in his reform of the Catholic Church, particularly in his understanding of salvation and sin. He rejected the idea of salvation through works and instead emphasized faith as the singular means of salvation. This shift in perspective led to a reevaluation of sin and its implications.

Luther’s theology of sin is complex and multifaceted. Sin is not seen merely as a moral failing, but as a fundamental and inherent aspect of the human condition. It is a concept that is closely tied to the idea of the fall of humanity, which is a central theme in the Christian narrative.

Luther’s concept of sin has had a profound impact on Christian thought and practice. It has influenced the way we understand forgiveness, grace, and the role of the individual in their relationship with God. His teachings on sin and justification continue to be relevant and relevant today, as we grapple with questions of morality, ethics, and the nature of human existence.

Luther’s work on sin is not only a theological contribution but also a call to action. It challenges us to recognize our inherent sinfulness and to seek a deeper relationship with God, one that is characterized by forgiveness and mercy.

In conclusion, the phrase “Simul iustus et peccator” serves as a reminder of our human condition, where we are simultaneously capable of both good and evil. It is a call to humility and a reminder of our need for grace and mercy, both within ourselves and towards others.

FREEDOM TO SIN

...and a sinner

ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS: The unconditional trust in the grace of God renders it a certainty

ONE CANNOT SPEAK ABOUT SIN WITHOUT SIMULTANEOUSLY SPEAKING ABOUT THE GOD WHO HAS MERCY UPON US – AND VICE VERSA

Photograph: Jesuit Institute, SA

LEXUTT, Professor of Church History at the Justus Liebig University, Giessen

Petitioning God in New Ways
Petitioning God in New Ways

Weighty tomes of church historical expositions are rarely considered to be a particularly exciting reading matter! Rather, one expects to find long-winded accounts of how the Church finally won the victory over all its external and internal enemies. But whoever reflects a bit longer, can appreciate that the portrayal of events would have looked entirely different if it had been the defeated party who had triumphed. Thus, every discussion concerning the history of the Church must disclose how the “orthodox” majority dealt with the supporters of the different schools of thought – the heretics – or rather, how they should be dealt with.

Of course, Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714) had to confront this question and did so through his voluminous “Unparteysiche Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie” (Nonpartisan History of the Church and of Heretics). He deliberately meant to be nonpartisan and not to take sides, since every visibly constituted church had already taken a side in separating from the original and still entirely holy Church of the very early ages. On this basis, Arnold unfolded the gripping “history of anger and frustration” concerning a Church which, quite early on in its development, did not wish to remain solely reliant upon its own resources; and which, since the time of the Constantinian shift or earlier, sought to enlist the support of those in authority, becoming ever larger, increasingly influential and progressively more powerful. A development which was particularly sinister, and which Arnold saw as an unmistakable sign of decline, was the emergence of an estate of clergy who, since the earliest times, branded everyone a heretic who believed and thought in ways other than theirs.

Arnold did not want to demonise heretics. This sounds good; we regard with sympathy those who suffer defeat and who we like to think of, in an idealised way, as trailblazers for particularly interesting ideas. We must be careful in our interpretation however: Arnold meant to be nonpartisan and thus not to take any side, even that of the heretics, since even they might develop into self-opinionated, contentious persecutors. Instead, he favoured a different methodology and portrayed as exemplary, those individual Christians who had refrained from choosing an allegiance to the existing churches and sects.

So why did Gottfried Arnold want to take up a position outside the Church? He was deeply disappointed with his Lutheran Church and their officials, as well as with his Pietist allies, and had demonstratively seceded from this “church of Ba-bel” and resigned from his position as professor. Ultimately, it was Arnold’s firm conviction that one had to flee from the Church in order to be able to live out the true and essential Christian life as an individual. Time was short for Arnold: the year was 1700 and the suspected beginning of the end times was close at hand. Therefore, another way of reading the “Unparteysiche Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie” (Nonpartisan History of the Church and Heretics) is as a general challenge to individuals everywhere to emulate him and leave the churches.

Should our view of the historiography of the Church be similar? Do we concur that the history of the Church is a “history of anger and frustration”, and compare it with the teachings of luminous figures such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer? 

NEITHER CHURCH NOR HERETIC

Gottfried Arnold’s “Unparteysiche Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie” (Nonpartisan History of the Church and of Heretics) of 1699/1700

by Katharina Greschat

Weighty tomes of church historical expositions are rarely considered to be a particularly exciting reading matter! Rather, one expects to find long-winded accounts of how the Church finally won the victory over all its external and internal enemies. But whoever reflects a bit longer, can appreciate that the portrayal of events would have looked entirely different if it had been the defeated party who had triumphed. Thus, every discussion concerning the history of the Church must disclose how the “orthodox” majority dealt with the supporters of the different schools of thought – the heretics – or rather, how they should be dealt with.

Of course, Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714) had to confront this question and did so through his voluminous “Unparteysiche Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie” (Nonpartisan History of the Church and of Heretics). He deliberately meant to be nonpartisan and not to take sides, since every visibly constituted church had already taken a side in separating from the original and still entirely holy Church of the very early ages. On this basis, Arnold unfolded the gripping “history of anger and frustration” concerning a Church which, quite early on in its development, did not wish to remain solely reliant upon its own resources; and which, since the time of the Constantinian shift or earlier, sought to enlist the support of those in authority, becoming ever larger, increasingly influential and progressively more powerful. A development which was particularly sinister, and which Arnold saw as an unmistakable sign of decline, was the emergence of an estate of clergy who, since the earliest times, branded everyone a heretic who believed and thought in ways other than theirs.

Arnold did not want to demonise heretics. This sounds good; we regard with sympathy those who suffer defeat and who we like to think of, in an idealised way, as trailblazers for particularly interesting ideas. We must be careful in our interpretation however: Arnold meant to be nonpartisan and thus not to take any side, even that of the heretics, since even they might develop into self-opinionated, contentious persecutors. Instead, he favoured a different methodology and portrayed as exemplary, those individual Christians who had refrained from choosing an allegiance to the existing churches and sects.

So why did Gottfried Arnold want to take up a position outside the Church? He was deeply disappointed with his Lutheran Church and their officials, as well as with his Pietist allies, and had demonstratively seceded from this “church of Ba-bel” and resigned from his position as professor. Ultimately, it was Arnold’s firm conviction that one had to flee from the Church in order to be able to live out the true and essential Christian life as an individual. Time was short for Arnold: the year was 1700 and the suspected beginning of the end times was close at hand. Therefore, another way of reading the “Unparteysiche Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie” (Nonpartisan History of the Church and Heretics) is as a general challenge to individuals everywhere to emulate him and leave the churches.

Should our view of the historiography of the Church be similar? Do we concur that the history of the Church is a “history of anger and frustration”, and compare it with the teachings of luminous figures such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer?
Petitioning God in new ways

Have mercy on me, o God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

“For the joy of repenting – EKD.” Yes, I know, it sounds like an advertisement for a popular make of car. Whether or not you think about driving when you hear this phrase, the words sound strange together. “Joy” and “repenting” – are like “living death” or an “old boy”: an oxymoron. Happy repenting: although this sounds so wrong, it is precisely this experience which gave rise to the Reformation.

500 years later, we need to rediscover this experience and ask God afresh to “… have mercy on me, o God, according to your steadfast love” (Ps 51:1). Daily, thought Luther, it was both possible and necessary to drown the “old Adam in us” through “sorrow and repentance”, so that “a new person daily come forth and rise from death again. He will live forever before God in righteousness and purity”. For Luther, this was a thoroughly promising perspective: No one has to stay the way he is! The old way of living – a self wrapped up in righteousness and purity – does not have to determine how we live.

“I want to stay the way I am”?! No, this is precisely what you do not have to do! On the contrary: You will become like a new-born child, young and fresh, just like it was on the morning of creation (Ps 51:10 employs the same verb as that which is used to describe God’s creation of the world at the very beginning of time!).

It is quite extraordinary that, not very long after the awakening movements of the early 16th century, a Protestant culture of sin and guilt developed, submerging the good news of happy repenting into the gloom of sombreness and contrition. Luther and his fellow Reformers wanted to achieve the exact opposite; for them, it was important to be able to lift up their heads and be exuberantly happy: “Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice, with exultation springing” (German: Evangelisches Gesangbuch 341,1; cf. Ps 51:10). The Evangelical culture of repentance is a culture of joy.

You are not what you make of yourself – how liberating is this statement in times of a permanent entreaty to “quantify your life” – a loop of introspection which forfeits the last elements of freedom which one possesses! These are some of the rather stressful ways in which people try to lead the most optimal and somehow “free” life! Are you just optimising, or are you alive?

There are also far too many people who cannot even dream of “optimising” their lives, because, all around the world, the gap between the rich and poor is increasing. And since those who optimise themselves are predominantly those who only perceive themselves and the project of their good lives, there is barely any recognition of the Lazarus before their doors…

Asking God afresh also means letting go letting go of myself and my constant revolving around myself. This applies not only to individuals, but also to congregations and churches. The Church does not “have” the truth, but depends on being called out and journeying together with the one who is himself the truth (John 14:6) and whom therefore no-one can “have”. Church, too, draws life from the joy of repentance. If it does not do so, it will turn in on itself, be so un-free and so intense that no-one will believe it might yet have “good news” to proclaim.

But it does! Such good news! The good news of a God who is devoted to us and who calls us out of the securities we build for ourselves. The good news of “the God who brings people to you” and leads them into the glorious adventure and uninhibited freedom of the children of God. With him, the cautious become the courageous, the fearful preservers become new players. Accepting God’s challenge, agreeing that he is right and saying “Amen” – this is the punchline of repentance!

Take care: no-one, who is on a journey with the God of challenge, remains unchanged. For information concerning the risks and side-effects of setting out with him, please read about Abram or Moses, Ruth or Esther, Peter or Paul; and if you like, also about Luther, Zwingli or Calvin, Francis of Assisi or Pope Francis; or ask, with a trusting heart, the joyful Christian next to you.

By Wolfgang Bönisch

Photo: Sebastian Arlt

Petitioning God in new ways

INspiration for a sermon

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Speaking about God in such a way that people feel, as it were, God entering their individual lives

By Albrecht Grözinger

When we want to speak about the things which move us, the things of the heart, we use a special kind of language. We speak in a different way than we would if we were to ask someone for the time, or for directions to the station. When we speak about the things of the heart, we leave the language of every-day life behind and seek out the language of story-telling and poetry. The Romantic poet Novalis, quite rightly, said that only poetry could speak about love. It is no different when we want to speak about God and our experiences with him. If God is – as the theologian Paul Tillich put so beautifully – the ground of our being, then we can only speak about him as we would speak about an issue of the heart. We look for similes, in the same way that we search for similes when we want to speak about love. To my mind, the person I love is like a flowering rose or like living water. Often, we simply omit the word “as” or “like”. In my thinking, my beloved water. Sometimes, we simply omit the word “as” or “like”. In my thinking, my beloved.

It is no different when we want to speak about God and our experiences with him. It is no different when we want to speak about God and our experiences with him. It is no different when we want to speak about God and our experiences with him. (Psalm 23). Not only is he like a watchman, he is the watchman over Israel, who neither sleeps nor slumbers (Psalm 121). Open to misinterpretation, such a way of speaking is not without its risks. Some might ask whether it is correct to speak about God in an all-too-human fashion? This might be the case if we were no longer able to hear the words “as” and “like”, even when they are not uttered. Our animate religious sentiment, however, understands the “as” and the “like” of comparison, which resonate in all of our talk about God. It is only when a religion becomes inflexible that it locks God into certain formulas and modes of speech. By way of contrast, biblical language is the language of the starting point and therefore, a language of constant change.

The vibrant linguistic world of the Bible is informed by Jesus and his parables. As he proclaimed his message, Jesus managed to speak about God in such a way that people sensed, from his manner of speech, how God could, as it were, enter into their individual lives. In Jesus’ parables, God and humankind draw near to one another in surprising ways. In his parables, Jesus tells us about people’s every-day lives. However, he speaks about their every-day lives in such a way that they appear in a new light. Jesus is able to read our every-day lives in such a way that he tells them more than they are able to say. Thus, a trivial story about a woman who loses and then finds her coin – such things happen to us every day – becomes a parable about how happiness can suddenly even surprisingly, break into our every-day lives, and thereby change them. God himself is a transformer of our lives, and this is what Jesus communicates in his parables. They are stories about every-day life, which radiate into our own every-day lives. They tell us that we can also encounter God in the midst of our every-day lives, and that we can do so repeatedly. For this to happen, there is no need for a specially religious or mystical experience, but simply a new way of looking at our every-day lives, which is what Jesus’ parables make possible. God is at home in our every-day lives, and this is why Jesus can speak so simply about our every-day life.

At the same time, Jesus’ parables invite us to enter into these every-day life stories with our own, individual life story. Jesus’ parables are stories of invitation and entry. They open up to us a new means of access into our personal life story. In the people of the parables, and their experiences, we recognise ourselves. We often recognise ourselves better when we look at these stories, than we do when we look exclusively at ourselves and our own stories. This is why Jesus’ parables also carry with them an invitation for us to relate them to others. If we listen closely to these parables, we can ourselves become narrators of our own life story. It is true that we ourselves appear in these stories, in an entirely unspectacular way, and perhaps, for this very reason, such stories encourage and renew us. Whoever draws close to the storyteller Jesus, can become a storyteller themselves – and can do so entirely without effort or having ever been trained in the craft of storytelling. Simply because – good storytelling is highly contagious.

God is at home in our every-day lives, and this is why Jesus can speak so simply about our every-day life.

JESUS RECOUNTS PARABLES

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GODPARENTS OF A EUROPE OF SOLIDARITY

The European Roadmap links together 68 cities -

BY JÜRGEN SCHILLING

“Could Crailsheim be a location for the European Roadmap? ‘Yikes!’ the people would think,” says the Dean of Crailsheim with a mischievous smile, because this “Yikes!” is exactly the reaction he wants to elicit. Not many people are aware of the particularities of the region and not many suspect that, in this small town in Wurttemberg, there are certain features which could be used to great effect.

Not many know, for example, that Crailsheim was one of the first off the mark, at the start of the Reformation. Crailsheim was a trailblazer and the movement gained a foothold here much earlier than it did, for example, in the district town of Schwäbisch Hall. It was towards the end of 1521 that the Reformer Adam Weiß, of Crailsheim, preached here “in an Evangelical way”, long before the Reformer Johannes Brenz from Halle did so. In terms of the first “Evangelical” celebration of the Lord’s Supper, it was again Crailsheim where pioneering events took place, with the first celebration coming to pass during Easter 1526.

What about today? Since 2013, visitors have been setting off along the Crailsheim Reformation Pathway, which is a circular route of the inner city featuring twelve “way-stations”, pointing to radical changes induced by the Reformation. Among various “way-stations”, pointing to radical changes induced by the Reformation. Among various

Arts ateliers mark the individual stations whilst a bronze plaque at each provides an explanation. Historical achievements however, are not the focus of the exhibition, but rather, the contemporary matters of “Reformation between freedom and authority”, “Reformation and migration”, and “Reformation and democracy”.

In addition, the Reformation Pathway in Crailsheim will be receiving an eminent guest on 20th December 2016, when the European Roadmap will visit the small town of 33,000 inhabitants.

In total, 68 cities, 47 churches and 19 European states will be linked together through the European Roadmap. Under the banner “Stories on Tour”, a truck will travel from Geneva, via Vienna and Prague, to Rome and Riga, Dublin and London, Eisenach, Speyer, Augsburg – and to Crailsheim. In every location, every church and every borough, there will be a day of celebration with an invitation to all who are willing to come. The aim of the Roadmap is to remember the regional Reformation history and examine its relevance for today. People, both great and small, young and old, representatives of the eccumenical world and cultural icons will present stories which testify of the reforming power of the Christian faith.

In Crailsheim, the Story-Mobile-Truck will park immediately in front of the town hall. Through the use of displays and video screens, visitors inside the truck will be able to find out and experience how the anniversary is being celebrated in other locations. At listening stations, they will be able to hear stories which have already been collected as well as recounting their own, personal stories. In the evening, the town hall’s ceremonial hall will be decorated and filled with singing, laughing, discussions and acting. The programme will be colourful, entertaining, informative, witty and moving. The next day, the inhabitants of Crailsheim will have to say goodbye to the “Story Mobile”; but with the pleasure of knowing that, as it travels to Wildhaus, which is the next station in the Swiss Canton of St Gallen, the collection of stories will have been enhanced by the addition of their own stories.

For the first time in 500 years, we will celebrate the anniversary of the Reformation in eccumenical breadth. Across the boundaries of denominations and nations, we will remember our shared history of learning. The route of the Roadmap will illustrate this history as it passes through the places connected to the people of the Reformation, which include: Adam Weiß in Crailsheim; Matthias Zell in Strasbourg; Tamás Nádasdy and János Sylvester in Sarvar. The Roadmap will also pass through Prague, the location where Jan Hus lived and worked; Gesenius, with its painful memory of the time of the Counter-Reformation; and Turku and Bergen which witnessed the Reformation in the Scandinavian state churches. In Venice, we will be in vibrant fellowship with the Church of the Waldensians; and in Cambridge, the Church of England will be our host. Wuppertal is the place where the Confessing Synod of Bremen took place; Geneva is the “capital city of the eccumenical world”;

and the European Roadmap displays to the general public, to be a treasure. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case. A glance at our shared history clearly shows that a creative power, which has the ability to cross boundaries, can only arise from the Christian faith, when the various traditions and influences remain interconnected. In 2017, for the first time, this will be made possible in a way which carries conviction. Indeed, during the anniversary year, it is possible for the churches of the Reformation to become godparents of a united Europe, a Europe which lives together in solidarity with those even beyond Europe’s borders.

REV JÜRGEN SCHILLING, Member of the Reform Process Project Team in the EKD Church Office.

TO ENJOY TELLING STORIES

VON THOMAS KLUPP

ustave Flaubert’s “Madame Bovary”, J.R.R. Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings” and J.D. Salinger’s “Catcher in the Rye”, are all great novels of world literature. In each of these novels, there are a number of characters, and all of these characters are implicated in a plot – this however, is as far as it goes when it comes to the common features of the works. “Madame Bovary” tells the story of a country doctor’s discontented wife in 19th century France; the “Lord of the Rings” is the story of a courageous Hobbit in a fictitious country called Middle Earth; the “Catcher in the Rye” is the story of a youth who breaks away from school in New York. The internal and external conflicts of the protagonists, the world in which they live and the path of development they take: In all these elements there are hardly any common features.

The same applies to the style of the novels. Flaubert tells his story in a cool and realistic manner; Tolkien strikes a tone which is both magical and mysterious; and Salinger’s language is based upon the meandering speech patterns of young people.

Although these works are profoundly different, each one of them reached an audience of millions and touched the hearts of many in countless ways. If one asked their readers, what exactly it was about the stories that moved their hearts, some would say the one thing, whilst others would say something entirely different. They would all identify different features which they would consider to be responsible for the effects of the story. And they would all be right.

Indeed, in the big, wide world of literature, there are no fixed rules which guarantee the success of a story; there is no binding recipe to achieve a certain literary effect. Of course, as an author, it is helpful to repeatedly remind oneself of certain guidelines; the ones which Aristotle had already established in his poetry more than 2,000 years ago. Doubtless, it is conducive for a story if it is built up around a single, clearly defined centre. There is no question that one will reach the reader more readily, if one makes it possible for him or her to visualise the events of the story, as opposed to merely summarising the proceedings in quick-motion-style, or through flashbacks or accounts. And certainly, it is beneficial if the characters themselves develop and undergo change during the course of the action.

Eespecially however, the secret of powerful narratives does not lie in any of these factors. Rather, it consists in the respective story unfolding an inner rationale or entelechy, as it envelops the composition of characters, action and language. This inner rationale causes the reader to sense that, from page to page, he or she is participating in a genuine creation; one in which, just as is the case in the natural world, each element connects with the next in a coherent fashion and all things are interconnected in a complex and dynamic way.

To go against this advice would be to leave the author up the creek without a paddle. After studying exemplary models such as Flaubert, Tolkien or Salinger and working through poetics, one can concur with a statement by Henry James, who, towards the end of the 19th century, compared the art of storytelling with the art of cooking: “There is only one recipe – to care a great deal for the cookery.” The same is also true of storytelling.
I

n July 1968, when the fourth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches met in Uppsala, the theme of the conference captured the spirit of optimism, in all its dynamism, which was prevalent in the Church, society and political sphere during those years: “Behold, I make all things new!” In this time after the Second Vatican Council, and inspired by liberation theology’s drive and enthusiasm, the civil rights and democratization movements, the speakers emphasized – with pathos – that it was time to follow God’s will here on earth as well, so as to counter church schisms, militant fomentations of violence and destruction – particularly in Vietnam – and racism and social injustice as expressions of unbridled capitalist exploitative ambitions.

With visionary force, a better future was championed and, not for the first time in the history of Christianity – and in anticipation of its transcendent perfection – the worldwide realisation of the Kingdom of God was called for in the here and now. Not everyone however, shared this yearning for improvement and optimism, and some fundamental scepticism was voiced concerning the productive creativity inherent in every person, the individual can reflect this, demonstrating that he is capable of permanently creating new beginnings. The past is thereby not levelled and nullified, but rather it is, in turn, newly interpreted. This claim, are already true.

What is past will be set out in the same way that what is contemporary will also be resolved. With authoritative action, God breaks through the historical continuity and its causality, proclaiming a radical new beginning and underlining the truth that there is indeed cause for the hope that this will become reality in the present. The essential potential for innovation thus lies with God, but, due to the productive creativity inherent in every person, the individual can reflect this, demonstrating that he is capable of permanently creating new beginnings. The past is thereby not levelled and nullified, but rather it is, in turn, newly interpreted. This process will reassure those who find themselves becoming repeatedly irritated when they see how quickly the new naturally becomes the old.

And yet, this is also the home of the good old railway, the major corporation featuring red and white barriers and the red brick signalman’s house – though the InterCityExpress has long since outstripped the car in terms of speed. Today, it is no longer the lonely inventor who rolls his invention out of his shed. The 4.0-World works differently. There are teams at work and the room in which they operate encourages dialogue. This is what Michael Mielke stands for. Admittedly, Reformation 4.0 thinks in wider dimensions. But InnoLab is also a part of it.
Henning Kiene: Where, then, are new things actually developed?

Michael Mielke: In principle, new things can develop anywhere. However, they develop most readily in everyday life. It does not have to be the legendary Google-playground. It is helpful if the place neither smacks of, nor looks like, work. For me, it is important that a question about the “where” is asked, because the question concerning the “how” belongs to the question about the “where.” New things develop if I am not alone, but rather in places where I meet other people who inspire me. How do new things develop?

First of all, by switching on our brains. This is as difficult as it sounds. In order to think about new things, one must think very hard. And one needs to extract oneself from the internet for at least 90 minutes. I need paper, a pencil, and then the intensive discussion with others. A clear head is necessary and it helps to put on a different pair of glasses. When I speak of glasses, I mean thinking glasses. When I actually write into it, for example, how much of one’s own ideas with one’s colleagues. You can do this kind of communication in particular – and the communication about the communication – where diverse constructions of possibilities are discussed, which can then indeed lead to new things.

What is the biggest innovation to have been developed in the InnoLab?

It is an app, whereby one can share and evaluate one’s own ideas with one’s colleagues. You can actually write into it, for example, how much time or money you would need to think something through. And the whole thing then becomes a process in which the team manager gets involved. If he wants, he can simply release the innovation. It works on a mobile platform. There is no laborious logging process, but rather, I can get on with it quickly. This app pulls together all contributors; it is a profound innovation. There are many others, but this is one of the biggest highlights.

Through whom do new things develop?

In former times, it was more likely to be an individual. I think that today, it is more likely to be a group of people. In a group, either one or the other can contribute to the development of something new; and either more or less so. New things primarily develop in communication with other specialist disciplines, with other people whose characters are very different, in terms of personality type, stage of life and wealth of experience. It is this kind of communication in particular – and the communication about the communication – where diverse constructions of possibilities are discussed, which can then indeed lead to new things.

From the Regional Bishop of Augsburg.

REV DR ERNST ÖFFNER

Today, literature longs for a God who takes care of people

BY ERNST ÖFFNER

Contemporary literature longs for God – but I miss him

Lead editorial pundit and critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki once said, in his inimitable apodictic way, that good literature has only two topics: love and death; everything else is negligible. However, perhaps he overlooked an even bigger subject matter hiding behind these two topics: God. Our entire life is more than love and death! Where is God in it? Is God in there?

It is surprising how many contemporary authors are concerned with these questions; surprising, because literati are something like the seismographs of society. Take Martin Walser, for example, who, during a life-time of novel-writing, grappled with the subject of love and its breakdown. When he was more than eighty years old, however, he wrote three books in the space of two years (2011/12), and in these, he wrestles with religion and God as a metaphor for love (“Muttersohn” (a mother’s son), “Über Rechtfertigung” (about justification), “Das dreizehnte Kapitel” (the thirteenth chapter)). Walser is investigating the question: What does it mean to have a faith, to speak of God? He lets his characters speak vicariously for himself, and invents protagonists who attempt to plumb the depths of love and faith; who dare to be religious in the widest sense of the term. Putting up with oneself, in all of the abysses and ambiguities of life, of sin, of one’s own limitations, of a lack of success, of exhaustion, and of failure – these are his topics. And of being comforted in despair. For which he employs a surprisingly theological term: “being justified”. Possibly the most personal of all his statements, the one which he continuously modifies, is the following: “Why do we believe? Because there is a lack in us.” As one of his protagonists puts it: “Whether or not there is a God – I need him”. Similarly, the English author Julian Barnes wrote: “I don’t believe in God – but I miss him.” In his book, “Religion for Atheists. A Non-Believer’s Guide to the Uses of Religion” (2013), the London-based, Swiss author and self-declared atheist, Alain de Botton, poses the question as to whether a non-believer can have part in that which is available to believers, in terms of equipment for the soul. For him, Christianity is fascinating, in that Jesus’ death on the cross conveys the feeling to people who are suffering and failing “that they are not alone in their condition”. In such a way, de Botton draws believers and non-believers into an intelligent conversation about religious values and the “uses of religion” in his book.

Searching for God at the very limits of life, Arno Geiger writes movingly about his father’s Alzheimer disease (“Der alte König in seinem Exil” (the old king in his exil), 2011) and seems surprised that his father, who has moved into a nursing home, repeatedly expresses the desire to go “home” – but yet he is not referring to the house which he built and lived in his whole life. “... It was only years later that I understood that my father’s desire to go home contained something profoundly human...” This place of comfort was called home by my father; believers call it heaven.” In an interview, he said: “Whether I am or am not a believer – I would quite like to have such a place where I feel at home.”

Many of these contemporary authors find that they are missing something which once supported people through life. They speak of a sense of longing, a longing that there might be something which supports us, especially during the dark hours of life: the hours of despair, of fear, and of facing death. This becomes obvious in statements such as the following: “I don’t believe in God – but I miss him.” “Whether or not there is a God – I need him.” “Whether I am or am not a believer – I would quite like to have such a place where I feel at home.” Whoever misses God is already searching for God, as a longing for a sustainable faith which helps in life, and also, when it is time, in death. This is not a small thing. Perhaps it is a beginning. And sometimes, if the longing is strong enough, it already carries with it the taste of fulfillment.
Do you believe in God? – the student asks, precariously steadying himself with two fingers on the desk. It is a private moment. Otherwise, he would have immediately cavorted out into the break with the others. But this time, the physics lesson had been nail-bitingly packed with suspense. Do you believe in God? The teacher brushes him with a glance, as if to check whether this is a serious question. Then, he steps over to the window and looks out. The seconds drip by whilst he searches for an answer. – If, as you say, the boy tries once more, if there truly is such a violent interplay of forces up there, if black holes trap all light, if stars explode and gravity waves shake hundreds of billions of galaxies... Who then can still believe in a God on earth? – Without turning his face, the teacher tentatively begins: Perhaps our imagination does not have a big enough image of God. Perhaps the heavens tell of his true size. Perhaps God is bigger than the universe. And everything that expands, lives, widens and moves because of his breath. Perhaps we are just waking up and beginning to see an unfathomable vastness, the teacher answers, and his voice sounds hoarse with excitement. With every year that astrophysics progresses, God becomes more mysterious, more awe-inspiring to me. – The boy thinks for a while, until the image recounted has built up in his own imagination and sinks in. God, so great that an expanding universe has space in him! God as the space of the worlds in which infinity thickens to places, and eternity to time and presence of mind! The seconds go by, and the two are united in the silent enjoyment of pure fascination. Then, the connection is broken, the boy shudders. Do you believe in such a God?, he asks again. – Faith, the teacher says, weighing the word carefully, I would rather say that I am deeply impressed. I do not understand how it is possible for him to be so big and yet so small that he can look into our eyes here on this marble-sized earth. I believe, the teacher says, as if to himself, I believe that the generations before us have truly been right. We are seen. At times, I can feel his glance; it shakes me to the core.

**Rev Dr Uwe Vetter, Düsseldorf.**

**They will speak of the power of your awesome deeds;**

**I will declare your great accomplishments.**

*Psalm 145:6* · CEB, 2011

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He belongs to the cityscape of Lutherstadt Wittenberg, just as much as the Castle Church with its door of these, just as much as the tourists from all over the world and just as much as the street singer with his guitar. Cloaked in his medieval-looking garment, his wily-looking eyes peering out from beneath a black cap — this is how the children and the old people love him, this is how he walks through the town as a tourist guide. Many are not aware of his real name. They only know him as "the Luther". According to his identity card however, he is Bernhard Naumann. He is famous beyond the boundaries of the city, welcomed at church conferences and exhibitions, and well-known throughout the media. He declares himself to be the "world’s best contriver of original Luther quotations".

One dark evening, he approaches me in the streets of his city and addresses me: "Brother, why are you so sour-faced?" I start: "I am annoyed because..." and do not finish the sentence. "Luther" interrupts me, looks me squarely in the eye and says: "Brother, take good care of your words: They bring things to light. Who is annoying you?" I stop, then merrily continue on my way.

**By Jan von Campenhausen**

**Photo: Sebastian Arlt**

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They will speak of the power of your awesome deeds;

I will declare your great accomplishments.

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CELEBRATING GOD IN NEW WAYS

WHY DO WE CELEBRATE?

In a Field of Tension between Anarchy, Order and Compulsion

Celebrations and celebrating, as a basic form of human behaviour, can be found in all societies. They involve symbolic, expressive actions, which allow the analyst to draw conclusions about the organisation, the structures, value system and ideas of the participants. They can be read as being symbolic systems of a collective construction of meaning, the significance of which only becomes comprehensible against the backdrop of the respective social, historical or religious context. There are various explanations as to what celebrations and celebrating means for society.

RELIEF AND ECSTASY

The celebration – particularly the festival – is the social place where spontaneous and emotional behaviour is not only permitted, but is even desired. During a festival, one breaks with habitual conventions and escapes from the monotony of every-day life with its norms and adversity. The pressure to perform, the compulsion to constantly plan ahead and the fear of the future fall from a person and he or she is able to let go and live in the moment. Festivals inherent-ly involve an element of supernatural experience. Ethnologists report occurrences of ecstatic rapture during the celebrations of so-called “primitive societies” in days gone by. The French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, regarded the essence of the festival as being the excess; the momentary return to the creative chaos of an original time, in which a person faces the divine. Every festival therefore, even an irreverent one, contains traits of a religious ceremony. Visual and experiential aids as well as supporting attractions serve to amplify the experience: The festive meal, which – in former times – was preceded by a time of fasting, was just as much a part of the festival as the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs; and just as much a part of the festival as the use of music, dance, and light displays – all in all a demonstration of maximum splendour. The festival is associated with an atmosphere which is easy-going, relaxed and disengaged, one which facilitates the individual’s detachment from normality. Masks are commonly used in festivals to abolish personal and social con-ventions. The festival not only brings relief to the individual, but, as a corporate occasion, it also has a consolidating effect on the group. As such, it aids the overcoming of every-day conflicts and friction, and the reaching of a new awareness of unity.

MEANINGFUL CELEBRATIONS

Rather than a mere suspension of every-day life, some celebrations place the realisation of something significant at the forefront. Contemplation, thoughtfulness, reflection and solemnity characterise the celebration, which aims to establish historical continui-ty, cultural unity and the affirmation of values. Regulated and organised down to the last detail, such events frequently occur in particular locations at specific times, which bear a relation to the history of the celebrating group or institution. Examples include anniversaries of battles, revolutions, peace agreements, birthdays, anniversaries of deaths, founding dates and religious feast days. The central element of such festive occasions is the spoken word – the address – which is often recited with a pathos that often, a variety of other human activities are rarely found in reality. Rather, festive and celebratory factors blend into one another on many occasions, and liberating and restricting elements sit very closely together, so much so that often, a variety of explanatory approaches can be applied to one and the same festival. Boundary-setting and the dissolution of boundaries, compulsion and anarchy, order and chaos can thus be regarded as the contrasting pairs which bring the festival to life.

LIBERATION AND UPEHAVAL OR STABILISATION OF AUTHORITY?

In some epochs and in some societies, the celebration of certain occasions have been – and still are – prohibited, because there are those in authority who fear them. At times, festivals can stir up a liberating power, which has the potential to be harnessed for upheaval and revolt, even revolution. Festivals can act as a critique of the existing conditions and evoke images of a just, umo- pian order, inspiring people to dream of a more beautiful and better world. Such an interpretation does not define the festival as a place of freedom from every-day life nor as a form of event which gives meaning to every-day life, but rather, as a liberation from the very reality of what has become every-day life. Here, the festival does not legitimise every-day life; on the contrary: It signifies the “bad conscience” of every-day life with all its injustices, and calls for the realisation of a more ideal society.

A fourth perspective relates to the notion of the social power of a celebration, but in reverse. In such an interpretation, the festi-val is a consumption-oriented spectacle which acts as an instrument of power for the powerful; as a purposefully instituted outlet for the reduction of the pressures and political dissatisfaction within society, and as a sedative for the masses.

Comparing these various interpretations with concrete examples of festivals, one observes that each theory selects particular festivals as the examples used to demonstrate their “true” meaning. However, in their pure forms, the models described are rarely found in reality. Rather, festive and celebratory factors blend into one another on many occasions, and liberating and restricting elements sit very closely together, so much so that often, a variety of explanatory approaches can be applied to one and the same festival. Boundary-setting and the dissolution of boundaries, compulsion and anarchy, order and chaos can thus be regarded as the contrasting pairs which bring the festival to life.

BY WALTER LEIMGRUBER

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PROF DR WALTER LEIMGRUBER, Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Basel.
**CELEBRATING THE FESTIVAL OF FAITH TOGETHER**

An Invitation to Join the Celebration  
**BY CHRISTINA AUS DER AU**

When on Wednesday evening, during the opening service, the familiar fanfare of the Kirchentag is heard, the bi-annual celebration will be about to start again. By this time, 100,000 people will have already arrived, having worked their way through the thick guide to the event during their train journey. 2,500 events will have been planned, stages built and market stalls erected. Hosts will have opened the doors to their homes and welcomed their guests for the Kirchentag, with a great deal of curiosity. There will be an optimistic atmosphere, vibrating in the streets and alleyways of the city during an “Evening of Encounter”. During the next three days, the congregation of the Kirchentag will cram happily – even singing at times – into full buses and trains, making it a daily habit to push their way through from exhibition hall 7.1 to hall 10.3, where they will sit on cardboard stools for hours and hours, again and again. People will listen and discuss, sing and pray, laugh and celebrate. 5,000 helpers will ensure that everything runs smoothly and, at the gate, they will confidently ask everyone to show their entry ticket, even if the person in front of them is a federal minister. On Sunday, the agencies and those in positions of authority within the city will observe that it is quite true what the organisers of the Kirchentag have been telling them for a year: That Kirchentag is different from all the other large events which have so far been hosted in their city. During the closing service, the instruments of thousands of brass players will blend together to produce a spectacular sound. Once again, the hundred thousand muscles of authority within the city will observe that it is different from all the other large events which have so far been hosted in their city. During the closing service, the instruments of thousands of brass players will blend together to produce a spectacular sound. Once again, the hundred thousand muscles of authority within the city will observe that it is different from all the other large events which have so far been hosted in their city. During the closing service, the instruments of thousands of brass players will blend together to produce a spectacular sound. Once again, the hundred thousand muscles of authority within the city will observe that it is different from all the other large events which have so far been hosted in their city. During the closing service, the instruments of thousands of brass players will blend together to produce a spectacular sound. Once again, the hundred thousand muscles of authority within the city will observe that it is different from all the other large events which have so far been hosted in their city. During the closing service, the instruments of thousands of brass players will blend together to produce a spectacular sound. Once again, the hundred thousand muscles of authority within the city will observe that it is different from all the other large events which have so far been hosted in their city. During the closing service, the instruments of thousands of brass players will blend together to produce a spectacular sound. Once again, the hundred thousand muscles of authority within the city will observe that it is different from all the other large events which have so far been hosted in their city.

Perhaps it is this that makes Kirchentag so special — that, for five days, so many things will be so easy: Arguing about a topic, yet staying together. Living of good cheer, even though there has been constant snoring in the communal accommodation during the night. Living in very different ways, yet knowing full well that we derive life from the same source. Either feeling very young or very grown-up, we can drift along, sing and dance and do what — in other circumstances — could be quite embarrassing. Suddenly, many things become quite easy. Life becomes wider, and we celebrate and wonder.

Kirchentag makes space for whatever is possible — for the Church and for us as individuals. If, for example, a gay and lesbian celebration of the Lord’s Supper is led by a female bishop, in the heart of the district of Hamburg — the area which contains the most mosques — and the celebration is “guarded” by some of the Turkish boys who live in the district and who asked what they could do to help? This is Church, in an unusual place, daring to do great things and build new bridges.

And when we stand together at the closing service and celebrate together, when the head and the heart are enlarged and the soul starts to sing, we become newly conscious of what we can do and to what we are called. Then, our desire to live differently, more freely, more responsibly, and more peacefully, seems to be within reach. Then, the notion that we could change and transform ourselves, becomes conceivable. This euphoria may well quickly dissipate from every-day life, but the memory lingers in our hearts.

Kirchentag also involves experiencing a sense of community, not having to explain oneself, but simply to belong. Saying the same prayers, belonging in the same One: It is these things which bind us together and strengthen us. They make us grateful for what we have been given. We feel that we are children of God and have reason to celebrate the One whose presence we sense.

The song “There is a longing in our hearts, O Lord, for you to reveal yourself to us” has become a Kirchentag hit. Whoever celebrated the artoklasia (the breaking of bread) in Munich, which united the denominations in table fellowship; whoever saw the thousand candles floating on the river Elbe in Dresden, they sensed what it might feel like when the Kingdom of God comes. Whoever participated in the opening service in Hamburg, in the middle of the Reeperbahn; whoever experienced the moment of stillness in Stuttgart, after the Taizé chant from the district and who asked what they could do to help? This is Church, in an unusual place, daring to do great things and build new bridges.

This is what it means to encounter God in new and very different ways, celebrating and proclaiming the One under whose blessing we stand, as a vibrant fellowship, on a journey together. In such a way, the Kirchentag is a large, happy and impressive celebration of faith, which, God willing, takes place every other year.
There are cross-roads in life, and it is at junctures such as these that we celebrate, both in the family and in the church. A child is born, a young man takes leave of his childhood, a couple decide to live together “until death do us part”, a relative dies and one has to say a final farewell. Many people resort to the liturgical support that is offered by churches during these important transitions from one phase of life to the next. They are grateful for the birth of their child, they want to express their thanks in a service and celebrate their child’s baptism together with others. In view of the many demands which raising a child entails, in view of the unknown risks which lie ahead (either those affecting the individual or those in the political sphere which affect the many), in view of the fears which many people possess, God’s blessing is requested and protection for the child is solicited, so that the child might, by gracious powers, be wonderfully sheltered. The rites of these occasional offices tangibly express God’s love and care. The tangible aspect becomes apparent during the blessing as people feel the water and the sign of the cross on their foreheads, and sense the minister’s hands on their head, as a blessing is conveyed. The rites of these occasional offices thus require the physical presence of those involved. Given that there are a great number of occasions, in our modern society, where communication is possible independently of bodily presence, such offices cannot be taken for granted. However, during a celebration, it is only possible to celebrate with people who are physically present.

Occasional offices are services which disrupt life. We need festivals and celebrations in order to gain a sense of detachment from our everyday lives – with its babble of multiple voices – and to be able to think about life. From a sociological perspective, there is a difference between a festival and a celebration. A festival makes those involved aware of the whither, whence, what for and why of their lives. It reflects the meaning, the purpose and the future of their lives – as well as their social environment – in a supra-individual context of meaning. A celebration helps deal with everyday life, focusing on a positive aspect of it and thus revealing it to be meaningful. Therefore, celebrations can be rather serious and solemn in tone. Given such a definition, occasional offices can be predominantly regarded as celebrations. However, they also contain elements of a festival. Festivals help us to cope with everyday life by suspending it for a certain period of time. Thus, a festival can be exuberant, happy, and even contain elements of ecstasy. At a wedding, this aspect is particularly evident.

First and foremost, it is the family celebration which emphasises the happy and elevated elements of the celebration. Food and wine are just as much a part of a party as festive attire. They carry us away from everyday life and lift up the soul. However, there are festive aspects to be found, not only in baptisms, confirmations and weddings, but also in funerals. If the funeral ceremony is predominantly marked by a sad and solemn tone, during the subsequent reception, there is frequently a happy reminiscing of the life of the deceased and a great deal of laughter. It is not only the loss, but the rich memories of the life of the deceased and his or her idiosyncrasies which often characterise the conversations. Festive elements not only emerge during such family celebrations, but they also occur during the services. Music, in particular, plays an important role. This is the case, for example, during a confirmation service, when the organ plays a prelude as the confirmands process into the church and the congregation stands; or whilst the congregation sings “Now Thank We all Our God” at the end of such a service; or during a marriage ceremony, when the wedding march by Mendelssohn is played. In these instances, many emotions are roused through the use of such music. Quite a few people will have tears in their eyes. The musical and festive character of these occasional services ensures that life events – which are naturally highly charged with emotion – are brought to the senses, and thus to consciousness. Music facilitates a harmonisation of emotions and connects people in a fellowship. Birth and adulthood, love and death are foundational in the history of an individual and of a family. They are places of change; places which – during a service – are shaped, interpreted and celebrated.

For many people, the core aspect of the celebration is the blessing. In a blessing, God’s support is given, and at the same time, conveyed to a person, to a couple, or to a family. In the gesture of blessing, they are told something and given something which they can neither say nor give to themselves. Implicit in the blessing is the notion that individuals are not merely a product of their own existence, but that they are more than they themselves are aware. In the blessing, God is celebrated as the giver of all good things, and life is interpreted as a sign of God’s love and care. The gaze thus moves away from one’s own personality and capabilities, to a life which is understood, first and foremost, as a life which has been given, a life which one has received. With all their queries and emotions, people are encouraged to entrust themselves to God during the blessing. They are not referred back to themselves alone, but they experience the feeling of being held. The indelible nature of one’s individual identity before God becomes particularly obvious at the beginning and end of life. God respects the individual in baptism, before they are able to act as an independent entity and, during the funeral, God respects the individual even after they have ceased to exist as an independent being. Such occasional offices celebrate God in the midst of life.
“ARE YOU HUMOROUS WHEN YOU ARE ALONE?”

Asks Max Frisch in his questionnaire on humour.

This question is, at first, somewhat irritating, since humour is frequently connected with socialising and with the ability to make others laugh. However, in a pointed manner, this enquiry gets to the heart of the matter of humour, since, in an adverse situation, humour boils down to a sense or an attitude. It is only in such a situation that a sense of humour can unleash its striking power and potential for change, which is brought about by making oneself laugh when one could just as well cry or fly off the handle with anger. Take for example, the man who went for a walk on a Sunday in a snow-white shirt on which a pigeon chose to deposit its droppings. “Truly,” he said, “it is good that cows can’t fly!”

With a clever comparison, he claims the power of interpretation over his misery, and quite rightly so. There are always more perspectives concerning the one problem to consider, no matter how unpleasant it may be.

GRIEF AND HAPPINESS OF HUMOUR AND FAITHS

Whether the issue is a mere trifle or an enormous mess, “Humour grows on the dirt which pollutes the air that I breathe” (Sigmund Graff). Thus, humour has amazing potential. It connects the greatest misery with the greatest lightness, without casually brushing the hardship aside. On the contrary, only in confrontation can new perspectives become accessible. The Christian faith is very much aware of this. It is the mad assumption that we were not made to be perfect. Indeed, God is already at work, and that we already live in God’s just world, even if it does not look like it. Stumbling, searching, sensing, spirited, lion-hearted or faint-hearted, we do our best, enjoy wonderful moments, get upset and look for strategies to change whatever has annoyed us. This is somewhat mad, and is meant to be, since we are nonetheless “fools in Christ” (1 Cor 4:10).

SERIOUS, BUT NOT TOO SERIOUS

Faith thus confronts the serious side of life – and humour does the same. Humour is the amazing attitude of taking oneself, one’s circumstances, the world and all the disagreeable things seriously, but not too seriously. In this way, there is creative room for manoeuvre between being serious and being all-too-serious, which opens up new opportunities for action. This constitutes the lightness and inner freedom of humour. It is also the attitude with which faith is familiar. An inner freedom amidst all the mess, even towards death. The Christian faith is not afraid to take even death seriously, but not too seriously. In general, this little word “too” seems to be quite complicated, and one which increasingly manoeuvres a person into a nonsensical high-performance spiral. Everything needs to be perfect, absolutely watertight, unambiguous, well thought out and exact. Such an attitude generates self-opinionated, dogmatic and – in the worst case – fundamentalist individuals. It is good if humour can enter at such a point, since it saves faith from fanaticism and brings it back to itself. Both, faith and humour, know full well that we are not perfect, and that we were not made to be perfect. Imperfection – and even failure – are part of life. It is good Reformation doctrine to remember God’s grace at this point. Whilst Luther asked how he could find a gracious God; today, every person has to ask himself: “When will I finally be gracious with myself? When will I finally accept myself, warts and all? When will I stop functioning according to rationality of further, better, more? One wishes for a bit more defiance, the defiance of faith and of humour.

Fun-loving and exuberant, a person with humour relies upon their own creativity in a time of need, just as faith relies upon the power which comes to its full strength in weakness (2 Cor 12:9). Therefore, both humour and faith hope for what is impossible, even though they do not hope for what is perfect; and faith even hopes for God’s impossible possibilities. Indeed, they allow us to be courageous, at times also visionary, audacious, nonconformist, careless and even boisterous. This is the only way that things will change and, of course, one does not immediately have to start another Reformation. A sense of humour can prove to be very helpful in terms of developing faith, since it radiates this intrepidity, curiosity and defiance, which faith, at some point, seems to have lost. The band of disciples showed sparkling, ecstatic enthusiasm, shared possessions and words, and rejoiced, whilst sharing bread and wine (Acts 2), but this seems to have happened a long time ago. Could it be dangerous to be all aflutter with excitement, in an uncontrolled way? This is however, precisely what rejoicing is about, in the large and the small celebrations of life.

CELEBRATING GOD IN NEW WAYS

“IT IS GOOD TO LAUGH AT GOD’S IMPOSSIBILITIES, FULL OF LOVE”

Martin Luther

Dr Gisela Matthiae

Free lance Theologian, Clown and Clown Trainer.

PHOTO: GISELA MATTHIAE
A after a long time of thinking, hoping, worrying... the victory over the cancer was decided in my favour. The struggle was hard. A new phase of life is beginning—for me, this is a significant Reformation.

For more than half a year, there were only question marks in my head: What will happen? Will I be able to live the way I did before the diagnosis? "Oh yes, I will!" is what I kept telling myself. I was defiant. After a long period of suffering, it was over. "You are healed," I can still hear the doctor saying. The new life could begin. In many ways, I had to start from scratch: reviewing friendships, looking for a new job, giving my life new shape, thanking my parents and others. Simply living became a task which was not so easy for me. I quickly grew dissatisfied, but it could have been worse... No-one knew how it would end, and now it became difficult to accept a new lease of life.

Starting from scratch worked well: I found a new job, made wonderful friends, had to gather courage, and build up my self-confidence. Even my former looks slowly returned. The illness had changed me. I thought I was ugly. Though I always knew that there are more important things in life than a new hairstyle, I was nevertheless happy when people could no longer immediately guess my illness by looking at me.

Today, almost twelve years later, I can face everything in a completely different way, much more openly. In my deepest crisis, I would never have expected my life to become so beautiful again. During the entire time, I have learnt a lot.

BY MICHAELA LANGE

And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant, to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

LUKE 14:17 · ESV, 2001

Celebrating the Lord’s Supper in new ways? Come, for everything is now ready!

This invitation can be heard in the churches, whenever the Lord’s Supper is celebrated. It is then that those who feel invited come to the table of the Lord. They know what to expect; although the spoken words do not explain what is so inspirational about the Lord’s Supper. It is a kind of magic that I feel as I eat and drink along with the others. It is wonderful when the celebration begins and unfamiliar people join the Christian meal. When Christians were still new in world society, the Lord’s Supper was an exclusive event. Only the initiated were allowed to participate. For them, this was the only way to survive as a Christian congregation. The mystery of faith was not freely available. One had to successively draw closer to it. It was dangerous to acknowledge one’s allegiance, which is why there was such reserve and secrecy.

Say to those who are invited: Come, for everything is now ready! How do we pass on this invitation to the people who are not in church on a Sunday? New ideas? Or breathing new life into old opportunities?

Is the invitation really meant for everyone? Without any qualification? What would happen to our past? Where would our traditions be left?

Tradition however, needs to be alive in order to survive. This means that, since we are the messengers, we need to bring ourselves into the discussion. I invite people! “Tomorrow, I am going to the Lord’s Supper and I would like you to join me.” Does that work?

The children in the children’s ministry are an example to us. They write elaborate cards of invitation in their favourite colours: pink, blue and gold. “Will you come? Everything is now ready! Eating and drinking with Jesus at his table is wonderful. Do please come!”

Every invitation, whether written and coloured or spoken, is a confession! It says: I belong to this group of Christians, to this church. It also says: I like you! I want you to be there. So much warmth! Magical!

REV CATHARINA UHLMANN, Consultant in the EKD-Centre for Quality Development in Worship Services, Hildesheim.
The world visiting friends” – this wonderful claim of the “summer’s tale” that was the World Football Championship of 2006 – albeit that Germany might not have been selected as the host country through exclusively legal means – can hardly be outdone: It is short, succinct, clear; an ideal example of good communication. The world – in this case, 24 teams and the correspondingly diverse guests – came to visit football friends in Germany. By comparison, the term World Exhibition sounds more laborious, since trendiness, innovation and presentation are connected with it. The World Reformation Exhibition is located between two fields of associations: On the one hand, it is about guests celebrating with us during the summer of 2017, on the other, it is about the artistic staging and presentation of the topic. The term “world” in the title “Gates of Freedom – World Reformation Exhibition” points to three different dimensions within the context of the anniversary of the Reformation in 2017:

First of all, the term “world” relates to the “world” of the faith of the Reformation. During the course of the “Luther Decade”, from 2008 to 2016, the anniversary of the Reformation not only served to make new pathways into the world of the Reformation, to facilitate discussions about its significance and to raise criticism at its being overrated, it was the very means by which many people initially accessed this world in the first place. Much of this will be visible, experienceable and debatable during the World Exhibition in Wittenberg as, between 20th May and 10th September 2017, there will be many specific places and times in this world-famous town of Wittenberg portraying the world of the Reformation through exhibitions and concerts, discussions and productions. The “world” of the Reformation’s insights and contradictions, the world also of its beauty and breadth, the world of its powerful faith and controversies: these will constitute the first dimension of the World Exhibition.

The second dimension is the global orientation of the World Exhibition: Contrary to a tradition of Protestant nationalism – which is just as pronounced as it is deplorable – the 500-year-anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 is to have an international flavour. From its very beginning, the Reformation was a “citizen of the world”, which, since we are expecting guests from across the globe, is a literal dimension. The tourism industry is sending unambiguous signals that there will not only be guests from countries which have been greatly influenced by the Reformation, such as America and Sweden, but also guests from many other countries. They will take advantage of this summer to visit Europe, including Germany and, whilst in Germany, will also visit Wittenberg. It should also not be forgotten that the National Special Exhibitions in the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin, the Luther House in Wittenberg and Wartburg Castle are also popular attractions. In no way does the global dimension of the anniversary year of 2017 and the World Exhibition rest solely upon the shoulders of the Evangelical Christians, rather it is the joint initiative of the churches, state and civil society, who, in their diverse ways, will contribute to the presentation of Germany as a hospitable democracy that is open for discussion and shaped by its cultural heritage, and a nation which can remember its religious roots without indicating a biased preference for a particular denomination. The world visiting friends – this claim also applies to 2017, but, given that it has already been claimed, cannot, of course, be used as a motto. 

**The World Exhibition will not be restricted to either Lutheran, or German, or European perspectives**

In 2017, the Reformation was a “citizen of the world”. The celebration of the anniversary will not be restricted to either Lutheran, or German, or European perspectives. The World Reformation Exhibition will become tangible through the presence of the global dimension of Reformation faith; that through the “Luther Garden” of the Lutheran World Federation, through the Guesthouse for the Ecumenical World in Wittenberg which has been planned by the EKD congregations abroad, through the discussions of international topics, or through individual churches of the ecumenical world found in Wittenberg. Of course, no-one can expect all Reformation churches from across the globe to be permanently present during the World Reformation Exhibition. However, the Evangelical Christians in Germany will ensure that, during the time of the World Exhibition, there will not be a single day in which one might even consider that this could be a nationally-minded exhibition.

This aspect alludes to the third dimension of the World Reformation Exhibition denoted by the term “world”, which, the Evange-
On the Occasion of the Anniversary of the Reformation, Important Questions about Life in our Present Times are Addressed in the Seven Gates of Wittenberg

BY MARGOT KÄSSMANN

Those who visit Wittenberg in 2017 will not only see the World Reformation Exhibition, they will see themselves becoming part of a Reformation experience. Seven gates will be designed as places where we, today, consider anew, with a fresh perspective, the need for reform and reformation. 500 years ago, in this small city, Wittenberg, thoughts were developed which were able to unleash so much power that they changed the world. Within its gates, the main protagonists met daily: Philipp and Katharina, Martin and Elisabeth. This is the very place from whence the message of Christian freedom went out; the gates from whence the news that no one of Christian freedom went out; the gates were constructed in Wittenberg. In a very beautiful way, the gates stand for a vision of a peaceful future (Is 62:6–10) “You who remind the Lord, take no rest…”. This hope for God, for the presence of God, is indeed a yearning also found amongst the people of today. However, one can also be trapped within the gates of a city, as David was (1 Sam 23:7), and this should not be underestimated. Locked gates restrict freedom, frighten people and give rise to injustice. How do we deal with the locked gates of our time, from which people cannot free themselves? What do we say about the prisons of our country, or to those who are imprisoned by the labels that have been ascribed to them, such as: handicapped, unemployed, old or ill? A person faced with a locked gate knows no freedom. The locking of gates to Europe also springs to mind, such as in Greek Idomeni. Therefore, one of the ways in which Wittenberg will be dedicated to the topic of Globalisation.

Another gate will be devoted to the subject of youth, community and religion and another upon art and culture. It is the central vision of the book of Revelation that the gates are no longer shut (Rev 21:25). A world of free and open gates, in which people can think in the way that the Reformers imagined, is also independent and free. The key message from the World Exhibition in Wittenberg to all the world is to know that, in the face of all fundamentalism, we can return to the places which were once successful in opening the gates, and through which we can still venture out into the freedom of the world and faith today. With courage and the un-restrained hope that there are stories from which we can learn and that reconciliation is possible in the 21st century, we can go through 2017 with new strength.

The “Presbyterian School of Science and Technology” in Cameroon is the youth school of the project network. It is an important educational institution for people who support Cameroon in its development.

„BE A BLESSING FOR EVERYONE“ is the motto of the COME High School in Myanmar. The Evangelical school is part of “schools500reformation”, a global network of schools established to mark the anniversary of the Reformation. Through this network, Evangelical schools are able to access international contacts, so as to open up a wide educational horizon for pupils and teachers. A glance at the website: www.schools500reformation.net shows how young people of the Reformation tradition developed into Protestants who shape the future. “Protest for the future”, the joint campaign of 2015, provided information about concerns and projects which young people, from every continent, find important to pursue through their school and church work. Whether they are followers of the Christian or other faiths, their passion to change the world for the better finds expression in worship services such as the one at the Evangelical School in Gelsenkirchen entitled: “How do I become a Reformer?” The 500th school in the project network, the Presbyterian School of Science and Technology in Bafut, Cameroon, with its rich spiritual life – as displayed by its choirs, its lessons and its devotions – demonstrates that a young people of the Reformation tradition developed into Protestants who shape the future. “Protest for the future”, the joint campaign of 2015, provided information about concerns and projects which young people, from every continent, find important to pursue through their school and church work. Whether they are followers of the Christian or other faiths, their passion to change the world for the better finds expression in worship services such as the one at the Evangelical School in Gelsenkirchen entitled: “How do I become a Reformer?” The 500th school in the project network, the Presbyterian School of Science and Technology in Bafut, Cameroon, with its rich spiritual life – as displayed by its choirs, its lessons and its devotions – demonstrates that...
FROM THE RIGHTS ESTABLISHED IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE REFORMATION TO THE MODEL OF THE FUTURE

The Liberal Constitutional Law Concerning Religion in Germany

BY HANS ULRICH ANKE

The constitutional law concerning religion in Germany is predominantly informed by the Reformation, and the ongoing confessional conflicts which emerged as a consequence. The theological insights of the Reformers made their way into the field of tension between the interests of the conflicting political powers. In 1555, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation succeeded in ending the constitutional crisis by means of the Religious Peace of Augsburg. For the first time, it ensured the peaceful co-existence of different confessions; by abstaining from the decision of religious questions and remaining neutral; by recognising the differing confessions as being equal; by guaranteeing the freedom of spiritual ministry, and by obliging the parties to agree that “a complete peace within the disputed Christian religion shall be attained only by Christian, friendly, and peaceful means…” (

1

Having learnt the lessons of totalitarian Nazi dictatorship, the Basic Law commits state action entirely to the service of the fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as to the service of the inviolable dignity of every human being.

2

The constitution comprehensively acknowledges the existential need for free religious practice. It guarantees and promotes religious freedom in its individual, collective and corporate dimensions.

3

At the same time, the Basic Law ensures that the rights of third parties are safeguarded, as they relate to religious ministry, and that the necessary responsibilities of the state can be fulfilled.

4

The secular state must remain neutral toward different beliefs.

5

Differing religious and ideological convictions enjoy the same legal guarantees. However, depending on the factual context, the state can adjust eligibility criteria to suit external requirements such as size, organisational form or relation to state responsibilities.

6

Finally, an essential development to note is the right to practise religion freely, even in the public arena. The pertinent guarantees of religious communities have the opportunity to participate in public discourse, to get involved in the challenges that are faced by society, and to enter into an open dialogue with other beliefs. In such a way, this right also counteracts the tendency to marginalise religious communities, who, among other risks, increasing radicalisation may well pose a threat.

Even after almost one hundred years of practical experience, the conception of the liberal, constitutional law concerning religion in Germany is convincing: Not marginalising religion, but recognising and promoting it as a definitive power for the life of the individual, and as an essential contribution to an open, vibrant society.

This concept is open to further development and is meant to be thus, so as to allow Christians, Jews, Muslims and followers of other religious beliefs to align their lives in the best possible way with their religious ideas. At the same time, all citizens are required to: abide by the legal order in a consistent manner; refrain from violating the rights of others; recognise the religious freedom of others, including the freedom to change their religious affiliation; and acknowledge the equal rights of women and men. Legislators, government and courts ensure that the constitutional law concerning religion is consistently developed so as to manifest its liberal character which also serves the common good. With a public ministry that is not focused on their own interests, religious communities can, time and time again, contribute significantly to the creation of a general acceptance of the liberal state of the Basic Law, as being both a gift and a responsibility.

The constitutional law concerning religion is productive, safeguards freedom and is open for development. However, even after almost a hundred years of effectiveness, its best times are still those ahead.
Luther, Paul, God—Discovering the Discoverers in New Ways

Paul, the apostle and oldest Christian author, and Martin Luther, the Reformer, have both experienced what it means to rediscover the God with whom they were familiar in entirely new ways. They also experienced the resultant effect of finding a completely new purpose in life. As a zealot for God, Paul, the Jew, was hunting down the first believers in Christ, when God revealed to him that the crucified man was the Messiah. Henceforth, Paul became an enthusiastic missionary to the nations. That God was the sole author of the reconciliation between Paul and God, without Paul’s assistance; that God had himself, in a sense, discovered Paul in a new way, was, for the apostle, a sign of God’s grace. His conviction that God saves all people, both Jewish and non-Jewish, through the gospel, which is...
After just a few moments on this island, it seemed to me as though I had booked a journey through time. Secluded from the rest of the world, occasionally in the streets however, some young people would appear just across the way from a smart-looking house or a hotel. For a brief moment, they connect themselves to the net, the World Wide Web. This is a way of opening up to the world, one might think, but outside of the World Heritage City, there is no connection whatsoever.

Here, there are old “Latterwagen” – cars of high representatives of the former UDSSR, the kind of cars that were around in East-Berlin before the time of the turnarounds and reunification. Alongside all of the fancy cars from the capitalist country, the land of unlimited opportunities, they are still going strong. Today, these sets of wheels from the 50s have been brightly polished for the tourists.

Revolutionary ideas were once the inspiration for this nation. Looking first this way, then adopting a slightly different pose, good old Che greets me from placards. And here I am in the middle of it all. I wander through both town and country, by river, on foot or by bike, through gorgeous scenery until I reach the Caribbeans with their prefabricated buildings. Revolutionary ideas were once the inspiration for this nation. Looking first this way, then adopting a slightly different pose, good old Che greets me from placards.

And every so often, a little Fidel. Everything is still controlled and directed, in the true sense of the word: the truck of the socialist friend which serves as a bus, the yoke for the oxen ploughing the fields, the world of literature.

So where is the opening which people are talking about? In Cuba, with all its morbid charm, what will people make of it? What will come after Raoul? Whilst I am pondering and walking away from the tourist routes, it happens. There is a markedly nice atmosphere. Food and drinks, too, which is great. I am sitting in the Café Arcángel in the Calle Concordia.

I stay for a while, write postcards and describe this place, the place that makes it clear to me that, in the midst of chaos and decay, with a little initiative of one’s own, a new beginning is possible. This truth applies to other places, other contexts and also to me.

It is entirely in keeping with the motto: “They all said: ‘This is impossible.’ Then a person came along who did not know that, and simply did this.” Does this also work with regard to unity – even peace – in the world? Why not? Just do it!

BY SUSANNE ERLECKE

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18 · NRSV, 1989

Come back next spring and take pictures of my flowers, they look more like me than I do,” is what the French painter Claude Monet (1844–1926) is reported to have said to a photographer who wanted to paint his portrait. This intriguing answer prompts in me an image of the world: the truck of the socialist friend which serves as a bus, the yoke for the oxen ploughing the fields, the world of literature.

Claude Monet's remark is also a lesson in seeing in the school of faith. No-one knows better than us to make use of God’s senses. To see what God sees, hear what God hears, and say what God has said. Whoever “unveils” their face and gazes in amazement at the world in such a way, reflects God and is transformed. “The world is full of God”, said Martin Luther, adding that the main thing was to discover him!

The Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) gives us a helpful suggestion. He said that Christ had to leave the earth in order to encounter us in every location on the earth. We had to lose the ability to physically gaze upon his irretrievable face in order to seek him in every person: “We lost those features, in the way that a magical number may be lost … We may see them, and not know them. The profile of a Jew whom we pass in the subway may be that of Christ; the hands which give us some coins at a sales counter may recall those same hands that soldiers once nailed to a cross.

Perhaps some feature of the crucified face lurks in every mirror; perhaps the crucified face died and was effaced, so that God might become everyone.”

REV MATTHIAS STORCK, Herford
Some like to explain the Christian faith as trust – “Believing means trusting” is the relevant title which a contemporary author has given to his book. Equating “faith” with “trust” however, has been done for a very long time – in the Old Testament, the Hebrew equivalent of our word “believe” relates solely to people and not to issues. In the Old Testament, that “one believes a person” means that one trusts that person, because one feels addressed and influenced positively by him or her. Even in the oldest section of the Hebrew Bible, God is portrayed as a person. He speaks to people. And people believe him, because they trust him, as a person and as his word. One can only believe a fact (“In the supermarket, beer is on special offer today”), but a person and his or her word can be believed and trusted (“Trust me, I am telling you: In the supermarket, beer is on special offer today”). And yet, according to the testimony of the Old Testament, the biblical God cannot be counted as being one of us – humankind – in which we can have either more or less trust (“You can’t trust John when he claims that beer is on special offer today; he is almost always wrong”). The biblical God inspires a basic trust in the people whom he addresses, which sustains their entire existence. Though this externally-inspired basic trust within people can occasionally be affected by doubt, it is not constituted by the person themselves (in the same way that one’s love for another is not constituted by oneself), but rather, it is constituted by God, through his addressing of an individual as a being that has been created by him and belongs to him: “I have called you by name, you are mine” (Is 43:1). Since God’s address inspires trust in a human being, this person then orients his or her life towards that which God’s word both demands and promises. In other words: Since he trusts God, who addresses him, a person is able to take on responsibility for his own life, for the lives of other people, and for the entire society. He is able to take on responsibility, because God confers on him responsibility through his words. Trusting in someone automatically leads to the bestowing of responsibilities; this special basic trust in God is a particularly intensive foundation of responsibility. Not only Judaism, but also Christendom held onto all these basic insights about faith as being trust, and they are expressed in the first Testament. Such a notion of “faith in God” equating to “trust in the person who addresses me, inspires trust in me and gives me responsibilities” was scarcely known in the majority of the world described in the Bible; and people only became acquainted with the concept through the Greek translation of the Old Testament and the declarations of the first Christian churches, which were not part of Judaism. Jesus of Nazareth gave this notion a slightly different twist when he said that this trust in God, of which the Bible speaks, can give people so much power that with it they can move mountains (Mt 21:21). His way of speaking, which was full of imagery, thus underlined the special power which lies in trusting God.
The Reformation Discovery of the “World” as a Location in which Faith can Prove itself

BY TRAUTGOTT JÄNNICHEN

ne of the most essential ideas of the Reformation is the focus on Christian conduct as it relates to everyday life, considering the transformation of the mind, according to the will of God, as a “reasonable service” (in accordance with Rom 12:1f. K21). Whilst in the Middle Ages, a contemplative life was superordinate to the so-called secular estates, the Reformation highlighted that, in serving our neighbour and taking responsibility before God, faith proves itself to be the adequate lifestyle for Christians. The backdrop to this transformation was Luther’s fundamental discovery that, from the moment they are baptised, all “Christians are truly of the spiritual estate” (WA 6, 407), and are therefore all equally called to a Christian life. In this way, Luther understood that it was not only the Sunday service, but every-day tasks and activities which were a form of worship for all baptised Christians. In this light, he gave new meaning to the term “vocation.” A vocation designates the respective place where the Christian life is to be lived out and involves – in obedience to God – consciously taking responsibility for the people whom God has entrusted to us.

That Luther’s insight was a theological innovation can be seen in his taking up of the traditional notion of vocation (vocatio), his releasing it from its original reference which related to the spiritual – or even monastic – life, and his re-employment of it as a label attached to all activities undertaken in the service of one’s neighbour. This obligatory accepting of responsibility for one’s vocation was regarded by Luther as the cross, which each Christian has to bear (cf. Mk 8:34f.), and he repeated – referring to the common difficulties connected with the vocation of the monk – his interpretation. He contrasts this with the way that monks bore the cross of Christ and considered their lifestyle to be self-imposed and therefore misguided. According to Luther, the basis of every-day life is the “vocation” of the married couple, or the parents of the family. The work carried out there, in taking care of one’s children, caring and teaching them, not least in religious education, is foundational and exemplary for a Christian way of life, both in its joys and its difficulties and hardships.

Since the Reformation doctrine of good works is emphatically not about the securing of justification before God, because Christians are justified by gra- ce; Luther observed that Christians could undertake works which were completely and utterly for the benefit of their neighbour, and that such acts were inspired by the commandment to love. Hence, it is “vocalional work” – according to Luther, fundamental framing of the “freedom” and “servitude” of the individual – that defines the practical consequence of our justi- fication.

Against this backdrop, the henceforth married clergy who were living in areas that were being impacted by the Reformation were occupied with the secular life of the “house.” The developing Protestant parsonage was to be a model of the general regulations for marriage and family life. Whilst they were classified as belonging to the secular realm, the clergy performed their spiri- tual regiment through the Word alone, fulfilling their respective responsibilities as preacher, counselor and teacher. In their preaching and teaching, they were to proclaim the justification of the indi- vidual, and also to explain, to those with responsibilities, the ethical principles of the right administration of the office of a prince, councillor and parent, as well as all other roles. For this reason, a clergyman did not set foot in the town hall himself, but closely observed what took place there, and made his view known through his sermons and his counselling.

Luther rejected not only the medieval ideal of the monastic life, but also the tendencies of the so-called “enthusiasts”, who challenged the well-ordered structure of world reality and thus the necessary ofces and their authority (cf. WA 30/I, 214f. or BSLK 694f.). According to Luther, the problematic ideo- logy of the “enthusiasts” ulti- mately denied the theological significance of daily life as well as the respective structures of the ofces. In his later years, Luther theologically justified Christian responses to the world, predominantly within the framework of his Genesis lec- tures. Human beings are funda- mentally determined by the relationships which they are being addressed by God and challenged to respond gratefully. In being addressed by God, the humanity of a person is constituted, and in its extent, Luther re- cognises the fundamental process of wor- shiping God, and ultimately the foundation of the Church. The order of a household is determined by the relationships which exist between the man and the woman, the parents and the children, and the organi- sation of the work. The political order is motivated by the Fall, since it attempts to compensate the consequences of the corruption of humankind as a result of the Fall.

In its essence, the whole Christian lifestyle is determined by the “common order of Christian love” (WA 26, 505). Christian love is the guiding principle which characterises conduct within the secular order, as well as people’s conduct in extraordinary situations. By pointing to the “common order of Christian love”, a target perspective is laid down which can inform all action, and which can, in individual cases, break through the logic of active offices. Such actions is habitual in everyday-life, so as to provide for a neighbour- in-need. Luther points out that, when in doubt, it may be better to release an ofender than to kill an innocent man. He also emphasises that in raising children, one should, at times, allow exceptions to the rules. Such suggestions open up perspectives for the discharge of the re- sponsible offices”, which underline the pri- macy of love and mercy over and against a strict legalism (cf. a.o. WA 11, 272, 276).

The concise concept of the realm of the “world” as a place in which the Christian faith proves itself, which was developed by Luther, was not always fully adhered to following the Reformation. A present-day continuation of this Reforma- tion concept has to develop a theo- logical understanding of the institutions of society, taking into consideration their significance as well as their flexibility. The continuing relevance of so- cial institutions shows over and against the fiction of an individual autonomy; that it is necessary to accept the cultural preconceptions of society and the particular way of living. In principle, the function of institutions as serving bodies, in keeping with the Jesuitic inter- pretation of the commandment to keep the Sabbath (cf. Mk 2,27), is to be highlighted. This is to be emphasised over and against the conservative-static ideas of order, and also accentuated in the face of the levelling tendencies of the modern age. In this context, the criteria which determine that which is suitable for humankind from a theological perspective, also need to always be consulted as the standards for the eval- uation of social institutions.

The Church, too, is to be understood as an institution, and one which is com- parable to other social institutions with regard to certain structural features. Thus, a harsh juxtaposition of the “Church” and the “world” is inappropriate, since, at an individual level, one cannot speak of a fundamental dichotomy. However, it is also of primary importance that the Church im- plements the specific actions to which it has been commissioned by the gospel in such a way as to testify to the gospel in the “world”.

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Every-day Life as Worship

The Reformation Discovery of the “World” as a Location in which Faith can Prove itself

By Traugott Jännichen

ne of the most essential ideas of the Reformation is the focus on Christian conduct as it relates to everyday life, considering the transformation of the mind, according to the will of God, as a “reasonable service” (in accordance with Rom 12:1f. K21). Whilst in the Middle Ages, a contemplative life was superordinate to the so-called secular estates, the Reformation highlighted that, in serving our neighbour and taking responsibility before God, faith proves itself to be the adequate lifestyle for Christians. The backdrop to this transformation was Luther’s fundamental discovery that, from the moment they are baptised, all “Christians are truly of the spiritual estate” (WA 6, 407), and are therefore all equally called to a Christian life. In this way, Luther understood that it was not only the Sunday service, but every-day tasks and activities which were a form of worship for all baptised Christians. In this light, he gave new meaning to the term “vocation.” A vocation designates the respective place where the Christian life is to be lived out and involves – in obedience to God – consciously taking responsibility for the people whom God has entrusted to us.

That Luther’s insight was a theological innovation can be seen in his taking up of the traditional notion of vocation (vocatio),
he relationship between the Church and finance has always been multi-faceted, and sometimes strained. In the modern world, which originated in the Reformation, church institutions, diaconia, health and social management depend upon strong financial partners. What are the requirements that specialised providers need to meet, in order to handle the money that is entrusted to them, in a responsible and sustainable way?

In 1520, Luther provided some guidance in his treatise “On the Freedom of a Christian.” He said: “A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one.” Here, Luther describes Christian freedom as being a freedom which relates to responsibility, and which is actively engaged in the community.

Already in the 1920s, people in churches and diaconal ministry were free to found independent banks, in the form of church co-operatives, so as to administer their finances. Solidarity, responsibility, kindness, partnership and supporting capacity-building are the values which shape the actions of both the largest German banks used by the Church today. They are guided by the Christian canon of values and exercise social responsibility in very diverse ways; through campaigns for donations and sponsorships, for example.

Reformation means asking questions and being open to change. Whoever feels accepted by God has no fear. Such a person is free to serve others in the world and wants to help shape the present and the future – even during times of comprehensive social and technological change, to which the financial sector is not immune. Together with their customers and members, the Evangelical financial institutes within this German church investor’s group (Arbeitskreis Kirchlicher Investoren) work towards an ambitious implementation of the EKD-guidelines for ethical and sustainable financial investment within the Evangelical Church. As investors themselves, they make their own capital investments whilst considering ethical and ecological criteria. For example, in accordance with strict criteria, any investment into armaments, nuclear technology, tobacco products and alcoholic beverages is excluded.

As a result of their convictions, the two Evangelical Church banks are among others – pioneers of “green money”.

As a result of their convictions, the two Evangelical Church banks are – amongst others – pioneers of “green money”.

Follow ing strict sustainability criteria, they purposefully advise their customers, from the churches, diaconia and social economy, about their financial investments and professional fund management. Changing the world by means of “green” – and thereby good – money and, step by step, maintaining ecologically sound living conditions, is the approach of sustainable investment products whereby investors put money into ecological projects, renewable energies or developing nations.

In this way, the large church banks actively contribute to the comprehensive implementation of the social and ecological standards that have been devised by this church investors’ group, in church communities, church districts and regional churches of the Evangelical Church in Germany. The high importance that is attached to the churches’ orientation towards sustainability is reflected internally in the ambitious sustainability certification programme, awards for the “Best Sustainable Investor” and the regularly advertised sustainability prize of the Evangelical Bank.

Reformation means being aware of one’s roots. It is only this rootedness in convictions and values which enables responsible action, both in the present and in the future. We understand this Reformation mandate as an obligation, not only towards the customers and members of the church banks, but also towards society, towards subsequent generations and towards the environment. Doubtlessly, climate protection is to be numbered amongst the greatest challenges of our time. It is about the preservation of creation. Investments in renewable energies are thus, not only imperative in an ethical sense, but also reasonable in an economic sense. Through ecological credit programmes, which facilitate energy-related renovation, or the expansion of solar energy on fair terms, and other such projects, the Evangelical Church banks support the diverse efforts to improve energy efficiency. Thus, when it comes to allocating credits, the churches’ financial institutes have special requirements. They are to serve a purpose, and serve the customers, according to terms which are sustainable. Investments are put towards, for example, church projects, education, the development of the healthcare sector, and ministry to youth, old or disabled people. Specialist know-how, high levels of professionalism and professional expertise guarantee absolute reliability and consistent customer orientation.

To handle the money that has been entrusted to us, in a wholly responsible and sustainable manner, is an elevated ambition, which challenges and urges us to place Christian values and the legacy of the Reformation at the very heart of our daily conduct.
LEAVING THE CHURCH IN THE CENTRE OF THE VILLAGE

Speaking about the World and God Always Entails Speaking about Jesus Christ

BY CHRISTIANE TIETZ

Following in the footsteps of Martin Luther, the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) fought against a Christian life separate from the world or identical with the world. Bonhoeffer gained fame through his insistence on a “worldly interpretation of biblical concepts”. Using these ideas, which he developed whilst in prison, Bonhoeffer protested against a church which denigrates the modern world, and its independence, and tries to prove to the world “that it cannot live without ‘God’ as its guardian.” Anxious for its self-preservation, such a church ends up securing a religious space separate from the world. In contrast, Bonhoeffer assigns “the center of the village” to be the place of the church. As Luther had previously pointed out, the church needs to live in the world and finds its essence in “being-for-others”. Being a Christian in such a way means turning to one’s concrete neighbour, taking responsibility and responding to their needs, whether they are a church member or not.

Previously, during the time of the Kirchenkampf (church struggle), Bonhoeffer emphasised the other side: the risk of a Christian life identical with the world. At a time when the church’s opposition to the world was necessary, because the latter was guided by principles which were contrary to having faith in Jesus Christ, Christians should not be content with living a life of “cheap grace”, by which was meant: “Christian life consists of my living in the world and like the world, my not being any different from it, my not being permitted to be different from it — for the sake of grace!…” Bonhoeffer contrasts this understanding with “costly grace”. Luther had taught this concept, but the heirs of the Reformation had not. With them, Christianity had conformed to the world. Discipleship (which is not an ethical programme, but a commitment to Jesus Christ) seemed no longer to be necessary and was even denounced as legalism. Neither separation from the world nor conforming to it are appropriate. The relationship of the Christian with the world depends upon God’s relationship with the world, as it is defined in Jesus Christ: “In Jesus Christ the reality of God has entered into the reality of this world. … From now on we cannot speak rightly of either God or the world without speaking of Jesus Christ.” God accepted, judged and reconciled the world in Jesus Christ. The world is not separate from God, but in a relationship with God. This is not a one-dimensional concept however, but rather, it is defined by incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection; and therefore, by acceptance, judgement and renewal. This is why the Christian does not despise the world. Yet where necessary, the Christian will protest against it. [Translation by Christiane Tietz]

Translation by Christiane Tietz

WE ACT UNJUSTLY TOWARDS GOD WHEN WE HOPE FOR NOTHING FROM HIM, WHEN WE FAIL TO TRUST HIM BUT WHAT OUR SENSES CAN PERCEIVE

John Calvin
Towards freedom?
The train is rolling, and so are the tears. Did I bring everything? Violin, suitcase, passport, visa? My journey starts out from the small space which is the GDR – and will take me away. My parents stand on the platform. Do they already sense that they will not see me for a long time, or even longer?

June 1988. A one-way ticket to the West – this is what I am planning to do. My objective is to study in Göttingen. In the GDR, I did not get a place at university. Unfortunately, my views were not appreciated. Border controls. My heart in my mouth – will they notice something? All the things I have in my suitcase: my favourite photos, cutlery, summer clothes (and less summery ones), my diary, a copy of my graduation diploma. These are not the kind of things that the dogs, sniffing around the train, are interested in. They seem to be looking for people.

Helmstedt . . . Göttingen. Exit. Strange smells. A friend is waiting for me. More tears. She takes me along to her small flat.

There are many things which I did not know during those first days in the West. In the shop, Edeka, even though all the food looked delicious, I suddenly felt nauseous. There are just too many things to see, too many colours, too many fragrances, too much. Do I really want to be here?

I pick up my welcome benefit payment the next day: 100 D-Mark. Straight into the clothes shop New Yorker. Immediate retreat – I could never decide on an item here. This would take time. And then, interesting things begin to happen. I ring my godmother’s bell. She almost falls over. Many years ago, she too had fled the GDR. She opens her arms: “You must stay here for a while.”

God, I thank you that you were with me when I began my new life. The first time in this unfamiliar country was difficult. I felt miserable and lonely. I knew nothing about notice-boards at uni, nor the General Students’ Committee, nor demonstrations, nor the job centre, nor health insurance.

God, I thank you that I found friends and that, already a year later, I was able to see my family again.

God, thank you for the wings and the roots that you freely gave me.

ANTJE M. ERNST

"Trust . . ." – the slogan of a prestigious bank company claims – "... is the beginning of everything." Trust however, can easily be lost, and it does not need a great deal to take whole industries – or even an entire economic system – to the brink of disaster. “A liar is never believed . . .” Trust is a precious commodity. Wherever trust has not been invested from an early age, and wherever confidence in the reliability and fairness of social institutions and structures has been fundamentally shaken, it can only be won back with endless effort and patience.

At the same time, however – and thanks to God – trust is also an every-day phenomenon, an every-day victual which I enjoy quite naturally. Without trust, I would not be able to get out of bed and across the zebra crossing, let alone enter into a genuine conversation, whereby I always assume that the other person means what they say and that they take seriously what I contribute. Certainly, I could not co-operate with others, as any joint venture would not be successful – would not even materialise – without a minimum of trust. It is remarkable and wonderful that such trust is sufficiently available; like our daily bread, it is freely given to me on innumerable occasions and it is also given away by me. Though, often, it is barely noticed, it is always noteworthy and wonderful.

Faith is greater than – and different to – blind trust. Faith wants to see and learns new ways of seeing. Faith borrows the vision of Jesus of Nazareth. It lets its eyes be opened to see the birds in the sky and the lilies of the field; and it practises looking at the world, one’s neighbour and – not least – itself through the eyes of God.

Faith does not believe in itself. It does not start with itself and therefore it does not stop at the edge of its own limits. Whoever believes, seeks and experiences a trust which is bigger than themselves. “I believe, help my unbelief!” (Mk 9:24) a man calls out during an encounter with Jesus – and, as we read, he was indeed helped.

ANNETTE KURSCHUS, Praeses of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia and Deputy Chair of the EKD.
Shaping Church Life with Trust in God

How can the gospel be heard in new ways and be made relevant for people who have little or no time for the Christian faith? In a pluralistically-thinking society, the Evangelical Church is seeking to find its particular commission, to adjust its mission and to develop new activities alongside its traditional forms. This is an age-old task, in which a “once-and-for-all” solution does not exist: How can we succeed in passing on the gospel to subsequent generations?

“Mission in the Region” asks how co-operations, individual profiles of churches and their mutual complementation, as well as new beginnings can be successful, and what types of mission, in a regional context, can promote interaction with the gospel as well as open up new approaches to the gospel.

“We are something quite special here”: The region as potential for creative space

Every regional identity is a blend of its history, experiences, motives and culture. In pioneering regions throughout Germany, we ask: How can we use this region as a wide-open, creative space for churches and church districts? How can the gospel be communicated in such a way that people, in the various regions, both hear and understand it – in Frisia, where there is a different accent than there is in the Ruhr area, and in the Altmark, where people hear with different ears than they do in the Kraichgau region? What forms of congregations, what kind of preaching which church, how co-operations and profiles in each region can help people discover their own approach to the gospel? In many places, an appreciation of the regional identity has led to a clearer own approach to the gospel. The most important discovery of the Centre for Quality Development in Worship Services is that quality always refers to the nature of an object, which, in the case of a worship service, is its character. First of all, quality should always be defined as being of theological importance – for example, to have a special personal and existential relevance for the audience – or for free drinks to be offered during the interval. Thus, it makes a difference whether or not a service has a missionary focus and means to win people to faith for the first time, or whether or not it is celebrated by a congregation who have a strong foundation in the faith. Each target group (young, old, families, the de-churched) has different implications for the quality requirements of a service, and the same is true for different kinds of occasions. Applying first-rate techniques to a service tries to connect that which is recognised as being of the first importance, and which is likely to be appreciated, with the feed-back loop. Sadly, this is still lacking in many worship services. It is for this reason that the Centre for Quality Development in Worship Services has made this area its third new field of focus, which includes suggestions for service observations by colleagues, post-service discussions, visitations for services and occasional services…

This is about establishing an appreciative perspective, developing new ideas and for continuing to celebrate with joy.

Quality in the Worship Service

By Folkert Fender

Quality in the worship service. The EKD-Centre for Quality Development in Worship Services...

Helping to Birth Change

The EKD-Centre Mission in the Region

By Hans-Hermann Pompe

“What as if everything depended on god and work as if everything depended on you.”

(Attributed to Martin Luther)

Trusting God in new ways, as a theme of this magazine, refers to both aspects of the above quotation: The active shaping and directing of church activities is founded upon trust in the work of the Holy Spirit, which is exempt from man’s command, which inspires faith even against all probability, and which does so wherever and whenever God desires.

The Church is built by and through the free working of the Spirit. Supported by this trust in God, we are challenged to shape and direct church life and activities, and to work as if everything depended upon us.

During the recent Luther Decade, the EKD has proved its ability to continuously develop and change through its engagement, within the framework of the reform processes, with a large number of programmes. Whilst trusting in God, we are also challenged to shape and direct church life. As examples of such an attitude, the four EKD Reform Centres hereby present aspects of their ministry in the following pages.

By Hans-Hermann Pompe, Head of the EKD-Centre Mission in the Region, Dortmund

By Folkert Fender, Head of the Centre for Quality Development in Worship Services in Hildesheim

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NEW WAYS TO PREACH
The EKD-Centre: Wittenberg Institute of Preaching and Homiletics

BY KATHRIN OXEN

“It is the aim of the Institute to promote the culture and practice of evangelical preaching within the context of the current linguistic culture, in effective and sustainable ways.”

A
t the time of its foundation, in 2009, the Wittenberg Institute of Evangelical Preaching and Homiletics (Zentrum für evangelische Predigtkultur; ZIP) faced the challenge of describing this brief summary of its objective in detail. The initial situation was considerably complex, since advanced homiletic training is a sensitive area. The sermon, which is effectively one of the most public of pronouncements in the Church, is often carefully guarded from feedback and critique. This “silence about the main business” (Alexander Deeg) very often complicates the work on problematic concepts regarding homiletic competence. Furthermore, possibilities and methods of homiletic training can only be developed in co-operation with others who are responsible for basic and advanced training in homiletics.

First and foremost, the joy of preaching will be promoted if the critique of a sermon is successfully transferred from an evaluative discourse to a consultative discourse. In recent years, in order to facilitate this process, the Institute has developed the cura homiletica. In Wittenberg, preachers are supported on their journey towards an effective and credible use of the language of preaching, and a convincing preaching performance, through the application of the methods of systemic coaching. A preacher’s script for the sermon and their performance are reflected upon through careful analysis and appreciative feedback. Preachers experience an approach which first tackles the more easily objectifiable aspects of preaching, such as the linguistic/rhetorical form and presentation of a sermon over and against a predominately content-focused discussion, and have found it to be extremely helpful.

The Institute offers the cura homiletica to individuals, as well as to groups, both small and large, such as pastors’ conventions. In addition, through the training offered by preaching coaches, across the whole area covered by the EKD, the cura homiletica method has been working effectively and demonstrating positive effects in the regional churches since 2015. Alongside this original approach to homiletic training, the Institute is also involved in intense communication with those arts which are related to the art of preaching.

Taking inspiration from philosophy, literature, rhetorics, music and art is the second level of the work of the Institute, in which diverse ideas are always examined according to their homiletic relevance. Contemporary performance word art: the poetry-slam, for example, inspired the development of the sermon slam and has since spread throughout Germany, bringing a new level of joy to language and performance.

By offering different materials for use in sermon preparation, the Institute contributes to the communication of its objectives and methods at grassroots level, i.e. the preachers. In particular, great attention has been paid to the fasting campaign of 2014, which employed the motto “No Big Words” and was designed to combat the exclusivity of the Church’s language as well as to encourage those in church to find new and compelling words for faith-based subject matters. Creative approaches to texts and topics are offered by the Homiletische Exkursionen (homiletic excursions) and Hörboxen (audio boxes). The Institute followed the new ordering of the texts for sermons, which had been planned, through the website Stichwort. The emergence of the Institute’s Facebook-group is fascinating. It has developed into a vibrant platform for the exchange of opinions between colleagues, and now involves about 1,800 preachers. Here, ideas and draft concepts for sermons are shared and discussed with great openness and great appreciation.

A new emphasis for the sermon is quite in accord with Martin Luther’s words: “God is wonderful, who commands us preachers to take up the office of his word, with which we shall govern the hearts of the people which we cannot see. However, this is the office of our God, and he says to us, Preach, and I will give you success, I know the hearts of the people. This shall be our comfort.”

A PLACE FOR ORIENTATION AND A SPACE FOR DEVELOPMENT
EKD-Centre for Leadership and Management

BY PETER BURKOWSKI

Transformation requires competence and networking
Since the middle of the 1990s, churches in Germany have been experiencing obvious change in their background conditions. Similarly, since the beginning of the 1990s, the diaconal ministry of the churches has no longer had the security of having their costs automatically met, as the principle of cost coverage has been abolished. Those in positions of responsibility are learning to handle this challenge, as well as its theological, managerial and domain-specific implications. In nearly every field of action, organisational adaptation processes and substantial reforms have taken place.

While, in the Church, it was predominately the decline in income from church taxes which triggered the initial processes of change, other determinants eventually re-enforced the trend, including the demographic changes and the quest to find appropriate forms by which to communicate the gospel in times of social pluralisation. Today, in the sphere of diaconal ministry, we are largely aware of the challenges our missionary calling places on us. The work involved in developing inclusion and networking within the local community requires new cooperation and organisational forms. In this context, the central question is about the future? Will the comprehensive principle of leadership has become increasingly important and increasingly difficult. An orientation towards the biblical testimony and the fruits of the Reformation tradition remains the essential foundation of all action.

At every level, the transformative processes converge on these key theological questions: How is the communication of the gospel to be shaped in today’s world? Precisely how are we, in this place (here), and at this time (now), being the Church of Jesus Christ? What shape should our work take?

Training — conferences — networks
In line with a comprehensive understanding of Christian responsibility, the following perspectives for development emerge:

• one’s own action (personal development)
• the commission of the Church and diaconal ministry (theological reflection/strategic orientation)
• the staff and volunteers entrusted to the leadership (staff development)
• the respective organisation (organisational development)

By engaging with these aspects of development, leadership and managerial staff within the Church and Diaconia can be supported and encouraged. This can be done through modular training programmes over several years (e.g. “management in social organisations” or “the art of leadership”), by way of short seminars and conferences which address various topics (such as “project management”), through networking and — at times — through consultation or coaching. Handling management tools and taking active steps in the various processes is practised on the basis of a systemic understanding of organisations, as well as theological reflection regarding the Church and diaconal ministry.

Pattern formation
The experience of the Leadership Academy reveal that there is still a growing need for people in positions of leadership responsibility to be supported. People in management positions and functions often find themselves alone as they attempt to master increasingly complex stresses and strains. The necessity to initiate processes and make decisions, in the face of uncertainty, requires reassurance, the exchange of opinions, and often a different set of tools and skills than the ones which have already been acquired. The Leadership Academy for Church and Diaconia invests in those who are in positions of leadership responsibility, contributing to their ability to practise and implement a theologically considered strategic capability, in order that the communication of the gospel can be successful in a time of transformation.

PHOTO: CHRISTA BRUNT, PETAR CHERNAEV/ISTOCKPHOTO

REV PETER BURKOWSKI, Executive Director of the Leadership Academy for Church and Diaconia in Berlin
2017 AND BEYOND

Broadening the Outlook to Include the European Dimension of the Reformation

BY MICHAEL BÜCKER

For more than ten years, Evangelical Christendom has been preparing itself for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. Within the Evangelical Church in Germany, the celebrations in Wittenberg will constitute one of the main focuses of the Reformation anniversary. Expectations are high: After all, this is the first century celebration of the Reformation within the ecumenical era. Alongside many significant events and activities, that will prove to garner good publicity, preparations for the Reformation anniversary also co-incide with a profound discussion about the Reformation, its background and its effects.

We associate a spiritual awakening of global significance with the Reformation, both in Church and society, as it released forces which have had a continuing influence until today. In 1517, Martin Luther’s critique of the system of indulgences, which was contained in his 95 theses, triggered a movement which met with receptive ears and hearts in many places. This movement affiliated itself with new approaches to theological reforms such as those promoted by Jan Hus in Bohemia and John Wycliffe in England, and joined hands with existing renewal movements as that of the Waldensians or the humanism which was emanating from Italy.

For this reason, the commemoration of the Reformation cannot be limited to the year 2017. Rather, it is only in 2017 that the celebrations are properly beginning. In the years following 1517, the message of the Reformation spread across Europe and was popular with large parts of the population. The Reformers translated the Bible into the respective national languages; and in almost all European nations, the emergence of a literate culture, using the language of the people, is due to the Reformation. Through the invention of the printing press, texts spread at a speed that was previously unknown. More and more people learned to read and write, and schools, colleges and printing works were founded.

At the beginning of the year 1519, Huldrych Zwingli was appointed to be priest of the Great Minster in Zürich, and this was the beginning of the Swiss Reformation. In addition to the so-called “Wittenberg Reformation”, which became widely accepted, from Central to Eastern Europe all the way up to Scandinavia, the “Reformed or Calvinist Reformation” was predominant in Central and Western Europe. The medieval unity of the Corpus Christianum, led by emperor and pope, was severed. From a political perspective, this was visible in the emergence of nation states, and from an ecclesial perspective, it was visible in the evolution of diverse denominations. The Evangelical churches evolved from efforts to renew the one Church of Jesus Christ through an understanding of the gospel as an agent of liberation and justification.

It was the combination of diverse Reformation events, in both the city and the countryside, which determined the course of the Reformation. In the early stages, it was predominantly the cities that became the hubs of the multi-faceted processes of the Reformation. The Reformation affected every area of life, and it was in the cities that one encountered the fullness of these aspects of life in a compounded way. Thus, many cities became centres from which the Reformation spread, and grew territorially. It was the cities which were primarily responsible for the fact that the Reformation became European, for the fact that it profoundly transformed almost all of Europe and finally gained international importance, beyond Europe and across the globe.

Looking at a map of Europe, to locate the places where the leading Reformers were based, the European dimension of the Reformation becomes immediately apparent. Who would have thought that the first translation of the New Testament into English would have been printed in Worms, and that the Slovenian translations of the Reformation writings would have come from Villach and Klagenfurt in Carinthia.

Through the Reformation, citizens took on responsibility for their social systems in ways which were previously unknown. Thus, following a fire in the 16th century, Klagenfurt was rebuilt as a Protestant city. In Finland, which belonged to Sweden in the 16th century, the native Finnish preachers advanced the Reformation even before Sweden officially introduced it in 1527. In Hungarian Debrecen, citizens took their chance to confess their affiliation to Calvinist doctrine against the backdrop of a chaotic situation caused by the power struggle between the Transylvanian princes, the Ottoman sultan and the Habsburg king.

The co-existence of the denominations also took on very different forms. In Gennep in the Netherlands, for example, Protestant and Catholic Christians were still using the same churches, decades after the Reformation; and even worshipped together in some of the services. However, in Switzerland, the citizens of St. Gallen built a wall to separate the Protestants from the Catholics and in the Upper Austrian Steyr, locals drove out all of the Protestants with the Counter-Reformation, willing even to risk that the city could be depleted of people.

All of these cities were awarded the title: “European City of the Reformation” and will thereby broaden your outlook concerning the Reformation. Just like our lives and our churches, the Reformation in Europe is multi-faceted.
The Detailed Analysis of the Reformation during the Reformation Decade has Allowed Theses to Emerge Which Have the Potential to Influence the World All Over Again

BY SERGE FORNEROD

THE TIME HAS COME TO PROCLAIM OUR THESES

2009, we have been closely examining the example of Calvin and his international influence. In 2016, we turned to the admirable and comprehensive knowledge of Erasmus. From 2019, dear brothers and sisters of the Lutheran Reformation, we will, if you so wish, listen attentively, along with you, to the main points that Zwingli made – and, after that, to those made by several other Reformers.

In so doing, we pursue the single objective of empowering our churches to engage in dialogue with the world and to testify about God’s love for his world. In 2017, the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches will publish the conclusions of a reflection process that has been undertaken in the churches. On 31st October 2017, the Church will take this result into the streets - the gospel amongst the people! The level of interest awakened, on the occasion of this anniversary, should make all those in our churches who have doubts concerning the relevancy and purpose of this undertaking, who feared self-staging, a popularisation and “eventisation” of this anniversary – think again. Today, the message of the liberation and guiding power of the gospel is essential for the well-being and joyful co-existence of all those who live in our society.

In recent months, I have frequently been asked to describe what the transition is meant to look like after 2017. I have always been slightly irritated by this question: Firstly, because I do not believe that, having brought so much spiritual treasure to light, the German churches will stop drawing upon the legacy and power of the Reformation; and secondly, because we in Switzerland have also been doing the “2017” thing. Whatever the main theological points of a Reformer may be, the most important and central one is the degree to which he has become a carrier of the message of God or, on the contrary, the degree to which he has obstructed the passing on of this message. The Reformation spread throughout all of Europe in just a few decades and profoundly changed the continent. This is why the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches is of the opinion that the phase which follows the year of 2017 ... is 2018! This is the year in which the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) will hold its General Assembly in the immediate vicinity: The Swiss churches are delighted to be welcoming the delegates, who represent Evangelical churches from all over Europe, between 13th and 18th September 2018. The General Assembly will be held in Basel, which is an international city at the intersection of three cultures. Together, we will be able to reflect on what the year 2017 has meant for each of us individually, and ask ourselves how the year 2017 can help us strengthen our unity, and also our testimony, which becomes concrete as we serve our societies.
EIKON TV-EVENTS 2017

Since the beginning of the Luther Decade, the EIKON-group, which is part of the Evangelical Church, has produced TV films and documentary series for both German and international broadcasters concerning the topic “Reformation Anniversary 2017”. By way of a culmination, four TV-programmes, of a considerable size, are currently in production and will be broadcast later this year on the ARTE channel. In 2017, they will also be broadcast on the ARD channel, public television’s regional channels (the so-called third channels), and also on the ZDF and Deutsche Welle channels for the international community. Almost twelve hours of programmes are being put together, which, during their first broadcast, will reach about 20 million viewers.

KATHARINA LUTHER

TV film, 105 min. movie about the marriage of Katharina von Bora and Martin Luther

With: Karoline Schuch (as Katharina von Bora) and David Striesow (as Martin Luther)

Script: Christian Schnalle  Directo: Julia von Heinz

Sent to a convent against her will by her father, when she was six years old, Katharina von Bora is now a young woman. Affirmed by the writings of Martin Luther, that the celibate life contravenes the order of creation established by God, she persuades her fellow sisters to escape. Whilst searching for “the whole of life”, she is still convinced that thereby, she can change the destiny of people and nations up until today.

When she meets Martin Luther, Katharina sees an entirely different man to the hero who proclaimed: “Here I stand, I can do no other.” This one is vulnerable, ill, full of doubt and a workaholic driving himself to exhaustion. However, after the wedding, she succeeds in fighting her own fears, making the dilapidated Augustinian cloister, the Black Monastery, Luther’s main place of residence, eliminating all the factors which threaten to further damage his health, and becoming Luther’s discussion partner, as one who is intellectually on a par with him.

THE GREAT BEGINNING

3 x 45 min. programmes about Europe in and around the time of 1500, when the shift towards modernity begins.

Script: Ingo Helm  Director: Andreas Sawa

500 years ago, the world was radically changing: America had been discovered, the printing press invented, and banks had gained power, humankind was re-inventing itself. It is in such a setting, that a monk named Martin Luther rocks the power structures of the Church and prepares the way for new ways of thinking.

Behind the Reformation, powerful protagonists gather. In their eyes, the rebellious monk from Wittenberg has arrived at just the right time. Luther suddenly finds himself on the great stage of politics; he is admired, feared, hated. His theses of October 1517 light the beacon of revolution, through which much more than merely the attitude towards the Church will change for people.

A well-known presenter (not yet determined) will take us into the world of 1500 and the accompanying years, to the very start of the modern era; to the “great beginning”, which will determine the destiny of people and nations up until today.

CRIME SCENES OF THE REFORMATION

8 x 15 min. programmes about both petty and sizeable crime cases, at the time of the Reformation

With: Julian Sengelmann  Director: Andreas Heineke

Murder and bloodshed are surely not what one normally associates with the Reformation; and such crimes can certainly not be reconciled with the Christian commandment to love. Moderator Julian Sengelmann is surprised by some of the evidence from Reformation times concerning brutal murders, conspiracies and unjust court procedures. He goes out to investigate. Which other crime cases can we reconstruct today?

As ever, it is about power and intrigue, murder, kidnapping and betrayal – and all of these elements are based on factual evidence concerning the offenses which were punishable at the time.

Each film focuses on a particular case, an unusual story. Julian Sengelmann climbs up towers, scours caves, explores museums and rummages through archives to investigate what really happened.

THE LUTHER-CODE

66 x 5 min. programmes which ask the question: How much of the Reformation can be found in today’s world of change?

Script: Wilfried Haule  Directors: Alexandra Hardorf, Wilfried Haule

Young people have always posed the questions: What is the purpose of my life? What do I want to achieve? What will the future look like? What is responsibility? And in what should I believe? Today, these questions are joined by new ones: Where will the unlimited networking of the world lead us? How do we want to live tomorrow?

The “Reinvention of the World” tells the story of the history of the Reformation and its consequences in our world today. The leading actors are young people, between the ages of 20 and 35 years old, who are asking questions about the why, the wherefore and the whereto. As they seek answers, historical figures from the last 500 years appear, each of whom, in their own time, found an answer – and for this reason are still remembered today.

They include Da Vinci, Hua and Martin Luther; Kepler, Lessing and Friedrich Engels; Bertha von Suttner, Albert Einstein and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

All of a sudden, one realises that what we know, what we think, what we do and what we dream today, has been nourished by the great turning point of the ages, around 1500.

For women, the long and arduous journey of being allowed to think and act independently – and on an equal footing with men – was prepared by women such as Katharina, and is far from being concluded. It is a great honour to have a part to play in it.
THE LUTHER EFFECT

PROTESTANTISM – 500 YEARS IN THE WORLD
DEUTSCHES HISTORISCHES MUSEUM
AT MARTIN-DOBRUSCH-DAM, BERLIN
APRIL 12 TO NOVEMBER 5, 2017

LUTHER AND THE GERMANS
WARTBURG CASTLE, EISENACH
MAY 4 TO NOVEMBER 5, 2017

LUTHER! 95 TREASURES – 95 PEOPLE
LUTHER MEMORIAL FOUNDATION OF SAXONY-ANHALT, LUTHERHAUS/AUGUSTEUM, LUTHER MEMORIALS FOUNDATION OF 95 PEOPLE – MAY 4 TO NOVEMBER 5, 2017
WARTBURG CASTLE, EISENACH
GERMANS AND THE LUTHER
APRIL 12 TO NOVEMBER 5, 2017
AT MARTIN-GROPIUS-BAU, BERLIN

THE FULL POWER OF THE REFORMATION
3XHAMMER.DE
Three National Special Exhibitions commemorating the Anniversary of the Reformation 2017.

POSTER EXHIBITION #HEREISTAND. Martin Luther, the Reformation and its consequences

From autumn 2016, the co-operation project “Here I stand...” offers a simple opportunity to have an exhibition of one’s own about the history of the Reformation. Information about the poster exhibition, as well as materials for schools and extracurricular educational activities, can be found at www.here-i-stand.com (or http://goo.gl/forms/zvRryYwmIl).

The exhibition is able to accommodate up to 30 DIN-A1-posters (40 x 59.4 cm). The exhibition area has a modular structure so that you can create your own exhibition in one of the smaller spaces if you prefer. The smallest module can accommodate nine posters, and the largest 30 posters. For 30 posters, for example, about 20 m² of wall space would be made available.

The exhibition shows the most important stages of Reformation history and their effects up until the present day. With the aid of modern infographics, the history of the premodern era is explained in easily understandable ways. The exhibition contains 7 large representations of first-rate museum objects. As a special feature, some original exhibits have been scanned into a computer, and can be downloaded and printed out using a 3-D printer.

FURTHER INFORMATION

www.luther2017.de
www.v2017.org
www.reformationstag.de
www.reformationstag2017.de
www.reformationstag2017.de
www.geistreich.de

Additional copies of this magazine can be ordered by emailing the Church Office: licit@ekd.de.

Would you like to support the work of the Project Office for the Reformation Anniversary in 2017?

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E-mail: info@ekd.de
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In 2017, Pop Oratorio “Luther” will be performed in eight German cities. The piece, which focuses on the events at the Diet of Worms, is to reach more than 100,000 people and will involve around 20,000 singers altogether, making it perhaps the largest participative project of the Reformation Anniversary. Any interested parties can register, independent of their faith, church affiliation or musical ability. Tickets, registrations and information can be found at: www.luther-oratorium.de

The Reformation Anniversary in 2017 is the climax of the Luther Decade “Luther 2017 – 500 years of Reformation”. The EKD has supported the Decade by producing thematic magazines each year. This magazine is the final one in the series. The others are as follows:

2016: REFORMATION AND MUSIC
2015: REFORMATION – IMAGE AND BIBLE
2014: REFORMATION AND POLITICS
2013: REFORMATION AND TOLERANCE
2012: REFORMATION AND MUSIC
2011: REFORMATION AND FREEDOM
2010: REFORMATION AND EDUCATION
2009: REFORMATION AND CONFESSION
2008: REFORMATION AND THE WORLD
2007: REFORMATION AND LITURGY
“YOU ARE GOD’S INSTRUMENT. HE DESIRES YOUR SERVICE, NOT YOUR REST. FOR GOD’S SAKE DO SOMETHING COURAGEOUS”

Huldrych Zwingli
DOWNLOAD

THE FULL-PAGE PHOTOS in this thematic magazine also exist in different sizes and are readily available for use in display cases, church newsletters, websites and as templates for use in lessons. TO DOWNLOAD these images for free, please go to www.gott-neu-vertrauen.de. There, you can also download the ONLINE EDITION of this magazine. When referencing the magazine as a source, please be mindful of the guidelines which can be found at: www.gott-neu-vertrauen.de.