

## 2017 in North Atlantic Lutheran Perspective + Sarah Hinlicky Wilson

I would like to begin by saying how indebted this presentation is to all the other presentations we have heard at this seminar so far. My own small seeds of ideas have grown tremendously from exposure to the sunshine of the other lecturers as well as conversations with the participants here, and I thank you all for that. Further, since we have already heard about 2017 in Latin American Lutheran and African Lutheran perspective, I'd like to qualify my own presentation as 2017 in North Atlantic Lutheran perspective, as someone whose cultural and religious assumptions are shaped by Europe and North America.

If you spend some time reading the ecumenical documents that Lutherans have signed in the past forty years, you will notice that an interesting pattern emerges. I'll begin my lecture today by reading a few examples of what I have in mind.

I'll turn first to the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973 between Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the document, it is stated: "Faced with real differences in style of theological thinking and church practice, the Reformers could not, in faith and conscience, see their way to avoid divisions, despite the numerous things they had in common. In this Agreement, the participating churches acknowledge that *their relationship to one another has changed since the time of the Reformation*" (§3, my italics here and in all further statements quoted). In particular, Leuenberg has in mind judgments regarding the respective churches' teaching on the Lord's Supper, christology, and predestination. The document goes on to give a very brief description of the doctrinal consensus that the Lutheran and Reformed churches today can agree to. At the end of each of these three sections, there is a concluding statement. For the Lord's Supper it is said: "Where there is such consensus between churches, the condemnations pronounced by the Reformation confessions of faith are *inapplicable* to the doctrinal position of these churches" (§20). For christology: "In these circumstances it is impossible for us to reaffirm *the former condemnations today*" (§23). And for predestination: "When there is such consensus between churches, the condemnations pronounced by the Reformation confessions of faith are *inapplicable to the doctrinal position of these churches*" (§26). Thus, the Leuenberg Agreement concludes at the end, in the "Declaration of Church Fellowship," that "the doctrinal condemnations expressed in the confessional documents *no longer apply to the contemporary doctrinal position* of the assenting churches" (§32.b).

Now I'll move on to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed by the Catholic and Lutheran churches in 1999.<sup>2</sup> It begins with the observation: "From the Reformation perspective, justification was the crux of all the

---

<sup>1</sup> Available in English at <http://www.leuenberg.net/node/642> (accessed July 15, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Available in English at

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_31101999\\_cath-luth-joint-declaration\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html) (accessed July 15, 2012).

disputes. Doctrinal condemnations were put forward both in the Lutheran Confessions and by the Roman Catholic Church's Council of Trent. These condemnations are *still valid today* and thus have a church-dividing effect" (§1). But, it says a little farther on, "The present Joint Declaration has this intention: namely, to show that on the basis of their dialogue the subscribing Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church are *now* able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ" (§5). However, "this Joint Declaration rests on the conviction that in overcoming the earlier controversial questions and doctrinal condemnations, *the churches neither take the condemnations lightly nor do they disavow their own past*. On the contrary, this Declaration is shaped by the conviction that *in their respective histories our churches have come to new insights. Developments have taken place which not only make possible, but also require the churches to examine the divisive questions and condemnations and see them in a new light*" (§7). The ecumenical examination of these divisive questions has given rise to a new "consensus on basic truths concerning the doctrine of justification. In light of this consensus, *the corresponding doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century do not apply to today's partner*" (§13). "Thus the doctrinal condemnations of the 16th century, in so far as they relate to the doctrine of justification, appear in a new light: *The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration*" (§41). At the same time, "Nothing is thereby taken away from the seriousness of the condemnations related to the doctrine of justification. Some were not simply pointless. They remain for us 'salutary warnings' to which we must attend in our teaching and practice" (§42).

Finally, I'll turn to *Healing Memories*, the document that paved the way for the request for forgiveness by the Lutheran World Federation to the Mennonite World Conference for the sin of Lutheran support of the persecution and execution of Anabaptists in the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> As part of the joint writing of their history together, the following was noted: "Mennonites refer to Anabaptists in the sixteenth century as their forebears who continue to offer spiritual inspiration and theological orientation while, on the other hand, Lutherans are still committed to the Augsburg Confession... [T]he present-day relation of Lutherans and Mennonites – both to their own doctrines and to the doctrines of the sixteenth century – are different in some degree today than they were in the sixteenth century. Such changes need to be described historically and evaluated systematically" (p. 73). Accordingly, "we cannot simply ask whether the condemnations of Articles IX and XVI applied to Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, even though the answer to this question is one important element of our task. Rather, the question must also include *whether the statements of the two articles are actually applicable to present-day Mennonite understandings*. In answering the

---

<sup>3</sup> Available in English at [http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Report\\_Lutheran-Mennonite\\_Study\\_Commission.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Report_Lutheran-Mennonite_Study_Commission.pdf) (accessed July 15, 2012).

latter question, it will not be enough for Lutherans simply to repeat the two articles from the Augsburg Confession; nor can Mennonites simply cite statements from their spiritual forebears in the sixteenth century. Instead, both will need to consider their experiences over the past five centuries and take seriously *the deep changes in church, state, and society* that have occurred since then" (p. 78).

What all three of these documents share in common is a conviction that something has changed since the sixteenth century. In fact, enough has changed that former "enemies" of the Lutherans – the Reformed, the Catholics, and the Anabaptist-Mennonites – need no longer be considered enemies *today*. What has changed is, certainly, in part the circumstances in which we find ourselves, at a time when political power and military force are not so closely aligned with the Christian churches anymore. But the implicit, though not always openly admitted, reality is that the *churches* have also changed. It is their own internal change that makes it possible to say that "former condemnations no longer apply to today's dialogue partner."

On one level, it is obvious that all our churches have changed. How could they not? In the perspective of human history, five hundred years is a long time. On the other hand, this observation raises uncomfortable questions. *What* precisely has changed? And for what reasons? Are they good reasons or bad ones? And how great have the changes been? The deep worry is that change may signify a loss of continuity with or fidelity to the past that gave rise to our present existence. This relates to the universal Christian confession about the *apostolic* attribute of the church: to be the church, we must be in continuity with and faithful to the apostles who were ear- and eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ. But we also must be apostolically testifying to the apostles' faith in every time and place that we Christians find ourselves, which means addressing the specific problems that confront us. The question of change is the question of whether our preaching and practice are truly apostolic, in both senses: bearing the faith of the apostles *and* doing it in such a way that our specific time and place can hear it and respond in faith as well. The latter sense of apostolic is the one righteous justification for change.

This is what makes the 2017 commemoration of 1517 such an interesting ecumenical problem. So far, with ecumenical statements like the Leuenberg Agreement, the Joint Declaration, and *Healing Memories*, we have focused our attention on the churches *today* and all the ways they confess in common the faith of the apostles. The same documents have allowed each church to claim fidelity to their own pasts, although these pasts that were defined by division from one another. What has not been openly addressed is *how* this is actually possible. How can we *both* be in agreement with one another today, *and* in agreement with our pasts, which clearly were *not* in agreement with each other? This problem is, I imagine, precisely what causes many skeptics to deny that any such thing as ecumenism is possible. It is thought to be an either/or kind of thing: *either* the present *or* the past, but not both. But I hope it is clear to all of us that a forced choice between past and present will be catastrophically impoverishing. A church that lives only in and for the present is

trapped by its own assumptions and circumstances, shortsighted, and certain to repeat errors that have been dealt with and overcome in the past. At the same time, a church that lives only in and for the past will be a missional failure and continually tighten the boundaries around it, allowing in only those who are committed to a religion as unchanging as objects in a museum. We should be on our guard against both these false alternatives.

What we see in 2017, then, is a chance to experiment together, ecumenically, with this difficult but essential task of holding past and present together – and doing so for the sake of the future, for those believers who will follow after us. The unique ecumenical challenge of 2017 is to address at last, openly and honestly, the paradox of how we can be in fellowship with each other in the present along with our own divided churches in the past. This will require us to confront our bad historiographical habits – all the ways we have told our histories to inflate ourselves and deflate our competitors. Some examples of bad historiography are the Lutheran demonization of all popes as the Antichrist; the Catholic lie that Luther started the Reformation because he couldn't control his sexual impulses; the Mennonite adoption of a victim mentality; the Pentecostal account of church history that assumes utter darkness from Constantine to Luther; and many more besides.

Still, even if we clear away this clutter of falsehood, some basic convictions remain in each of our churches that do not coexist easily with others. It is probably possible for all the Protestant parties in the sixteenth-century conflict – Lutherans but also Reformed, Anglicans, and Anabaptist-Mennonites – to agree that the Reformation was about the *rediscovery of the gospel*, even if they disagree on some of the details of what the gospel entails. But it is probably considerably harder for Roman Catholics to accept this account, even if they are willing to admit some corruption or bad theology circulating in the Western church at the time. Though I would like to see a very broad Christian response to the commemoration in 2017, I think we should admit openly that the hardest task – and therefore the one that deserves the most attention – will be to forge a common Catholic-Lutheran perspective, since the whole sixteenth-century conflict originated in Rome's dispute with Luther.

I cannot pretend that I hold the magic key to solving this difficulty. But I would like to share with you a recent thesis in Reformation studies that I think could help a great deal – not only in addressing the Catholic-Lutheran conflict, but also in creating a space for the whole range of Reformation responses and confessions. Scott Hendrix, a scholar of Luther and the Reformation generally, has proposed a new approach to the sixteenth century as a period of “re-Christianization.”<sup>4</sup> Rather than seeing an extreme opposition between the Middle Ages and the Reformation, between Catholic piety and Protestant reforms, Hendrix argues that “[i]nitiators of

---

<sup>4</sup> All quotations here from Scott H. Hendrix, “Rerooting the Faith: The Reformation as Re-Christianization,” *Church History* 69/3 (2000): 558–577. See also his book that makes the case at greater length, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 2004).

the Reformation were late medieval Christians whose agenda grew out of the ongoing medieval project to make European culture Christian"; theirs was "an attempt to reroot the faith, to rechristianize Europe" (561). The "[r]eformers certainly differed on how it was best done, but they were united, even most of the radicals, in the conviction that piety had to be refocused on Jesus as the way of salvation" (566). "At the heart of Luther's vision is the recovery of a religion that will mark his society with a vigorous christocentric piety" (569); clearly, the same could be said of Zwingli, Calvin, Bucer, Menno Simons, and others across the Protestant spectrum.

For Hendrix, this thesis includes the Catholics and their own reformation. He writes: "Given all the disagreements that emerged among Protestants as well as the disputes that continued between Protestants and Catholics, is it possible to speak meaningfully of one Reformation with a common agenda? I believe one can do this if the agenda – rerooting the faith in Europe – is seen as the common goal of the Reformation and the disagreements are understood to be different conceptions of how this rerooting could best be accomplished. Protestants and Catholics agreed that the abuses of medieval piety should be abolished, but they disagreed, as did Protestants among themselves, about the extent of that abolition" (568). The Council of Trent and the Jesuit movement can also be seen as attempts to rechristianize, though obviously their judgment differed markedly from the various Protestant groups, with a strategy of retaining but purifying most medieval practice as opposed to tossing it out and starting over.

If Hendrix is right that there is a common commitment to re-Christianization among all the sixteenth-century factions, then how is it, you may ask, that they were so hostile to each other? Why couldn't they come together? Hendrix argues that it is exactly the *urgency* of the need to re-Christianize that caused such conflicts to flare up. As he explains, "More than reform of the church was at stake; the survival of genuine Christianity itself was in question. Differences among mainline reformers about how best to reroot Christianity in the culture were therefore seen as more than alternate policies subject to friendly debate. Instead, they were evaluated in light of their potential to save Christianity or to hasten its demise. Proposals for rerooting the faith that threatened the existence of Christendom itself, such as the separatist and communal initiatives of the Anabaptists, were quick to be judged as not only seditious but also blasphemous and, therefore, as unchristian" (576). This is an observation with serious consequences, and one to which we will return.

Hendrix concludes his article with the remark that "the Reformation is a potent reminder that Christianity is a historical religion not wedded to any particular culture, and that consequently no Christendom will last forever. Instead, Christianity has to be rooted and rerooted in every society it enters." And the fact is, "Christendom did gradually erode. But the more Christendom eroded, the more relevant the agenda of the Reformation became, as one sees in the renewal movements – pietism, Methodist reform, and evangelicalism – that succeeded it" (575). Here we begin to see the lines of connection between the sixteenth-century Reformation and the Christian bodies that arose later; I would add Pentecostalism to

Hendrix's list. And not only that; as Hendrix writes, "the Reformation itself was a process of indigenization: a deeper rooting of the faith in the vernacular and local cultures of sixteenth-century Europe. Viewing the Reformation agenda in this way, however, will make the Reformation seem less foreign to the globalization of Christianity and early modern Europe a richer source for the study of global cultures" (577). As the mission movement and the rapid growth of newer Christian churches largely in the Global South have come more to the center of the theological agenda, we see here how important it is to put the Reformation in a bigger framework – and also how its legacy is relevant for churches that came into existence long afterward.

So what can we ecumenists draw from Hendrix's church-historical findings? I think we can see here at least the seed of a possibility for reconciling our present-day churches and drawing closer in fellowship while maintaining continuity and fidelity to our own pasts. We can acknowledge that we *all* desire a genuine, true, free christianization of our societies and the people in them. We can also acknowledge that we *disagree* about how this is to be done, while admitting that there are disagreements on these matters *within* our churches as well as *between* them! The key challenge for us will be to overcome the need to put our approaches to christianization in competition with one another, as if in the end one church was going to win and all the rest were going to lose. We should not see ecumenism as the final resolution of all our different approaches to christianization, as if the problem could be solved once and for all. It can't be! Christianization will always be a fresh problem and puzzle in every location and in every generation. What ecumenism should enable is *the possibility of arguing fruitfully about it*. Previously we did not have fruitful arguments – we had mutual condemnations and demonizations. We stopped learning from one other and talked only among ourselves. That made all of us smaller and poorer. Through ecumenical encounters we should learn for the first time how to have *real* arguments: exciting, meaningful, challenging arguments that enlarge our minds and hearts. These arguments will not be for the sake of victory against one another, but for the victory of the gospel against sin, death, and the devil. If we can start having real arguments, then we can also include in our commemorations of the sixteenth-century Reformation the perspectives of other attempts at christianization and re-christianization at that time, and also since then – from the Pietists through the Methodists down to the Pentecostals, from the mission movement to the new indigenous churches, and also the whole long story of Eastern Orthodoxy that is largely still unknown in the West. We all realize by now that we are in a time and place where questions of christianization and rechristianization are as urgent as ever. Under this rubric of rechristianization, we can aspire to work together and not against each other.

All of this so far has been very general and paints a broad picture of the ideal spirit in which to approach 2017. It's time now to come to some more concrete suggestions. I will necessarily speak here from the perspective of a Lutheran to other

Lutherans. Since 1517 is somehow *our* big year, commemorating the actions of Martin Luther specifically, I think it is incumbent on Lutherans to do it well and set the right tone for a growing number of five-hundredth anniversaries that will follow. But I also hope that many if not all of the suggestions that I offer here will be relevant to other Christian families as well.

In my judgment, there are two aspects of the 2017 commemoration that need to be taken up with equal seriousness. The first is the need to repent; the second is the need to celebrate. I'll address them in that order.

Of what do we need to repent? At a minimum, indulgence in inflammatory language from Luther onward; defamation of the Jews and other vulnerable groups<sup>5</sup>; all-too-willing alliances with violent state power; triumphalistic self-congratulation of our own church at the expense of all others. The plain truth is that no historical movement is pure and clear. There is plenty of bad behavior to go around and Lutherans are certainly not exempt from that. But bad things in our history, including church history, are not to be ignored or passed over in silence. This is a crucial matter of proclaiming the entire Christian message: we ought to confess and repent of our sins openly, not hide them under the supposition that we are supposed to be perfect already, because we know that God will forgive us and set us back on the right path. This is our opportunity to make a powerful witness to the entire world. How rare it is for any community or organization to admit its own failures and subject itself to the judgment of others, rejecting opportunities for "spin control" and self-defense. And after all, the first of the Ninety-Five Theses is about repentance: "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said 'Repent,' He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

I am glad that we already have had some practice at doing this. The action of the 2010 assembly of the Lutheran World Federation to confess and ask forgiveness of the Mennonites for Lutheran sins against their Anabaptist ancestors was an incredible breakthrough in the history of church relations. It should not be underestimated – and it should not be the last time. What made it so unique was the willingness to dig into the details. We did not offer a general apology for general harm. Instead, we examined what exactly we had done and how we had done it, assessed the consequences, and admitted to the results. This made the repentance both more heartfelt and more believable to our Mennonite counterparts. I would like to see more of this!

As I have said before, given the specific conflict between Luther and Rome dating back to 1517, I think the next place to work on confession and forgiveness is in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue. Needless to say, it should happen on both sides, for both have ample need to repent. There have been some general confessions –

---

<sup>5</sup> This has already been done, but it wouldn't hurt to do it again. See [www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations/Christian-Jewish-Relations/Declaration-of-ELCA-to-Jewish-Community.aspx](http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations/Christian-Jewish-Relations/Declaration-of-ELCA-to-Jewish-Community.aspx) and [www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/lutherans-apologize-to-jewish-communities-in-argentina-and-uruguay.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/lutherans-apologize-to-jewish-communities-in-argentina-and-uruguay.html) (accessed July 15, 2012).

such as the statement in the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism that “we humbly beg pardon of God and of our separated brethren, just as we forgive them that trespass against us” (§7), or Pope John Paul II’s acknowledgement of guilt, in connection with prayers for forgiveness, on March 12, 2000, in Rome. But these are only general confessions, not specific ones. Apologies are popular nowadays, but they can be offered a little too easily. It will be hard to take an apology with full seriousness if those apologizing have not dug into their own hard history and thus taken full responsibility for what happened. I hope that the Catholic Church will be a full partner with the Lutherans in undertaking such a detailed confession and apology; but if not, I hope the Lutherans will have the courage to go ahead and confess their own sins anyway. What if we Lutherans dared to be astonishingly generous in our apologies? We would not do so in order to deny what was done to us and the ways we were persecuted. But we should show that our confession regarding the wrong we have done still stands, even if we receive nothing in return.

Another aspect of this process that I would like to recommend is the mutual recognition of each other’s martyrs. Recently it has become a matter of great ecumenical interest how many Lutherans and Catholics died together at the hands of the Nazis or the Communists; for one example among many, the Lutheran pastor Karl Friedrich Stellbrink was executed along with three Catholic priests by the Nazis. The three priests have been canonized by the Catholic Church and are now known as the Lübeck Martyrs. Obviously, the Lutheran pastor has not been canonized, even though he died for the same reasons and confessing the same faith, though honestly I expect that most Lutherans – or at least those outside of Germany – have never heard of him, much less his Catholic counterparts. Honoring such martyrs together would be one phase of mutual recognition. But I think we need to push it even further than that. In the year 1540, in England, the Lutheran reformer Robert Barnes was executed with two other “evangelicals” on account of their faith and with three Roman Catholics for their alleged treason against the crown – another shared martyrdom, but under significantly different circumstances, at the hands of other Christians! Beyond this particular example, we have far too many cases of Catholics executed by Lutherans and Lutherans executed by Catholics. We Christians have done terrible things to each other, and we have shared terrible fates at the hands of our mutual enemies. If we wish to christianize the world, to bear the good news to the ends of the earth, we must openly admit to and reject our evil deeds against one another, and we must honor the faith of the martyrs even outside our own boundaries.

Let us move on now to the rather more cheerful topic of what to *celebrate* in 2017! I personally do not want us to celebrate the establishment of Lutheran churches – which would be inappropriate for 2017 anyway; maybe in 2030, on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, we could consider this possibility. 1517 is a date that refers specifically to the person of Luther and the reform in theology and practice that came out of his engagement with the Holy Scriptures. As a matter of truthfulness, I think we should keep our celebration to him and not the

churches that resulted from him. This would not only prevent triumphalism, which has been the chief feature of previous centennial anniversaries, but it would also make it much easier for other churches, which do not call themselves “Lutheran” and yet hold Luther in high regard, to participate in our celebration. Yet there remains the problem of what aspects of Luther to celebrate. His person has been put to many uses, not all of which we want to emphasize today, for example Luther as the nationalist hero.

Thus in what follows, I will lift up four examples of what I think could faithfully celebrate the best of Luther – and to me Luther is best celebrated when he is a window through which the light of Jesus Christ shines. These are mainly suggestions for the congregation, and also for congregations linked through the Lutheran World Federation across the world, rather than for a big formal celebration such as will be held in Wittenberg. I also expect that many of these suggestions will be valued by other Christians, and that would be a wonderful thing! Our identity should not be controlled by how we differ from others. If others believe the same thing, we should rejoice, not be threatened.

(1) It is well known that a commitment to the vernacular was a central aspect of the Reformation and its success. But I think only recently have we come to realize that it was not only a practical matter; it was a theological matter, too. God does not speak only one holy language. God can speak in every human language; actually, God *desires* to speak in every human language. As Scott Hendrix said, Christianity does not belong to any one culture. So a commitment to translation into the vernacular, both in the linguistic and in the cultural sense, should be a primary focus of Lutheran churches. The 2017 anniversary is an occasion to refresh our commitment to translation. There are already active Lutheran Bible societies at work, but I would like to see the Lutheran World Federation undertake a survey of our communities to discover, first, which ones still do not have the Bible in their mother tongue, and secondly, which have only minimal texts of Luther and the Book of Concord in their mother tongue. And then I would like to see a worldwide drive toward the generous giving of money and time to enable translations. We have heard that the newer Lutheran churches have had little opportunity so far to develop their own unmediated response to Luther’s theology. Instead of sending them more books that we have written about Luther, let’s send them Luther himself! And then let us learn from them.

(2) Closely related to the translation project, I would like to see a common global commitment to reading a handful of Luther’s texts. We could choose just enough to make a small booklet. If I were choosing, I might include the sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness and the sermon at the consecration of the first evangelical church in Torgau, the treatise on The Freedom of a Christian, and some of the Bible prefaces. Or perhaps it should simply be the Large Catechism. Whatever the final choice would be, I would like all member churches of the Lutheran World Federation to make these texts available to all of their pastors and teachers – and indeed to any of the laity who are interested – so that for a period of several years,

we would know that all Lutheran clergy around the world were reflecting on the same foundational documents and considering how to bring this theology to life in their own contexts. This would build unity among our communion, deepen our theological convictions, and help to eliminate inaccurate or inadequate perceptions of Luther's legacy.

(3) Luther was a great promoter of the word of God; he likewise promoted the faithful use of the sacraments. For him, one of the most important reforms to undertake was restoring the sacrament of holy communion to the people. They were not to be frightened of it or kept away by stringent requirements for confession; and they were not to receive the bread alone, but the wine as well – the full body and blood of Christ. Yet it is clear that for centuries now, Lutherans have avoided weekly communion with this most terrible of excuses: "That's too Catholic." We are in an ecumenical age now, fellow Lutherans! Let's not have any more silly excuses like that! Holy Communion is not Lutheran or Catholic or anything other than the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, given for us to forgive our sins and constitute a new community. Reception of the sacrament should be as much a part of our weekly worship as the hearing of the word. I would like to see, by the year 2017, every Lutheran church in the world offering holy communion at every Sunday worship service. Along with this practice, I'd like us to receive afresh Luther's rich understanding of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament. This is not ultimately a matter of philosophy, as some have thought. It is the living image of the fact that we do not have to ascend to God because God *descends* to us. As I listened to the descriptions of Lutheranism in Latin America and Africa, I was struck by how embodied their theology is – so much more than among us North Atlantic Lutherans, who have learned from the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution to be strangers in our own bodies and hostile to the imperfect bodies around us. We need to hear, whether our problems are Northern or Southern, that our brother and Lord Jesus became truly human, and in that human body was truly crucified and died, and yet his wounded and suffering body was raised to new life – and it is *in this new life* that he comes to us in the bread and wine. Considering what it is, we should be demanding communion as often as possible!

(4) My fourth suggestion will be perhaps a bit shocking for some of you, but here it is: I would like each and every congregation of Lutherans to be re-confirmed. Yes, the entire congregation, on Reformation Sunday in October 2017 itself, should receive the rite of confirmation. There is nothing in Lutheran theology that prevents it from being repeated; anyway, it is an affirmation of the baptism that happened to many of us before we can remember, and Luther thought we should affirm our baptism every single morning! Though it is a wonderful tradition to teach our young people the Small Catechism, most Lutherans never see it again for the rest of their lives, and that is a tragedy. Thus I would like to see pastors teach the Small Catechism in worship – maybe during the year leading up to the 2017 celebration – along with the Bible texts that it refers to, giving our lay Lutherans a chance to relearn their own faith and heritage, and finally in the re-confirmation service allow

them to confess and claim their faith publicly again. In this way, the Reformation anniversary would use Luther as an instrument, but it would not primarily celebrate the man himself. It would celebrate the work of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for us and for our salvation, that so many of us learned through and because of Martin Luther.

These four concrete suggestions are by no means adequate to all that Luther bequeathed the church. I have said nothing here of his doctrine of vocation; his beautiful testimony to Christian freedom; of the relationship of grace and faith, or more specifically the doctrine of justification; of the importance of education and social renewal; or of the priesthood of all believers. These are also parts of the treasure of Reformation theology that need to be continually rediscovered and applied in new and creative ways in the church over the generations. Perhaps some of you will be inspired and come up with a great idea to give life to Luther's theological commitments! Whatever we decide as a church, I hope that it contributes to the christianization and re-christianization of the whole world, to the greater glory of God.