

The past as prologue: The Reformation and the future of Christian dialogue

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1. The past, the present and the future: A pilgrimage from Geneva to Rome and Wittenberg

Two weeks ago I was in three places that are strongly linked to what we call the Reformation: Geneva, Rome, and Wittenberg. For many reasons I call it a pilgrimage, even if it was part of my role as general secretary of the World Council of Churches. To be in these three cities, one after another, offered many opportunities to reflect on the theme you have given to me.

Indeed, walking around the Schlosskirche in Wittenberg and into the Lutherhaus, entering St Peter's Basilica in Rome, and going to my daily work in Calvin's Geneva, also being reminded of Geneva as a city of refuge for the Huguenots escaping the massacres of the French king, the past of the Reformation is very alive and present in my mind.

However, being in all these places as an ecumenical pilgrim, leading the World Council of Churches' work day by day in all kinds of dialogues in our quest for unity, justice and peace, I see how what we are doing is to be seen also as a continuation of some of the best intentions and effects of the Reformation. But there is much more to it in this connection between the past and future. The past is indeed what we learn from, what has shaped us, but also what has given us the problem of divisions within Christianity that requires the efforts of the ecumenical dialogues. The need for the ecumenical movement and its instruments is not only a matter of the past – as we commemorate 50 years of the Ecumenical Institute in Collegeville and next year 70 years of the WCC. It is an urgent need today, for the sake of the future of the churches—and for all humankind and the creation. The search for the unity of the church is a service to all – and therefore a central dimension of the mission of the church of Christ in this world.

It is exactly this connection between the mission of the church in its witness to Christ and its service and ministry in this world and the quest for unity for tomorrow that needs our full attention when we ask what is our role in the ecumenical movement today. In my recent conversation with Pope Francis, he repeated his three words for describing how he understands the ecumenical call today: Walking, praying and working together. For our part, in the WCC, we say that the overall perspective on what we are doing is given in the theme "Together on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace." And we could affirm that our vision is the same: moving onwards, into the future together, based on the results of the ecumenical dialogues so far. We are also harvesting the fruits of the Reformation and other parts of the Tradition of the churches, but not waiting till all the questions are solved through advanced theological dialogue. The needs are too strong, the powers of division in this world are too active. We cannot wait, we have to move on as the Holy Spirit guides us, leading our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:80). This is how we can contribute to the hope of the world that the church is by definition to carry, nurture and share – through a constant accounting of our own hope as it is given in the daily work of the Creator, the crucified and resurrected Saviour, and the life-giving Spirit.

The Reformation was a period in time. This year we count 500 years since an event in Wittenberg that became a starting point for enormous changes in theological reflection, in

church leadership, in political dynamics and the landscapes of power, in economic realities, in creating a public sphere for change. What was at the heart of the matter that made such an impact on the church—and the world—of that time? What is at the heart of this force for change and transformation that we also want to see as a prologue to the present work for Christian unity?

The experience in the church in Wittenberg two Sundays ago provided some of the answers.

2. In front of the Cranach painting in St Marien Kirche in Wittenberg

The famous painting of Martin Luther preaching in the church in Wittenberg is the most well-known image depicting the Reformation: He is pointing to the centre of the church, where we see the crucified Jesus Christ, and only him. By pointing in that direction – towards the centre – he is helping the congregation to look to him – the Christ – for their expectations, their prayers, and their salvation. I was asked to stand there, in front of that picture, in the centre in front of the altar, to lead the celebration of the so-called Lima liturgy for an ecumenical gathering in Wittenberg. This shows us the best part of how the Reformation can be seen as a prologue to what we harvest from ecumenical theology today.

For me it was a very special experience. I have worked in dialogues between the Lutheran church in Norway and many of the churches that were represented there, and we have brought the dialogues to reception and mutual acceptance of Eucharistic sharing and mutual recognition of baptism and the ordained ministries. This is the case with our relationship to the Church of England, to the Methodist church, to the Reformed churches in Europe, and indirectly to the Moravian church and the Old Catholic church. We have celebrated these agreements, but I have never celebrated a Eucharist myself with all of them present at the same time.

What made it possible? In my view, as we worked in these dialogues and as we continue to engage in these relations of church communion, it is the sharing of the Gospel of “Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, according to the Scriptures” (as the Basis of the WCC says!). It is actually quite relevant and operational for these dialogues, and their reception in a Lutheran church what the *Confessio Augustana*, article 7, says, that for the unity of the church it is sufficient to share the preaching of the Gospel and the sharing of the sacraments.

This centre of the Gospel and the basis for our fellowship has the potential to bridge gaps and divisions. Sometimes it is easy to forget that the central message of the Gospel is what gives a centre to our fellowship as churches, not just to our individual faith and confession.

I also was reminded that we are not fully together with the Roman Catholic Church so as to be able to celebrate the Eucharist together. But we have taken such significant steps forward, especially through The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, and this declaration has now been signed by several church families.

When we long for the full fellowship and shared communion of all churches, we should not forget what we have received already. Most of those churches represented at the altar in Wittenberg would not celebrate Eucharist together 70 years ago. And no Catholic bishop would stand next to us, reading the Gospel and the prayers for us. Hardly 50 years ago, either. The ecumenical dialogue in its many efforts has been producing substantial fruits. Now is the time to be accountable for what we have achieved, manifesting it as we did in the light of the heart of the Reformation message. Now is the time to be more accountable for what the gifts of the ecumenical dialogue mean to us, and how we continue to learn from one another to love God and our neighbour as ourselves as disciples of Christ. We have to continue our mutually accountable dialogue about what it means to share the Gospel with one another and the world.

3. The Reformation as an opening of dialogues of mutual accountability

The 500th anniversary of the 16th century Lutheran Reformation highlights the actions of Martin Luther in denouncing church abuses, setting in motion events that led to the Reformation and the separation of Western Christianity into Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. Against this background, the Reformation can be commemorated properly only if remembrance is undertaken in a spirit of mutual accountability. Celebrating an institution or an ideology in a one-dimensional, self-sufficient, and self-affirming way cannot bring the world forward beyond the pride of success and the power of those identifying with it. Such jubilees, however, can be valuable when they reflect an attitude of accountability. This means asking openly and self-critically the following questions: What have we learned? What was important and significant in this particular history? How has it been distorted or even abused? And how can we bring the best of it forward into the future of our life together?

The most effective and appropriate approach is for Christians and the church to look to the past and the present in accountability to God, whatever has happened. To stand before God is to stand at the same time in accountability to all of God's creation, and particularly to those created in the image of God – human beings and the one humanity. The best way of celebrating a jubilee so that we really learn from it is to do so in mutual accountability to others in God's world from whom we learn, through affirming the gifts we have received and shared and through constructive critique.

Mutual accountability is a central attitude that has brought the ecumenical movement to life as a fellowship of churches, as I have tried to demonstrate in my book *The Truth We Owe Each Other: Mutual Accountability in the Ecumenical Movement*.¹ Mutual accountability is exercised when we ask and respond to each other in a transparent, open, humble, and constructive way what we have done with our common legacy as churches, with the Gospel, and with the one tradition of the church. Mutual accountability involves dialogue about how we deal with the differences and divisions that have developed, and how we are stewards of this legacy. We need to ask, as well, how we are mutually accountable to the values and the things we have learned that we affirm and share together and how we, therefore, engage each other in finding a way forward together. We need to show that we are accountable, reliable, and honest. In all of this, we are mutually accountable to how the Gospel is shared so that those to whom the gospel is addressed can receive it as a word of liberation, transformation, and hope that the holy scripture brings to the church and the world in every generation and in every context.

The Gospel passage of the Pharisee and tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) shows clearly the difference between self-centredness and pride, and standing in full accountability for who we are as sinners before God, so that we rely fully on God's grace alone. It shows the link between God's gift of grace, accountability, and repentance.

My thesis is that a sense of accountability, even mutual accountability, was at the heart of the matter that led Martin Luther to start a dispute about the real meaning of penitence in his theses of 31 October 1517. The openness in his approach was an academic prerogative, searching for a better way for how the church could be accountable to scripture and the Gospel, so that the accountability of the believer could be given proper expression. He wanted thereby to be of service to the church and to believers. Remembering this event, we can explore in an open discourse the value of penitence as a power of real liberation and transformation. We can discern how to avoid its being distorted to something that makes neither the church nor the believer really accountable to God and others.

4. The need for accountability and reformation in church and world

Many of the ecumenical discussions today regarding the 500th anniversary of the Reformation are looking back at the church-dividing events in the 16th century and the theological, political, and cultural divisions and conflicts that followed. This perspective asks what we can learn from what we call the European Reformation, and the potential for change today as seen through the lens of the Reformation.² The most impressive ecumenical dialogue on the Reformation has applied the “healing of memories” approach that has been an important dimension of the peace-building work of churches in Northern Ireland, South Africa, and many other countries. In Germany, for example, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the German Bishops’ Conference have jointly published the document *Erinnerung heilen – Jesus Christus bezeugen* (Healing Memories: Witnessing to Jesus Christ) as a contribution to a joint commemoration of the Reformation.³ Others have been developing interdisciplinary research, such as the project on “Radicalizing Reformation,” which demonstrates that the Reformation has been part of an era of profound changes and transformations in world history, leading to the modern world with important threats to life for our own and future generations.⁴

I would like to go one step further, combining our understanding of the word “ecumenical” as a “house of living stones” (or the fellowship of Christian churches) and as “God’s household of life” (which embraces the whole of creation). Remembering the impulse the Reformation gave in its time to the transformation of church and society, my question is: what kind of renewal of churches and theology is required today in view of the threats to life and survival humankind is facing? My ecumenical experience tells me that there is no single answer or ready-made solution at hand. No one alone has the full picture. Indeed, we urgently need to understand just what is required of us to be on the way of justice and peace as a diverse community in mutual accountability, and what the core of our Christian faith can contribute in responding to the main challenges we are facing together as human beings on the way. In other words: What does it mean and require today to be together on the way following Christ, looking for signs of God’s reign to come, and discerning the way guided by the Holy Spirit, and to do all this in mutual accountability? What does this mean in a multicultural and multi-religious context, where the strong self-interests of individuals, groups, and nations block the change that is necessary and fuel conflict and war to the detriment of human communities and all life on planet Earth?

In short: What does it mean to be on a pilgrimage of justice and peace in today’s world, together with people of good will of different cultures and faith communities? I have asked myself this question every day as general secretary of the World Council of Churches since the 10th assembly – which in 2013 gathered in Busan, Republic of Korea – called churches and all people of good will to join in transformative action on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

Before trying to address these questions, let me recall some of the things that we have learned in the more recent past. We have been reminded that there have been difficulties in celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation ecumenically. Cardinal Kurt Koch and others pointed to the fact that the Reformation led to a schism of the Western Church and in consequence to conflict and war in Europe. These realities stood, it was suggested, in the way of a jubilee celebration.

The first time I participated in discussions about the 500th anniversary of the Reformation was in the committee for ecumenism of the Lutheran World Federation more than 10 years ago. I urged that the results of the extensive ecumenical dialogues of recent decades should be the basis for the commemoration. The ambiguity of marking the 500 years as a jubilee

celebrating all we give thanks for, and the critical scrutiny of the negative and dramatic consequences of the schisms that occurred during and after the period of Reformation, were, in my mind, to be addressed through a common celebration of the gospel. Was not this – the celebration of the gospel – the central point in the critical questions and the finest initiatives from Luther and other reformers?

The phase of discussion about the profile and the purpose of the commemoration of the 500th anniversary is now behind us. The churches are together celebrating the gospel of Christ at the centre – “ein Christusfest.” It is remarkable that Protestants and Catholics together are taking responsibility for the conflicts and wars that followed the Reformation. The joint publications – *From Conflict to Communion* of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity⁵ and *Erinnerungen heilen* of the German churches – show how the churches have received and own together the progress made in ecumenical dialogue since the Second Vatican Council. The same spirit prevailed in the preparations for the joint Catholic–Lutheran commemoration of the Reformation in Lund and Malmö in Sweden on 31 October 2016, where I represented the whole fellowship of the WCC. This event was significant for the whole ecumenical movement. As part of the commemoration, Caritas Internationalis and the Lutheran World Federation – World Service signed a declaration of intent for closer cooperation. All these are promising signs of new energy for ecumenical cooperation in mutual accountability. We are indeed harvesting some of the fruits of the dialogues that were pursued in the past.

Interdisciplinary cooperation demonstrates clearly that a theology and church-centred approach alone is never enough to understand the dynamics of change in history. The scope of mutual accountability needs to include the religious dimension, but it cannot be reduced to it. We are also to be accountable beyond the church to our fellow human beings in all dimensions of life. The insights of social, economic, political, and cultural research contribute to a more holistic understanding of the Reformation in the spheres of both the church and the world. The Reformation was part of a broader historical process that led toward colonialism, on the one hand, and modernity, on the other.

In the German Catholic and Lutheran perspective, for instance, when thinking about the Reformation, it seems obvious to look to 31 October 1517 as the date when Martin Luther publicized his 95 Theses about indulgences. This date, therefore, is seen as the starting point of the Lutheran Reformation. Looking at the events, however, in a broader Europe-wide and worldwide perspective, it becomes obvious that we are not to forget Jan Hus, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin, also catalysts for change that both preceded and followed the Lutheran Reformation and developed in parallel. Further, the development of Anglicanism and new Protestant churches in the English-speaking world needs to be taken into consideration. Historical actors such as Luther, Cajetan, Frederick the Wise, the Emperor Charles V, or the Fugger family, others like King Henry VIII or Queen Elizabeth I, or rich merchants in Amsterdam and Antwerp, Hamburg and London who supported the new theological orientation were fully aware of their own context. This context included the beginnings of the colonial conquest of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, with new opportunities for global trade, as well as the advance of the Ottoman Empire. In 1492, Martin Behaim, a German cosmographer and philosopher, presented a globe to the Welsers and other rich banking and trading houses in Nuremberg to demonstrate the new realities of a radically changing world. Reformation is thus intertwined with a long process of globalization that accelerated with colonialism and neo-colonialism.

We see the emergence of the modern world with a worldwide, but divided, Christianity and with global competition for economic and political power coupled with important technological advances. This is the historical background to growing inequalities, economic injustice, and claims to hegemonic political and military power as an environment for mutually reinforcing economic, ecological, and social-cultural crises in our day. This is not to

say that the Reformation is at the origin of all these developments, but it unfolded in the context of these trends.

The Reformation has led to developments in the areas of modernity and democracy, and was also followed by a globalization of Christianity in its many forms through mission. Konrad Raiser has explored these dimensions of Reformation in his newly published study about these issues, seen in the perspective of the life of the churches worldwide today and their relations through the ecumenical movement.⁶ We find ourselves today in a situation that requires developing new forms of sharing, cooperation, and ecologically sound lifestyles, but in which the capacity and the will to do so is weakened by reactions against global trends and powers often magnifying regional cultural and religious particularities. This is a common feature of populist political movements, religious fundamentalism, and other justifications of violence that also affect groups in the churches. Those who belong to such movements refuse to be held accountable by others who do not belong to their particular group.

5. The Unfinished Reformation

Can we call the ecumenical dialogue a way to address the “unfinished reformation”?^[7] I think we can see the ecumenical dialogue as an inspiration for a new common quest for the uniting potential of the Gospel.

When we read the many texts from the ecumenical dialogues, we find striking examples of how the biblical texts often offers a common ground and a point of reference that can open up the confessional controversies. The joint biblical studies over some decades have brought real new insights and fruits for the agreement between the churches. This is the case for many dialogues I have been involved in, such as Lutheran with Anglicans, Reformed, Methodists and Catholics, and with the many bilateral dialogues facilitated by the WCC’s Faith and Order Commission. *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* - which is now signed by five different world communions - also uses that methodology as one of its most basic and effective approaches to the challenges of the mutual condemnations from the Reformation area.

It is important, though, to see beyond the list of biblical references and see how the themes of the Reformation have played into the substance of the dialogues in different ways. The important discussions in Faith and Order about The Tradition and the traditions (late 1950s and early 1960s) culminated in the World Conference in Montreal 1963 and opened up the deeper hermeneutical reflection about reading the Bible with an understanding of its context, its history in the church, its diversity and its unity. This, combined with the new approaches of Vatican II, opened up common ground for using the biblical texts as references and basis for establishing a common ground.

The connection between the biblical texts and the Church Fathers of the ancient church was the significant point of reference for some of the Reformers, for example, the logic of the *Confessio Augustana*: What we teach is the better interpretation of the Bible and the Fathers. This became also a significant part of the contribution from the Fathers of the creative fellowship in Collegetown and their contributions to the new orientation of the Vat II from the liturgical point of view - inspired by a new study of the Biblical texts and the Early Church Fathers.^[8]

Furthermore, I have seen in many ecumenical dialogues a focus on the biblical basis of the Christian faith as the good news, the Evangelium, about the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. This has helped many ecumenical relations and dialogues to find a focus on what is given to us in the faith in Jesus Christ as the essence of what we share. In that sense, we have many examples of how the ecumenical dialogues of recent decades have continued the most valued and most recognized dimension of the events we call Reformation.

However, we have also to be honest and say that the ecumenical call is also to pursue a dialogue to overcome the problems and divisions in faith that the Reformation and its effects caused. There is no clear line between Reformation and a modern, tolerant, truth-searching and mutually accountable ecumenical dialogue. Nevertheless, the impulses from Reformation in this regard do play a significant role in so many ways.

Furthermore, we need to be looking wider and see that, though the Reformation still influences churches all around the world, it is not the necessary basis for the life and understanding of the church. It is not so in the Orthodox family, and only partly so in the Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless, the question is relevant in the sense that maybe the intention of renewing the church by referring it back to its sources in scripture is a programme that really can unite churches of today and tomorrow.

6. Violence and religion: a difficult heritage of intolerance

The Reformation has caused new insight and basis for ecumenical dialogue, but it also opened up severe conflicts, in which religion, new power structures of the local and national kingdoms, and later on what we could call nationalism, were involved in the most dramatic and violent conflicts. The reality of religious wars and persecution is also a legacy of the Reformation and its many effects.

We should not be surprised today that religion can have that effect of absolutism, and carry within itself a potential of violence. We see how religion is used as a power base and an ideology for different political agendas, some of them also in the name of Christianity. One thinks of some Muslims' thinking leading in that direction, but also Judaism and Hinduism can lead to legitimization of violence. The politicization of religion has been discussed in the WCC for several years now, but we see it as a growing reality in many contexts. Examples from the history are legion, and we cannot blame only one side of that process. Myanmar, Pakistan, Nigeria, Hungary, USA—examples are everywhere.

These examples show us why we cannot separate the so-called dialogue of truth from the so-called dialogue of love. The search for the truth must always be a search for the true love of God and the true love we can have for God, our neighbour, and all God's creation.

It is also in the combination of the dialogue of doctrine—the truth of our confessions and our catechisms—with the common pilgrimage in service for the world today that we can see the best expression of the dialogue of love. The dialogue of love is not emotional or only practical, but really going to the heart of the matter.

So we cannot ignore the questions of accountability, asking what have we made out of the Gospel, what have we made in our thirst for righteousness and peace? There is no sense in claiming to be followers of the Reformation if it does not lead to accountability, real repentance, and the transformation of love today.

7. A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace into the common future

The gospel of justification by grace leads us to the first thesis of Martin Luther and the call to a constant repentance. Justification should lead to justice. But the Reformation offers us access to some old, time-tested insights into human life and the reality of sin.

Neither postmodern relativism nor attempts to foster agreements based on a minimal number of shared principles are enough. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights covenants have shown a way forward, but they are still vulnerable to the fact that their origins are in the northern hemisphere with its Christian roots. The opposition of

“us” and “them” is dominating thinking and action at a time when we need to speak of “we” as a planetary community in recognition of the difference and the otherness of the “other.”

In theological terms, the lack of capacity to relate to the “other” or the neighbour in responsible ways reflects the brokenness of community with the other and with God. Such brokenness of the most basic set of relationships is called sin in the biblical tradition. Sin is a reality that disrupts and diminishes human relationships and destroys the life given to us as human beings in God's creation. It is a destructive reality in our own lives. To build up our lives and new relationships, a kind of conversion toward the other is needed – a new, more inclusive understanding of identity that includes the material, moral, and spiritual dimensions of life.

It makes good sense to me to address this underlying dimension of contemporary challenges using the categories of the Reformation. In view of the deep conversion that is needed, I would emphasize one single dimension, referring to Luther's first thesis on the door of the church in Wittenberg: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘Repent’ (Matt. 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

Sin is real, and it undermines the lives of individuals and communities. There is no way to avoid the reality of sin through money, power, ignorance, pious practices, church doctrines, offices, or any other means. There is no way to avoid the need for repentance, conversion, and the renewal of life.

Repentance is the way to receive justification by grace and to be liberated from the shackles of sin. Repentance leads to a conversion that involves all dimensions of our identity. Its horizon is the renewal of life in the death and resurrection of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Luther argued that the notion of repentance is not a once-for-all action or word. It is an attitude, a way of being that represents attentiveness to the critical voice, an understanding of the dimension of tragedy, and willingness to acknowledge the reality of what is wrong. It is also the attitude of hearing carefully the voice of God's complete forgiveness, not in the sense of accepting a deal, but as openness to change the direction of one's life in order to focus on the needs of the other, especially of those who are poor, in need of safety, of justice, and of having their rights and dignity recognized. The way toward justice and peace is a way of repentance, conversion, and renewal. Anticipating the goal that already describes the way, our way becomes indeed a pilgrimage *of* justice and peace.

In other words, true repentance means real accountability to our past, as individuals and as a fellowship, in the churches and as peoples (*confessio*). True repentance means a real willingness to change, listening carefully to the other and particularly to those who are less privileged and victims of what we have done, past and present (*contritio*). True repentance means real actions of transformation, and an on-going willingness to be in a process of transformation that focuses on how the other – other human beings as well as the whole of creation – is affected constructively or destructively by my and our attitudes and actions. Transformation is the essence of a pilgrimage of justice and peace that leads to addressing the needs of the poor, in a wide sense of the term, including those who are less privileged, victims, those who are oppressed – according to the expression “the preferential option for the poor.”

In this way, I unfold the meaning of mutual accountability as attitude and as form for our life together, trusting the power of the gospel to address the needs we all have for liberation from the powers of sin and for the transformation into the life and the values of the kingdom of God.

We need to acknowledge there is never a time in the life of a human being, a nation, or a culture when the need for the attitude of repentance can be considered obsolete. The

continuing existence of injustice, racism, war, killings, persecution, and despair that drives people to flee from their homes and families reminds us that these are not just matters of history but remain a reality in the whole world today.

In Europe we recall the refugee conventions that were established after the Second World War, particularly in response to the needs for protection of the many European refugees – Germans, Polish, Hungarians, Czechs – and many others suffering from the brutal realities after the disaster of war and the later effects of the Cold War and the division of Europe. The problems have not stopped. Today there are many from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa who have the same needs for protection and for finding another place to call home. All of us must forever be conscious of the temptation to be complicit with the reality of sin in all its forms, old and new. Indeed, those of us who are Europeans are vulnerable to such temptation and therefore must guard against the tendency to ignore the need for critical self-assessment. Many in the United States of America discuss racism these days as “America's original sin.” They face the dimensions and expressions of racism that permeate their society, and which have been publicly exposed to the world in recent years. Speaking as a European, I know that we should also look at ourselves in the same mirror: What is our original sin? Actually, we have to admit that what is seen in the US is a consequence of European migration to the United States over many centuries, rooted in Eurocentric ideas of white superiority and privilege.

Many of us today struggle to understand how we could allow such destructive notions of “Übermensch” (the super-human) to take hold in our past, and to continue to exist today – to the extent that even now, racist and xenophobic rhetoric have become acceptable and respectable in the public space in Europe as well as in the US. How can we dismantle and resist the seemingly normal reaction of self-preservation and self-protection manifested in suspicion toward the stranger and those of different faiths? How do we arrive at a modus of real and constructive repentance opening to the way forward in mutual accountability?

This is about making the best values of the Reformation a living reality today. We protect our values best by using them as the basis and the source for serving other human beings. Our present realities must be shaped by and rooted in a vision of how we should live together tomorrow as one humanity. Values are of no worth if they are solely about the past. This is also true of our understanding of sin and repentance. Those who want to protect Christian values by closing the borders to Europe do not know what Christian values are.

I am confronted with these realities again and again in my work and during my travels. This experience shows me that it makes a lot of sense to consider the challenges we face today as one humanity in the light of the legacy of the Reformation, not in the sense of a general pessimism or condemnation of everything that is human but in attentiveness to the reality of sin and the reality of the needs of others. It rather gives me hope. There is a sign of hope in every repentance and conversion that follows.

The Reformation brought a new sense of our accountability to God as sovereign, as the one who is not at the same level as we human beings in all our failures and weaknesses. This accountability did not mean that we are accountable to powers of authority in the world or in the church that claim to have the final word about our relationship to almighty God. Rather, the Reformation emphasized that we are called to be accountable in our humanity, called to be free and responsible to find our ways to serve God and fellow human beings. This freedom is also a call to seek the company of all people of good will with whom we can share a sense of mutual accountability for who we are and what we can do together. This includes that which is beyond the realities that are separating us or putting us against each other as “us” and “them.”

The Reformation's call to repentance is not a call to despair or pessimism or misconceptions about the possibilities of human life and efforts. On the contrary, it is a call to take these

opportunities to serve more seriously and to be inspired by the liberating word of the Gospel. It is a constant prologue to the life in God's future of liberation and service for others, united in our common call.

8. The Reformation Focus on the Gospel as Promise and Ecumenical Dialogue for a Theology of Hope

The ecumenical movement must be a movement of faith, hope and love. It cannot be for the sake of the academics or for the sake of church politics, but must serve the people and their need for different expressions of hope. This hope can only be grounded in the love of God which we receive through our faith. But we have to remind ourselves that when St Paul dealt with the ecumenical divisions and problems of the church in Corinth, he insisted on a focus on only Jesus Christ and him crucified. It is this understanding of love, the self-giving and ultimate expressions of love that should also guide any attempt to overcome the divisions. There is one better way than any other, as he says in chapter 12 and 13 of the First Letter to the Corinthians: Love. It is the way that really makes dialogue into actions of change, transformation and hope that can make people believe. To be one, and to search to be one, must always be to search for a share in the love of God and to share the love of God with others. This is an often forgotten dimension of the famous chapter of John 17.

The Reformation opened some doors, and we have in our time opened other doors of dialogue to find the truth and to find one another as sisters and brothers in Christ. But there is more to be done. The prologue is not the whole. We have to continue, asking the questions of accountability to the Gospel again and again, but also looking forward, into the dawn of God's future. We do not look into the night of fatalism and despair; we look into the dawn from on high.

This is why we continue our journey together. In dialogue and hope.

[7] Cf the proposal of using this terminology from Hans-Georg Link ("Die unvollendete Reformation")

[8] I had a wonderful opportunity to listen to this story told by your brother here in Collegeville, F Gottfried Dickman, during my stay in the International Ecumenical Centre at St John's in Collegeville.