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Bible, Prayer and Confession. Current challenges on the way towards the Jubilee of the Reformation

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1. Introductory Note

First of all let me welcome all of you in Germany. Augsburg certainly is a very adequate site to reflect upon "Theology in the Life of Lutheran Churches" as it was here that the reformation ... and it was in Augsburg where ten years ago the LWF signed the "Joint Declaration on Justification" with the Roman Catholic Church. This took place in the first few weeks after my election as bishop of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Hanover. It is a mainly rural church in northern Germany, with 3 million members the largest protestant church in the country.

I am convinced, Lutheran theology is prepared to meet the challenges of a globalized world. We will have to search for the balance to reform the church of the reformation (*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*) and at the same time preserve the tradition of theological thinking and liturgical practice. Augsburg certainly is a wonderful place to reflect from different contexts in the world what that may mean for our common confession.

2. Preparations for the 500th Jubilee of the Reformation

The year 2017, indeed is a very special anniversary. Not only our church in Germany and abroad, but also the state authorities are looking forward to it. In a public hearing in the commission for tourism of the German Parliament on 16th January this year, for example, it has been pointed to the immense cultural, religious and also political meaning, including national and international consequences. It has been said that the Reformation was a precondition for the development of a new, enlightened view of the world.

By the town of Wittenberg the Jubilee is regarded as an immense chance. The coming years will be composed under a special theme each, stage plays and open air events are in the process of planning. The tourism forecast confirms the view of the town to be accurate: 400 Million Protestants world wide have an immense potential. Take alone the United States of America with 156 million people - they are a huge market. Curiously, for example also the town Jüterbog in Brandenburg sees herself sitting in the same boat, though Luther never has been there, but rather Johann Tetzl, that man, who had become famous for selling indulgences. Nevertheless, the parliament of the state Saxony-Anhalt carried the motion to acknowledge the use of the Luther-Decade and the Jubilee as a trademark for touristic offers and as a very important matter for the whole region. At occasions like this, Peter Hahne, prominent member of the Council of the EKD uses to whisper in my ear: "Margot, a revival movement is likely to arrive..."

During the first debates in the LWF also the General Assembly was scheduled to meet in Germany in order to demonstrate: 1517 was not a regional event, and not at all a provincial one. No, by that time world history was written in Wittenberg. But then it was considered: Let us better meet in Germany by 2010 in order to get the Jubilee started, and have a conference in 2017 in a different place in order to show: meanwhile a world wide church has emerged, which starting from Wittenberg has achieved a profile on every continent. This evidently makes sense. The Lutheran World Federation alone represents 61.7 Million Lutherans world wide in 140 member churches. This means, the Lutheran faith has been exported into all countries of the

world. And additionally to the faith the understanding of the freedom of Christians, the justification through faith alone, the respect for the conscience of any individual and the reformatory idea of human education has written world history.

I am, quite impressed, how the preparations for the Jubilee are gaining shape. A common body of representatives of the government and the hierarchy of the church, chaired by the head of the council of EKD, Bishop Wolfgang Huber, will coordinate the preparations. An international and interdisciplinary committee of experts will engage in research on the historic, spiritual and cultural dimensions of the Reformation and develop a new understanding of its meaning for the present age. A steering committee will reflect on the questions of marketing and consider the need of the restoration of historical sites of the Reformation. A Luther medal to honor outstanding characters already has been created. And the EKD is about to take ownership of the "Schlosskirche" itself.

We are planning right now possible stages of the Luther Decade which relate to historical events (www.luther2017.de). In fact, it is impressing how it is tried to form bundles of events and historical sites of the reformation with certain themes on the way to the great Jubilee. As one example I like to point to the proposal to focus in 2012 on the relation of the reformation to music, and to connect this with Johann Sebastian Bach and the Jubilee of 800 years of the Thomas Church in Leipzig. Another example is to pick up in 2015 the relation of art and media and take up Lucas Cranach as character together with his creativity and the meaning of his paintings. On the way to the Jubilee Protestantism in Germany anyhow seems to rediscover common focal points and themes. This is incredibly exciting.

One point which especially moves me is the ecumenical dimension of the Jubilee. In many background papers a major emphasis is put on the idea, the jubilee to be a "protestant event". It is taken as an opportunity for protestant image cultivation and protestant self assertion. I can understand that the Roman Catholic Church feels a certain uneasiness about this. As far as we explain ourselves being inheritor of the Old Church (Luther, Wider Hans Worst 1541), it is a common history we talk about. During the last official ecumenical conversation, the meeting of the Council of EKD and the Conference of German Bishops, this was an intensively discussed theme. For my part, I do not like to see the Luther Dekade as a delimitation from the Roman Catholic Church. The intention of Martin Luther was the reformation of his own church, but not the split. This perhaps may become an orientation for us. Anyhow, for me a Reformation Jubilee under the sign of delimitation makes no sense.

Instead it would be great to discover where we have moved closer to each other. Sure, I know that there are many "gravamina" (complaints) on the protestant side. For example: Dominus Jesus, the declaration of indulgence for the year 2000, and also in this year the celebration of a Year of St. Paul, as if that were a matter of one denomination alone. And there are "gravamina" on the Roman Catholic side, as the missing protestant participation in the redaction of the new German Standard Translation of the Holy Bible, the declaration "The Protestant Understanding of Church Communion". And there have been conflicts e.g. on the passages related to the passages on the adoration of Maria and the teaching on the ministry of the Pope in the document "Communio Sanctorum". Finally the latest papal actions with regard to the "Pius Convent", the Prayer on Good Friday for the Jews to find their way towards Christ, the intention by some, to go back behind the "subsistit" to an "est" and the mass in Latin - all this seems to confirm a tendency to go back behind Vatican II and its ecumenical impact.

But: In 1999 in Augsburg, Germany, the Joint Declaration on Justification by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation has been signed. It was declared: The condemnations of the 16th century, according to the teachings of today, do not condemn any

more the today existing churches. The signing of the Common Agreement on the Joint Declaration in Augsburg on the 31st October 1999 was a solemn event. It does not mean – and this was clear to all those present – that the dogmatic terms of the different traditions of teachings were based on identical convictions. But the signing was appreciated to be one step on the way to come closer to each other. A breakthrough was expected to be close, according to the motto: This declaration will not erase the differences, but hopefully will lead to the option to mutual invitation to the Lords Supper on the basis of hospitality. We can be thankful for the fact that it was achieved to find common formulations on that issue which once broke the unity.

It has to be admitted that protests from the side of theological faculties from the very beginning pointed to remaining deficits in clarity. The former chairperson of the Council of EKD, Manfred Kock, explained in his report to the Synod of EKD: “It makes no sense to compare the result with a tariff treaty, for the comparison completely misses the intention, the character and the meaning of the Joint Declaration. The formulations, which have been signed at Augsburg, describe a broad field of tolerance, in which mutual acceptance is possible.” The dispute shows how important it is to continue with the conversations between theological faculties and the leading bodies of the churches on this questions. Moreover, there is an urgent need to come into an even deeper conversation between theology and church leadership.

And: The suffragan bishop Jaschke from Hamburg at the occasion of the Reformations Day in 2008 declared, the 95 theses of Luther were also now accepted from the Roman Catholic side, and he emphasized that he agrees with the critics of Luther in the trade of letters of indulgence.

Thus I plea to give the Jubilee of Reformation a clear ecumenical dimension. As this is very clear: notwithstanding all differences and the specific identities of either sides, there is more in common than what separates. And: In a secular society a common witness of Christians is of eminent importance. My experience is: The closer we are in our presentations to the public, the better it is listened to us.

3. Luther up to date

Planning the years to come, it will be very interesting also to critically investigate the reception of Luther. In an article related to the Reformation Day 2008, Prof. Dr. Lehmann described in a very interesting way, how the Reformation Jubilees of the past have been shaped by their respective times.

- 1617, he describes, the jubilee was an occasion for confessional self-assertion.
- 1717 is characterised by giving Luther the image of a pious man or making him the representative of the age of early enlightenment over against the superstition of medieval times.
- 1817 is a stage production of a religious and national celebration, commemorating the Battle of the Nations nearby Leipzig in 1813; Luther here becomes the German national hero.
- His 400th anniversary in 1883 promotes Luther to the Founder and Father of the German Empire, and
- 1917 he finally became, together with Hindenburg the saviour of the Germans in times of deep affliction.

- The year 1933 offered to Luther the aura of the God-commissioned leader, respective his herald.
- And on the 400th commemoration of his death – 1946 - he was regarded as the one, who is able to offer comfort to the Germans, by a time when comfort was urgently needed.
- In 1983 there was a sort of competition about the legacy in East and West Germany. In the GDR Luther now was not any more only the servant of the princes but a representative of the early revolution against the princes.

I was fascinated and moved by this article. This must make us sensible for the fact that Luther Jubilees always are indicators for “Zeitgeist”, the spirit of the age. How will the generations to come judge about us and our “stage production”? Will they then explain, that we wanted to shape our profile on the expenses of others? Will be said, that it was tried to gain the attention of the public for the Protestant Church? Or will it become evident: here the Lutheran legacy has been reviewed in a self-critical manner and in constructive ways, well, in a good protestant manner?

Who did we arrive to be, the Lutheran Churches at the beginning of the new Century and Millennium? What is our message for the people in our country, who live in sorrow, with questions about the meaning of their lives, anxious about their future? What is the message of the Church of Reformation in a world of injustice, where almost a billion people are starving? My hope is that our profile will be shaped by our own clear answers.

In his solemn speech to celebrate the opening of the Luther Decade on 21st September 2008 Bishop Huber said: “As much as we appreciate Luther’s contribution to the German culture, especially the power in which he shaped the German language, as little we have reason to repeat the gestures of superiority, with which Martin Luther and an alleged “German Essence” has been fused. Germans at home, as much as Germans abroad, for a long time have been seduced to mix up patriotism and nationalism under the reference to Luther.

This is important for me: The Jubilee is to be used also for a critical review. No, there will not be a “Cult on Luther”, like it was written in the newspaper WELT of the 26.th September (Gernot Facius), referring to the apprehensions of the Roman Catholic German Bishops Council in its plenary assembly. I am convinced, the Churches of the Reformation in Germany as well as Lutheran churches world wide are strong enough not to blind out the dark sides of their great founder. This is valid not only with regard to nationalism, but also with regard to his relation to people of Jewish faith, which strongly and enduringly shaped the Lutheran Church in a negative way. It is also true with regard to the rebelling peasants and Luther’s refusal of solidarity. And also with regard to violence Luther has made comments, which are horrifying today. In his fulminate struggle against excessive interest Martin Luther presumes himself to phrases as “Therefore the profiteer and scrooge really is not a right human being; the way he commits sins actually are not human! He must be a werewolf, worse than all tyrants, murders and thieves, just about so evil as the devil himself. For he does not sit there in the custody and peace of the community as an enemy but as a friend and neighbor and anyhow robs and murders more cruelly as all enemies and incendiaries. Now, when for this one is ready to torture simple thieves from the street, murders and enemies and beheads them, how much more then one should break the profiteers on a wheel and torture them, how much more one should expel all scrooges, curse them and behead them...” (Kleiner Sermon vom Wucher (1519).

I hope that in 2017, after in the coming years having critically reflected Luther's heritage, we clarify our specific profile and at the same time discover him as a protagonist of the Ecumenical Movement? For, this in fact he was: a Roman-Catholic Christian. Similar to me, who was surprised, when I was a teenager, to discover and understand that Jesus was a Jew, today I have to say: Although Luther struggled against the Pope and Rome, he still was a Catholic Christian. Would it be possible to discover Luther as an ecumenical character and "Leitfigur": appreciating what we have in common, but reflecting on separate identities? This would be an interesting approach to the Jubilee, I think.

4. Bible

The bible is the focal point of reference for the reformation. Through studies in the bible Luther develops his "reformatorische Entdeckung", reformatory discovery. And it is a fact that we as Catholics and Protestants have the bible in common.

Repeatedly the famous question is raised: "What book would You take with You on a remote island?" Sometimes it is almost embarrassing for me to respond: The bible. When a bishop gives this response, it sounds like a work-related reflex. But very simply, as a human being, a Christian, I am firmly convinced, that this book of books never will be exhausted for new readings. On the one hand again and again I discover new passages of which I am convinced: You never noticed this before! For example Schifra and Puah, this two midwives of the age of Pharaoh, I discovered only in the context of the preparations for the Women's World Day of Prayer. Rather by chance it attracted my attention that Joseph and his eleven brothers also have had a sister, Dina. The little verse on the wife of Pilate I have overlooked for a long time. The different accents of the four gospels again and again I find surprising. And the travels of Paul I reconstructed for my understanding in his letters only when I prepared myself for a presentation – and I discovered that he somehow was the first promoter of globalization.

Secondly, the text of the bible in no way is once and for ever the same in life. The experiences of many people of Psalm 23 are extremely different. These words have meant for many humans in extremely different situations comfort and encouragement. But then there are also those, who deep inside feel resistance, when they hear: "Your rod and Your staff comforts me". They reflect it on the background of punishment in the family, strokes which allegedly were meant to be good for them. It took quite some time until I understood this feelings.

For my part, I notice that the texts again and again speak freshly into new contexts. 25 years ago I wrote my first sermon. Considering that there exist six series of biblical readings for sermons, one for every one in the circle of six years, a pastor is confronted all six years again with the same biblical text. Within six years pastors change; perhaps they now are in a different congregation, and also the context has changed. Events like the Tsunami 2004, the Soccer World Cup 2006 or the present crisis of the Financial System have impacts to those who preach and to those who listen. The biblical text is a record of an experience of faith, which enters into a dialogue with the faithful and their context. For this the reading of the text never is exhaustive, but always freshly and anew a part of a dialogue. Recounted experience with God and experience of the existence of God converge. It is about a triangle relation between God, human being and a context, in which the biblical text on any occasion is reflected and relevant anew. For this reason the bible reading never is exhaustive.

In the movie about Luther, which came to the German cinemas on the eve of the Reformation Day 2004, this became apparent in a wonderful way. With Joseph Finnie in the star role, Luther did not fit to the Cranach portrait, which most of us have in the mind's eye, as Finnie appears to be too skinny. But in an excellent way he shows: Luther did not depend on

others, did not rely on traditions, but rather studied the bible himself, tried to understand by himself; he struggled for truth and insight. When he theologically realized, that nothing and nobody had the power to separate him from Christ, no teachings, no priest, no tradition and no Pope, this meant liberation to him. From then on, he fully and completely relied on that: Faith is a gift to a human being, given by God for free, and therefore he or she can completely live by God's mercy, liberated from fears. From then on Luther was not afraid any more, but in consequence out of his faith courageously took over responsibility in the world. How much we needed this today!

Above all, for Lutherans the Bible is of prime importance for orientation. Indeed, the entire Reformation is developed from Luther's biblical studies. In the movie this is enacted in the sequence, when his fatherly teacher Staupitz (played by Bruno Ganz) is about to send him for studies to the University of Wittenberg. "Have You ever read in the Bible?" he asks. And Luther, the monk, responds: "The gospel? - No." Here the immense change, which is about to happen can be perceived.

Only few years later Luther will translate the Bible in the castle of Eisenach, the Wartburg. In the movie he hands out the translation to Frederic, the Wise – historically this is not accurate as Luther never in his life has met with the ruler, who in a marvelous way is played by Peter Ustinov in his last role before he died. But in this sequence it becomes clear, what a gift and what a challenge it means to the church that people become able to read by themselves.

The translation into the German language was a revolutionary process. Today it is often dealt with in an ignorant way. Again and again I experience people saying, Christianity however is not interesting. And when I ask, what daunting matters they have read in the Bible of, or, where their problems originate from, it often becomes clear: They never have read in the bible themselves. This is tragic! Today the entire Bible is translated into 392 languages, the New Testament into 1012 languages. It has an enormous meaning to some people in the world that by now they are offered the chance to read in their own language, what is written.....

But at home in Germany many people do not know the Bible any more. This was my experience, when the public television channel ZDF in Germany advertised for "Our Very Best", this time the very best books. And as it was expected that the Bible will be under the last ten – this at least is a sign of hope – I was asked to advocate for the Bible by responding to questions. The journalists asked three questions:

"Could you tell in one sentence what this book is all about?"

"Would you recommend the Bible for reading during vacancies?" (Well, I said, the story of Josef, book of Genesis, Chapters 36 following, maybe...)

"Do You think, the Bible belongs in the category of world literature?" But yes, indeed, I said, you cannot understand architecture, history, culture in Europe without knowing the bible.

Afterwards the young man asked: "Do you really think, I should look into it, even though I have no interest in the church?" "Evidently!" I replied. „Also those who are not Christians, have to have knowledge from the Bible! This, for sure, is a question of education. Take alone the common speech: The wolf in a sheep's clothing, tohowabohu, to hide one's light under a bushel – all phrases originate from the Bible!" – "What a cool book!" he confessed....

For Christians world wide the Bible primarily is the most fundamental book of our faith, the supporting pillar, the central point of reference. Often I am fascinated during international

church conferences that is so simple to agree in certain questions. Everybody knows the book of Jonah; referring to the beatitudes everybody knows what is meant, all have an idea about Gethsemane. Therefore the Bible is a key for achieving agreements crossing cultural and national boundaries. It is testimony of faith and source for faith. To German Protestants the sound of translation of Luther is eminently common. The power of his language has proved its value for over almost 500 years, with only little revisions.

I hope that during our preparations for the Reformation Jubilee we will seek fresh orientation from the Bible and also again will find a common language as Christians in Europe. The concept of scripture, sola scriptura, remains a burning issue. We have to talk about our own matters and concerns, about the faith to Jesus Christ, that God has created the world, that the Earth belongs to God and that we are called to be stewards, who have to cultivate and protect it. Many Christians turned silent about this. But especially in our times we need a new capacity for dialogue, in order to be able to enter into conversation with other religions. This is a huge challenge. How can we find our specific language, which enables us to relate faith to reason, to relate science and theology.

To express and witness in an individualistic and secularized society about my faith, my convictions and about what is sustaining me, remains an urgent matter. The resources of the Bible, the expressions of personal faith are convincing even today, if we only learn from the Luther's powerful language. Luther knew how to articulate the biblical message in his time. Every generation has to discover this again as its own challenge. In his famous reflections "Widerstand und Ergebung", Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes: "It is not our business to predict the day..., on which people afresh will be called to articulate the word of God, that through it the World will be changed and renewed. It will be a new language, perhaps a language without any religious character, but as liberating and redemptive as the language of Jesus himself. ... the language of a new justice and truth, a language, which proclaims the peace of God with humanity and the approaching of his reign."

For me the most beautiful language of faith is poetry. Poetic texts in the Bible, from the psalms up to the famous chapter 13 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, always have touched the hearts of the people. In our times, when we often suffer from too many words, poetry can reach the hearts and touch the soul. On our way to the Reformation Jubilee, let us rediscover the Bible and recognize poetry as a language of faith!

5. Prayer

Praying is regarded as being the "heart of Christian spirituality" (VELKD 2005). At the same time it seems to be the easiest access to spirituality, for it does not require long introduction. Prayer works by itself, so to say. And we should not make it too complicated. Luther once wrote to his barber, Master Peter, on the issue "How to pray" and encouraged him, simply to join in the Lords Prayer. There is no need to make much fuss, in that prayer everything is included, when only the heart grew warm with it. Luther writes: "And I myself have learnt from this one prayer so much more than I could have drawn from much readings and reflections. ... What different are you doing than tempting God, when your mouth babbles and the heart is distraught otherwise?"

Yes, praying is an exercise of concentration. It is helpful to have a certain place for prayer and a certain time. There is common prayer during worship service as well as private prayer in the course of the day. Prayer also is an exercise to attain certain spiritual routine in life. By prayer our conversation with God can become a fixed part of our everyday life. We start gaining track of our conversation with a fixed ritual. And then the conversation will become a part of our lives here

and there in more points of our routines or in holidays, on times of crisis or of exuberant happiness.

Over all it is important, according to Luther, to pronounce the "Amen" powerfully, in order to fight down our doubts and stand firmly with our faith. Never Luther swept the doubts under the carpet; this is important to me. Nobody stands so firmly in his or her faith, that he or she never could become unsure about it. Over all when we catch sight or even experience suffering, we arrive in questioning: Does God really exist? And when God exists, why can God allow this or that to happen? Has my prayer not been heard?

I am impressed by the experience of our mothers and fathers, that has always been included in their prayers. There is a story, where pious Jews sit in judgment on God. Regarding the awful condition of the world they conclude, that God is not existing. Too much injustice and suffering is in the world. After this has been stated, one of them said: Now let us go and pray to God....

A story like this explains the tension, which exists between faith and doubt, perhaps in the best way. Of course we quarrel. And we also feel the thorn, which repeatedly taps us with questions like: Truly, was it God who created the world? Was he risen from the dead? This doubt, all these questions, can be included in our conversation with God. The practice of prayer makes us to believers of God's existence.

Important to me is Luther's emphasis, that we in fact do never pray alone but together with the entire Christianity. This idea, that a prayer is going around the earth is very appealing, I think. So to say, we exist in an orbit of conversation with God around the earth. Also in this way God is present in every place on earth. And that we also practice intercession for each other around the earth, places us within a world wide community. I know, that in some parishes and monasteries of my own church people are praying for me as their bishop. This very often touches me intensively. To say to somebody: "I pray for you", can offer comfort and distribute burdens on many shoulders". Praying for someone grants courage to him or her in difficult times, because he or she is affirmed: "I am not left behind alone." People feel strengthened by intercession, as they become aware: "I am not forgotten; for others my sufferings matter." Being asked about the effects of prayers, we can say that it already starts its effect through our appeal to God and through our solidarity with others.

Fulbert Steffensky writes:

God is the first one who prays, as he speaks out the first word of desire. Who are we when we pray, what is the prayer? Prayer is not a means to gain something. Rather it is the self-delivery of man and woman to the secret of life. In prayer we are the closest to the existence, to which we are designed to; those, who do not depend on themselves, who do not explain themselves into the reason of the world. ... We rather recognize our own beauty and dignity in our being as seen by God. ... The Prayer is the climax of passivity, the abandonment of the compulsion to be our own lover and admirer of our beauty. (VELKD 2006)

This is a decisive experience of a person in prayer: I let go control over my self. I entrust myself to someone else. And with this, praying is downright the practiced teaching of justification. I enter into a conversation with God, who is more than I understand, whose reign is wider and higher and deeper than I can imagine. This kenosis, this abdication of control over myself shapes a lifestyle. By this I also feel released from all the pressure, which is on me. Some of that matters, which are spelled out and discussed with God, lose its power, they are not so frightening to us any more. Problems do not disappear through prayer, but they are downgraded to a more appropriate dimension. The burden, which lasts on our hearts, fear that hassles us: this does not simply vanish, but it becomes manageable through our prayer.

Prayers effect changes. Germans experienced that in 1989, when prayers and candles overcame fear and started a peaceful revolution that overthrew a dictatorship. When people in fear and danger do not know anymore where to turn to, the common prayer is an invitation to community and hope for change. I have in mind the peace prayers, the circles of silence for prayer for the women, who have been raped in former Yugoslavia, or those around September 11, 2001, when people in their deep uncertainty swarmed into the churches, enlightened candles and appreciated, that words of prayer from a century old tradition have been offered by that time, when they were not able any more to find their own words.

In this way the private prayer and the common prayer, my prayer to God and my prayer together with others are molding for the movement of the Reformation. When we want to discover on our way to the Reformation Jubilee our Lutheran spirituality, then prayer, by the way also the sung prayer, is central. (I would have liked to say more about singing, as it was of immense importance for Luther and the reformation, but unfortunately the time today runs out.)

6. Confession of faith

Please allow me to emphasize right now, that I would have liked to speak also about education being central to the Lutheran church from its beginnings until today. This as well is not possible regarding the limit like. But I want to at least mention it as I consider the impact of the Reformation regarding education as of enormous relevance until today. I am fascinated, that Luther already in his early writing, „An den Adel Deutscher Nation” demanded the founding of schools, by the way, already for boys and for girls! The Reformation launched an enormous process of education. And for us in the Lutheran church education remains a central issue.

But let us now deal with the confession of faith, that meant so much for generations before us. For most first of all the Apostolic Faith comes to ones mind. What a creed! Since almost two thousand years this creed is spoken as the summary of our faith. Often I receive proposals about how to bring it up to date by changing the Virgin Mary to a young woman Maria, or to formulate in the Lords Prayer: and lead us through the temptation – as we may assume that God never leads us into temptation. But I think, we simply can rely on the old words of our fathers and mothers in faith, without examining every sentence on his dignity to us. The steady individualization is not always an improvement.

Considering the confession of faith, we Lutheran Christians certainly think of the Confessio Augustana (this remark has to made in Augsburg). Before all, it is the fundamental confession of the Lutheran rulers of the imperial states about their faith and was submitted at the Diet of Augsburg in the year 1530 by Philip Melanchthon. As we today count the Confessio Augustana to the authoritative confession writings of the Lutheran churches, her strength to grant orientation for today is evident.

I cannot explicate the whole confession. I rather want to give only one example, Article VII: “Of the Church” Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. Eph. 4, 5. 6.

This is, I am convinced, an excellent description of the Lutheran understanding of ecumenism until today. The church is, where the gospel is preached and the sacraments are celebrated. We are church. Others have different definitions. May be. But the fact, that we do not

need uniform ceremonies but rather understand unity from the principle of the Gospel in all cheerful plurality, this today is typical protestant.

And the Leuenberg Agreement from 1973, as I see it, has exactly implemented this vision. Therefore it is my hope also for the future, that in the wider ecumenical community with the Roman Catholic Church, a way will emerge towards such an understanding of unity, which is open to variety.

Therefore the confession of faith again and again grants orientation, even when today we ask ourselves, how we should celebrate the Reformation Jubilee, yes, even how to give an orientation to its content. When, initially, I argued that we should discover the ecumenical Luther, then we can discover the Confessio Augustana not as a means for limitation but rather for a widening. The great Lutheran freedom, can be recognized in an understanding of ecumenism, that has its foundation in scripture and sacrament and declares all other issues secondary. Therefore we can recognize others as churches, therefore we invite all baptized Christians to the Lords Table, even if they are members of other churches and denominations. This fundamental conviction encourages us to be engaged in the ecumenical movement: There is only one church of Jesus Christ, which is hidden behind different ecclesiological structures. The only decisive question is, whether Christ is proclaimed, solus Christus, whether it is taught about Gods grace, on which everything depends, sola gratia, and that the faith is being handed out to others, sola fide. All other things are differences which are invented by humans. On the way towards the Reformation Jubilee the confession of our faith is able to grant us decisive orientation, as in all the years before.

7. Concluding remarks

What does this now mean on the way towards the Reformation Jubilee? Perhaps we should prepare less papers on reforms but rather ask: Where and when do people long for the good news of the gospel today? In what situations are they depressed from the law and do need to be told the affirmation of mercy? How do we witness the Gospel in a world full of wars and injustice? How can we explain Lutheran responsibility for the world as a consequence to be drawn from our confession?

I would like to com to an end with the invitation and call for serenity, also in respect of the preparations for the Jubilee. Concentration and planning are necessary, but also an inner freedom, which is able to entrust some things to God. Luther once said, the gospel only can be proclaimed with a sense of humor. This approach I really liked Werner Thiede from Regensburg recently wrote: “In Luther’s humor we are not confronted with a world-transcendent, always serene smiling, but with a laughing which occasionally came from a lust and spirit of fighting, as it was unavoidable in place in the confrontations during the time of Reformation.” Thus it was not the humor as we know it from talk-show world, and not a bouncing laughing, but rather a serenity of faith, which comes from deep inside. We believe in the Resurrected and not in a dead man. Already Nietzsche said, if only the Christians would look only a little more redeemed, he possibly could come closer to the centre of it. Thus, let us emanate some more from our certainty of justification, from our being redeemed, from God’s mercy! I cannot but agree with Thiede, when he concludes: “Christians are students of a faith which is founded in humor. They are allowed already here and now exercise the eschatological laughter...”

So if we talk seriously about theology in our churches let us not forget that it is not eternity we shape. We take responsibility in this world, we reflect the biblical message in our context, we practice spirituality in prayer and other dimensions, we confess and we plan, but we should not forget about the eschatological future that is in Gods hands alone.

Thank You very much for your attention.