



WHAT TO DO ABOUT 2017?

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Five years is a generation or more in technological time, but it is barely enough to prepare for an anniversary of monumental historic significance. In 2017 Lutherans will be faced with the task of showing the world—and one another—what the Reformation that Luther started five hundred years earlier means to them—and to the world. This can be done beautifully, faithfully, and ecumenically. It can also be done meanly, weakly, and tribally. This essay is a small effort to lean the balance toward the former rather than the latter.¹

Spend some time reading the ecumenical documents that Lutherans have signed in the past forty years, and you will notice that an interesting pattern emerges.

At the beginning of the Leuenberg Agreement signed in 1973 by Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe, 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).² 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 to which Lutheran and Reformed churches can agree today. 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).

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed by the Catholic and Lutheran churches in 1999 begins with the observation, “From the Reformation perspective, justification was the crux of all the 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).³ But, it says a little farther on, “[t]he 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

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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 sixteenth 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).

Healing Memories is the title of 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.⁴ 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 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 the former “enemies” of Lutherans—Reformed, Catholic, and Anabaptist-Mennonite—need no longer be considered enemies *today*. What

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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*, attention has been focused 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 its own past, although those assorted pasts 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 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; it is 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 itself, allowing in only those who are committed to preserving a religion as static 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 at last to address, 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 widespread Protestant account of church history that assumes utter darkness from Constantine to Luther; the Orthodox narrative of abject Western heterodoxy from 1054 onward; 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 to 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

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commemoration of 1517, 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 to hold the magic key to solving this difficulty. But I would like to put forward 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 H. Hendrix, a scholar of Luther and the Reformation generally, has proposed a new approach to the sixteenth century as a period of “re-Christianization.”⁵ 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 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 purifying but retaining most medieval practice, as opposed to tossing it out and starting over.

If Hendrix is right about a common commitment to re-Christianization among all the sixteenth-century fac-

tions, 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

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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 the churches that came into existence long afterward.

So what can ecumenists draw from Hendrix's church-historical findings? 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 were 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

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condemnations and demonizations. We stopped learning from one other and talked only among ourselves. That made us all 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.

And 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 more urgent than 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. 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 the growing number of five-hundredth anniversaries that will quickly follow.

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 groups⁶; all-too-willing alliances with violent state power; triumphalistic self-congratulation of our own church at the expense of 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. 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.”

We already have had some practice at doing this. The action of the 2010 assembly of the Lutheran World Federation to confess and ask forgive-

ness 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 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. Generic apologies for unspecified sins are of little value.

Given the specific conflict between Luther and Rome dating back to 1517,

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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, 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 Catholics will be full partners with Lutherans in undertaking such a detailed confession and apology; but if not, I hope we Lutherans will have the courage to go ahead and confess our 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. Nor would we do so as if we regretted the gospel that Luther delivered to us afresh. But we should show that our confession regarding the wrong that *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 reason 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.⁸ Honoring such martyrs together would be one phase of mutual recognition.

But we need to push it even further than that. In the year 1540, in England, the Lutheran reformer Robert Barnes and two other “evangelicals” were executed on account of their faith, along with three Roman Catholics for their alleged treason against

the crown—another shared martyrdom, but under significantly different circumstances, and 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 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 five hundredth 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 restrict our celebration to him and not to the churches that resulted from him. This would not only curb 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 nationalist hero.

Thus I would like to make four suggestions about what could faithfully celebrate the best of Luther—which is Luther when he is a window through which the light of Jesus Christ shines. These are mainly suggestions for a congregation on its own and 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 expect that many of these suggestions could be useful to other Christians celebrating Luther, too, 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 realized that it was not only a practi-

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cal 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 the perfect 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. This could also happen on a more limited scale between partner synods and churches, where need is known and help is willing. 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, just enough to make a small booklet. If I were doing the 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 maybe I’d just choose the Large Catechism. Whatever the final choice would be, I’d like to see all member churches of the Lutheran World Federation 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. Again, this could also happen on a more local level; a synod could undertake joint reading together.

(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 com-

munion 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.” 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. Thus 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 sign of the fact that we do not have to ascend to God by our own efforts, because God descends to us. As I have learned something of Lutheranism in Latin America and Africa, I have been 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 God and Lord Jesus became truly human, and in that human body truly was 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, but here it is: I would like each and every congregation of Lutherans to be reconfirmed. 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. In any case, it is simply an affirmation of the baptism that many of us cannot remember, and Luther thought we should all 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. Pastors could make a point of teaching 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.⁹ In the re-confirmation service they would have the chance 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 to 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 service; 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 you will be inspired with a great idea to give life to Luther’s theological commitments!

But whatever we Lutherans decide to do in 2017—and before and after that significant year—may it above all contribute to the christianization and re-christianization of the whole world, to the greater glory of God. *LF*

Notes

1. A previous version of this essay was delivered at the International Summer Seminar, hosted by the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France. I am very much indebted to the other speakers at the conference, especially Claudete Beise-Ulrich on 2017 in a Latin American Lutheran perspective and Kenneth Mtata on 2017 in an African Lutheran perspective.

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

3. Available in English at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html (accessed October 15, 2012).

4. Available in English at www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Report_Lutheran-Mennonite_Study_Commission.pdf (accessed October 15, 2012). See commentary on this document in previous issues of *Lutheran Forum*: John D. Roth, “Mennonites and Lutherans Re-Remembering the Past,” 44/1 (Spring 2010): 38–42, and Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, “Joyful Exchanges, Part II,” 44/3 (Fall 2010): 2–6.

5. All quotations here from Scott H. Hendrix, “Rerooting the Faith: The Reformation as Re-Christianization,” *Church History* 69/3 (2000): 558–77. See also his book that makes the case at greater length, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 2004).

6. This has already been done, but it wouldn’t hurt to do it again. See, for instance, 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 (accessed July 15, 2012).

7. *Unitatis Redintegratio* §7, available online at www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html (accessed October 15, 2012).

8. Unless, of course, you are a subscriber to *Lutheran Forum*. See Andreas Kurschat, “Protestant Martyrs under the Nazi Regime,” 45/1 (Spring 2011): 38–41.

9. Resources for just such a preaching series can be found at www.lutheranforum.org/extras/small-catechism-preaching-series/ (accessed October 15, 2012).