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LUTHER'S LEGACY AFTER 500 YEARS. SOME THOUGHTS FROM A DUTCH POINT OF VIEW[1]

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Abstrakt. Niniejszy artykuł poświęcony jest Marcinowi Lutrowi, znaczeniu jego pracy oraz postrzeganiu „Roku Lutra" w Holandii z ekumenicznej perspektywy. Czy istnieje ekumeniczna chęć do przeprowadzenia nowej oceny Reformacji? Czy możemy świętować pięćsetlecie protestantyzmu czy tylko pamiętać o tej rocznicy? Nie powinniśmy zapominać o ciemnych stronach Reformacji. Osobiście postrzegam Reformację jako retusz błogosławieństwa. Artykuł opisuje kilka ważnych doświadczeń w życiu Lutra. W roku 2017 potrzebujemy pełnego ekumenicznego zaangażowania jako kościoły przyszłości. Apeluję o to oraz o pozostawienie za sobą starych sporów i dążenie do zjednoczenia.

Słowa kluczowe: protestantyzm, Niderlandy, Marcin Luter, 1517, Reformacja 500, ekumenizm

Abstract. In this article, I focus on Martin Luther's legacy and the ecumenical perspectives of the 'Luther Year' in the Netherlands. Is there willingness to re-evaluate the Reformation in an ecumenical perspective? Can we celebrate 500 years of Protestantism or just commemorate it? We should not forget the dark sides of the Reformation. I see the Reformation as a blessing in disguise. I summarize some important experiences in Luther's life. In 2017, we need wholehearted ecumenical commitment as churches for the future. I make a plea for it, leaving behind our conflicts from the past and looking forward towards communion.

Key words: Protestantism, Netherlands, Martin Luther, 1517, Reformation 500, Ecumenical

In 2015, when I started my work on the 500 years of Reformation in the Netherlands I chose a double focus. On the one hand I wanted to put the focus on the ecumenical perspectives of the 'Reformation Year' in the Netherlands, and on the other hand I wanted to give special attention to the women of the Reformation[2], because these are the two big topics in my life as a theologian. In the beginning it was not the intention of our Church Leadership to focus so much on Luther (we are mostly Calvinists), but the image

1 Rev. Harvey Richardson, Methodist minister in Britain, corrected my English. I thank him for his kind help.

2 M. Gosker, *Vrouwen van het Protestantisme – Tegendraads*, "Ouderlingenblad", 94, 2017, 1081, pp. 10–13.

of Luther's 95 theses is apparently so strong that we could not avoid it. And we had of course already celebrated the Calvin Year in 2009. In March 2017 we organised in the Netherlands an event on the theme *Women of the Reformation* and in September 2017 we organised several (at least four) events on the theme *Rome-Reformation*. In this article I do not offer a complete view on Luther's theology. That would be impossible. I just focus here on some aspects of Luther, the importance of his work, and the ecumenical perspectives of the 'Luther Year' in the Netherlands. Is there any willingness to re-evaluate the Reformation from an ecumenical perspective? Can we celebrate 500 years of Protestantism?

Ecumenical commitment

The Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN) was born in May 2004. Three denominations: the *Netherlands Reformed Church*, the *Reformed Churches in the Netherlands*, and the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands* have been united as the result of a long process of unification, including a number of French-speaking *Walloon* congregations.[3] The greater part of our church (about 2 000 000 members) has a Calvinistic origin.[4] The Evangelical Lutheran part of our church is relatively small.[5] It counts only 55 communities and just 10 000 members. The process of unification has taken more than forty years and was closely linked to Jesus' appeal for unity.[6] In our country we organised the 'Luther Year 2016–2017' in an ecumenical way, because we think this is our ecumenical task, and as the Germans say: *Gebot der Stunde*. From the very beginning the PCN worked together with the *Council of Churches in the Netherlands*, with the Dutch part of the well known *Refo500 International Platform* (with 160 partners all over the world), with the *Catholic Association for Ecumenism* (*Katholieke Vereniging voor Oecumene*), with the *Ecumenical Women's Synod in the Netherlands* (*Oecumenische Vrouwen Synode in Nederland*), and with the Roman Catholic organisation named *Marienburg Association* (*Mariënburgvereniging*).

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3 A. Plaisier/L. Koffeman (eds.), *The Protestant Church in the Netherlands: Church Unity in the 21st Century*, Lit Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wien, Zürich/Berlin, 2014, pp. 11–37.

4 M. van Veen, *Een nieuwe tijd, een nieuwe kerk. De opkomst van het 'calvinisme' in de Lage Landen*, Meinema, Zoetermeer, 2009.

5 M. van Veen, *Luther en calvinistisch Nederland*, Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer, 2017.

6 K. van den Broeke, *Preface*, in: A. Plaisier/L. Koffeman, *"The Protestant Church"*, pp. 1–2, 1.

Celebrate or commemorate?

The PCN as a whole is ecumenically involved, but there are also wings within the PCN who think less ecumenically. Those who are not so ecumenically involved, or those who want to use (or misuse) this 500 years in order to promote especially their own church, may preferably speak of '500 Years of Protestantism' or a 'Jubilee Year' and emphasize only the positive side of the Reformation. From this viewpoint it is emphasised that God has granted our church many blessings in the 500 years of Protestantism. It is the time to be deeply grateful for all the efforts and fruits of the Reformation and to celebrate the jubilee. I agree of course: we have so many reasons indeed to celebrate. To the crown jewels of the Reformation I count: the focus on the Holy Scriptures, the Priesthood of all Believers, the Freedom of a Christian, and last but not least the emphasis on God's free amazing Grace. But we also recognise that the Reformation brought many things which fill us with shame. There was much misunderstanding, prejudice, and many struggles. Consequently, others prefer to speak of the 'Reformation Anniversary' or the 'Reformation Commemoration'. This is because they have developed an ecumenical sensitivity, thereby teaching us that we cannot just look back and celebrate the fruits of the Reformation. We must also be aware of some dark aspects of the Reformation. Can we celebrate? Hardly, I say.[7] And according to René de Reuver, General Secretary of the PCN, it seems inappropriate.[8] Also our own Roman Catholic bishop for ecumenical affairs, Mgr Hans van den Hende, has said the same. If we realize that Protestants and Roman Catholics have been divided and have gone separate ways for the last 500 years, we must regret our failures and confess our guilt. Therefore it is rather difficult to celebrate the 500 years as a festivity.[9] Cardinal Kurt Koch, the head of the Vatican Pontifical Council for promoting Christian Unity, said in 2016 at the opening of the Plenary Assembly, that the schism of the Churches turned out to be exactly the opposite of what the Reformation was

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7 M. Gosker, *500 Jahre Protestantismus in den Niederlanden*, in: H.-G. Link/D. Sattler (eds.), *Zeit der Versöhnung*, Vanden hoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2017, pp. 88–93, 91. F. Trento, *500 Jahre Reformation sind kein Grund zum Feiern*, https://www.kath.ch/newsd/500-jahre-reformation-sind-kein-grund-zum-feiern/ (9th Augustus, 2017).

8 R. de Reuver, *Protestant: samen één. Oecumene behoort tot het DNA van het protestantisme*, "Woord & Weg", August, 2017, p. 16.

9 G. Bausenhart, *Feiern oder begehen? Eine katholische Perspektive auf 1517/2017*, "Ökumenische Rundschau", 61, 2012, 1, pp. 6-22. V. Leppin, *2017 – ein Jubiläum*, "Ökumenische Rundschau", 61, 2012, 1, pp. 23-35, 23.

supposed to be. The 500 years of Reformation can be commemorated, but hardly celebrated, because of the pain and the guilt of the separation.

Blessing in disguise

It is clear that Luther and the other great Reformers did not want to divide the church. They just wanted renewal, refreshment. They wanted to reset the church, as we would say today. Luther knew how much the church needed reformation. As an ecumenical theologian he just wanted to make the church more catholic,[10] but he was also well aware of his own frailty. He knew very well that the Reformation of the church is not our human work, but it is God's own work.[11] Unfortunately, we are all aware that the Reformation was also the work of sinful human people. Despite all good intentions, the Reformation brought to the Netherlands and Europe many struggles and divisions, much violence and aggression. People were called heretics and were sentenced to death. The iconoclastic fury in the Netherlands (1566), for example, was outrageous. There was conflict without communion everywhere. Everything was focused on heresy and heretics. Both parties emphasized the things that separated us from each other instead of looking for what united us.

> We accepted that the Gospel was mixed with the political and economic interests of those in power. Their failures resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. Families were torn apart, people imprisoned and tortured, wars fought and religion and faith misused. Human beings suffered and the credibility of the Gospel was undermined with consequences that still impact us today. We must deeply regret the evil things that Catholics and Lutherans have mutually done to each other.[12]

However, all things considered, the Reformation can be seen as a blessing in disguise. I am very grateful for the fact that, for the first time in history, we can commemorate the Reformation centenary in a truly ecumenical way.

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10 J. Vercammen, Archbishop of the Old Catholic Church in the Netherlands during a Summer School of the Protestant Theological University, gathering in the Dominican Monastery in Huissen, 11th July, 2017.

11 H.J. Selderhuis, *Luther. Een mens zoekt God*, Uitgeverij De Banier, Apeldoorn, 2016, [further HJS], p. 71.

12 *Common Prayer. From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*. Text by the Liturgical Task Force of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, p. 14.

We cannot just celebrate and if we do, we do it in a different way than in previous times and contexts. "What happened in the past cannot be changed, but what is remembered of the past and how it is remembered can, with the passage of time, indeed change. Remembrance makes the past present. While the past itself is unalterable, the presence of the past in the present is alterable".[13] We are not able to tell a different history now, but we are able to tell that same history differently. This is precisely what we should do. The Reformation anniversary 2017 is different from previous Reformation centenaries. The first centenary of the Reformation took place in 1617 on the eve of the Thirty Years' War, with numerous victims. In those circumstances we can imagine that all parties emphasized their own identities. During the second centenary (1717) Luther was 'praised to the heavens'. Both in Germany[11] and in the Netherlands[12] a lot of commemorative medals were made, bearing a text in honour of Luther and his teachings. During the third centenary in 1817 (after the French Revolution and the fall of Napoleon), Luther was portrayed as a truly strong national hero. And in 1917 (in the middle of the first World War), Luther was considered – together with Bismarck and Hindenburg – as one of the founding fathers of the National German Empire, and the Luther song *A Mighty Fortress is our God* was misused as a military song.[14] Of course, it was not seen that way in the Netherlands. Although we are mainly Calvinists, Luther's song was also popular in the Netherlands until c. 1970. I think we should reinstate it in an ecumenical way, as a song against the power of all evil in the world. In 2017 the Reformation centenary in the Netherlands is mainly being celebrated in an ecumenical context. Our Roman Catholic friends are greatly interested in it. If I were asked by them to briefly explain the significance of Luther and the Reformation, what would I say? It is impossible to be comprehensive, since there are so many themes and biographies[15], but I would mainly tell them the following.

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13 *From Conflict to Communion*. Lutheran – Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, Leipzig, 2013, II, § 16.

14 K. Breitenborn, *Zwei "Deutsche Eichen" – Bismarcks 100. Geburtstag 1915 und das Reformationsjubiläum 1917 im Zeichen des Ersten Weltkrieges*, in: F. Kadell, B. Kießling, B. Lüdkemeier (eds), *Lutherland Sachen-Anhalt*, Mitteldeutscher Verlag, Halle, 2015, pp. 301–327. I thank Dr. J.D. Wassenaar who draw my attention to: M. Fischer, *Religion, Nation, Krieg. Der Lutherchoral 'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott' zwischen Befreiungskriegen und Erstem Weltkrieg* (Münster/New York 2014).

15 S. Hiebsch, M. van Wijngaarden, *Luther, zijn leven, zijn werk*, Uitgeverij Kok, Utrecht 20173. L. Roper, *Luther. Een biografie*, Uitgeverij Ambo/Anthos, Amsterdam, 2017.

Luther's theses

I would say: the Reformation is not just a date, but an ongoing process and we are obliged not only to look backwards, but also to look forwards, – a new era has begun. What we now call the Reformation started in Wittenberg and soon spread out across the whole of Germany, Europe, and later throughout the world. We can hardly overestimate its significance for the life of the church, for politics, culture, music and for all kinds of art, sculpture, architecture, and painting. On 31st October, 1517, Luther nailed his famous 95 theses[16] to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. Probably he never did so literally, because no historical evidence of it has ever been found. But the 95 theses were published immediately after Luther wrote them, and they rapidly spread throughout Europe. And so – to Luther's own surprise – a crisis arose. Luther wrote his 95 theses in Latin in order to start a discussion with his colleagues at the University of Wittenberg about the indulgences trade, a practice which brought the church of the 16th century a great deal of money. Ecclesiastical punishments were imposed on the people, and no one could escape this regime. Many people thought that by buying indulgences they could save their souls and secure a place in heaven. Luther knew very well that this was not the official teaching of the church. No Pope could impose or waive punishment other than that which he himself had imposed. But Luther criticised anyone who claimed that fines for the dying were valid in purgatory. In his theses he stated: "Ignorant and wicked are the actions of those priests who impose canonical penances on the dead in purgatory" (thesis 10). "This changing of the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory is quite evidently one of the tares that were sown while the bishops slept" (thesis 11). "In former times the canonical penalties were imposed not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition" (thesis 12). So in fact Luther was defending the church's authority and he was deeply disturbed that the ecclesiastical authorities thought differently. Division in the church was the last thing he wanted. He wanted to renew the church from within. In his own specific and pertinent way, Luther protested loudly against the trade in indulgences and other abuses in Roman Catholic theology and practice. Ordinary people still had the idea that they could earn their eternal salvation with good works or buy it with money, and so they

16 H.J. Selderhuis, *De 95 stellingen (1517)*, in: H.J. Selderhuis, *Luther Verzameld*. Deel I, Uitgeverij Kok, Utrecht, 2016, pp. 35–45. Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum [further LV, I], WA 1, pp. 233–238.

paid promptly. Luther knew that our eternal salvation is only in God's hands and that it is impossible to pay an amount of money for it. But Luther also saw quite sharply how greed is the twin brother of money. Money is a good servant, but a bad master, and the love of money is the root of all evil, even within the church.

Three important texts

Who was Martin Luther (1483-1546)? What was it that drove him? He was a gifted writer, that's for certain. In April 1518 he wrote a pamphlet about the indulgences: *A Sermon on Indulgences and Grace*.[17] Within two years it was printed 22 times. This sermon has been seen as the start of the Reformation movement. In 1520 Luther produced twenty titles. Three of them were the most important and fundamental treatises – in Latin as well as in German – that characterized his theology of the Reformation. In August 1520 an open letter appeared: *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*.[18] It was already obvious that the ecclesial hierarchy had not listened to his complaints. Consequently Luther now approached the political leadership and asked the secular authorities to support him in his attempt to reform the church. If the church leadership did not wish to cooperate, there was only one way to proceed: the Reformation should be supported by ordinary believers, especially those who had influence and authority. Two months later came *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (October 1520).[19] Here Luther was severely attacking the papacy. In his view the pope and the Roman Curia had misused their power by numerous unbiblical regulations and traditions, and were transforming church governance into a sacramental system of coercion and control. Papal absolutism also claimed many privileges for its own sake. Then a third important text was published in November 1520: *On the Freedom of a Christian*, wherein Luther expressed the total freedom

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17 C.-J. Smits, *Een preek over aflaat en genade. Stellingen over de vergeving van zonden* (1518), in: LV, I, pp. 112–121. *Ein Sermon von den Anblass und Gnade*, 1518, WA 1, pp. 243–246, WA 1, pp. 630–633.

18 D. Timmerman, *Aan de christelijke edelen van de Duitse natie, over het herstel van de christelijke stand* (1520), in: LV, I, pp. 211–300. *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Besserung*, WA 6, pp. 404–469.

19 H.J. Selderhuis, *De Babylonische gevangenschap van de kerk (1520)*, in: LV, I, pp. 301–407. *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium Martini Lutheri. Von der babylonischen Gefangenschaft der Kirche*, WA 6, pp. 497–573.

of every Christian life.[20] A Christian is the most free of all and subject to no one, but at the same time the most humble servant of all and a servant of everyone.

Martin Luther, a phenomenon

Luther was a gifted writer. He wrote an endless stream of publications during his lifetime. He was a fascinating personality, a great theologian and a hard worker. He was spiritual and creative, he had musical talent, he was intelligent and humorous, but on the other hand also quick-tempered and obstinate. He had a rich vocabulary, great faith and deep insights, but he was not diplomatic. Sometimes it would have been better if he had kept his mouth shut! He had a coarse tongue, had a difficult character and he did not make things easy for himself or others. With advancing years, things became worse than ever. The most interesting insights were discussed during meal-times. In Luther's household the meals were often shared by students, colleagues, or visitors from abroad. These conversations (*Table Talk*) became world famous. Luther loved the good life; he was certainly not an ascetic. He had gigantic self awareness and a big ego. He had a phenomenal knowledge of the Bible, a wonderful way of preaching and he gave fascinating lectures to his students. He had so many new thoughts and ideas. And what he said was heard indeed, not only in Wittenberg, but all over Europe. Almost everything he stated was immediately printed and distributed throughout Europe, thanks to the invention of the printing-press some decades earlier. It was also very helpful that from 1516 everyone could use the National Post, which was founded in 1491. This gave 'wings' to the Reformation.

Luther was neither an angel nor a saint. He was a man full of errors and he made many mistakes. He was a sinner 'first class', so to say. He was very much aware of his own shortcomings and therefore he was constantly struggling with himself. But he had to accept himself and others as well. "You have to take him as he is", John Calvin once said.[21] Nearly everyone had quarrels and disagreements with Luther, including his own family, especially his father, who had a difficult personality too. It is obvious where Luther got that from!

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20 C. Boerke, *De vrijheid van een christen* (1520), in: LV, I, pp. 408–451, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*, WA 7, pp. 49–73.

21 HJS, p. 7.

As early as 1519 he wrote a sermon about marriage as a precious gift of God.[22] Six years later he married Katharina von Bora (1499–1552) in June, 1525.[23] This caused a major scandal. No wonder: how could a former Catholic monk – already middle-aged – marry a former Catholic nun sixteen years his junior? Two years earlier Katharina von Bora – together with eight other nuns – escaped from the monastery Marienthron in Nimbschen and fled to Wittenberg. Katharina was a fine partner for her demanding husband. She was intelligent, self-confident, with a critical discerning mind and she really settled everything on his behalf. At the same time she always could bring out the best in him. He called her affectionately *Herr Käthe*, and that is significant. Of course Luther received contradictions, objections, and protests not only from his own wife. He endured many attacks during his lifetime and he had to be on the defensive constantly. He withstood princes, nobles, and other persons of high rank. He was persuasive and stuck firmly to his principles: *Here I stand. I can do no other*. He wrote some very beautiful spiritual songs, but he could also be incredibly sniping at everything and everyone. What he wrote about Jews, especially in 1543, *About the Jews and their lies*, is disgusting and indefensible. Luther's appeal to burn their synagogues and schools can never be justified.[24] In short, Martin Luther was a man with many flaws and defects, but also blessed with a deep faith and a huge persuasive power.

The young Luther

Luther was baptised on 11th November, 1483, the name day of Saint Martin and therefore he was called Martin. He had been born a day earlier on 10th November. His mother was Margarethe Lindemann, his father Hans Lüder (Loder, Lotter, Lutter, Ludher or Lauther).[25] They lived in Eisleben.

22 T. Noort, *Een preek over de huwelijkse staat*, in: H.J. Selderhuis, *Luther Verzameld*. Deel II, Utrecht, 2016, pp. 1044–1052, [further LV, II], *Ein Sermon von dem ehelichen Stand*, WA 2, pp. 166–171.

23 M. Treu, *Katharina von Bora*. Biographien zur Reformation, Drei Kastanienverlag, Wittenberg, 20107. H.-C. Sens, *Katharina Luther und Torgau und weitere Beiträge zum Katharina-Luther-Haus*, Torgauer Geschichtsverein E.V., Torgau, 2006.

24 K.H. Büchner, B.P. Kammermeier, R. Schlotz, R. Zwilling (eds.), *M. Luther, Von den Juden und ihren Lügen (1543). Erstmals in heutigem Deutsch mit Originaltext und Begriffserläuterungen*, Alibri, Aschaffenburg, 2016. M. Mulder, *Over de Joden en hun leugens (1543)*, in: LV, I, pp. 645–663. *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, WA 53, pp. 412–552, 655.

25 HJS p. 12.

As a child Luther grew up with a strong devotion to the Virgin Mary. But in his theology Mary had a different place, and later he rejected the practice of praying to Mary. He brought her high position down to earth, because he wanted to give all the glory to God. But he also acknowledged that God had done great things through Mary, the mother of God (theotokos). He wrote a beautiful commentary on the *Magnificat*. Everybody should know that God chose a Cinderella (Aschenbrödel) to become the mother of God (Immanuel).[26] But to the fundamental insights of his theology also belonged the conviction that Jesus Christ was central. God gives us all the space and the grace and the freedom through Jesus Christ and in Christ alone. According to legend he prayed in that famous storm: Holy Anna, help me, I will become a monk. Was the young Luther more attached to Saint Anne than to the Virgin Mary?

Luther grew up in late Medieval times, a period filled with many new inventions, but also with devils and witches, as we know them from the paintings of our Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch. People were frightened at that time. They feared the Last Judgement, and priests were preaching hell and damnation. Also the Black Death was ravaging Europe.[27] Sometimes – at a rough estimate – a third of the European population died from this terrible plague. Times were hard and a culture of fear 'ruled the roost'. In the church much emphasis was laid on sin, repentance and confession. People had to confess and atone for all their sins. The young Luther was suffering under this burden. He was a serious young man and he wanted to do all that was right. He did his utmost, but if it went wrong time and time again, it often made him desperate. His father had wanted his son to study Law, in order to ensure a good future for him, but after a spiritual experience during a violent storm Martin decided – against the wishes of his parents – to follow his calling. He would go into the monastery and be a monk.

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26 J. Boendermaker, *Het Magnificat. Luthers uitleg van de lofzang van Maria (1521)*, in: H.J. Selderhuis, LV, II, pp. 812–868, 812, WA 7, pp. 545–601. *Het Magnificat in de volkstaal overgezet en uitgelegd door Maarten Luther (1521).* Met een inleiding van prof. H. Riedlinger, Unistad, Antwerpen, 1983.

27 F. Kadell, *Blicke auf das Alltagsleben Martin Luthers und seiner Zeit*, in: F. Kadell, B. Kießling, B. Lüdkemeier (eds.), Lutherland Sachen-Anhalt, Mitteldeutscher Verlag, Halle, 2015, pp. 108–147, 114.

Luther became a monk

In 1505 he entered the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt.[28] There he got, supposedly for the first time, a Bible in his hands, and his eye fell on the book of Samuel. He found it captivating. He read and read and read. He exercised himself in the biblical texts and in the scholastic theologies of his time: Johannes Duns Scotus, Gabriel Biel, William of Ockham, Petrus Lombardus[29], and he read also Thomas Aquinas, at least according to O.H. Pesch.[30] As a young theologian he developed an aversion to the philosophy of Aristotle, which was very much in vogue, yet he still retained something of Aristotle.[31] But Luther had a genuine preference for Augustine. In 1507 he was ordained priest. And even long after 1517 he remained a monk. He wore a monk's habit until 1523. The regular monastic life, the seasons, the prayers, the fasting, the liturgy, the awareness and respect for sacred things and holiness formed him, but his fears did not leave him alone. He suffered under his thought, convinced he was not good enough. For God you never do well enough, however much you try to pray and follow all the rules. God's punishing justice pursued the young Luther. Christ was for him a severe judge, who will judge every man on the day of his Last Judgment. Thereby Luther suffered under self-blame and self-torment.

Luther's discovery

Luther studied the Bible and gradually discovered its liberating message, that God does not want us to be perfect, but accepts us in grace (*Sola Gratia*). God gives us all the space and freedom in Jesus Christ and in Christ alone (*Solus Christus*). He learned and taught that we come to Christ through the Bible (*Sola Scriptura*). Luther recognised something which is still very real ev-

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28 The oldest report of Luther's entrance into the monastery comes from Crotus Rubianus, confer C. Augustijn, *Luthers intrede in het klooster*, Kok, Kampen, 1968, p. 6.

29 G. den Hertog, *Disputatie tegen de scholastieke theologie (1517)*, in: LV, I, pp. 25–34. *Disputation gegen die Scholastische Theologie, 1517*, WA 1, pp. 224–228.

30 O.H. Pesch, *Martin Luther, Thomas von Aquin und die reformatorische Kritik an der Scholastik. Zur Geschichte und Wirkungsgeschichte eines Missverständnisses mit weltgeschichtlichen Folgen*, vorgelegt in der Sitzung der Joachim Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften vom 1. Juli 1994, 12, 1994, 3, Hamburg, 1994.

31 E.H. Erikson, *De jonge Luther*, De Arbeiderspers, Amsterdam, 1967, p. 94.

ery day – the actuality of our justification.[32] We are both justified and sinful at the same time (*Simul iustus ac peccator*). For God we are good as we are, even if we make big mistakes. Christ has taken the burden from us and therefore we are free. Free for God and free for each other. Luther also said that no one has the right to rule over someone else. No one is ever somebody else's servant. At the same time, he stated, a believer is always willing to help. Voluntarily. A lovely paradox! Luther's big discovery was that God is not always demanding and judging us. The righteousness of God is a gift for all believers in Jesus Christ. We get everything, just for nothing. Romans 1:17: "The righteous will live by faith". By faith alone (*Sola fide*), Luther stated and he resisted vehemently, after being criticised, that in his Bible translation he had smuggled in the word *only*. That was true indeed, because *only* is not in the original Greek Bible text. But in Luther's opinion a Bible translation had to be clear and in this way he provided clarity. So he persisted: *by faith alone*. We are all sinners. Even if you do things wrongly or worse, even if you show criminal behaviour, Jesus is our Saviour. By faith alone you receive God's goodness. God will give you his love and grace, you only need to open yourself to it. If you are doing well, do it happily. To do good works is not a *conditio sine qua non*, but a sign of joy and gratitude.[33] We are not righteous or holy from ourselves as we are, but in Christ we are made righteous and holy. We were poor sinners. Christ was righteous. Christ took our sins upon himself and brought salvation and freedom for all believers: *the wonderful exchange*.[34] This is our faith, and thanks to God's grace we bring glory to God (*Soli Deo gloria*). The five sola's are seen as the crown jewels of the Reformation.[35] Luther himself did not say or write it that way, but it is certainly derived from his mental legacy.[36] In 1517 Luther decided to write his name in the future as *Luther*.

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32 H. de Leede, *De theoloog van het kruis spreekt de werkelijkheid uit. De prediking van de rechtvaardiging van de goddeloze*, "Kontekstueel", 31, 2017, 3, pp. 10–13, 13.

33 R. den Hertog-van 't Spijker, *Over de goede werken (1520)*, in: LV, I, pp. 126–210. *Von den guten Werken*, WA 6, 204–250. C.P. Burger, *Over de goede werken*, in: J.T. Bakker/K. Zwanepol (eds.), *"Door het donkere venster van het geloof"*, Meinema, Zoetermeer, 1993, pp. 115–124.

34 R. Schwager, *Der wunderbare Tausch. Zur Geschichte und Deutung der Erlösungslehre*, Kösel, München, 1986. J.T. Bakker, *Beeld dat blijft spreken: De vrolijke ruil*, in: K. Zwanepol (ed.), *Luthers erfenis*. Teksten van het Luthercongres 22 Februari 1996 te Kampen, Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer 19962, pp. 88–106.

35 H. Zorgdrager, *"Lecture at the Reformation Event of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands"*, held on 4th March, 2017, in Appingedam.

36 But it is also said, that they are exclusive (Exklusivpartikel) and their sharpness needs to be softened. It should be: Christ with the Church, Grace with Freedom, the Word with the Sacraments, the Holy Scriptures with the tradition and Faith with Love. C. Link,

Luther is similar to the Greek ἐθγυηέκιολ, which means: freed.[37] From then on Martin Luther was a free and freed man, living by grace alone. But at the same time always in temptation (tentatio) and standing under the Cross.[38]

Luther not the first one to reform the Church

Of course, there were in Europe many predecessors of the Reformation who also wanted to reform the church. The Reformation is not a date. It is a process of renewal that had already started well before 31st October, 1517, and is still going on.[39] In Italy Francis of Assisi wanted a church without great pomp and circumstance like Petrus Valdes in North of Italy. In Bohemia Johannes Hus fought against abuses, such as the trade in church posts, relics, and indulgences. The English reformer John Wycliff wanted to go back to the Bible and the Church Fathers. It is interesting, that in our country Geert Groote and Thomas à Kempis were pioneers of an important spiritual movement (*Devotio Moderna*), which pursued Church renewal and personal sanctification. This Modern Devotion movement has actually been the real Reformation movement in Netherlands, you could say, with far more influence than Luther ever had in our country. Luther fought against the trade in indulgences, but Geert Groote protested in 1374 against the construction of the famous Domtower in Utrecht. He wrote a protest note: *Contra Turrim Traiectensem*. Money, intended for the poor, should not be used for the haughtiness of that monstrous tower. So he was strongly opposed to the collection of the money which was held in order to pay for its construction, and nobody should obey the bishop, when it came to such overly expensive buildings. But Geert Groote was no Luther. In order not to risk his church career he never published the document. Only one manuscript was preserved, and it finally resurfaced after six

"Umstrittene Reformation- Thesen zum Jubiläum 2017", in: H.-G. Link/D. Sattler (eds.), *Zeit der Versöhnung*, Vanden hoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2017, pp. 15–20, 19.

37 C. Link, *"Umstrittene Reformation"*, p. 17.

38 T. Karttunen, *"Die Luther-Lektüre Bonhoeffers"*, in: K. Grünwald//C. Tierz/U. Hahn (eds.) Bonhoeffer und Luther. Zentrale Themen ihrer Theologie, VELKD, Hannover 2017, pp. 9–31, 13–14.

39 It is often forgotten, that also a reform movement at the Roman Catholic side came under the inspiring leadership of Carolus Borromeus (1538–1584) and later Franciscus de Sales (1567–1622).

centuries.[40] All these forerunners paved the way to what became the Reformation in the end. But it was Luther who hit the nerve. He went to the heart of the matter. The effect of his 95 theses was – so to say – more by luck than judgement. You might call it an accident, because of all the additional negative consequences, such as schisms, the hunting of heretics, the Inquisition, iconoclasm and pyres. But one thing is for certain: the time was ripe for Church renewal. Somebody had to show up. Someone like Martin Luther, who had the faith, the personality, the intelligence, the energy, the character structure, and the intransigence to say: *Here I stand, I can do no other*. Admittedly he needed to be corrected by his friend and fellow reformer Philipp Melanchthon, who was much more subtle. But Luther was the man who hit a nerve. He said exactly what was needed to be said at the time. He was unsurpassed. He touched the core and so he got a Reformation movement going, which changed Europe forever.

Luther excommunicated, but the Reformation goes on

Popes and emperors had to determine their position in front of the man from Wittenberg. In June 1520 Pope Leo X sent Luther a warning: *Exsurge Domine*. The bull's name is derived from a Psalm text: "Arise, O Lord against the enemy". It was clear who the enemy was. Luther now had to revoke his position. If not, things didn't look good for him. But Luther didn't think of it! He burned the papal bull on 12th December of that same year.[41] On 3th January, 1521, Luther was resolutely excommunicated by Pope Leo X. His excommunication was formally pronounced in the bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem*. For political reasons Emperor Maximilian had not taken action in the former years. His successor Emperor Charles V was crowned in October 1520. Three months after the papal excommunication, Luther was interrogated at the Imperial Diet in Worms by Emperor Charles V, who placed Luther under the Imperial Ban. From now on he was an outlaw. Anyone could kill him, unpunished. These were the rules in the *Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation*. Sometimes even this assumption emerged: if the Dutch pope Adrianus VI

40 Geert Groote's Treatise *'Contra Turrim Traiectensem'* was found backc in 1967, http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/grot001rrpo01_01/grot001rrpo01_01_0002.php (3th Augustus 2017).

41 M. Raveling, *Waarom de boeken van de paus en zijn volgelingen door doctor Martin Luther zijn verbrand (1520)*, in: LV, I, pp. 452–463. *Warum des Papstes und seiner Bücher von D.M. Luther verbrannt sind*, 1520, WA 7, pp. 161–182.

had not died so early after a short papacy (he became pope on the 9th January, 1522, and died on the 14th September, 1523), could he have prohibited the schism and could he have saved the renewal of the Church?[42] I doubt it, for it was already too late. Pope Adrianus (Adriaan Floriszoon Boeyens) was not insensitive to the abuses of the past. He was well aware of the need for reform. He even composed a *Confession* of the sins of the hierarchy and had it read at the Imperial Diet in Nuremberg on 3th January, 1523, by his legate, Chieregati.[43] But the pope would not hear of any compromise. On the contrary, he wrote letters to Erasmus and Eck, asking them for their help in the battle against Luther. And he also confirmed Luther's condemnation. Luther was furious and wrote a pamphlet against him, calling him *The Antichrist* and the *Donkeypope of Leuven*. Luther was lucky to have the strong support of the powerful Elector of Saxony Frederick the Wise, who always remained faithful to the Mother Church. Nevertheless he was Luther's patron and as a precaution he arranged for Luther to be kidnapped, and Luther was kept in the Wartburg Castle, under the name of *Jonker Jörg*. It was here that Luther had time and opportunity to translate the Bible into the vernacular German language. In eleven weeks the New Testament was ready. Quite a performance. Luther's opposition to the trade in indulgences was the immediate cause of the Reformation, and his protest was very effective. But also some opposing forces manifested themselves. In 1529 the Reformation was threatened to be nipped in the bud. A violent protest came up from princes and cities, who disagreed with the decision to curtail religious freedom. This is known as the Protest of Speyer. And so the word *Protestant* was born. Not only those following the Reformation, but also those who remained in the Roman Catholic Church had to deal with the situation. Erasmus remained a Roman Catholic, but he developed many innovative thoughts. A common saying is: 'Erasmus has laid the egg of the Reformation and Martin Luther has hatched it out'.

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42 H. Berkhof, *Geschiedenis der kerk*, Callenbach, Nijkerk, 19505, pp. 197–198. T. Geurts, *De Nederlandse paus, Adrianus van Utrecht 1459–1523*, Uitgeverij Balans, Amsterdam, 2017. A. Bodar and P. van Geest also take this position.

43 H. Scott Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy. Stages in a Reformation Conflict*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1981, p. 142.

Luther's spirituality

What can we say about Luther's spirituality? His life was a big search. He was looking for God all his life. He struggled with the big question: how do I find a merciful God? He wrote numerous spiritual songs; many of them are still in our Dutch Worship Book and are sung in our services. Luther was also a comforter.[44] He wrote in July 1523 a comforting letter to fellow believers in the Netherlands. After the Imperial Diet in Worms the Antwerp Augustinian monastery was destroyed by the Inquisition and those who were in sympathy with the Reformation had to flee or recant. Hendrik Vos and Jan van Esschen did neither. They were burned as heretics on the marketplace in Brussels. As Luther heard of it, he was very distressed. He wrote a consoling song.[45] And he also wrote a comforting letter *To the Christians in the Netherlands*.[46] Luther also knew about mysticism, though he was not a mystic himself. And he was a man of prayer. For him prayer was of vital importance. On 18th January, 1518 he wrote to his friend Georg Spalatin, who was the secretary of Frederick the Wise, that it is impossible to understand the Holy Scriptures solely by keen insight. Prayer. You must always start with prayer, asking the Lord that something will really happen with his words. Not for your own glory, but to the glory of the Lord.[47] And you should pray all the time, everywhere, but prayer is most powerful and strong if people are praying together.[48] For Luther the celebration of the Eucharist was really intense and holy. He was extremely nervous when he celebrated the Eucharist for the first time. But theologically he saw the sacraments misused as chains

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44 A. Bas, *Troost voor wie ten zeerste aangevochten wordt*, in: LV, II, pp. 1090–1093, WA 7, pp. 785–789. S. Hiebsch, *Een kort troostbriefje voor christenen, dat zij zich in het gebed niet van de wijs laten brengen*, in: LV, II, pp. 1094–1096, *Ein kurzer Trostzettel für die Christen, dass sie sich im Gebet nicht beirren lassen*, WA 51, pp. 455–456.

45 Ein neues Lied heben wir an, – das walt Gott, unser Herre – zu singen, was Gott hat getan zu seinem Lob und Ehre. Zu Brüssel in dem Niederland wohl durch zwei junge Knaben hat er sein wunder g'macht bekannt, die er mit seinen Gaben so reichlich hat gezieret. HJS, p. 182.

46 Luther wrote "allen lieben brudren ynn Christo, so ynn Holland, Barband, und Flandren sind", *An die Christian ym Nidderland*, WA B 12, pp. 73–80.

47 S. Hiebsch, *'Luther en de Schrift'*, "Alleen de Schrift", 1, 2017, pp. 15–22. J.P. Boendermaker, *Luther. Brieven uit de beslissende jaren van zijn leven*, Ten Have, Baarn, 1982, pp. 79–81, http://www.theologienet.nl/documenten/Luther%20brieven.pdf.

48 "Man kann und soll überall, an allen Orten, und alle Stunden beten; aber das Gebet ist nirgendwo so kräftig und stark, als wenn der ganze Haufe einträchtiglich mit einander betet." M. Luther, *Predigt Dr. Martin Luthers gehalten am 5. Oktober 1544 zur Einweihung der Schlosskirche Torgau*, A. Rothe (ed.), Druckerei Kopielski, Torgau, 2006, p. 7.

and so he developed a different view on the sacraments and introduced the term *Supper*, which is not a biblical word. Not only the clergy, but all believers could now receive both the bread and the wine, he argued in *De Captivitate Babylonica*.[49] The Bohemian reformer Johannes Hus had already introduced this earlier. Luther was certainly familiar with mysticism and he could also appreciate it. He knew the works of Bernard of Clairvaux, Johannes Tauler, Meister Eckhart and the work *Theologia Deutsch*, that he wrongly attributed to Tauler. Luther was also familiar with mystical language. The Lutheran theologian H.-M. Barth gave us a good example of it. In a sermon on Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:17)[50] Luther writes in this mystical language. In those few sentences we recognize great mystical words, which were important in medieval mysticism, like pouring, sweetness, comforting, creature, abyss. Luther himself also had had a special mystical experience. He went up into the third heaven. Yet Luther was not woolly or bigoted. It is well known how he disliked and fought against what he called the "Schwärmer". He just wanted to base his theology on the Scriptures and he avoided the pitfall to rely more on mystical experience than on faith. For him it remained anyway: Sola fide. By faith alone. Luther died in 1543. I saw his handwritten testament with my own eyes in Budapest. Katharina was the only heiress, but she did not get anything, because Luther's will was against the law of that time.[51]

Renewed ecumenical commitment

After 500 years Luther is still speaking to us. His strength, his faith, his theology and his songs can inspire us to be free Christians willing to serve the world. As protestants we are various and always different. Diversity is

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49 H.J. Selderhuis, *De Babylonische gevangenschap (1520)*, in: LV, I, pp. 301–407, 311. WA 6, pp. 497–573. C.J. Munter, *Het avondmaal bij Luther*, Drukkerij Oppenheim, Groningen, 1954, p. 11. WA 6, p. 507.

50 In einer Predigt über *"Dies ist mein lieber Sohn"* führt er aus: "Mit diesen Worten macht Gott aller Welt Herz lachend und fröhlich und durchgießt alle Kreatur mit lauter göttlicher Süßigkeit und Trost... Nun wie könnte sich Gott mehr ausschütten und lieblicher und süßer dargeben? Müsste uns da nicht das Herz "vor Freude in hunderttausend Stücke zerspringen"? Denn da würde der Mensch "in den Abgrund des väterlichen Herzens sehen". H.-M. Barth, *Mystik bei Luther*, in: Luther, "Zeitschrift der Luther-Gesellschaft", 88, 2017, 1, pp. 48–58, 55.

51 S. Hiebsch, *Maarten Luthers laatste wil*, in: K. Zwanepol (ed.), *Luthers erfenis*. Teksten van het Luthercongres 22 Februari 1996 te Kampen, Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer 19962, pp. 145–156.

typically protestant, in a positive and a negative way, but in our times the search for unity is getting stronger.[52] The Reformation year can be used to strengthen our ecumenical relations and ties. We are grateful for the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999.[53] In 2017 also the World Communion of Reformed Churches signed the Agreement. In the Netherlands we want to use this Reformation year for the healing of memories,[54] and the removal of misunderstandings and prejudices. We work cooperatively together with a new ecumenical vision. Cardinal Koch reminded us that ecumenical commitment is one of the main priorities.[55] Ecumenism is an essential part of the church's mission. Without hope for unity faith would be lost. In Amsterdam at the start of the Reformation Year it was emphasised that, for the first time in history, the Roman Catholic Church is officially taking part in the commemoration of the Reformation.[56] The church leadership of both sides emphasizes this with joy. On the same day, 31st October 2016, Pope Francis came to Sweden to be present at the opening of the Reformation year in Lund. Modern technology is wonderful, so we could follow this significant event partly by streaming on a screen in Amsterdam. A new ecumenical liturgy was celebrated in Lund: a common prayer, specially made for this occasion by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for promoting Christian Unity. It appeared together with a new Study Document: *From Conflict to Communion*. Now it is time to put our conflicts behind us. "*Restoration of Unity is today's Reformation.*" These words come from a joint declaration in the Netherlands, which came out on 18th March, 2017.[57] Another (new) ecumenical joint declaration (I call it an ecumenical Love Letter) was released in Utrecht on 31st October, 2017. It is friendly and nice, but not more

52 M. Gosker, *500 Jahre Protestantismus in den Niederlanden*, in: H.-G. Link/D. Sattler (eds.), *Zeit der Versöhnung*, Vanden hoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2017, pp. 88–93, 88.

53 http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html, (16th August 2017). H.-G. Link, *Aufbruch zu einem "Jahr der Versöhnung" zwischen den Konfessionen*. Ein Vorschlag im Namen des Altenberger Ökumenisches Gesprächskreises für das Jahr 2017, in: H.-G. Link/D. Sattler (eds.), *Zeit der Versöhnung*, Vanden hoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2017, pp. 27–42, 27.

54 M. Hein *Impulse aus der Reformation für die Zukunft der Kirche*, "Perspectief", 37, 2017, pp. 27–38, 29.

55 We can read it in the first sentence of the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 21 Nov. 1964, https://www.rkdocumenten.nl/rkdocs/index.php?mi=600&doc=618.

56 http://www.raadvankerken.nl/pagina/4179/oecumene_bij_jubileum-500, (20th July 2017).

57 This declaration was presented in Nieuwkuijk by G. de Korte, bishop of 's Hertogenbosch and K. van den Broeke, President of the General Synod of the PCN.



Lucas Cranach the Elder,
'The Reformers Luther and Hus Giving Communion to the Princes'

innovative and not more courageous than the earlier one. If Protestants and Roman Catholics could finally know, recognize, and accept that what unites us is greater than what is dividing us, we would be more and more aware of the gift of God, and that we are one in Christ. In *From Conflict to Communion*,[58] we read: "The Church is the body of Christ. As there is

58 *Common Prayer. From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017.* Text by the Liturgical Task Force of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, § 219.

only one Christ, so also he has only one body". In the programme of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands which we organised in September 2017 in the South of our country there was a rich and varied Reformation Programme with several activities, focusing on the relationship between Protestants and Roman Catholics.[59] I find it really wonderful that so many Roman Catholic people (including bishops) want to give their cooperation to commemoration of the Reformation 2017 in the Netherlands.

Jesus Christ, Lord of the Church,
send your Holy Spirit!
Illumine our hearts
and heal our memories.
O Holy Spirit: help us to rejoice
in the gifts that have come
to the Church through the Reformation,
prepare us to repent
for the dividing walls
that we, and our forebears, have built,
and equip us for common witness
and service in the world.
Amen[60]

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59 Activities in Bergen op Zoom, Oosterhout, 's-Hertogenbosch and Gennep. Speakers: Prof. Dr. Martin Hein, Lutheran Bishop of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen Waldeck, Mgr Dr. Hans van den Hende, Bishop of Rotterdam, Dr. Arjan Plaisier, former General Secretary of the PCN, Mgr Dr. Jan Liesen, Bishop of Breda and Mgr Dr. Gerard de Korte, Bishop of 's-Hertogenbosch.

60 *Common Prayer*, p. 12.

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Dziedzictwo Lutra po upływie 500 lat. Kilka refleksji z holenderskiej perspektywy

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł poświęcony jest Marcinowi Lutrowi, znaczeniu jego pracy oraz postrzeganiu „Roku Lutra" w Holandii z ekumenicznej perspektywy. Czy istnieje ekumeniczna chęć do przeprowadzenia nowej oceny Reformacji? Kościół protestancki w Holandii jest ekumeniczne zaangażowany. Czy możemy świętować pięćsetlecie protestantyzmu (1517–2017), czy raczej musimy upamiętniać tę rocznicę? Nie powinniśmy zapominać o ciemnych stronach Reformacji. Osobiście postrzegam Reformację jako retusz błogosławieństwa. W roku 2017 potrzebujemy pełnego ekumenicznego zaangażowania jako kościoły przyszłości. Katolicy są bardzo oddani idei „Roku Reformacji" w Holandii. Co powiedziałabym moim katolickim przyjaciołom, jeśli zapytaliby mnie o znaczenie i wpływ Lutra? Wskazuję na jego najważniejsze osiągnięcia: trzy podstawowe prace napisane w 1520 roku: *Do chrześcijańskiej szlachty narodu niemieckiego*, *Niewola babilońska kościoła* oraz *O wolności chrześcijańskiej*. Luter nie był ani pierwszą, ani ostatnią osobą pragnącą zreformować Kościół. Ale Luter to prawdziwy fenomen. Artykuł opisuje kilka ważnych doświadczeń w życiu Lutra: jego młodość, decyzję o wstąpieniu do zakonu, ekskomunikę, małżeństwo oraz jego duchowość. Wnoszę o odrodzone ekumeniczne zaangażowanie, pozostawienie za sobą starych sporów i dążenie do zjednoczenia.

Luther's Legacy after 500 years. Some thoughts from a Dutch point of view

Summary

In this article, I focus on Martin Luther, the importance of his work, and the ecumenical perspectives of the 'Luther Year' in the Netherlands. Is there willingness to re-evaluate the Reformation in an ecumenical perspective? The Protestant Church in the Netherlands is ecumenically involved. Can we celebrate 500 years of Protestantism (1517–2017), or do we just have to commemorate it? We should not forget the dark sides of the Reformation. I see the Reformation as a blessing in disguise. In 2017, we need whole–hearted ecumenical commitment as churches for the future. Roman Catholics are very much involved in this 'Reformation Year' in the Netherlands. What would I say if I was asked to tell my Roman Catholic friends about the significance of Luther and his influence? I show his most important work: three fundamental texts written in 1520: *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *On the Freedom of a Christian*. Luther was not the first or the last wishing to reform the Church. But Luther is really a phenomenon. I summarize some important experiences in Luther's life: his youth, his decision to become a monk, his excommunication, his marriage, his spirituality. I make a plea for a renewed ecumenical commitment, leaving behind our conflicts from the past and looking forward towards communion.

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