

# Commemorating the Quincentenary of the Reformation<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** To commemorate the 500th anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation this article will offer a brief historical overview of the key figures and events which demonstrate that the Reformation was not born out of a single moment, but is a movement that developed prior to Martin Luther's *Nintey-Five Theses* in protest of the Roman Catholic Church. A movement which grew out of the early Church and Middle Ages and continued to impact the history of Christianity well into the twentieth century. Moving from the early Church to modern history this article will examine the interpretation of the *reformatio ecclesiae* as well as its usage and meaning at specific historical moments and by specific reformers.

**Keywords:** *reformatio ecclesiae*, Middle Ages, religious controversies, ecumenism.

Commemoration of key historical events is often linked to a debunking of old myths or to the creation of new ones, both prone to be motivated by practical interests in the present. However, with the current state of scholarship it would be reductive and even misleading to engage in such critical reflection without examining some of the meanings of the word “Reformation” throughout the history of Christianity. Moreover, the prevailing current trend in early-modern historical studies regards the Reformation no longer as an event that had little connection with the Middle Ages and lasted just a few decades of the sixteenth century, but rather as a prolonged process, with roots going back hundreds of years and extending over several centuries of modern history.<sup>2</sup> In keeping with this historiographical paradigm and without presuming to exhaust such a complex subject, in the following considerations I will examine some patristic and especially medieval interpretations of the topic of the *reformatio ecclesiae*; I will then discuss and compare the use made of it in the early-modern religious controversies. Finally, I will dwell on today's meaning of the term from an ecumenical perspective.

## ***Reformatio in the Early Church and Middle Ages***

For many, the word “Reformation” immediately evokes heroic memories of a determined German Augustinian friar defiantly hammering his challenge to the Roman Church with the posting of his *Nintey-Five Theses* on October 31, 1517. Yet, long before it was applied to the work of Martin Luther, the term *reformatio* had an extended and varied history.<sup>3</sup> Its common usage already existed in classical Latin.<sup>4</sup> In its broadest sense, it means every attempt to renew the essence of a community, institution,

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2. Emidio Campi, *Shifting Patterns of Reformed Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 15–34.

3. See Emidio Campi, “Ecclesia semper reformanda: Metamorphosen einer altherwürdigen Formel,” *Zwingliana* 37 (2010), 1–19; Campi, *Riformare la Chiesa. Storia di una idea* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 2019); Theodor Mahlmann, “Ecclesia semper reformanda. Eine historische Aufklärung. Neue Bearbeitung,” in *Hermeneutica Sacra: Studien zur Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Bengt Hägglund zum 90. Geburtstag*, ed. Torbjörn Johansson, Robert Kolb, and Johann Anselm Steiger (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 381–442.

4. Theodor Mahlmann, “Reformation,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* vol. 8, ed. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer and Gottfried Gabriel (Basel: Schwabe, 1992), 416–427; Mahlmann “Reformgedanke,” in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 159–164; Ulrich Köpf, “Reformation,” in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*:

or similar group by reaching back to its original, primal sources. Indeed, the concept has been known to Christianity since its earliest beginnings. Thus, it was used in the time of the Church Fathers<sup>5</sup> to signal that Christians and the church are continually in need of *reformatio in melius per Deum* – in need of transformation for the better. From there, and already as early as the beginning of the fifth century, the idea had gained a specifically religious meaning.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, it was not until the early Middle Ages that the term *reformatio* began to acquire significant weight. Then *reformatio* was primarily an impulse of the Western Monastic tradition. In the sixth century, Benedict of Nursia was fundamentally a “reformer” owing to the fact that he did not create monasticism, but rather “reformed” it. Other tremendous waves of *reformatio* followed within the church through Benedict of Aniane in the eighth and ninth centuries, the Cluniac reform of the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Cistercian reform of the twelfth century, as well as that of the Dominicans and Franciscans in the thirteenth century. They were all not only struggling for the renewal of a declining monastic tradition, but also for the “reformation” of all Christianity and indeed of Christendom. The so-called Gregorian Reform, promoted by Pope Gregory VII (1015–1085), but in fact beginning toward the middle of the eleventh century and continuing into the first decade of the twelfth century, intended in fact to return the church to its original purity, to renew (*renovare*) and restore (*restaurare*) the original pristine form of the church (*ecclesiae primitivae forma*).

The reform movement reached beyond the sphere of Monasticism and church attempts of restoration of a pristine state, and beginning in the eleventh century, embraced religious movements among the laity such as the Albigenses, Cathars, and Waldensians.<sup>7</sup> Especially the latter considered the Constantinian turn to be the ruin of Christianity, and they consequently sought to renew the church from the inside out, in order to lead it back to its pristine form. Even Joachim of Fiore (1130/1135–1202), who professed his vows as a Cistercian monk in 1168, expressed multi-faceted hope for a deep spiritual renewal of the church with his prophetic perception of a coming age of the Holy Spirit soon to erupt into history.<sup>8</sup>

While the church progressively deteriorated, demands for reform grew in magnitude and intensity. The expression *emendatio ecclesiae in capite et in membris* (correction of the church in head and members) – first used by Pope Alexander III in a letter on October 29, 1170<sup>9</sup> – and its equivalent *reformatio universalis ecclesiae* – employed by Innocent III in his papal bull on April 19, 1213 convening the Fourth General Council of the Lateran (1215)<sup>10</sup> – both passed into common usage to express a general and deeply felt need that remained a *topos* throughout the entire Middle Ages and into

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*Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 145–159.

5. Gerhardt B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); Bernd Christian Schneider, *Ius Reformandi. Die Entwicklung eines Staatskirchenrechts von seinen Anfängen bis zum Ende des alten Reiches* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

6. See Edeltraud Klüeting, *Monasteria semper reformanda. Kloster- und Ordensreformen im Mittelalter* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005).

7. Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992); Amedeo Molnár, *Die Waldenser. Geschichte und europäisches Ausmass einer Ketzerbewegung* (Göttingen: Vandenoek & Ruprecht, 1980); Gabriel Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent: Persecution and Survival, c.1170–c.1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Euan Cameron, *The Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

8. Roberto Rusconi, *Profezia e profeti alla fine del Medioevo* (Roma: Viella, 1999).

9. PL 200, 743: “si ecclesiam Tornacensem in capite vel in membris tantae pravitate vitio invenerit involutam, tibi ex parte nostra significet, ut hujusmodi excessus pastoralis sollicitudine corrigas et emendes.”

10. PL 216, 824: “inter omnia desiderabilia cordis nostri duo in hoc saeculo principaliter affectamus, ut ad recuperationem videlicet terrae sanctae ac reformationem universalis Ecclesiae generale [...] concilium juxta priscam sanctorum Patrum consuetudinem convocemus propter lucra solummodo animarum opportuno tempore celebrandum: in quo ad extirpanda vitia et plantandas virtutes, corrigendos excessus, et reformandos mores, eliminandas haereses, et roborandam fidem, sopiendas discordias, et stabiliendam pacem, comprimendas oppressiones, et libertatem fovendam, inducendos principes et populos Christianos ad succursum et subsidium terrae sanctae.”

the early modern era. The demand for *reformatio in capite et membris*<sup>11</sup> was subsequently taken-up at numerous reform councils, and especially at the Councils of Constance and Basel in the first third of the fifteenth century.<sup>12</sup> There is a noteworthy definition of the notion of *reformatio* by the learned Spanish theologian John of Segovia (1395–1458), the secretary of the Basel Council. He defined Reformation as *correctio morum pro exstirpatione vitiorum* (the correction of morals for the extirpation of errors).<sup>13</sup> This definition does not stir images of fanatical Protestants storming churches, but rather implies returning back to a starting point through the cultivation of traditional Christian virtues, together with the containment of corruption through the improvement of the administrative machinery of the church. In passing, the word *reformatio* came to acquire a closely analogous meaning in the secular realm. It recurs in the so-called *Reformatio Sigismundi*, an anonymous document that swept through Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, containing plans for recasting the political and social order of the Holy Roman Empire, which entailed preserving and restoring peace and justice through the *potentia conservativa et pacativa imperii* (the conserving and calming power of the Empire).<sup>14</sup>

The late Middle Ages, however, also witnessed other, more radical tendencies of the *reformatio ecclesiae*. With the preachers of the *Christus Pauper*, such as John Wycliff (c. 1331–1384) and the Lollards in England, Jan Hus (1369–1415) in Bohemia, or Savonarola (c. 1452–1498) in Florence, dissent became socio-religious heresy.<sup>15</sup> For Wycliff the Bible was not just one authority among many; it alone stood above all other authorities and along with this principle he believed that the Scripture was intended for everyone. Hus went even further than Wycliff in his call for church reform and denounced the restriction of the chalice during the celebration of the Lord's Supper to the celebrant alone as contrary to Holy Scripture and to the ancient tradition of the Church. Savonarola wanted to found in Florence a Christian republic that might initiate the reform of Italy and of the church. However, as the Waldensians had already experienced on their own bodies, tight limits were set for the possibility of a reformation in which the Bible provided the guiding principles for the life of church and society.

Finally, the humanist movement cannot be overlooked. Preeminent scholars such as Lorenzo Valla, Giannozzo Manetti, Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and later the Christian humanists Lefèvre d'Étaples, Rudolf Agricola, Johannes Reuchlin, Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, John Colet, Thomas More, Erasmus, and Juan Luis Vives were in no way less guided by the biblical vision in their concern for church renewal than other religious movements of their times. This author can think of several examples, for instance, Valla's *Adnotationes in Novum Testamentum* (c. 1444, discovered and published by Erasmus 1505), where for the first time humanist philology was applied to a sacred text; Reuchlin's *De Rudimentis Hebraicis* (1506), a grammar that was of great importance in promoting the scientific study of Hebrew and hence of the Old Testament; Lefèvre d'Étaples's *Quintuplex Psalterium* (1509), and of course Erasmus's first edition of the Greek New Testament with the odd title *Novum*

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11. The French canonist and bishop of Mende, Guillaume Durand (also Durant, c. 1230/32–1296), has been credited with inventing the formula *reformatio in capite et membris*; see Constantin Fasolt, "A new view of William Durant the Younger's *Tractatus de modo generalis concilii celebrandi*," *Traditio* 37 (1981): 291–324.

12. Aldo Landi, *Concilio e papato nel rinascimento (1449–1516): Un problema irrisolto* (Torino: Claudiana, 1997).

13. "correctio morum pro exstirpatione vitiorum, sanctorum profectus [...] virtutum pro carismatum incrementum." Cited in Kluetting, *Monasteria semper reformanda*, 1.

14. Heinrich Koller ed., *Reformation Kaiser Siegmunds* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1964); Hartmut Bookmann, "Reformatio Sigismundi," *TRE* 28 (1997), 384–386.

15. Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Stephen E. Lahey, *John Wycliff* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Amedeo Molnár, *Jan Hus testimone della verità* (Torino: Claudiana, 1973); Thomas Fudge, *Jan Hus: Religious Reform and Social Revolution in Bohemia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010); Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

*Instrumentum* (1516), along with the *Ratio seu methodus compendio perveniendi ad veram theologiam* (1518). For all his dedication to the *belles-lettres* and stress upon the revitalization of classical Antiquity, how moving was his concern for the *philosophia Christi*: that all truth, wherever found, belongs to Christ, and that a Christian commonwealth should have an ethical basis and be permeated with a fervent faith.<sup>16</sup>

Four years before Martin Luther wrote his *Ninety-Five Theses* against indulgences, the Camaldolese monks Paolo Giustiniani (1476–1528) and Vincenzo Quirini (1467–1519) presented to Pope Leo X the reform memorial *Libellus ad Leonem X*.<sup>17</sup> A text of paramount importance for the religious history of the sixteenth century, the *Libellus ad Leonem X* contained the most complete reform program ever proposed, such as the translation of the Bible into the vernacular, the use of the vernacular in the liturgy, theological education of the clergy grounded in Scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers, revision of the Code of Canon Law, as well as basic guidelines for the pastoral care of the faithful. The bold plan that could have helped Western Christianity find the path out of the spiritual crisis was struck down by the stubborn obstruction of the Roman curia.

On the eve of the Reformation – based on this brief overview – we can summarize that the conceptions of the *reformatio ecclesiae* were in no way uniform. They ranged from the conservative quest for complete renewal of the antique spiritual legacy to the radical nurture of eschatological hope. All these conceptions of *reformatio* are oriented one way or another towards an imagined pristine Christian condition, and all have the hope of its eventual restoration in common.

### **The *Reformatio Ecclesiae* in The Early Modern Religious Controversies**

It is difficult to deny, even if it has been done, a patristic and medieval component to the topic of the *reformatio ecclesiae* in the thought of the sixteenth century Reformers; but it is equally difficult to propose a simple parallelism, ignoring its differentiation to the point of reaching outcomes not only different, but even completely opposed to each other. Let us take one particular example, to show that Luther's main goal did not concur with the aspirations of so many of his monastic predecessors and contemporaries. His aim was not to renew either his own Augustinian order or the administrative apparatus of the church and only indirectly was he concerned with the renewal of society. Not only was he sceptical concerning the reform efforts of the past and his own time – “I have almost totally given up hope for a general reformation of the church,” he wrote in his commentary on the Psalms of 1519<sup>18</sup> – but he rarely used the word “reformation” to describe the work he himself had undertaken.<sup>19</sup>

Elsewhere the monk-professor wrote: “The Church needs a reformation, but this is not

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16. Arie Vanderjagt, “*Ad fontes!* The Early Humanist Concern for the *Hebraica veritas*,” in *Hebrew Bible. Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*, 2: *From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2008), 154–189; R. Ward Holder, *Crisis and Renewal: The Era of the Reformations* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 37–57; Richard Rex, “Humanist Bible controversies,” in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible: From 1450 to 1750*, ed. Euan Cameron (Cambridge: University Press, 2016), 61–81; Christine Christ-von Wedel, *Erasmus of Rotterdam: Advocate of a New Christianity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); Martin Wallraff, Silvana Seidel Menchi and Kaspar von Greyerz, eds., *Basel 1516. Erasmus' Edition of the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

17. “B. Pauli Iustiniani Et Petri Quirini Eremitarum Camaldulensium Libellus ad Leonem X Pontificem Maximum,” in *Annales Camaldulenses ordinis Sancti Benedicti* (Venetiis: aere Monasterii Sancti Michaelis de Muriano, 1773), 612–719. ET: *Libellus: Addressed to Leo X, Supreme Pontiff*, ed. and trans. Stephen M. Beall (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016); D. Bowd, *Reform before the Reformation: Vincenzo Querini and the Religious Renaissance in Italy* (Brill: Leiden 2002).

18. WA 5, 345, 20–21 (Psalmenauslegung, 1519): “ego velut certus desperavi reformationem generalem Ecclesiae.”

19. See Wilhelm Maurer, “Was verstand Luther unter der Reformation der Kirche?” *Luther* 28 (1957): 49–62; Erwin Mülhaupt, “Was Luther selber von Reformation hielt,” *Luther* 36 (1967): 97–113; Bernhard Lohse, *Lutherdeutungen heute* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 5–18; Gottfried Maron, *Zum Gespräch mit Rom. Beiträge aus evangelischer Sicht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 17–20.

something for one person, the pope, also not many cardinals [...] but rather for the entire world for such a reformation is known only by him who created time.”<sup>20</sup> Caution is therefore required when interpreting what Luther intended for *reformatio ecclesiae*. Moreover, there is a lesser-known aspect of the Reformer’s ecclesiology that strikes those who approach his writings. Despite the occasional, sometimes gross invectives against the Roman Church, Luther acknowledged that God has left in it some *ecclesiae vestigia*, remnant marks of the true Church, a concept that goes back to Augustine and the Donatist crisis. In his second commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians of 1531, Luther wrote: “In the city of Rome, though worse than Sodom, there remains the baptism, the preaching, the voice of the gospel, the Sacred Scripture, the ministry, the name of Christ and God.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, Luther never re-baptized Catholics who became Lutherans, nor renewed the ordination of priests who became pastors. He was adamant in his assertion that the Catholic Church was founded on Trinitarian faith, and the Augsburg Confession of 1530 – the first of the great Protestant Confessions – solemnly declared that it stand firm on the same foundation before expounding the specifically Lutheran doctrines. This was a point of agreement between the Magisterial Reformers. Calvin, for example, compared the Roman Church to a ruined cathedral, of which only the foundations had remained.<sup>22</sup> For us who see things 500 years later, the image is gloomy, but for his day it was not as bad as it might seem, because in the New Testament writings the foundation of the Church is Christ himself. For Calvin, too, Christ remains the foundation of the Catholic Church.

Nothing, perhaps, renders so vividly the new meaning of the ancient locution *reformatio ecclesiae* as Luther’s famous utterance in one of his *Table Talks*:

Doctrine and life must be distinguished. Life is bad among us, as it is among the papists, but we don’t fight about life and condemn the papists on that account. Wycliffe and Huss didn’t do this and attacked the papacy for its life. I don’t scold myself into becoming good, but I fight over the Word and whether our adversaries teach it in its purity. That doctrine should be attacked has never before happened. This is my calling. Others have censured only life, but to treat doctrine is to strike at the most sensitive point [...] When the Word remains pure, then the life (even if there is something lacking in it) can be moulded properly.<sup>23</sup>

What makes this *Table Talk* remarkable is the shift in perspective. Luther considered the reformation of doctrine of far greater importance than reform of practice and ritual in the church, and insisted moreover that reformation of doctrine would bring reformation of life in its wake.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the entire question of “Reformation” is elevated to an altogether new level with respect to which all previous discussion now lags behind. The critical question regarding the *legitima reformatio* is posed: “legitimate reformation,” as Luther affirmed in a sermon in 1512, requires first and foremost a renewed

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20. WA 1, 627, 27–31 (Resolutiones, 1518, Conclusio LXXXIX): “Ecclesia indiget reformatione, quod non est unius hominis Pontificis nec multorum Cardinalium offitium, sicut probavit utrumque novissimum concilium, sed totius orbis, immo solius dei. Tempus autem huius reformationis novit solus ille, qui condidit tempora.”

21. WA 40/1, 69.5–7 (Ad Galatas, 1531): “[...] manent in Romana urbe, quamquam Sodoma peiore, baptismus, vox Euangelii, textus, sacra scriptura, ministeria, nomen Christi, dei.”

22. Inst. IV, 2,11.

23. WA TR 1, 294, 19–295, 3: “Doctrina et vita sunt distinguenda. Vita est mala apud nos sicut apud papistas; non igitur de vita dimicamus et damnamus eos. Hoc nesciverunt Wickleff et Hus, qui vitam impugnarunt. Ich schilte mich nit fromm; sed de verbo, an vere doceant, ibi pugno. Doctrinam invadere ist noch nie geschehen. Ea est mea vocatio. Alii vitam tantum insectati sunt, sed de doctrina agere, das ist der gans an kragen grieffen [...] Sed quando manet verbum purum, etiamsi vitae aliquid deest, so kan vita dennoch zu recht kommen.”

24. Eeva Martikainen, *Doctrina: Studien zu Luthers Begriff der Lehre* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft, 1992). Surely this could be applied to John Calvin, Bullinger, Vermigli and almost all other Reformers. See Victor E. d’Assonville, *Der Begriff “doctrina” bei Johannes Calvin – eine theologische Analyse* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2001); Herman J. Selderhuis, “Der Begriff ‘Doctrina’ in der reformierten Tradition des 16. Jahrhunderts,” in *Bewegung und Beharrung: Aspekte des reformierten Protestantismus, 1520–1650. FS für Emidio Campi*, ed. Christian Moser and Peter Opitz (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 413–432.

listening to God's word with awe and fear,<sup>25</sup> and as he stated in his first commentary on Galatians (1519), it occurs when the word of truth is purely preached.<sup>26</sup>

Basically, Zwingli and Calvin's arguments follow the same line of thought. The *reformatio ecclesiae* is achievable, and indeed should be achieved, but not primarily as a reform of Church form and structure. They did not seek to found a Zwinglian or Calvinist church, and they did not lead off with a demand for renewal of the church through measures in areas of church life; rather they placed the Word of God at the epicentre because the church lives in relation to this alone. It was enough for them to confess the *ecclesia catholica et apostolica* and to shape a new understanding of how this is constituted through the divine *Verbum*. Thus, Zwingli defined the church as every "congregation that was founded on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his Word."<sup>27</sup> In the Disputation of Bern in 1528, one of the turning points in the Swiss Reformation, the Protestant party led by Zwingli put forward the thesis: "The Holy Christian Church, whose only Head is Jesus Christ, is born from the Word of God, and abides in the same, and listens not to the voice of a stranger."<sup>28</sup>

The same was true of Calvin. After the Augsburg Interim of 1548, when the Lutherans, both princes and theologians, lost and confused seemed willing to submit to an honorable compromise with the energetic imperial politics of recatholicization, he wrote a treatise, *The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom and Reforming the Church*.<sup>29</sup> The Reformer did not shed tears over the deep institutional, moral and spiritual crisis of the Church of Rome, but he examined point by point the theological knots of dissent within it: the authority of Scripture, justification by faith, the sacraments, and the conception of the Church. In his sermons on Deuteronomy (1555–1556) he was even more direct when he asks:

What is the root cause of disturbance in today's Christianity? We ask [...] that the doctrines forged by men are not accepted, but that the Church is subject to the word of God, and that Scripture is recognized as the only perfect doctrine which must inspire all our lives.<sup>30</sup>

In short, for the Reformers the incomparable encounter with the word of God is sufficient to free the Church from its spiritual pride, the Pharisaism of its dogmas, the will to power, and the secret compromises with the world. Thus, their conception of Church reform appears as something completely different from the expectations of time; it has none of the features with which it had been prefigured.

It is no wonder that after the initial enthusiasm, many refused to follow the reformers. For some they went too far, for others not far enough. Obviously, for those who were loyal to the old church, like

25. WA 1, 13, 25–35 (Sermo praescriptus praeposito in Litzka, 1512), part. 35: "Nam hic rerum cardo est, hic legitimae reformationis summa, hic totius pietatis substantia."

26. WA 2, 609, 10–13: "Et, ut dicam libere, impossibile est, scripturas posse elucidari et alias ecclesias reformari, nisi universale illud reale, Rhomana curia, quam primum reformetur. Haec enim verbum dei audire non potest nec sustinere ut pure tractetur: verbo autem dei non tractato neque caeteris ecclesiis succurri potest."

27. Z 3, 168, 6–7 (Christliche Antwort Zürichs an Bischof Hugo, 1524). See also Z 3, 217, 35–218, 1: "Denn das gotzwort macht die kilchen, und die kilch mag nit das gotzwort machen." and Z 3, 223, 6–7: "Welchs ist aber sin kilch? Die sin wort hört." See Berndt Hamm, *Zwinglis Reformation der Freiheit* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1988), 23–27.

28. Z 6/1, 243, 10–12 (Berne Disputation, 1528): I. "Die heylig christenlich kilch, deren eynig houpt Christus, ist us dem wort gottes geborn, im selben belybt sy und hört nit die stimm eines frömbden."

29. *Interim adultero-germanum: cui adjecta est, vera christianae pacificationis, et Ecclesiae reformandae ratio* in CO 7, 545–674). ET: *The Adultero-German Interim: To Which is Added The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom, and of Reforming the Church*, in John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 190–358.

30. Dtn 4, 1–2, Sermon 19, in CO 26, 108–109: "Car aujourd'huy le principale article dont la Chrestiente est troublee, quel est-il ? Nous demandons qu'on escoute Dieu parler : et là-dessus qu'on ne reçoive quelque doctrine qui sera forgee à l'appetit des hommes : mais que le monde s'assuettisse à Dieu, que l'Escriture sainte soit tenue comme une doctrine de perfection: que nous la cognoissions estre la verité de Dieu, à la quelle il faut que tout nostre vie soit reiglee, qu'on n'y adiouste n'y diminue. "

Erasmus, Beatus Renanus (1485–1547), and Sir Thomas More, they went too far. Reformation meant revolution, uproar, and the destruction of Christendom. On the other side of the spectrum, for those like Karlstadt, Thomas Müntzer, or the Anabaptists, the reformers did not go far enough.<sup>31</sup> A renewal of faith was not enough for them; they were not willing to wait patiently for the fruit of faith, as the reformers recommended. What had begun must be brought to completion. That entailed a radical reformation of the church, in some cases even with the use of violence, in order to establish absolute purity. These radical reformers, however, did not achieve their goal in the sixteenth century.

On the contrary, the old believers had historically great success. With the Council of Trent, they successfully mustered astounding strength for an entirely new plan for the *reorganization* of the Roman Church.<sup>32</sup> It is noteworthy that this council, which was convened with the aim to mend all of the damage that had been caused by the Reformation, grew to be an even more powerful reform council but entirely different in type. It ran, so to speak, on two tracks: the reformulation of Catholic dogma in contrast to Protestant teaching, and the recasting of Church discipline. Within a few months, the theological work of the council fathers succeeded in digging an impassable moat between Catholicism and Protestantism with the decrees on Sacred Scripture and on Justification. As we will see, it would take five centuries to overcome this divide. In addition, the council approved a bold program of church discipline reform and an administration called *Decreta de Reformatione*, which would influence the life of Catholicism for centuries to come – from mandatory residency for bishops to provision of improved theological education for the clergy, from Bible translation to revised marriage regulations.<sup>33</sup>

Amazingly, the word “reformation” appears quite often in the documents of this Council – which has been described as the embodiment of the *Counter-Reformation* – while it is almost totally missing from the confessional standards of the sixteenth century Protestant churches.<sup>34</sup> One could say with some degree of irony that everyone in the sixteenth century was talking about the reformation, with the exception of the magisterial reformers! Is it not astounding that this word should ultimately come to be assigned to these of all people? Is it not indeed remarkable that what they initiated came to be known as *the* Reformation? History sometimes takes strange turns and historiography follows behind. And usually the actors are not even asked for their opinions. Yet, surely the historians are absolutely right in calling “reformers” those who did not consider themselves such, because in the final analysis they plainly understood the real sense of the term *reformatio*: namely, neither a plan to undertake large or small-scale corrections, nor a proud expression of human reason, but rather the striking recognition that the Church is born from, lives in, and moves by the Word of God. From the encounter with the Word came a fresh understanding of the Christian message, a new awareness of

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31. See Tom Scott, “The ‘Volksreformation’ of Thomas Müntzer in Allstedt and Mühlhausen,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34 (1983): 194–213; Siegfried Bräuer and Helmar Junghans, eds., *Der Theologe Thomas Müntzer. Untersuchungen zu seiner Entwicklung und Lehre* (Berlin: Evangelischer Verlagsanstalt, 1989), 174–194, 195–220; Andrea Strübind, *Eifriger als Zwingli. Die frühe Täuferbewegung in der Schweiz* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 2003), 440–470; Urs B. Leu and Christian Scheidegger, eds., *Die Zürcher Täufer, 1525–1700*, (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2007); John D. Roth and James M. Stayer, eds., *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

32. John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013). On the reaction of the magisterial reformers to the Council of Trent, see Emidio Campi, “The Council of Trent and the Magisterial Reformers,” in *The Council of Trent: Reform and Controversy in Europe and Beyond (1545–1700): Between Trent, Rome and Wittenberg*, ed. Wim François and Violet Soen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 277–309.

33. Elisabeth G. Gleason, “Catholic Reformation, Counterreformation and Papal Reform in Sixteenth Century,” in *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600*, ed. Thomas Brady, Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 2: 317–345.

34. I have searched for the word reformation (Latin and French) in the *Confessio Augustana*, *Confessio Gallicana*, and *Confessio Helvetica posterior* in the *BSLK* and the new edition of the *Reformierte Bekenntnisschripte*, ed. Heiner Faulenbach et al. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002). There is no reference in the *Augustana* or *Gallicana*, but it does appear two times in the *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* (vol. 2/2 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2009], 273, 16, and 313, 8).

the nature of the Church, which not only involved the renewal of devotion and worship, but in addition supplied the commonwealth with a new public ethos to match the new perception of faith. This encounter with the word was not new – in the sense that nobody had ever known it before or that the reformers were the first who properly understood it – in fact, they were continuing a debate that had been going on for centuries. However, this debate was new and fresh for them, as in each generation it has to be found and proved anew.<sup>35</sup>

### **The *Reformatio Ecclesiae* in The Seventeenth Century**

If we look at the usage of the formula *reformatio ecclesiae* in the early modern period, we note a seemingly paradoxical situation. It appears as though the Roman Catholic Church successfully sought to give a concrete answer to the old question, whereas on the Protestant and Anglican side there was a great deal of confusion and uncertainty. Let us consider the Catholic side first.<sup>36</sup> The Council of Trent was the first *salvo* of an epochal change of Catholicism that became at once more dogmatic, more Roman, and more Catholic. “More dogmatic,” means here striving for inner unity and doctrinal cohesion by cutting-off all theological variations. The neo-Aristotelianism cultivated in the Jesuit colleges and the dogmaticians of the Salamanca school represented a novelty in European thought and competed successfully with the Erasmian humanists and protestant theologians. “More Roman” indicates the remarkable increase of papal control over the entire church. And finally, “more Catholic” implies that in the time frame between 1563 and c. 1650, the boundaries of the Catholic confession were expanding worldwide. Also, the spiritual life experienced an unprecedented renewal: figures like Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, and Ignatius of Loyola played a significant role in the renewal of the Church that followed the Council of Trent. In short, the post-Tridentine Church embodied and guided, as well as accompanied and promoted, the grandiose historical transition from Renaissance to Absolutism. This being said, as a historian of Waldensian origin, and therefore two times a heretic, I observe very sympathetically that this *reformatio ecclesiae* was a splendid reconstruction of the ruined cathedral, which lacked, however, decisive architectural elements such as the centrality and authority of Scripture, the unconditionality of grace and salvation, and the priesthood of all believers.

And now let us turn to the Protestant side. After Luther’s death in 1546 significant controversies broke out in the Lutheran Church which were settled only with the *Formula of Concord* of 1577. Soon after the Augsburg peace of 1555, dissatisfaction with the condition of the Reformed Church was loudly voiced. Already in 1554, the Dutch theologian Johan Anastasius Veluanus (and after 1567) sounded the call for a “thorough Reformation” in his best-seller *Wegweiser für Laien* (Guideposts for Laymen),<sup>37</sup> and in c. 1633, Werner Tesche[n]mancher (1589–1638), the Reformed preacher at the Brandenburg-

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35. On the continuities and discontinuities between the Reformation and late medieval reform of church, theology and piety, see Berndt Hamm, “The Urban Reformation in the Holy Empire,” in *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600*, ed. Thomas Brady, Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 2:193–220; 210–216; Volker Leppin, *Transformationen: Studien zu den Wandlungsprozessen in Theologie und Frömmigkeit zwischen Spätmittelalter und Reformation* (Tübingen : Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

36. Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450–1700: A Reassessment of the Counter Reformation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999); John W. O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490–1700* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 317–484; Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen and Mary Laven, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

37. The complete title of this rare book is: *Kort Bericht in allen principalen pu[n]te[n] des Christe[n] geloues: mit klair ghetuichnis der hilligher Schriffture[n] vn[d] guede kuntschafft der alden doctoren, mit anwysung wanneer vnde durch welcke personen die errorren opgesta[n]den vnde vermeeret zijnen, bereit vur den simpelen ongelerden Christe[n], vn[d] is des halue[n] genant der Leken Wechwyser* (Strasbourg: Balthasar von Klarenbach, 1554).

Klevisch court, demanded a “second Reformation” that would be “exhaustive and better.”<sup>38</sup> A prophet of spiritual renewal in the Lutheran church was certainly Johann Arndt (1555–1621), who wrote several influential devotional books. His principal work, *Wahres Christentum* (book 1: 1605; books 1–4: 1606–1610) i.e., “True Christianity,” a best and long seller that has been translated into most European languages, corrected the purely forensic side of the reformation theology dwelling upon the mystical union between the believer and Christ.<sup>39</sup>

A real and pressing problem was the “completion” of the Reformation through Puritanism in England.<sup>40</sup> Theologians like Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603) and Walter Travers (c. 1548–1643) wanted to “purify” the Church of England from the relics of Catholicism. On the European mainland, Pietism made itself known as a reform movement in the last quarter of the seventeenth century.<sup>41</sup> While stressing personal improvement and upright conduct as the most important manifestations of Christian faith, its expectation of a new and comprehensive Reformation went in some degree so far that the perception of old Protestant orthodoxy was rejected as harmful. It may be taken as historically certain that the famous formula “*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*” (the reformed Church must be continually renewed) that was and is continually attributed to Luther, really originated in the “Nadere Reformatie” (Further Reformation),<sup>42</sup> the Dutch Reformed pietistic movement, and was used for the first time by Pastor Jodocus van Lodenstein (1620–1677) in his treatise *Beschouwinge van Zion* (Contemplation of Zion), published in Utrecht in 1674.<sup>43</sup>

Originally, the continuing Reformation was striven for across the breadth of the entire church. The aim became problematic and narrow when the church and the members of the church concentrated on their own perfection, and thus a tendency for separation came into being. Renewal attempts, followed not infrequently by church divisions, continued to be the fate of Protestantism, especially in the nineteenth century, at the time of the so called “Awakening” or “Reveille,” when free churches sprang up and have continued to divide again and again, often over fairly minor differences. However, this particular time period cannot be dealt with here and thus, the article will move forward and concentrate on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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38. Werner Tesche[n]macher, *Repetitio brevis catholicae et orthodoxae religionis, quae singulari Dei beneficio ante seculum a papatu reformata Cliviae, Iuliae, Montium ducatus cum attinentibus comitatibus & dominiis, hactenus ex Dei verbo tradita & conservata est [...]* (Wesel: Martin Hess, 1635), passim.

39. Johann Arndt, *Vier Bücher Von wahren Christentum* (Magdeburg: Francke, 1610). ET: *True Christianity*, trans. Peter Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

40. John Coffey and Paul C.H. Lim, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008); David D. Hall, *The Puritans: A Transatlantic History* (Princeton: University Press, 2019).

41. Martin Brecht, ed., *Geschichte des Pietismus*, vol. 1: *Der Pietismus vom siebzehnten bis zum frühen achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993); Martin Brecht and Klaus Deppermann eds., *Geschichte des Pietismus*, vol. 2: *Der Pietismus im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995); Dorothea Wendenbourg ed., *Philipp Jakob Spener, Begründer des Pietismus und protestantischer Kirchenvater: Bilanz der Forschung nach 300 Jahren* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007).

42. Johannes van den Berg, “Die Frömmigkeitsbestrebungen in den Niederlanden,” in *Der Pietismus vom siebzehnten bis zum frühen achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, ed. Johannes van den Berg and Martin Brecht (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 84–88; Ernst Saxer, “Ständige Erneuerung – eine reformierte Devise?,” in *Die Reformierten: Suchbilder einer Identität*, ed. Matthias Krieg and Gabrielle Zangger-Derron (Zurich, TVZ: Theologischer Verlag, 2002), 71–73.

43. Jodocus van Lodenstein, *Beschouwinge van Zion: ofte aandagten en opmerckingen [...]* s.n. [Utrecht]: 1674–1678. To his flock, tireless and stingy, like every respectable Calvinist, and always too convinced of having God on their side, the learned and pious pastor of Utrecht told: “Sekerlijk de Gereformeerde Waarheyd [...] leert that in de Kerke ook altijd veel and herstellen is.” (Truly, the reformed doctrine teaches that also in the Reformed Church there is much to reform). See Mahlmann, *Ecclesia semper reformanda*, 423.

### Contemporary Usage of the Formula *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda*

The rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe and the subsequent *Kirchenkampf*, Church Struggle, brought up again and with extreme urgency the subject of the *reformatio ecclesiae*. In May of 1934, the Synod of the Confessing Church meeting in Barmen, Westphalia, released the so called “Theological Declaration,” a document mostly written by the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth that triggered a theological and ecclesiological revolution and at the same time marked the beginning of ecclesial, cultural and even political resistance against National Socialism. The Declaration points to the inalienable identity of the church as distinct from the world, based in the church's intrinsic relation to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, while at the same time recognizing and practicing in hope the relationship with the world:

The Christian Church is the congregation of the brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. As the Church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance. We reject the false doctrine, as though the church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions.<sup>44</sup>

That this fundamental document, however, was not well enough known and taken seriously by the churches, can be seen in the fact that by 1947 Karl Barth had to raise the issue again, admonishing:

The Church must rely on the message [of God's free grace]. From this message comes the right, the duty, and the freedom of the Church to exist as the Church in the world, as the *ecclesia semper reformanda*, without pretensions, but also without fear before all Christian and unchristian demons.<sup>45</sup>

Hence, Barth was, as far as I can see, the first theologian of the twentieth century who, steadily and with insurmountable clarity, restored the old *adagium*. In 1953 Barth expounded this thought in his *Church Dogmatics*:

[...] The “catholic” and therefore the true Church is not the oldest Church as such...the question of the true Church cannot possibly resolve itself simply into that of conformity with any forms which are earlier in point of time... Conversely, it is not the newness, the modernity, the up-to-dateness of a Church which as such proves and commends it as the true and catholic Church. [...] [M]odernity, up-to-dateness, has nothing whatever to do with the question of the truth of the Church. For that reason, the idea of progress is a highly doubtful one as applied to the Church. What counts in the Church is not progress but reformation – its existence as *ecclesia semper reformanda*.

Barth continues

*Semper reformari*, [note the present passive infinitive !] however, does not mean always to go with the time, to let the current spirit of the age be the judge of what is true and false, but in every age, and in controversy with the spirit of the age, to ask concerning the form and doctrine and order and ministry which is in accordance

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44. “Theological Declaration Concerning the Present Situation of the German Evangelical Church,” in *The Book of Confessions: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 2016), 281–284; Eberhard Busch, *Die Barmer Thesen 1934–2004* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004); Michael Weinrich, “God's Free Grace and the Freedom of the Church: Theological Aspects of the Barmen Declaration,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 12 (2010): 404–419.

45. Karl Barth *Die Botschaft von der freien Gnade* (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947), 19; ET: “The Proclamation of God's Free Grace,” in *God Here and Now*, trans. Paul M. van Buren (London: Routledge, 2003), 44.

with the unalterable essence of the Church. [...] It means never to grow tired of returning not to the origin in time, but to the origin in substance of the community. The Church is catholic when it is engaged in this *semper reformari*, so that Catholicism has nothing to do with conservatism either [...]. Therefore neither flirtation with the old nor flirtation with the new makes the Church the true Church, but a calm consideration of that which as its abiding possession is superior to every yesterday and to-day and is therefore the criterion of its catholicity.<sup>46</sup>

Of paramount importance in this text is the connection between the idea of Church reform and its “catholicity” (universality). Since the second half of the twentieth century, the formula *ecclesia semper refomanda* appears in fundamental documents of Christian Churches. At the Second Vatican Council, in a noteworthy formulation included in the decree on Ecumenism, the council fathers picked up this theme as they spoke of Christ who summons the Church to “continual reformation” (*perennis reformatio*), emphasizing that “Church renewal has [...] notable ecumenical importance.”<sup>47</sup> Demand for continual Reformation is also a requirement for membership in the (former) World Alliance of Reformed Churches, today renamed the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Article 2 on membership of the constitution of 1970 states:

Any church which accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, which holds the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the supreme authority in matters of faith and life; acknowledges the need for the continuing reformation of the Church catholic; whose position in faith and evangelism is in general agreement with that of the historic Reformed confessions [...], shall be eligible for admission to the Alliance.<sup>48</sup>

Thus “church reform,” as in the Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II, is no longer conceived merely as a renewal of a single church or confession, but of all churches, so that they grow in an ever-greater faithfulness to the Lord.

The “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (JDDJ) of 1999 signed by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation was a further step in this direction.<sup>49</sup> The JDDJ affirms that the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation share “a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ” and acknowledge that the condemnations relating to the doctrine of justification set forth by the Council of Trent and the Lutheran confession do not apply to the Catholic and Lutheran teachings on justification set forth in the JDDJ.<sup>50</sup> This “common understanding” seeks to place both “difference” and “consensus” within a broader

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46. *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV/1 (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1953), 787; ET: *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, ed. Thomas F. Torrance and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 704–705.

47. *Decree on Ecumenism* III, 6, “Every renewal of the Church is essentially grounded in an increase of fidelity to her own calling. Undoubtedly this is the basis of the movement toward unity. Christ summons the Church to continual reformation as she sojourns here on earth. The Church is always in need of this, in so far as she is an institution of men here on earth. Thus, if in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in moral conduct or in church discipline, or even in the way that church teaching has been formulated—to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself—these can and should be set right at the opportune moment.”

48. Cited by Alan P.F. Sell “The World Alliance of Reformed Churches,” in *Encyclopedia of Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 403.

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

50. JDDJ (Engl. Text), § 5: “The present Joint Declaration has this intention: namely, to show that on the basis of their dialogue the subscribing Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ.”; § 41: “Thus the doctrinal condemnations of the 16th century, in so far as they relate to the doctrine of justification, appear in a new light: The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration.”

theological framework in which a substantial theological consensus is affirmed, albeit that there remain differences in emphasis and forms of expression within the respective traditions.

It is of outmost ecumenical importance that in 2006 the World Methodist Council “affirmed its fundamental agreement with the doctrinal expression found within the JDDJ,”<sup>51</sup> and that in April 2016 the Anglican Consultative Council “welcomed and confirmed the substance” of it.<sup>52</sup> On July 5, 2017 the World Communion of Reformed Churches formally joined an ecumenical statement with Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Methodists aiming to overcome divisions between Protestants and Roman Catholics from the time of the Reformation. The WCRC published a document titled the *Association of the World Communion of Reformed Churches with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* that explains the particular emphases and additional insights from the Reformed tradition that they wished to add to the JDDJ.<sup>53</sup> “Today we are not only signing a statement, we are building a church together,” said the Rev. Najla Kassab from Lebanon in her sermon at the service in the *Stadtkirche* of Wittenberg, where Luther used to preach.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the medium-term consequences of the *Declaration*, if assumed in all its implications, are evident in the form of a possible transformation of ecclesial self-understanding of all signatory confessions, a *reformatio in melius per Deum*, the only one that can eradicate spiritual pride, the pharisaism of doctrine, the will to power – shadows that every church knows.

To these documents we can add the Joint Statement on the occasion of the Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation signed in Lund, October 3, 2016, by Pope Francis and Bishop Munib Yunan, president of the Lutheran World Federation:

While we are profoundly thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, we also confess and lament before Christ that Lutherans and Catholics have wounded the visible unity of the Church.<sup>55</sup>

Even more significant is the thought expressed by Pope Francis on the same occasion during his homily in the cathedral of Lund:

With gratitude we acknowledge that the Reformation helped give greater centrality to sacred Scripture in the Church’s life. Through shared hearing of the word of God in the Scriptures, important steps forward have been taken in the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, whose fiftieth anniversary we are presently celebrating. Let us ask the Lord that his Word may keep us united, for it is a source of nourishment and life; without its inspiration we can do nothing.<sup>56</sup>

These are incredibly challenging words. They reveal a singular convergence with the ecumenical sensibility of Yves Congar, the great Dominican French theologian, pioneer of ecumenism and acute interlocutor of Karl Barth. Well before the Second Vatican Council, Congar rejected the traditionally Catholic ecumenical conception centered on the idea of the “return of the schismatics” and outlined a path to be realized in the common recognition of the variety of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and in the awareness of what each confession lost from the others, so that he hoped: “The encounter, if

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51. ET: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/meth-council-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_2006\\_0723\\_text-association\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/meth-council-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_2006_0723_text-association_en.html).

52. The Anglican Consultative Council, Resolution 16.17: Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. ET: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/234449/acc-16-resolutions-2016.pdf>.

53. ET: <https://www.rca.org/news/wcrc-affirms-joint-declaration-doctrine-justification>.

54. See <http://pres-outlook.org/2017/07/wcc-hails-wittenberg-declaration-aiming-overcome-reformation-divisions/>

55. See <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2016/10/31/0783/01757.html#ita>.

56. See [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161031\\_omelia-svezia-lund.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20161031_omelia-svezia-lund.html).

one day there will be, will be in a different church from the present Catholic Church, different because it is developed, purified, reformed.”<sup>57</sup>

More than seventy years since these words were written, one can add: the day on which every Christian confession remembering its essence and its mission would accept to be renewed by the power of the Spirit, on that day the confessions would cease to exist and a new wholeness, a new catholicity will emerge, encompassing everything alive and vital that has arisen on the millennial trunk of the Christian faith. Of course, it would not be realistic to pretend not to see what and how many serious obstacles are still on the path of the *reformatio ecclesiae* in an ecumenical vision, or how confused and labyrinthine the ecumenical situation still is today. But a seed has been cast and it cannot fail to grow, even though it is in the midst of so many tribulations. It is in the name of this hope that I would like to close this Quincentennial Commemoration of the *reformatio ecclesiae*, so that we may be strengthened in the tasks that await us in the future.

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57. Yves Congar, *Chrétiens en dialogue* (1947), reprint in: *Chrétiens en Dialogue. Contributions catholiques à l'Œcuménisme* (Paris, Édition du Cerf, 1964). See also Gabriel Flynn, *Yves Congar's Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

### Abbreviations

- BSLK *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche. Vollständige Neuedition.* Edited by Irene Dingel. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.
- CO *Ioannis Calvini Opera Qua Supersunt Omnia.* Edited by Wilhelm Baum, Eduard Cunitz, and Eduard Reuss. Corpus reformatorum, 29–87. Brunswick, Berlin: Schwetschke, 1863–1900.
- Inst. Calvin, Jean, *Christianae Religionis Institutio*
- PL *Patrologia Latina.* Edited by Jacques Paul Migne. Paris: Garnier, 1844–1890.
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe.* Weimarer Ausgabe, Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–2009.
- Z *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke.* Edited by Emil Egli et al. Corpus Reformatorum, 88–101. Berlin: Schwetschke, Leipzig: Hensius, and Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1905.

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