

From Augsburg to Geneva: The Erosion of Confessionalism in Lutheran Theology

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1 The Lutheran Reformation in the 16th century

We are gathered here in this conference as heirs of the Lutheran Reformation, which was inaugurated in Germany in 1517 by the nailing of the 95 theses of Dr. Martin Luther (1483–1546). There never occurred a reformation in other parts of Christendom, neither in the Greek Orthodox body of Constantinople and Moscow, nor the in the Ethiopian, Coptic or other Oriental churches. There have been periods of decline and renewal but never a reformation of such a magnitude as in Western Europe. Dr. Luther, a professor of Wittenberg University in Saxony, Germany, a pastor of the city and a monk in the order of Augustinian Hermits, intended to summon theologians and churchmen to an open discussion concerning true biblical repentance. The immediate reason for taking up this question publicly was the large-scale business of selling indulgences in Germany. The Pope had released this commerce of indulgences in order to finance the construction of the new gigantic Basilica of St. Peter in Rome. Theoretically, we must distinguish between the forgiveness of sins in the confession and an indulgence. The forgiveness of sins pronounced by a priest was free of charge. Yet, in Roman Catholic doctrine, the forgiveness of sins entailed works of satisfaction as the last part of the sacrament of the confession: contrition, confession, absolution, satisfaction. Satisfactions were ordered according to the severity of a sin confessed to the priest confessor. If the satisfactions were believed to be defective, the soul of a deceased Christian entered the fire of Purgatory where it was supposed to be finally cleansed to be fit for the blessedness of Paradise. Officially, the satisfactions concerned only the fire of Purgatory, not the flames of Hell. Purgatory was taught to be a cleansing station of the Christians on their way to heaven whereas Hell was the final, eternal end of those condemned on the Last Day. The works

of satisfaction could be compensated with money; hence, the sale of indulgences. The supposed authority of the church and the Pope of Rome as the Vicar of Christ, was taught to guarantee the validity of indulgences.

The dispute concerning this pastoral question could not have been as explosive as it was unless there was such a multitude of gigantic problems in the Western part of Christendom under the rule of the Bishop of Rome, called the Pope or Pontiff.¹ In terms of theology, the question remained whether the teachings of the church were correct or not. What is the authority and guarantee of a doctrine: the Bible, tradition, a decision of the Pope, or that of the canons of various church councils or synods? The Roman canonical jurisprudence studied and applied to practice various and often contradictory sources of authority in the church. The question of authority is a question of power: what or who rules the church? This question entails the question of the limits of power: does the head of the church have worldly power as well? At the beginning of the second millennium, some popes had claimed that their authority was temporal as well as spiritual. Their reasoning was like this: eternal salvation is superior to matters of this world, which last only for a short time. Therefore, spiritual authority is far more important than worldly power. Consequently, the Pope of Rome is in possession of the keys of heaven as well as the worldly sword. Hence, worldly rulers such as emperors, kings and inferior potentates, should submit themselves fully to the authority of the Pope of Rome. In reality, apart from a few exceptions, such submission never happened. Still, the claim remained in place.

For such reasons, the Reformation was at the same time both religious and political. Great political, economic and sociological changes had taken place. Sociologically, the entire continent of Europe was, at least nominally, Christian. What happened in the church concerned the masses. Thus, in the Reformation of the 16th century and after in the religious wars of Europe in the 17th century, church life experienced everywhere times of turmoil and upheaval. In some areas, a completely new church-life sprouted among the Christians who were called Protestants. In many areas, Roman church life was re-established by persuasion or by military power and oppression. This action was called the Counter Reformation. Since no church council was summoned, and because the situation was hottest in Germany, the forum for the deliberations concerning the Reformation were the imperial diets of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, as it was called. A series of important diets was held: Worms 1521, in Speyer² 1526, 1529. The Lutheran princes presented on behalf of their churches at the Diet of

¹ 'Pope' is derived from the Latin word 'Papa' meaning 'Father' (actually 'pater'). 'Pontiff' is derived from the historical Latin title 'Pontifex Maximus' meaning 'the Supreme Bridge-Builder'. In the pagan Roman religion, the priests of this class were supposed to connect gods and humanity with their sacred rites.

²German: Speyer.

Augsburg in 1530 the Lutheran confessional document, called *Augsburg Confession (CA)*. This soon became the chief confession of the Lutherans. To cut a long story short: the Emperor of Germany and the King of Spain, Charles V, finally failed to impose his will to eradicate Lutheranism from the German Empire either through diets or on battle-fields. He reached the end of the road at the Diet of Augsburg in 1555, where the division of Germany along confessional lines was confirmed. Charles V abdicated and began to prepare himself for eternity. The Lutherans who were badly divided after Martin Luther's death under the erratic leadership of Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560) were united by a doctrinal document which solved most of the disputes amongst them, namely the *Formula of Concord*, in 1577. The Lutheran confessional books were published as the *Book of Concord* in 1580. The Lutheran churches in Europe either adopted the entire book as Sweden did, or parts of it as Denmark did. The *Unaltered Augsburg Confession* has been adopted by all Lutheran churches.

Already in the 1520s, a different branch of the Reformation sprouted in Switzerland. The leader of this movement was Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) in Zurich. Differences with Luther and the Lutheran Reformation became obvious. Where Luther had reformed the church moderately, bearing in mind its continuity from the days of old, dismissing false doctrine and only such practises that clearly contradicted the Word of God, Zwingli's movement was more like a revolution. Unlike in the Lutheran churches, the traditional Western liturgy was abolished in Switzerland, the altars were demolished, church art such as paintings, crucifixes and statues were removed from the churches in fear of idolatry. More importantly, Zwingli repudiated the Lutheran teaching concerning the sacraments. To him, they were not means of grace but only signs of Christian commitment. Thus, the question of the sacramental real presence of Christ became the dividing watershed between Luther and Zwingli, and later between Lutherans and Jean Calvin, Theodor Beza and others. Luther and Zwingli met personally once in Marburg in 1529 but a concord concerning the Sacrament of the Altar could not be reached. The Reformed or Calvinistic church was born. Therefore, the Lutheran confessional books draw a clear boundary not only against Rome but also against Reformed teaching, particularly in the *Formula of Concord*. Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches have been Zwingli's and Calvin's heirs. To Calvin, the doctrine of double predestination was constitutive: God in his majesty does not only predestine men to salvation but also to damnation. The Reformed churches do not acknowledge the distinction between Law and Gospel. Order and discipline as copied from the Bible are central to them. Anglicanism has historically adhered to their doctrine as well. Confessional texts have never featured as prominently as in Lutheranism.

Thirdly, new movements emerged that refused to be controlled by kings and princes, namely a wide variety of baptists. Generally, Anabaptists were oppressed

and persecuted in Europe. In doctrine they stood closer to Zwingli than to Luther. They wanted to revive the biblical pure life of the early Christians such as they imagined it, although the history of the Early Church does not know movements similar to the Anabaptism of the 16th century. There were radical, revolutionary Anabaptists as well as peaceful, pacifist Anabaptists. They did not believe in original sin that has radically corrupted the mankind. Because of their shallow anthropology (doctrine of man), their doctrine of salvation, soteriology, was also shallow. Infant baptism was dismissed as unnecessary and unbiblical. Interestingly, inner light and visions were favoured at the cost of the Bible. Later, Quakerism cultivated this trend to the extreme. Luther and Lutherans were criticised for their biblical faith based on the Bible alone. Lutherans were seen as slaves to the Scriptures. Modern Pentecostalism can be seen as an heir of historical Anabaptism.

The Reformation caused many religiously motivated wars in Europe, particularly in the 17th century. Protestants were exposed to merciless persecution in the Catholic countries. There were civil wars as in France between the Catholic establishment and the Protestant Huguenots. England had its own wars and revolutions. There were international wars: Spain planned to conquer England by sending the Great Armada that finally perished. Germany was devastated by the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648).

The Reformation gave birth to strong Lutheran churches. After the publishing of the *Book of Concord*, the pure doctrine was to be taught to all and be practised by all. Lutheranism produced towering theologians and clear textbooks in dogmatics. In many countries, the Lutheran churches became national churches. The Bible and doctrinal books were quickly translated into national languages. This is how many European vernaculars became literary national languages and survived until present day. The Lutheran Reformation matured in the era of Lutheran Orthodoxy. It created a rich culture of devotional and doctrinal literature, hymnody, church art and music. The heyday of the Lutheran Orthodoxy was culturally the era of the Lutheran Baroque. Since Lutheran countries were landlocked, Lutheran overseas mission was not possible. The great sea-powers of the day were Roman Catholic (Portugal, Spain, France), Anglican (England) and Reformed (The Netherlands), not Lutheran. Lutheranism was expanded by emigration from Europe. The first Scandinavian Lutherans arrived in North America in 1619, a year prior to the 'Mayflower'. Swedish and Finnish Lutherans settled down on the Delaware in 1638. The English Crown granted to Lutherans in New York—earlier New Amsterdam—the privilege of building their own church in 1664.

2 Understanding the Lutheran Reformation

Later on, the Lutheran Reformation has been understood and explained in various, even contradictory ways. I will pick up the main alternatives and conclude with the understanding of Dr. Martin Luther and the other Lutheran reformers of the church.

In **Marxism**, of course, the Reformation was attributed solely to various societal and economic factors. It was seen as a pre-revolutionary movement and an upheaval. In Marxism, only the radical Anabaptists were truly revolutionary since they dared to draw the extreme conclusions. Liberals also share such a view: Anabaptists were true reformers unlike the conservative, biblicist and traditionalist Lutherans.

Liberal theology in the 19th and 20th centuries considered the Reformation primarily as a paradigm: the Reformation was an answer to various questions of its own time. Similarly, the church must today find its own answers to our contemporary questions, which are different. Our answers must not necessarily conform to the doctrinal articles of the Reformation/the Book of Concord. It is the model of “doing something” which makes the Reformation acceptable to Liberal theology, although the content of this “doing something” can be extremely far from the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. Today the agenda of such “do something”-theology is generally anti-biblical to the extent of being hostile to the Holy Scriptures, since the content of the biblical doctrine contradicts and strongly opposes such fashionable, politically correct trends as the ordination of women and the practice of homosexuality. Basically, these contradictions concern the doctrine of justification. The idea of doctrinal continuity from the Bible to the Early Church and through the Reformation until our own time is totally alien to Liberal concepts. Marxist and Liberal concepts have created many cross-breeds of political theology: the Reformation is seen as a paradigm of “doing something” in culture, politics, in national life, emancipation, feminism, and so forth, although the Bible and the Lutheran doctrine are at the same time being met with scepticism or dismissed at the outset. It is the model that matters, not the doctrine.

Confessional Lutheranism follows the intentions of the Lutheran Confessions to believe, teach and confess the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, in its purity. The Reformation was far more important than being solely a historical model of action. Since the doctrinal articles of faith are true summaries of the Word of God, they cannot be outdated or, therefore, altered. There prevails *doctrinal continuity* from the Early Church until the present day. The traditional liturgy indicates this continuity in the worship of the church. The Lutheran Reformation was a rediscovery of the Gospel. The Gospel is christological and, thus, eternal. Christology makes the Gospel, the power of God, also the doctrine of the Bible (Lk. 24:27). This doctrine cannot change since Jesus Christ is the same yesterday,

today and for ever (Hbr. 13:8). The closing statement of the first part of the *Augsburg Confession* says clearly that the Lutheran reformers purported to reintroduce to the life of the church the classic Trinitarian and Christological doctrines of the Early Church. They wanted to retain the classic worship of the church in the West:

*This is about the Sum of our Doctrine, in which, as can be seen, there is nothing that varies from the Scriptures, or from the Church Catholic, or from the Church of Rome as known from its writers. This being the case, they judge harshly who insist that our teachers be regarded as heretics. There is, however, disagreement on certain abuses, which have crept into the Church without rightful authority. It is a false and malicious charge that all the ceremonies, all the things instituted of old, are abolished in our churches. But it has been a common complaint that some abuses were connected with the ordinary rites. These, inasmuch as they could not be approved with a good conscience, have been to some extent corrected.*³

Where is our place as heirs of the Lutheran Reformation?

3 The Enlightenment and Revolution

In the course of the 18th century, Europe was permeated by a strong cultural current called the Enlightenment. It was seen in stark contrast to the religious intolerance and religious wars of the 17th century. The Enlightenment was human-centered. It revered human reason and promoted tolerance. Generally, the thinkers of the Enlightenment were critical of Christian dogmas, of doctrinal formulations. Biblical criticism took its first steps under the Enlightenment. The Word of God was increasingly seen in the light of reason rather than divine revelation. The Enlightenment was, again, a European phenomenon. Islam has never experienced events similar to the Reformation or the Enlightenment. From this time on, the influence of critical biblical scholarship has grown to new heights. The French Revolution in 1789 was a fruit of the French Enlightenment. It also disclosed the blood-thirsty, violent nature of enlightened political fanatics. This revolutionary violence recurred in apocalyptic proportions in the Communist regimes of the 20th century. As during the French Revolution, so also under Communism multitudes of Christians had to pay for their faith with their blood. The Enlightenment was in Europe a decisive turn away from the biblical Christian faith in culture, science, philosophy and even critical theology. The Enlightenment was boosting the development towards a secular society with values more and more opposed to

³CA XXI (Latin; *Concordia Triglotta*).

the Christian faith. This critical, secular society with many anti-Christian values is today the reality in the West. More ideas and philosophies critical to Christianity were downloaded in the course of the 19th century, such as Marxism, positivism and Darwinism.

4 The Renewal of Lutheranism

The 19th century brought amazing renewal after the Napoleonic wars which ended in 1815. Waves of awakenings (in German, '*Erweckung*') swept over Europe. In Lutheran churches, these revivals generally generated renewal. They were also strongly opposed and even oppressed by church leaders and authorities in society. The critical rationalism of the Enlightenment gave way to Romanticism. The Enlightenment did not completely disappear from the churches but at least it had to make room for the living, biblical faith. Rationalistic criticism of the Bible, however, grew as never before. Yet, Lutheranism experienced renewal in the form of 'Neo-Lutheranism'. Ordinary men and women began to study the Book of Concord. Print-runs of Lutheran literature grew. In Germany, Lutheranism underwent persecution under the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm III, who in three phases, in 1798, 1817, and 1830, forced the Lutheran and the Calvinistic churches to a church of union. Since then, confessional Lutherans faced all kinds of discrimination in public offices. Even military force was used against Lutheran Christians who opposed the policies of the king. Thousands of them emigrated in the steadily rising stream of immigration into the United States of America. These German Lutherans formed many confessional churches, most importantly in 1847 the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Immigration brought to Canada and the U.S. great numbers of Lutherans from Scandinavia and from various other Lutheran churches of Europe as well.

Western colonialism reached its peak in the course of the 19th century. Almost the entire world was more or less controlled by the colonial powers of Europe. Protestant missions expanded under their protection. Lutherans in growing numbers joined the world mission. Revivals at home gave birth to missions in abroad.

Biblical Lutheran renewal even continued in the 20th century. This century underwent two gigantic, devastating world wars in 1914–1918 and 1939–1945 and periods of blood-thirsty dictatorship in Russia, Germany, China and other countries. Internal genocides of millions of people took place in Turkey, in the Soviet Union, in Hitler's Germany and in Maozedong's China. In the 20th century, more Christian martyrs lost their lives than during the preceding 18 centuries put together. In theology, Luther again made a come-back in the so-called theological Luther Renaissance. Lutheran churches were growing around the world, no more solely in Europe. Mission work was bearing fruit. In theology, though, rational-

ism and historical criticism permeated the established churches more and more. It suffices in this connection to refer to the famous critical scholar of the New Testament with a Lutheran background, namely Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) and his devastatingly critical de-mythologising programme of the New Testament in 1941.

5 The Lutheran World Federation

The 20th century witnessed the emerging ecumenism and the birth of great international organizations to serve churches generally or within their own historic groups. After World War I, the Lutheran World Convention was founded in Germany to unite the Lutheran churches. This forum was trampled down by the events in Germany during Hitler's regime in 1933–1945. After World War II, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was founded in 1947 in Lund, Sweden. After six decades, some features may be observed concerning the LWF. The first two decades were dominated by conservative churchmen who wanted to go back to the biblical sources of theology and the church, such as Eyvind Berggrav from Norway, Hans Lilje from Germany, Carl Fry from the U.S., Martti Simojoki from Finland and Lajos Ordass from Hungary. Berggrav, Lilje and Ordass had personally experienced a church struggle against a totalitarian state. They expected a Lutheran revival and renewal to develop in traditional established churches. Such a folk-church renewal, however, never came.

The General Assembly of the LWF in Helsinki in 1963 disclosed an amazing inner weakness in the member churches: Lutherans were unable to produce a document and declaration concerning the meaning of the doctrine of justification! Such was the disarray of the theological ranks of the Lutheran churches. From then on, the LWF ventured into new areas. During the global final boom of communism, prior to its rapid collapse, and in the days of the rising New Left in the West, the theological work of the LWF embraced political theology. In the course of the 1970s, the old conservative leadership was retired and gone. New leaders with Liberal or political agendas began to man the offices of the LWF in Geneva. Today, the LWF is a forum and an agency of radical secular theology which deviates from the classical Christian faith. The faith of the *Book of Concord* has not been on its agenda for a long time. In the General Assembly of Winnipeg, Canada, in 2003, many eyes were opened when homosexuality was strongly advocated on the official platform of the LWF. Many a delegate, especially from Africa and Asia, asked what is the true direction of the organization when it leads to such an appalling conflict with the Word of God. The ordination of women had changed the conception of the apostolic office of the ministry. Feminism had brought in a new he/she god to be worshipped like in the days of pagan Roman Antiquity.

Now the elementary natural way of being human, namely being man and woman, has been replaced by androgyny, which was familiar to the pagans of Hellenistic culture but which was an abomination to the Christians, who confessed the faith in God's creation.⁴

6 The Bible Crisis and Re-grouping of Lutheranism

The development in Germany after World War II ran towards union between the Lutheran and Reformed churches. It was believed that the historically insurmountable differences between the Lutheran and Calvinistic confessions could be reconciled with the help of modern biblical scholarship. In 1957, the so-called Arnoldshain theses concerning the Eucharist were published. They paved the way for church fellowship between the Lutheran and the Reformed churches as well as the churches of union. This full altar and pulpit fellowship was argued and declared in the Leuenberg Concord in 1973. In practice, the concord became a yard-stick with which the Lutheran Confessions were measured from then on, not the other way round as should have been the case. What thus happened was an alteration of the Lutheran Confessions. What the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm had started with royal administrative decrees and state coercion at the end of the 18th century had finally been sealed in Germany on the theological and ecclesiastical level. Friedrich Schleiermacher had triumphed over Martin Luther and Martin Chemnitz, so to speak. Basically, the exegetical method was based on the idea of a multidoctrinal New Testament: Since the NT was supposed to contain different doctrines, which however could live side by side, consequently the differences between the Lutheran and the Reformed doctrine were explained as inclusive, not exclusive, possibilities. The critical idea of multidoctrinalism in the NT has been generally the Liberal method either to make the doctrine relative only or to dismiss it completely as a source of contradicting interpretations. Historically, however, the Early Church did not acknowledge the principle of multidoctrinalism. On the contrary, the doctrine was one. This conception is underlined by the fact that various creeds of the Early Church were, indeed, varying, but never contradicting each other. The Lutheran Reformation also dismissed the idea of multidoctrinalism. Multidoctrinalism would make the Bible into a vacillating foundation of the faith and the church. Christ would be an ambiguous witness to the truth. Opposing such relativism, as Luther did against Erasmus in the *Bondage of the Will*, Luther-

⁴Androgyny, 'man-womanhood', a concept that abolishes the difference between the sexes and considers the sexes to be rather matters of choice. Man has womanhood present in himself and *vice versa*. Hellenistic culture: a period c. 600 years from Alexander the Great (d. 323 B.C.) until the victory of the church during Constantine the Great in the 4th century A.D.

ans taught the authority (*auctoritas*), clarity (*claritas*), transparency (*perspicuitas*) and the efficacy (*efficacia*) of the Holy Scriptures.

Later, new developments have carved world Lutheranism, which is represented by the LWF, hollow and hollow in terms of doctrine and the confession. Two ecumenical documents matured in the 1990s, namely the Anglican-Lutheran Porvoo Agreement between the Scandinavian and Baltic Lutheran churches and the Anglican churches of the British Isles in 1996 (similar agreements followed in North America), and the Joint Declaration concerning the doctrine of justification between the LWF and the Vatican in 1999. Rome swiftly neutralised for its own part the very little it had seemingly given in with reservations in the JD. The Pope, very soon after the signing of JD, directed the Roman church back to the decrees of the Council of Trent in the 16th century. As we should know, it is the decrees of Trent, the council of the Counter-Reformation, that condemns in strongest possible terms the Lutheran doctrine concerning justification by faith alone. Recently, the Pope has declared that other churches apart from the Church of Rome are defective semi-churches. He explained this by insisting that the lack of those characteristic elements of Rome, for instance the office of the Pope, makes other Christians communities defective and handicapped. They are not churches in the fullest meaning of the word.

The problem of such doctrinal documents as Porvoo in Scandinavia or JD with Rome is that, in terms of church politics, they become moulds into which the historical Lutheran Confessions are being cast whereas, in reality, the opposite should be done. For instance, a new understanding of the office of the bishop has recently changed ecclesiastical practises towards the Anglican concept to the extent of being clearly contrary to the Lutheran Confessions. For example, due to the adaptation of the concept of a tripartite office of the ministry (bishops-priests-deacons), it is only the bishop who is authorised to ordain. Even the keys of heaven have been taken from all the clergy to the bishops, contrary to the Lutheran doctrine. Yet, it is crystal clear that the Lutheran Confessions acknowledge differences amongst the clergy only to human authority (*ius humanum*), not to the divine authority or justice (*ius divinum*).⁵

Various church unions or federations or fellowships between Lutheran churches within the LWF and other Protestant churches with differing doctrines follow the rule that it is only the churches in decline, with hollow identities, that like to join other churches, regardless of doctrine and confession. Strong, dynamic churches choose carefully their partners or have no interest at all in joining other churches since their growth is occupying their resources. Alliances between declining churches can only accelerate their down-hill walk. Therefore, Rome, which has recovered its might and self-confidence even in spite of recent moral set-backs, is

⁵CA 28; SA; *Treatise*.

interested only in swallowing up the Protestant churches. This growing giant has learned to wait, and it can afford to wait and see as well. While waiting, it can expect to witness how the historic Protestant iron ring in Europe is finally rusting away as secularised traditional Protestant main-line churches are losing further ground in theology and amongst European peoples. Strong Catholic immigration within the EU is already changing church sociology in traditional Protestant countries. As it presently looks, the future of religion will be dominated by Rome, Islam and a new, mighty Protestant contingent, namely Pentecostalism. The time has passed when the term main-line churches principally meant Anglicans, Lutherans and Presbyterians. Their historic political status as established churches and their missionary resources had given them this favourable position. No more. When these traditional churches today are sending a few scores of missionaries here and there, and this includes even the LCMS, the number of American missionaries world-wide is, according to statistics published by *The Economist*, c. 200,000. Where are they coming from? The number of various Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians is estimated at c. 400 million. A growing contingent lives in Chinese home-churches. It would be a waste of time for Liberals to attempt to enter into dialogue with these new biblicist main-line Christians with the classics of modern, secular, critical, non-biblical academic theology which is the jargon and the talk of the town in Geneva.

The fundamental crisis in the withering former main-line Protestant churches concerns primarily the Holy Scriptures. The Enlightenment and Rationalism first inflicted a deadly wound to them in academic theology. This wound has now infected entire church bodies. I have witnessed in my brief life-time just such a rapid process in a strong established Lutheran church. The classical scriptural Lutheran doctrine first gave way to multi-doctrinalism. The historic turn occurred in the ordination of women. Since then, a trend of secular anti-scriptural doctrine has swiftly permeated the church. The secular media have played an important role in this secular mission within the church. The life of the clergy and of their parishes bears less and less resemblance to Christianity. Simultaneously, this new secular religion in the church is growing extremely intolerant. Multi-doctrinalism is developing into a single, secular, anti-scriptural dogmatism with which everyone must comply. Secular Western churches have also tried their best to implant theologies of this description in Africa, South America, the Pacific and Asia. It is sobering, however, to see all the relevant factors in context: declining, crumbling churches; declining mission efforts; secular, non-scriptural theology which nowadays embraces all possible heresies concerning doctrine and life, heresies known already to the Early Church. It is a formula for disaster. What makes church-leaders and many observers blind to its impact is positive, secular Western media coverage. The media is, however, a capricious mentor. It can quickly turn its back on doomed projects. After all, it cannot inflate life and vigour into empty bags.

The title 'From Augsburg to Geneva' covers the development of the Lutheran churches from the heyday of the Lutheran Reformation until present-day situation, when the LWF is residing in the historic city of Jean Calvin, namely Geneva. As it may have sometimes sounded to you in the course of this presentation, my concerns about the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions are not primarily pragmatic: "Liberalism is a formula of disaster, so let us try confessionalism!" No! My concerns are scriptural and christological. If we lose the Bible, we lose the Lord and King of the Holy Scriptures, who is the Lord of the church present amongst his believers. He cannot be manipulated even with most persuasive oratory of men and angels, if this oratory is against His own word. Only He can give life to his church. The purpose of all true theology is to formulate the biblical doctrine as clearly and as profoundly as possible. Liberal theology attempts to manipulate the Holy Scriptures and the church with a flow of words that give a deviating meaning to the words of the Bible. These different words stem from human philosophies. Philosophical principles then hijack the Bible as has happened and happens time and again. The theological work of the LWF since the 1970s is bearing this very mark on its forehead. It has already disclosed its true character in theological and ethical bankruptcy.

The way of the Lutheran Reformers, like the way of the Early Church, was different. It is the way of new life and constant, amazing renewal by virtue of the word of the Holy Scriptures. Are we seriously willing to follow this road? There are many Lutherans all over the world who would strongly say, 'I will'. Following the road of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions requires logical steps, readiness even for shame and suffering. Many fellow Lutherans can support us with their experience of dealing with shame and tribulation. The Lutheran doctrine as the true summary of the Bible is, after all, indispensable to all Christians who adhere to the divine revelation of the Bible. That is why the pure Lutheran doctrine has so much to give. It can always inspire those who are open to the truth of the Word of God. This is our heritage and our task. Lutheran renewal has always taken history with surprise.

World Lutheranism is in the process of crumbling and re-grouping at the same time. Our agenda is to serve in the best possible way the renewal and the future glory of the Lutheran Reformation. This is not because of ecclesiastical tribalism to promote a denomination at all costs but because of the divine truth of the Holy Scriptures: "Holy Father, sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth" (John 17:17).