



**PATHWAYS FOR  
ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS  
DIALOGUE**

# Ecumenical Perspectives Five Hundred Years After Luther's Reformation

Edited by  
**Gerard Mannion · Dennis M. Doyle  
Theodore G. Dedon**

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Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious  
Dialogue

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Editors

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Perspectives Five  
Hundred Years After  
Luther's Reformation

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**Gerard Mannion** held the Joseph and Winifred Amaturio Chair in Catholic Studies at Georgetown University, where he was also a senior research fellow of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. Educated at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, he was an honorary fellow of the Australian Catholic University and held visiting professorships and fellowships at universities such as Tübingen, Germany; the Dominican Institute for Theology and University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, Canada; the Institute of Religious Sciences in Trento, Italy; and the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium. He has served as chair of the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network, and numerous books and articles have been published particularly in the fields of ecclesiology, ecumenism, ethics and social justice.

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# Introduction

*Dennis M. Doyle and Theodore G. Dedon*

Gerard Mannion provided the initial momentum that brought about the Ecclesiological Investigations Network conference held in Jena, Germany, in 2017 from which this volume of essays has been drawn. Gerard was a mover and shaker when it came to ecumenical action. As ecclesiologist Brian Flanagan of Marymount University wrote in a recent memorial,

rather than waiting for ecclesial divisions to cease or for official dialogues to reach their conclusions, Gerard attempted to simply live into a world where ecclesial divisions mattered, but did not matter that much; in which the realities of difference were never ignored, but also never allowed to dominate relations between people or provide cover for dismissive attitudes. In the face of the “not yet” of the divisions of the church, Gerard lived into the

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“already” of being with others across the divisions of the church, both theologically in the voices he listened to and amplified in his scholarship, and personally in the ways in which he brought people together.<sup>1</sup>

This volume represents one small piece of the many contributions of Gerard Mannion to ecumenical theology.

The essays collected here address important issues such as the meaning of the Reformation, the reception of Luther in Germany and beyond, contemporary ecumenical dialogues, and pathways to the future. The authors employ a number of methodologies. Taken as a whole, the primary method of this book is theology informed by history, hermeneutics, ethics, and social theory.

The main focus is on Reformation Christianity and on current Lutheran-Catholic understandings and relationships. There is also some inclusion of Jewish and Orthodox traditions as well as global issues. The majority of authors are from the United States and Germany, with some from other parts of the world. On the one hand, the volume includes many essays by easily recognized and established figures. On the other hand, the volume continues the tradition of Ecclesiological Investigations Network by including also contributions by younger, emerging scholars.

Given the conference’s location in Jena and that two of the headline speakers were prominent German Luther scholars, the volume is oriented toward what has come to be thought of as the German interpretation of Luther that focuses on the doctrine of justification and Luther’s break from Rome in connection with the birth of the modern world. It should be noted that the alternative Finnish interpretation of Luther associated with Tuomo Mannermaa is not addressed in this volume.<sup>2</sup> This interpretation, currently popular in the Nordic countries and beyond, emphasizes parallels between Luther’s thought and Orthodox tradition, especially in regard to divinization.

Within the structure of the book can be found the classic hermeneutical circle: What was the meaning of the Reformation for Luther in his own time? What are various ways in which Luther and the Reformation have been interpreted in history? How does knowledge of these things help us today to understand the Reformation and to move forward? This arrangement mirrors the “Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue”

<sup>1</sup>Brian Flanagan, “In Memoriam: Gerard Mannion (1970–2019),” *Ecumenical Trends* 49/3 (May 2020): 25.

<sup>2</sup>See Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).



pattern of asking: Where have we been? Where are we now? Where are we heading?

The first section on the meaning and reception of the Reformation opens with back to back essays by two esteemed German theologians, one a renowned Protestant biblical scholar and the other a famous Roman Catholic ecclesiologist. Both authors, Gerd Theissen and Peter Neuner, focus on Luther's interpretation of Paul, and both find in Luther's teaching on justification a key to addressing present ecumenical challenges.

Gerd Theissen's contribution, initially a keynote address, offers a visionary overview that builds summarily upon his life work. Theissen argues that it is the task of contemporary Christians to continue the reforms begun by Paul and Luther, especially in areas where they were not successful. The meaning of their messages of reform must be translated into our current times as recognition of the ultimate value of each person and the need to fight against oppressive boundaries. Theissen examines the sparks that ignited the reforms of Paul and of Luther in order to draw inspiration for igniting a third spark today, based in mysticism, that will be manifested in a Dialogical Bible as well as in interreligious cooperation in the pursuit of universal human rights.

Peter Neuner observes that celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Luther's Reformation tend to honor Luther more as a contemporary cultural celebrity than as an historical figure. Images of Luther are put in the service of various causes and forms of commerce. Few seem interested in Luther's own thoughts regarding religious faith and reform. A similar tendency can be found in every era since the time of Luther. Neuner offers an historical survey of various ways in which Luther has been interpreted to fit the purposes of particular times and movements. He also addresses the negative reception of Luther among Catholics as well as the very gradual shift toward acceptance and even endorsement. He recommends that Protestants and Catholics today try to build together an ecumenical reception upon what was truly important to Luther—the doctrine of justification.

Stephen Brown focuses on the reception of Luther in the territories that after the Second World War made up the German Democratic Republic (GDR). These territories were the heartland of the Lutheran Reformation. Brown explores how the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED), although initially deeply ambivalent about Martin Luther and his legacy, attempted to use the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth to re-appropriate motifs in German history it had previously spurned and to incorporate the

GDR's Protestant churches into the strengthening of the socialist state. Instead, the commemoration contributed to the self-confidence of the Protestant churches, and the official attempt to construct a new national narrative for the GDR ultimately failed. Brown demonstrates how the consequences of this failure would be seen in the growth of disaffection and dissent within the Protestant churches and beyond, and which became manifest in the "peaceful revolution" of 1989.

Craig Phillips examines how Paul and Luther are being received in the work of the political theorist Giorgio Agamben. Agamben employs a secular, non-theological, reading of Pauline messianism in order to make law inoperative, such that law can be restored to its common use in the plane of social and political praxis. Phillips begins with an investigation of what "freedom from the law" means for Agamben's philosophical project by contrasting it with Martin Luther's theological understanding of "freedom from the law." He then investigates Simon Critchley's critique of Agamben's radically antinomian understanding of faith and its relationship to law. Finally, Phillips contrasts the passive righteousness that Luther finds in Christian freedom with the freedom Agamben finds in law that has been made inoperative. For Luther and Agamben the way to genuine freedom is not through action, but through inaction.

Theodore Dedon investigates ways in which false narratives about medieval Christianity and the Reformation are used within contemporary far-right political visions. Drawing upon Eric Hobsbawm's concept of "invented tradition," Dedon analyzes a species of reactionary far-right politics that utilizes and sometimes criticizes Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant. Specifically engaged in the promotion of white identitarianism against encroaching Islamism, liberalism, and globalism, these political actors have invented forms of Christianity which would be otherwise alien to their historical counterparts. Dedon examines non-Christian thinkers such as Julius Evola alongside cultural Christians such as Anders Breivik and explicit Christian identitarians such as Brenton Tarrant, both of whom are infamous for terrorist acts in defense of "western civilization." He contextualizes their claims historically and sheds light on how seemingly traditional symbols, concepts, or historical episodes are used in ways that are ahistorical and thoroughly modern.

The book's middle section focuses on ecumenical relations, offering two essays on Jewish-Christian relations followed by essays exploring connections between Lutherans with Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Reformed traditions. Amy Phillips' essay explores how Robert Bellarmine's

training as a Hebraist and work as a censor afforded him the opportunity to encounter Jewish literature with a depth that rivaled his Protestant and Christian Hebraist counterparts. She demonstrates how Bellarmine's positions on Scripture give insight into how the decrees of Council of Trent were interpreted. Bellarmine follows the reforming decrees of Trent and provides an exegetical complexity that did not formerly exist in apologetics against Luther's and other Protestant readings of Scripture, especially in his work *Disputationes de controversiis Christianae fidei*. Although censors at the Congregation for the Index of Prohibited Books wanted the elimination of all Jewish literature, Bellarmine called for moderation, arguing that insight and value could be found in rabbinic commentaries. His encounter with the Talmud was not without misunderstanding but it enriched his awareness of interpretations offered by Jewish scholars at a time when the Talmud was forbidden, censored, or burned.

Luc Forestier traces out an important though often invisible connection between Jewish-Christian relationships and the Ecumenical Movement, starting from 1947 with the "Ten Points" of the Conference in Seelisberg (Switzerland). He builds upon the fact that for most churches today, the permanency of Israel presents not only a historical fact but also a theological issue which may sometimes create division within and between denominations. Forestier shows how the question of biblical hermeneutics becomes central as we discover in these texts signs of the ongoing debates within the Christian communities about relationships between Jews and Christians. He even finds in the establishing of a new tradition of biblical interpretation by Martin Luther an example of the interaction between the canon of Scripture and the People of God. And this interaction, he suggests, may give a new relevance to the articulation of Christian ordinances as displayed by the Lambeth Quadrilateral. Finally, Forestier explains how the distinction between the People of God and the eschatological kingdom raises questions which belong to fundamental theology.

Radu Bordeianu first briefly outlines the history of the Orthodox-Lutheran dialogue, beginning in the sixteenth century, when the Ecumenical Patriarchate had contacts with Melancthon and Tübingen's theologians, up to today's dialogue, focused on ecclesiology. Then, to anticipate the direction of future Orthodox-Lutheran dialogues, he addresses three themes that were prominent at the 2016 Council of Crete: first, under the influence of anti-ecumenical elements, the council did not consistently designate Western Christians as "churches," instead using

“confessions” or “communities,” which is a most recent innovation; second, the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue will have to seriously consider the role of politics in ecclesial matters, since both our churches have suffered over the centuries from the state’s hindering of church unity; and third, despite paralyzing intra-Orthodox dynamics and negative experiences at the World Council of Churches that have now been addressed, Orthodoxy remains committed to ecumenical dialogue, now with a conciliar mandate.

Samuel Wagner draws upon twenty years of ecumenical experience to consider positive impacts and lessons learned as a Lutheran living and working alongside Catholic peers, colleagues, and mentors. Beginning with a graduate education at The Catholic University of America, then a career at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ office for ecumenical and interreligious relations, and now presently in the Office of the President at Georgetown University, he explores how appreciation for one’s own tradition (in this case, Lutheran) can be deepened while engaged in projects to promote ecumenical and interreligious dialogue for Catholic institutions. His reflection highlights insights gained from involvement in this unique career path, concluding with the impact of Pope Francis as Lutherans and Catholics commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Gesa Thiessen demonstrates in her essay how Luther rejected the outright iconoclasm of Reformers such as Zwingli and Calvin and instead adopted a balanced position. She shows how Luther recognized the danger of the misuse of images while acknowledging their role in spreading the gospel and in clarifying the Christian message, considered the choice to use or not use images to be a matter of Christian liberty. Luther, explains Thiessen, opposed not material images but their misuse, especially when connected with the belief that good works merit salvation, and he found idolatry to lie not in material objects but in the human heart. She demonstrates further how Lutheran art came to be used in polemics against Calvinists and Catholics alike; how Lucas Cranach the Elder, and the Younger as well, promoted specifically Lutheran themes in pictorial form; and how the altarpiece in the city church of Wittenberg expresses a distinctive Lutheran aesthetic that rejects both idolatry and iconoclasm and which today can be understood in an ecumenical way.

Closing out this middle section are essays that formed a book panel at the conference in Jena. Three scholars offer their comments on Bernhard Knorn’s *Versöhnung und Kirche: Theologische Ansätze zur Realisierung des Friedens mit Gott in der Welt*. Dennis Doyle reads the book with a focus

on the work's ecumenical dimensions, emphasizing especially the potential of contemporary Catholic sacramental theology. Simone Sinn draws upon her work with the Lutheran World Federation to consider how Christians can communicate their theological narratives in ways that foster both ecumenical progress and processes of reconciliation in the world. She affirms the identification of the church as an actual place of reconciliation, but questions whether Lutherans can rightly think of the church itself as a sacrament. Ralf Wüstenberg first offers an appreciative analysis of Knorn's sacramental ecclesiology. He then raises questions concerning parallel efforts already made by Protestant theologians as well as the relevance of Knorn's approach for non-Christians. Knorn responds to the questions raised by the three scholars.

The final section contains essays that look toward the future of ecumenism. Leo Lefebure proposes a strategy to transform the history of animosity between Catholics and Protestants by realigning memories in light of problems that challenge all parties to the conflict and that call for cooperation for effective action. His essay transcends the traditional Catholic-Protestant binary by examining various meanings of the freedom of a Christian, from Martin Luther's proclamation of this theme to the efforts of Antonio Montesino and Bartolomé de las Casas on behalf of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, and also to the hymns of freedom of enslaved African Americans. While these memories were quite different in their original contexts, they continue to make claims on us today to work for liberation, and they have particular significance for the present time at Georgetown University as its community wrestles with its history of profiting from the enslavement and sale of African Americans.

John Borelli draws upon Pope Francis to talk in a positive way about a craziness for the love of God and one another that can fuel a crazy hope in ecumenical progress. Borelli proclaims that more reason exists after 2017 to hope for success in ecumenism than at any time in 500 years. Unlike previous centennials, the fifth in 2017 of the Lutheran Reformation epitomized a commemoration for the ecumenical age. By 1999, the dialogues had realized a differentiating consensus for agreement on the doctrine of justification and as a model for the future. Borelli demonstrates how hope impelled the dialogues; hope topped the themes of 2017; and hope directs five communions of churches sharing the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* to discern its spiritual and ecclesiastical consequences for greater fellowship and communion.

In the essay that concludes this volume, Peter Phan retrieves the excitement generated by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) for having instituted a twofold dialogue, dialogue among the Christian churches and dialogue between Christian churches and other religions. His essay, both historical and constructive in nature, first gives a brief overview of how the Catholic Church viewed non-Catholic churches and other religions. Phan explains Vatican II's teaching on ecumenical unity, especially in its decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, as well as its teaching on the relationship of the church to non-Christian religions, especially in its declaration *Nostra aetate*. Finally, inspired by the papacy of Pope Francis, he suggests ways to go forward beyond the current impasse in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

**Acknowledgments** Vladimir Latinovic partnered with Gerard Mannion in the planning of the Ecclesiological Investigations Network 2017 conference in Jena upon which this volume is based. Theodore Dedon, at that time a graduate assistant to Gerard, performed many of the everyday tasks. Also helping in the planning were EIN members Mark Chapman, Dennis Doyle, Dale Irvin, Leo Lefebure, and Jason Welle. On the ground in Jena, Martin Leiner, the Director of the Jena Center for Reconciliation Studies at the Friedrich-Schiller University of Jena, his colleague, Dr. Francesco Ferrari, and the Jena Center staff aided greatly in both the planning and the execution of the conference.

Before his untimely death, Gerard Mannion had collected the contributions and did the first round of editing. Theodore Dedon worked alongside Gerard during the entire project. Dennis Doyle more recently joined the editorial team.

PART I

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The Meaning and Reception of  
Luther's Reformation



# Open Temple and Dialogical Church: How to Fulfill the Reform of Paul and the Protestant Reformation? A Keynote Address

*Gerd Theissen*

Paul's doctrine of justification was the spark that initiated Luther's Reformation. Paul aimed at an opening of Judaism for all peoples, and Luther aimed at a renewal of the Christian church. The model of Luther's Reformation was Paul, his person, and his doctrine—even if Luther perhaps did not understand some significant aspects of Paul's work and theology. According to many exegetes, he did not recognize the social dynamic of his preaching of justification and grace.<sup>1</sup> Both reformers, Paul and

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1977); Parish Sanders, ed., *Paul and Palestinian Judaism. A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977); James D.G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," in: *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 65 (1983): 95–122. This new

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Luther, failed. Therefore, my thesis is: It is our task to fulfill Paul's failing reform and to continue Luther's unfulfilled Reformation. The presupposition is: Luther's model and inspiration was Paul, both his person and his doctrine.<sup>2</sup>

The person of Paul was Luther's model because Paul had resisted Peter. In Antioch Paul had criticized Peter and defended the liberty to break with traditions that separated Jews and Gentiles. Just as Paul had resisted Peter in those days, so has Luther now resisted the Pope. Luther regarded Paul's criticism of Peter as legitimation of his criticism of the Pope.

Paul's theology was Luther's inspiration for his theological doctrine of justification. At Antioch Paul emphasized that he basically agreed with Peter in this regard, but that he wished to implement this doctrine of justification more consistently in life. If all people are justified only by grace, the separation of Gentiles as sinners and Jews as righteous people must be wrong. Jewish commandments, separating Gentiles from Jews, are therefore no longer valid. The doctrine of justification opened the door to the Gentiles. It prevented at the same time an internal split between Gentiles and Jews in the Christian congregations. There are no Christians of first and second degree. All are equal in Christ.

This doctrine of justification was the spark of the Reformation. Paul ignited it; Luther made it glow again. Luther caused a firestorm, causing also some fire damages. If we want to celebrate ecumenically the Reformation today, we have to consider on the one side these damages, but on the other side also many good ideas of the Reformation time—ideas of both Protestants and Catholics which may inspire us today.

The spark of the Reformation is still alive today. Some discover this spark even in the present Pope. Of course, the message of the Reformation sounds in our times a little bit different than in Luther's time. The message addressed to us today is: Regardless of what a human being, whether one is successful or fails in one's life, whether one has done good or evil, regardless of whether one is rich or poor, Jew or Greek, immigrant or native, man or woman—all people are acknowledged by God. God

perspective on Paul is not at all present in the "*Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre*" (Augsburg 1999); compare *Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre*, (Frankfurt aM: Lembeck, 42000). That is hard to understand: If the doctrine of justification opens the door to other human beings, it has an ecumenical dimension.

<sup>2</sup>Victor Stoll, *Luther und Paulus. Die exegetischen und hermeneutischen Grundlagen der lutherischen Rechtfertigungslehre im Paulinismus Luthers*, in *Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte* 10 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2002).

requires only one thing: We must trust God in the same way that God says “YES” to us. There is no other precondition, except that we accept this divine acknowledgment as a pure gift from God.

This message opposes nowadays neither a Pope, nor Catholics, but contradicts very clearly a resurgent nationalism and tendency toward autocracy in the whole world. This message of justification wants to open the door for all people in the world. The national-autocratic movements want to close it and plan to erect high walls separating nations, rich and poor, inhabitants and immigrants.

This message contradicts nowadays also a commandment for optimization in our modern society in both the sphere of work and the private sphere. The basic imperative in our society is: You must produce and produce more. The basic imperative in our lifestyle is: You must develop your own EGO and develop it more. The message of justification says on the contrary: All human beings have an unconditional value in God’s eyes. This message is against mere ego-love and production for its own sake.

If one understands the doctrine of justification in this way, it sounds almost like a declaration of human rights. Human rights also say that all human beings are of equal value and have inalienable rights—regardless of whether they are Europeans or Africans, Muslims or Christians. But there is a crucial difference. Human rights are valid by birth, as justification is valid by faith. We have human rights by nature, and we are justified by grace. This is illustrated by the well-known Latin formulas in which the Reformation summarized its message: *sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus*.

The first formula *SOLA GRATIA* says: “Only by grace is man justified.” This formula characterizes God’s action.

The second formula *SOLA FIDE* says what a human being must do: One must trust God; one must believe God.

But how can one learn this confidence, when so much speaks against it, suffering and injustice in this world, wars and oppression, and last but not least our own weakness, failures, and sins? Therefore, the third formula answers: *SOLUS CHRISTUS*. It is only through Jesus of Nazareth, through his life, his preaching, his death, and his resurrection that we learn this trust and preserve it in all crises. This is roughly how the doctrine of justification sounds in modern sermons and thoughts, while the formula *SOLUS CHRISTUS* is sounding today often more quietly than *SOLA GRATIA* and *SOLA FIDE*.

Five hundred years ago the doctrine of justification sounded quite different. Perhaps you recognize some similarities: Human beings are saved from eternal hellfire, one is protected from death and the devil, eternal life is given to one if one not only believes that Jesus was sacrificed in one's stead by God, but also was justified in one's stead by his resurrection.

There is no doubt: We must translate such a faith today. But, despite all differences, one thing is common: the spark of the Reformation is an unconditional affirmation of life in response to an unconditional "YES" of God to human life. It is a responsive affirmation of life. But the images in which this life affirmation is expressed are indeed very different: I take hell as a picture for the world where it becomes a hell, both in life and in death.<sup>3</sup> I take the devil as a picture for the autodynamics of evil when the monotheistic faith becomes fanatical.<sup>4</sup> I interpret the vicarious death of Jesus as a picture teaching us that we live at the expense of other lives that are dying vicariously for us.<sup>5</sup> So viewed, these images are no longer so strange and far away.

Twice this spark of the Reformation was ignited. In primitive Christianity, Paul opened up Judaism to all peoples and implemented equality within the congregations. That was a progress, but with a negative effect: Judaism was split and the Christian church separated from Judaism. As far as Paul was concerned, when it came to opening up Judaism for all peoples, he failed. In spite of this failure, however, he became the most important architect of Christianity.

At the time of the Reformation, the same spark was to bring about a renewal of the church, but not as an opening of the church for other peoples. It was much more an opening up the frontier within the church between priests and laity. That was a real progress. But this progress too had a price. The one church was divided, and the internal church rule was not abolished. Rather, the good idea of common priesthood of all Christians legitimized the usurpation of power within Protestant churches by secular princes. If all Christians are priests, why should not a secular Christian prince become a church leader? Insofar as Luther intended a

<sup>3</sup> Compare Gerd Theissen, *Glaubenssätze. Ein kritischer Katechismus* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2012<sup>3</sup>2013), no. 126, 217 on the descent to hell.

<sup>4</sup> Gerd Theissen, *Glaubenssätze*, no. 124, 214–15 on the myth of Satan.

<sup>5</sup> Gerd Theissen, *Glaubenssätze*, no. 111, 191–2 and no. 112, 193–4 on the vicarious death of Jesus.

renewal of the whole church by overcoming internal church rule, he failed. But in spite of this he became one of the most important architects of Protestantism.

Our question is: Will the spark of Reformation flare up a third time and inspire Christianity? We have seen that this spark wants to remove two boundaries, the boundary between in-groups and out-groups and the boundary between social strata within one and the same group. This spark wants to cross the borders between one's own people and other nations and between those who have power in the church and the other ones. Precisely because Paul and Luther failed, both tasks are still unsolved. It is true, these limits will never completely disappear. Overcoming the borders between the peoples, between those "inside" and those "outside," will remain a timeless problem. Likewise, the separation within one and the same community, between those "above" and those "below," will survive. This is not only true for the church, but for the whole of society. The spark of Reformation, however, is alive wherever we do not accept these limits. We are able to shape these limits in a transparent and responsible way. We can recognize them, and we can sometimes cross them. We must not forget: All religion is a border phenomenon—it is awareness of the border between human beings and God and an awareness that human beings belong together because we all are living on the one side of this border. But religion should mean that a spark transcends all these borders.

These considerations result in the structure of my contribution: The first part offers a sketch of the reform movement of Paul in the first century CE. The second part offers some thoughts on the Reformation in the sixteenth century. The third part deals with our tasks today. I will focus on one task: How can the Christian churches open themselves to other religions and enter into a dialogue with them?

## PART I: THE SPARK OF REFORMATION IN PAUL'S MOVEMENT—THE OPENING FOR ALL PEOPLE

A new perspective on Paul says that Luther misunderstood Paul when he came to realize that God's salvation overcomes a bad conscience and the anxiety of damnation.<sup>6</sup> Luther himself says that the justification of the

<sup>6</sup>Gerd Theissen, "The New Perspective on Paul and its Limits. Psychological Considerations," Alexander Thompson Lecture Princeton 26.2.07 in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 27 (2007): 64–85. A fair comparison of Paul and Luther can be found in Wilfried

sinner and this confidence had become for him the “Gateway to Paradise” and to God.<sup>7</sup> The new perspective on Paul, on the other hand, says that the justification of the sinner was a “gate” to all other peoples. The problem for Paul was not a bad conscience, but the separatist function of the law which separates Jews and Gentiles. This social interpretation of the doctrine of justification is basically correct. After Paul has defined the justification in Romans 3:28 with the words “that a human being is righteous without the works of law, only through faith,” he asks rhetorically: “Is God the God of Jews only? Is God not also the God of the Gentiles?” (Rom 3:29). There is no doubt, therefore, that Paul’s doctrine of justification aims at opening the frontier between Jews and Gentiles.

I illustrate this point by the events at Jerusalem at the end of his missionary activity.<sup>8</sup> When Paul wrote the letter to the Romans before his journey to Jerusalem, he was afraid that he would be murdered there. Why was he afraid? As the goal of his mission, Paul defines the unification of all human beings in the worship of the one and only God. In Jerusalem his mission as a priest is to “sacrifice” Gentiles in a metaphorical sense (Rom 15:16). He thinks of the temple as the place of this “sacrifice.” Only in the temple can a sacrifice be offered. In fact, Paul had taken with him uncircumcised Gentile Christians. He was accused (according to Acts 21:28) in Jerusalem of having given one of them access to the temple against the law. Therefore, Paul was arrested. Most exegetes think that this accusation was unjustified. But it was justified, not because Paul had actually smuggled Gentiles into the temple, but because he was publicly dreaming that the temple would soon be opened for all God-fearing peoples in the whole world. The opening of the temple and of Judaism for all peoples—that was the great goal of his life!

But how can the temple be opened? Paul hopes that God will intervene. He says with an OT quote that the Savior will come “from the Zion” (i.e., out of the temple)—not as we are reading in the OT “because of the temple.” Paul expects Christ to come out of the temple, that he is coming just from the place where atonement for Israel was again and again

Härle, “Paulus und Luther. Ein kritischer Blick auf die ‘New Perspective,’” in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 103 (2006): 362–93, in *Spurensuche nach Gott. Studien zur Fundamentaltheologie und Gotteslehre* (Berlin: de Gruyter 2008), 202–39.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther in his preface of his *opera latina* of 1545, Weimar Edition, 54, 185.

<sup>8</sup> Compare Gerd Theissen and Petra v. Gemünden, *Der Römerbrief. Rechenschaft eines Reformators* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 311–26: “Der Traum von der Öffnung des Tempels.”