**From Conflict to Communion.**

**Joint Conference of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church on the Occasion of the 500th Anniversary of Reformation**

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**“From Conflict to Communion”: The Lutheran Perspective**

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Dear fellow participants,

The conference “From Conflict to Communion” is one of the major events in Estonia on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The anniversary of the Reformation is celebrated in Estonia with a great number of diverse events. This includes several important conferences and congresses. The unique feature of today’s conference is that it is organised jointly by the *Roman Catholic* Church in Estonia and the Estonian *Evangelical Lutheran* Church. This organisational arrangement itself is a sign of building bridges. However, bridges are also built in several other important respects.

Our *local* conference follows the work of the *international* Lutheran and Catholic joint commission that prepared study report “From Conflict to Communion”, which was presented in a recently completed Estonian translation in the opening part of the conference.[[1]](#footnote-1) Therefore, this conference is certainly a sign that Estonia is working on its response to the document, which has been the subject of global discussions in recent years. This document played an important preparatory role for the joint commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, held on 31 October 2016 in Lund Cathedral by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church. The prayer service was led by President Bishop Munib Younan and General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, representing the Lutheran World Federation, and by Pope Francis and Cardinal Kurt Koch, representing the Roman Catholic Church. We know that this common prayer service, which had participants from all over the world, was also attended by Bishop Philippe Jourdan and Archbishop Urmas Viilma from Estonia.

The common prayers service of Lund did not only include Catholics and Lutherans but also *representatives of other churches.* The presentations of today’s conference are enriched by contributions from free church and Orthodox perspectives. These examples help build a bridge to the specific characteristics of our local ecumenical context in Estonia. When we come to discussions, we will surely hear from the representatives of other sister churches, as well as hopefully from those who are not affiliated with any church. This is not a closed conference, but an open event for all who are interested. These bridge-building considerations and ambitions are characteristic of the conference “From Conflict to Communion” on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in Estonia.

Many of you probably know that, in the past year, I have held presentations on the basic characteristics of the spirituality and theology of the Reformation, the current status and future prospects of Lutheranism, and the significance of Martin Luther and the Reformation today. This is the reason why I am very glad to have this opportunity to contribute to the advancement of the discussion on the content and meaning of "From Conflict to Communion" in the Estonian context.

So much for introduction. The following reflections are divided in three parts. I start with a descriptive part, providing a brief overview of the document. The second part is analytical, in which I offer a critical – i.e., discerning – reflection on the assumptions, method and purpose of “From Conflict to Communion”, commenting on some of the emphases of the document. The third part includes my constructive reflection on the significance of “From Conflict to Communion” for the Catholic-Lutheran relations in particular, as well as the significance in a wider ecumenical context. Among other aspects, it will reveal a deficiency of the current ecumenical situation in Estonia and the consequent task.

1. The document “From Conflict to Communion” was developed from 2009 to 2012 by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, which was established by the Lutheran World Federation and the central ecumenical body of the Roman Catholic Church: the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The official Lutheran-Catholic dialogue began at the global level with the Second Vatican Council when the bilateral Commission on Unity was established in 1967, exactly half a century ago. Indeed, “From Conflict to Communion” draws on the results of nearly 50 years of discussions between Lutherans and Catholics, providing a kind of interim report. One of the objectives of the common study is to report on the situation in which Catholics and Lutherans find themselves in the year 2017, namely that a responsible celebration of the anniversary of the Reformation can only be a common celebration. For this reason, the subheading of the document is “Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017”.

The document consists of an introduction and six chapters of very different lengths, and the entire text is also divided into 245 numbered paragraphs.

The concise foreword, which provides a very important initial setup for the reader, has been signed by both co-chairs of the Commission. The foreword ends with an invitation to “all Christians” – not only Catholics and Lutherans – “to study the report of our Commission both open-mindedly and critically, and to come with us along the way to a deeper communion of all Christians”.

The introduction of the document (para. 1) begins with the following observation: “In 2017, Lutheran and Catholic Christians will commemorate together the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation. Lutherans and Catholics today enjoy a growth in mutual understanding, cooperation, and respect. They have come to acknowledge that more unites than divides them.” The introduction concludes (3) with the formulation of two challenges of the year 2017 for Catholics and Lutherans. One challenge is to discuss *in dialogue*, i.e., together “the issues and consequences of the Wittenberg Reformation, which centered on the person and thought of Martin Luther”. The second challenge is to develop perspectives for the remembrance and *appropriation* of the Reformation today. Luther’s ‘reforming agenda’ poses a spiritual and theological challenge for both contemporary Catholics and Lutherans.

When providing an overview of the chapters, I will spend more time on the first chapter, which helps to create a horizon of understanding. The remaining chapters will be discussed briefly to reveal the logic of the entire document.

The first chapter is entitled “Commemorating the Reformation in an Ecumenical and Global Age”. It outlines some characteristics of the contemporary context, which are new and represent a significant difference between the 500th anniversary and previous major anniversaries of the Reformation. The changed context means both new opportunities and new challenges.

What was the significance of 31st of October, which very early became a symbolic date of the Protestant Reformation, in the era of confessional conflict and opposition? The brief answer: On one side – for Lutherans – it was a commemoration of the beginning, existence and legitimacy of the evangelical form of the church, which was tied to a critique of the Roman Catholic Church. On the other side – for Catholics – it was an occasion to accuse Lutherans of division from the true church and a rejection of the gospel of Christ (5). Thus, the anniversary of the Reformation was, for both churches, a reaffirmation of their own identity and a justification of the division between them. The year 2017 sees the first major commemoration of the Reformation, which takes place during the ecumenical age. I have already mentioned the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue. Of course, the communication and mutual influences between Lutherans and Catholics have taken place in other formats and cannot be limited to official bilateral theological discussions. In any case, the document observes (7) that the decades of ecumenical movement have resulted in a situation where Lutherans and Catholics now “long to commemorate 2017 together”.

This change requires work on finding a new, common approach to the Reformation and its anniversary (8). It is not possible simply to repeat earlier accounts of the Reformation period by one or the other side, which presented Lutheran and Catholic perspectives separately and often in opposition to one another. Such accounts of the past have often tended to intensify the conflict, sometimes leading to open hostility. However, the way how the Reformation is remembered and conceptualised still has consequences for the relationship between the churches. For this reason, a common ecumenical commemoration of the Reformation is both very important and at the same time difficult. The document recognises that, even today, many Catholics associate the word ‘Reformation’ first of all with the division of the church, while for many Lutherans it signals the rediscovery of the gospel, certainty of faith and freedom (9). Both of these points of departure need to be taken seriously in order to relate the two perspectives to each other and bring them into dialogue (9).

In connection with the new context, the first chapter also reflects on the question, how the commemoration of the Reformation is or should be shaped by the significant fact of 2017, namely, that in the last century Christianity has become increasingly global and the number and relative importance of Christians in the South is growing. It also considers the 500th anniversary of the Reformation from the perspective that the number of Christians in the North is shrinking, people are leaving churches or forget their Christian legacy (10). The changed context of the commemoration of the Reformation is further described in connection with Pentecostal and other charismatic movements, which have put forward new emphases in Christianity (14), as well as in connection with the plurality of religions, which is a worldwide characteristic of the environment surrounding Christians (15).

The second chapter is entitled “New Perspectives on Martin Luther and the Reformation”. It starts with the declaration: “What happened in the past cannot be changed, but what is remembered of the past and how it is remembered can, with the passage of time, indeed change” (16). The task for Catholics and Lutherans in connection with the anniversary of the Reformation cannot be altering the past or rewriting history. However, the challenge is to tell the history differently (16), to recount their history in new ways (17) – not in the key of conflict and opposition. There are many reasons for this change of direction: The chapter starts with references to various factors that have brought Catholics and Lutherans closer together (17; cf. 7): family relations between members of the two churches, service to the larger world mission, and common resistance to tyrannies in many places. These deeper contacts have changed mutual perceptions and created a new impetus for ecumenical dialogue and further theological research.

The ecumenical movement has altered the orientation also in terms of the perceptions of the Reformation. The chapter on the new perspectives reviews the *contributions of research on the Middle Ages*, which has changed the perception of the Reformation period and has induced corrections in both traditional Protestant and Catholic accounts. The chapter also discusses 20th-century *Catholic research on* the person and theology of *Luther*. It mentions the ecumenical projects of Lutheran and Catholic theologians, which included in one way or another direct reflections on the Reformation period and culminated with the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, signed in 1999 by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, which affirmed a consensus in the basic truths of the doctrine of justification – that is the doctrine that was the central object of disputes during the Reformation period and one of the main reasons for mutual condemnation. A separate part of the chapter is dedicated to those developments in Catholic and Lutheran churches, which facilitated the opening of new perspectives of Luther and the Reformation. In case of Catholicism, a special emphasis is placed on the impetus received from the Second Vatican Council, while Lutheran research on Luther underwent considerable development. Finally, the chapter elaborates on the importance and method of ecumenical dialogues (32-34).

I will only briefly mention the next chapters in “From Conflict to Communion” to provide a basic outline of the dynamic of reasoning. The third chapter presents “A Historical Sketch of the Lutheran Reformation and the Catholic Response”, told together by Lutherans and Catholics. It starts with the explanation of the meaning of the word ‘reformation’ and then highlights some of the most important historical situations and theological issues of the Reformation of the 16th century (35). A longer section is dedicated to the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which defined the Catholic-Lutheran relations for several centuries, but the legacy of which “must now be viewed through the lens of the actions of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)” (90). The Second Vatical Council “made it possible for the Catholic Church to enter the ecumenical movement and leave behind the charged polemic atmosphere of the post-Reformation era” (90).

The fourth chapter is by far the longest. In this, Catholics and Lutherans provide a common overview of some of the “Basic Themes of Martin Luther’s Theology in Light of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogues” After noting Martin Luther’s deep embeddedness in the late Middle Ages, the tradition of the church fathers, monastic and mystical theology, the main part of the chapter focuses on four topics, which have caused controversies for centuries and have been the subject matter of Lutheran-Catholic dialogue since 1967: justification, eucharist, ministry, and Scripture and tradition. The discussion of each topic includes a presentation of Luther’s perspective, a description of respective Catholic concerns, and a demonstration of “how Luther’s theology has been brought into conversation with Catholic doctrine in ecumenical dialogue”. The emphasis is on convergence, while identifying remaining differences (95). In this way, the main part of the chapter summarises and records the main results of the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue *so far*. The chapter concludes with two sections which, even though they are short, are very important in my opinion, as they look *ahead* in the context of ecumenical dialogue: “The Gospel and the church” and “Towards consensus”.

The fifth and sixth chapters are both short. The fifth chapter is entitled “Called to Common Commemoration”. It starts by emphasising baptism. Through baptism “Catholics and Lutherans are bound to one another in the body of Christ as members of it” (221). “In remembering with each other the beginning of the Reformation, they are taking their baptism seriously” (221). Baptism is the foundation of unity and joint commemoration. Then follows an examination of the elements, or dimensions, associated with preparations for commemoration and common commemoration (shared joy in the gospel, reasons to regret and lament, prayer for unity, evaluating the past, Catholic confession of sins against unity, Lutheran confession of sins against unity).

The sixth and final chapter formulates “Five Ecumenical Imperatives” for commemorating 2017 together. They are related to mutual realisation of belonging “to the one Body of Christ” and awareness that “the struggle of the sixteenth century is over” and “[t]he reasons for mutually condemning each other’s faith have fallen by the wayside” (238).

This concludes my overview of the document “From Conflict to Communion”. In the second part, I will present a critical reflection on the assumptions, method and purpose of the document, and comment on some of the emphases of the document.

2.1 The incentive for the drafting of the Lutheran-Catholic common document “From Conflict to Communion” was the approaching 500th anniversary of the year 1517 combined with the recognition that 2017 also marks the 50th year of ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans. What is important in my opinion is that, for the most part, this document does not present an original or a completely novel approach, but rather a kind of summary of this common ‘ecumenical journey’ (92, 244). However, the fruits of the past 50 years of ecumenical dialogue and research are used to answer a new question – a question related to historical contingency – it is a question about an ecumenically responsible response to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. How should we conceptualise and commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in light of those decades spent on an ecumenical journey? This is a novel way to ask the question, even though the answer – as mentioned – relies on the outcomes of the ecumenical journey so far. It could be said that it is a test of the capacity of previous ecumenical results – the particular character of the Lutheran-Catholic relationship is demonstrated and concretised by the proposal of a common response to and commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It was mentioned in the previous part of the presentation that, for centuries, the Reformation and its anniversary was traditionally and predominantly interpreted through a hermeneutic of opposition. The document “From Conflict to Communion” demonstrates – rightly and well in my opinion – that a continuation of this tradition today would be anachronistic and irresponsible behaviour.

2.2 The ecumenical journey – from conflict to communion – of Lutherans and Catholics started immediately after the Second Vatican Council. The document talks about the “renewal of Catholic theology” (27; for details, see 26-28, 90), which included opening of ecumenical perspectives that seemed impossible earlier and enabled the Roman Catholic Church to enter ecumenical dialogues. Indeed, the document repeatedly emphasises the importance of ecumenical dialogue as an instrument of the ecumenical journey. How is this dialogue – the method of dialogue – described in the document? In my opinion, it reflects a natural and justified recognition that even the understanding of the process of ecumenical dialogue has undergone certain dynamics over the decades. Indeed, there are different possibilities, which have been the subject of critical reflections and debates, in particular, in the last decade. In my assessment, the descriptions of the ecumenical dialogue in the common document “From Conflict to Communion” very clearly reflect these discussions and, therefore, indicate an ability to learn and avoid certain one-sidedness and naivety.

Consequently, in addition to the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission jointly looking back on the events of the 16th century; in addition to offering a presentation of Martin Luther’s theology; in addition to presenting the current results and status of the ecumenical discussion between Lutherans and Catholics, the document also supports further research efforts on how the experience of nearly 50 years of dialogue could shape the formulation of the actual or desirable content of ecumenical dialogue (cf. 32-34, 91-93, 123, 17).

I would like to highlight and comment on some aspects. *Firstly*, the document emphasises that the dialogue partners are committed to the doctrines of their respective churches, which – according to their own convictions – express the truth of the faith (32). *My comment:* A dialogue can, therefore, be responsible only if both parties draw on the binding doctrine of their church. Ecumenical dialogue does not mean that the partners should make compromises with regard to the valid doctrine of their church. Ecumenical discussion can only be fruitful if the partners take seriously the applicable doctrine of their own respective churches. Consequently, in a strict sense, ecumenical dialogue and its results cannot be described as ‘settlements’ or ‘compromises’. Ecumenical dialogue is not bargaining. It is not accurate to depict it as a process where one or both partners have to reject something of their doctrine in order to find or create something in common.

*Secondly*, while the doctrines demonstrate great commonalities, they may differ, or even be opposed, in their formulations. Communalities make dialogue possible and the differences of expression make it a necessity (32). The dialogue can also reveal that “the partners speak different languages and understand the meanings of words differently; they make different distinctions and think in different thought forms. However, what appears to be an opposition in expression is not always an opposition in substance.” (33) *My comment:* The document thus emphasises that, in a dialogue, it is important to differentiate between the substance and the form of doctrine. Differentiation does not mean separation.

*Thirdly:* the document describes ecumenical dialogue as a process of conversion from patterns of thought that arise from and emphasise the *differences* between the confessions. “Instead, in a dialogue the partners look first for what they have in common and only then weigh the significance of their differences. These differences, however, are not overlooked or treated casually, for ecumenical dialogue is the common search for the truth of the Christian faith” (34). *My comment:* The differences and particularities of the partners are taken seriously in ecumenical dialogue. They are not treated casually. However, the first focus – and emphasis – is on communality. Considering the above remarks on the commitment to doctrine, it seems clear that both partners see *communality* from their *unique* confessional perspectives. Consequently, access to common and joint recognition is mediated though the particular confessional perspective of the partners.[[2]](#footnote-2) The communality revealed in ecumenical dialogue is therefore, strictly speaking, not a settlement on a compromise, but rather an affirmation and recognition of that what both Lutheran and Catholic doctrinal perspectives discover and see as a common ground. As a preview, I can already reveal the secret – this common ground is found primarily in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I will return to that in the last part. However, it is important to note that ecumenical dialogue as such bears witness to the fact that the truth of the Christian faith – the triune God – is not in the possession of either partner. Neither partner in the factuality of their being can claim to be an exhaustive and complete reflection of the truth of the Christian faith. Consequently, it is not possible to overlook the differences or approach them with disinterest, even though a closer examination of particular differences can cast new light on their weight and status. Ecumenical dialogue is a process of common movement and growth in the understanding of the truth of the Christian faith.

2.3.1 The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* is in particularly prominent position in the document “From Conflict to Communion”. It could be argued that the *Joint Declaration* plays a key role for the entire line of reasoning presented in the document (see Foreword). For many reasons, it is not surprising. We know that the *Joint Declaration* was born in the later stages of the dialogue, which means that it was preceded by decades of ecumenical discussions and research, summarising them. In addition, the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* has a special status compared to the remaining joint statements of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission, because it has been through a special official procedure in the churches and the official representatives of the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church signed the document in Wittenberg on Reformation Day, 31 October 1999. The doctrine discussed in the document is of fundamental significance for the doctrine and theology of the Lutheran church, as it formulates the understanding of the gospel. It was this doctrine that was one of the main drivers of conflict, mutual condemnation and schism in the 16th century Reformation (see 122).

2.3.2 Indeed, justification is the first fundamental theological topic examined in “From Conflict to Communion”. The account of the respective ecumenical dialogue and research is actually based on the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. At this point, I would like to highlight only the term, which is used in “From Conflict to Communion” to describe the outcome of dialogue. The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* records a ‘differentiating consensus’ of Lutherans and Catholics. Note that the term is ‘differentiat*ing* consensus’, not ‘differentiat*ed* consensus’, which has been used earlier in the context of ecumenical theology. What does the ‘differentiating consensus’ presented in the *Joint Declaration* mean? Quoting the document “From Conflict to Communion”: the *Joint Declaration* “offers a differentiating consensus comprised of common statements along with different emphases of each side, with the claim that these differences do not invalidate the commonalities. It is thus a consensus that does not eliminate differences, but rather explicitly includes them.” (123) By including an explicit presentation of both common statements and differences, the *Joint Declaration* demonstrates that the “presented differences” are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations. Ecumenical dialogue and research can lead to the admission of differences between the doctrines of justification of both churches, but they are not dividing Catholics and Lutherans (cf. JDDJ para. 5).

2.3.3 Consequently, in conversation with Catholics, Lutherans have discovered and recognised a differentiating consensus in the understanding of justification, i.e., the gospel. This differentiating consensus in the understanding of eucharist and baptism according to the gospel had become apparent already in earlier ecumenical dialogues and research. From the Lutheran perspective, it means that, despite the various kinds of differences in the doctrine and order, it is theologically responsible for Lutherans to recognise the Roman Catholic Church as a true church in a theological sense even today – and that means unilaterally. Consequently, from the Lutheran viewpoint, the way is open to living and deepening this discovered communion between the churches.

From the Lutheran perspective, unity of the church means a communion of churches that recognise each other mutually as true churches. Discovering and recognising each other as true churches. i.e., as parts of the Church of Jesus Christ, entails the duty to live, build and increase this unity of the church – this communion of churches.

Lutherans and Catholics have not succeeded in reaching this goal – full mutual recognition as true churches. According to the foreword of “From Conflict to Communion”: “The following text describes a way ‘from conflict to communion’ – a way whose goal we have not yet reached. Nevertheless, the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity has taken seriously the words of Pope John XXIII, ‘The things that unite us are greater than those that divide us.’”

Thus the title of the document “From Conflict to Communion” points to an ecumenical journey – a journey, which has been and continues to be supported by crucial contributions from ecumenical dialogue; a journey, which cannot be and does not have to progress on a straight line and without setbacks. The document is an excellent indication of the growth in mutual understanding and recognition, but it is also clear that – I quote – “An ongoing need for ecumenical dialogue and mutual understanding remains” (92). I would like to add that a theological dialogue between churches remains important even in a situation of communion, i.e., when churches recognise each other fully as true churches. Theological reflection and discussion is an integral part of a lived communion of churches.

When I described the purpose of the document, I highlighted the goal of dialogue in the narrower sense – the ‘differentiating consensus’. However, this formulation expressing an outcome of ecumenical dialogue cannot be a goal in itself. I already hinted at a possible Lutheran perspective on the target of ecumenical efforts.

In the first half of the next, and final, part I would like to provide a slightly more general examination of the message of “From Conflict to Communion”. I am interested in the future as it appears in this document, which positions the relationship between Lutherans and Catholics as being on a journey together – I would like to emphasise: as travelling companions who have been on the journey for a long time and have thus grown rather close. How does “From Conflict to Communion” formulate and conceptualise some of the next particular steps toward visible unity, or on the journey toward communion? In any case, the document does not see a commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation as an obstacle on this journey, but rather presents it as a promising opportunity. In the second half of the final part, I would like to place “From Conflict to Communion” on the background of wider ecumenism that includes more than only Lutheran-Catholic relations, and tie its message directly to the ecumenical landscape and situation in Estonia.

3.1.1 Lutherans and Catholics are moving toward a goal, which has been, in my opinion, adequately and eloquently formulated in the *Official Common Statement* by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, which was signed to confirm the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.* This goal is – I quote – “full communion, a unity in diversity, in which remaining differences would be ‘reconciled’ and no longer have a divisive force”[[3]](#footnote-3) (3).

3.1.2 As is observed in “From Conflict to Communion”, in addition to “giving Catholics a better understanding of Martin Luther’s theology, ecumenical dialogue, together with historical and theological research, gives Lutherans and Catholics a better mutual understanding of each other’s doctrines, their major points of agreement, and issues still needing ongoing conversation” (211). It highlights the issues associated with *ecclesiology*.

The conversations have revealed a clear consensus “that the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of the church belong together” (216; cf. Foreword). Both partners understand “justification and the church as works of the triune God which can be properly accepted only in faith in him” (216 = *Church and Justification*, para. 5). The past discussions have made “significant contributions” to the understanding of the church, but further conversation – taking into account the important past achievements – is needed on topics such as “the relation between the visibility and invisibility of the church, the relation between the universal and local church, the church as sacrament, the necessity of sacramental ordination in the life of the church, and the sacramental character of episcopal consecration.” (218) According to the document, continuing conversation on the church is urgent, “since Catholics and Lutherans have never ceased to confess together the faith in the ‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church’” (218).

The document as a whole helps us understand the significance and achievements of past ecumenical dialogue and theological research and convey the message that continuing conversation and efforts to achieve mutual understanding are essential. Looking ahead, continuing dialogue on the understanding of the church is identified as a particular task.

3.1.3 A particular step on the journey towards communion arises from the realisation that Lutherans and Catholics are “*called* to common commemoration” of the Reformation. This is the title of the fifth chapter. I believe that the word ‘called’ is meant to indicate that the actual subject who issues the call is Christ. The document emphasises – also with a reference to the Second Vatican Council – that Catholics and Lutherans are connected, through baptism, as members of the body of Christ (211, cf. 210). Thus, they both share in the same body of Christ. Consequently, although the communion of Lutherans and Catholics in the sense of a ‘full communion’ is currently a matter of hope, rather than reality, they are already living in an imperfect communion. This communion, which has already been received from Christ, means that both partners share the same journey and are called to move forward.

“From Conflict to Communion” presents a carefully thought-out rationale that commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation is theologically responsible behaviour and entails a promise of being a significant step toward full communion of evangelical Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church, i.e., toward a ‘visible unity’. It also outlines several key elements of this common commemoration.

The document presents the valuable and welcome idea that, when giving account of the events that occurred 500 years earlier, Lutherans and Catholics should put “the gospel of Jesus Christ at the centre” and take as the guiding rule “the doctrine of justification, which expresses the message of the gospel” (Foreword).

It is also valuable and welcome that the document suggests, as the focal point of common commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, celebration of the gospel and communication of the gospel to the people of our time “so that the world may believe that God gives Himself to human beings and calls us into communion with Himself and His church” (Foreword).

The document makes the valuable and welcome observation that common commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation entails to fundamental aspects: we rejoice in ‘our common faith’ in the gospel of Jesus Christ, but to this joy “also belongs a discerning, self-critical look at ourselves, not only in our history, but also today” (Foreword). What is meant with these words is, in my opinion, that the common commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation is an event, which focuses on the origin of Christian identity and reveals the fundamental dynamic of Christian life at individual and communal level. This, in turn, means that common commemoration of the Reformation is also essentially a missionary event.

3.2.1. The study “From Conflict to Communion” is an ecumenically open and inclusive document. All Christians are invited to study the report of the Commission critically and with an open mind. All are invited to come “along the way to a deeper communion of all Christians” (Foreword). It is thus understandable and very relevant that the local evangelical Lutheran church and the local Roman Catholic Church do not hold this conference between the two of them, but have invited others to participate. I am happy to see that this invitation has been accepted and the conference has so many participants. Even though the document “From Conflict to Communion” discusses Lutheran-Catholic relations, it is obvious that Lutherans and Catholics are not alone in the world and their growth in communion takes place in a wider framework of the journey of all Christians toward a deeper communion. The study “From Conflict to Communion” can certainly provide fruitful insights on the relationships and dialogues of Lutherans and Catholics with other churches. However, I could even imagine that the example of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue can provide inspiring and helpful ideas for conversation and dialogue between many other partners of different kind as well. In any case, the “five ecumenical imperatives” at the end of “From Conflict to Communion” deserve closer consideration as guidelines for communication not only between Lutherans and Catholics but also between Christians in general.

3.2.2 In connection with the wider ecumenical background and taking into account the earlier insights, I would like to highlight two aspects, which have the potential to influence further development of the relations between churches.

Firstly, the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* of the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, which plays such a prominent role in “From Conflict to Communion”, was also adopted by the World Methodist Council in 2006. The World Communion of Reformed Churches did the same in this year. In England, a commemorative service will be held on 31 October 2017, in which the worldwide Anglican Communion will express its support for the document.

Secondly, the document “From Conflict to Communion” was completed in 2012 and highlighted the importance of addressing the topic of the church. The same year saw the completion of the long process in the Faith and Order Commission at the World Council of Churches, with the publication of the study document “Church – Towards a Common Vision”, which was sent to member churches for study and assessment. This document combines Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic perspectives and has a significance comparable to the text “Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry”, which was completed 30 years earlier. In 2014, the international Lutheran-Reformed dialogue resulted in publication of the document “Communion: On Being the Church”. In 2015, the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue produced the document “The Mystery of the Church: The Nature, Attributes and Mission of the Church”. Also in 2015, the Lutheran World Federation completed the study document “The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion” and Reformed and Anglican churches started a dialogue on “Communion”. In 2018, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe is expected to conclude its doctrinal discussions on “Church Communion” and the dialogue with the Vatican on “Church and Communion”. As this overview indicates, the topics of ecclesiology – church and communion – are currently highly relevant and they are being elaborated on in different conversation frameworks and at different levels.

3.2.3 It is my sincere hope that the document “From Conflict to Communion”, which is now also available in Estonian, will provide an impetus for theological conversations between churches and improved common theological efforts in Estonia. We already have an example of *bilateral* dialogue. The dialogue between the Orthodox Church of Estonia and the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church began in 2006 and has made a significant contribution, for instance, to the current close cooperation of the churches in the field of higher theological education. A deeper *multilateral* dialogue in the framework of the Estonian Council of Churches would be essential as well.

3.2.4 The previously mentioned common prayer service of Lutherans and Catholics in Lund on last year’s Reformation Day was a yardstick for the document “From Conflict to Communion” and a special sign of its effectiveness. I recall that in the context of this common prayer service the Lutheran World Federation President Bishop Munib Younan and Pope Francis signed the[*Joint Statement*](https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/joint_commemoration_joint_statement_final_en_0.pdf) which reflects the message of the document “From Conflict to Communion”. Similarly, the document is essential for today’s conference. The representatives of different churches have assembled for common theological research and discussion. It is meaningful and right that the conference “From Conflict to Communion” will conclude with a common prayer, in which we express our joyful gratitude and repentant penitence to the very source of faith and communion – the builder of bridges, the triune God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I would like to conclude my presentation with the final sentences of “From Conflict to Communion”: “The beginnings of the Reformation will be rightly remembered when Lutherans and Catholics hear together the gospel of Jesus Christ and allow themselves to be called anew into community with the Lord. Then they will be united in a common mission which the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* describes: “Lutherans and Catholics share the goal of confessing Christ in all things, who alone is to be trusted above all things as the one Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5f) through whom God in the Holy Spirit gives himself and pours out his renewing gifts” (*JDDJ* 18)”. (245)

Thank you for your attention!

1. The presentation is based on the English original text of the document: [The Lutheran World Federation, The Pontificial Council for Promoting Christian Unity, From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Badeborn: Bonifatius, 2013](https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion%20EN.pdf). The German and Estonian translations have also been used: [Vom Konflikt zur Gemeinschaft. Gemeinsames lutherisch-katholisches Reformationsgedenken im Jahr 2017. Bericht der Lutherisch/Römisch-Katholischen Kommission für die Einheit. Verantwortlich für die deutsche Übersetzung sind Theodor Dieter und Wolfgang Thönissen, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Badeborn, 2. Auflage, 2013](https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/LWB_Vom_Konflikt_zur_Gemeinschaft.pdf) and [Konfliktist osaduseni. Luterlaste ja katoliiklaste ühine reformatsiooni aastapäev aastal 2017. Luterlaste ja roomakatoliiklaste ühtsuse komisjoni raport, tõlkija Vallo Ehasalu, toimetajad Tauno Teder ja Kadri Lääs, Eesti Evangeelne Luterlik Kirik ja Rooma-Katoliku Kirik Eestis, 2017](http://www.eelk.ee/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/konfliktist_osaduseni_veebiversioon.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In “From Conflict to Communion”, ecumenical theologians of both partners are described as follows: they “have decided not to pursue their confessional self-assertions at the expense of their dialogue partners but rather to search for that which is common within the differences, even within the oppositions, and thus work toward overcoming church-dividing differences” (17). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. „[F]ull church communion, a unity in diversity, in which remaining differences would be „reconciled“ and no longer have a divisive force“ (Official Common Statement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)