

### **Dr. Michael Bünker**

Dr. Michael Bünker was born on April 26, 1954, in Leoben/Steiermark and studied Protestant theology in Vienna. He has acted as Vicar and Pastor in Vienna since 1980 and took on the position of Director of the Protestant Religious Education Academy in 1991. In the fall of 1999, he was elected as 'Oberkirchenrat' (Superior Church Council) and has held the position of bishop of the highest administrative body of the Protestant Church A. B. in Austria since 2008. Since January 1, 2007, he acts as the Secretary-General of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe.

### **Perspective on the European Dimension of the Reformation**

The Reformation was a European movement. This is especially apparent in the various and diverse recipients of the letters written by reformers Martin Luther, Johannes Calvin, and Heinrich Bullinger. The beliefs and values of the Reformation spread quickly and easily through the then newly established mobility of students, miners, and tradesmen as well as via the networks of intellectuals that were greatly influenced by the humanism. Moreover, this was directly facilitated by the letterpress, which proves further that the Reformation was also a media revolution.

The flows of refugees emphasized the European dimension of the reformation. Hundreds of thousands fled their home countries in the search for religious freedom and in order to seek shelter from the numerous conflicts in their countries. The Confessionalization and the religious wars, which lasted more than two-hundred years, caused countless people to seek shelter elsewhere. The persecution of the Huguenots in France and the persecution of the Protestants in Salzburg in 1731 exemplify this notion. The consequences of these incidents could be felt all through Europe. It is therefore not a coincidence that the first calls for a unified Europe emerged around that time. Johann Amos Comenius and William Penn must both be named as representatives of these very young European ideals.

The anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 is the very first one in the ecumenical age and - at least in most European countries - the first one in times of peace. Additionally, it marks the

first anniversary that crosses the borders of sovereign nations. The Reformation has become a 'world citizen' (quoted from the Secretary-General of the Lutheran World Federation, Martin Junge). The challenge remains to emphasize this European dimension of the reformation for this anniversary. Three initiatives that aim to highlight the European dimension shall be discussed exemplary.

The 'Reformation Roadmap' was officially implemented in Geneva on November 3, 2017. This initiative was planned and executed by the Protestant Church in Germany, Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. The Reformation Roadmap included a truck which traveled to 68 European cities. During each stop representatives of the local churches organized various events together with representatives of local politics, culture, and tourism. The initiative aims to highlight the regional roots and developments of the Reformation, its diverse value in numerous contexts, and finally the current importance of reformation impulses for churches, cities, and individuals. At some stations - such as Emden - all three aims could be combined with the guiding themes of refuge and migration. The Reformation Roadmap connects 68 stations in 19 countries and 47 Protestant churches. It culminated in the collection of Reformation stories which were shown at the 'Weltausstellung Reformation' in Wittenberg in May 2017.

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe decided during its General Assembly in Florence in 2012 that it aimed to visualize the European dimension of the Reformation through a joint initiative with European cities. The idea derived from the Reformation movement's own understanding as an 'urban event' (A.G. Dickens). City councils in all European countries were invited to apply for an additional title of Reformation city in the past years. So far 100 cities in 17 countries have been given this title - Erfurt is of course amongst these cities. These Reformation cities together with local protestant churches aim to demonstrate the value of the ideas and of the history of the reformation in today's context.

Both projects were supported by numerous publications such as the book 'Europa reformata' by Michael Welker, Michael Beintker, and Albrecht de Lange which was published in 2016.

The network which was established through these joint initiatives is of high importance to the European understanding of the Reformation. Europe is - from a Protestant perspective - neither a glorified past nor is it a privileged achievement that needs to be safeguarded. It is,

however, a project of the future in which justice, humanity, liberty, and responsibility can be shared freely and openly. Gottfried Locher, President of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches and of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe encouraged everyone to use the retrospective on 500 years of reformation in order to form a new perspective for the churches, our society, our country and all of Europe. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Council President of the Protestant Church in Germany, added that these projects are a strong signal for the shared sense of community in Europe. According to Bedford-Strohm, 'it is exactly these ideas that we need in Europe and we must spread them across Europe and its borders'.

The European dimension of the Reformation is a living heritage which encourages the Protestant churches to stand for a united and diverse Europe. 'Unity in Diversity' is the leitmotiv for the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and it must also be the vision for the Europe of tomorrow.