



# RETHINK Reformation 2017

RETHINK the World | RETHINK Modernity | RETHINK Europe

**1-3 November 2017**

**Aarhus University**

## Conference call

2017 is the official 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. It is also the year in which Aarhus is to be the European Capital of Culture (ECoC), under the general theme of RETHINK. What is more, the years leading up to 2017 have seen significant global and regional challenges and, not least, a growing distrust in the European project and the very ideas of a unified Europe and international conventions and obligations. Religious conflicts, migration, economic crises and climate change are all issues that have posed questions regarding the future of our shared life on this earth with renewed urgency.

These historical constellations provide a unique opportunity not only to celebrate and commemorate, but also to critically review the legacy of the Reformation, retool the vision of the European past and future, and reconsider in this light the basic conditions of human existence. On 1-3 November 2017 Aarhus University is holding an international conference that reflects on 500 years of European history, raising the questions of what the historical event of the Reformation means for European societies today, and what new reformations the continent requires now.



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This broad approach to the Reformation and its relevance for the world today is intentional. Clearly, the Reformation did not die with Luther, but is still alive and kicking. The conference thus reflects the ongoing theological, philosophical, sociological and political repercussions of the Lutheran Reformation and, more specifically, seeks to problematise and rethink its strikingly two-sided legacy: historically situated at the divide between the Middle Ages and Modernity, the Reformation both sacralised and secularised Europe. Likewise, it both preserved the hierarchical structures of society and propagated ideas of freedom and equality that had, and still have, a decisive impact on how Europeans relate to themselves, to God, and to the world at large.

### Keynote Lectures:

- Niels Henrik Gregersen (University of Copenhagen): Rethinking Martin Luther's Theology in a Postsecular Age
- Claudia Welz (University of Copenhagen): Freedom, Responsibility, and Religion in Public Life
- Robert Stern (University of Sheffield): Freedom from the Self: Luther and Løgstrup on Sin as 'Incurvatus in se'
- Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München): Protestantisms and Modern European Politics
- John Milbank (University of Nottingham): Is the Reformation to Blame for Modernity?
- Marcel Hénaff (University of California, San Diego): Our common body: grace, ritual and reciprocal recognition. Rethinking the anthropology of Reformation
- Theodor Dieter (Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg): Coming to Terms with the Reformation
- Norbert Frei (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena): Making Sense of the "Breach of Civilization". The Holocaust in History and Memory
- Aleida Assmann (Universität Konstanz): Learning from History? The Crisis and Future of the European Project

### Currently accepted panels:

- “Luther and sociality” - Organizer(s): The Lumen Center
- “Rethinking God in his Relation to the World” - Organizer(s): Svend Andersen (Aarhus University) and Sasja Emilie Mathiasen Stopa (Aarhus University)
- “Models of Authority and Societal Development” - Organizer(s): The Lumen Center
- “Luther as a Philosopher” - Organizer(s): Robert Stern (University of Sheffield) and Hans Fink (Aarhus University)
- “Philosophy and Reformation: Existence and Enlightenment” - Organizer(s): Anders Moe Rasmussen (The Protestantism Network, Aarhus University)
- “Interpreting Luther in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Theology” - Organizer(s): Niels Henrik Gregersen

We still welcome panel proposals and paper abstracts. For more information see below and on the conference webpage: [www.rr2017.au.dk](http://www.rr2017.au.dk)

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The conference explores three main themes. The first day is devoted to theological and philosophical questions concerning the statuses of the human, God and the world; the second day focusses on sociological and political theoretical questions concerning the Reformation and Modernity and the relationships between values and community; and the third day reconsiders in the light of current exigencies the history of European identities with special attention to the roles of Europe’s Others.

## RETHINK the World: Graciously Given?

Both medieval theology and the Lutheran Reformation share the understanding that the world is fundamentally given by God. However, by rejecting intermediary institutions, notably the papacy, the Reformation redefined the place of the individual human being in the world and the relationship of the individual to God. The Reformation, however, was not only a confrontation with ecclesial scholasticism; it rebelled against various kinds of wonders and folk superstition and made the question of right interpretation a subject of public debate. In this way the Reformation in many respects paved the way for the Enlightenment and a form of critical thinking

that might very well, with Immanuel Kant, initially have cleared a place for faith, but that nonetheless continued its critical path to a point where neither God, nor eventually human beings, were left much room, but where the structural, the discursive, the neuronal, the economy etc. are thought to constitute reality. Hence, the complex trajectories opened with the Reformation raise a manifold of metaphysical, theological and philosophical questions concerning the most basic conditions of human life in this world. What does it mean that the world and existence are given? What does it mean to receive and to respond to such enigmatic gifts? What is the place of wonder and awe in human existence? What is the status of the individual in relation to God and in relation to the Other? Is the Reformation a continuation of or a reaction against Renaissance Humanism? Is it the beginning of anti-humanism?

## **RETHINK Modernity: Communities beyond Disenchantment?**

It is well known that Max Weber linked the development of capitalism to the Protestant ethic. But is the Reformation more broadly conceivable as a catalyst of the disenchantment of the world characteristic of the Enlightenment culture in the wake of which we are still living? Or did the redefinition of the human place in the world prompt a correlative reconceptualisation of the modalities of sacred and divine presence instead of disenchanting the world? Add to these contested issues the fact that the Lutheran Reformation changed the status of “good works”, thereby unhinging practical life from the matter of salvation, while the burgeoning of Modernity during the subsequent centuries would posit as ultimate principles of practical life increasingly secularised understandings of human freedom. This raises several questions pertaining to the possibilities of community, the status of morality and values, and the scope and potentiality of human agency. What was the impact of the Reformation on the ideas and practices of community? How does the change in the status of the deed (e.g. indulgence, cultivation of virtue, donation, gift giving) affect community building? How are grace and (the works of) love implied in the constitution of community? Are there values and communal bonds in this world besides or beyond those offered by pragmatics and economic necessity? Does value ultimately mean economic value?

## RETHINK Europe: Violence, Memory and Europe's Others

Religion and identity are as closely linked as identity and conflict. In addition to theological and institutional innovations, the Lutheran Reformation added diversity to the already complex range of identities in Europe and opened up new zones of religious and political conflict. The experience and the memories of waves of armed conflict from the Wars of Religion and the Revolutionary Wars all the way to the world wars of the 20th century and the struggle with terrorism in the 21st century have had an enormous impact on the very idea of Europe and the self-definition of its citizens. What role have the churches and religious communities of Europe played in these conflicts, which have marred Europe for 500 years? What measures were taken, for instance, within the divided culture of Christianity in coming to terms with the extreme violence of the Thirty Years' War? What measures were taken during and after the Holocaust? Could centuries of ecumenical dialogue be perceived as memory politics of regret and reconciliation; that is to say, as the creation of a kind of cosmopolitan memory *avant la lettre*? Or have the Christian churches along with other elites fanned the flames of war and genocide? These are not purely intellectual or historiographical concerns. The way in which we analyse and remember the violence of past centuries has a decisive impact on how we envision our future. In this context it is particularly important to reflect about collective fantasies of belonging and the very real divisions between inside and outside, centre and periphery, and privilege and oppression that they create. How have the key registers of modern European identities – religion, science, politics and mass entertainment – created visions of collective destiny through powerful symbolic processes of inclusion and exclusion? How have prejudice and racism and the memory of prejudice and racism shaped Europe's perception of itself? How can the ways in which we remember past crimes help create a better future? In the current situation we should, for instance, ask ourselves what memories of migration Europe should embrace in order to open up new perspectives for social action and inclusion.

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The conference committee invites participants, paper abstracts and proposals for themed panels. The spirit of the conference is inclusive and exploratory, and contributions from scholars at all academic levels as well as other professionals are encouraged. Panel proposals should consist of a 300-word abstract suggesting a themed panel and preferably indicate under which of the three overall themes the

panel is to be placed. The panel proposal can, but is not required to, include named participants and paper abstracts for the session. Paper abstracts should also indicate and clearly engage with one of three overall themes and should comprise no more than 300 words and 3 keywords.

The *RETHINK the World* sessions are concerned with, but not limited to

the phenomenology of givenness; the relationship between God, self, and the Other; Løgstrup's and/or Kierkegaard's Protestantism; the ethical demand; humanism/anti-humanism; creation, cosmology and the ontological status of world etc.

The *RETHINK Modernity* sessions are concerned with, but not limited to

the relation between the Reformation, Enlightenment and Modernity; disenchantment and values; the possibility of community beyond economic rationality; the status of the deed; love, grace and community; gift giving within Protestantism etc.

The *RETHINK Europe* sessions are concerned with, but not limited to

The history of the ideas of Europe; European diversity and European identity; the Reformation and European identities; the Church and the Holocaust; migration and the question of the "neighbour"; compassion as politics etc.

Please send panel proposals and **paper abstracts** to [rr2017@au.dk](mailto:rr2017@au.dk) before 15 August 2017

Online registration opens on 15 January 2017 and closes on 1 October 2017. Please note that the registration fee will be increased after 15 August 2017.

A preliminary programme will be available on the conference website on 1 July 2017: [www.rr2017.au.dk](http://www.rr2017.au.dk)

Organisers: School of Culture and Society and Faculty of Arts, Aarhus University

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