

WCC general secretary: What have we learned from the Reformation?



Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit. © Albin Hillert/WCC

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Speaking at the Peterskirche, the University Church of Heidelberg, on 27 October, World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit said the Reformation can only be commemorated properly if the remembrance is done in a modus of mutual accountability.

The 500th anniversary of the 16th-century Lutheran Reformation marks the action of Martin Luther in publishing his 95 Theses on 31 October 1517 to denounce church abuses, setting in motion events that led to the Reformation and the separation of western Christianity into Roman Catholic and Protestant churches.

“To stand before God is to stand with our accountability to all God’s creation and particularly those created in the image of God, the human beings and the one humanity,” said Tveit.

He was speaking at the university event exploring the ecumenical aspects and responsibilities in commemorating the jubilee of the Reformation.

“Mutual accountability is the attitude that has brought the ecumenical movement to life,” he said. “This is the attitude of firmly having a position that shows that we are accountable, reliable, and honest.”

This attitude is shown in the exercise of asking and answering in a transparent, open, humble, and constructive way what we have done with our common legacy as churches, he continued. “This is to ask together in dialogue: how do we deal with the differences and divisions that have developed in how we steward this legacy? How are we mutually accountable to what we affirm that we share together and how do we therefore try to find the way forward together?”

Many of the ecumenical discussions today regarding the 500th anniversary of the Reformation are looking back at the church-dividing events in the 16th century and the theological, political and cultural divisions and conflicts that followed, he said. “The perspective has been what we can learn from what we call the Reformation, and what we can be helped to see as a potential for change today,” he said. “The best ecumenical dialogue on the Reformation applies the approach of the ‘healing of memories’ that has been an important dimension of the peacebuilding work of member churches of the WCC in Northern Ireland, South Africa and many other countries.”

The same spirit of new energy and a wish to harvest some of the fruits of past dialogues will prevail at a joint celebration by Pope Francis and the representatives of the Lutheran World Federation on 31 October in Lund, Tveit said.

“I look forward to be there representing the whole fellowship of the World Council of Churches,” he said. “This event has relevance and will be significant for the whole ecumenical movement.”

[Full speech: "The Jubilee of the Reformation – ecumenical?"](#)

[*The Truth We Owe Each Other - Mutual Accountability in the Ecumenical Movement* \(By Olav Fykse Tveit\)](#)

[Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation](#)

[European Reformation Roadmap launch](#)