



Academic conference

**PERFORMANCE-BASED IDENTITY IN THE
REFORMATION AND TODAY**

The Reformation Research Consortium (REFORC) and the Wittenberg Center for Reformation Studies (WCRS) invite the interested public to a scholarly conference on performance-based identity. The conference will take place in the Old University of **Wittenberg**, Germany, **October 11–12, 2024**.

“Performance-based identity” is a concept developed in pastoral counseling for elite athletes. Sport is just one example of the modern quest for an identity based on performance. In the history of Christianity, there has always been an interest in the relationship between divine and human agency, and advocates of renewal have often emphasized the importance of humanity’s relationship with God being focused on divine gift rather than human achievement. How does the modern emphasis on being defined by one’s accomplishments relate to the Christian understanding of identity being rooted in a relationship with the Triune God? Within Christianity, how are divine and human agency understood to initiate, develop, and deepen the relationship between Christ and his body? Focusing on the Reformation, the conference will show how Western Christianity has understood the relationship between justifying faith and human performance, and will look more closely at the modern challenge of performance-based identity in professional sports. Our aim is to show that a relationship-based identity, grounded in a free gift of unconditional love, is an important source for the wellness and resilience needed to achieve. As such, the message of the Reformation continues to have relevance to contemporary society.

On the first day, a series of 30-minute papers will introduce early modern approaches to performance-based identity. How does divine agency relate to human agency in the eyes of major streams of Western Christianity? We will look at Lutheranism, Calvinism, Anglicanism, and Roman Catholicism. A contribution from a historian will consider ideas of human optimization in early modern culture. On the second day, a second series of 30-minute papers will focus on current debates about performance-based versus relationship-based identity. Various facets will be evaluated: religion, philosophy, psychology, and sociology. There will be time to discuss the papers and to consider two core questions: Is the modern search for a relationship-based identity a result of the renewal of Western Christendom in the sixteenth century? Can the memory of this renewal help us to question the idea of performance-based identity and to develop a healthier relationship with ourselves and the world?

SCHEDULE

Friday, Oct. 11, 2024

13:30 Introduction to the conference (Dr. Ashley Null/Dr. Benjamin Houltberg)

Section 1: Early modern Christianity and performance-based identity

14:00 Martin Luther's ethics and the modern "moralization of Christianity" (Dr. Andreas Stegmann, Wittenberg Center for Reformation Studies)

Does Tridentine Catholicism advocate performance-based identity? (Dr. Colin Donnelly, University of Limerick)

16:00 'Reformation Anglicanism' and relationship-based identity (Dr. Ashley Null, Wittenberg Center for Reformation Studies)

Did early modern Reformed Christianity contribute to the rise of performance-based identity? (Prof. Gert van den Brink, Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn)

18:00 Optimizing oneself and creating a new man: mentalities, discourses, and practices in the early modern period (Dr. Georg Eckert, Universität Freiburg)

Concluding discussion: Historical perspectives on relationship-based and performance-based identity (chair: Prof. Dorothea Wendebourg)

Saturday, Oct. 12, 2024

Section 2: Performance-based identity today

9:00 'Identity' and 'performance' as key concepts of the modern world (Prof. Günter Thomas, Ruhr-Universität Bochum)

Religion and performance-based identity today (Dr. Laura Upenieks, Baylor University)

11:00 Psychological research into performance-based vs. purpose-based identity (Dr. Benjamin Houltberg, Search Institute)

Sociological research into performance-based identity – The example of professional football players (Dr. Graham Daniels, University of Cambridge)

14:00 Philosophical analysis of performance-based identity (Prof. Sabrina Little, Christopher Newport University)

Sport and religion: in dialogue with Roman-Catholic perspectives from the 20th and 21st centuries (Dr. Robert Ellis, University of Oxford)

16:00 Concluding discussion: The Reformation as a resource for today? (chair: Prof. Jörg Dierken, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

The conference will take place at the Leucorea Conference Center, Collegienstrasse 62, D-06886 Lutherstadt Wittenberg, Germany (www.leucorea.de) and is generously supported by the 'Coram Deo Program'.

The nearest airport to Wittenberg is Berlin. Wittenberg is about 45 minutes from Berlin by express train (please book a ticket to 'Lutherstadt Wittenberg'). The Leucorea is a 15-minute walk from the train station, just past the Luther and Melancthon Houses. The conference is free of charge. Please register with the Wittenberg Center for Reformation Studies and book your own accommodation. Rooms are available at the Leucorea Conference Center and at several hotels in the Old Town of Wittenberg.

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