

# **Reformation, Education and Transformation – International Twin Consultations 2015/2016**

**The relevance of Reformation tradition for the Churches role in global civil society - transforming unjust, unsustainable and un-peaceful structures through education and service in the past and in future.**

**Project Outline for two international conferences 2015/2016**

**Joint Project between Bread for the World and EMW in cooperation with partners in the South**

**Date: 15 August 2014 - final**

## **Background**

Churches of the Reformation traditions in Europe as well as on global level are journeying towards the 500<sup>th</sup> centenary of the Reformation also in reaching out to Churches beyond the Reformation tradition. Mainline German Protestant churches have planned a journey towards 2017 within the “Reformation Decade” 2007-2017 in which each year has a particular umbrella theme. For 2016 the theme of “*Reformation and the One World*” is envisaged and preparations by several actors within Germany are going on to mark this year.

2017 is a highly symbolic date for a major strand within Reformation tradition. This date and others likewise important dates within the Reformation history pose as one challenge to identify how and on what to look back at these occasions and on what to focus under the theme: “Reformation and the One World”. “One World” refers to the growing awareness of the interconnectedness of the whole globe. The term is not just stating the fact that we live in a globalized world but highlights that solutions of the global problems will not be achieved unless they are addressed in common – across the regions, denominations and religious traditions, as a concern of humanity as a whole.

Protestant traditions are part of World Christianity, yet a minority of approximately 250 million within it. Protestantism has spread over the world through mission and migration and as well has become a globalized dialect of faith as well is formed by a multitude of contextual expressions. This is the result of a history which has been formatted by fragmentation and including moments of dogmatic struggles, political power assumptions, and persecution and at the same time learning experiences so that Protestantism at large has also contributed to freedom of confession, to liberation

struggles, to the propagation of human rights and justice for all, to reconciliation and to strengthen individual rights as well as the global civil society.

**Reformation and Transformation** therefore is a thematic umbrella under which the attempt should be made to jointly identify the resources protestant churches all over the world have mobilized from within their tradition and with a strong commitment to education to respond to the challenges of their respective contexts and to cope with global tendencies of lacking justice and sustainability, human rights violations and violence and help to transform them. Their strong commitment to education as transformative power will require a special emphasis.

The Churches of the Reformation tradition have in these areas not always been the progressive forces and never have been the sole actors in these fields. However, communication of the gospel and commitment to education have in many cases gone hand in hand with the search of the role of the churches in their and strengthening their respective societies and how protestant positions – the importance of biblical insights, the value of the individual, reconciliation on the basis of justification by God's grace - developed into advocacy for human rights, justice and peace and of taking sides with the marginalized. Since Protestantism has highlighted the interconnection between theology and learning both public theology and theological education can be identified as two vital resources that Protestantism can contribute to the challenges World Christianity is facing in the context of rapid globalization and growing inequalities in this world.

Bread for the World (Berlin) and the Protestant Association of Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW), both acting globally in cooperation with partners, plan to contribute to the Reformation Decade in 2016 in preparing for a major conference project reflecting on its sources in Reformation theology and traditions of churches of the reformation as a key to meaningful contribution to civil society as well as justice, peace and human rights – locally and globally. A special focus will be laid on the transformative role of education. Vice versa Protestant theology and churches have been challenged by social and political changes and development of societies to reflect on the role of the Gospel, the Bible and the services of the churches.

### **Project of twin-conference**

The idea is to have two major consultations, the first in a context of the global South and the second one in the German context. Each of them should be prepared and operate with partners of different contexts and be shaped transculturally. The first one should take place the last three months of 2015 (November 2015), or in the beginning of 2016 (January/February 2016), the second should take place in the second quarter 2016 (May/June) in order not to clash with major other events.

Each conference should have some 80-100 participants.

The first conference should take place in the global South. The EST in Sao Leopoldo has agreed to be a crucial partner for the first global consultation to take place in November 2015 in Brazil. The second global consultation should take place in May 2016 in Germany. Both consultations will be related to places and institutions where the intersection between Reformation tradition and education has played a major role and is obvious also in attractive present forms.

Both conferences would be organized with crucial international and national partners, providing expertise in advise, participants and in some cases also funds for the conference (such as LWF, WCRC, WCC, EKD, EMS and others).

### **Timing**

The possible time frame would be a 3-4 days conference in both cases (starting Thursday, 3 full conference days, including as option one Sunday for local worship).

### **Goals**

Both consultations would be under the same umbrella theme

**Reformation, Education and Transformation:**

**The relevance of Reformation tradition for the Churches role in global civil society - transforming unjust, unsustainable and un-peaceful structures through education and service in the past and in future.**

It will belong to the common goals of the two consultations,

- a) To highlight how churches and faith based development bodies by tying in with the tradition of the Reformation heritage took and take effect in civil societies – especially through the promotion of education. New trends and challenges for education and for public theology will be highlighted in order to mark education as a (their?) key contribution of the Protestant churches towards the transformation of society. *Education as core concern of the Reformation tradition is here the core emphasis.*
- b) To highlight how churches and faith based development bodies by tying in with the tradition of the Reformation heritage made an impact in their societies with regard to strengthening the civil society and their role in development and politics, the responsibility of political power and the protection of the common good. Although there are significant differences between the various protestant church traditions their impact in many cases was significant for the development of the society at large in which they exist. *Public Theology as core concern of the Reformation tradition is here the core emphasis.*
- c) To scrutinize and define the contribution which Protestant church traditions have made in terms of the creation of an awareness of belonging together in One World, of sharing with other forces in the tasks for new models of sustainable development, just and peaceful societies and towards a just and

participatory world society. *Justice and reconciliation as a core concern of the Reformation tradition are here the emphasis.*

- d) To define the moments since when churches of the Protestant traditions began took effect on the education and formation of leadership in a given context within the ecumenical movement. *Special contextual shapes of Reformation tradition within the churches in the Global South are here the focus.*
- e) To study how the churches of the Protestant traditions reacted and responded to the influences and challenges they received from other actors in the respective societies, how that affected their reflection in using and applying the theological instruments of the Reformation tradition and how this could be helpful to cope with the challenges ahead of us in our globalized world. *Contemporary needs to carry forward, to reinterpret and to update the theological essence of Reformation tradition with regard to current challenges are here in the center.*

Key questions for the whole process are:

- 1) *What are the challenges and changes churches in the Reformation tradition in various parts of the world are facing today with regard to education, social transformation and participation in civil society?*
- 2) *Which role has Reformation played/should Reformation Christianity play with regard to strengthening education, commitment in civil society and promoting the necessary transformation?*
- 3) *Which role has theological education played /should theological education and Christian leadership development play in future in churches of the Reformation for strengthening issues of justice, peace, human rights and eco-theology and for enabling transformation of society? What are key dimensions of the political ,economic and ecological transformation which is needed urgently both on global as on national levels today?*
- 4) *Which role have and can liturgy, spirituality and study of the Bible of the Reformation churches play today for strengthening the sense of belonging to one World and the processes of transformation?*
- 5) *Which models of international or regional partnerships in the area of mission and education are best suited and needed in future to take up key challenges of leadership formation and development of public theology in World Christianity today?*

While being related to the same overarching umbrella theme and common goals, both consultations would be having its distinct profiles

- In terms of its participants, which will not be identical, though with some overlapping
- In terms of its major thematic emphasize.

While the first consultation will be focusing on the relevance of the Reformation tradition for the **participation of Churches in civil society and the role of theology for transformative education** with a focus on the chosen context in the South,

the second consultation will be focusing on the **relevance and contemporary challenges of the Reformation tradition for justice in the world, the great transformation** and towards “fullness of life” in the global context..

In terms of results both conferences will produce a pointed final statement or affirmed conclusions with common convictions, key questions raised and suggestions for priorities in terms of themes and concerns for follow up which will contribute to the ecumenical profile of EMW, Bread for the World and all partners involved in the years ahead.

A documentation of papers is planned, however not as purely an academic anthology, but as a broader documentation which can be shared with a wider spectrum of people.

## **Partners**

*Ownership partners* involved in both planning and for sending participants should be

- EMW and Bread for the World as key organizers;

*Cooperative partners* for the consultation process (in terms of sending participants and giving advice):

- LWF, (Department on theology and public witness), WCRC, WCC
- partner churches/organizations from the global South;
- EKD;
- EMS and other mission agencies as members of EMW;
- A few key institutions of theological education and theological research which are involved in similar concerns and discourses in the global South;
- Networks of younger theologians (scholarship organizations, GETI network etc)

## **Participants**

Those considered for participation (by invitation or delegation) will be

- a) Key representatives from ecumenical partner churches and theological institutions in the South;
- b) Key representatives from Protestant churches in Germany and Central/Eastern Europe;
- c) Selected representatives from other member churches of WCC, LWF and WCRC;
- d) A significant number of younger theologians in order to build bridges for the younger generation from EWDE scholarship desk and others;
- e) A significant number of representatives from minority churches in settings where protestant churches are in minority and diaspora.

- f) Participants will be selected according to known balances and criteria,

### **Thematic scope**

Possible building blocks concerning the thematic structuring of the program could be the following:

- a) Reformation, Participation in Civil Society and Transformation
- b) Reformation, Education and Development
- c) New Models of cooperation between churches in Reformation tradition for Education, Transformation and Promotion of Justice, Peace and Human Rights

### **Ownership and Planning Group**

While the project of two conferences is formally owned by Bread for the World and EMW/MA, an executive steering committee of not more than 6 people from Germany and from the South needs to be constituted by latest September 2014 which will bring together at least some of the following people

- a) Representatives from EMW/MA (Christoph Anders, Michael Biehl, Uta Andree)
- b) Representatives from Bread for the World (Dietrich Werner, Dennis Arion)
- c) Representatives from LWF (Kenneth Mtata, Kaisamari Hintikka)
- d) Representative from churches of the South (Rudolf von Sinner from EST and others)

A kind of Executive steering committee with 5-6 members will be needed to work from September 2014.