"Reformation Traditions Engaging with Key Areas of Education and Societal Transformation"

Thursday, 19 May, afternoon

1. Public Theology and the Churches' Social Witness

1.1 Transformation and Justification – Which Concept Are We Aiming for?

In São Leopoldo it was often obvious that participants were using different notions of "transformation". Some spoke of a "great" transformation in the sense of a political-economic process, others of transformation as reform (rather than revolution), still others referred to thelogically-rooted concepts of transformation as for example in the Orthodox tradition.

This workshop will deepen the study of "transformation". It will address the inner tension between transformation concepts which generate from human efforts to transform and change their lives and their societies and a fundamental transformation received from God. Concepts such as justification, holiness or discipleship could be understood as the efforts of various Reformation Traditions to formulate that tension.

1.2 The Church as Agent of Transformation?! Who Are "We" as Churches to Witness and to Offer a Specific Contribution for Transformation?

"Church" is quickly identified as the agent of transformation. Workshops in São Leopoldo highlighted, however, that churches have not always been transformative powers.

This workshop will address the relation between goals for advocacy (Human rights, justice, SDGs) which churches share with other agents in civil society and the specific contribution churches do and can offer in various contexts. Which distinctive insights do they offer to the formulation of such goals? What is the specific role of church(es) in the public sphere where its voice is one among others?

3. Human Dignity, Integrity of Creation and Alternative Development

3.1. Human Rights Recognition and the Role of the Churches: Advocate or Stumbling Block?

A workshop in São Leopoldo with a similar focus offered important insights vis-a-vis the connection between Reformation Churches and human rights initiatives. Concepts like the "sanctity of human beings" and "freedom to dissent" were discussed. Yet it became also evident that churches sometimes act in opposition to the recognition of human rights, particularly when they believe that these rights stand in contradiction to the Gospel.

What can we learn from studying such debates in the history of the Reformation traditions? To what extent do conflicts of the past offer a perspective as to how such divisive issues be dealt with fruitfully? Is transformative education an option here?

3.2 The Sustainable Development Goal Agenda 2030 as Global Reformation Process:The Role of Churches and Faith-Based Organisations inthe Search for Alternative Development Concepts

Various secular organizations (e.g. World Bank, United Nations and others) have disovered Faith-Based (FBO) or Faith Inspired organisatons (FBI) as partners in development and

promotion of Sutainable Development Goals (SDGs). Beyond being partners in action: Can and do religious actors offer models for alternative development based on their tradition and theology? What could be the contributions of the Reformation Traditions in this connection?

3.3 Towards an Ecological Reformation of Christianity – Eco-Theological Concepts , Economic "Realities" and the Reformation Heritage

In São Leopoldo, it was often asserted that neo-liberalism and capitalism have a religious dimension. Delegates from Latin America, but also others argued that to follow these ideologies "faithfully" is tantamount to idolatry.

This workshop will review alternative concepts for an ecological renewal and the contribution the Reformation Traditions can make towards the critique of so-called „economical necessities".

5. Suffering, Solidarity and the Theology of Empowerment

5.1 Gender Justice and the Role of Women in Theological Education and Research

A focus on women and gender is not necessarily part of standard curricular in theological training and research in general or pastoral formation in particular. Some churches have it, some do not. There are also some churches, particularly within the Orthodox traditions and the Evangelical and Pentecostal movements, who resist such a focus. Do the Reformation Traditions provide a mandate for taking gender justice seriously? What is the content of that mandate and how can it be presented constructively? What do theological education and research stand to gain by adopting a focus on gender justice?

5.2 Rethinking God's Solidarity in the Face of Poverty and Social Exclusion

The Prosperity or Health-Wealth Gospel has become a powerful influence in the theology of many churches today, including churches which are rooted in the various Reformation traditions. This in spite of the fact that the accumulation of wealth – in Reformation time that of the Roman Catholic Church in particular – was often condemned by the Reformers. Nevertheless: worldly success and material well-being have in the Protestant tradition often been seen as manifestations of God's grace and glory. Is this valid, or does it stand in contradiction to the Reformation's critique of justification through works? Last not least: What of those who find they cannot escape poverty? What does God's blessing mean to them?

5.3 Proclaiming the Gospel to All People: Overcoming Cultural and Sociological Captivity by Forming Just and Inclusive Communities

Protestant Churches in Europe and in North America are often tied to a particular social milieu. This can have negative connotations. The emphasis Protestant churches in Germany place on education often gives persons with only modest educational credentials the feeling that "church is not for me." Churches can also be tied to other sociological groupings, be it income level, professional status or ethnic background. What examples can we find for "just and inclusive congregations", i.e. congregations which succeed in going beyond sociological stereotypes to become a true community of faith? What could help us to form more such communities, whether in the Global North or the Global South?