

Halle, May 2016

Word of Greeting by Christoph Anders, Director EMW

Dear Prof. Dr. Müller-Bahlke,

Respected church leaders, colleagues from all over the world, dear sisters and brothers!

For the second time it is my privilege to extend a word of greeting to all of you on behalf of the EMW at the beginning of the Halle Assembly.

1 Speaking about Transformation during the present Pentecostal time has a special relevance. The disciples were transformed by receiving the Holy Spirit: Scared, hidden in a house of Jerusalem they became witnesses of the Good News. Transformation happened likewise with the listeners of the Gospel: They experienced new ways of understanding, crossing language borders. In listening and believing in what they heard, a joyful transformation of lives started.

One may call the Holy Spirit an educator and understand Pentecost as an event of successful transformation. Since education processes intend to generate new world views and life perspectives, we see this happen: There is consolation, empowerment and understanding the truth of God among the disciples and the first congregation as fruits of the Spirit's transformative education work.

And there is a possible Reformation related interpretation of Pentecost. It is the birthday of the Church. But we should not forget that Jesus, his disciples and the first Christian congregations lived

with the self-understanding of a radical reformation of their own Jewish religion.

For our assembly here in Halle we pray for the Spirit of Pentecost to assist us in understanding each other in building an inspired community although we speak many different languages.

2 Coming from São Leopoldo/Brazil to Halle/Germany, we look back with gratitude because R-E-T has been an important learning experience so far. Why?

2.1 Looking at our Churches' we noticed a plurality of voices, polycentric developments related to Reformation as a "World Citizen".

2.2 The Reformation of Churches and transformation of societies are ongoing processes. We have heard about renewed lectures of basic theological convictions. This helps to respond to the challenges of their societies. Education and formation are needed, longing for meaningful actualizations of traditions in the Churches of the Reformation. But - especially in contexts like Latin America - other churches stand likewise for an impressive history of educational inputs in their societies. We know: Churches of the Reformation have no exclusive ownership when it comes to transformative education.

2.3 We spoke about churches in times of radical social transformations: Be it in constellations of dictatorship, be it in revolutionary situations, or in contexts of structural violence. There is however a mixed balance for Churches of the Reformation, irrespective of their profiles. They have been among the forces raising

voices against authoritarian regimes and life-denying economies. But sometimes they could not fulfil their mandate of fighting alongside with those in need of solidarity and empowerment.

2.4 Gender-questions played a remarkable role in São Leopoldo. Be it the experiences of vulnerability and exclusion of women in societies and churches, be it the important role women played in the formation programmes of the churches and in the mission movement. We will deal with these issues here in Halle again.

3 A new avenue in our R-E-T process is what we call the Twin - Approach. Both meetings, one in the Global South and one the Global North form such a twin and each event should be marked by its own local flavour. We could experience this in a fascinating way in São Leopoldo due to the hospitality of Faculdades EST and the Lutheran Church. The events in SL and Halle are linked by the same overarching topics and similar subthemes, in distinctive but interrelated perspectives. The same has been valid for the persons invited for keynotes and workshops, offering “twinned” perspectives for dialogue. This happened quite successfully in São Leopoldo. However, we realized that it was not always easy to link or to “twin” different positions and to define a transcontextual connectedness on a new level. It remains a challenging task to listen to the different contextual positions and agree on connecting topics and aspects. We are convinced that we will have to work others here and we will know better about the viability of such a Twin Approach in evaluating the R-E-T-Process later.

4 The Francke Foundation and the Theological Faculty of the Halle-Wittenberg Martin Luther University offer a perfect space to continue our reflection. Here we are in the heartland of the Reformation in Germany. Halle is one of the places in Mission movement famous local and worldwide for its emphasis on diaconical and educational work.

Today the contexts have drastically changed, but it is not so easy to agree how to characterize what we see: Is it Dechristianization? Post-Modernity? Secularization? Believing without belonging? Or is it just a new period of Transformation of faith and worldviews? We will carefully listen and try to connect insights of the Halle debates with the ones of Sao Leopoldo.

5 For us in EMW the first opportunity to reflect upon the results of the RET-process with our constituency will be the coming meeting of our Commission for Theological Education at the end of May. It will be interesting to see in how far R-E-T-results may have an impact on our cooperation in Ecumenical Theological Education worldwide. Some of our partners are represented here and we look forward to deepening our cooperation in the light of the RET-Process.

6 My gratitude goes to all of you who have constantly supported the RET-Process: Especially to the Colleagues here in Halle, same is true for Geneva, Berlin and São Leopoldo, Hannover, Hamburg and in many other places worldwide. Thanks to all of you as active

participants for accepting our invitation to contribute to this journey of common learning. We share the conviction, that the R-E-T- Process is generating meaningful insights to different processes related to Commemorating 500 years of Reformation in the context of the life-transforming presence of Christianity in the One World.

6 And now it is my great pleasure to speak in direction of Dr. Wilhelm Wachholz, rector of the Faculdades EST and his colleagues. Some of you may know that Faculdades EST celebrated its 70. birthday some weeks ago. I congratulate and on behalf of EMW and on behalf of this audience. I know from my own experience that Faculdades EST play an important role in Ecumenical Formation far beyond the frontiers of Brazil. Your history is a lucid example for the wrestling of an institution with strong theological traditions based on the Reformation. You had to act in contexts of rapid social Transformations with the urgent need to find meaningful ways of Education and Formation. Your birthday is realized in the midst of a challenging political and social crisis in Brazil. We hope Faculdades EST can contribute to find ways towards a good governance in your country. We thank you for your presence in the R-E-T-Process and wish to you and your colleagues in the staff, the students and the different boards: strength, wisdom and presence of God's spirit in the future!