

Word of greeting Christoph Anders EMW, first consultation
November 19-23, 2015 in São Leopoldo, Brazil

Word of Greeting in the Opening Session of the Twin Consultation Reformation – Education - Transformation by Christoph Anders, EMW

1 Respected church leaders, colleagues, dear sisters and brothers!

It is my privilege to extend a word of greeting to all of you at the beginning of this conference. I do so on behalf of the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW).

Our Consultation process began with a question, some three years ago: Given the understanding of „The Reformation as a World Citizen“ quoting Martin Junge, General secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) - how could we create a congress format which brings together the various perspectives of worldwide partner-networks, of Bread for the world and EMW in particular? So we began reflecting on this issue in the leadership of both organizations. In times of deepened interconnectedness due to Globalization, the polycentric developments of the Reformation should become just as visible as the different church profiles in multiple countries. Yet the focus should also be directed to our presence: Which are the basic theological insights being formulated by churches of the Reformation today which enable them to respond to the challenges posed by their various societies and the One World?

2 We wanted to depict different contexts and common focal points of various churches with a Reformation heritage. As a result of intense dialogues with our ecumenical partners, the idea of a “Twin Consultation” was born. Two exemplary venues, one in the Global South and one in the Global North, have been identified to deal with related thematic issues and comparable methodologies in quite different perspectives. We found active partners in the three World Communions, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and some German mission agencies.

3 Of utmost importance is the support of two Universities and Formation Centers acting in those places mentioned above. Here in Brazil, that is the Faculties EST. In Germany, it is the Francke Foundations in Halle and the University of Halle-Wittenberg. This support was of decisive importance, as the thematic focus of the event is to be the theologically grounded processes of formation and transformation. These institutions represent an extraordinary knowhow in organizing learning processes related to church and society. I note with gratitude that many people in

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these institutions were willing to join this project and help us develop this Twin format that today brings us together from North and South, East and West.

4 For us in EMW, this Twin Consultation is our main contribution to the Reformation Jubilee preparations. This as one of our main working areas is directly connected to the questions we will be addressing in these days. In our support of Ecumenical/Theological Education and Formation worldwide, we experience it again and again: The mandate of a realistic interpretation of the world and the responsibility towards both humanity and the creation as a whole is of vital importance to the Churches of the Reformation and others as well. However, the responses to this mandate are quite varied. Further, it is clear that acting in a responsible way will only possible be through intense and fruitful cooperation with actors in other churches and in the society at large. It is precisely at this point that formation processes are of decisive importance. Here we truly enter into dialogue.

5 The Bible gives several accounts of different people coming together to sit at one table - including various examples with Jesus Christ. For me personally, Luke 13, 29 is important: "Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God." (NRSV). In such earthly encounters, people converse with each other, eat and drink while united at one table. By doing so, they become transparent for another, providing a glimpse of the completed communion at the end of time. In such table communions in our time there will be surprises and risks, because people articulate quite diverse experiences of their individual journeys to the common table. We must be attentive to this, exercising patience in order to achieve mutual understanding. Participating in such table communities in a meaningful way will empower us to go back to our places of living, our congregations, churches, villages, towns and societies, transforming them into spaces of hospitality, tolerance and reconciliation. Therefore we urgently need formation processes which transcend borders. This is just one insight gleaned from the painful incidents of the last weeks in Paris, Bagdad and Syria.

So the first Twin Consultation is offering us, coming as we do from the four corners of this world, special opportunities for encounters at tables in tents, on this magnificent campus or in seminar rooms. We will listen to each other and gain renewed insights as to how our theological and spiritual profiles are embedded in our daily lives.

6 In closing, I express my deep gratitude to all who have prepared this consultation in such a committed way: Here in São Leopoldo, in Geneva, Berlin, Halle and – last not least - in our own EMW Offices in Hamburg. There will be an opportunity later on to

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International Twin Consultation 2015/2016



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name each and every one of them. I want to thank all of you who have accepted our invitation and will contribute to our common journey of learning with regard to Reformation-Education-Transformation. We hope to set a benchmarks guiding us in the coming months, until we will meet again in Halle next year and hopefully thereafter as well. Our common bond throughout is our deep dedication to the crucial and current relevance of Reformation insights, leading us as they do to education and formation processes which help World Christianity to play a vital role in transforming the One World into a place where life in fullness for all becomes a reality.

I thank you for your attention, God bless you all.

São Leopoldo, 19. November 2015

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