
An invitation to Reformation – Education – Transformation

“Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.” (Isaiah 40:31)

We gathered from 18 to 22 May 2016 in Halle/Saale, 500 years after the beginnings of the Reformation in this region to reflect on how its insights might contribute to the transformation of the world today. We came from more than 40 countries throughout the world and from a wide range of confessional and theological traditions.

We were enriched by our experiences of common prayer and worship, and reflecting together on how we respond to the Word of God in our situations today.

Each day as we met in the Francke Foundations in Halle, we could read the words of Isaiah above the entrance of the main building, a former orphanage. They spoke to us of the promise of God’s transformation of human beings and societies.

Here, August Hermann Francke worked to renew and transform the church, and created a social and educational institution to renew and transform society. Francke’s work and that of others formed the basis for mission to other parts of the world, sharing the Gospel in word and deed, becoming one of the movements making the Reformation a global process.

Our meeting was the second stage of our “Twin Consultation” as part of the “Reformation – Education – Transformation” (R-E-T) process that began in São Leopoldo in Brazil in November 2015.

In São Leopoldo we met in a situation marked by Protestant immigration in the 19th century but where today the religious landscape is characterised by an abundance of religious expressions of the most diverse kind. In Halle, we met in the lands of the Reformation of Martin Luther and the women and men who accompanied him, but which are now among the world’s most secularised territories.

We asked whether our experiences in São Leopoldo and Halle reflect typical situations in other parts of the regions often referred to as “Global South” and “Global North”. We considered whether transformation is related to numerical strength, and about how churches, in whatever situation they are, contribute to promoting “life in fullness”.

One of the goals of the “Twin Consultation” was to explore challenges and insights from these two contrasting situations, looking to the relevance of Reformation traditions for the participation of churches in the public space. In a globalised world of new networks, neighbourhoods and nearness, we

have the opportunity to learn from these different contexts, freed from the narrowness of our own territories.

In Halle, we listened to and wish to learn from the experiences of our sisters and brothers in this region as they seek to interpret the Reformation tradition in their society today, as in some other parts of the world there is also decreasing identification with religious institutions. We look to our communities to find ways to be spaces of encounter for dialogue, reciprocity, empowerment and the sharing of stories.

In seeking inspiration from the Reformation tradition, we are not seeking to promote a triumphalist view of history. A central insight of the Reformation is that the Gospel needs constantly to be rediscovered for contemporary situations. We sought to discover the transformative power of Reformation today – not as a past event but directed to the future.

Meeting in the Theological Faculty of the Martin Luther University Halle–Wittenberg and the Francke Foundations we have reflected on the role of the Reformation tradition in promoting education for the development and transformation of societies here and worldwide.

We underlined the role of learning as an active process. We asked who the subjects of education are, and how people may become educators for transformation, confronting power and creating space for liberation in church, society and economy. In this light, we thought it helpful to consider in the “twin approach” the key concepts of educators such as Paulo Freire in Brazil and August Hermann Francke in Germany.

We look for creative and innovative ways of global ecumenical learning, intercultural dialogue and transnational partnerships between churches of different traditions. At the same time our congregations and churches need to be transformed so that no visitor will ever feel unwelcome.

Transformation requires the involvement of the whole people of God, in which the voices of indigenous peoples are heard, women are valued as equal partners, theology is “engendered”, and our communities are communities of intercultural diversity, open to dialogue and mutual change.

For churches to be agents of transformation requires openness and tolerance. We need to be agents of reconciliation, offering a prophetic witness, embodying human dignity and promoting just and inclusive communities. We know, however, the continuing need for repentance for the many times when churches failed to act in this way. Asking for God’s forgiveness should therefore be a constant prayer.

Our world needs transformation. We live with the realities of fragmentation and conflict that tear our societies apart, including religious fundamentalism and religiously-justified violence. We have learned the need to confront negative attitudes in the Reformation tradition towards Catholics, Jews and Islam, and even within the Protestant family itself. It is therefore the task of theological education to promote a critical understanding of holy texts and religious traditions to overcome religiously-legitimised behaviour that promotes violence and division.

The protest of the early Reformation against material greed, corruption and religious idolatry has profound implications for recognising, promoting and developing alternatives to the present economic realities. We have been challenged to make common cause with partners in all parts of our societies to advance the 2030 agenda of the United Nations and the Sustainable Development Goals. Churches and faith-based organisations have a significant contribution to offer, including the link between holistic education and development strategies. In these tasks, social, ecological, economic and spiritual transformation need to go hand in hand.

We have been challenged to deepen further what is meant by the relationship between Reformation, Education and Transformation. Although the “Twin Consultation” has now concluded, the R-E-T process will continue over the next two years. During this time, there will be many events and study processes linked to the insights of what we have learned and experienced together. As participants in the “Twin Consultation”, we are committed to work as bridge-builders to other ecumenical initiatives related to Christian contributions to education and development wherever they are taking place. And we invite sisters and brothers from the ecumenical family to join us on this path.

In this time of Pentecost, we pray,

“Come Holy Spirit, Reform, Educate and Transform our world”

The “Twin Consultation” is a joint project of Bread for the World, the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW), Faculdades EST São Leopoldo, the Francke Foundations and the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg in cooperation with the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Evangelical Church in Germany, and other partners.

www.r-e-t.net

<http://www.globethics.net/web/reformation-education-transformation>

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