

Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg
Report to the LWF Council 2016
by the Chair of the Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research

A. The present priorities of the work of the Institute

A 1: The most important field of the three areas of the Institute's work, namely research, participation in LWF-dialogues, and communication/teaching, is the *commemoration of 500 years of Reformation as an ecumenical challenge.*

This includes the Summer Seminar four years ago investigating the perspectives of commemorating Reformation from eight different church families (Anglican, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Reformed, Roman Catholic) and from different regions (including Africa, Brasilia).

Within the broad area of commemorating the Reformation, the main priority of the present work is given to the Lutheran/Roman Catholic relations. These relations seem to change as a consequence of preparing the upcoming centenary of the Reformation in 2017. In the last years, the Institute contributed substantially to the document "From Conflict to Communion" and to the "Joint Liturgy" that will be used at the celebration in Lund. In the coming into being of these texts of the LWF the Institute played a leading role and has thus fulfilled the purpose that its Constitution has given to it. The commemoration in Lund with Pope Francis as co-hosting the common prayer will be the main event of the LWF within a decade (or more). The Institute is delighted to have helped LWF in making this event possible.

"From Conflict to Communion" is used in many countries, and the Staff of the Institute has been invited to many countries and places (including a colloquy in Venice in April 2016, events in France, Slovenia, U.S., Denmark, Germany etc.)

50 years of Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue have lead to the event of Lund. Lund means honoring this dialogue and its results from the Roman Catholic side in the highest possible way. This dialogue was established in a meeting that took place in April 1966 in the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg. Thus its anniversary deserves to be celebrated this year. The Institute does this with its upcoming Summer Seminar: "50 Years of Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue". This Summer Seminar will be different from other seminars. It will be a study seminar and give an overview over 50 years of this dialogue. The following aspects will be discussed: (I.) Historic Backgrounds (Prof. Kenneth Appold, USA; Prof. Wolfgang Thönissen, Germany), (II.) The Beginning of the Dialogue (Prof. Hervé Legrand O.P., France; Prof. André Birmelé, France), (III.) *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Prof. Theodor Dieter, Strasbourg; Bishop em. Dr. Eero Huovinen, Finland; Prof. Michel Fédou SJ, France), (IV.) From to *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* to *From Conflict to Communion* (Prof. Angelo Maffei, Italy; Prof. Friederike Nüssel, Germany), (V.) Developments in Different Countries (France: Prof. Elisabeth Parmentier; Tanzania: N.N.; Germany: Dr. Mareile Lasogga; Latin America: Prof. Scampini, USA: Prof. Sarah Hinlicky Wilson; Farfa-Group on Petrine Ministry: Prof. Myriam Wijlens), (VI.) The Future of the Dialogue (Prof. Bernd Oberdorfer and Prof. Johanna Rahner [Roman-Catholic], both Germany). There will be a concluding ecumenical service with Bishop Dr. July and Archbishop Grallet from Strasbourg. The presentations of the seminar will be published together with an introduction by Karl Cardinal Lehmann, who will also participate in the seminar, and an epilogue by LWF General Secretary Dr. Martin Junge.

In the area of theological research the Institute continues to work with the interpretation of Luther's 95 Theses. There exists still no comprehensive commentary on the 95 Theses. Since the controversy on

these theses launched the Reformation, the understanding of the debate on them is ecumenically significant. The project together with the Catholic Johann-Adam-Möehler-Institute in Paderborn (Germany) has brought together 12 Catholic and Protestant researchers that have the task to offer an historical account of that debate giving voice to all debaters. The research does not aim at any consensus on indulgences rather it is a historical-critical study. But it has its specific character by engaging Catholic and Protestant who in fact bring different perspectives also into a historical account. In this field, the Institute's professors are involved in research projects in different places (Aarhus, Melbourne, Strasbourg [University]).

A 2: The second priority of the Institute's work is given to the commemoration of the Reformation *ad intra*, with respect to Lutheranism: project "Lutheran Identity"

Some 40 years ago, the Institute published a booklet with the title "Lutheran Identity". For 2017 and as a gift for the upcoming LWF Assembly the Institute plans to offer an updated version of the book. The Institute's Staff prepares 4 series of theses that will be discussed by a group of Lutheran theologians in Klingenthal in September 2016. Taking up their recommendations, the staff will revise and add what was presented in Klingenthal. The staff will work hard to finish the booklet in time for the Assembly. The topic of the Summer Seminar in 2017 will also be "Lutheran Identity", of course in an ecumenical perspective. The Board of the Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research thinks that this is an appropriate title for the Summer Seminar in the 500th year of the Reformation. It takes seriously that Luther did not wish to create a new church rather contribute to the reform of the church of his time. Lutheranism is a gift to the whole church. The Institute wishes to make this clear with the 50th Summer Seminar that the Institute offers (another anniversary!). Not very many events around 2017 raise the question what it means today to be "Lutheran." The Institute wishes to fill this gap with this project. Kaisamari Hintikka proposed that the booklet could be complemented by regional reports from different LWF member churches. The Institute is open to this idea.

A 3: The other priorities: Participation in dialogues and communication

a) Dialogues:

aa) Catholic/Lutheran: A basic problem for the current work of the Commission on Unity is the problem of the relation between the Church as the Body of Christ and the universal church that according to the Roman Catholic Church "subsists in" this church. We need to identify the entity into which we are baptized and we have to find descriptions of this entity that are in line with the respective doctrinal understandings of the Lutheran church and the Roman Catholic church. There are very complex discussions within the RC Church about the right understanding of the "subsistit in" – these discussions have serious consequences for the dialogue. – Another problem is whether (from a Lutheran perspective) we can talk about degrees of communion. If the theme of the Commission is "growth in communion", this implies that there must be degrees while Lutherans in most cases object the concept of degrees of communion.

The Institute contributes its research to the dialogue by drafting parts of the final document of the Commission on Unity, by carefully checking drafts and by hosting drafting meetings in the Institute.

bb) Trilateral: It has turned out that Mennonites have among themselves different understandings of sin (of original sin, actual sin etc.) and of grace and that they do not feel fully understood by Lutherans and Catholics in their understanding(s). This question is crucial when it comes to describing what happens in baptism. The research required from the Institute in this respect may also help the Mennonites to clarify their own understanding. This will be done in dialogue when Mennonite professor John Rempel will stay

in the Institute for six weeks. In conversation with him Theodor Dieter will draft the first chapter of the final report and host a drafting meeting in the Institute in order to finalize the complete draft of the final document

cc) Lutheran/Pentecostal dialogue: Sarah Hinlicky Wilson wrote a handbook “Pentecostalism for Lutherans” as a tool for the preparation of the Lutheran participants in the dialogue (and perhaps also for Pentecostals). One can download the book for free from the Institute’s website: <http://www.strasbourg-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/A-Guide-to-Pentecostal-Movements-for-Lutherans.pdf>

dd) The Lutheran/Reformed dialogue in Europe (CPCE) met last year in the Institute preparing the study document “Church Fellowship” under the leadership of Michael Beintker and André Birmelé. The document aims at deepening the communion. It will be sent to the member churches very soon. On the basis of the responses from the member churches a final text will be written for the Assembly in Basel in 2018. It is interesting that the theme of *communio* is the topic of the Catholic/Lutheran dialogue, of the dialogue between the CPCE and the Vatican, and within the CPCE.

The Institute’s contributions to the LWF dialogues show a special feature of the research done in Strasbourg. This research is not done on behalf of its own rather with respect to the dialogues. It is deliberately *applied research*. This is a difference from research done in the academia. The Institute does research for the churches and their ecumenical work.

A special emphasis of the Institute is its cooperation with the University of Strasbourg. This especially concerns students whose doctoral work focuses on ecumenical themes and are happy to take advantage of the extensive theological competence and good library of the Institute. Two doctoral theses on ecumenical subjects were defended in December 2015, both of which received the highest rating of “excellent.” While neither student was a Lutheran theologian, both have been active in recent years in various Institute activities, including offering lectures at our yearly Summer Seminar.

b) Communication / Teaching

The staff of the Institute offers very many presentations to different audiences (parishes, pastors’ conferences, bishops’ meetings, academic conferences) in many countries (Madagascar, Taiwan, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, USA etc.).

Three events should be mentioned especially:

aa) From 9 to 13 January 2016, the Institute in Strasbourg hosted a group of 13 pastors from the Gambia, a small country in West Africa. The pastors came as representatives of 7 of the denominations belonging to the Gambia Christian Council: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, and Assemblies of God. Already having basically positive relationships as a tiny minority of Christians in this predominantly Muslim country, the GCC wanted to deepen and strengthen the ecumenical fellowship in the Gambia. The initial idea came from Bp. Samuel S. Thomas of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Gambia, who in 2014 participated in the Studying Luther seminar offered by the Institute’s staff each November. Excited by the work the professors were doing, he brought home news of the Institute to the Gambia and encouraged involvement in the Institute’s activities. Prof. Wilson gave an overview over one hundred years of ecumenism putting an emphasis on the Faith and Order Commission’s “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” and leading to the challenge to create a baptismal covenant, recognizing each other’s baptisms despite of differences in ministry, theology, and method. Prof. Dieter reviewed the conflicts of the 16th century leading to the division

between the church of Rome and the various Protestant groups and described the attempts to overcome the divisions (*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, From Conflict to Communion, Lutheran-Mennonite Reconciliation*). The Gambian participants also worked on analyzing their own particular situation as many Christian churches in a Muslim context, and the challenges they face in more fully living out their unity in Christ. Beyond the hard work, the participants enjoyed time for fellowship and visits in the area. They met with the Anglican community in Strasbourg and with Lutheran pastors in the area, paid visits to the beautiful cathedral of Strasbourg and the Lutheran St. Thomas church. The whole group also took an excursion to the Vosges Mountains where the participants delighted in the heavy snow, for many the first in their lives. The Institute's professors are particularly glad to have had the opportunity to host this seminar as they reflect on ways in which to extend their ecumenical work more intensively into the Global South. It became clear that attention to unity and diversity in the body of Christ is just as urgent in the South and among younger churches as it is among the older churches in the North. The staff gained many insights for future work and projects. The Institute is grateful to the Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg and the Lutheran Church in Bavaria for supporting financially this seminar. For a more detailed report including the reactions of the participants see: <http://www.strasbourg-institute.org/en/ecumenical-training-for-interreligious-contexts-a-seminar-for-15-pastors-from-the-gambia/>

bb) The 49th International Ecumenical Seminar 2015 had the topic: "Ecumenism in the Arts". It was the attempt to find a different approach to ecumenism and new ways in order to identify elements that unite divided Christians. These perspectives from music, visual arts, film, poetry, and architecture were enthusiastically welcome. Participants offered many own contributions in addition to the presentations by invited speakers. For more information see: <http://www.strasbourg-institute.org/en/summer-seminar-2015-ecumenism-in-the-arts/>

cc) Seminar: Studying Luther in Wittenberg 2015

This November saw the 12th Seminar Studying Luther in Wittenberg hosted by the LWF Center and the 7th to be taught by Professors Theodor Dieter and Sarah Hinlicky Wilson of the Institute in Strasbourg. Twenty participants gathered from 5 continents and 17 countries: Argentina, Canada, Denmark, Ethiopia, Germany, Guyana, Hong Kong, Latvia, Madagascar, Myanmar, Poland, Senegal, Serbia, South Africa, Tanzania, and the United States.

The special theme for this Seminar was Luther's teaching on the Holy Trinity. In the first week, after a review of the medieval context, the foundational texts of Luther's Reformation thought were covered: the 95 Theses and the lesser-known Theses on the Remission of Sins from 1518, The Freedom of a Christian, The Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness, A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels, and, as a summary, Luther's hymn "Out of the Depths" and his coat of arms, commonly known as the Luther Rose. This offered a solid foundation of the doctrine of justification and the righteousness given first as a gift in Christ before being an activity of the justified person herself. The participants also spent time reviewing the way the doctrine of justification shapes Luther's practice of baptism, including infant baptism. In the afternoon sessions, participants broke up into groups to discuss what Luther's writings meant for their varied contexts. The second week turned more specifically to the topic of the triune God, though already in the first week it was clear how deeply interwoven trinitarian thinking is with all of Luther's other theology. The texts under consideration were the Large Catechism on the First Commandment and the Creed, a sermon on John 14, The Last Words of David, The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Church, and again several hymns, "We Praise You Jesus Christ," "We All Believe in One True God" and "Dear Christian Friends Let Us Rejoice." Luther's teaching on the Trinity is basically drawn from the early church with no challenge or deviation. His one contribution, perhaps, is to insist that the Trinity is "for us," and that knowing this fact is intrinsic to knowing the Trinity at all.

For details see: <http://www.strasbourg-institute.org/en/studying-luther-in-wittenberg-2015/>

Relation to the LWF

The Board of Trustees of the Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research would like to remind the LWF Council of the presentation of LWF General Secretary Dr. Marin Junge at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Institute on April 21, 2016 (you find the full text on website: <http://www.strasbourg-institute.org/en/studying-luther-in-wittenberg-2015/> : “In theological terms: for the LWF, the Institute with its research capacity and its support of the communion’s ecumenical relations is not an *adiaphoron*, a ‘could be,’ but a necessity, a must be.”

On December 9-10, 2015, the Institute’s staff paid a visit to the Department for Theology and Public Witness in Geneva. An earlier meeting with the Geneva colleagues in Strasbourg had to be cancelled due to the financial consequences of the change in the exchange rates between Euro and Swiss Frank. The Strasbourg colleagues enjoyed the kind hospitality of their colleagues in Geneva, and everybody had the opportunity to present the respective profiles of his or her work to the others. The meeting was very helpful for a good coordination of the respective activities. There is a close working relationship between the Strasbourg and Geneva staff in three dialogues (Catholic/Lutheran, Trialog [Theodor Dieter], Lutheran/Pentecostal [Sarah Hinlicky Wilson]). The Institute is grateful to Véronique Debal from the Office for Finances and to Lisa Filippi from the Office for Personnel for a very good cooperation.

B. Challenges

B 1: Personnel:

- a) The Board of Trustees of the Foundation for Interconfessional Research decided to appoint Prof. Dr. Kirsten Busch-Nielsen as new member of the Board (successor of Prof. Aud Toenessen, Norway).
- b) Sarah Hinlicky Wilson left the Institute at the end of February 2016. The Board of the Foundation for Interconfessional Research decided upon a successor on its meeting on April 6-7, 2016.
- c) Theodor Dieter will retire on December 31, 2016. The Board decided to extend his contract by one year until December 31, 2017.
- d) Prof. Dr. Matthieu Arnold, Professor of Church History at the Strasbourg Theological Faculty, began to work as Adjunct professor with the Staff of the Institute on January 1, 2016. Arnold is an excellent Luther expert; he will take care for the continuation of the very good relationship to the Strasbourg Faculty. Kenneth Appold, Elisabeth Parmentier (now Professor at the University of Geneva), and Sarah Hinlicky Wilson work with the Strasbourg Staff as Visiting Adjunct Professors. Fortunately, André Birmelé continues to work with the Institute as he did before his retirement at the Faculty or even more than before. The close cooperation with the professors from the Strasbourg faculty has been and will be essential for the work of the Institute.
- e) From the beginning, the perspective of the Institute’s work included Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Colleagues regularly went into these regions in order to offer seminars. For some 20 years the Institute had colleagues from Indonesia and Eritrea working in Strasbourg. Due to financial constraints the Institute could not continue this cooperation. The Board and the Staff of the Institute will make new attempts to have at least one colleague from the Global South in the Institute. They will approach Mission Societies in different countries asking them whether they could finance a position for a theologian from the South in the Institute. The Staff will try to have students in the Institute through grants from the LWF.

Also the Strasbourg Thomas Chapter indicated that there might be possibilities for a student from Africa to get a scholarship for a certain time in the Institute.

B 2: Financial:

Due to the overall economic development the income from the capital fund of the Foundation for Interconfessional Research is much lower in these years than it was in earlier years. The Finish money that Bishop Huovinen as the then Chair of the Board gathered in 2004 in order to cover a certain structural deficit of the Institute is consumed. Thus the Institute will face serious financial difficulties if not individual churches will support the two positions of research professors. The Board has committed itself to discuss possibilities to cope with this financial situation.

Bishop Dr July, Stuttgart