

***“Here I stand: The truth vis a vis unity in Christ. Reformation perspectives
as seen from the Land of Reformation in Relation to Ecumenism in Oceania”***

A Keynote Address at the Academic Reformation Symposium

Pacific Theological College / Suva March 18th and 19th, 2017

Full Version

I. Introductory

Honourable Leaders of the Ecumene in Institutions and Churches here in Fiji, Sister and Brothers: Greetings in the name of Christ – the ultimate reformer in all of our lives, incarnation of the unique God, superior to human division, warrant of divine truth for our salvation, giver of hope, faith and new life! Let me first of all give salute – my sincere, very personal appreciations to all organizers in PTC, the Principal Prof. Nokise, Dr. Weinbrenner and Dr. Vaii and all faculty for making this event possible. We as Protestant Churches are all somehow “children” of the Reformation movement in the multitude of its historical manifestations and theological impacts. We get mature as we engage in the discourse with former “opponents”; since many decades we are on the way to greater unity, guided by Him - which is true not only for so called mainline Churches. This goes together with a sincere vote of greetings from the leaders of our Centre Mission OneWorld, the "Foreign Affairs" of our Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria / Germany (ELCB) – first of all from our Presiding Bishop of ELCB, also Chair of 23 Mio. Protestants in Germany, Prof. Dr. Heinrich Bedford Strohm who commended such greetings.

My role is a limited, yet an exciting one – as a “go in between”, hopefully facilitator, maybe bridge builder between Churches, Institutions, Christians in the region, whilst rooted in our Lutheran confession yet ecumenically committed and open. What a wonderful manifest of togetherness to see ELC-PNG here represented by its Head Bishop, Rt. Rev. Jack Urame – the biggest protestant Church in the Pacific with quite their special relation with our ELCB. Since I come from one of the main source lands of former Reformation, Germany, I am glad to witness, that all around our torn apart, struggling, in-just, ailing world we Christians do come together in order to meditate, reflect, share, sing, celebrate. We must strive for open doors, manifest hope, our calling to go public, so that the earth hears His voice and serve each other in a new spirit of responsibility, which our times longs for. Many societies bleed out of thousand wounds, threat of radicalisation and totalitarian approaches spills out disastrous realities, much inward looking in our political local scenes. Thus, peoples do need protagonists, prophets, councillors, experts with positive geared mindsets. Reformation was such an event which sparked change as divine interference. Our forefather and foremothers teach us what it means to stand up together, speak up, quest change every time does need. Let me affirm, that I cannot imagine any confession can claim to be the owner of full recognition and truth. Never shall we say: Martin Luther, the Lutherans come first or even Germany first. We are here as do the many Million Christian who gather around the globe – not to claim majority over against any Christian Church or expression of Faith to range second. How could anyone from the “old world” say, that we do better, to hold control maybe of other religions, be richer and even dominate others. We cannot forget about reality facts of our sad global scenes and be humble before God and each other. Instead of putting Christianity to some superiority, we in the footsteps of our Lord cannot downgrade other religions, but want them to encounter the one living God. Thus we children of Reformation are to celebrate Christ, proclaim, pray, struggle to see His kingdom of love, peace, justice come – the sooner the better.

I am so pleased to be here with you - certainly driven by German theology if such a thing exists as yet - but more by my ecumenical endeavour in our contribution to the Ecumene. Also do I take this chance to give tribute to PTC leadership which has granted me my second Dr., a Ph.D. two years ago – as it says in the Laudatio for my strive for a living Ecumene in the region. Our world, the body of Christ, our personal lives do need joined hands to be able to encounter, match and overcome the many pertinent challenges, which ultimately can only happen by the might of His spirit, which is a spirit of truth, but which take us into accountability.

II. Remembering, Celebrating – what do we try to actualize: Christians, Lutherans, Protestants, Friends of the Pacific, as Ecumenical Sojourners?

II.1. Basics

* I believe, that it was God's timing and determination to choose people like Jan Hus, Martin Luther, Charles Wesley and hundreds others – each with a very clear mind about awkward circumstances and urgencies for unavoidable change – driven by faith experiences and in its dooming decline of Church and society of the “Holy Roman Empire of German Nationhood” at their times. Church life was in such a disorder, that individuals and society alike could not bear anymore the tragic development but longed to realise changes which are inclusive and lasting.

* Yet and foremost, our commemoration “Reformation 500” is not at all about celebrating ourselves to be Lutherans, even so I am one and commend to anyone to get insights in the good reasons for this unique event called “Reformation 500” since its inception, yet ever unaccomplished. Reformation - a movement which shaped Christianity not just on an individual basis but with a tremendous public impact was not restrained just to one specific protagonist, country or Church. I regard it rather like a cosmic event: Divine secrets unveiled in life in its daily human struggles. Could Christians, normal people then realize what this movement meant and sparked? Was it foreign, superimposed, was there "new truth" or just "breakaway"? Definitely the disclosing of a Christianity much larger and richer than traditional faith was at hand. Retrieving the core of faith and Church roots in the end resulted in the urgency of the Ecumene, to take the other's Christian faith and life serious, even so thus was conceived quite late. By the way, I am married Methodist, one of my daughters married a Baptist, the other one worships with the Presbyterians in the US and my son is a band leader in Lutheran and rather Charismatic Churches.

* Thus we will talk and elaborate on essential Lutheran insights not for the sake of exclusiveness or any abstracts. Likewise do we theologians keep in mind, that the Reformers before Martin Luther - be they scholars, priests, publishers, professor or even rebels wanted to served as agents of change, warning signs in the late middle ages, not confined to their times and contexts. We do need those, times and again - also in our present Christian being and Church life. Evidently also in the Catholic Church Reformation did prompt changes - a never ending process in all of Christianity. Ultimately, when we relate the quest for unity and truth as maybe rivalling factors, let us elaborate where we do stand ourselves, as individual and communal-corporate Christians, contributing to unity and struggle for truth or rather self-centred. Anyhow, the Reformation sparked an ongoing transformation process - linking our faith back to the roots and longing for new relations by faith - to God, community and the next, guided by scripture, freed by grace, reconciled in Christ. Basics which we long to retain as trustworthy Christian Churches and communities.

II.2. Perspectives

* Many options are thinkable and employed, how to interpret Reformation in its historical settings as well as in today's contexts. Some not so unimportant insights: Definitely Reformation is not a “German Property”, but does address Christianity at large - without allowing to use it as a kind of tag to legitimize any kind of change in Christian landscape. For sure, either merely instrumentalizing Luther, his findings and actions by applying schemes driven by foreign parameters wouldn't do justice to Reformation: Resources-pooling, Discovery of arts, to advocate radicalization or politicizing Luther - deviations of the root cause and main objectives.

* Reform as an event in history: Radical changes, deep felt personal challenges: life or death, relational faith or formal obedience, where to get access to Gods might and grace, conflicts between Church and bible, temptation, grave mistakes and suffering on either side. Countless!

* Conflicts, crisis, serious challenges shape all of history of mankind - and they are caused by us humans, who yet in the end are deeply religious beings. Reasons do look at Reformers from the middle ages throughout until our present times, bear ongoing quests for change. Such remains absolutely necessary and is immediate. Reasons are not overcome, but remain quite the same: Once analysis is done, answers remain pending yet, in order to be disclosed and to find appropriate new venues, which is not an easy thing and brings about new tensions and will not finish off conflicts. Reformers acted as personalities in good faith and full life commitment, activated hidden potentials; they did not stand as academics but as pacemakers in Christ's footsteps. Relevant issues were foremost like the following: The sovereignty of God in His commandments and in His promises for life as rendered in the gospel, prioritisation of salvation, scripture, freedom in faith and service, genuinity of Church leadership/ministry, clear distinctions between secular powers and Church rulers, educating Christians in the interest of life spiritual relationships with God Triune, full participation of all Christians in the Church life regardless of hierarchies, purity and humanity of worshipping the Lord, boldness of self determination - under God, discovery of consciousness to be subject to God and His word alone, penetration of the communities with a spirit of belonging and acting accountable before God and men. Those and more are issues, well themes, are never either concluded, overcome or ever fully accomplished.

III. Changes desired – Causative Factors

III. 1. Political-Culturally, general: Clash of societies, cultures, governance systems: Rome, Italy, and the German Duke/Electors System with all their, highly questionable powers bestowed to them and embedded.

III. 2. Salvation under Stress, alienated Faith: Aspects

- * Church and society were under traditional dominion with enforced ambiguous unity dominion: “Holy Roman Empire of German Nationhood” prompted the quest for differentiations.
- * One fundamental reason was the well-documented and pervasive corruption in the then Roman Catholic papacy and clergy. Popes in the late middle ages had mistresses, meddled in politics, hired armies and waged wars. Higher clergy lived lavishly, exploited people monetarily and spiritually whilst living against principles of scripture and their own regulations.
- * Cry were heard for spiritual liberation, an exodus from the “Babylonian Captivity”: Change to truthfulness and accountability to God and mankind first became an option to be enacted.
- * Salvation was subject to payments – distortion of scripture and Church ethics alike.
- * Luther’s time saw a false unity: Societies and Church were held together by means of force, violence, suppression, blind allegiance. The Holy Roman Empire of German Nationhood was a construct not based on inner conviction, least to speak on democracy, but due to the context and ruling of that ere. The forced hierarchical order in the disguise of divine authority. Church and state in close complicity. No distinction between them: What type of unity would that constitute? Deadly diseases all around created fear of getting lost, hell, no escape!
- * The “human factor”: Power to establish and maintain Church superiority and influence - Example: The extravagant expensive St. Peters Cathedral in Rome, build on bad conscience of poor and rich, suppression and exploitation of religion in those times was a document of human art and might, not better.
- * Suppression of conscience in terms of forced corporate submission to Church commands.
- * Desire for an immediate faith and non rites-and-order based relations to the one God voiced its interest.
- * Lack of education and participation in public life, true for the majority of the population, was spelled out finally as a deprivation of basic needs which needed to be tackled.

III. 3. Social

* Challenges and new discoveries: Science in the awakening, change of world perception enlarged dimensions of human knowledge and worlds beyond our solar system, including new technical facilities.

* Humanistic word and life interpretation emerged and opened up so far unknown avenues for alternative assessments and insights; such stipulated a distancing from traditionally binding truth.

* Quests for differentiated communication in word, picture and text did enter the scene: The foreign Latin in use as Church language was a mode agreed on, but with no advance for the individual and the communal likewise in faith and identification with the contents of Christian life. Such backward geared perceptions undermined any understanding of the faith in the own language. Luther struggled for the fabrication and use of a common language, accompanied and supported by the Co-Reformers. A living liturgy was needed.

* The Christian religion determined all values in societies, their cultural templates with far ranging implications for the public life.

III.4. Forerunners and Affinities

* The Reformers did not primarily intend to create new Church entities, or to overcome existing political powers and their rules and dominion; this was affirmed many times. Luther was (only) one but a prime figure amongst others who struggled within given contexts and needs of their late middle age society to touch the misery of a distorted gone astray Church. The divine call for being a Church with credibility and impact went lost in murky waters of a strange mixture: Self centeredness of the Church, also raise of liberal subjectivism, agonies of traditions lost in the past without appeal to present needs. How could Church come back to the source of divine truth and Godly relations: The alienated body of the real existing Church was called to rediscover what Acts had said about the early Church: One Heart, One Mind, One Faith - linked by convictions of personal relationships with and under Christ alone rather than by sheer obedience to authorities, driven by fear and anger.

* We know, that there were significant developments during the 1400s with their forerunners of Protestant Reformation. Disputes among academic theologians raised issues similar to those later addressed by Luther and other Reformation thinkers. William of Ockham (1280–1349); mystical thinkers wanted to bypass Scholastic theology entirely. Churchmen disagreed about fundamental issues like Gods sovereignty, human efforts in gaining salvation, effects of sin and grace on the human soul and more. With the growth of universities and the spread of printed books around 1500, many more thinkers became aware of these debates about the fundamentals of Christian faith, setting the stage for Reformation controversies.

* Recovery of Greek and Latin texts did spur intellectuals to look at the writings of the Church fathers and the scripture in new ways. Erasmus in 1516 issued the first printed edition of the N.T. in Greek, together with a new Latin translation that changed the meaning of several key passages.

* Protestant Reformation shared important features with the Hussite movement that swept through Bohemia in the early 1400s. The teachings of Jan Hus contained several ideas that Luther later engaged: an emphasis on God's grace over human works in salvation, critique of the papacy, a call for lay Bible reading in local vernaculars. His ideas gained support in Bohemia amongst nobles and peasants who combined Czech resentment of German dominance with aspirations for a just Christian society. Anger about the special privileges that priests enjoyed and about the fiscal impact of an international Church on local societies heightened anticlerical feelings across Europe at this time. Luther's recognitions in his sharing of Hus's ideas accelerated his break with the papacy, and Protestant propaganda later named Hus among its martyrs.

* All across Europe after 1500, reformist clerics sought to reform Church organization, to purify religious practice, and to intensify individual piety. Among all these groups, humanist ideas and connections played an important role.

* The emergence of separate Protestant Churches, which was n o t the original intention of Martin Luther, could not have taken place without those previous movements and their early quests for a breakthrough in the Holy Roman Empire of German Nationhood: Luther, by God's grace, became a critical player to prompt far reaching changes as not seen before in Christian Europe.

* The Protestant Reformation as a movement began among German clergy, nobles, and common people as from 1520 onwards. Positive responses emerged and grew rapidly because of the force, clarity and some evidence of Luther's thoughts and writings. Such aired what many had reflected about and said before, but now it was on the table, in the market squares, in the assemblies of the clergy and Church rulers, up to the halls of kings . One factor for a quite rapid breakthrough certainly was the fact, that the gospel became understandable and had a very personal appeal, also that biblical texts were finally printed no more just in Latin but in German, along with illustrated versions. That is what forerunners intended likewise and had prompted of.

* Many predecessors and early adherents saw Luther as a German champion against a corrupt Roman hierarchy and its financial abuses, and approved his attacks on the exclusive superiority of the clergy. But his call was not downgrading, denouncing for the sake of better knowing or doing different. His move was a call for repentance to attain again a truthful Church, a quest for "spirituality first", a cry for communities with a new orientation and self interpretation, with lighter burdens and less suppression! Luther's precise theological arguments about justification, grace, joyful change and new beginnings therefore had quickly influenced and convinced academics, thoughtful clerics, spiritually focused Christians, individuals as well as groupings.

The Reformation did not "just happen"! An important factor was the invention of the printing press in Mainz, Germany. This made possible widespread circulation of books, pamphlets and tracts at prices that nearly anyone could afford. Access to knowledge and ideas was no longer limited to the Elite. Translations of the Bible from Latin allowed people to read the Bible for themselves. Bible readers discovered that many Roman Catholic beliefs and practices were contrary to Scripture!

IV. Reformation as a Call to the Origins vis a vis a forced Centralism

The Jerusalem Church was a model for Apostolic Christians. In contrast to that the Roman hierarchy gained control over most of professing Christendom as from the fourth century onwards in the days of Constantine. This control was extended and maintained for more than 1000 years. It is instructive to remember how that power was used.

The Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches had separated already in 1054 A.D. when the Pope and the Eastern Patriarch excommunicating each other. During this time and beyond, anyone who disagreed with decisions of Popes or Church councils was censored or excommunicated. Crusades were launched against Muslims and other, Inquisition against heretics - conducted by priests who functioned as lawyer, judge and jury. Those convicted of believing or teaching contrary to Roman doctrine – Jews, Muslims, and non-conforming professing Christians were labelled heretics. Properties were confiscated and the "guilty" were banished, imprisoned, tortured or burned at the stake. Inquisition was instituted, because "Christendom" was *not united*. A far more crucial issue was that the Roman hierarchy itself was seriously divided. During the 1300s, French and Italian bishops were locked in a power struggle for control of the Church. At one point there were two rival Popes. A French Pope ruled from Avignon in France. An Italian Pope ruled from Rome. Each claimed to be the universal head of the Church with the right to collect the revenues of "Christendom." 1.500 years following the ministry of Jesus Christ, there had been numerous conflicts over doctrine and multiple ruptures in the so-called body of Christ.

Did the Reformation really destroy the unity of professing Christendom? The facts of history provide informative answers. The Reformation was not the first disagreement with, or challenge to the authority claimed by a Church headquartered in and steered by distant Rome. As said, history records the continuous existence of Christians who never accepted doctrines that emanated from Rome. Luther, step by step, stood up to speak and act in the face and before Monks, Academics, Bishops, Electors, Emperors, Pope alike – to help the Church on their way back to its origins.

V. Changes on their way

V. 1. Church to again become genuine

* Martin Luther did not anticipate the huge response his 95 Theses which in 1517 publicly deplored the distortion of the Church's practice, doctrine and an ill-nourished faith of the believers. He did neither want the Church to convert as a whole to his thoughts, but to come to a standstill from their drives and reflect on what is true and necessary for salvation and life. He could not foresee the splintering of Protestantism into some 38,000 Christian denominations in 2010. The long term crisis coming along with that: If, as Luther's movement proposed, there is no authority vested in the Church, where are reasons not to break off and begin again and again new movements within Christianity - forsaking unity?!

* Luther did not remain within the conceptualisations of the spiritual and theological mindset and practices with the underlying world views in the monasteries – as then many of the orders and monks did practice the withdrawal from public life, communities, prevailing social contexts. Reformers like Luther, instead, opened doors towards a theological and academic open discourse, including opposing to what he felt to be inadequate, including the public and politics. Starting off with a new experience with God, scripture, conscience, he then did not intend to call people out of the real world to individualism. Likewise as his forerunners and Co-Reformers his very personal insights were embedded in recognizing deficiencies for the sake to bring about corporate betterments. His fight for truth had an immense communal impact, which of course he intended and promoted. All that was not structurally drafted on “any drawing board”, but borne from his innermost and geared towards the public, the community, the cities, the seats of the rulers.

* Reformation in no way was prompted by abstract theories about “structural adjustments” - a phrasing much (over-)stressed in our deliberations today - or emotional dissatisfaction. The core of changes overdue lied in the realms of theology, discoveries of the misery of human nature - regardless of the praise of God's creation, the need of a renewed holistic personal relationship between God, Church, creation, mankind and hunger for spiritual fulfilment in the One alone.

* The discrepancies were most evident in the area of doctrine, practices in Church and public which were not derived from scripture. Reformers, example given, disagreed with Rome over the doctrine of an abstract transubstantiation, as if during the Mass the priest transforms bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Jesus which is visible and tangible – separate from personal faith. Yet, some of the other Reformers claimed, that these elements were symbols only and not the actual flesh and blood of Christ: “finitum non capax infiniti” – the limited (=earthly) never can contain the unlimited (=heavenly). This brought about disputes between Luther who wanted the respective wording in the N.T. to be taken verbally – as we members of the LWF Churches do, likewise to other protagonists among the Reformers. As well did most Reformers criticize speculations on purgatory; stood against celibacy, prayers for the dead and more – due to the lacking of scriptural foundations. Likewise they viewed the worship of relics and statues as

idolatry and violation of the second commandment. The Mass, adoration of the virgin Mary and the cross and the practice of praying to "saints" were rejected as unscriptural practices borrowed from paganism. Christians may be surprised to learn, that worship of a Madonna and child can be traced back to ancient pagan religions, like in Babylon. Reformers were very clear on the confusion of peoples mind to whom they shall be eligible and accountable in their allegiances.

* The Reformation sought a return of the Church to its origins and call. Reformers asserted the Bible alone was the ultimate authority for doctrine. They boldly rejected the Roman idea that Church councils and traditions were equal to scripture in the mode of extended oral traditions being equal to the authority of scripture. The role and authority of the Pope were rejected as lacking scriptural and historical foundation. History shows that there was no papal office in the Apostolic Church. The bishops of Rome assumed that position "by elevating themselves to the head of the Western Church" over a period of centuries While Roman Catholics claim that Jesus appointed Peter as the first Pope, both Protestants and Eastern Orthodox reject this "Petrine theory." Peter's role in the first Church council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) hardly resembles that of a Pope. The Apostle James presided at that council and stated the final decision.

* All this and more was reflected, composed and comprised already in the main writs, publications and confessions of the Reformation movement between 1517 (95 Thesis), 1525 (Big Catechism), 1529 (Small Catechism) and 1530 (Augsburg Confession).

V. 2. In Detail – Descriptive Summarizing

* The Reformers wanted to bring the First Commandment back and again to its prime intention and authority: The One, Atua, first and in the Centre and Originator of the living Cosmos to be recognized as Lord of all and everything. Such every life shall and can "trust, love and fear (=fully respect) Him". Away with the concept and attitude that any hierarchy of faith, religion, structure or human powers can take in fact His place or be interwoven with His sovereign authority. Any world interpretation cannot work apart from scripture or by just using her as justification or Church formats: Christ first and above, in whom all Godly dwells in fullness – instead of any competition of Spirits, Saints and their veneration. This he stated in terms not as abstracts from real life but rather as a call for living relationships between God and his mankind, including evidently the creation – see His very specific exegesis of the First Article of the Apostolic Creed. Ancient philosophy derived from platonic idealism and his dualistic interpretation was foreign and rejected by Luther who saw all of life under one God addressing all components of life and Being, which comes into fulfilment in Him.

* Church not to be any more centrally ruled, put the focus on local congregations. Your liquid continent, the Pacific is an ocean of islands, but there is a linkage in the interpretation of cosmic realities, I believe to the One, Triune, the "Cosmocrator". The so called remote or marginal – they do constitute as much the Centre as the technically created modern Centres of the Western and Northern world-centres.

* Mankind feels a quest of a new type of togetherness. Churches linked to each other because of faith in the Credo (the Apostolic Creed) do realise, that they do not depend on same word views, ethnical affinity, economic status, association with political alliances etc.. Even financial situations, pressure, deficits can not hinder or do away with our belonging to one global family as His Ecumene. Also is there no buying of heal and blessings – according to scripture and the Reformers. Not enough with that: Much more has Luther emphasized the corporate nature of the Christian Church: Our accountability towards God each other, our next, falls into one.

* Distortions in a country divided in many electorates with forced unity under a German Emperor under the influence of Rome became a problem of politicians again to enter scene and

play with conditioning religious adherence. Unity here was not possible, since a forced return to the Roman Catholic dominated Centralism was a no go.

* Sinner and reconciled at the same time: If we read the - I reckon - most important writing of Luther's early thesis, his script "Freedom of a Christian" (1520) carefully, we will discover the wonders of divine enacted liberation and much more. The sinfulness of human being is not the prime focus, but a divinely, redeeming redefinition of Christian Life: Fully free though faith – and fully committed to the next by love. Luther and a renewed Christian being carries a communal nature. The core of such of course is God's wondrous "Joyful change": Christ makes it possible, to give away sin and receive forgiveness: Righteousness before God in full – true, life long. Freedom from any power other than by faith alone does lead Christians onwards and outwards.

* Christians become the owners of the ministries - instead of just the hierarchy: we are no more on the passive side of Christianity.

* Education, Starting advanced Schooling and Printing: Flow of Information changing towards participation of the excluded masses. Melanchthon started the programmes of Higher Education for the Youth – a pioneer project not confined to Germany, but a model for Europe.

* The Developing and Uniting of the German Language made public challenges via discourses in public possible.

* The Discovering, writing and spreading of new music, songs, and later by professionals the Christian Oratoria emerged: Joy and furthering of art became a mode of transforming knowledge, attitudes, personalities, with a lot of public impact.

VI. Dynamics of Reforming: Bible, Church Life, Culture

VI.1. Reflections

* The former two conflicting claims, that the Roman Catholic Church be the only and true one, or that the Reformation restored Christianity to its original Apostolic purity – thus points us to discern what had happened to the Church established by Jesus and the Apostles. Jesus had said that His Church would not die but would continue to exist. The visible Church never can become a prominent worldly institution claiming full truth, but was to remain a humble flock – without any intention or even claim to act as a dominating body in resemblance to worldly powers, but remain full obliged to Jesus in his servanthood and love attitude and nature.

* The true Church is invisible, actual or future – a Church to whom to belong ranges beyond human achievements – and is of divine and human alike in its nature. This Church preaches the gospel of the coming kingdom of God and the reign of the Saints with and under Christ on a renewed earth and heaven. Reformers emphasized the need for repentance, pointed out to Christ's sacrifice alone - which no clergy or "treasurers of the Church" ever can achieve – to attain obedience under the new law of the spirit, but not separate from God's commandment.

* What about truth and unity in situations in the light of shadow of inflation of Churches in the protestant scene in the Pacific and all over worldwide. Yes, all of us fall short or do sin against the will of Jesus from John 17: "...that they be one". In Germany, I do sense, a time is dooming, where a shift from "official, mainline" Churches to free Churches and Christian groupings becomes a new normality. Do they care about Luther etc., do they act as kind of ever going "changers" without objectives other than their own spiritual advance?

* What about Polynesia and Melanesia: Does the Church after mission history need adaption in the hermeneutics to their languages. Is there enough teaching material, classical and modern, in text, sound, imaging, wireless or traditional?

* Concepts of Faiths: How will we develop our faith today further – when biblical power and life concepts come to stand against perceptions of the "old everlasting" cosmos or even modern superpowers: In which world realities do Christians live in our more than diversified Churches?

VI.2. Struggles, ongoing: Disputes, Writings, Preaching as public proclamation, Living worship, Education for Christians: Catechisms

Some notes on that medium of education in the public square as well as in the private realms of families – and of course in the heart of every congregation. The following aspects are of relevance there:

- * Luther was bold in disputing over biblical backed theological insights.
- * Publishing lots of pamphlets led to a new interest in Sophia – wisdom and ability to apply what had been recognised and accepted.
- * Worship: Preaching/Sermons became central in every Sunday service.
- * Old songs were complemented by new songs (Luther composed 46 songs himself). A soft revision of elements of liturgy made its way into the congregations which moved across in the hundreds to the new. Hymnbooks were to be compiled
- * The urgency of schooling “normal people” up to higher education, which used to be privilege and preference of the monasteries and academic worlds was made known and given to bigger crowds.
- * The tool for discernment, understanding and applying were the two Catechisms: for the theologians/pastors (“large” - 1525) and for the Christian Family (“small” / 1529). His interpretations teach us a lot about scripture applied in our lives and about God's will and promise for any Christian existence.

VI. 3. Changes in the Ministry as one major concretion

Please may interested readers look up for this sector a very informative paper from Dr. Stephen Haar, Australian Lutheran College in Adelaide – presented by him in our Summer School 2016 in Centre Mission OneWorld of ELCB, Neuendettelsau.

VI. 4. Critical Impacts – Some notes on questionable outcomes

- * Conflicting Impacts of Developments: Social Wars became a test and even a fundamental question over against impacts and progress of Reformation. This is true for adherents within the Reformers grouping and over against the Catholics. Within the realms of Reformation, scholars of theology became activists, politically minded Christian leaders took the chance to press for radical social change. Very ambiguous example: The infamous farmers/peasants wars. Religious wars as a result of a falling apart society, of course, put achievements of Reformation into doubt. Competitions of mainline Churches in the Reformation transition times led to much conflict, loss of life, freedom and property when in the years just before and after Luther's death wars rampaged through Germany, then between Catholics and Protestants. Finally in Augsburg a peace treaty was made, 1555, with the result: Survival and freedom of exercise of faith was conditioned by separation and clearly defined boundaries: “Cuius Regio – eius religio”, a structural solution; thus was it declared. Counter-Reformation attempts and more struggle followed. Yet, 1648 after the dreadful 30 years religious war another step was taken to bring violence and the heavy toll of bloodshed to an end: The peace treaty of Westphalia (= one Province in Germany).
- * One sad result and example on the outcome of such lost unity was, towards our modern times: Due to Church fighting countries like Czechia have only 15% of Christians left; too many were fed up by the undermining of genuine biblical principles by Churches themselves and Christianity had lost its credibility.
- * Likewise were some strange, non-biblical, error-full scripts of Luther against God's peoples of the first covenant, the Jews, given. Thus, this kind of derailing being exercised already all across Europe, Luther's words were misused by infamous political powers to act against the Jews – the worst of all by the Nazi – regime and dictatorship two generations back in Germany and the mid

of Europe. What a sin against God! Many attempts were made since then to ask for forgiveness, by Lutherans and other Christians and come to a new understanding of God's unique ways with his people, Israel. Many Churches, also ELCB has even adapted the constitution to declare how Christian Churches have to acknowledge God's ways with Israel, in scripture and in the sense of our interrelatedness, based on proper interpretation of scripture.

* Reformation was ongoing in unexpected ways: The "Radicals" – some more notes. Left or right wing reformers like Anabaptist or Radical social reform attempts, as mentioned. We shall be very careful nowadays to not just react judgemental towards those groupings and honour tragic doings and events; it just is important to assess such developments not simplified. In regard of all that we have also to state, that given the fact that unity as conditioned by the Pope and Rome or by the centrality of the German emperor, was no more there: Reformation in effect was not a movement towards a new reconciled society at large, or even a one, unified protestant Church. Nevertheless Reformation prompted dynamics towards return to essentials of faith and of Christian responsibilities – also supported by the humanistic movements of those centuries.

* We can discern a "divine interrelatedness" that faithful life of individuals combined with redefinitions of what a Church is, created new interest in Church life as a corporate entity in one's life. Certainly prompted personal expression of faith and the discourse about what is "right or wrong" new attitudes, along with diversities, resulting not only in one format of traditional. We know that even the "German Mass" serves a central model and ritual, but in fact a multitude of worship styles and orders were developed throughout the last 50+ years in our ELCB and beyond.

* What about impacts of inflationary mission impacts in Western Melanesia, the multitude of loss or shift of members through all kind of propagation and sometimes misusing mixed interests and perceptions in world views, which can do violence to souls and physical life. What about the increase of "stealing sheep", along with its weakening of a personal faith certitude? What about the splitting of families and communities, the number of Church splinter group which might outnumber the 800+ tribes in PNG society during the next decades?

* How can Christianity have a public positive role in the future in our societies if we Christians "for the sake of a better truth" may hurt likewise the unity and credibility which Christ wanted and ordered to us all in the living Ecumene? Christ's call to us Christians all was and remains to be salt of the earth and light of the world, not divisive actors against each other!

* We are so grateful to know and observe, how the Catholic Church prompted the critical self checking and the consecutive attempts to come to change and adaptations, til the second Vaticanum in the 1960's and beyond. Let me affirm, how grateful I am and many of us are to be, for the Church leadership of Pope Fransiscus, his public voice, his stand for truthfulness and doing justice in our ailing world.

* Luther's and other Reformer's radical condemnations of Liberals, Anabaptists etc. became a wound in the reformed body of Christ. Much guilt was afflicted to too many, the bloodshed toll was not in line with God's will. This was a matter of critical self evaluations for decades, but it took an awful long time until repentance and new beginnings were enacted.

Therefore the quest and ritual for apology over against the Mennonites during the Full Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in 2010 in Stuttgart / Germany was a real progress and a change-of-attitude event: Confession of guilt from the past and acceptance of such combined with forgiveness. I was so impressed and moved when I witnessed this historical event "life" myself.

* Jeopardy to credibility: Martin Luther wanted accountability to God before all – but how are we Christians respecting differences between each other? In the end we are all failing humans before God, which Luther conceded very much in fact, and very much towards the end of his life. But this prompted him to not ask for anyone to follow him or even use his name for the Church arising, but rather to differentiate amongst all our failures and inequities what the scripture with its core figure, Jesus Christ, the later developed dogma on the trinity wants us to be and to do.

* When Luther died - was his mission accomplished? He had times of depression, others were deceived, for some time that renewal movement seemed to disappear from the scene. Yet, Reformation remaining ongoing its dynamics, the driving force, the aims in our today's world full of disunity and non-truth need to be clarified anew. The WCC, the LWF and major alliances do formulate how to pursue our objectives, but who is listening and doing – for the sake of the common Christian good.

VII. The Truth that shall set us free and help us to discern unity we need

* There is no total truth in any given Church and we will not be united before Christ's advent. The Bible underscores the importance of "unity" and "oneness." Unity with others is "good" and "pleasant". Unity is essential because the Church is the "body of Christ" and disunity and disharmony are a wound. Jesus' plan for His Church is people unified in faith and service.

* The secret to unity begins with how we view ourselves within the body and how we view others. The key verse that addresses this is Philippians 2.3: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." All disunity in a Church can be traced back to the simple truth that too often we act selfishly and consider ourselves better than others. Paul goes on to explain further in the following verse: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." Sadly, Churches that experience disunity and are in conflict and turmoil are generally filled with people looking to their own needs, their own desires, and their own ambitions. Such behaviour is characteristic of unbelievers, not those with the mind of Christ. Worldliness, not godliness, is the hallmark of the dis-unified Church, as Paul reminded the Corinthians: "For you are yet carnal. For in that there is among you envying and strife and divisions, are you not carnal, and do you not walk according to men?" (1 Corinthians 3.3)

* Paul tells us that we are to consider others' needs before our own. In all modesty, humility and lowliness of mind, we are to "be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4.2). A Church filled with such people cannot help but strive for peace, unity and harmony. The truly humble person sees his own faults in light of the perfections of Christ; he does not seek to see the faults of others, but when he does, he speaks the truth in love and desires their sanctification so they will be built up in the image of Christ.

* As Christians we are to see one another in the light of the cross. Fellow Christians are those for whom Christ died a painful death so that He might exchange His righteous perfection for their sin. How could we not extend to others with love, compassion, and grace given by of our heavenly Father? How can we demean, criticize, and defame those covered with the precious blood of Christ? We are now slaves of Christ, slaves to righteousness; the task before us is not to demand our needs be met but to reflect His grace and love to those who are also His by His mercy. A Church full of such people enjoying their "common salvation" will be a true, biblical Church unified in, and earnestly contending for, the "faith once delivered to the saints"

VIII. Ecumenical Recognitions and Adaption towards Unity our World needs. Statements – just Titles or brief accounts...

VIII.1. The Unity of the Church: Gift and Calling - The Canberra Statement of WCC 20 February 1991

The text, a product of the Faith and Order Commission, was adopted by the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Canberra, Australia in 1991

VIII. 2. Lutheran-Catholic Declaration on Justification Lutheran Catholic: 1530 Augsburg - 1999 Augsburg

The **Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)** is a document created, and agreed to, by the [Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity \(PCPCU\)](#) and the [Lutheran World Federation](#) in 1999, as a result of extensive [ecumenical dialogue](#). It states that the Churches now share "a common understanding of our justification by [God's](#) grace through [faith](#) in [Christ](#)."⁴ To the parties involved, this essentially resolves the five hundred year old conflict over the nature of [justification](#) which was at the root of the [Protestant Reformation](#). The [World Methodist Council](#) has also adopted the document 2006.

VIII. 3. Redefining our relations between Christians towards Gods people of the first covenant Israel - Declaration of the EKD on Christian Jewish Relations at Weisensee, Germany 1950 and resp. ones following: The Core expression and interest: The Church is not the substitute of a "lost" Israel of the first covenant or testament. God never halted his unique relationships with his people called Israel. This is not a political, but a theological statement. Others followed recently, like the mentioned one in our ELCB 4 years ago.

VIII. 4. Lutheran World Federation's New Mission Paper 2006: Reconciliation, Transformation, Empowerment: A very useful paper and tool to interpret God's mission in and through the Church – following the previous Declaration "Together in God's Mission" - still valid and a rich source to draw from when we enter the realms of mission in our given contexts: The One, the truth shared in its essentials applicable to Christianity all over.

VIII.5. LWF Full Assembly Stuttgart 2010: Repenting from serious Sins against the Mennonites – See above.

VIII 6. From Conflict to Communion

* Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. From Conflict to Communion, written and edited jointly by LWF and The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity: A real progress!

* Common Celebration of LWF 1947 – 2017, Lund in the presence of Pope Francis. What a joy to receive the Papal declaration of mutual learning and repenting in the year of "Reformation 500". Recommended very much to be read!

* Coming Sunday, March 19th, Germany: A very special event will take place: Services and gathering of Bishops from Lutherans and the Catholics Bishops Conference will take place in Germany: Repent for wrong doings on each side and perspectives to look forward, striving for a greater unity ahead of us.

IX. Contemporary Aspects and Activities

IX. 1. Mission and Respect: Dialogue in faithfulness and Commitment to the truth. Declaration of the Catholic Church, Evang. Alliance and World

Council of Germany, 2015: A Milestone of Ecumenical Togetherness in basic interpretation and disposition in doing mission!

IX.2. Germany - Facts and Challenges of Change: Associative

* Evidence: Decline or loss of Church acceptance and search for alternative religious affiliation is the biggest problem and challenge in Middle Europe 500 years after Reformation. Some academics or leaders think, that we can make Church attractive again by adjusting structures and adjusting even maybe our doctrines and the like. Let us humbly concede that the spirits moves where and wants to do so.

* I am not sure, if this event "Reformation 500" in 2017 is an incentive, a change, an instigation for re-entering living faith and Church relationships – but this is certainly one of our main expectations. I pray that this shall be mediated through the many thousand events alone in Germany this year. I do hope, that change and return to Christ along with a new servanthood attitude as described above will re-emerge which our world longs for, but we are not achievers, rather facilitators.

* We are aware, that in my lifetime alone 30% of our population in my home country, have left Christian Churches. Is this true for Germany alone? Whilst Christianity and specifically LFW members have significantly grown in the South, we are faced with the eventuality, that the next generation in Germany will see Christianity as a minority religion in Germany – similar to neighbouring countries. France has more active, confessing Muslims than Christians, nowadays! A very critical development, since it is totally uncertain if the tolerance towards religion, belonging, believing or not etc. - which is claimed by the Liberals in western societies to be normative for adherents of other religions, especially in the light of the violence exercised by adherents of religions, very evidently mostly by radical Islamists and their destructive attitude and activities: The infamous use of brutal violence to force a strange kind of unity under a radical Sharia law as propagated by dozens of life destroying Islamist terror groups is a real threat to the future of a free world – not just in Europe and the Near East but maybe for other regions too. Are we just silencing away or do we shy of under the coating of "tolerance". How can total intolerance be accepted by tolerance. Where are peoples who dare to speak up and to resist, peacefully, but impact oriented!?

* Many People on search for help have turned to other faiths, but there are good chances to reach out and win people for Christ – in whom alone full truth and the vision for unity in freedom and love can be achieved. Our prayer is, that some of the over 10.000 events offered in Germany alone during the 500 years jubilee will have lasting impacts – far beyond 2017 and our country which was entrusted an important role of serving and sharing His gospel and His love.

IX.3. Oceania

* Lutherans are minorities in most of Asian countries – but what does that mean? In your Oceania the only Lutheran Church, ELC-PNG holds 10 % of the population of the Pacific – very impressive. Are numbers important? The founding of Church alliances, well now communions is so important: LWF in 1946. Long time before the WCC with its roots in the mission movement had been formed. Also was the founding of your PCC a result of the transition of mission to Church – and to encourage self controlling Churches to remain mission minded, "eclesia semper reformanda". There is a quest for a different quality of Protestants in the communion ahead of us: Confessional, Relational, Accountable, Committed to God's calling in all – and in any case inclusive: Jesus' is alive in the life of the poor at our doorsteps...

* Yet, the Lutherans have emerged as the biggest protestant Church in your continent, where my Church and others after had engaged in the most intensive mission endeavour ever seen in Church history - 130 years ago. My presence here let please be perceived also as my acknowledgment of the achievements of over 1.400 international and maybe over 5000 indigenous missionaries to bring about change in Papua New Guinea – a very ambitious enterprise. The zeal was to come from isolation and hostile seclusiveness and separation towards

a reconciled folk of God. Thus let me pay, at the end, my deep respect today which goes to ELC-PNG, its members and leaders – and to all the other Protestant, Catholic and mainline Churches.

* Even so PNG can be understood as a challenging example of a nowadays not-mainstreamed diversities or competition of non united Churches, still the quest and the options are there, the doors largely open inwardly and ecumenically, especially after the important PNGCC meeting last October (2016) in the presence of PCC General Secretary Rev. Francois and ELC-PNG Bishop Rt. Rev. Jack Urame in the meeting at the very important Ecumenical Study Centre in PNG, the Melanesian Institute in Goroka.

* Who does possess the "full truth", who can manifest an achieved unity nowadays? Nobody then God alone – who calls us to follow Christ's footsteps to attain greater clarity and unity in Him, which is not made by "Church brokers" or writers of correct documents. Thus convening, talking together, speaking up, joining each other to stand for justice – that is what the world expects from us, and what the N.T. entrusts to us. There I really bow down my head to salute the Catholic Bishops Conferences in Oceania, for their boldness and faithful commitment to openly speak up and not to shy away or remain silent. Our common Christian heritage has a big thrust for Christianity to be salt for the earth and light for the world. How grateful are we to witness changes in Lutheran PNG under the new leadership in ELC-PNG emerging and their strive to come towards a dissemination of insights and options for progress to overcome some sombre years, which finished January 2016.

* The magic of numbers and figures: What concept is the Pacific ways to celebrate culture and Christ in its midst when we think of "Reformation 500". We look forward to hear more on that in 2017, not only in ELC-PNG. The joy and thrust of celebrating will always be multidirectional: Looking back and looking forward, also looking inward! Many people again will ask, in Melanesia at the least: What does Reformation help me in the daily life struggles: Search for work, find protection in the midst of so much violence, fighting one prime evil in PNG – corruption, finding alternatives to the use of drugs. What does the freedom of a Christian bring about for tribal groups who are not able to get access to the blessings and jeopardy's of so called modern, global scenes? How do Churches mediate hope for them? How do they experience God's love?

* West Papua: The Cry for Human dignity and Rights must be the common voice of all "Protestants" in Oceania. I am glad and satisfied to see, that the last PCC Full Assemblies have spoken in regard to violation of peace and justice in West Papua, where I engaged as well. Wonderful do see, that PNGCC together with PCC in PNG/Goroka in October 2016 again have addressed the conflicts of West Papua.

* PNGCC and PCC: Which impact do we Christians exercise for the unity and faithfulness and accountability within our societies: Protest cannot be an inner-Church interest alone: The Reformers did not keep the gospel and the proclamation never works in a silent mode.

* *There is a good paper which was as well addressed at Summer School 2016 in our Centre Mission OneWorld, ELCB – called: The struggle for Life, done by Dr. Michael Press, former lecturer here at PTC.*

X. Personal notes: What I want to further deliberate on and engage in...

* What about you and me in our specific contexts in all those processes? We Christians in the North are about to discover what kind of transformation we do need, starting right in the middle of our spiritual and congregational lives, in our handling of the ministry of believers, the inclusiveness of focusing holistic mission, the care for the many displaced refugees in our countries?

* Christianity, as humankind throughout ages, does need Protagonists and Pioneers: Maybe those are your fathers, mothers, a professor, so called lay leaders, Theologians, ethical outstanding personalities who gave all for seeing change to eventuate, which impacted you most. I do know and honour those who brought change to my life by their charisma, their truthfulness, their intervention.

* Yes, my Christian being does need confessions, a profile, struggle to remain faithful to divine truth, but much more do I need living relations with the Lord Supreme, the great One – to be impactful by the might of His spirit. I do strongly desire to learn and share nowadays what was rediscovered and regained 500 years ago, with my fellow Christians. I want to remain grateful for what God himself has achieved. Much more do I wish, what other protestant denominations point to more at then “we Lutherans” usually do: Being transformed into the image of Christ as Paul has phrased it prophetically and straightforward in his letters and in the witness of his life. We Christians – leaders, academics, trainees and experts, female and male, young and old – can all learn from the Reformers. Yes, our life is a struggle, yes we are running with all our strength to not fall back but being led by the One who commenced it all and who will complete our lives.

* Total dependency on Gods love and forgiveness can persistently create faith and hope in my and others life. This goes together with intimate devotion and prayer, studying scripture, communion of believers in tangible solidarity. Let also us not accept reality sad as she comes into our mind, but be bold to reactivate the heritage of the Reformers at our institutions, in our congregations, in the priorities we set in our committees, in our personal and communal piety, in our cry out for His reign to come. Anyone of us can be a protagonist of change.

Thank you.

Neuendettelsau – Suva, February/March 2017

The Rev. Dr. Dr. h.c. Traugott Farnbacher
Secretary for PNG, Pacific and East Asia
Centre Mission OneWorld, ELCBavaria

*Thus speaks the Lord: "I will give you a new heart
and I will put a new spirit in you!" (Watchword 2017)*