



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

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LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

Department for Theology and Studies –Office of the Director

Letter adopted by participants in the theological seminar:

“Fundamentals for a Lutheran Communion in the Face of Fundamentalisms”

March 20, 2007

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Fundamentalism, in its various forms and expressions, is increasingly evident throughout the world today, with a magnitude, scope and breadth that cannot be ignored. Some view it as an increasingly dangerous force in our world today. Fundamentalist tendencies and phenomena are deeply affecting societies and churches, including many within the Lutheran communion. For this reason, the LWF Department for Theology and Studies, with the assistance of the Church of Sweden Research Department, convened a theological seminar of, church leaders, LWF Council members and theologians, 18-20 March, 2007 in Höör, Sweden, on the theme, “Fundamentals for a Lutheran Communion in the Face of Fundamentalisms.”

Certain features of religious fundamentalism are often cited, such as absolute, unchanging truths, biblical literalism, sharp distinctions between insiders who are saved and outsiders who are damned, clear but selective moral requirements based on what is perceived as right and wrong, and a cosmic struggle between good and evil. Fundamentalist tendencies are found in some of our churches, at times within ourselves, or are seen in other churches or religions. Our perspectives and evaluations of fundamentalism vary greatly, depending on our context and personal history, and whether we are in the religious majority or minority. Especially alarming are the abuses to which it can lead, such as violence toward women and other vulnerable groups, wielding political power on the basis of fundamentalist ideology, and an escalation of enemy images, militarism and violence in the world.

In the face of various expressions of fundamentalism, we as Lutherans are reminded of what we stand for, including:

1. The Bible is fundamental for us, as it witnesses to the living Word of God. As faith communities, we engage with Scripture in the search for truth and meaning in our lives and in history, with openness to dialogue, criticism, correction, through the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. In interpreting the Bible we focus on the Gospel as centered in Jesus Christ. Through God's grace in Christ, we are unconditionally accepted rather than justified by anything we do to merit God's favor. Our lives are grounded in God's mercy and love.
3. God incarnate in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ opens up new life and hope in the midst of suffering and death. We live by the theology of the cross rather than placing our hope in a theology of prosperity or glory. Called to do justice, we stand in solidarity with those who are suffering and vulnerable.
4. Through baptism and Holy Communion we become and are nurtured as part of the body of Christ. The life of worship grounds and brings healing to who we are as God's people.



5. We respond to God's love by living out our baptismal vocation through diaconal service to others, including advocating for justice, human rights, peace and the care of the whole creation.
6. To proclaim the Gospel is to liberate people, not to enslave them.
7. The Triune God is active in creation and history, using a variety of people, means and structures. The two realms and the distinction between secular and religious life must not be confused, nor the public voice of the church become captive to political interests and powers.

At the same time, we especially need to give attention to:

- Increasing the biblical literacy of our members so that they, as part of the priesthood of all believers, are equipped to read and critically interpret the Bible, and to confidently connect biblical narratives with their own lives.
- Making people feel more comfortable in sharing their religious experiences with others and witnessing to God's presence in their life, especially in small groups in their congregations.
- Inviting and guiding people to live differently from destructive relationships and patterns of the world but without removing them from a deep and enduring commitment to the world and its future.
- Giving public witness of our faith by means of advocating for full participation of all members of society in serving the common good.
- A renewed awareness of distinctive Lutheran perspectives in contrast to those of fundamentalism, and of the ongoing need to reformulate these understandings in new contexts.

We need to challenge fundamentalist views of the Christian faith that are contrary to central Lutheran convictions, while at the same time respecting those who hold such views. Whenever possible, dialogue and common action for the common good should be promoted.

We call upon member churches and related educational institutions to engage in further discussion and action on these matters, and in that regard, we affirm the importance of the ongoing LWF/DTS initiative, "Theology in the Life of the Church," of which this seminar was a part.

May God transform us ever anew into credible communities witnessing to God's love and care for the world through the power of the Holy Spirit!

Participants in the seminar:

Rev. Dr Wanda Deifelt (Brazil /USA)
 Rev. Dr Jubil Hutaaruk (Indonesia)
 Bishop Lok Oi Peng (Malaysia)
 Bishop Julius Paul (Malaysia)
 Bishop Dr Stephen Munga (Tanzania)
 Mr Girma Mohammed (Ethiopia)
 Rev. Dr Alexander Priloutski (Russia)
 Dr Mariette Razivelo (Madagascar)
 Rev. Dr Seppo Rissanen (Finland)
 Rev. Sonia Skupch (Argentina)
 Bishop Dr Ho Fai Nicholas Tai (Hong Kong)
 Mr Raymon Wimpel (Suriname)

Rev. Dr Elisabeth Gerle (Sweden)
 Rev. Boris Gunjevic (Croatia)
 Bishop Cieslar Miecyslaw (Poland)
 Bishop Dr Dieter Lilje (South Africa)
 Bishop Dr Cosmos Moenga (Botswana)
 Rev. Rabson Mwanza (Zambia)
 Rev. Dr David Pfrimmer (Canada)
 Rev. Prof. Dr Barbara Rossing (USA)
 Bishop Nils Rohwer (South Africa)
 Rev. Dr Hanna Stenström (Sweden)
 Prof. Dr Dr Günter Thomas (Germany)

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