

# 3 |

## The Anniversary Celebrations

**This chapter contains contributions chosen contributions from the two anniversary celebrations of June 18/19 2015, in Hamburg and the EMW General Assembly of 23rd to 25th September 2015, in Herrnhut.**

CHRISTOPH ANDERS

## 40 Years EMW. A Review.

**Two stations - Hamburg and Herrnhut – were the places where the celebrations for the 40th anniversary of the EMW took place. Besides a review and many words of thanks, we also received various suggestions for the future work of the umbrella organisation.**

More than a hundred people followed the invitation of the EMW to come into the Ecumenical Centre in Hamburg's harbour city on June 18th 2015. Typical for the EMW it was a colourful mixture of guests: representatives from partner organisations from all continents, and from the ecumenical World Associations, EMW members and associates from mission societies and the ecumenical world. A sensitive subject was the role of religions in different societies. Prof Dr Fernando Enns - Head of the Department "Theology of the Peace Churches" at Hamburg University and a member of the Central Committee of the WCC - pointed out in his speech that today religious communities are facing the task of developing an up-to-date peace ethic from their traditions. There would be potential for reconciliation, if such positions were to be brought into interreligious dialogue and social realities.

How Christian churches and ecumenical alliances are involved in direct projects for peace and reconciliation was described in interviews by ecumenical guests from the Middle East, Indonesia, India, East Africa and Central America. Independent of whether they find themselves in a majority or a minority situation, they all considered such involvement as being important for life together in their own individual societies. They all agreed that the question of the reconciling potential of religions was very important. It remains to be seen how local and global action by churches can be sensibly coordinated with each other. Church associations such as the EMW offer important ecumenical forums in the community of their global partners, to work on these subjects together.

The next day was an "International Ecumenical Study Day" in the EMW offices in Normannenweg. The enthusiastic participants were sisters and brothers from ecumenical alliances, staff members from member agencies, member churches and friendly organisations, and finally staff and members of the Board of the

EMW as hosts. Ten workshops were at the centre of this meeting. The choice of subjects combined current challenges for World Christianity with main focuses of the work of the EMW, and the special competences of our ecumenical guests. Just a selection here showing the wide range of subjects: Christians in difficult situations, impact observation, transparency and the avoidance of corruption, religious freedom in India and Oceania, ecumenical theological training, and also current debates on mission theology.

As a link between the workshops there was a forum with ecumenical guests. The central question here was how the present structures of the ecumenical movement relate to the far-reaching profound transformations within World Christianity. We were presented with a many-faceted snapshot of the present situation. Quite a lot of ecumenical organisations have continual difficulties in their own contexts to keep up with the current complexities and to react appropriately to them. For the situation of each of the member churches is just as different from that of the others, as is their theology and understanding of ecumenism.

Among complaints about the weaknesses of some ecumenical organisations, the critical question also arose as to whether partners such as the EMW should continue to direct resources into strengthening and keeping such structures going. The people in the forum were agreed that there are no alternatives to these structures, for only by cooperating together could they work in their societies in a transforming way - and in some cases in a way that gave direction even for other religions.

### “A gift for the worldwide church”

We received a very special kind of birthday present when we requested our global partners to contribute a word of greeting or a similar stimulus or description of experiences with the EMW. The texts were put together in an over 300 page volume, with the title (taken from one of the contributions): “A gift for the worldwide church”. Important evaluations of cooperation with the EMW so far can be found in the contributions, and also references to the challenges of future cooperation. Some motives run as a common thread through several contributions:

The EMW is consistently described as “an advocate for the partners and their concerns”. This is combined with the wish, that possible or necessary changes should not be declared unilaterally, but rather developed together. The importance of partner visits is also specifically emphasised, for they have - beyond clarifying practical questions - a spiritual dimension. But the EMW is also

asked, in how far they see themselves committed to report to their partners, for example, about the percentage of women in leading positions.

Some partners see it as an important concern to strengthen the church and mission in Europe and Germany. They presume, that church protagonists here can learn important things from the experiences made in other parts of the world. The EMW could in this case be a catalyst and instigator for ecumenical learning communities, because it is not perceived primarily as a donor organisation, but rather as a community from which missionary momentum could arise.

The South-South communication between our partners is still considered to be deficient. South-North orientation continues to dominate bilateral relations. The EMW is called upon to enable its worldwide network of partners to show more solidarity through an exchange of qualified people. And beyond that: they should communicate the positive experiences with their partners to others as examples of "best practice", thereby extending the platforms for an intensive exchange of experience.

Some partners understand themselves as border crossers. They try to build bridges in order to overcome cultural estrangements, to break down confessional borders and interreligious prejudices, and to make transformations possible in church and society. Such border-hopping is risky, it requires patience, before such efforts can bear fruit. EMW as a partner is expected to continue to be willing to take risks and to show staying power.

Border hopping is also significant for the changed relationship between the EMW and the Evangelical organisations. The deep ditches that stemmed from the harsh conflicts in the beginning, have now become overgrown, even if differences remain. Trust is also growing through the intensive involvement in joint events, such as recently the Congress "Mission Respect" in August 2014 in Berlin.

Finally, what is transitory is reflected also in the fact that contacts and relationships have been extended beyond the classic ecumenical partners - here including the Catholic partners: we now have active relationships to Independent Churches in Africa, Pentecostal Churches and their networks, and migration congregations whose leaders we are helping to train in Germany.

The many different voices of friendly gratitude from our partners gives us courage and offers us a great amount of material for discussions about the future of

the EMW. One thing is certain; the partners are very clearly willing to share their ideas for it. Another thing has become very clear to us from these texts; the central challenge for the coming years will prove to be how to find the appropriate form for the EMW, in the tension between the character of an umbrella organisation for very different members in Germany and an association working internationally with a very differing range of partners.

### General Assembly in Herrnhut

The anniversary year came to an end with the EMW General Assembly from 23rd to 25th September 2015 in Herrnhut at the invitation of the Moravian Church. By their presence, the three General Secretaries of the WCC, LWF and WCRC demonstrated how they value the long years of close relationship with the EMW.

In his speech, Dr Olaf Fyske Tveit (WCC) linked the motto of the first WCC General Assembly (Amsterdam 1948, “We are committed to STAY together”) with the insight of the 10th General Assembly (Busan 2013, “We are committed to MOVE together”) and the “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace” that was initiated there. This pilgrimage as a movement in faith and of faith, he said, is something that unites people and churches and sets them in motion with a founded hope for change. Being on the move and seeking for deeper unity come together here.

Dr. Martin Junge (LWF), pointed to the involvement of the LWF in refugee support since its foundation in 1947, and to the fact that at the present time more than 60 million people are fleeing from their homes throughout the world. For



*Worship with the members of the General Assembly in the famous „Church Hall“ in Herrnhut.*

the churches he saw, above all, the task of reminding governments of their duty to show solidarity with the refugees. At the same time, he said, it requires intercultural discussions about upholding the validity of values.

Rev. Chris Ferguson (WCRC) described the most important task for his organisation that was restructured in 2010, as being to preserve the powerful Reformed traditions, whilst at the same time overcoming its somewhat restrictive attitudes. An important role for this was to find a clever balance between commitment to the unity of the community and commitment to global justice. For the WCRC understands itself as a church movement, which not only introduces transitions, but also aims to change societies and structures.

We worked hard under the famous Herrnhut stars, but we also celebrated. In the celebration service the newly elected Board was installed, whose job it will be to give new ideas how the important insights of the Jubilee year can be put into practice.

## Outlook

The Jubilee year has given us plenty to think about for the direction of the future work of the EMW, which should be summarised here.

Developments taking place in global Christianity are both dynamic and complex. Streams of migrants are changing religious landscapes, and it is worth noting the change in the gravitation centre of global Christianity to the global South. Where are "the margins" and "the centres" today and in the future? Through intensive dialogue with its partners, the EMW has special potential to make a name for itself as a place where competent analysis of the development of global Christianity can be called up.

The quest will be for the place of an allegedly weakened institutionalised ecumenism in the Ecumenical Movement. Will confessional attempts to make their mark, or the concentration of an occasional joint action in local ecumenical networks take the place of the traditional search for visible unity? In what constellations is it possible to name the "added value" of institutionalised ecumenism? Must we rediscover what "ecumenical" means today?

The EMW is committed to a multilateral, interdenominational ecumenism. This should also enable it to detect the potential for cooperation beyond existing as-

sociations or descriptions of church policy. New inroads into uncharted ecumenical territories are demanded of an association that also acts as a “scout” or “border crosser”. The tension remains. The EMW as a multilateral bridge builder and communicator and also as an agent of advocacy prepared to take risks.

War, flight, forced displacement – throughout the world the search for ways to find peace, healing and reconciliation is urgent. The tasks of church and mission must be explored in a new way, for more and more religions are being seen as potentially sharpening existing conflicts. The EMW should once again focus on Mission as a service of reconciliation – ten years after the World Mission Conference in Athens in 2005. Naming unjust structures is as necessary as describing respectful forms of Christian witness in multi-religious constellations. Experiences of vulnerability and healing must be taken up, positions of “hospitality” as the appropriate form of missionary presence must be understood. Holding on to the resistant term “Mission” is just as important as the task of countering old reservations.

The companionship of protagonists in mission and development so far offers reason for optimism, is without alternatives, and is being deepened and making its mark by diversifying its cooperation partners. The growing importance of religion as a factor in development processes and the increased involvement of mission agencies in developmental fields (“holistic mission”) cries out for coordinated concepts of complementary action. The EMW will have to clarify in this context how in future it can discharge its tasks as an umbrella organisation in these fields (campaign and lobby work, human rights commitment, globalisation debates etc.)

In the EMW two levels of action come together: first an independent programme and project cooperation with partners throughout the world. Here it is especially important to profile the relationship between long-term institutional cooperation and short-term project-related cooperation. Secondly its activities as an umbrella organisation as a counterpart to and together with its international active members located in Germany. This requires coordination and informative input that strengthen joint action.

This should be made much clearer, for through the EMW partners and members are incorporated in ecumenical networks, that go way beyond their own – and if actively used can achieve a clear added value for all concerned.

FERNANDO ENNS

## »Societies without Religion – Dream or Nightmare?«

**Prof Dr Fernando Enns is Director of the Institute “Theology of the Peace Churches” at the Faculty of Protestant Theology of the University of Hamburg, and Professor for (Peace-) Theology and Ecumenical Studies at the Theological Faculty of the Free University Amsterdam (VU). He is Vice-Chairperson of the Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany (AMG) and a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. For this purpose he has made a slightly revised version of his lecture presented on 18 June 2015 at the 40 years celebration available to us.**

Distinguished Guests, Sisters and Brothers,

Congratulations EMW! It is a special joy for me to be here today and to be invited to speak on such a wonderful occasion, 40 years Association of Protestant Missions and Churches in Germany! To be honest I was surprised that the EMW is still so young. 40 years of age - nowadays one has just got out of youth, finally and is standing with full vigour in the midst of life, making lots of plans and being full of joyful expectation of all the things that are still to come. That is how I feel about EMW! I am most grateful for such a strong EMW.



EMW/Heiner Heine

I.

In 1975 the wise decision was taken to found EMW. The historic cooperation between mission agencies and churches goes back much further of course. In the forerunner organisations there was active ecumenical cooperation between Protestant Regional Churches and Free Churches, which otherwise did not exist: the Conference of German Protestant Mission Societies (DEMT). It had evolved out of opposition by the mission societies and their Council of German Protes-

tant Mission Societies (DEMR) to forced integration into the state church of the German Christians (of the Third Reich). The mission societies are considered to be the forerunners of institutionalised ecumenism in general. Mission agencies and missiologists from Germany played an important role in the first World Mission Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, which led to the founding of the International Mission Council in 1921. That this council - and with it also the member organizations from Germany - were then integrated into the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1961, was a step that institutionally implemented what had long become clear theologically, and what had already proved to be of value. The worldwide activities of the different churches are an expression of the essence of these churches: a global "fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." (Basis of the WCC). The mission movement and the ecumenical movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century - with all their dynamics - simply cannot be separated from each other. And that is a blessing!

One additional date should under no circumstances be left out here: 1991, very quickly after the peaceful revolution that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Association of Protestant Missions in the (east-) German Democratic Republic (AGEM, founded in 1964) united with the EMW in the Federal Republic of Germany and West Berlin to form the present EMW. In this way it became possible for that to grow together, which basically had always felt to belong together, but had developed in different ways under the different political systems.

I stand here as a representative of one of the churches with the least number of members in the EMW: The Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany. The fact that I have been invited to present a key-address at this moment of celebration illustrates something very meaningful: in this ecumenical community the number of members is totally secondary, if not even of no importance. That mirrors how I have personally experienced the cooperation in the EMW, always. I remember 1996, when we were preparing for the World Mission Conference in Salvador da Bahia (Brazil). The EMW invited the member churches in Germany to come together for this, and the large Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) was having great difficulty in deciding how the limited number of delegates could be appropriately selected. Nevertheless they were visibly taking care to see that this young Mennonite (whom hardly anyone knew) should be included. I presume that one or another well-known bishop had to stand back for that reason. I tell you this because here we see

an expression of an elementary characteristic of the EMW which I consider very important: it is the perspective that counts. If one really wants to be an ecumenical body – and the EMW has that in its genes – then one is convinced; the perspective of a young person, the perspective of a widely marginalised tradition cannot be missing at the ecumenical table. Not just as a symbol of hospitality, no, the conviction is that the urgently needed prophetic voice comes just from the “margins”. Now, I do not claim here that I outed myself at that time as a prophet! Today I rather look back at that experience as true ecumenical formation. The EMW opened up ecumenical spaces to me, encounters, places, experiences, which have influenced my theological thinking more strongly than many standard heavy-weight theological books I had to study at that time. This is – apart from its ecumenical and diaconal thrust – surely the third decisive effect of the EMW. And I am deeply grateful for it, I feel truly privileged to be part of this fantastic institution. And with the Academy of Mission here in Hamburg we also have the suitable institution to continue this reliable and innovative theological education work together.

To be sure, not everyone has always been so pleased with the directions EMW took. Massive challenges, even enmity are also part of the history of the EMW. The strong polarisation between evangelical missions on the one hand (that led to the founding of the Association of Evangelical Missions in 1969) and ecumenical missions with a clearly political agenda on the other hand, seem however today to have been overcome. Many fears and also much arrogance have given way to a search for the Gospel more fitting to the place of the churches in the One World and with much less ideology. On the other hand new polarities have grown, which today in 2015 challenge us as Christians, yet as people of faith altogether.

## II.

During the last WCC General Assembly in South Korean Busan (2013) we had the opportunity to look more closely at this new definition of our role in the global ecumenical fellowship of churches. The mission agencies have in my opinion provided decisive groundwork for this with their new Ecumenical Mission Declaration, “Together Towards Life. Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes”. Whoever does not understand how to read the signs of the time will stay frozen in conservatism or even fundamentalism. But *how* the signs of the time are to be read, from which perspective, will then truly decide whether religion in general will be regarded more as arsonist or as peacemaker. Should

we wish that secularisation will progress further, because religion on account of its claim to absolutism tends to legitimise violence? Or can religion be a critical counterpart to governments and political movements, to the advancing commercialisation of all areas of life and ideologies of all kinds? Can it contribute to the liberation of societies from fatal spirals of violence?

Here, the new ecumenical mission declaration chooses the perspective of the “marginalised”, those who have been pushed to the margins. That does not simply mean one pre-determined group; each and every one can become (and probably is) marginalised under certain circumstances, depending on the specific topic that is assumed to be at the “center”. This perspective of the marginalized is indeed deeply rooted in the Gospel itself, for this is the perspective which God Him/Herself chooses, has chosen, in becoming human; incarnation being the strongest expression of God’s Mission for and in this world – the *missio Dei*. All of the Bible bears witness to this God’s perspective, both the First and the Second Testament. God’s mission with Creation is the choice of the small, the unimportant, and the powerless. It is the incarnation at the margins of society, with those who have to live in precarious situations, with those who are refugees, with those who are poor – not only “spiritually” poor (Mt 5), with those who “bear suffering”, who “hunger and thirst for righteousness”, who are “persecuted for righteousness’ sake”. For all these, the Gospel, the “*eu-angelion*” is the Good News indeed. For the gentle, the merciful, the peacemakers are promised that God Him/Herself sees the world from *their* perspective – in all its violence and injustice – in order to transform it. That is *God’s* mission, in which we *can* participate.

Yet, is that really the perspective the church(es) is taking? It was the mission-people in Busan who asked this question. And the church(es) answered with a new commitment: the “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace”, to which they also invite people of other faiths, yes, all people of goodwill. It is meant to become the all-incompassing programmatic approach which shall provide coherence and direction, also to the mission of the church(es).

Three dimensions of this new endeavour of a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace are important here:

It is a metaphor for being on the road, a *process*! The ecumenical movement must itself be freed from certain institutional ossification. It has to change and allow itself to be changed. And changes come about through movement, from

one place to another, through new and different people who accompany us on the way, on new, still unknown ways, which are needed to bring about a change of perspective.

Secondly, a pilgrimage is always a *spiritual* journey. However we shall not expect a self-centred wellness experience here, but far more a growing into a "*transformative spirituality*", which can lead individuals, churches, religions actually to be liberated from the "ballast" that they have collected on their way so far, and that in fact blocks their perspective: power, riches, institutions with jobs and functions, influence which we sometimes euphemistically call "partnership" etc.

And thirdly, it is a way *of Justice and of Peace*. The ecumenical fellowship of churches has committed itself, yes, the individual churches have committed themselves to *live* justice and peace on the way. "*Walk the talk*", we say in English. Behind this is the conviction that all the well-meant moral appeals and also well-prepared "prophetic sermons" will in the end run to nothing, if their credibility is not reflected in living and sharing communities of *Justice and Peace*. Unless our own steps, our relationships with each other – also our relationships with believers in other religions – bear witness to that which we call "*missio Dei*". If we do not, then the churches – as all other religions – will at best become irrelevant for our societies, and at worst they will develop into "nightmares".

So, this Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace hands us a yardstick at this very moment in history, which allows us to answer the question, whether our religion, the Christian faith, will become a curse or a blessing for living together in society and in the "global village". I conclude:

- decisive is God's perspective: that of the "marginalised";
- decisive is the road character of a religion, which allows it to remain open for change, "*aggiornamento*" (Pope John XXIII), and *semper reformanda*;
- decisive is a transformative spirituality, which liberates from self-glorification and self-sufficiency;
- decisive are the basic elements of justice and peace – for all relationships, yes, also for the relationship to and within nature.

## III.

Finally I wish to shed light on some phenomena of our times, in order to illustrate that the role of religion in societies remains ambivalent. However, I want to make clear that religion has the potential to become a creative and life sustaining force in societies, if the above mentioned parameters are accepted and welcomed in their identity formation effects.

1. We live in a time of *globalisation*. The world has become a village. What happens in one part of the world has either causes or consequences in all other parts of the world - whether we like it or not. The mission movement is basically one of those groups who prepared the way for globalisation. At an early stage the churches were not only witnesses but also part of the colonialisation processes and the destruction of whole cultures. The history of violence, also by the Christian Mission, has been described sufficiently. - Now, the lesson learned is not, to simply stop all missions, but rather to finally live a quality of relationships within the global community (at least that of churches), that is characterised by peace and justice. And this will basically only succeed, if the perspective of the marginalised is always brought to bear. For this is the basic idea of ecumenism: to demonstrate an alternative quality of global relationships, which are not simply invented by themselves, but rather divinely granted by the love of God. The globalised world community can then be understood as a gift, which includes everyone (!), yes, every person has an equal share in it.

2. We live in a time of thorough *commercialisation* of all areas of life. We feel this effect even deep in our church communities and institutions. In the end everything is measured by its material value. - But religions especially could reflect a different kind of culture, and lead us away again from the dictates of economic pressures. Admittedly the prerequisite is that the chosen perspective does not allow itself to be limited to short-term growth and the value of stocks and shares, or even set itself up as a "prosperity gospel". Here the question quite simply is that of the responsibility for life. The wisdom of seeing ourselves as part of creation must surely prevent us from destroying nature and the climate in favour of short-term material profits, especially when the livelihood of so many marginalised people has already been destroyed and the consequences can already be felt.

3. We live in a time of nearly complete *digitalisation*. Everything can be transformed into bits and bytes. This does not only lead to an absolute transparency in all areas of life, but also accelerates time in a way so far unthinkable. Wonder-

ful ways of communicating are opening up that can be lifesaving, new networks are forming at lightning speed – for good and also for bad. – The spread of the so-called “ISIS” would have been impossible without this, and the development of new killing systems such as armed drones, which are operated from far, have become a reality, killing thousands.

Has that anything to do with religion? A transformative spirituality will want to critically examine this drift and make use of it itself, to create places of quiet and peace where people can re-experience privacy and direct personal encounter; not as an aim in itself but rather for salvation, to find healing from hubris and sensory overload. Peace for the stressed souls and justice towards our bodies – and those of others.

**4.** We live in a time of extreme *pluralism*. Everything can, anything goes. Sometimes, especially representatives of religion react in panic to this. Not only where religion is simply misused for political ideologies, or in efforts to gain power, but also, where religion simply wishes to offer clear orientation, to help form identity, to proclaim moral rules for life. – Even here the question of perspective remains decisive: it can prevent us from creating new injustice and strife. God’s will for the world *is* plurality – that is what the creation stories of the Bible teach us. If religion wants uniformity or claims to be the sole representative of that will of God, it will bypass this creativity of life and become a curse, because it will end in legalism. However, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace offers decisive criteria so that we should not fall victim to every trend. What serves peace? And: what is just – from the perspective of those directly affected, the most vulnerable? This discerning of the spirits is not easy but possible, if we move together.

**5.** And finally: we live in a time of a massive *breakdown of traditions*! Hardly anything is still accepted as a matter of course just because it always was so. Everything has become a matter of choice. The „compulsion to heresy“, as Peter Berger once called it. Religions are massively affected by this, because religions themselves have become a matter of choice. We may complain about this, but especially in the case of religion there can be no compulsion. According to the understanding of the Christian faith, belief is and will always have to be the free answer to the gift of life from the one Creator. And wherever this freedom is infringed, by violence or by cheap manipulation, religion can only go astray. Wherever religion claims to be permitted to destroy life itself in order to preserve an allegedly higher cause, religion, every religion is perverted.

#### IV.

Dear Sisters and Brothers, I am very happy and deeply grateful on this special celebration day, that I can count myself part of a community like the EMW. Because here I enjoy those freedoms of belief – together with you, and so many others:

- worldwide community of faith across all borders, that allows me to experience globalisation as something precious;
- worldwide community that is linked together by completely different values from those of economic dependency, and in which I can search for life in just relationships for everyone;
- worldwide community in which I can willingly open myself for all that is new, in order to examine critically together with others how far it will serve peace and justice;
- worldwide community, in which I can celebrate diversity as the gift of God;
- and finally a worldwide community that will never accept violence without springing into action, but where at the same time I can withstand the temptation to simply react to it with counter-violence.

Participating in this community now on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, gives to me – and to so many others – confidence and trust. The EMW makes it possible to experience this community and to walk together on a common journey. For this common, spiritual journey I offer us, the EMW, a Bible verse from the book of the prophet Micah (6, 8):

*“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God”*

Congratulations and God Bless!

## INTERVIEWS

**Round Table Discussion**

Following the lecture of Prof. Enns, the journalist Bettina von Clausewitz interviewed the ecumenical guests. Regional ecumenical organizations were represented by Michel Jalakh (Middle East Council of Churches, MECC) und Rosangela Jarjour (Federation of Middle East Evangelical Churches, FMEEC).

National Christian Councils were represented by Henriette Lebang, President of the Communion of Churches in Indonesian (PGI), evangelical partners of EMW by Ruth Padilla de Borst (Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana) in Costa Rica.

Engaged in interreligious dialogue and Peace building are the EMW-partners PROCMURA (Programme für Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa), represented by Johnson Mbillah and the India Peace Centre, represented by Kasta Dip.

**Bettina von Clausewitz:** In the light of what we have just heard from Prof. Enns we will have three short rounds of interviews with our guests from the Middle East, from Latin America, from Indonesia, and from India. They will talk about the role and the challenges of religion in their respective countries and will thus respond to some of the insights presented by Prof. Enns.

For the first round of interview let me welcome Reverend Dr. Henriette Lebang and Dr. Michel Jalakh. Rev. Henriette Lebang, you are the president of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) and come from the Reformed Church. Until May this year you served for five years as the General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, the CCA, with more than 100 member churches. In both positions, you were the first woman. I found a headline in the “Jakarta Post” of last November when you were elected: “PGI elects first woman leader”. Please tell me, are you sick and tired of being the first woman all the time?

It is very difficult to be short on this but I believe it is a gift of God and I just try my best to do what I can do in that position, not because I’m woman, but because I’m entrusted with something, with the gift that God gave me to share in the leadership.

*The first round  
of interviews:  
Bettina  
von Clausewitz,  
Henriette Lebang  
and Michel  
Jalakh..*



**Dr. Ery, in your society the community is traditionally very important: hospitality, interreligious harmony ... What has happened over the last few years that we hear so much about religious tensions and the burning down of churches in your country?**

It is on the news that such conflicts happen in some parts of Indonesia. But as you know, Indonesia is such a large country. If something happens in one place, it doesn't necessarily affect the other places. I would like to remind you while we talk about religions in Indonesia that today is the official start of Ramadan month in Indonesia. So we can't live without remembering our brothers and sisters in the community. That is the first thing. And I think, although there is eruption of violence here and there generally speaking, it does not disturb so much the larger community. There is fear, but we know that we live in a pluralistic society. And we have to live in that society and this is a challenge for the churches and for the faith communities: how do we live together, in the midst of a pluralistic society?

**But obviously something has changed if we think of the fires and tensions.**

Of course there is a change in the sense that this creates sometimes fear and insecurity in many moments. For instance, at Christmas time people begin to fear that something may happen. However, we also see some of our Muslim brothers and sisters who tell us: go to the church on Christmas, nothing will happen, we will take care of you. So that also happens, and these two sides give the whole picture what happens in society. The challenge for the churches is how not to take the plurality in the society for granted but how to cultivate the culture of peace, the culture of respect of each other and accepting the differences. In the past we often have lived with prejudices against each other.

**Do you have an example how this can work: that you as a church can bring people together and build peace? You are not only the ones who suffer from violence but you react to it and you bring people together?**

Well, in many instances whenever something happens in the society. Take for instance corruption. I mean, this is the concern for all people in a society that corruption is fought. Here, all the religious leaders stand together saying no to corruption. It is the witness of the people of different faith to say that we can do things together for the fullness of life for all.

**You once said about your own people in your country and also in other Asian countries:**

**“We as Christians should go out into the society. We should not be isolated in our churches.”**

Yes, recently the General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia met under the theme: “Living together in the household of God.” How do we see the life as our life together? So the perspective has to be changed: to think togetherness rather than living in isolation and only fighting for our own needs and our own benefits. And I think that living together in the household of God is a shift in theological thinking and of the churches as well. If you want to witness, if you want to do the mission, please consider that this world is the household of God which is granted to all people for the fullness of life for all, justice and peace for all.



*Dr. Henriette Lebang, President of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI).*

**You say it's a change in theology. Is it also part of theological education?**

Definitely. It should change the theological paradigm.

**It should or it does?**

It has been in the process and it is the homework for the churches in Asia which have been starting to do this. In the past, Christianity was brought as a foreign religion to many Asian people. I mean we are grateful to our missionaries. However, there are instances when Christianity is just taken as a planted pot and is brought to the different Asian countries. Where this happens we as Christians are foreign to our lands, we are isolated. To confess the Christian faith sometimes means respect: it is the work to find Christ, to discern the seeds of the

Gospel in our own culture. So this has to be done with respect to our spirituality in Indonesia: How do the Christians in Toraja, the place where I come from, for instance feel that they are part of the community? We are talking here about transformation and they transform some of the seeds of the powers of death and bring up at the same time the power of life for all.

**Thank you. Let me switch to another region and to Father Dr. Michel Jalakh. He lives in Beirut, he is the General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) which represents 27 churches, and he is a Maronite Catholic and a priest in Lebanon. He studied and worked in Rome for about 20 years and he is known as someone who builds bridges, as I heard. In the beginning the so-called Arab Spring raised so many hopes. How is it possible that religion in your region became so much an instrument of violence, instead of being a witness for peace? All religions have peace on their agenda.**



*Dr. Michel Jalakh, Secretary General of MECC.*

Dr. Michel Jalakh: Well, thank you for this question but I think we first have to correct the terminology: it is not a question of religion – it is a question of interpretation of religion. It is about how we live it and how we understand it. I think the Muslims are living through a kind of suffering how to interpret, not only their religion but also the Koran. If we want to establish a kind of parallel with the churches and with Christianity we could think of the 14th - 15th century. The Muslims are living in a comparable period and someone said that maybe the Muslim religion needs a Martin Luther. A Martin Luther to reinterpret the Koran in a modern way, and in a way that we can live together as Dr. Ery said.

**What about interreligious dialogue? It sounds like it's quite vivid.**

Jalakh: Interreligious dialogue is more important than ever. I think in the Middle East Council of Churches where we are 27 churches and communities we now have a paradigm shift from ecumenical dialogue to interreligious dialogue of Christianity and Islam which I think is the most important now: How can we achieve to live together? How can we achieve that especially together with the moderate Muslims because they are suffering as much as Christians.

**Does it mean that as MECC you have certain forums and partners you can talk to on a regular basis or is it just good will: some people meet here, some people there and they talk?**

Jalakh: No, we are invited all the time and we invite also to such talks. I think there is a need both from the Christian part and from Islamic part. Not all, unfortunately, but they also need that we believe in dialogue. So they want to affirm this maybe because they suffer, maybe to react against misinterpretation, maybe because of ISIS and all these fundamentalist movements. I can affirm that we are in collaboration with KAICIID, the “King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue” based in Vienna. It represents Saudi Arabia and has been founded by King Abdullah. And the centre is asking us all the time to be together and to find common ways to live together.

**The MECC has always been struggling with unity and diversity, I know, in the past and probably also now. Does the crisis you are facing now unite the forces or does it divide the churches within the MECC more?**

Jalakh: No, no more divisions because Christians in that area of the Middle East are all together. Nobody distinguishes. We Christians distinguish between Maronite, Melkite, Protestants, Evangelicals, Lutherans but in front of others we are all united. We are facing now other challenges, not among us as Christians but between us as Christians and the others.

**So the pressure unites. That was the question.**

Jalakh: I don't want to say that because we are pressured we are united ... no, we want the unity, we live for it. This is why the MECC was founded forty-one years ago - almost as you in EMW! So no, there is a way to be united, not because we are under pressure but because we believe in unity.

**The last question to you is: we hear often in the media about the Christian Exodus, you also may use this term but I am not quite sure. If you look into the future: will Christians and Muslims be able to live together in this region ever again after what has happened and is still going on?**

Jalakh: This is surely a question hard to answer. It is difficult to predict things. We have to realize that we are living in a crisis. So when we live in the crisis it is difficult to preview or to forecast the future. I think first of all that as Christians we have to live there, we have to resist the persecution, the suffering, the emigration because it is the hope not only for the Middle East or for Christianity in the Middle East but for Christianity in Europe, in the United States, everywhere. It is very important that Christians will remain in the region.

**Thank you Dr. Ery, Father Michel for this short sharing. So, for the second round let me call Ruth Padilla de Borst and Kasta Dip to come forward please. I heard Kasta has to be pronounced like Kosta? I will try to say it like that.**



*The second round of talks: Ruth Padilla de Borst and Kasta Dip.*

**Ruth Padilla de Borst is a theologian, a narrative theologian as she says, an international speaker and teacher from Costa Rica although she grew up in Argentina. She has been involved in leadership development in theological education in Latin America and beyond for many, many years. Most of you will know her. Currently, she serves on the board of the Latin American Theological Fellowship (FTL) and is a coordinator of the networking team of the International Fellowship of Mission as Transformation (INFEMIT) and together with her husband James she leads a centre for interdisciplinary theological education. Both are members of a community called Casa Adobe where they live in a multicultural family in Costa Rica.**

**I had asked for CVs from the guests and in hers I found not only years and lines about what she has done. Her first sentence was that her strongest desire is to see peace and justice embraced in the beautiful and broken world we call home. Now you find that religion is often playing a bad role as a fire-raiser instead of a peacemaker. What can a theologian and a teacher do to address all the burning issues?**

Well, in 30 seconds? I think as we have already heard that the role of the Church is going to be defined by the paradigms, by our imagination, by our understanding of who we are called to be in the world. In Latin America where I am coming from the church debates on the image of being the servants of the God,

of empire, of power, of oppression, of instituted religion. Our colonizers came with a Cross and the Bible at the same time. That motto continues to live when growing churches today say: “We are at the top now. What used to be the Roman Catholic Church - now Evangelicals, Protestants, Pentecostals are the powerful ones”. They have no sense of service, of belonging, of engaging in issues of peace and justice. The other option is to serve the Lord of - as it is said in a very Latin American song - the “rostro curtido”, of the “weathered face”. The God who in the most visible form Jesus Christ walked the streets, engaged with the people nobody else engaged with. So, what does theology have to do? It has to capture the imagination and give the nourishment and the vision to the Church so that it can engage in following Jesus in the midst of the challenges of violence and corruption and emigration and broken families and similar matters.

**That seems to be the question. We have heard very concrete examples from the Middle East and from Indonesia. If you look to Latin America what would you say are the biggest challenges the Church has to address? You never can address all of them.**

One of the hugest challenges right now is in Central America. Probably very few of you know that the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras are known as the Triangle of Death. Why? Because of a sequel of civil wars - wars are never civil and these were fueled by outside powers - there are weapons, families have been broken up, poverty and injustice prevail... so today the violence in that Triangle of Death rivals any war zone of the world. In El Salvador there were last month 658 murders - in a tiny country in just one month. Violence is killing the children, is killing young people. So parents are hiding their children - eight year old girls and boys - on trains and buses behind fruits to send them North because they would rather risk the death in the dessert than to stay in the city where there's so much violence.



**Ruth Padilla de Borst leads the Center for Interdisciplinary Theological Studies (CETI) in Costa Rica.**

### **What are the churches doing?**

I am very grateful to see one very big Pentecostal Church that 10 years ago had a much closed and very narrow mindset and had no idea of engaging with these

issues. Today because of theological formation that really builds the bridges between the Word and the world it is spearheading a movement of El Salvador Sin Armas (El Salvador with no weapons) and engaging with civil society, publishing in the newspaper, calling together a coalition across denominational lines. A Pentecostal Church that used to be aside is now spearheading a movement against violence in the country. Like that there are other examples.

**One more question: You mentioned quite a number of different churches in Latin America. Among Evangelicals it seems still to be very common to say: “to you and your faith it is important that you have peace in your heart and that you talk to your God ...” The involvement in society which is quite common for you and for EMW and taking the context and projects seriously – many people say: no, that is not our job. What do you say to them?**

Padilla: That’s why we need theological formation, because we need to open up the minds. We need to plant seeds of the whole Gospel that has to do with the whole world and with all people. So my answer is to bring the Word but the word out of and in relation to the challenges of the particular context. It cannot be something imported and brought down, it has to come from inside as we grapple with the issues of our context in the light of the good news of the whole Gospel.

**The theologian and the teacher are answering in one person. Thank you, Ruth.**

**So we turn now to Kasta Dip. He is the Director of the India Peace Centre in Nagpur. I had to look it up, it’s a 2.4 million big city in the center of India. He is engaged for justice, peace, and reconciliation since a long time. I found you on Facebook where you post that you enjoy Hamburg and you send picture from the harbour in Hamburg and you are missing your family.**

**The India Peace Centre was founded by the National Council of Churches in India and it promotes interreligious dialogue and is an interreligious centre for justice and peace. What are the main obstacles for justice and peace in your country now?**

Kasta Dip: The main problem is, as you all know, the politicization of religion which is actually very dangerous in my country. We have a tradition of being a secular country for almost 70 years and ever since we have achieved our independence we have enjoyed the fellowship of the people of other faiths. But from time to time we see communal violence erupting in different parts of India. It is wrong to point the finger at one particular religion and say that they are the ones who instigate violence on the others. It is in fact one particular group of

one particular religion. They are the ones who are actually responsible for all the religious violence that is happening in India, and there I see the biggest challenge, and that is what in India Peace Centre we are working on. The strategy we have adopted is to bring all the people together because we believe that although Indian society is divided according to the religious lines every religion and the religious scriptures have importance to hold Indian society together. We are using those positive aspects to keep the society united so that we can live in peace.

**Can you give an example how you work? If you come together and you talk to people from different religions ... which religions are the ones you can talk to more easily? Who is more open: Hindus, Buddhist, Muslims ... and who are your more important partners?**

Well, we can talk to all the faith communities. What it is at times difficult is to get the hardcore Hindus actually for a dialogue and talk about justice and peace. We have people from the Muslim and the Buddhist communities. I live in a city called Nagpur and Nagpur happens to be a Buddhist city because probably 50% of the people of the city belong to that community. But Nagpur also happens to be the headquarters of a Hindu fundamentalist group called RSS, that is Rashtriya Swayamsevah Sangh, which is responsible for most of the communal violence in the country, particularly targeting the Muslims and the Christians in the country. We work all over India but I take my examples from Nagpur. So whenever we invite for a dialogue we get people from all the communities. All the religions, but it is very difficult have somebody from the headquarters of RSS for a dialogue because the moment we send out an invitation and they see that the word justice is there, they don't accept our invitation because they know that they are responsible for much of the injustice in the society.



**Kasta Dip, Head of the India Peace Centre in Nagpur.**

**I have seen an article from 2008 when in Orissa so many people were dying and so many churches were destroyed. You were a youth worker for the Church in the North in that region and you said “religious plurality can be both, a blessing and a challenge.” That’s what we also heard in some of the other interventions. So, has the situation has become better since then or is it getting worse and worse all the time as we hear from other regions?**

Well the situation is getting better, but you cannot generalize it. In the Kandhamal region the situation is now better because it became the focus of the world community and there was external pressure, political pressure from the different countries. So the government has really acted well and also the local communities have taken initiatives to talk to each other, and therefore that process of reconciliation has really worked in Kandhamal. But we still receive reports of the spreading violence in different parts of the country. What happened in Gujarat and what happened in Kandhamal really attracted the attention of the world community. There is, however, violence every day which goes unreported and that is of course unfortunate. Let me also say that for the last one year you may not have read reports of communal violence in the country but that does not mean that we are living in a peaceful society in India. It is because even the media is now controlled by the government and so they cannot report these incidents.

**So many observers say that in conflicts, social or other conflicts, religion is just abused for political reasons. How do you comment on that? What is behind the conflicts?**

Sometimes you have to see the problems in India also through the lens of the caste system. I am a Dalit and I know that in fact most of the conflicts that we see in India are because of caste issues. Even the observers and the analysts would say that what happened in Kandhamal was in part because of caste issues. It was an attack on the Christian community, but caste really plays an important role in the Indian society because we are fragmented on the basis of caste. One caste cannot tolerate the others, and there are also people who are outcasts and they are the poorest victims of this system.

**Thank you very much for these insights from India and Latin America. For the next and last round I invite to come forward, please, Ms. Roseangela Jarjour, from the FMEEC and Dr. Johnson Mbillah from PROCMURA. Welcome.**

**Roseangela Jarjour has served since 1991 as the General Secretary of the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC) based now in Beirut, Lebanon, representing 17 Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican churches in the Middle East. She is a teacher by profession and she has been a member of the Central Committee of the WCC for 15 years. The Fellowship runs programmes in different areas like theology, empowerment of women and Christian educa-**



*In the third round of interviews: Johnson Mbillah, Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) und Rosangela Jarjour, Secretary-General of the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC).*

**tion. Being a Syrian national she now organizes humanitarian aid for refugees from Syria, and I understand your hometown is Homs and that means that you are a refugee yourself. Right?**

Yes, indeed..

**So you are very close to this situation. Roseangela Jarjour, let me quote what you said in a Bible study two years ago at the Kirchentag in Hamburg which quite moved me. Then you said: “While the churches inside Syria are struggling to provide assistance, much of the global Church keeps silent. Our churches are waiting to hear the prophetic voice of your churches towards God’s compassion and justice in the midst of this conflict.” What do you experience today?**

If I may connect this question to the lecture, because this is the question that many of us still are raising, in our understanding Europe is a Christian world because it is based on Christian values and faith. We see that the churches are not taking that seriously because they are not raising the questions that should be raised while seeing such bad things happening in our region, in our countries. So we are asking: Where is Christian Europe? Where are your values? And this is still a big question. Not only they are not coming to rescue and to help as we expect but also they’re not fulfilling their own expectations: like questioning the policies of their countries by asking why certain countries are allying with

forces of - as we say - evil in our region. They see the wrong and they don't say that this is wrong. Where is the sense of judgment that we are given by God? He has given us this sense so that we can ask the question. Where are the churches in Europe? Are they asking the right questions? Are they taking the right actions? The time is not yet up, you still have time to come forward and say your word as churches, state your conviction.

**Maybe we have time later to discuss it a bit more but if you say you want to hear a prophetic voice. Has anything happened since then? Have you received help? Have you heard the voice or have you received emotional support?**

It's coming up. I cannot deny that it was slow but as EMWs Middle East Secretary Owe Boersma always says: "Raise up your head and be patient, the German churches are a bit slow but when they come they surely come forward." So, yes, it's coming slowly but surely.

**In the beginning of the Arab Spring you could see Christians and Muslims joining hands in the street. I remember pictures from Cairo, for example. Do you see any common attempts among the religions to end the conflict or at least face the conflict?**

We are standing in the middle. We don't know whether we can fully see with both eyes what's going on here or there. On the one hand we see a lot of violence and killing done in the name of religion and those who are doing it, ISIS, quote the Koran. That is the danger of it; they say they act in the name of religion. On the other hand,

we have the experience over the years of recuperation and real coexistence and friendship. I was raised in an Evangelical school; I sat together with friends who are Muslims. I didn't know at all they were Muslims until I was 14 years old. Can you image? So we find ourselves as Christians in the middle and we do not know which force will lead us. Will it be the attraction of that evil force or the attraction of that good force? We have built over the years a lot and we are counting on this. We have put a lot of energy into cooperation and dialogue with Muslims and so on, and we are expecting that now is the harvest time. We expect Al Azhar (University) to come up and say: What these people are doing is very wrong. We are waiting for that but until now we have not heard a clear voice from the moderate Muslims with whom we have lived so many years. We are missing that.



*Rosangela Jarjour, FMEEC  
General Secretary, .*

**So you are missing that voice, too. Let me put my last question to you. I dare to ask: Are there signs of hope?**

We cannot say no, we are Christians after all; we are very serious about our faith. What do you think? Now my question to you: What do you think is keeping us in the Middle East except the hope that He is there? .

**Now Dr. Johnson Mbillah. He is an ordained Minister in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and holds a PhD from the University of Birmingham on Islamic and Christian-Muslim relations. In his broader family there are Muslims and Christians, so he has both religions in one family. Since 17 years he is the General Advisor, I think one can also call it a Director, of PROCMURA, which means Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa, a Pan-African organization headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya. Now you're right in the middle of a religious conflict hotspot, I would say. PROCMURA started in 1959, it is well established in 20 African countries and visible in 10 more, whatever that may be, I found it on the Internet.**

**Dr. Mbillah, a short outline of PROCMURA, please: your daily work, how you support churches in Africa to work peacefully and in coexistence in the neighborhood, in the village, the suburbs? Let me just add: the World's Watch List from 2015 of Open Doors says: "after we have seen so many hotspots of persecution of Christians now Kenya has made a large jump from place 43 to 19 in the list of 50 countries." What are you doing?**

In the first place I am very pleased to be here and to be able to interact in this manner. Now, regarding the first question on matters related to Christians and Christianity. Within PROCMUCA we have a principle that without intra-Christian relations and without getting the Christian community to understand the dynamics and the complexity of Christian-Muslim relations we will not make any progress. So, our first and foremost work is how to get the Christian community of all denominations to understand what it means to relate with the religious other. The situation in Kenya is a tough one and the quoted index mentions what Kenya is. But on the African continent, we realize that we have several challenges people will have to deal with which is not something you can limit to just Kenya.

**There are so many fires burning. Why has religious extremism come to Africa? It used to be mostly in other areas.**

When we talk about so many conflicts and religion I have to say that the situa-

tion is more complicated than that. A religion is pushed forward but there are very strong latent factors. But let me make some key statements. The first one is that there is the politicization of religion. That is clear. The second one is that there is also the religionization of politics. Apart from that you will see economic stress finding an ally in religion, because the African is a religious being and a lot of things revolve around religion and then religion is pushed forward. I'm not undermining the religious aspect but I am saying that it is one aspect amongst many aspects of what we face.

**Let me come to one of the terrible incidents. Just this year in April at the Christian College in Garissa more than a hundred young students were shot when it was found out that they were Christians, while Muslims stayed alive. How do you deal with a situation like that? Is there anything for you to do? Work with the churches, the people, with those families? Or is there something else you also can do before?**

The misuse of religion is real. Many of you will know of the Garissa killings. In the Garissa incident the target was clear. It was the Christian community. And apart from that, prior to that, you will know that there was a bus that moved from Garissa and the bus was stopped. And all were brought out and everyone was asked to recite the Shahada, that is the Islamic statement of Faith. That makes someone a Muslim. If you could not do that it meant you were not a Muslim and then you were killed. Here, who did that? Al-Shabaab said they did that. Why did they do that? It is part of the religionization of politics, which comes into focus. What could we have done?

In that particular instance we could not have done anything. What needed to be done and what the churches and the Muslim community have tried to do is to get the government of Kenya to be responsible in protecting all Kenyans.

**So, it's a political question.**

It is a very strong political question. We provide education; the government has to protect life.



*Johnson Mbillah, PROCMURA.*

**Your main approach is to work with churches, to prepare them to foster dialogue. Do you experience that the churches want to play this role in the society?**

The churches definitely want to. And mind you, we have a dual role in the churches and in the churches meeting with the Muslims. And my senior fellow is here, Dr. Karamaga, and he will tell you what we have been doing together with the Christian and Muslim communities. So it's just not Christians but Christians and Muslims. The Christians are aware very clearly that life before death is as important as life after death.

**Let me put one last question to you: your perspective not only for Kenya, I mean you have the whole of Africa in your mind. Religious intolerance has been increasing in recent years. What do you foresee? Will it die down in future in a few years again like it came?**

The answer is God knows, but let me repeat by answering your question on what Prof. Enns said. We live in a global world, that is true, but a global world requires glocal action. And this is also important. We can talk about globalization but we also need to talk about glocalization. And by glocalization we mean that the action that is carried out locally in a given country can have global implications. So we have this world we live in, we need to be very conscious about because of the universality of the two religions. As Christians we say: "In Christianity we are the body of Christ; no East, no West, no North, no South, no whatever." Same in Islam which says that in the Ummah "no North, no South, no black, no white." And that is a statement which makes glocalization very important.

**Thank you for this wonderful closing remark and thanks to all of you!**

## THE ANNIVERSARY IN PICTURES

# A Celebration with five Continents

At the end nearly all invitees had succeeded to come to Hamburg. After all, five continents were represented during the two days of the anniversary – companions of the EMW in the past and present. The photographer Heiner Heine, a long-time companion of the EMW public relations department, has held both days in pictures.



*Bishop Jan Janssen, Chairman of the Board of EMW, welcomes the guests from the world-wide ecumenical movement at the reception in the Ecumenical Forum HafenCity.*



*The service was opened with a prayer, led by EMW Director Reverend Christoph Anders.*



*Applause for the lecture of Prof. Enns. His speech provided material for further discussion.*



*The audience listens to the statements of guests of the ecumenical movement being interviewed. In the middle: Prof. Fernando Enns, who held the lecture.*



*Aisake Casimira, ecumenical officer of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) and Chairman of their Theological Commission, conveyed greetings of the General Secretary Rev. François Pihataae. He described the partnership with the EMW as an important and reliable support for the ecumenical education in the Pacific region, which is characterized by a strong denominationalism. South Pacific theology is highly contextual, but only partially pronounced ecumenical. Strengthening ecumenical orientation is one aim of the current programme „Rethinking Oceania“.*

*To illustrate the contextual aspect of Christianity in the South Pacific, Casimira told the story of a young man who flees on a high palm tree to escape the village community. One by one, senior representatives of different churches try to move him through gentle pastoral words to come down. All in vain. The Chief of the village, looking at the young man and draws a cross in the air, first a vertical bar with his arms followed by a horizontal. Immediately the young man climbs down the palm tree. Clearly impressed, an observer asked the Chief, why his gesture was more successful than the Christian words of the clergy. Smilingly he explains that the vertical stroke was to indicate he should come down. The horizontal stroke threatened him with what would happen if he wouldn't come down.*



*Dr. André Karamaga, General Secretary of the All African Conference of Churches (AACC), highlighted the steady partnership with EMW even in times of financial and organizational turbulences. Thanks to the intensive monitoring by the head of EMW's Operational Support Desk, Martin Blöcher (d. 2014), the crisis had been not only been overcome, but AACC is standing on solid financial footing. In his home country of Rwanda, EMW was the first organization which funded the reconstruction of theological training after the genocide.*



*Petra Bosse-Huber, EKD Bishop for foreign relations and Uwe Michelsen, member of the EKD Council. Both are members of the EMW board.*



*Prof. Konrad Raiser, former WCC General Secretary, in conversation with Pastor Antje Heider-Rottwilm, head of the Ecumenical Forum HafenCity Hamburg..*



*Companions of the EMW (from left): Hermann Vorländer, former Director of Mission EineWelt, Klaus Roeber, former Asia and Middle East Secretary of the EMW, und Ulrich Schöntube, Director of Gossner Mission.*



*The Conference Room of the EMW has never been so densely filled as at the opening of the Study Day on 19th of June 2015.*



*One of ten workshops: “Experiences with corruption - and finding ways to overcome them”, directed by EMW’s Executive Secretary Olaf Rehren (left).*



*An intellectual and manual challenge: The workshop “string figures” with EMW press officer Freddy Dutz (left) and administrative assistant Petra Jaekel (right). String figures are part of the traditional culture among indigenous peoples, for example the Inuit, Papua and North American Indians.*



*Middle Eastern Dialogue in Hamburg: Rosangela Jarjour (Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches, FMEEC) and Michel Jalakh, Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). Later they shared that the EMW’s anniversary offered them for the first time an opportunity for a detailed conversation.*



*The workshop „Christian Muslim encounters in the Middle East“ was an opportunity for the exchange of African and Middle Eastern experiences. Involved where (left to right) EMW Middle East Secretary Owe Boersma, Johnson Mbillah (Programme for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa [Procmura], Michel Jalakh [MECC] and the journalist Katja Dorothea Buck. Attentive audience in the background: Bishop Jan Janssen, Chairman of the Board of the EMW.*



*Between the workshops the participants discussed “Perspectives of multilateral ecumenism”. Aisake Casimira describes the specific challenges of the Pacific Council of Churches in his home region.*



*Closing of the Study Day in the Conference room. Front (left to right) Gerdi Nützel, Member of the Theological Commission of the EMW, Herbert Meißner, former Director of EMW, Friederike Deeg (EKD Church Office) and Cornelia Uckro, Oriental Women's Mission Society.*



*It will be another ten years until EMW has a Year of Jubilee ahead. One reason more to enjoy the company during lunchbreak in EMW's backyard.*

OLAV FYKSE TVEIT (WCC)

## »We are sent Together into this World«

**Addressing the EMW General Assembly in Herrnhut, the WCC General Secretary emphasized that the 10th Assembly in Busan (2013) gave a new momentum to the ecumenical movement. The Call from Busan for a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace increasingly shapes the work and programmes of the WCC. From the EMW, a long-standing partner, the WCC anticipates a continuous accompaniment and support in the future.**

Dear colleagues and friends,

We are participating in the mission of God which is encompassing the whole world. We are called and sent by God to do so. Therefore, I was so happy that you have chosen a wide ecumenical perspective for this day of reflection which is a central dimension of the work of the EMW. We know that it is not just an add-on to your agenda which makes you more global and more interesting; it is an integral part of your self-understanding and your work.



*Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit,  
General Secretary, World Council of Churches*

I am grateful for this opportunity to share with you about the present focal points of the work of the WCC and how they relate to the core of your agenda.

### Moving together

The WCC's first assembly 1948 in Amsterdam concluded with the famous statement: "We intend to stay together!" That was an extremely important affirmation, binding the churches together in mutual accountability in a constant re-

relationship with an important eschatological dimension to it. Only a short time after World War II, the assembly delegates expressed their conviction that there was no reason why they should not stay together.

At the WCC assembly 2013 in Busan, the message ended with a slightly different sentence. There the assembly declared: "We intend to move together!" The ecumenical fellowship and relationships we have are not just to be seen in the perspective of remaining in fellowship. We are in this relationship because we are sent together into this world. The missiological dimension makes this ecumenical fellowship a movement. The call of the tenth assembly to all our member churches, to all our partners and to all people of good will to join in a pilgrimage of justice and peace is a new way to express this truth. It sends us forward and it is an impulse for renewal which is also to be seen in a missiological perspective. Let me share with you some of my reflections on the meaning of the call to a joint pilgrimage of justice and peace and where God is calling us to go in today's world.

I was visiting our member churches in Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Colombia at the beginning of this month. Many of you know them well because of your close relationships with them. I was very curious to see how they would react to a visit that had as its theme the "pilgrimage of justice and peace". I was warned by some that if any churches in the world would not accept the terminology of pilgrimage it would be these churches. I was traveling together with our president for Latin America and the Caribbean Rev. Gloria Ulloa from Colombia. From the first sentence she said: "We are on a pilgrimage together to visit you as churches, to include you and invite you to be with us on this pilgrimage of justice and peace." There was no reason for preparing the audience. She went right to the core of our message. The whole visit to these churches was indeed a pilgrimage.

It was a common learning experience and it showed us that the ecumenical movement has both a strong legacy in Latin America from the 1980s and 1990s in the struggle for human rights, but also needs renewal to become a fellowship of churches moving together. I heard no further critical reaction to the terminology of pilgrimage. I rather said: Let us make it our own as a genuine Christian expression of the spiritual dimension of our journey together and how we see our whole life as Christians. I trust something similar can be said regarding the spiritual dimension of the 40 years' journey of the EMW and its members.

## A movement of faith and hope from the margins

The pilgrimage is a movement in faith and a movement of faith. This is especially important as the ecumenical movement needs to renew itself and to go back to the basics: that we really share the faith in our Triune God, that we really follow Christ, that we really do this on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, and that we do this to serve the world together. These are the basics. They are good enough to strengthen us for what we are called to do. Recognizing them with each other has a huge potential for the churches together. We have the chance to show that the ecumenical movement is not a narrow movement of some churches who define themselves as being something different from, for example, an evangelical movement or from the Roman Catholic Church – now with its missiological approach pursued by Pope Francis – or from other dimensions of how the churches move together today.

It is very important to say that we are actually going forward with the pilgrimage of justice and peace on this basis. This is why we are doing it. This is a movement of faith not only believing that we are called to be people of confidence in the truth of the Gospel but also that we are moving with our faith in hope, which is always driving a real Christian faith. Hope is looking at transformation in the perspective of the transcendence. Jürgen Moltmann has again stated this in his last book that there is no Christian faith without hope that moves us forward.

I was asked in March to address the Human Rights Council in Geneva from a faith based perspective. In response to the question of the connection between human rights and the challenges of climate change I said: from a faith based perspective we believe as Christians like many other faith communities that God created and still is creating this world. Therefore, there is hope also in the present situation beyond the facts we see as a consequence of human activities.

Faith is not an apocalyptic and fatalistic approach to the world obsessed with a catastrophic end. We believe that God is able to renew this world and that we are called to be part of God's movement of renewal and new creation. Faith is to believe that we have a right to hope. That God has given us the right to hope is another way to express the Gospel message.

The pilgrimage of justice and peace as common journey towards the future is an expression of everybody's right to hope. This is not a movement from the centres to the margins like the old mission movement as people often think, although

I do not believe that this is correct. My own country Norway, for instance, was really at the margins of the world, but missionary movements came also from Norway even in the 19th century. The missionary movement came not only from the powerful colonial countries. The new CWME mission statement has made mission from the margins a new paradigm. People at the margins are spiritually empowered for mission. Mission from the margins becomes a movement of all of us as a movement of justice and peace, qualified by values of the kingdom of God and by what we believe God is creating already now and there. It is up to us to affirm this and to be empowered by it.

### A common perspective and vision

The call to the pilgrimage of justice and peace is shaping more and more our work and all our programmes as the WCC. It is also showing us more clearly God's call to the ecumenical movement in our time. The EMW is participating in this movement as a mission body. All three dimensions of the work of the WCC in unity and mission, public witness and diakonia, and ecumenical formation are now to be seen from the perspective of the pilgrimage of justice and peace and how they are contributing to it. Of course the work on public witness and diakonia is addressing issues of justice and peace every day.

As I talked to President Santos in Colombia two weeks ago, he told me that on that very day they had signed an agreement with the ELN (National Liberation Army) to become part of the peace process. It was the first day that the Presbyterian Church in Colombia said to the president that they support him fully. Sometimes God gives us these moments of grace and clarity. We see that something is happening that makes for peace and that the churches have a role both to contribute and to bring their visions to the process. In Colombia, we know this was the contribution of the churches for many years. We are not creating a new movement; but, we are in a movement where people have been planting and sowing for decades.

Another dimension of our work for peace is not just the refugee situation in Europe; but, it is connected to the crisis in the Middle East, in Africa and also related to climate change, the shortage of water, a difficult economic outlook and so on. As WCC, we underline that none of these issues can be dealt with separately. It is not justice or peace; it is always justice and peace.

We could continue to reflect on this in many ways; but, let me share with you two other dimensions of it - one related to ecumenical formation which is also high

on your agenda and part of your support to the WCC, the other related to unity and mission. I see an opportunity to make this pilgrimage also an issue of formation with the many tools that we have at hand. We can shape our minds and our lives through a combination of education, of practices and of joint activities and initiatives. Seen from the perspective of the pilgrimage, our different activities for ecumenical formation gain greater momentum when they are relating to the pilgrimage of justice and peace. This is not diverting the interest from theology. Rather to the contrary, it becomes even more important what kind of theology we are doing and teaching together.

The other concern related to unity and mission is often expressed as a complaint that the emphasis on unity seems to be missing from the pilgrimage of justice and peace and the important work of Faith and Order is shelved and buried in the archives. But if moving together is not contributing to uniting us, how then shall we come closer together? If we do not believe that God is uniting us by moving us forward together, what then shall deepen and grow our fellowship? This is the essence of my conversation with Pope Francis on the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC. We have to serve together. We have to move together. In this common mission of God, God will also open up new opportunities for our common mission and greater unity. Therefore, I am quite sure that the Faith and Order movement and the mission movement not only find their way in the pilgrimage of justice and peace, but there are absolutely crucial for it for thorough reflection and the expressions of the deeper meaning of the pilgrimage of justice and peace.

### **New opportunities for the common journey**

I am not worried. This is a new possibility, a new gift for us as the ecumenical movement. On our way, we need strong partners like you. We need your vision; we need your capacities and particularly your commitment to do this with us. We definitely celebrate with you that there is a growing shared understanding of what mission means today despite of remaining differences. There is also a growing willingness to do mission together. The World Evangelical Alliance, the World Pentecostal Fellowship, Pope Francis and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity with Cardinal Koch, the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace want to work with the WCC from the perspective of sharing in the mission of God and finding ways of doing it together.

Your wide perspective and your constituency are real assets in this regard. This conference is also demonstrating this as an ecumenical event representing the values and qualities that mark and shape your work. Your reflections in your jubilee celebrations on “societies without religion – dream or nightmare” are key concerns for us far beyond Europe. There is no continent where these questions are not surfacing. I have discussed them with many African church leaders. Do we see signs of secularization also on the African continent with the next generation? This has something to do that we have global realities, global movements, global media and new ways young people communicate through the social media which reflect a non-religious approach to life.

On the other hand, we also see the tendency that religion is on the agenda of all continents as a problem contributing to tensions and conflicts and growing divisive forces. But by even acknowledging the problematic aspects of religion, we still will also discover religion as a source of hope with the deep conviction that change is possible. Last Friday, we signed at the WCC an agreement with UNICEF. They asked for it, saying that they need partners who have a much stronger impact on how children look at their lives, how they are protected against violence in the local communities, and how climate change and poverty affect children. Partners like UNICEF are discovering that there is a huge potential if religion and faith based organizations are able to contribute to a constructive and committed approach to justice and peace.

My last point is to say that I am very delighted at how you contribute to the life of the WCC, how you support the mission team and the work on ecumenical formation, for instance in the way you participated in the GETI initiative, bringing students together at the occasion of important and meaningful events in the ecumenical movement as we did with the Busan assembly. We plan to do it at the World Mission Conference in 2018 and support it during the Kirchentag in 2017 in Germany. There are great opportunities for young people to learn from each other and from the encounter with others in the ecumenical movement, allowing them the possibility to create something for themselves. We have to give them these spaces. They are not the future ecumenical movement, they are the present. They are today’s actors in the ecumenical movement. Your focus on education is not only asking what shall equip them for the future, it is empowering them today. That’s our common call together to empower young people whether they of the age of 5 or 50 or 75. We all have to be open for where God is leading us today. And a Pope that is 75 years old is also leading us.

(Authorized version for this publication.)

MARTIN JUNGE (LWF)

## »The Churches must Strengthen the Ecumenical Movement«

**The LWF General Secretary commemorated in his keynote the Reformation Jubilee in 2017. The churches of the reformation should be churches in reformation – meaning they must interfere in the current political challenges as well as proclaiming the Christian Gospel.**

My coming here is then a reflection of both an interest to get a better understanding of where you are, in the EMW, with your longstanding historic relationships from the different mission organizations with Churches around the world, which are also our member Churches. And you want to know with what LWF is concerned with at the moment.



*Rev. Dr. Martin Junge,  
General Secretary, Lutheran  
World Federation*

### Of People and Refugees

Firstly LWF is concerned with people, people fleeing. That is not a new phenomenon. From the foundation of LWF in 1947 matters of migration and refugees within the European context, as a result of II World War, were among the driving impulses.

Today LWF members all over the world have to face the challenges that arise from 60 million people seeking refuge – while after WWII it was 50 million. LWF is involved through LWS in camps where two million people are living. I just returned from Hungary where our Church is advocating with the Hungarian government. It is shocking that politicians can pretend to be astonished about so many people fleeing. What do they expect after Syria has been burning for four years, or trade agreements hindering justice and undermining development work? It has become very important to us to remind governments that there is also the legal obligation they agreed to by signing refugee convention of 1951. The overwhelming reaction of solidarity must be upheld. Therefore it

is necessary to solve the issues that arise from so many people showing up in one place at one time, that questions of infrastructure are solved and the new cohabitation well managed.

### Mission from the Margins

I am very concerned with the debt crises that is fired up by the refugee crises. When we are now debating about where center and where the margins of societies are we have to state that border lines are volatile. Discussing that issue in mission theology we note that debates about what constitutes margins and where they are geographically located, is extremely important because those margins are in every city, they are in every country, they are in every continent, and you cannot locate them South, North, East, West, Africa, Europe ... it doesn't work anymore.

### Reformation Anniversary

As Lutheran World Federation we do have a stake in the Reformation anniversary in 2017. We feel reformation is a global citizen and we are emphasizing both on globality and citizenship. We not only look upon what has been taken from the North to the South, but: what is coming back? There is a meaningful conversation needed.

We want to have a Reformation anniversary in ecumenical accountability. In 2010 in Stuttgart there was the big reconciliation action with the Mennonites. We signed with the Church the joint declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999. How would we put that aside and reconnect to discussions when the world has changed since the 16th.

In addition we are not just Churches of the Reformation we want to be Churches in reformation. That also indicates that we have to watch out for the young people and bring them onboard. Just two weeks ago, 150 of them from all over the world met in Wittenberg in order to understand, learn, and work together.

We have three sub-themes for the reformation anniversary: Salvation is not for sale. Human beings are not for sale. Creation is not for sale.

One of the great achievements of Reformation claims is that salvation is free, whatever preachers of the prosperity gospel teach. Human beings are not for



*The assembly listen to the keynote addresses by the General Secretaries.*

sale, meaning we have to go against human trafficking. Creation is not for sale which implies that we have to deal with issues such as climate change under the perspective that Lutherans have to add to the discussion from the standpoint of being a Church of Freedom, standing next to Churches of Justification, and Churches of Grace.

### Changing Landscapes

We find landscapes of World Christianity changing and I dread fragmentation, the downbreak of communication and the withdrawals into safe space of secluded insular identities. The churches must withstand this trend and strengthen the ecumenical movement. Historic relationships like yours are an incredible asset for a world to still be able to be connected, to engage over differences, and to work together. I'm trying to promote the vision of polycentric communion of Churches. There is no one center anymore in this world, and there is no one center anymore in the communion.

### Theology

There are a numbers of issues that need to be discussed among the churches before other organisations pick up those subjects and deal with them according to there likening, such as matters of human rights.

I am concerned with one approach to mission that seems to surfaces. Why are some mesmerized by numbers? My theory: Faith has always needed philosophi-

cal structures to be processed. Platonism in the early Church; Aristotelism with Thomas; idealism with the German Protestantism. What is the philosophical structure today? It is market philosophy which is heavily introduced into the Body of Christ. That's why we seem sometimes so concerned about and overly focused in numbers and growth.

### Societies without religion: dream or nightmare

The moment you develop consciousness about life, sadness, joy, death, sickness ... you will begin to touch upon the phenomenon of religion. Religion can and has the potential for the good, and it carries the potential for the bad. The UN and others are interested in what religion contributes to society. I think we need to seize that opportunity, to make a difference. We must not allow our religion and faith be misused and corrupted for political or economical reasons. That would be part of the nightmare.

What is my call and my hope with EMW? I've said it already, let's go deeper into understanding how multilateral and bilateral relations come together, contribute to each other, enrich the very much needed relationship web at a global level opposing fragmentation; opposing withdrawal; opposing the communication breakdowns which we cannot afford as a human family and I believe Churches have a contribution to offer in this respect.

All the matters I referred to are of deep theological nature that need to be responded to out of theology and not out of market ideology. And for that, we need to have deep sound theological reflection globally, across cultures, together with others.

[Authorized version for this publication.]

CHRIS FERGUSON (WCRC)

## »We must be simultaneously pastoral and prophetic«

**After thanking the EMW for the accompaniment and support during the process of merging the two reformed church bodies the WCRC General Secretary explained that the WCRC understands itself as a church movement, which not only introduces transitions, but also aims to change societies and structures. Through the partnership with EMW the WCRC feels empowered to accomplish this mission.**

When I began my journey in mission, one of the first situations I encountered in Central America was working very closely on projects that were supported by EMW, and in that I learned several things. No matter what EMW actually said they were focusing on, what they were actually doing in that particular project, was to actually build right relationships. EMW's construction of a model of mission of partnership, a mission of solidarity, expressed itself through many different forms and in many different ways. But the underlying thread, throughout EMW's history, has not been about choosing the right theme to focus but has been, in fact, altogether about with whom EMW stood and how EMW stood with them.



*Rev. Chris Ferguson,  
General Secretary, World  
Communion of Reformed  
Churches.*

We, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), are pleased that EMW has chosen to stand with us. Although our predecessor organizations have been around for decades, the WCRC understands itself as a new organization, having formed in 2010 as a merger between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council. Still, we carry with us the Reformed tradition, for both good and otherwise.

First, the Reformed, Calvinist tradition has a tendency to divide more than unite. This is something we must confess. Through our history we've drawn lines, but

now we are drawing more and more circles, trying to be inclusive rather than divisive. We take seriously our commitment to be a Communion and all the means.

Secondly, we have the gift of being reformed yet always reforming. We are always testing our beliefs, our faith with the reality of the world in which we find ourselves. This manifests itself today in our commitment to be ecumenical. At the same time the ecumenical imperative of unity includes the imperative for us to deepen and understand our own particular family identity. So not only is there not a contradiction to strengthening and deepening Reformed identity and participation in the ecumenical movement, but in fact it's the only way that it can and should be done.

A particular way in which we do this is through the confessing tradition we find in many of our member churches. This is shown most vividly in the Accra Confession, adopted by the World Alliance in 2004 and reaffirmed by the WCRC in 2010. Coming to the initial adoption of the Accra Confession was a *processus confessionis* that came from our General Council in Debrecen, Hungary, seven years earlier, to discover what the faith implications were of the dominant world economic system.

The Accra Confession begins with a faith in God, the Lord and Creator of all. This then leads us to reject any systems and structures that put profits over people, that marginalizes, excludes and so on, making clear links between ecological destruction and social injustices. This was a bold, prophetic call in 2004, when many still denied the existence of the neoliberal world economic order. Since then many of the premises in the Accra Confession have been reaffirmed, a faith statement affirmed by economists and sociologists.

Today the majority of people in the world would have a hard time saying that the world they see reflects God's glory. Our world is more closely tied together through the global economic system than ever and yet we notice that there are strains in the world more fractious than ever before, between North and South, between different cultures and regions, between different life circumstances. And we see this reflected in our Communion, with churches dividing both amongst and between themselves.

The WCRC itself, as an organization, has faced its own share of challenges in recent years. But now, since our move from Geneva to Hannover and several years of financial struggles, we see ourselves as moving from transition to transfor-

mation. And EMW is assisting in that. Dialogues with the Catholics, Anglicans and Pentecostals, the last focused on mission, deepen our engagement with other Christian communities. Our Global Institute of Theology where young, Reformed theologians from around the world are brought together to gain a global perspective in the present tense, helps to build the next generation of ecumenical leaders. We have mission empowerment projects that focus on strengthening our regional structures, and we support our member churches on the front lines of religious fissures.

We are striving to be in solidarity with victims of economic injustice, but we also see the prophetic imperative to actually seek out and change the systems and structures that hurt and destroy and marginalize. With the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and the Council for World Mission we are embarking on a project to create a New International Economic and Financial Architecture, a just alternative to the neoliberal capitalism destroying God's world today.

In this amazingly complex world, in which we are ever seeking to reform and transform, we must be simultaneously pastoral and prophetic. Each act of compassion and hospitality has to be matched with an act of transformative justice.



*The three keynote speakers Chris Ferguson, Martin Junge and Olav Fykse Tveit with Bishop Jan Janssen (M.), chairman of the EMW Board, and Christoph Anders (r.)*

The church reflects the brokenness of the world, and therefore the imperative of unity is not only God's plea and hope for us but is a way of building right relationships and moving beyond the world that we have towards creating the world that God wants. The WCRC is committed to the renewal of the church to transform the world.

We have been empowered in our mission through EMW, by your example of partnership and sharing; by your intuitions and understandings on how to always bring people together; in your sense of the relationships between justice, unity and mission; in your careful thinking and your always-present theological centre. So we find in you not only tremendous support but an inspirational model, and we hope our future will continue to grow together in God's mission, so that all may have life and may have it abundantly.

(Authorized version for this publication.)