

People's Reporter

A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

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Radicalizing Reformation Provoked by Today's Systemic Crises

500 years since Luther's Reformation

"Justice Alone"

“ The international working group on 'Radicalizing Reformation' met from 7 to 10 Jan. 2017, in the historic city of Wittenberg, Germany, 500 years after Luther's Reformation in 1517, building on previous reformations, began. Christians, Jews and Muslims from all over the world, representing various disciplines, participated in the 3rd International Conference of the project. *Please see page 3* ”

The most radical reformer of all, Jesus Christ, is uniting the global church in mission today



Bishop Dr. Munib Younan,
President of
the Lutheran World Federation

“When Pope Francis and I were together in Lund and Malmö, Sweden, we spoke on the issue of ecumenical witness. The very fact that such a Common Prayer was co-hosted, and that the Pope and myself signed a joint statement, and that Lutheran World Federation World Service and Caritas signed a document of commitment to working together, is a powerful sign that our Lord Jesus is radically reforming the church right now. This is not a work of our own doing. This is the work of Jesus and his Gospel of love.”

“The most radical reformer of all, Jesus Christ, is uniting the global church in mission today, for the sake of the world. As we celebrate the 500th anniversary, we remember that we never proclaim the Lutheran Jesus or the Catholic Jesus or the Orthodox Jesus. We

proclaim the Christ of the cross. He does not belong to one tradition, to one continent, to one gender, to one ethnicity, or to one context. Jesus is the Lord of all.”

Please see page 5

Adopt new life-enhancing ways of life and work

We are meeting in a global situation with dark clouds at the horizon. We face unpredictable years. The dominating imperial capitalist civilization has produced multiple crises including ecological disasters, grave injustices, wars and the incredible misery of tens of millions of refugees and displaced persons.

· We are gathered here to better understand the systemic structures and processes of this situation.

· We are here to look at the way the Reformation tradition has made positive and negative contributions to these structures and processes.

· We are here to repent, where necessary.

We are here to encourage each other in order to challenge faith communities and societies to turn around and transform the economic, cultural social and political realities to adopt new life-enhancing ways of life and work.

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Dr. Ulrich Duchrow is
the Chief Co-ordinator of the Project,
'Radicalizing Reformation -
Provoked by Today's Systemic Crises'

A Special Feature on
the 3rd International Conference on
'Radicalizing Reformation'
- Please see pages 3 to 6 -

Church of South India

35th Session of the Synod

“Pilgrim Journey Towards Forgiveness and Reconciliation”



35th CSI Synod: Inauguration

L to R: Most Rev. Dr. G. Dyvasirvadam, Adv. Robert Bruce, Rev. Dr. Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda, Rt. Rev. Thomas K. Oommen & Rev. Dr. Christopher Ferguson

“ The 35th Session of the Synod of the Church of South India was held at the CSI Retreat Centre, Kottayam, Kerala, from 14 to 17 January 2017. The theme was 'Pilgrim Journey Towards Forgiveness and Reconciliation.' ”

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ferguson, the General Secretary of the World Council of Reformed Churches, delivered the inaugural address. Most Rev. Dr. G. Dyvasirvadam, the Moderator of the CSI, presided over the sessions. The General Secretary Rev. Dr. Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda presented the reports.

Rt. Rev. Thomas K. Oommen was elected as the new Moderator of the Church of South India. Rt. Rev. Vadappally Prasada Rao, Bishop in Dornakal Diocese, as the Deputy Moderator, Rev. Dr. Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda, as the General Secretary and Adv. Robert Bruce as the Treasurer.

About 500 delegates from the 24 dioceses spread over Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Seemandhra, Telengana, and Jaffna in Sri Lanka, participated in the four-day deliberations.

Excerpts from the address delivered by
the newly elected Moderator at the Installation Service

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People's Reporter
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**The message
President Obama leaves**

The election of Mr. Barack Obama, an African-American, as the President of the US in 2008, was a historic event. The occasion of his leaving the White House, after serving as the President for 8 years, and the assumption of that office by Mr. Donald Trump, is feared to become a turning point in the nature and functioning of the democracy in the US and other countries. It is a sad predicament that when Obama leaves the office with one of the highest approval ratings in recent history, his party faced a severe blow. Obama will be remembered for many remarkable achievements. Affordable Health care Act even in the face of opposition, Iran Nuclear Agreement and Restoration of diplomatic relations with Cuba after five decades, are some of them. He has also initiated steps to release a good number of detainees from the infamous Guantanamo prison. But, it is sad that, despite being a well-meaning President, he could not even touch the basic ills of the system.

Acknowledging this, in his final speech as the US President, Mr. Obama shared his worry about the threat to democracy: "Our democracy is threatened whenever we take it for granted. All of us, regardless of party, should throw ourselves into the task of rebuilding our democratic institutions", he said. He is quite right, because, the loss of trust and credibility of democratic institutions due to the corrosive influence of money, the hijacking of the ruling and the opposition parties by the corporations and the neglect of the people by the political parties, have reached dangerous levels every where. Along with growing economic inequality, simmering racial divisions, recurring economic crisis, terrorism and hacking of computers to influence elections, bring new threats to the life of the people and the system of governance. Therefore, he raised the demand for a new social contract "to guarantee to all kids, the education they need, to give workers, the power to unionise for better wages, to update the social safety-net and to make more reforms to the tax-code so that the corporations and the individuals who reap the most from the new economy do not avoid their obligations to the country that made their success possible". These are the issues to be addressed, in any country including the US. Sadly, it is in these issues that every government fails.

The parting message reveals that although Mr. Obama knew the problems very well, he could not address them effectively. It is the inability of even a well-meaning President like Mr. Obama to touch the basic ills affecting the life of the majority of the people and the system of governance, that forced the people in the US to seek shelter under a person like Mr. Trump. People cannot be blamed for such turns in the US, Egypt, Turkey, India and other countries.

When political parties under the democratic system fail to discharge their primary duties with commitment and consistency, leaders like Hitler mesmerize people and hijack the system. Mr. Obama, after being in the office of the President of the U.S., for eight years, has admitted the reality and reiterated the need to rebuild the democratic system.

People in all countries should take seriously Mr. Obama's introspection and save the democratic system from crumbling.

Thought for the Fortnight

Never wait, just vote for the least imbecile of the lost and continue griping and create whatever microcosm of perfection you can, in your own life.

— Andre Monestier

Church of South India

35th Session of the Synod

**"Pilgrim Journey Towards
Forgiveness and Reconciliation"**

Excerpts from the address delivered by the newly elected Moderator at the Installation Service

**Let us commit ourselves to accomplish
a united and borderless church of
the least, the last and the lost**

Thomas K. Oommen



The Church of South India is a united and uniting church and it aims at the well-being of the common mass, in its journey.

As we move forward in this journey, the pilgrim journey of forgiveness and reconciliation, it is our inevitable task to aim at better relationships and wider ecumenical associations.

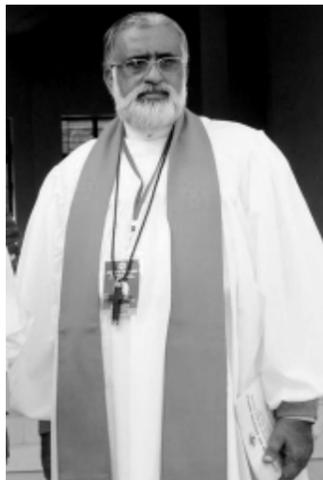
The contemporary social scenario demands a church which can replicate the Indian face in its theology and faith practice and also in the liturgy.

Only CSI and CNI can meet this demand.

It is not an over ambition to dream a United Church in India which comprises of both the CSI and the CNI.

Both the CNI and CSI have the most vulnerable sections in the Indian society.

Also we need to refresh, and relook at, the existing relationship with the Mar Thoma Church and the Methodist Church in India for more meaningful engagements.



The Biblical portion Ephesians 6:10-18 talks about the necessity to rely upon the strength of the Lord. When I take up the Tertullian task of the CSI Moderatorship, these verses are quite inspirational. It is, indeed, a happy day in my spiritual journey.

For me, to become the Moderator of a significant church like ours, is absolutely a great challenge. But I humble myself before the God Almighty, who called and entrusted this ministry and great responsibility upon me.

From the very first day I committed myself for the ministry of God, He guided me all through

these years and challenged my commitments with the provision of greater responsibilities. I consider myself as not worthy enough to take up this challenge but trust on the promise of God as mentioned in Ephesians 6: 10, 'be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might'.

The churches in the Madhya Kerala Diocese were, before the union, part of the Travancore-Cochin Anglican church which had its headquarters at Kottayam. This Diocese claims its descent from the first missionaries of the Church Missionary Society, the missionary wing of the Church of England. The first CMS missionary arrived in Alleppey in 1816 and established an Anglican Church there, and we celebrated the 200th anniversary of that event in November 2016.

This Diocese has a rich tradition and a legacy of commitment. It played a vital role in the formation of the Church of South India.

When the second Pentecostal event happened on 27 Sept. 1947 with the formation of the Church of South India, the then Bishop of the Diocese Rt. Rev. Dr. C. K. Jacob was the

Presiding Bishop at the Holy Service held at St. George's Cathedral, Madras.

The Church of South India is a united and uniting church and it aims at the well-being of the common mass, in its journey. As we move forward in this journey, the pilgrim journey of forgiveness and reconciliation, it is our inevitable task to aim at better relationships and wider ecumenical associations. The contemporary social scenario demands a church which can replicate the Indian face in its theology and faith practice and also in the liturgy. Only the CSI and the CNI can meet this demand. It is not an over ambition to dream a United Church in India which comprises of both the CSI and the CNI. Both CNI and CSI have the most vulnerable sections in the Indian society. Also we need to refresh, and relook at the existing relationship with the Mar Thoma Church and the Methodist Church in India for more meaningful engagements.

I request you all for your support and prayers in accomplishing an Indian church and a borderless church in this country.

May God bless us all. ●

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3rd International Conference on 'Radicalizing Reformation Provoked by Today's Systemic Crises'

Welcome Address

The quincentenary of the Reformation offers us a unique opportunity

Ulrich Duchrow

(Excerpts from the address delivered by Dr. Ulrich Duchrow, Chief Co-ordinator of the Project, 'Radicalizing Reformation Provoked by Today's Systemic Crises', introducing the programme and welcoming the participants).

This is a great moment, the opening of the 3rd International Conference of the project "Radicalizing Reformation – Provoked by the Bible and Today's Crises", at Leucorea (Luther's ancient university), Lutherstadt Wittenberg, from 7 to 10 Jan. 2017.

Who would have believed in 2010, when some of us sent out the invitation for this project, that we would meet in Wittenberg to open the year 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation? Who would have believed that we would be able – without any institutional base – to meet three times, produce seven volumes of studies, 94 Theses and now again such relevant reports and papers.

The quincentenary of the Reformation offers us the unique opportunity to leave behind the normal superficial or even

misleading ways of looking at things. We have the chance together to go into historical depth in analyzing, strategizing and spiritually meditating on the pressing reality. Thus we can create hope, love, faithful commitment and engagement. At this point Luther and other traditions of the Reformation like the Anabaptists, can help with their unequivocal systemic criticism of early capitalism. **This is the reason, why we took the statue of Prof. Axel Seyler "Luther Tramples Money Underfoot", as our Logo.**

Some of our US friends have already articulated this in a conference and a publication under the title "The forgotten

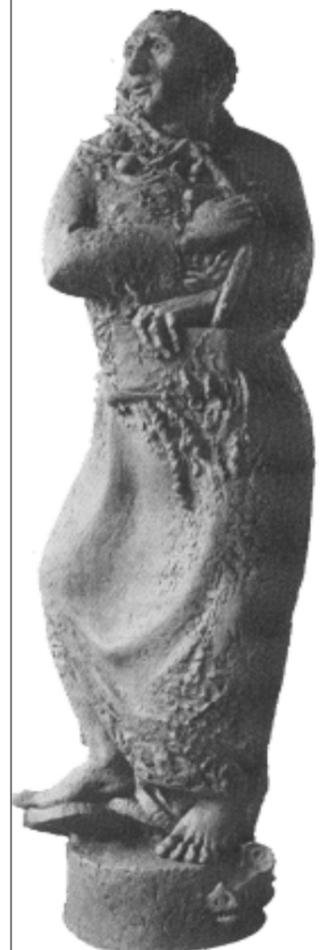
Luther". This highlights Luther's critique of early capitalism, which is normally downplayed by bourgeois churches and theologies. Who, for example, knows that Karl Marx called Luther the first German "national economist" whom he preferred over all economists of his own time? Who has realized that Luther regards Mammon as the most important theological question, like Jesus did?

We are very grateful for the fantastic voluntary commitment of many people and for the trust and financial support of the **University of Halle-Wittenberg**, represented by Prof. Axel Noack, the Evangelical Church in Central Germany and Bishop

Ilse Junckermann, the Evangelical Churches in Baden, Hessen-Nassau and Westphalia, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover, the EKD and Rev. Jan von Campenhausen, the EMW and its director Christoph Anders, Mission Eine Welt Bayern; Brot für die Welt and, the Ecumenical Theological Education and its former director Dietrich Werner, Dr. Marianne Schröter and the stewards Andres Lopez, Pauline Reppenhagen and Konrad Zimare.

The facilitators of our project are **Karen Bloomquist, Martin Hoffmann, Craig Nesson and Hans Ulrich**. We, along with **Axel Noack**, prepared the conference together.

Conference Logo



"Luther zertritt das Geld" ("Luther tramples money underfoot") by sculptor Axel Seyler

adopt every sentence but rather to stimulate your own faith community to seriously deal with these issues and come to committed decisions so that we together might turn around and become part of God's work for life by overcoming the forces of death in this critical situation.

– Co-ordinating Team



Prof. Axel Noack, Professor at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, welcomes the participants to Leucorea. L to R: Dr. Ulrich Duchrow, Dr. Birgit Mahnkopf, Dr. Karen Bloomquist and Dr. Vitor Westhelle

The project "Radicalizing Reformation"

>>> Contd. from Page 1 Col. 1

We started the project "Radicalizing Reformation – Provoked by the Bible and Today's Crises" in 2010 and published earlier results in 6 volumes of studies and 94 Theses (see www.radicalizing-reformation.com)

Following up our previous reflections on the meaning of the Reformation our purpose was to respond to concrete crises in

today's context.

We came to Wittenberg in a spirit of gratitude to God for the Reformation legacy and for the revolution in church and society set in motion in this town in the year 1517. But we also realized that the Reformation and also its subsequent traditions produced various errors which have to be confessed and overcome in the light of the Bible. We believe that striking

this balance can best be promoted by following the prophets and Jesus in living out God's gracious gift of justice in the midst of dangerous crises. The document JUSTICE ALONE is first of all a protest against our own complicity in the systems that produce poverty, forced migration and division among peoples of the world.

"The gospel is inherently nonviolent – promising, inviting, welcoming, witnessing – never

coercive or forcing" (Wittenberg Declaration IV).

This is the spirit in which we invite you to join our attempt to confess our faith on the basis of the Bible and other Abrahamic faith traditions in relation to what we experience as the most critical conflicts. Of course, these are only examples of the multiple crises, rooted in the systemic crisis, to be addressed.

Our idea is not to ask you to

Panel Sessions

The keynote address was delivered by Birgit Mahnkopf on "Root cause of forced migration and related crises and social inequality war/terror and climate disasters as a result of imperial capitalism". There were 5 Panel Presentations at the 3rd International Conference.

The first Panel was on "How, in the context of forced migration and related crises, are churches – in collaboration with others – critiquing the global political economy and working on alternatives? How do we draw on the Bible and Luther's Bible-based system critique of early capitalism? The Moderator was Hans Ulrich. Mammen Varkey, Lilia Solano, John M. Itty, Paul Wee and Rudianto presented papers.



L to R: Mammen Varkey, John M. Itty, Rudianto, Paul Wee and Lilia Solano

The second Panel was on "How are we moving from the anti-Semitic and Islamophobic tendencies in Reformation writings toward inter-religious solidarity for justice?" – The example of Palestine/Israel. Dr. Ulrich Duchrow moderated the session Charles Amjad-ali, Junaid Ahmad, Mark Braverman, Munther Isaac and Brigitte Kahl made presentations.



L to R: Munther Isaac, Brigitte Kahl, Amjad-ali, Junaid Ahmad, Mark Braverman,

3rd International Conference on 'Radicalizing Reformation Provoked by Today's Systemic Crises'

Wittenberg Declaration

Justice Alone

"Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24)

Justice is the cry of the majority of people around the world – a world subjected to the logic, spirit and practice of imperial capitalism for at least 500 years.

Justice is the golden thread throughout the Bible – the Hebrew Bible and the messianic scriptures of the Second Testament. "**Liberation towards Justice**" was the title of the first of several volumes in the Radicalizing Reformation book series.

In the face of early capitalism, Martin Luther claimed: **"If the (bank and trading) corporations are to remain, right and honesty must go down. If right and honesty are to remain the corporations must go"** ("On Trade and Usury").

The latest of many catastrophes produced by this capitalist culture are climate change and the millions who have been driven from their homes and made refugees. This civilization kills and is suicidal. In the long range, it has to be replaced by a culture that makes life possible in the future through just relations. In the midst of crises we must begin with concrete examples and transformation possibilities right now. This is what those from Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe brought when they met together in Wittenberg.

People of all faiths, specifically Christians in the tradition of the Reformation, urgently need to respond to these kairotic times and

1. join the global ecumenical consensus to reject the increasingly totalitarian, multi-dimensional capitalist culture and work for just and life-enhancing alternatives,
2. join the struggle of small farmers/peasants worldwide by rejecting agribusiness and land-grabbing and by supporting life-enhancing agriculture instead,
3. bring justice to Palestinians and Israelis through interreligious solidarity by rejecting the state of Israel's notorious violation of international law and human rights, and by rejecting how some Christian theologues, business and politics continue to provide support for Israel's occupation of Palestinian land,
4. reject all military, sexual, racist, structural and cultural violence and join non-violent action for life,
5. develop participatory institutions and practices in faith communities, society and politics on the basis that "no human being is illegal but created in the image of God".

I: Justice Through Overcoming Capitalist Civilization

"You cannot serve God and money" (Luke 16:13)

We believe that Jesus calls us to make a definite choice between God and Mammon. All people have the inherent right to justice, freedom, dignity, and peace. On this basis, Martin Luther sharply criticized the evolving unjust and oppressive capitalist system. The hegemonic capitalistic model increasingly develops a totalitarian

regime with its consequences. The huge increase of people who are forced to migrate is but one of its serious consequences today. This massive influx is the result of the sin of political economy and the export of arms and wars to peripheral countries. The forced migration of manual workers across the world is the result of concealed schemes of capitalist accumulation embedded in the neoliberal economic policy.

We confess being part of a "Babylonian captivity" that obstructs both the revolutionary spirit of the Reformation and also people's and civil rights.

We reject all forms of systems and practices that deny freedom, democracy, and peoples' participation.

We call upon people and communities of faith to reject the wisdom of greedy money and to embrace the wisdom of the cross, and to work for reconstructing the economic, political and social systems and religious institutions to ensure the dignity and worth of all humans. We especially call upon churches to develop and pursue ways of mission that aim to transform the political systems so that they become more humane. We also call upon the congregations, synods and mission agencies to draw action programs that promote peace and justice in society.

We commit ourselves to promote authentic Christian faith and Reformation spirituality that confronts the social and political powers causing violence, poverty, deprivation and worship of Mammon, and shares congregational resources for bringing about greater economic equity and justice.

II: Justice through ecologically-sensitive agriculture and land distribution

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now" (Romans 8:22)

We believe that God's mission for life in its fullness obliges all Christians and churches to commit themselves to the ecumenical process of "Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation." Hearing the radical voices of the Reformation we seek to get out of a world economic system that results in land-grabbing and destruction of nature. Within a biblical approach to land, relationships and values of subsistence are upheld, and people empowered for healthier relationships between land and people.

We confess that we stand in the tradition of Luther who legitimated the feudal order against the peasants in a way not consistent with the Bible. Later Lutheran traditions drew the wrong conclusion that economics and politics follow autonomous laws, although Luther himself rejected the early capitalist system. We confess that churches adapted themselves to the modernization and industrialization of agriculture with the "Protestant work ethic" and the spiritual interest in material success and

even provided ideological underpinnings for capitalism. Those working with churches often have advocated an ideology and theology of development that supported this.

We reject the imperial hegemonic system of neoliberal policies, financial capitalism and agribusiness, which provokes deep inequalities in the relations of production and exchange. The ongoing land alienation, land confiscation and undercutting of subsistence economies, as well as the growing practice of monocultures, are economic abuses. Genetically modified seeds and the intensive application of pesticides are extractive production models that risk serious consequences for the people and the environment.

We call upon churches to address the challenges of socio-economic and environmental justice as key to their mission. Opportunities need to be provided for reflection, debate and alternative proposals from of a liberation perspective.

We commit ourselves to struggle side by side with the movements seeking more healthy land-people relationships, to help develop land policy of our churches and societies, to integrate these issues in educational curricula and to produce materials for this purpose.

III: Interreligious Solidarity for Justice in Palestine/Israel

"To be vessels of mercy God has called us – not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles" (Romans 9: 24)

We believe with the Apostle Paul that in the Messiah Jesus the ethnic, religious, class and gender binaries and power asymmetries are overcome (Gal 3: 28). We believe that the post-Constantinian anti-Judaism in Christianity, and especially Luther's abominable and cruel pamphlets against Jews, used by Nazism as a basis for murdering millions of people, was a crime against humanity. But we strongly believe that Christians and churches cannot atone for this crime by failing to take a stand against the unacceptable violations of human rights and international law by the State of Israel in its colonization of historic Palestine and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people beyond the UN-recognized borders.

We confess being part of the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and also of the silence of Christian churches vis-à-vis the unbearable oppression of Palestinians.

We reject all forms of anti-Semitism and at the same time all theologies that support and justify the dispossession and continuing oppression of Palestinians. We reject as well the church theology that underlies the churches' silence, preaching reconciliation and dialogue without justice.

Contd. Page 5 Col. 1 ...>>>

Panel Sessions

Panel III: "How are we struggling today against corporate controlled agribusiness and for ecologically-sensitive agriculture, land distribution? How does this relate to the Peasant Wars? What are the consequences for development policies?" Moderator: Martin Hoffmann, Panel: Daniel Beros, Nancy Cardoso, Praveen Perumalla, Josef Widyatmadja, Christoph Zimmer.



L to R: Nancy Cardoso, Josef Widyatmadja, Praveen Perumalla, Daniel Beros, Christoph Zimmer

Panel IV: "How do we overcome violence against nature and humans, particularly women, today with non-violent action? How are we drawing from different Reformation traditions, ecumenically and interreligiously?" Moderator: Craig Nesson, Panel: Claudete Beise, Mungki A. Sasmita, Christopher Rajkumar, Evangeline Anderson Rajkumar, Moiserale Prince Dibeela and Maake Masango.



L to R: Claudete Beise, Mungki A. Sasmita, Christopher Rajkumar, Evangeline Anderson Rajkumar, Moiserale Prince Dibeela and Maake Masango

3rd International Conference on 'Radicalizing Reformation Provoked by Today's Systemic Crises'

[Excerpts from the sermon preached by Bishop Dr. Munib Younan, President, Lutheran World Federation, at the Conference]

A Radical Reformation of the Church, the Society and the World

Munib Younan

Text: John 1: 14 - 17

It is an honor for me to be with you here in Wittenberg today, in the city of Luther, as we begin the 500th Anniversary Year of the Reformation.

This Sunday (8 January 2017) we are celebrating the Feast of the Epiphany. Today, the Lutheran church honors the Visit of the Magi twelve days after Christmas, but at one time in history the two feasts were celebrated together. Still today, the Armenian Church continues to celebrate as a single event the birth of Jesus in my homeland, and the arrival of visitors from faraway lands.

The arrival of Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar from afar, signals that the news has spread further than the Bethlehem countryside. The Word has become flesh. **The Messiah has come, not just for my land, but for every land and nation. This is the Good News of Epiphany! And for this reason, Epiphany is a celebration of mission. Mission is also the**

“ We remember how the reformers did not seek to magnify themselves, but always pointed the church to Christ. Our call is the same. As Luther famously said, the disciple's first concern is to seek “was Christum treibet”. What promotes Christ? This is a critical message for all. Are we like John, seeking that Christ grows within us and we become small? Or have our concerns, our worries, our churches, our denominations, our organizations, and even our commemorations become large, and Christ very small? As we look to the next five hundred years of the Reformation movement, we must remember that unless what we do, carries and promotes the cross of Christ, then it is not mission. It is not Gospel. It is not witness. It is merely our private business. I think we cannot overemphasize the importance of this core Reformation message today. ”

All things must point to Christ!

focus of this conference.

In light of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, we seek to “radicalize Reformation” for the sake of Christ, for the sake of the church, and for the sake of mission to our neighbors. On this Feast of Epiphany, which is a feast of mission, our preaching text from the Gospel according to John offers us, several important themes to consider.

It is written: John testified to him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, “He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.”

It is important to consider John's particular kind of witness.

John was a spiritual person with many followers. Given his popularity, he easily could have announced himself to be the Messiah. He would have been well-received as a Messiah figure. People were already asking him, “Are you Elijah? Say about yourself?” (John 1:21) But John did not seize the opportunity to make himself famous. He was just the forerunner, and always pointed the crowds and his followers to Jesus. “I am the one crying out in the wilderness” he said. (John 1:23). “I baptize with water. Among you stands one.” (John 1:23)

In the same way, we remember how the reformers did not seek to magnify themselves,

but always pointed the church to Christ. Our call is the same. As Luther famously said, the disciple's first concern is to seek “was Christum treibet”. What promotes Christ? This is a critical message for all. Are we like John, seeking that Christ grows within us and we become small? Or have our concerns, our worries, our churches, our denominations, our organizations, and even our commemorations become large, and Christ very small?

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witness. It is merely our private business.

I think we cannot overemphasize the importance of this core Reformation message today. All things must point to Christ!

We must not be weighed down with worry about how to radically reform our world. Jesus is doing it already. In fact, the Reformation was not a one-time event. It did not begin in 1517, nor did it end when the great reformers died. The Reformation of the world has been and is ongoing.

This is the reason Lutherans still proclaim the motto, “Ecclesia semper reformanda est” – the church is always reforming.

To be continued

**In the next issue
A Suffering Church is
a Reforming Church**

Wittenberg Declaration

Justice Alone

>>> **Contd. from Page 4 Col. 3**

We call upon the churches, including the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), to repudiate Luther's writings against the Jews and at the same time to clearly and publicly side with our sister churches and people of all faiths in Palestine/Israel and worldwide in challenging their governments to condition all aid for and cooperation with the State of Israel on the liberation of Palestine according to UN resolutions and fundamental principles of human rights. This will also liberate the State of Israel from being an oppressor and open paths for a shared City of Jerusalem. We ask that all follow the example of many churches in the USA, South Africa, and Scotland, by supporting the non-violent measures of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) called for in 2005 by Palestinian civil society. This call was affirmed in 2009 by the churches of the region in the Kairos Palestine Document. It should be reinforced today after 50 years of the illegal colonization of the West Bank and the inhuman blockade of Gaza. We also ask the churches to set clear standards for all church-sponsored travel to Palestine/Israel.

We commit ourselves to pray for peace and justice in Palestine/Israel, to work at all levels to live up to these

theological and political commitments ourselves. This includes the challenge of becoming confessing churches, engaging in non-violent civil disobedience, welcoming of refugees from the region and working together with people of all faiths for developing a culture of life for all.

IV: Justice Through Non-violent Action

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (John 14:27)

We believe that the gospel is essentially “the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15). This peace is not merely a peace between humanity and God but also peace among humans and with creation. The gospel is inherently nonviolent – promising, inviting, welcoming, witnessing – never coercive or forcing. In light of the contemporary crises this means peace with justice.

We confess that nonviolent action is a constitutive character of Christian witness to

Panel Sessions

Panel V: “How, in the context of forced migration and related crises, are congregations and other organizations developing resistance to market forces so as to form critical, creative and politically active citizens? What are the implications for religious education and the formation of church leaders today?”



Karen Bloomquist moderated the Panel Discussion V: Dietrich Werner, Karin Ulrich, Kuntadi Sumadikarya, Conrad Braaten, Silfredo Dalferth and Mareike Bangun presented papers

the world. Violence can never serve as a means for attaining any goal, for God has reconciled all things to Godself (Colossians 1:19-20). Practicing peace means participating in disciplined and organized direct nonviolent action to address specific contexts in need of social change.

We reject all forms of violence – structural violence, state violence, technological violence, military violence, physical and psychological violence of every kind – as well as the abuse of religion. Furthermore we reject the international arms trade that perpetuates violence across the globe. The universality of violence becomes evident in the endemic practice of constructing “others” as enemies, especially in making others into scapegoats. Jesus Christ died as the final scapegoat to put an end to the spirals of fear and violence that lead us to scapegoat others. This nonviolent understanding of the cross is urgently needed at this moment in human history.

We call upon churches to receive the blessing of God's all-embracing peace (shalom/salaam) as life-giving relationships with God, other persons, and all creation. Practicing peace means living, speaking, and acting without violence. Practicing peace begins with how one speaks, exercising no rhetorical violence. Practicing peace means doing justice:

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3rd International Conference on 'Radicalizing Reformation Provoked by Today's Systemic Crises'

Wittenberg Declaration

Justice Alone

**V: Justice Through Nurturing Practices
for Resistance and Transformation**

**"For Christ is our peace, who has made us both
one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility"
(Eph 2: 14)**

We believe that theological insights raised through the Reformation liberate people from fear and systemic bondage and empower us to pursue justice and the common good for neighbors throughout the whole global community. Luther addressed the systemic challenges of his day; so must we today.

We confess that we too often treat those who do not believe, look or live like "us" as if they were not also created in the image of God. This "us" vs. "them" dualism is contrary to the heart of the gospel. We seek to be more effective communicators of the public implications of this, so that it might transform those who, out of anger and frustration, succumb instead to populist appeals that blame those who are different.

We reject expressions of nativism and xenophobia that are attracting many people today. We also reject religion being misused to distance or exploit others, rather than building bridges with those of other faiths or backgrounds.

We call upon churches and educational institutions to nurture liberating public theology that can effectively engage and transform the systemic economic, political and environmental injustices that are at the root of what people are experiencing and feeling, and to hold governments accountable for such.

We commit ourselves to live with and develop relationships with those who are migrants and our new neighbors as equal subjects, open to being transformed through these relationships.

We urge that in congregations and other settings, critical Bible studies engage the urgent systemic challenges in their contexts and globally, encourage people to think critically about the systems dominating their lives, and empower them for individual and collective resistance and transformation of these challenges for the sake of greater dignity and justice for all. ●

>>> *Contd. from Page 5 Col. 3*

listening, welcoming, forgiving, sharing, giving, healing, being merciful, and helping. All of these are works of resistance to violence. In this context we are called to build dialogue mutually and intentionally – especially with respect to diversity of race, gender, ethnicity, political affiliation, and including religion – to work against prejudices and stereotypes in order to solve the problem of humanity and to build harmonious life.

We commit ourselves to participate in the common life of all in a political community that is characterized by peaceful practices and truth-telling. Furthermore we commit to empowering the next generation, children and youth, to reject violence. Practicing peace means continuing to sustain the effort of the decade to end violence, being realistic with regard to one's own responsibility, because only by doing so will peace prevail in the world.

A few participants reflect on the Wittenberg Conference

A pilgrimage

Moiserale Prince Dibeela



From 7 to 10 January 2017, I had the privilege of joining with nearly seventy theologians and theological students at a conference on Radicalizing Reformation. The conference was organized by the renowned theologian, scholar and activist Prof Ulrich Duchrow, at Wittenberg, Germany.

The night I arrived in Wittenberg, the city of Martin Luther, it was wintry and dark, with snow-covering the surfaces of the roads. I lost my way and could not easily find Leucoria, the conference centre where the conference was held. As I walked through the city, cold and slippery, I thought to myself that these might have been the streets that Martin Luther walked through. This for me became a pilgrimage, a walk through history, a privilege to participate in the protestant journey of *ecclesia semper reformanda*.

The conference itself was beyond expectation. The participants sought to use Luther's protest theology as a lens to read contemporary manifestations of empire. One major issue was the situation of the occupation of Palestinian lands by apartheid Israel. It became clear that unless a new quest for reading the Bible was attained, the Imperial system would continue to use propaganda to deceive and mask their oppression using Biblical rhetoric. Further, the conference looked at the growth of fascist and right wing organizations throughout Europe. The epitome of these disconcerting developments is the recent election of Donald Trump who is openly racist, chauvinistic and islamophobic.

Several panels, during the conference, recognized that one of the major challenges of the present generation is economic inequality generated by neo-liberal policies. Through several discourses it became clearer that current inequalities cannot be done away with as long as we operate our economies on the basis of the current imperial economic system.

Another major issue that was discussed included current immigration crises, especially arising out of wars engineered by the West and the East in places such as Syria, Afghanistan, Libya and other places. It became apparent that this is a ticking bomb that needs to be addressed with dexterity as soon as possible.

As we celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the reformation the global church has to move towards being a confessing church, especially in the light of financial capitalism that renders the majority of the human race impoverished.

(Rev. Dr. Moiserale Prince Dibeela, Botswana, is former President of the Council for World Mission)

The Spirit of Reformation will not die

Evangeline Anderson Rajkumar



Justice Alone! The message flowed as the outcome of the International Conference in Wittenberg as a unanimous shout of joy! It is so easy to be overwhelmed by everything connected to 500 years of Reformation history when one sets foot in that little town of Wittenberg.

The world paused for me that moment when I stood at 'the door' where Luther nailed the 95 theses! From where did this man, Martin Luther derive such courage and faith to articulate his deep faith in God as a God of Love, God of Justice and God of all? His aim was not simply to articulate *his personal faith* in God. Rather, Martin Luther, believed that it was an important personal task to point out to the awesome eternal and universal grace of God. Martin Luther turned the needle of time and history. He turned the needle of faith to point to God as the eternal source of Grace, mercy and forgiveness, the Source of Life and salvation.

Ulrich Duchrow, the eminent Lutheran Theologian has to be congratulated for his unstinting effort in envisioning the global conference from its inception to fruition stage.

Let me summarize my learning moments:

• **With God, even ONE is majority:** This logic is baffling! From the very beginning in history, God did not leave the world without witnesses to the triune God: Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. People with various gifts were chosen as instruments to share the story of God's love, grace and justice in this world. Martin Luther was such an instrument that God used. When God calls, God also equips. Martin Luther was not just an individual; he was an Institution! Martin Luther's reformation did not begin on Funds. His faith was, Justification by faith through grace. Justice flowed in this struggle. God's Justice wins!

• **The Power of the Word of God / Scripture:** God's Word opens our hearts to see God's utter common grace for all in this world. Just because one tries to speak lies very loud, he/she cannot turn any untruth into truth, injustice into justice. The power of the empty tomb/ the resurrection stands beyond the reach of the Cross.

• God's eternal and universal grace is a

freely given gift of God. This is the meaning and implication of being created in the 'Image of God' and this gracious gift for all can be experienced, cherished and mutually affirmed. No one can claim any superiority based on one's faith, skin color, creed, caste, region, sex or sexuality. No one can deny another of the right to be human.

As one born and raised within the Lutheran tradition, and after thirty five years of engaging in theology, ecumenism and activism for the sake of Justice, all I can say is this: It is my faith in God as revealed by Jesus Christ that makes me embrace the fundamental principles of inclusivity and continuity. The Lutheran Faith and discipline increased in me, the passion to fight for justice and gave me the courage to speak out, no matter what, as long as one is open to be corrected in the light of the Gospel. *The spirit of Reformation will not die; it will be sustained by God for eternity.*

[Rev. Dr. Evangeline Anderson Rajkumar is Adjunct Professor at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Lenoir Rhyne University, Atlanta, USA]

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The disciples' most vexing question and the Risen Lord's response - 10



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Mammen Varkey

At this time none of them ran away!

"..... To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God..... So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.'"

The Acts of the Apostles 1:1 - 8.(RSV)

[Continuation of the Reflection Along with Him - 337, 'In witnessing, Jesus calls us inescapably to have a new 'measure' and to reject this world's 'measure', published in the Issue 22 (Volume 29) of the People's Reporter]

To the One who conquered the impossible, the death, his beloved disciples asked their most vexing question, "Lord, will you at this time restore the

kingdom to Israel?" It was responding to their Master's call, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1: 15), that they left everything and followed him.

'Forsaking' and 'fleeing' are clear indications!

In fact, they all had been following him, most anxiously looking forward to the

establishment of the 'kingdom'. **Terribly shattered by the unfulfilment of their hope, all of them ran away when their Master was crucified. "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled." Matt. 26: 56. The 'forsaking' and the 'fleeing' are clear indications of their rejection of the way of the Cross for the establishment of the kingdom. If the one who should have been the ruler in the kingdom of God, chose to die, how could the kingdom be established?**

The establishment of the kingdom would be delayed!

Jesus' conquering of death, something normally unimaginable, revived the hope of the disciples in the power of the Risen Lord to establish the kingdom. So, when the disciples met their Risen Lord, with inestimable hope but with indescribable anxiety, asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" But the Lord's reply was blunt, forthright and so most upsetting, shocking. Jesus said, "It is not for you to know times or seasons

which the Father has fixed by his own authority." Acts 1: 7. It must have been, for them, the most unanticipated response. It must have been totally incomprehensible too, for them. When they were being called, their Master had been proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." Mark 1: 15. But, even after conquering the most impossible, the death, the most triumphant Master of theirs, told them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority". How could the disciples have reconciled this response with their Master's earlier proclamation, "The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God is at hand"? But now, the most triumphant one said that it was not for them to know the 'times and seasons which the Father fixed by his own authority'. It implied that the establishment of the kingdom of God would be delayed!

A profound self-critical examination

The Risen Lord's reply must have terribly shocked them but it

did help them to have a deep reflection on their understanding of the 'Kingdom of God' and their role in it. **It led to a profound self-critical examination.** Further, most importantly, they were forcefully urged by the one who was crucified, to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. It was a new moment for them. In the earlier phase, they all must have thought, rather they strongly believed, that the kingdom of God would be established by Jesus during his life-time. In the new phase, even when they were not sure of the precise date of the establishment of the 'Kingdom of God', they were called to be his witnesses 'unto the end of the earth'. At this time, none of them ran away.

All of them did believe that they were called to be witnesses beyond Jerusalem and in all places, near and far. And they did not 'forsake him and flee away' but they set out for witnessing.

To be continued

A few participants reflect on the Wittenberg Conference

Continued from Page 6

Make space for the radical voices of the past and their receptions in history

Nancy Cardoso Pereira



'Radicalizing the Reformation' only makes sense if it feeds memory with rebellion and hope. We are not to please a radical criticism coming out of the West as a "desire to preserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject" (Dussel).

We are to consider the non-written story of the crushing defeat and exploitation of the defenseless by the powerful the indigenous peoples of the Americas, of the Africans who were brought to the Americas as slaves, and of the migrant-indentured servants, and

Radicalizing Reformation needs to be an exercise that is not exhausted in the retellings of the Reformation itself but that makes space for the radical voices of the past and their receptions in history.

landless peasants rented by oligarchs.

The peasant war (1524) was part of a wider context of changes. Peasant from all over Europe took the path of migration to the new world fleeing from wars, hunger, disease and expropriation; there was no place for those millions in the capitalism in formation.

In this sense, Land was not a secondary issue or the peasant war, a collateral crisis. The repression and the demonization of peasants by the hegemonic reformers had, and have, heavy costs for protestant theologies, especially in its inability to understand the last 500 years and its world-system metabolism.

We confess that the Reformation provided one of the sources of legitimacy for secularization of governance and enabled the regional authorities to change the institutional structure of economy. The modernization of agriculture in terms of the market and the capitalist industrialization were only possible after the horrors of the war between the confessions and the pressure on peasantry to migrate.

We reject the imperial hegemonic system of neo-liberal policies and financial capitalism which provokes a deeply asymmetry in the relations of

production and exchange. The ongoing land alienation, the land confiscation and the defeat of subsistence economy as well as the growing practice of monocultures are economic abuse. Especially genetically modified seeds and the intensive application of pesticides are extractive production models at the risk of serious consequences for the population and the environment.

Our challenge and commitment today is to support the peasant struggle, to integrate the issue of land and agriculture at the heart of our theology, spirituality and pastoral work. Land is God's dialogue with humanity, it is blessing and life for all.

Every form of private appropriation and exclusion is sin: the land belongs to God; the poor will inherit the land. (Psalm 37).

[Rev. Nancy Cardoso Pereira is a Methodist Pastor in Brazil and a member of the Land Pastoral Commission in Brazil]



**WINE
may lead to
WHINING,
never to
WINNING**

Juhanon Mar Thoma Study Centre

Christmas New Year Inter-Religious Fellowship



Mayor V. K. Prasanth lights the lamp

The Juhanon Mar Thoma Study Centre, Mannanthala, Thiruvananthapuram, founded in the year 1981, to perpetuate the social vision and commitment of the Late Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan celebrated this year's Christmas and New Year along with people of other faiths.

The theme of the programme was "Christ event: Then and Now". The Mayor V.K.Prasanth of Thiruvananthapuram inaugurated the programme on 2 January. In his address, he emphasized the need to live together and work together as a community cutting across religious boundaries. Very Rev. Dr. Jayan Thomas presided over the meeting. Rev. Ebenezer Shine Kumar, Adv. Sudhakar Kurup, Mr. Anil Kumar, Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham and Mr. Oommen George spoke on the occasion. **People from Christian, Hindu and Islamic communities participated in the meeting. — JMMSC News**

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There are no menial jobs,
Only menial attitudes

— William J. Brennan



OXFAM

Stark Inequality: 8 men as rich as half the world

“The gap between the super-rich and the poorest half of the global population is starker than previously thought, with just eight men, from Bill Gates to Michael Bloomberg, owning as much wealth as 3.6 billion people, according to an analysis by Oxfam released on 9 Jan.”

DAVOS, Switzerland (AP) — Presenting its findings on the dawn of the annual gathering of the global political and business elites in the Swiss ski resort of Davos, anti-poverty organization Oxfam says the gap between the very rich and poor is far greater than just a year ago. It's urging leaders to do more than pay lip-service to the problem.

If not, it warns, public anger against this kind of inequality will continue to grow and lead to more seismic political changes akin to last year's election of Donald Trump as U.S. president and Britain's vote to leave the European Union.

“It is obscene for so much wealth to be held in the hands of so few when 1 in 10 people survive on less than \$2 a day,” said Winnie Byanyima, executive director of Oxfam International. “Inequality is trapping hundreds of millions in poverty; it is fracturing our societies and undermining democracy.”

The same report a year earlier said that the richest 62 people on the planet owned as much wealth as the bottom half of the population. However, Oxfam has revised that figure down to eight following new information gathered by Swiss bank Credit Suisse.

Oxfam used Forbes' billionaires list that was last published in March 2016 to make its headline claim. According to the Forbes list, Microsoft founder Gates is the richest individual with a net worth of \$75 billion. The others, in order of ranking, are Amancio Ortega, the Spanish founder of fashion house Inditex, financier Warren Buffett, Mexican business magnate Carlos Slim Helu, Amazon boss Jeff Bezos, Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg, Oracle's Larry Ellison and Bloomberg, the former mayor of New York.

“The implications of the global trust crisis are deep and wide-ranging,” said Richard Edelman, the firm's president and CEO. “It began with the Great Recession of 2008, but like the second and third waves of a tsunami, globalization and technological change have further weakened people's trust in global institutions. The consequence is virulent populism and nationalism as the mass population has taken control away from the elites.”

Edelman highlighted how “the emergence of a media echo chamber” that reinforces personal beliefs while shutting out opposing views has magnified this “cycle of distrust.” According to the survey, search engines are trusted more as an information tool than traditional news editors, 59 percent to 41 percent.

Oxfam outlined measures that it hopes will be enacted to help reduce the inequality.

They include higher taxes on wealth and income to ensure a more level playing field and to fund investments in public services and jobs, greater cooperation among governments on ensuring workers are paid decently and the rich don't dodge their taxes. And business leaders should commit to paying their fair share of taxes and a living wage to employees.

Max Lawson, Oxfam's policy adviser, urged billionaires to “do the right thing,” and to do “what Bill Gates has called on them to do, which is pay their taxes.”

The ability of the rich to avoid paying their fair share of taxes was vividly exposed last year in the so-called “Panama Papers,” a leaked trove of data that revealed details on offshore accounts that helped individuals shelter their wealth.

“We have a situation where billionaires are paying less tax often than their cleaner or their secretary,” Lawson told The Associated Press. “That's crazy.”

It's because of this kind of inequality that trust in institutions has fallen sharply since the global financial crisis of 2008, according to Edelman, one of the world's biggest marketing firms.



Church's Auxiliary for Social Action

Application is invited for the following posts which will be based at CASA Headquarters in Delhi

1 Head of Finance

Qualification : MBA in Finance/ M.Com/CA
Experience : 10 years in Financial Management, Experience of Tally ERP 9, experience in dealing with Income Tax, FCRA and other related statutory requirements
Age : Around 45 years
Package : 12 lakh per annum on CTC basis

2 Administrative Officer

Qualification : Post Graduate in HR Management or any other subject
Experience : 10 years in an Administrative post
Age : Around 45 years
Package : 6 lakh per annum on CTC basis

Interested candidates are requested to send the application in sealed envelope addressed to the Director of CASA at:

Church's Auxiliary for Social Action, (CASA)
Rachna Building, 4th Floor, 2 Rajendra Place, Pusa Road, New Delhi - 110 008

Last date for receiving the application is 31st March 2017

Date: 12th Jan 2017

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The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the editors.