

**REPORT TO THE LWF COUNCIL FROM
THE INSTITUTE FOR ECUMENICAL RESEARCH
IN STRASBOURG
(2013–2014)**

(1) The purpose of the Institute for Ecumenical Research (IER) is, according to its Constitution (art. III), “to contribute to the fulfillment by the Lutheran churches of their ecumenical responsibility in the area of theology.” This is to be done by “(1) appropriate and critical theological research, both historical and systematic, in areas where Christian churches are divided in matters of doctrine and church order, and where theological questions are a matter of controversy.” “(2) The holding of theological seminars and conferences of a scholarly nature.” “(3) Contacts and conversations with theologians from other churches.”

(2) In the time since the last Council meeting in Geneva (2013) the research staff of the Institute has consisted of Prof. Dr. Theodor Dieter and Prof. Dr. Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, the adjunct professors Prof. Dr. André Birmelé and Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Parmentier (both in Strasbourg), and the visiting adjunct professor Prof. Dr. Kenneth Appold (Princeton, New Jersey, USA).

(3) The current LWF Council members who serve on the Board of the Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research, which oversees the Institute, are Bp. Dr. Frank O. July, Chair of the Board, and Bp. Dr. Ndanganeni Petrus Phaswana.

(4) The Institute has served the Lutheran churches and the LWF in close relationship with the Department for Theology and Public Witness and enjoys a very positive working relationship with Rev. Dr. Kaisamari Hintikka and her colleagues. Professors of the Institute participate as consultants in the current dialogues of the LWF:

- Lutheran/Roman-Catholic Commission on Unity (Prof. Dieter)
- Lutheran/Mennonite/Catholic Trialogue (Prof. Dieter)
- Lutheran/Orthodox Dialogue (Prof. Wilson)
- Lutheran/Pentecostal Dialogue [forthcoming] (Prof. Wilson)

The second meeting of the Lutheran/Mennonite/Roman Catholic Trialogue Commission took place in Strasbourg in January 2014, hosted by the IER. Prof. Wilson joined as a guest consultant with a presentation on Lutheran rites of baptism.

(5) The Lutheran/Roman Catholic statement “From Conflict to Communion” was published in 2013. Institute staff have devoted a great deal of time to giving public presentations on the statement and promoting its reception among the churches.

(6) Building on the foundation laid by the proto-dialogue initiated by the Institute with Pentecostals starting in 2004 and concluding in 2010, the LWF and classical Pentecostals now have plans in place to begin a formal dialogue starting in 2015 under the leadership of Dr. Hintikka of the LWF and Pentecostal chair Dr. Jean-Daniel Plüss. In the meanwhile, Prof. Wilson is working on a guidebook to Pentecostal and Charismatic movements intended specifically for Lutheran readers, which should be ready for distribution in 2015.

(7) In preparation for the year 2017, the Catholic Johann Adam Möhler Institute in Paderborn, Germany, and the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg began work on an “Ecumenical Commentary on Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses on Indulgences,”

under the leadership of Wolfgang Thönissen and Theodor Dieter in September 2008. "Ecumenical" does not, in this case, mean an effort to reach a consensus on the understanding or practice of indulgences today. Rather it is a team of Lutheran and Catholic theologians in conversation examining together the Ninety-Five Theses in their historical context. Such a joint effort will strive towards "audiatur et altera pars" (hearing the other side) in understanding the Theses and to develop a common telling of the beginning of the Reformation. It is interesting to note that up until now there has been no comprehensive commentary on the Ninety-Five Theses. With this project, the working group will fulfill this need. Along with the volume of commentary, another volume will follow with a series of individual studies that elaborate comprehensively on certain themes that are important for the interpretation. Further, important texts of the controversy will be reproduced in Latin and German in a third volume. The three volumes intend (a) to offer readers who wish to understand the Theses more deeply both historically and theologically necessary information for the formation of their own judgments, and (b) to propose a comprehensive and detailed interpretation of the Theses. The project is due to take six years. Fourteen theologians from various countries are participating in it. The working group meets alternately in Paderborn and Strasbourg and plans to finish its work in 2016.

(8) The Institute organizes international summer seminars every year addressing challenging ecumenical problems. Usually 50 to 60 participants come from more than 20 countries and many different Christian churches.

The topic of the 2013 Summer Seminar was "Saints without Borders: Ecumenical Reflections on the Great Cloud of Witnesses." At first glance, the saints seem to be one of the major dividing issues between Roman Catholics and the Orthodox on one side and Protestants on the other, with Anglicans perhaps lying somewhere in between. But as with many other matters, a great deal has changed in all of our churches since the dawn of the ecumenical movement. The Catholic canonization process has undergone a great deal of reform. Protestants are beginning to recognize a place for the veneration (if not invocation) of the saints in their own practice. Ecumenical pioneers and leaders have earned admiration and affection outside of their home churches. The common experience of martyrdom in situations of war and persecution has taught the churches greater respect for Christians who have given their lives for Christ outside of their own confessional boundaries. And there is a widespread sense that today's Christians, living in a vastly changed situation from Christians of the past, are longing for different kinds of role models in the task of living out their faith in the world, which invites a broad reconsideration of sanctity in human lives. At our Seminar, we heard a fascinating assortment of lectures on the topic: the Anglican A. K. M. Adam on "Saint-Spotting in Scripture," the Catholic Arnold Angenendt on "The Veneration of the Saints: A Historical Overview," the Orthodox Michael Plekon on "Maria Skobtsova: Making a Saint in the Eastern Church Today," Theodor Dieter on "The Reformation Challenge to the Veneration of the Saints," the Catholic Aimable Musoni on "The Catholic Canonization Process," religious psychologist Klaus Baumann on "The Importance of Models in the Religious," the Lutheran Marc Lienhard on "Ecumenical Pioneers as Models," the Presbyterian Stephen Haynes on "Case Study: Dietrich Bonhoeffer," Elisabeth Parmentier on "Mary: Still Church-Dividing?," the Mennonite Jeremy Bergen on "The Anabaptists' Martyrs Mirror in the Past and for Today," Sarah Hinlicky Wilson on "Parallel Practice and New Possibilities for Lutherans," and the Catholic Guido Dotti on "The Bose Monastery's Ecumenical Martyrology." The lectures may be found on the IER's website, <www.strasbourg-institute.org>.

The topic of the forthcoming 2014 Summer Seminar is "Non-Denominational and Trans-Confessional Movements." Over the last hundred years, innumerable new Christian congregations, churches, and movements have come into being throughout the world. Widely divergent in size and character, they exist both within and outside of the historic churches. As a result of globalization and worldwide migration, this ecclesial trend has grown

massively. With it, the face of global Christianity has been profoundly altered. Many of these congregations and churches have deliberately distanced themselves from the ecumenical movement or have even denounced it, while others have been engaged in it. New alliances and affinities have evolved, oriented toward a common understanding of Scripture, particular shared ethical convictions, or specific common forms and styles of piety.

In this year's Summer Seminar, aspects of this situation will be taken up and discussed through case studies, reports from representatives of these congregations and churches, and theological analysis. We will not merely talk about such churches in this Seminar, but rather with them, striving to understand them better. How is Christian discipleship understood in these communities? How do they see their relationship to other Christian communities, including the historic churches? How is the understanding of the church as the body of Christ expressed in their communities? Which models of the unity of the church are implicitly or explicitly at work among them? Emphases of this Seminar will be: the Evangelical movement both within and outside of the historic churches; the Pentecostal movement alongside the charismatic revival within the historic churches; the so-called megachurches whose focus is the prosperity gospel; and finally ethnic churches abroad, for example the Malagasy, West African, and Romanian churches in Strasbourg.

(9) In cooperation with the LWF Center in Wittenberg, the Institute annually offers a two-week course called "Studying Luther in Wittenberg" during the years leading up to 2017. This anniversary presents a special opportunity for the LWF and its member churches to deepen and develop their communion by studying together the theology of Martin Luther. The goals are: (a) to understand the focus of assorted texts of Martin Luther, (b) to experience and imagine the context in which Martin Luther lived, and finally (c) to relate the insights of Luther in a constructive way to the living circumstances of the participants. This ensures a fruitful dialogue that will strengthen the communion of the LWF. Successful participants receive a certificate. It is hoped that participants will return to their respective home churches better equipped to articulate Lutheran theology and eager to announce the Luther Decade and the events for the 500th anniversary, involving their churches in the preparations. For the home churches, these seminars will provide the opportunity to offer their pastors additional theological education.

The fifth Institute-led seminar took place in November 2013. Twenty-one participants (our largest group yet) came from Argentina, Australia, Columbia, Denmark, Ethiopia, Germany, Greenland, Hungary, Latvia, Madagascar, Myanmar, Senegal, Slovakia, South Africa, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, and the United States. The theme of this seminar was Luther's teaching on the church. We began with an introduction into Luther's life and times, and then proceeded to close study of numerous texts of the reformer. Through both lectures and discussions we analyzed Luther's teaching on justification by faith through the treatise "The Freedom of a Christian," Fifty Theses on the Remission of Sin, and the sermon on "Two Kinds of Righteousness." Law and Gospel were considered through his writings "How Christians Should Regard Moses" and "What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels." Then we took up Luther's understandings of the sacraments of baptism and communion through selections from "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper," and "On Repebatism." In the third segment of the seminar we turned to Luther's more specifically ecclesial writings, dealing with the marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*), the priesthood of all believers and the pastoral and episcopal offices, the treatise "That a Christian Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Doctrine," and selections from the Small Catechism, concluding with Articles IV-VIII of Melancthon's Augsburg Confession and the ordination liturgy used in Wittenberg.

It is always fascinating to experience how Luther's theology can draw together such diverse persons from so many different contexts and how intense the encounter with his thought is. When we take the time to get to know one another and become open to each other, our diversity as so many different people and views becomes profoundly enriching,

even while we remain united around a common center. And it is simply beautiful when people begin to reflect and think theologically together!

The November 2014 Seminar will discuss the Christian and temporal authority, addressing such questions as church and state, citizenship and Christianity, and two-kingdoms and three-estates theology.

(10) In June 2013, the IER invited seven Slovak doctoral students—four Lutheran, two Roman Catholic, and one Old Catholic—along with Prof. Dr. L'ubomir Batka from the Lutheran faculty in Bratislava to participate in an intensive ecumenical seminar in Strasbourg from June 23 to 30. The Lutheran and the Catholic church in Slovakia have few contacts with each other on account of the very painful conflicts of the past which still make their effects felt in the present. The idea of the seminar was that common work on relevant ecumenical documents far from home could create a new opportunity for young Catholic and Lutheran theologians to talk with one another. The texts under examination were the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and the new Catholic-Lutheran statement "From Conflict to Communion," which deals with the question of whether and how Lutherans together with Catholics can commemorate the 2017 anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation. Under the direction of Institute Prof. Dieter, the two documents were carefully and precisely read and then discussed in detail. At the same time, the conversations ranged widely and often lasted until late in the night. There was an atmosphere of openness, listening, and desire to understand that furthered the sense of trust, which the participants welcomed gladly. The group work will continue in Bratislava: a plan was formed for a group of Catholic and Lutheran students to translate "From Conflict to Communion" into Slovak, which will create further opportunities for taking up theological questions on the relationships between Catholics and Lutherans.

(11) As has long been the custom, the IER hosts a gathering of ecumenists every 18 months at the Château Klingenthal in the Vosges mountains, not far from Strasbourg, for unofficial discussion and debate on the state of ecumenism. The September 2013 gathering addressed the topic of "Prospects for the Future in Ecumenical Research and Dialogue." A panel of Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican, and Reformed experts considered such issues as what makes for a church-dividing issue and how to overcome its divisive nature, conciliarity in the early church, and an analysis of the new Faith and Order document on "The Church."

(12) A 65th birthday is an occasion to look back, but the IER decided instead to look forward to celebrate our colleague André Birmelé's 65th birthday on March 14, 2014. He has dedicated a large part of his life to the church and academic theology in the domain of ecumenism. For this reason ten younger theologians were invited to the Institute and asked them to develop their thoughts on the "ecumenism of tomorrow," based on their own experience and scholarship. All this took place at a symposium in Strasbourg from March 12 to 14 of this year. The topics ranged from "The First Year with Pope Francis" to "Ecumenism: Elbow Room for Freedom" to "The Impact of Taizé on Paul Ricoeur," offered by Lutheran, Catholic, and Free Church scholars. In addition to honoring Prof. Birmelé, the purpose of the colloquium was to identify and encourage younger ecumenists in order to assure good prospects for future ecumenical work.

(13) The aforementioned document on "The Church" was again the topic of a joint consultation by the IER and the Istituto di Studi Ecumenici San Bernardino in Venice in April 2014. The latter, run by Franciscan brothers, is the only ecumenical institute in Italy outside of Rome. Three of the IER staff contributed study papers on the document in question in addition to the many papers by Franciscan participants in the consultation.

(14) To contribute to the preparations for the upcoming Reformation jubilee, the Institute is planning to offer a "Luther Reading Challenge" for 2015, 2016, and 2017. Selections from Luther's key texts will be made available online every month from January 2015 to October 2017 in English and other languages as possible and as copyright permits. The idea is to create a worldwide, cross-confessional event of many Christians reading and discussing Luther's texts in an online forum. Please check the Institute's website <www.strasbourg-institute.org> later this year for more details.