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A Mirror of Global Lutheranism: Thirteenth General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation

Abstract

The World Lutheran Federation (LWF) is worldwide organization gathering Churches of the Lutheran tradition. Having global reach, the Federation is influenced by different processes and tendencies, including secularism in the Western world, theological and cultural syncretism in many countries from outside the Euro-Atlantic space, interreligious and ethnic conflicts and a dynamic growth of many Churches in Africa and Asia. The last General Assembly of the LWF held in Krakow in September 2023 was a particular opportunity for observing how Lutheranism, regarded as a Christian denomination, operates in various social, political, geographical and cultural contexts, and how the Lutheran Churches are an instrument of global unity, even despite internal conflicts, especially because of ethical problems. The article discusses the most important subjects of the Assembly, considering them in light of the assumed globalisation of Lutheranism. It aims to describe the most significant processes occurring in global Lutheranism, reflected in the Assembly's works. It also discusses the Federation's global commitment, considering particular example of its partaking in the tax justice movement.

Keywords: Lutheran World Federation, General Assembly, globality, ecumenism, Lutheranism.

Zwierciadło globalnego luteranizmu: Trzynaste Zgromadzenie Ogólne Światowej Federacji Luterskiej

Abstrakt

Światowa Federacja Luterska (LWF) jest ogólnoswiatową organizacją zrzeszającą Kościoły tradycji luterskiej. Mając globalny zasięg, odzwierciedla różne procesy i tendencje, w tym sekularyzm w świecie zachodnim, synkretyzm teologiczny i kulturowy w wielu krajach spoza przestrzeni euroatlantyckiej, konflikty międzyreligijne i etniczne oraz dynamiczny rozwój wielu Kościołów w Afryce i Azji. Ostatnie Zgromadzenie Ogólne LWF, które odbyło się w Krakowie we wrześniu 2023 r., było szczególną okazją do zaobserwowania, jak luteranizm, postrzegany jako wyznanie chrześcijańskie, funkcjonuje w różnych kontekstach społecznych, politycznych, geograficznych i kulturowych oraz jak Kościoły luterskie są narzędziem globalnej jedności, nawet pomimo wewnętrznych

konfliktów, zwłaszcza z powodu problemów etycznych. Artykuł omawia najważniejsze tematy Zgromadzenia, rozpatrując je w świetle zakładanej globalizacji luteranizmu. Ma również na celu opisanie głównych procesów zachodzących w globalnym luteranizmie, które znalazły odzwierciedlenie w pracach Zgromadzenia. Pokazuje także globalne zaangażowanie Federacji, biorąc pod uwagę konkretny przykład jej udziału w ruchu sprawiedliwości podatkowej.

Słowa kluczowe: Światowa Federacja Luterska, Zgromadzenie Ogólne, globalność, ekumenizm, luteranizm.

Among many associations with Lutheranism, its globality is rather rarely arose. However, Lutheranism is, and becomes, more and more, a global confession. In her commendable essay on the contemporary Lutheran world, Sarah Wilson notices: “All the historic Churches of the North Atlantic world are coping with the loss of voice, nerve, and faith, as has been amply documented. And like other Christians, northern Lutherans are discovering the almost unnerving vitality of their younger sister Lutheran Churches in the Global South – among them the million-member Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea, the dozen Lutheran Churches of Indonesia that range in size from twelve thousand to over 4 million, and the truly massive Churches in Ethiopia and Tanzania, both of them hovering around 6 million members.”¹ When accounting her experiences from the theological seminary for students from all over the world, Wilson confessed that Luther’s theology has turned out to be as universal as she hoped.

For several decades now, Christianity’s shift to the Global South has been a crucial subject of almost every discussion in the Church. So, Wilson’s essay is more about the dynamism of Lutheran theology in distant corners of the globe than about the crisis in the West. The global spread of Lutheranism is a matter of fact, reflecting all related hopes and difficulties. The Lutherans face challenges, expectations and conflicts similar to those faced also by Catholics, Anglicans, or Reformed Christians. Among this are: secularism in the Western world, theological and cultural syncretism in countries where Christianity is a “new” religion, interreligious conflicts and persecutions, to mention only a few.

Ultimately, observing the results of such a “globalisation” of Lutheranism is a fascinating theological adventure. It helps address the most crucial questions about the future of Christianity and the direction of its development in terms of theological doctrine and statistical figures. It also gives an insight into the processes – sometimes latent – of operating the Christian message in changing and distinct cultural, cognitive and ethical contexts. The last General Assembly of the

¹ The article was supported by the National Science Centre, Poland (ref. no. 2018/31/B/HS1/01254).

Sarah H. Wilson. 2016. Martin Luther at 500 and the State of Global Lutheranism. In *Protestantism after 500 years*. Eds Thomas A. Howard, Mark A. Noll, 290. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lutheran World Federation held in Kraków in September 2023 was a particular opportunity for such an insight. The conference was – undoubtedly – an organisational success. However, most importantly, it revealed the problems, sufferings, and joys of the everyday life of Christians from all over the world.

However, the global dimension of Lutheranism has another aspect. It refers to a commitment of the Lutheran Churches gathered in the Lutheran World Federation to shape a global responsibility – a conscious and active stance of contesting the system regarded as a factor of injustices of the contemporary world. The Federation recognises itself as a place of meeting for Christians from various geographical and cultural contexts who nevertheless have a common foundation and can bring together their different experiences. The LWF is thus a reliable source of knowledge about the most actual processes occurring in distant parts of the world.

The article discusses the most important subjects of the Assembly, considering them in light of the assumed globalisation of Lutheranism. It aims to describe the most significant processes occurring in global Lutheranism, reflected in the Assembly's works. It also discusses the Federation's global commitment, considering particular examples of its partaking in the tax justice movement. The literary analysis of the assembly documents and unpublished observations and reports by some Assembly participants are the methods employed in the paper.

1. The Lutheran World Federation: A Brief Presentation

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was founded in 1947. Its immediate predecessor was the Lutheran World Convention, established in 1923 in Eisenach² to promote efforts to alleviate the consequences of World War I and cooperation between Lutheran churches.³ The context and goals of the founding of the LWF were similar – a devastated and divided Europe and Lutheran communities embarking on a mission to help wounded societies. At the Assembly in Lund, Sweden, it was defined that the purpose of the LWF was to help people in need, to fellowship and cooperate in missionary activity and theological reflection, and to respond to the challenges of the ecumenical movement. The constitution, adopted in the same year, specified that the LWF should be a free association of Lutheran churches, without, however, having legislative authority over them, rather being a platform for Lutherans from all over the world to meet.

² Gilber A. Thiele. 1956. "The Lutheran World Federation." *Concordia Theological Monthly* 27 (6): 446.

³ Albert B. Collver III. 2018. "A Brief Status of Worldwide Lutheranism at the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation." *Logia* 27 (3): 6.

However, defining itself as an association of churches caused controversy in the following decades, referred to as the “great debate.” Peter Brunner emphasised that the LWF faced an “ecclesiological problem”. On the one hand, by referring to the Gospel and the sacraments, it is the Church, as defined in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession. However, on the other hand, by giving up the maintenance of theological discipline, it is unable to act credibly as the Church.⁴ Such structural tensions came to the fore in discussions about individual churches, for example, the Lutheran communities of South Africa and Namibia under apartheid, whose membership was suspended in 1984.

In addition, participation in the ecumenical movement has been controversial. As Michael Roth notes, Lutheran identity was shaped by a double movement: on the one hand, towards non-Lutherans through dialogues and ecumenical relations, and on the other hand, towards a more intense intra-Lutheran community. This two-direction might have been, as Roth adds, for some, a symptom of self-contradiction or even hypocrisy if one assumed that one could not simultaneously pursue ecumenical progress and reinforce confessional separateness. Others, however, saw nothing special in this, arguing that Lutheranism is intrinsically ecumenical. In any case, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Lutheran World Federation was shaken by conflicts over the Federation’s participation in the ecumenical movement.⁵

The controversies within the Federation, as well as the dynamic cultural and religious changes in the following decades of the post-war world, led to a change in self-definition. In 1990, after lengthy discussions at the General Assembly in Curitiba, Brazil (with later amendments added in 1997 and 2010), the Federation’s constitution was amended to state that it is “a community of churches that profess faith in the Triune God, are united in the proclamation of the Word of God and united in the communion of pulpit and altar,”⁶ and that it “confesses the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church and is resolved to serve Christian unity throughout the world (para. III).”⁷

Nevertheless, since the 1990s, the LWF has added to the controversies already mentioned, the tensions to which the whole ecumenical movement is also subject, namely ethical conflicts. Within the Federation, these appear to be particularly acute. The LWF is recognised as holding liberal positions on the key contentious

⁴ Peter Brunner. 1960. “The Lutheran World Federation as Ecclesiological Problem.” *Lutheran World* 7 (3): 237.

⁵ Michael Root. 1994. “The Ecumenical Identity of the Lutheran World Federation.” *The Ecumenical Review* 46 (4): 420.

⁶ Kjell Nordstokke. 1992. “The Ecclesiological Self-Understanding of the Lutheran World Federation: From ‘Free Association’ to Communion of Churches”. *The Ecumenical Review* 44: 481.

⁷ The Lutheran World Federation. 2010. Constitution (1.10.2023). <https://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Constitution%20EN%20final.pdf>

issues of the ethical and moral debate, i.e., the question of the blessing of homosexual couples, the protection of the environment, the socio-economic order, the role of women, etc. In describing the doctrinal direction of the Federation, Collver related that it follows the secular progressive movement, particularly in social, moral, ethical and justice issues.”⁸

On the other hand, the “LWF governing bodies have chosen not to take a position on family, marriage and sexuality issues.”⁹ Instead, it sees its role as a place for permanent debate on these (and other) issues. The topic of human sexuality is particularly controversial, with the division, as in the case of the Anglican Communion, for example, following the pattern of liberal West – conservative Africa. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania stated in 2004 that it opposes the legalisation of homosexual marriage and the ordination of homosexuals to ministry, while the Church of Sweden, when defining the aims of marriage as strengthening the relationship between spouses and creating a safe environment for the upbringing of children, added that such a definition also applies to relationships between same-sex partners.¹⁰

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church *Mekane Yesus*, one of the largest Lutheran communities belonging to the LWF (with more than 10 million faithful), broke its pulpit and altar fellowship with the Church of Sweden in 2013, as well as with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, precisely because of differences in its approach to accepting the emancipation of homosexuals.

This brief mention of the controversy within the LWF around issues of human sexuality refers back to other areas of the Federation’s teaching, mainly social ones. The LWF is one of the most active promoters of ecumenical social thought, which is also shaped in the World Council of Churches. A characteristic feature of this thought is a kind of social constructivism, a reflexive shaping of social norms and culture, taking into account the results of scientific, technological and cultural developments. Adopting this perspective, the LWF is actively involved in shaping gender justice, advocacy for human rights, with a particular focus on women’s rights (this is also reflected in the quotas introduced in the LWF institution itself), the fight against violence rooted in cultural gender patterns, especially patterns of masculinity, climate protection¹¹ and the shaping of peaceful relations between nations, religions or societies. An essential area of LWF reflection is a critique of the dominant economic

⁸ Collver III. 2018. “A Brief Status of Worldwide Lutheranism”, 6.

⁹ The Lutheran World Federation. 2007. Family Marriage, Sexuality (25.10.2023). <https://lutheranworld.org/what-we-do/churches-union/union-building/family-marriage-and-sexuality>.

¹⁰ Craig L. Nesson. 2010. “Three Theses on the Theological Discussion of Homosexuality in the Global Lutheran Communion”. *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37 (3): 191–192.

¹¹ Documents such as “LWF Together Green and Just” (2012) and “Creation Not for Sale” (2017).

system, which Lutheran theologians regard as neoliberal capitalism, and proposals for various alternatives, most often advocating a more significant role for social institutions and the state (such as the convivial economy).

2. The Lutheran World Federation: Structure and aims

A brief outline of the history of the Federation and the characteristics of its social and ecumenical profile refers to a concise description of its structure and declared aims.

The most important decision-making body, and simultaneously, the crucial moment in the life of the organisation is the General Assembly, held every seven years (Lund 1947, Hannover 1952, Minneapolis 1957, Helsinki 1963, Evian 1970, Dar-es-Salaam 1977, Budapest 1980, Curitiba 1987, Hong Kong 1987, Winnipeg 2003, Stuttgart 2010, Windhoek 2017 and Kraków 2023).

The Assembly elects a President and a Council (composed of 48 members representing seven regions), guiding the work of the Federation between Assemblies and defining strategies for its development (at the General Assembly in Krakow, Bishop Henrik Stubkjær from Denmark became the new President). The everyday functioning of the LWF, on the other hand, is ensured by the Communion Office, headed by the General Secretary (as of 2019, this is the Rev Dr Anne Burghardt from Estonia), dealing with ecumenical relations, relations within the Federation and the Congregation office, as well as three Departments: Department for Theology, Mission and Justice, Department for World Service and Department for Planning and Coordination. The Community Office is located in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva (next to the WCC headquarters). The global reach of the Federation is reflected in its numbers: there are 150 member churches, representing 77 million Lutherans from seven regions of the world (according to the division adopted by the LWF: Asia, Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, Central and Western Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Nordic countries, North America).

This structure resonates with the stated objectives. The Federation, in its self-definition referring to the constitution mentioned above, emphasises that it is a global community of churches of the Lutheran tradition, living and working together for a just, peaceful and equitable world and that it strives “to put our Christian faith into action through humanitarian and development work, advocacy, shared witness, and dialogue.”¹² Thus, it can be said that, in terms of objec-

¹² The Lutheran World Federation. 2022. Working For Peace (10.11.2023). <https://lutheran-world.org/who-we-are>.

tives, the horizontal dimension takes priority – a theology of social commitment and salvation “here and now” (*hic et nunc*) is emphasised.

The vertical dimension is more manifested in the description of the Lutheran “identity”, which is also intended to unite the churches. The Federation describes that the member churches, united in the communion of pulpit and altar, profess faith in the Triune God, the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and justification by faith alone proclaimed in word and sacraments and that the Lutheran identity “is rooted in the Word of God, Jesus Christ and the good news that all humanity is liberated by grace.”¹³ To this description, the Federation adds three characteristics of “being Lutheran”: evangelical, sacramental, diaconal. All are translated with quotations from the key articles of the Book of Concord: The Augsburg Confession (Articles IV, VI and VII) and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Article IV).

3. The General Assembly of the LWF in Kraków: Statements and Resolutions

The above characterisation of the structure and objectives, as well as a brief historical outline, allow a better understanding of the event, which took place in Kraków, from 13 to 19th September 2023, under the motto “One body, one spirit, one hope” (Eph 4,4). The meaning, themes and priorities of the Federation can be read by reviewing the public statements and resolutions adopted during the Congress. Often, their choice, as well as the positions adopted, coincide with the ecumenical mainstream epitomised by the World Council of Churches. Thus, in Kraków, declarations were published that address four issues: 1) “Public Statement on Christian Presence and Life in the Holy Land,”¹⁴ in the context of which the Israeli government was criticised (above all for conducting a settlement campaign) and attention was drawn to the deteriorating situation of Christians. 2) “Public Statement on Religious and Ethnic Minorities in Asia,”¹⁵ in the context of which attention was drawn to the persecution of and against various ethnic and social minorities (Dalits and Adivasis in India, for example, were mentioned) and called specifically on the Indian government to respect basic

¹³ The Lutheran World Federation. 2022. Who We Are (11.11.2023). <https://lutheranworld.org/who-we-are/our-lutheran-identity>.

¹⁴ The Lutheran World Federation. 2023. Public Statement on Christian Presence and Life in the Holy Land (15.11.2023). <https://2023.lwfassembly.org/public-statement-christian-presence-and-life-holy-land>.

¹⁵ The Lutheran World Federation. 2023. Public Statement on Religious and Ethnic Minorities in Asia (15.11.2023). <https://2023.lwfassembly.org/public-statement-religious-and-ethnic-minorities-asia>.

human rights. 3) “Public Statement on Tax Justice,”¹⁶ which joined a wide range of organisations calling for the establishment of a global legal order that would reduce the use of tax mechanisms for tax avoidance or tax abuse and thus contribute to diminishing the negative phenomena resulting from tax injustice, such as the climate crisis, violations of human rights and gender justice, forced migration and economic injustice. 4) “Public Statement on the War against Ukraine,” which condemned the brutal attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. It is noteworthy that the declaration uses strong and unequivocal words: it condemns the criminal imperialist ideology that justifies this war, expresses “shock” that some Christian Churches embrace this ideology and justify the war, that in this war, there is only one side, which is the aggressor, therefore any attempt to relativise guilt is indefensible, and finally that the only way is not to pursue a ceasefire, but a peace that will be just.¹⁷

In addition to the above statements, the Federation formulated more than a dozen resolutions, also showing well the areas of interest of the LWF: 1) A resolution expressing support for the decisions adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. 2) A resolution on strengthening theological education (here, support was expressed for the formation of responsible theology). 3) A resolution to support study processes in theology (this includes topics such as the theology of the cross in the 21st century, the relevance of the Augsburg Confession to the contexts of the member churches of the LWF, peace and reconciliation in the context of conflict and in times of war, human identity and participation in the life of the Church and society, with particular attention to power relations, gender relations and patterns of masculinity, theological frameworks in the context of persons with disabilities and the relevance of holistic mission for the LWF in the 21st century. 4) A resolution on inclusivity and participation, referring in particular to the levelling of obstacles that limit participation (e.g. in liturgy) for various reasons. 5) A resolution on shaping an intergenerational justice policy (introducing quotas to ensure representative participation of those under 30 in the activities of the Federation and member Churches). 6) A resolution on moving forward on gender justice policies. 7) A resolution on gender-based violence, noting the continued promotion of sex education with a particular focus on combating sexual and gender-based violence, domestic violence, and sexual harassment, including in the Church, and calling on member Churches to adopt a way of dealing with sexual harassment and gender-based violence. 8) Resolutions affirming the adoption of a policy of parity of participation of lay and young people in the function-

¹⁶ The Lutheran World Federation. 2023. Public Statement on Tax Justice (15.11.2023). <https://2023.lwfassembly.org/public-statement-tax-justice>.

¹⁷ The Lutheran World Federation. 2023. Public Statement on the War Against Ukraine (15.11.2023). <https://2023.lwfassembly.org/public-statement-war-against-ukraine>.

ing of the Federation. 9) A resolution on the rights of persons with disabilities, focusing on the introduction of mechanisms to ensure their participation in the life of the churches. 10) A resolution on Christian-Jewish relations, speaking of developing theological reflection on them from a Lutheran perspective and initiating or continuing local Christian-Jewish dialogues. 11) A resolution on solidarity and humanitarian aid to people affected by natural disasters. 12) A resolution on climate emergency, calling for assistance to people affected by climate change, advocacy in climate justice campaigns, or strengthening efforts to reduce pollution. 13) A resolution on serving people on the move, displaced by various disasters or political and social crises. 14) A resolution on the Church in the public sphere, affirming her voice in various contexts, including those where it is restricted or threatened, and affirming the Federation's participation in various global organisations and political agendas (e.g. related to the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2030). 15) Finally, a resolution to prepare for the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, especially to seek ways to make ecumenical use of the document.¹⁸

4. One Body, One Spirit, One Hope: The Message of the Assembly

The theme of the conference defined the speeches presented on the three consecutive days. The range of topics and relevance showed the global dimension of the Federation but also the common Lutheran identity. The observation by Hans-Georg Link, a longtime employee of the WCC and a devoted ecumenist, that the papers themselves, as well as the preceding and following discussions, focused on spiritual, theological and personal topics rather than political or purely organisational ones, is valuable in this regard.¹⁹ This was, in his view, a noteworthy feature of the Kraków gathering.

4.1. Body

Hans-Georg Link explained his position when considering the presentations by keynote speakers. So, the issue of the Body was analysed early on. Professor Kenneth Tsang from Hong Kong dwelled on the theology of the body of Christ from a Lutheran perspective. He argued that Christ becomes at once a vulnerable and suffering body that understands and accepts human weakness and suffering.

¹⁸ The Lutheran World Federation. 2023. LWF Assembly. Outcomes (17.11.2023). <https://2023.lwfassembly.org/assembly/outcomes>.

¹⁹ Hans-Georg Link. 2023. "Auf dem Weg zu einer «neuen Reformation»? Zur 13. Vollversammlung des Lutherischen Weltbundes in Krakau" (25.10.2023). Email message sent to author.

The Eucharist builds up the Church; in it, all Christians share the living bread of the risen Christ in order to become Christ's body themselves. Benny Sinaga of the Batak Protestant Christian Church in North Sumatra recalled Paul's theology of the body, emphasising that the body of Christ transcends ethnic boundaries between Jews and Greeks, social boundaries between masters and slaves, boundaries of patriarchy, and between man and woman. She related this emancipatory interpretation to the ordination of women and emphasised the universal character of Christianity. Naladzani Josephine Sikhwari from South Africa referred to Paul's theology of the body to emphasise the equality of all members of the Body of Christ. Finally, Bernd Oberdorfer from Augsburg invoked the theology of the Body of Christ to put the sins of Christians, such as Christian anti-Judaism, into a critical perspective.

Hans-Georg Link notes that the speeches were dominated by the motif of the woundedness of the Body of Christ, above all in the dimensions of the various threats and injustices of the modern world, such as climate catastrophe, migration, discrimination, war, and also, though secondarily, the motif of the community of churches shaping the ecumenical perspective.²⁰

4.2. Spirit

The reference to the issue of the Spirit was opened by Barbara Rossing from Chicago, recalling the promise of a new Spirit for Israel living in Babylonian captivity from the book of Ezekiel and asking from which "Babylonian captivity" we need to be liberated today. She emphasised that today, it is about reclaiming a bold spirit and a new energy for life. Rev. Dr Bruk Ayele of the Ethiopian Church *Mekane Yesus* described the difficulties the Church faces in pursuing one spirit against ethnic conflicts that often outweigh a common denominational identity. Bishop Izani Bruch of Chile spoke of the spirit of determinism that is prevailing in the Chilean Church and the need for the hope of one Spirit who will, in the face of all hopelessness, have the power to transform hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. Bishop Bruch also mentioned the erroneous theologies that distort the message of the one Spirit of God (here, she referenced the so-called Prosperity Gospel) and the biblically rooted responsible theology. She links the latter to the need to develop inclusive language and inclusive communities. Hans-Georg Link notes that the speeches demonstrate that the topic of the Spirit in Lutheran theology has been neglected and that the centuries-old focus on the individual Christian stands in the way of the Spirit leading to community.

²⁰ Link. 2023. "Auf dem Weg zu einer «neuen Reformation»?".

4.3 Hope

Gerson Acker from Brazil introduced the topic during the morning prayer, referencing Jürgen Moltmann's interpretation of the theology of hope, which emphasised that hope is born in the experience of doubt and suffering. Antje Jackelén, retired Archbishop of Uppsala, referring to the climate catastrophe, recalled Luther's words: "God hates both pride and doubt." She went on to describe hope as an offensive against the phenomena shaping contemporary reality: polarisation, populism, protectionism, post-truth and patriarchy, and distinguished hope from the following five characteristics: optimism, stoicism, apathy, fatalism and utopia. Finally, she explained Christian hope as 1) our vocation, 2) a culture of coexistence, 3) the embodiment of dawn that encourages singing, 4) confidence in eschatological matters and 5) an ecclesiological approach to society and creation through a prophetic, diaconal, ethical and theological Church.

A poignant speech was given by Bishop Pavlo Shvarts from Ukraine, with his testimony of practical hope included. He opposed the new secular prophets who, with the inferno of the nuclear catastrophe, invoke a new apocalypse and stir up fear and aggression. He countered them with Luther's 62nd thesis: "The true treasure of the Church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God" In the face of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, hope is referred to the most primal questions of life and death. The bishop concluded his speech with the words *dum spiro spero*.²¹

His speech was accompanied by children who described the trauma of the war. During the press conference, Bishop Shvarts also set out the conditions for achieving peace in Ukraine: ceasing violence, confessing sins, and beginning the peace process.

During the conference, the theme of hope also appeared in other contexts. The young participants focused primarily on the issues of climate and ecological risks, while Bishop Antje Jackelén asked about hope in the relationship between Lutherans and Catholics. She referred to theological reflection, such as the Catholic-Lutheran report "From Conflict to Communion," or ecumenical events, such as the participation of Pope Francis at the 2016 Reformation commemoration in Lund, Sweden. She also highlighted the fruits of practical ecumenism in the relationship between the two traditions.

²¹ Link. 2023. „Auf dem Weg zu einer «neuen Reformation»?“.

5. Global Approach of the Lutheran World Federation

This survey of the Assembly's statements, resolutions and papers is still uncompleted and sketchy. However, it allows one to conclude that the Kraków conference confirmed how the declared attributes of the Lutheran identity – evangelical, sacramental, diaconal – are manifested in different corners of the world. The references to the Eucharistic community and the theology of body are the best examples of this.

However, this global Lutheranism is also revealed in the ecumenical stance of the Federation. It is about an obvious openness to other Christian traditions: the presence of the representatives of the Catholic Church, such as Cardinal Kurt Koch, and the fact that the Catholic theologian Tomas Halik was invited to be a keynote speaker are the best proof of this. Nevertheless, it is also about an institutional and doctrinal closeness with the World Council Churches and a strong commitment to the practical ecumenism presented by the WCC. One could state that the Federation, together with the WCC and the World Communion of Reformed Churches, create a sort of ecumenical mainstream. Irrespective of the criticism of progressive ecumenism, these mainstream organisations are truly global in at least two meanings: first, they thematically cover the whole world; second, they develop global thinking and global responsibility through mutual care, humanitarian aid, and common prayer. In this respect, the LWF, the WCC, and the WCRC are abundant sources of knowledge about the everyday sorrows and sufferings of people in the most distant places and about the ideas combatting the causes of these sufferings.

Of course, global thinking is inherent to the ecumenical movement. Eventually, *oikoumene* means a whole inhabited world. Nevertheless, a systematic reflection on the nature and consequences of global relationships in politics, economy and culture developed since the 1960s, and in the 1990s, it became a focal point for ecumenical organisations, such as the WCC. This was even directly stated by the final report of the WCC General Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, where globalisation has been regarded as the process being in the very centre of economic, social and cultural challenges contemporary Christianity faces.²² The theologians from the WCC adopted the slogan of the alterglobalist movement – “another world is possible” – and strived to work out the Christian doctrine of social commitment in a global dimension.

The LWF shared this commitment. A number of documents published in recent years expressed how the Federation has affirmed the theological criticism

²² Diane Kessler. Ed. 1999. *Together on the Way. Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 26.

of the prevailing vision of globalisation raised by the WCC and WCRC and how the documents by the WCC inspired those of the LWF. Reports such as “Guiding Principle for Sustainable Development” (2001), “Communion, Responsibility, Accountability. Responding as a Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalization” (2004), and “Called to Transform. A Lutheran Perspective on Religion and Development” (2017), comprehensively and in many aspects address challenges of an increasingly globalised world and the consequences of global thinking. They offer constructive criticism when explaining the various devastating effects of globalisation and defining a Christian vision of a more unified and compassionate world. The quote from the second of the documents mentioned above introduces this vision well: “By compressing time and space, homogenising certain cultures and universalising aspects of modern social life, globalisation brings a competing vision of the *oikoumene*, the unity of humankind. But the unity of humankind being promoted by globalisation is one of exploitation and domination, while the unity envisaged by the *oikoumene* is one characterised by solidarity and justice. Our vision of the *oikoumene* puts great value in plurality and cultural diversity for mutual enrichment and for affirmation of life experiences as expressed in different traditions.”²³

Such Christian distinctiveness has been persuasively explained in the document “Called to Transform. A Lutheran Perspective on Religion and Development,” in which authors expound on some threats to the Christian Faith-Based Organizations involved in humanitarian and development aid. They distinguished four assets specific to the FBOs: a) religious literacy and expertise, b) the fact that they are globally connected and locally rooted, c) moral authority and credibility, and d) sustainability. Such characteristics could be referred to the organisations such as the WCC or the LWF: They gather people who, when having a common foundation in the Christian faith, link local experiences and contexts with the universal perspective of Christianity.

Kraków Assembly repeated this global reference many times. When exemplifying, one can consider the topics of the public statements issued by the Federation. Their survey demonstrates globality in two aspects: first, they address the problems of crucial importance for global politics, economy and culture, and second, they do it in connection with the ecumenical mainstream (together with the World Council of Churches and the World Communion of Reformed Churches) and show that the LWF is a devoted advocate of the ecumenical social teaching.

²³ The Lutheran World Federation. 2004. *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability. Responding as a Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalization*. Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 30.

One topic could be particularly referenced in this regard. The “Public Statement on Tax Justice” discusses the question, which is one of the most frequently raised by the movements striving for a fairer world (including the ecumenical movement). The idea of tax justice originated in the early 2000s, stemming from the seeking of equality and social justice “through fair taxes on wealthier members of society and multinational corporations.”²⁴ It soon became a driving force of a network of groups and movements contesting the hegemony of the neoliberal capitalist globalisation. In particular, “tax justice often focuses on tackling tax havens and curtailing corruption and tax abuse by multinational corporations and the super-rich.”²⁵

The ecumenical coalition of The World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Lutheran World Federation joined the tax justice movement when initiating and developing the Zacchaeus project. Basically, it is a campaign to advocate “tax justice, addressing social and ecological debts, including reparations for colonialism and slavery, at local, national and global levels (...) and at once serve to educate our churches about the issues involved while advocating for tax justice and reparations at the highest level.”²⁶

When being ecumenical, Zacchaeus project has some specific traits. So, it is based on the Biblical foundation of the socio-political program, referencing to values such as repentance, conversion and reparation and to the picture intelligible to Christians – the story about Zacchaeus, a tax collector whose encounter with Jesus symbolises conversion from sin. In addition, the project stresses the voices from outside the West connecting economic crises and poverty in postcolonial countries “with the enduring burden of slavery.”²⁷ Finally, the postcolonial approach based on the critique of a dichotomous picture of the world divided into a wealthy and powerful empire and a suffering and exploited rest of the world and nature is the conceptual scaffolding of the project. The message is clear – the dominant global economic order is “sinful and oppressive, delivering huge profits for the few and poverty for the many.”²⁸

So, the Zacchaeus project is in line with the overall approach of the ecumenical mainstream to the dominant socio-economic order, which is defined as global capitalist globalisation. It is a harsh criticism of this order and, concomitantly,

²⁴ Tax Justice Network. 2010. What is Tax Justice? (15.04.2023). <https://taxjustice.net/faq/what-is-tax-justice/>.

²⁵ Tax Justice Network. 2010. What is Tax Justice?

²⁶ The World Communion of Reformed Churches. 2019. Zacchaeus project (10.04.2023). <http://wcr.ch/zactax>.

²⁷ The World Communion of Reformed Churches. 2019. Zacchaeus project.

²⁸ The World Communion of Reformed Churches. 2019. Zacchaeus project.

a quest for a fairer world. The Lutheran World Federation is really an active and devoted participant in shaping this approach.

Of course, this participation often means political involvement. The LWF, like the World Council of Churches, takes a rather clear position in the political debate. This raises a strong critique among many theologians from outside the ecumenical mainstream who regard this voice as the sign of a politicisation of Christianity and a sort of secular ecumenism – something that Walter Kasper defined as an ecumenical paradigm focused on the joint Christian efforts for justice, peace, and integrity of creation, instead of coming to a theological agreement. Nevertheless, even when taking into account such objections, one could state that the LWF's participation in the global tax justice movement proves its global involvement and global approach.

Conclusion

The Kraków General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation clearly demonstrated that Lutheranism is increasingly becoming global in the theological and institutional perspective. This general comment refers primarily to the growing significance of Churches from outside the Euro-Atlantic space. The survey of resolutions, public statements, and papers delivered during the conference mirrors an epistemological shift from a theological monocentrism (eurocentrism) to polycentrism. The crucial subjects discussed in the conference showed a contextualization of the theological approach and the importance of experience in theological interpretations. Such an observation addressed, for example, the paper by a South African speaker who focused on social equality, the presentation by the Ethiopian theologian who discussed ethnic conflicts in Ethiopian Lutheranism or the lecture by the Chilean bishop who spoke about gender justice. In addition, the Assembly's statements and messages affirm the Federation's ecumenical commitment. The LWF vastly contributes to constituting an ecumenical mainstream and to developing ecumenical teaching in social and political matters. It is worth mentioning that the subjects of the public statements – about political and social deprivation of religious minorities in Asia, tax justice and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are also constant issues on the agenda of the World Council of Churches and the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

Finally, the LWF, like the WCC and the WCRC, emphasizes global involvement and global responsibility. It means that Churches share the everyday experiences of people from different parts of the world, especially suffering, persecution and sorrow. One could risk an opinion that the Federation, and the Assembly in particular, are the place where Christians may

learn from each other and thus build such a mutual – and therefore – global responsibility.

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