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The President of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)
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Withdrawal of the reformers' condemnations of the Pope as „Antichrist“

Cologne, November 20, 2020

Your Eminence, dear Archbishop Musa, dear brother in Christ,

may I briefly introduce myself to you. I have been living and working in Geneva for 7 years as executive secretary of the Faith and Order-Commission, having been responsible for the Apostolic Faith-Study and the 2nd edition of the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle (in German language). At the 6th Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1983 in Vancouver I was responsible for the celebration of the Lima Liturgy and in the Geneva worship committee I worked together with *Rita Virkkunen* from Finland, staff member of the LWF. After almost 20 years as ecumenical officer in Cologne I lead now in my retirement our Altenberg Ecumenical Group (Altenberger Ökumenischer Gesprächskreis) since more than 20 years with 5 publications in this time, focussing on the way towards church communion between the Evangelical – Lutheran Churches and the Roman – Catholic Church.

So far I have been visiting three times in the 90ies countries of your continent: Zaire/Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Republic of South Africa. Especially in the African context we all know, that questions of justice, peace and integrity of creation are the most important ones in the present ecumenical challenge there.

But these are not the only urgent ecumenical problems we have to cope with. In your address to *Pope Francis* of 7 December 2017 you mentioned the „open wound“, that families „cannot share the bread and wine“ of the Eucharist. This has to do besides other questions also with unsolved problems of the Reformation time: *Martin Luther* was excommunicated by Pope *Leo X.* on January 3rd 1521, a fact that is still valid up to now, as the Vatican never abolished it so far. On the other side *Martin Luther* condemned the Pope since autumn 1520 as „Antichrist“, which was taken over by 4 confessional writings of the Reformation: Apology of Augsburg Confession, Schmalkaldische Articles, Tractatus on Power and Primacy of the Pope, Formula of Concordance – all condemnations also being valid up to now, as never officially withdrawn by the Lutheran World Federation and Evangelical Churches as a whole. Unless these church dividing hindrances of the Reformation time are officially abolished, we are afraid, that church communion and shared Eucharistic celebrations will not happen between our Churches. This is the deep historical background, why we do not come forward with the Roman Catholic Church in Eucharistic sharing.

After Lutherans and Catholics celebrated 3 years ago the 500th Reformation anniversary „with a spirit of ecumenical accountability“, as you said in your address to the Pope, it is now 3 years later the right moment, to overcome these two obstacles of the Reformation, which remained unresolved between our churches exactly since 500 years.

Therefore already at Pentecost we members of the Altenberg Ecumenical Group have published the „Altenberg Declaration“. We asked on May 26 the Lutheran World Federation to transmit it to you without knowing whether you received it or not. Now please find enclosed an English translation of the „Altenberg Declaration“.

What we are requesting you as President of the Lutheran World Federation please allow me to quote from the „Altenberg Declaration“: *„In the same way we request the President of the Lutheran World Federation, Archbishop Dr Musa Panti Filibus from Nigeria, together with the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation to **declare: The condemnations against the Popes as „Antichrist“ by Martin Luther and Evangelical Lutheran confessional writings (...) do not meet the present papacy and its ministers.**“*

In a similar way we have requested first Pope Francis to *„declare, that the condemnations of the Excommunication Bull of 1521 do not affect the members of the Evangelical – Lutheran Churches of today.“* As these two mutual condemnations happened now 500 years ago we members of the Altenberg Ecumenical Group think, that 3 years after the joint celebration of the beginning of Reformation before 500 years in 1517 it is now *after* 500 years the ecumenical Kairos to abolish these obstacles on January 3rd 2021 or around this date. In this perspective the Altenberg Declaration says: *„In a common act, perhaps taking place at the same time in different locations, both sides could extinguish from the memory of the Church and let be forgotten the words and deeds, which led to the excommunication of Luther as well as to the „Antichrist“- condemnations.“*

In Germany next year is already officially called: *„The year of Ecumene 2021“*. It were another wonderful sign of growing partnership between the Evangelical-Lutheran Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, if you, *dear Archbishop Musa*, together with *Pope Francis* would inaugurate this coming year 2021 with a Declaration abolishing the Antichrist condemnation against Popes and Papacy by Lutherans as well as the excommunication of *Martin Luther* by Catholics.

Please find also enclosed the book of our Altenberg Ecumenical Group, explaining the background (p. 22 ff) and proposing a liturgy of reconciliation after 500 years (p. 168 ff). Unfortunately it is written in German language; so I hope, you will have a good translator at hand, who will interpret for you at least the content, the introduction into the Declaration (II.) and the draft of the liturgy (V.).

As I do not know, how and when this letter will reach you I were pleased to get an acknowledgement from your side.

I greet you with the *Herrnhut* slogan for a day of repentance and prayer in Germany this week (18th November): *„O Lord, our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but we acknowledge your name alone“*. (Jesaja 26,13)

Your obliged and hopeful brother in Christ

Pastor Hans – Georg Link

