

From 15 to 19 October 2018, Berlin Mission hosted its first Ecumenical Academy, bringing together pedagogical experts from more than ten countries in different regions of Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. For one week, they pursued the aim of formulating a strong common vision and mission for their educational work, based on the shared faith in the triune God, the theological and anthropological insights of the Reformation, and the needs of young people growing up in our contemporary world with its chances and challenges.

Following a fruitful sharing of information and experiences, a profound search for common perceptions and analyses, and a concentrated work on aims and objectives, the participants agreed on the following communique:

‘RAISING HUMANITY’

BRINGING UP YOUNG PEOPLE – LIFTING UP MANKIND

A Protestant Consensus on Education

Our starting point: Putting human dignity at the centre

We believe that every child comes into this world with the same dignity, created and loved by God, and worth of our love and support. Bringing up young people in this spirit means to raise them in such a way that the best which is in them shall be uncovered and unfold, according to their individual gifts and needs. Such attendance is not confined to schools and other educational institutions or to a certain period of age. In responding to this call, our Churches must reach out to children and young people and welcome them in different contexts and by different means. Establishing and maintaining confessional schools and contributing to the life of public schools are, wherever possible, important instruments to do so.

Our driving force: Discovering and committing our potentials

Churches are called to serve. To contribute to a meaningful formation of young people is among the greatest services we can render to humankind.

Churches are equipped to educate. By asking crucial questions about the source and destination of life, by holding open the spirit for divine intervention, by creating communities of mutual support and charity, Christians offer a unique contribution to an educational system often governed by the ratio of usability of people and their potentials for economic purposes.

Churches are willing to contribute. The Reformation made accessible the rich monastic tradition of learning and researching for everyone. It was driven by the desire to endow each and every one with a genuine understanding of the Word of God, as well as a desire to supply them with the means of being good stewards of the world. Today, Protestant Churches all over the world draw upon this heritage and commit to continuously develop and improve their educational efforts and methods.

Our guiding principle: Raising the potentials of young people

Education is interaction. The potential of young persons cannot be brought out without their cooperation, and it cannot come out without external guidance. Personality develops in dialogue with others, learning from each other in an ongoing process. We are as open to be asked questions as to be given answers by young people.

Education is orientation. Knowledge alone does not suffice. Knowledge without wisdom and love can be dangerous. In learning, young people attain command of the world around them. It is important that they also seek a deeper understanding, learn how to respect the other and the environment on which we depend. In conveying the powers of knowledge, we must also teach how to put it to the service of the community and of creation.

Education is celebration. The uniqueness of every individual and the love of God are reasons to be celebrated. Christian education does so by fostering personal development and by offering opportunities to encounter God.

Education is the opening of horizons. The core virtue of the knowledgeable and the wise is curiosity. Standing on the ground of Scripture and tradition, young people must be encouraged to overcome fear of the new or the alien, and to develop an open mind for new interpretations, discoveries and encounters.

Education is showing how to believe. Faith can be a strong source of understanding and compassion, but it can also make intolerant and zealous. By exploring children's belief with them and by cherishing and fostering what is valuable in it, Christian education offers an important element in helping young people to integrate into community and society.

Education is formation and transformation. Young people must at the same time become citizens of this world and the Kingdom of God. Christian education contributes to both by offering the instruments needed to sustain life and retain hope.

Our challenging conditions: Overcoming obstacles

Our contribution is not always as welcome as it deserves. While being at the centre of our Christian calling, in this world faith, justice, peace and the integrity of creation are endangered goods. We need to build alliances with all people of good will to make our voice heard and our offer received.

The educational system is rigid. It is difficult to change ingrained structures and practices, even when new pedagogical insights are available. Sometimes, independent schools or educational institutions are not given more leeway than public ones, sometimes they are even subject to stricter regulation. We need to work for more flexibility in the educational system so that new ideas can be tried and different types of schools coexist without discrimination.

The economy is ruthless. The dominant economic system utilises and exploits both people and our limited natural resources in a way that is neither just nor sustainable. It requires the education system to provide assimilated and productive workers, not individual and unique personalities. We need to work for an economic system which sustains welfare, both spiritual and material, and serves human development everywhere and for everyone.

Funding is scarce. While education is a crucial investment in the future, it is in many ways underfunded. Schools must become living spaces, nurturing curiosity and creativity. This cannot be achieved without material support and well educated and appropriately paid pedagogues. We must generate new sources of income through our work, while also advocating for an appreciation of the educational system expressed in the provision of sufficient means and resources.

Intolerance is widespread. People of other beliefs and convictions can at times be averse to our claim on education. They aim for a homogeneous educational system without a Christian note to it. We need to work for an open society, in which every person can live and practice their faith alone and together with others, in private and in the public sphere, in religious and in social forms.

Young people are underestimated. Education is only one part of bringing young people up, which is a joint effort of many stakeholders. Young people cannot realise their potential if families, church, community and state do not support teachers in their efforts. We need to work for a society that integrates young people, gives them space for development and shows confidence in their evolving skills and abilities.

Our concluding resolution: Putting trust in God and into each other

In our common quest for better understanding and promoting what constitutes a genuine Protestant approach to education, we realised that we are not the makers of education, but God's assistants in 'raising humanity' – both in the sense of bringing up young people and of lifting up mankind. In our Christian faith and the achievements and heritage of the Reformation we have a common ground, in preparing following generations for service in this world and in the kingdom that transforms it, we have a common aim. We also strive to speak more often with a common voice, expressing the key ideas of our vision and mission, and supporting each other with prayer, wisdom and resources. We pledge to work towards a global network for 'Church and Education' as a forum for exchange, learning and advocacy.

Berlin, 19 October 2018