



THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION

# **A mighty fortress**

**How can faith provide us a foundation  
without leading to fundamentalism?**

# Outline

- “Fundamentalism” – what is it?
- Luther’s concept of faith and certainty
- Genuine discipleship (Bonhoeffer)
- Dealing with diversity and difference



# Variety of terms

- **Fundamentalism:**
  - reference to “fundaments”
- **Extremism**
  - reference to “extremes”
- **Radicalism**
  - reference to “radix” which means “roots”



# The issue at stake

- Often these terms are used in polemical ways to label the other as bad
- Important question: what exactly is seen as “bad”? What are the negative effects?



# “Fundamentalist” as self-description

The first formulation of American fundamentalist beliefs traces to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, in 1910 which distilled these “five fundamentals”:

- Biblical inspiration and the infallibility of scripture as a result of this
- Virgin birth of Jesus
- Belief that Christ's death was the atonement for sin
- Bodily resurrection of Jesus
- Historical reality of the miracles of Jesus

These fundamentals were especially a reaction to the emergence of the historical critical method in Biblical interpretation



# Fundamentalism within and beyond Protestantism

- Classic reference to fundamentalism actually comes from within the Protestant tradition
- “The Fundamentalism Project” at the University of Chicago in the 1990s showed that fundamentalism exists in many religious and non religious traditions.
- There is atheistic fundamentalism, and also scientific fundamentalism



# Characteristic of fundamentalism

Fundamentalism is never “old-time religion,”

It is a modern phenomenon.

It is always reactive, born when there is an assault on values that people have and are uncertain about.

The Fundamentalism Project concluded: that there is presently a “massive, convulsive ingathering of peoples into their separatenesses and overagainstnesses to protect their pride and power and place from others who are doing the same thing.”

Usually this doesn't manifest itself in violent insurgencies or terrorism. It does appear in a cultural readiness to divide the world up into us and them, virtuous and vicious, good and evil.



# Martin Luther on faith

“Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace”

“I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess.”





# Martin Luther: difference between certainty and security

Emphasis on the receptivity (passivity): Luther's confidence in God was based on God's promises that were affirmed in **baptism**.

“If you have received forgiveness of sins, do not on that account be secure (securus). You are just, holy, from outside yourself (extrinsece).

It is through mercy and compassion that you are just. It is not my disposition or a quality of my heart, but something outside myself – the divine mercy – which assures us that our sins are forgiven”



# Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## “The cost of discipleship”

### On Judging Others

“Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating. By judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are.”



# Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## On Peace

“There is no way to peace along the way of safety. For peace must be dared, it is itself the great venture and can never be safe. Peace is the opposite of security. To demand guarantees is to want to protect oneself. Peace means giving oneself completely to God’s commandment, wanting no security, but in faith and obedience laying the destiny of the nations in the hand of Almighty God, not trying to direct it for selfish purposes. Battles are won, not with weapons, but with God. They are won when the way leads to the cross.”



# The LWF study document “The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion”

The document from 2014 explores what it means for churches to be part of the Lutheran communion

- Big task: dealing with diversity and difference
- Affirmation: communion is a gift, given to us by the Triune God,
- Way forward: actively engaging in relationships of mutual accountability, living communion in unity and diversity
- Basis: biblical notion of koinonia: we affirm that in our sharing bread and wine we partake in the body of Christ.
- Shared Lutheran convictions:

Gospel

Baptism

Eucharist

Task: developing an ethic of freedom and mutual respect based on the gospel.





Thank you!  
Looking forward to your insights

