

Conference speech in Geneva: Faith-based Entrepreneurs: Stronger Together. International Networking Conference, Monday 22 January 2018

Dear colleagues, dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

500 years ago Ulrich Zwingli, the reformer at the Grossmünster (“Great Minster”) in Zurich, initiated the first Alms Ordinance in the 13 independent states which made up the Old Swiss Confederacy, together with the political and economic powers of the city. This Ordinance was founded on three fundamental pillars and one condition.

1. Fundamental pillar number one: as set out in the bible, poverty is no longer a completely economic problem, but rather a theological one. God did not create poverty to make the rich pay for charity: may God reward you for it! In contrast to the political position of Switzerland, God is not neutral, he is partisan: Deuteronomy 15:4 states “But there will be no poor among you.”
2. Fundamental pillar number two: poverty is no longer a problem for religious institutions such as monasteries to combat, but a challenge which must be tackled by society using political and economic means. Politically, the first lines of a societal structure based on solidarity were drawn up by interconnecting self-reliance (liberalism) with solidarity (sense of community).
3. Fundamental pillar number three: businesses and trades such as the guild system in Zurich or the textile industry in Geneva were brought together in this network to combat poverty by Zwingli and his successor, Heinrich Bullinger, in Zurich and 20 years later by Jean Calvin here in Geneva. Fighting poverty through education and work! This was the reformist slogan. Churches which were no longer needed for religious services were repurposed to serve diaconal needs (the Predigerkloster monastery in Zurich was transformed into the city’s first hospital).

4. This diaconal-political fundamental transition was conditional on money. The coffers for the poor were filled by nationalising monasteries on the initiative of the last abbess of the Fraumünster abbey, Katharina von Zimmern, a close friend of Ulrich Zwingli, as well as by melting down gold and silver religious artefacts used in worship.

Dear sisters and brothers,

The fiery passion that made the protestant ethos glow some 500 years ago burns on strongly in my work as a teacher, minister and businessman of the reformist heritage and Christian culture. What does theological, political and economic diaconal work in the 21st century entail?

1. *Teacher*: as a lecturer in diaconal studies within the theological course catalogue, I have **a theological-economic responsibility** to develop and teach the theory of diaconal practice which partly, but not completely, defines the Christian faith, as a science combining various disciplines. Current challenges and topics include: health policy: people who care for aged relatives, using church spaces for diaconal purposes, missiology and deaconry, pastoral care for soldiers traumatised by war, Switzerland's relatively young diaconal history with a particular focus on the last 100 years ("contract children").
2. *Minister*: I have been a minister for 30 years, 15 of which I have spent at the Grossmünster in Zurich, the mother church of Zurich's transformation of society and the church, the place where the Swiss reformation began. Last year, 550,000 people visited the church: Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, atheists, socialists and members of the general public. The **politico-practical responsibility** involves trying to find a new way to shape the reformed identity in the face of megatrends and transformation into a pluralist society. In the future we must create ecumenical unity for Christianity as a minority and a part of other religious and ideological views.

3. *Businessman*: for 5 years I have been working intensively on the phenomenon of urban deaconry. I understand this as Christian entrepreneurs and ecclesiastic organisations giving aid and support in municipal residential areas and urban sectors. Deaconry imparts a sense of community when working alongside other social, economic and cultural entities such as initiatives, groups, establishments and organisations which serve to improve the quality of life of the disadvantaged. The **economic challenge** is partly to acquire sufficient funds through the “Urban Diakonia” foundation. A further aim is to use this money to kick-start and secure church-based diaconal initiatives, such as those in the evangelical-reformist parish of Witikon in Zurich or the “Espace Solidaire Pâquis” association near to the station here in Geneva, from an entrepreneurial point of view in the long term. Thirdly there is also Christoph Stückelberger’s initiative for commitment to cities in China. How wonderful.

Reformism means using all three diaconal activities, teaching, spreading the word and business, to form face-to-face networks with colleagues and to found an ecological, ecumenical and economical global domestic economy. Networking was a major objective for Zwingli and his friends 500 years ago and we are still doing similar work today. May God’s spirit move us, and may Zwingli’s legacy embolden us, as followers of Jesus, with his fundamental statement, which is painted on the wall in the vestry of the Grossmünster: “For God’s sake do something brave!”

23.01.2018/CS