



“One Body”

Keynote by Rev. Dr Benny Sinaga

The theme of “One Body, One Spirit, and One Hope” is inspired by Ephesians 4:4-6, “There is one Body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Anne Burghardt 2023). This text given by Paul goes on to set down the basis on which the

Christian unity is founded. There is “one body”, and Christ is the Head and the church is the Body. No brain can work through a body which is disintegrated and unco-ordinated and split into fragments. If there is not a coordinated oneness in the body, the thoughts and plans and designs of the head and the brain are hindered and frustrated. The oneness of the church is essential for the work of Christ. That does not need to be a mechanical oneness of administration and of human organization; but it does need to be a oneness founded on a common love of Christ and of every part of other (Barclay 1958, 166).

Everyone can explain the meaning of body, the human body, according to our various theological, or philosophical understanding, or according to the context where we live. Every day, as human being, we use our body to work, to serve, to preach, to play, to talk, to help, and even to do bad things. The movement of the body depends on the thought and heart. Head as the place of brain is the main control of all, and coordinates the members of the body. The works of the brain determine the movement of the body. In our Batak tribe, we have been and are being taught that we have to keep our body warm, (we usually put on the “ulos”, a traditional Batak cloth woven by Batak women) to cover our bodies, eat good,



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nutritious, and delicious food. Warm condition of the body results in the goodness of heart and mind to carry out activities. In a way, this condition brings about how the Batak people treat others. For those who have visited Batakland, the host will welcome you with good, nutritious, delicious food, and Ulos to keep your body warm. Similarly, we do the same way to express our gratitude, show our friendship, oneness, or togetherness. Overlaying Ulos on someone means that “you are most welcomed as fellow Batak, as one family, as one body”.

In this assembly the concept of One Body is an outcry to the LWF members as churches to be one in Christ. In Christ, all Christians can see the fact that God gives a special value to be not separated body, spirit, and mind from each other, for then we risk devaluing the body and especially the body of our neighbors. In 1 Cor. 6:19: “you do not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own”) (cf. Study Guide 2023, 11). But the body of Christ is broken. The body is not fine. Every day we find and experience some brokenness through war, injustice, violence, polarization, discrimination, hate, hunger, etc. The body is crying and this reminds us how Jesus is crying and suffering on the cross.

When the body of Christ was hanged on the cross we can see the wounds, tortured body, pains, sufferings, rejected, excluded, crying, and violence. The brokenness of Christ’s body showed the brokenness of the church and the world. In 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic tortured the spirit, the breath, and lungs, and millions of people died. This biological war has brought the families into crying, the churches are also crying, the world is crying because people are separated by the terrible massive death. From this experience, we come to understand more on how to value the air which is inhaled and exhaled every second of the life in the body; to value the meaning of the family and the church worshipping together as the fellowship in one body; to value the people who are always caring more about health, diseases, and pain. We were in silence, and in silence we talked more about God and with God.



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We listen and see Brazil's polarization and democracy since 2013 or 2014 has become a major risk not only to the country's democracy but also in its capacity to address its most urgent policy challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic devastation brought by the pandemic will likely make overcoming this deep-seated polarization even more difficult, as Brazil's already extreme level of inequality will rise even higher. While greater socio-economic inequality does not necessarily translate into greater polarization, the millions of Brazilians who escaped poverty during the commodity boom in the 2000s and who slid back in the 2010s- when Brazil's economy practically did not grow at all- have had their expectations reversed and will be far more vulnerable to radical solutions and populist temptations during the 2020s (Oliver Stuenkel 2021, "Brazil's Polarization and Democratic Risks" in <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/02/17/brazil-s-polarization-and-democratic-risks-pub-83783> accessed on July 23, 2023).

Democracies divided, rising political polarization is a significant element of the global democratic crisis. Intense divisions are tearing the seams of democratic societies in every part of the world, from Brazil, India, and Kenya to Poland, Turkey, and the United States. South and Southeast Asia, two regions with tremendously diverse democracies, are a vital ground for understanding the swelling tide of polarization, its many troubling consequences, and the ways in which domestic and transnational actors committed to strengthening democratic governance can try to contain or reduce them. Like in India – the longest-lasting democracy in the Global South – “threats to liberal freedoms are now approaching critical proportions” as the government of prime minister advances a polarizing Hindu nationalist agenda.

We can see the war in some parts of the world is ongoing armed conflicts until today, even not far from this city, the neighbor of this country, Ukraine, is still at war. This war as the brokenness of the unity makes more people crying, children on hunger, and families separated. Not far from the venue of the assembly, there is a historical



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site of Auschwitz, Birkenau. Since 1940's Auschwitz has become the symbol of terror, genocide, and the Holocaust ("KL AuschwitzBirkenau", <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/kl-auschwitz-birkenau/> accessed on August 1st, 2023). The voice and the name of Auschwitz could be heard globally; and Auschwitz-Birkenau became synonymous with the Holocaust. The story of Auschwitz, Birkenau is important for us, because this site is the witness about dehumanization, and how power was ruthlessly abused. This site also awakens people to value others more as fellow humans and fellow creatures. We need the Holy Spirit to strengthen our fellowship.

We hear also the crying of the children who lack of nutrition in underdevelopment countries, like in Yemen, Madagascar, Congo, Chad, Haiti, Nigeria, Lesotho, and Liberia. Global Hunger Index (GHI) reports, the level of hunger in Yemen reached 45,1 in 2022. This makes Yemen the country with the highest hunger rate in the world. Central African Republic followed second, with a hunger rate 44 points. Its position was followed by Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, each with a score of 38, 7 and 37, 8 points. The level of hunger in Chad was recorded at 37, 2 points and in Haiti is 32, 7 points. Lesotho and Liberia are recorded to have the same hunger level, which is 32, 4 points. The hunger level score is calculated based on four indicators, i.e.: malnutrition, child stunting, child wasting (weight below normal range), and child mortality (<https://dataindonesia.id/varia/detail/8-negara-ini-punya-tingkat-kelaparan-tertinggidunia-pada-2022>, accessed 2nd August 2023). If the body is hungry then the body will be weak and sick. If some parts of this world are hungry, then the world will be sick and has no warmth, no spirit to do the activities as the member of the body of this world. If one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers.

As the member church of LWF, we are committed to value the living and working together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world. There is a life of acceptance of others or inclusion, but let us correct ourselves as the body of Christ, whether we live



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more in inclusion or exclusion. We see people reject others because of the skin color (black and white), the economic level (poor and rich), education (educated and uneducated), clergy and lay, man and woman, as Asian or American or European or African. Some people are superior to others. Let's look at neighbors around us; the way you treat others, determine the way you understand the body of Christ. Sometimes we, the church and the body of Christ, talk a lot about the theology of the body and the unity, but in our daily life we reject others for some reasons created by people themselves.

In Indonesia, some women (and also men) prefer buying skincare whitening to have brighter skin color. They are worried about being rejected by people around them. Many Indonesians are more interested in people with bright skin color. Some people in Indonesia listen more to the person with fairer skin color or Northern people. The discrimination based on skin color is an Asian thing (and also in some part of the world, like: Europe, America, and Africa). We are aware about the black-and-white bias all across the world. Not long back, we know that people were primarily treated due to their skin color irrespective of their skills, talent, education, interests, or anything for that matter. It was a colossal denial of their existence. Even back home, in Asia, when the British came to India, white supremacy over brown was established for well over two hundred years. Moving forward in the 21st century, one would imagine such discrimination and oppression would have stopped, but in fact until today we are still talking about some discrimination whether skin color or race or gender (Riya Desmukh "Our Skin Color Does Not Need to Define Us" in The Times of India, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/myhealthtips/our-skin-colour-does-not-need-to-define-us-not-anymore-25825/> accessed August 2nd, 2023,)

We are the LWF members coming from 99 countries. Some of us come from rich countries and some from poor countries. During this assembly let us greet our neighbors who sit next to us, right and left, anytime, may be they need your touch, smile, prayer, or ideas. They need your hands to embrace and to help, your feet to



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walk together, your mind and heart to be wiser to find solutions, your talents to educate others. Next we might visit each other to strengthen and to build more inclusion. Some people are either afraid or reluctant to talk to their neighbors, so before and after Assembly, it's just the same. We might be very excited to go abroad to see sisters and brothers in one body of Christ in the LWF, but after Assembly, we fall back into our regular or usual tasks.

LWF has committed to justice and equality, but till today we find violence against women, discrimination against women, and subordination of women. When God spoke about creating a “helper” or ezer to man (Gen. 2:18), He did not mean that the women should be subordinates or submissive. The word ezer in the Old Testament mainly refers to assistance that one offers in term of strength to the one in need, for example: God helping (ezer) God’s people, a king offering help (ezer) to his people, etc. In fact, we still hear the cries of women who are living in double burden or even triple burden. Women do not have access to health, participation in politics. Women raise their voices for equality. In the 18th century when Batakland was not yet evangelized, women were subordinated, their life just to live at the father’s house, and after marriage, women belong to their husbands. But the efforts for justice and equality that have been done so far have not been in vain. Before 1900, the Toba Bataks were already aware on the importance of education as a new way to achieve social status. When the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft, a German missionary society arrived in Batakland (1861) and introduced education and gospel, some Batak women were educated. The seminary where I teach, named Sekolah Tinggi Biblevrouw HKBP (HKBP Bibelvoruw Seminary), is historical evidence that women in Batakland have received education in order to help improve mothers, girls, and children. From this seminary, women are ordained as Biblevrouw (woman preacher) to take part in the ministry and leadership. In 1986 for the first time Batak women were ordained as pastors, and now more than two thousand women in HKBP church have been ordained as Pastor, Biblevrouw, Deaconess, and Guru Huria, Evangelist, and Elders (Sintua)



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We also hear the good news from The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland took a historic step on 7 May 2022, when the then Presiding Bishop Jerzy Samiec ordained nine women to the priesthood at a service in Warsaw's Holy Trinity church. The event marked a concluding milestone in the discussion about women's ordination which has been ongoing in the Polish church for decades ("Poland: First Nine Women Ordained as Pastors" in <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/poland-first-nine-women-ordained-pastors>, accessed on July 30, 2023). We have to celebrate this historical story of Poland, and give thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit. We believe that God continue to move the church to do justice and equality in the body of the LWF and the whole world. For in Galatians 3:28: there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

We experience the global warming, the global crisis of the earth. Cosmos, our mother earth, is sick. We find more educated people but more people are cutting trees without limit, the wild animals have no homes; the rivers, the lake, and the air are polluted, droughts, floods, rising sea waters, wildfires, and unprecedented heat and cold waves. These are the signs of climate changes.

The earth is God's creation and God created them so well, but because of the greediness of human beings, the earth as the body is falling into brokenness (cf. Study Guide 2023, 15).

The sufferings of Christ on the cross are not just His sufferings; they are "the sufferings of the poor and weak, the sufferings of all creatures in this world, which Jesus shares in His own body and in His own soul, in solidarity with them" (Moltmann 1992, 130). And since God was in Christ, "through His passion, Christ brings into the passion history of this world the eternal fellowship of God and divine justice and righteousness that creates life. On the cross, Christ both "identities God



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with the victims of violence” and identifies “the victims with God, so that they are put under God’s protection and with Him are given the rights of which they have been deprived”. All sufferers can find comfort in the solidarity of the Crucified, but only those who struggle against evil by following the example of the Crucified (Volf 1996, 22-24).

The church as the body of Christ are both, sinners and sacred body. The church are sinners who are called to believe in Jesus, and let themselves be directed and covered by the Holy Spirit because of the resurrection. The church also could be understood as sacred member where the body has the only head, Jesus Christ. This metaphor could be found from the explanation that Jesus Christ is the only head of the body, while the member churches as the members of the body (Rm. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Ef. 3:6; 4:6. 15-16; 5:23; Col. 1:18. 24). The church is the sinned and become sacred body because of the resurrection of Christ, therefore the church as the body of Christ must be governed and overlaid by “Ulos”, the Holy Spirit.

For the unity of the body of Christ, let us practice more not “hostility” but “hospitality” as a virtue to welcome others and to treat our relationship as members of the body of Christ. Our hospitality starts from the Eucharist where Jesus welcomes every sinner to have banquet at His table. He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to the people, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me” and in the same way, He took the cup saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luk. 22:19-10; Matt. 26:26-28). This hospitality has taught believers to welcome others without borders, discrimination, rejection, violence, and hatred, but with peace, open hands, living as neighbors, justice, equality, righteous because He told us so: “Do this in remembrance of Me.” The members’ body of the LWF is the body of Christ who practices hospitality not only among the members but also to the all people and all creatures. This must be the strong character of the ecumenical life of the LWF.



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Christ united different “bodies” into one body, not simply in virtue of the singleness of his person (“one leader – one people”) or of his vision (“one principle or law – one community”), but above all through his suffering. It is profoundly significant that, Jews and Gentiles are made one body of God’s children without regard to ethnicity, nationality, gender, race, or class precisely in “the cross of Christ” (Volf 1996, 47).

The apostle Paul wrote: “because there is one bread we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1Cor. 10:17). On the surface, the singleness of the bread seems to ground the unity of the body. And yet the one bread stands for the crucified body of Jesus Christ, the body that has refused to remain a self-enclosed singularity, but has opened itself up that others can freely partake of it. The crucified Messiah creates unity by giving His own self. Far from being assertion of the one against many, the cross is the self-giving of the one for many. Unity of the body is a fruit of Christ self-sacrifice, which breaks down the enmity, discrimination, rejection, polarization, war, inequality, hatred, and injustice (cf. Volf 1996, 47).

The Holy Spirit is the center. The aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church are: first, the Holy Spirit builds the church, which is the body of Christ (2:22: 3:16) and which can, therefore only be one. The Holy Spirit always governs to the unity, not separation, for the power of movement of the church as one body is in her unity. Second, the Holy Spirit also gives the church hope (1:14), as such hope is integral to the Christian calling as true Christians (4:1). The hope is like the warm body that overlaid by Ulos to call for the good mind and heart to strive for more love. This calling is the work of the Holy Spirit, as Luther confessed so well in his explanation of the third article of the Creed: “I believe that... the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gift ... in the same way She calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth”. The Spirit of God is one; the church, therefore, must also be one; it is unthinkable that it could be divided (see 1 Cor. 1:13). The hope of the church must also, therefore, be one. It is not



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directed to a dozen different ends and goals. The church has only one hope, and that is Jesus Christ (Strelan 1981, 52).

As member churches of the LWF we need to reflect on what it means to be the Body of Christ in our different contexts. As the Communion of Churches we have the obligation to keep the Body together, be it the unity of churches, be it defending human bodies from violence and dominance. This is the calling we have and that we shall live out, together and in our different contexts. Because we are liberated by God's grace. I do hope this Assembly will be more than just a gathering of people from different place, and that we can think about developing some instruments to connect us more closely and more regularly in the future.

The [Thirteenth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation](#) takes place 13-19 September 2023 in Krakow, Poland. The theme of the Assembly will be "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope." It will be hosted by the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland.



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