

Evangelicals Dialogue with the Orthodox

Earlier this month, Dr Rosalee Velloso Ewell and Dr Thomas Schirrmacher participated in a colloquium on Evangelical - Orthodox dialogue held at St. Vlash Monastery in Durres, Albania. During the course of the four day event, they met with leaders of the Orthodox Church in Albania and representatives from both Orthodox and Evangelical traditions from all over the world. Following the words of John Stott in *The message of Ephesians*, 'It is simply impossible, with any shred of integrity, to go on proclaiming that Jesus by his cross has abolished old divisions and created a new single humanity of love, while at the same time we are contradicting our message by tolerating racial or social or other barriers within our church fellowship', the consultation was an important first step to examine the issues that divide and the ways God calls his people to move closer together for the sake of the gospel of Christ.



Evangelical - Orthodox Consultation, Durres, Albania, September 2013

Invitation to National & Regional Theological Commissions to General Assembly 2014

The WEA and its Theological Commission invites all board members of theological commissions (or groups with similar status) of national or regional evangelical alliances to attend the General Assembly of WEA to be held in Seoul in October 2014. We expect around 500 members of theological commissions at this gathering.

We will participate in the general agenda (including many plenaries and workshops planned by the TC), but every day we will have special planning meetings and discussion times to deal with our own agendas and issues of the TCs. This is the first time in history when all the boards of all the regional and national TCs will be able to meet one another face to face. Such personal interaction is fundamental as we seek to strengthen the service and work of the TCs for the coming years. Please contact TC Executive Chair, Dr Thomas Schirrmacher with your RSVP and for more information chair_tc@worldea.com

The General Assembly will be held October 18-26, 2014 at the COEX Convention Center, Seoul, South Korea and will involve leaders of Evangelical Alliances, members and partners of WEA commissions and initiatives, WEA associate members and global partners, member church networks and denominations, as well as global and local invited guests. For more information visit <http://www.worldea.org/ga2014>

Promoting Biblical Truth by Networking Theologians

Colloquium of European Evangelical Theologians from Neo-Latin Countries

Following the 2011 colloquium that was held at IFED in Padova (2nd-4th June), a group of 14 people from various Southern European countries (Spain, France, Italy, and Romania) met at IBSTE-Facultad Internacional de Teologia, Castelldefels, near Barcelona (Spain) on 27 – 29 August 2013 for the second colloquium. Though engaged in gospel work in different contexts, we all share the fact that our countries did not have a significant and lasting Reformation. We find ourselves working in minority situations which are largely shaped by Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox traditions. We face comparable challenges in theological work and church life, and we speak languages that have the same Latin root. The colloquium was convened as an opportunity for on-going training, fellowship, and encouragement to be engaged theologically in our national contexts .

The theme of this year's colloquium was 'The Lausanne Legacy: looking in retrospect and looking ahead'. Approaching the 40th anniversary of the 1974 Lausanne Covenant, it was felt appropriate to have two sessions: one looked back at the heritage of the Lausanne documents and movement; and the second reflected on what contribution Lausanne can make to our situations. Jean-Paul Rempp, Lausanne International Deputy Director for Europe, gave two stimulating papers which highlighted the theological and missiological trajectory of Lausanne (1974), Manila (1989) and Cape Town (2010), and investigated the remarkable importance of the 2010 Cape Town Commitment in dealing with important issues of our day.

Various comments underlined the importance of Lausanne for establishing a firm biblical basis for cooperation, for overcoming the unbiblical dichotomy between proclamation and social responsibility, and for strengthening the Evangelical appreciation of mission as being a call to which every Christian and every church should respond. Cape Town in particular can help our churches to widen our understanding of mission as embracing the whole of life and not just a few selected 'religious' activities. There was also a shared recognition that, with exceptions, we still struggle with the issue of reception of these texts.

Possible critical areas emerging from The Cape Town Commitment were also discussed. First, the insistence on the 'missional' dimension of the whole of life may result in a loss of confidence in the power of the proclaimed Word and the ordinary means of grace. Secondly, the fact that the term 'evangelical' is not used in the document (although its presence is implicit) may result in the weakening of the term as an identity-marker in the global world. This is especially relevant for countries like ours where the dominant Christianity (i.e. Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy) is not evangelical and is in many respects alien to the gospel. Thirdly, there is a problem with the expression 'missio Dei' if it implies that God receives his mission from outside of Himself. Another highlight of the colloquium was the country presentations in which we learned many details regarding the Gospel work and the theological landscape of the different countries which were represented.

It was agreed that there were ways in which the Colloquium might contribute in the future, such as developing a 'map' of existing theological colleges, publications, journals, theological conferences in the area, and also focusing on theological issues to which we can contribute in distinctive ways. Some of these are evangelicalism's relationship with both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, the understanding of secularism, the danger of confusing the Gospel with a form of moralism and developing tools to encourage civic and public engagement. Another aspect that could be included is the significance of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and how this could be an opportunity to appreciate the gospel in a fresh way.

It was decided to have a third Colloquium in 2015 and a working group was formed in the persons of Leonardo De Chirico from Italy, Jaume Llenas (or José de Segovia) from Spain, Yannick Imbert (or Paul Wells) from France, and Veres Otniel (or Corneliu Simut) from Romania.



(Adapted from a report from the conference organisers)

Evangelical Review of Theology

Special Issue on 'Insider Movements'

The October 2013 issue of the Theological Commission's flag publication, *Evangelical Review of Theology*, focuses on the 'Insider Movement', with papers reflecting a recent Bridging the Divide (BtD) conference on the topic. As the guest editors, Rob Haskell and Don Little, explain, 'BtD is made up of a committed group of missiologists, theologians and church leaders from both sides of the question: those who promote Insider Movements and those who are critical of them. The environment is rich with missionary experience, discussion and also disagreement, but there is also a strong commitment among the participants to honour each other and to learn from each other, even if this can at times be stretching.'

In the opening article, there is an overview of the current situation which arises from an increased interest in contextualizing the Gospel for Muslims, where response to the Good News has increased significantly in recent decades. The root question is about how much of Muslim religion and culture can be retained, or which parts, in discipleship and evangelism.

The BtD network which has existed since 2011, has this vision: 'Followers of Jesus from a variety of backgrounds unified in purpose to effectively share with Muslims the good news of salvation in Christ, resulting in obedient disciples and multiplying communities of believers (*ekklēsia*).' Its mission is to provide a suitable forum for the fruitful discussion of the issues, to refine the biblical and theological insights which bear on the issue and to eliminate misunderstandings and unhelpful practices.

Those involved are responding to the fact that there has been significant disagreement among those seeking to reach Muslims with the Good News about what approaches are biblically appropriate and effective in accomplishing God's saving purposes. With numerous articles, discussions, (and in more recent years) seminars and books promoting one position or another, many have received the impression that the dispute is between two camps locked in combat. The interactions of the BtD Network since 2011 have made it clear that rather than two distinct 'camps', a better description would be a *spectrum* of ideas, attitudes and practices, with various individuals landing at various point along the spectrum. Yet there remains a divide between individuals and groups holding to these diverse positions.

Efforts to 'bridge the divide' include personal contact which promotes better relationships and understanding of the various contexts and issues, and mutual exchange of ideas and insights through conferences and publications. A spokesman said, 'The "bridge" is not primarily for convincing people to come over to one's predetermined "side," but more for traffic to go back and forth, to be sharpened by God's Spirit as we listen to each other and receive from each other. For that to happen, we all need our personal portion of the "bridge" to be open, gracious, humble, listening, and speaking as clearly as we can.'

The WEA TC is pleased to provide a forum in which these important topics can be aired and the process of understanding this important part of the mission of the gospel can be advanced. It is a policy of the TC that pages of its journal ERT are open to organisations in this way, and for arrangements to be made for extra run-on copies to be produced. In this case, for the first time, the run-on copies are electronic and the BtD organization are distributing PDF versions amongst its constituency.

The Lead Facilitator for the Bridging the Divide network said, 'I'm very thankful for the opportunity that has been afforded us by the *Evangelical Review of Theology* to present this set of articles, written in the spirit of Bridging the Divide. As a network, we are committed to honest and gracious dialogue among varying perspectives toward the goals of better understanding and more biblically sound and effective ministry to Muslims. This issue of *Evangelical Review of Theology* epitomizes the kind of discussion we encourage. We trust it will edify and encourage you in your ministry. For the glory of Christ among all peoples.'

Migration in Theological Perspective

A conference was held in Berne Switzerland on 31 August 2013 to seek theological answers to issues relating to migration which constantly face the churches as well as sections of the global community. A notice about the conference said, 'The church addresses migration primarily in diaconal and social-political perspectives. However, migration issues have until now been only scarcely reflected upon from a theological viewpoint. This conference offers the opportunity for such a reflection.'

Titled 'Belonging(s)? Theological Perspectives on Migration', the conference served as an entry point into in-depth discussions on 'people's fear of losing their belonging and identity'. The dialogue questioned the concept of 'belonging' which sparks negative reactions to migration, from restrictions on immigration and asylum laws to practices of forced repatriation, the banning of construction of minarets or resistance to measures for the integration of immigrants.

Keynote speeches were given by Dr Amélie Adamavi-Aho Ekué, professor of social ethics at the WCC's Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, and Dr Reinhold Bernhardt, professor of systematic theology, University of Basel, with responses by the Rev. Antoinette Steiner, chaplain at the Vallorbe Centre for Asylum Application Registry and Processing, and the Rev. Andreas Nufer, a pastor in Bern. A series of workshops enabled participants to engage in detailed discussion on topics such as the richness of the stranger/strangeness, the church as home for all Christians, conflict and reconciliation in the multicultural society and pastoral care in asylum reception and detention centres.

Source: World Council of Churches—press release

The Creation of Synthetic Life....

By [Brian Edgar](#), *Asbury Theological Seminary*

Some recent headlines have declared that 'life has been artificially created' but the [J. Craig Venter Institute](#) says, a little more precisely, that they have succeeded in creating the first living organism – a bacterium – with a completely synthetic genome. Perhaps that is not as dramatic as saying 'we have created life', but it is a bit more accurate and it is, nonetheless, a great scientific achievement.

Every living creature has its own sequence of DNA which is the blueprint for what the organism is. A sequence of DNA designed on a computer has been created from the four chemical bases adenine (A), guanine (G), cytosine (C), and thymine (T) which make up DNA and this has been placed into a donor cell which grew and replicated itself. So now the world has a new bacteria which previously did not exist.

So what? Well, in the short term new bacteria could be designed to do the things that bacteria do. Bacteria are already used to clean-up many types of water and soil pollution. The right bacteria could, for instance, help clean up the huge oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Bacteria are also used to treat municipal waste water before it is released back into the environment. They are also used to breakdown soil pollutants. It might be possible to use new bacteria to create bio-fuels. And there might be medical uses as well. Bacteria not only cause infection, some sorts are good at helping in the healing of wounds. And in the same way that we now artificially synthesize insulin (instead of retrieving it from the bodies of dead people) bacteria could perhaps synthesis other products.

Of course, there are risks in this as well. A new bacteria might have properties that we don't know about and might cause either environmental or health problems. So there are questions of being able to work out safely what would be involved in good health outcomes for people and safe and productive commercial practices. This will be complicated by questions about the commercialization of life, and the patenting and ownership of life forms. None of this will be easy.

But on top of this, the greater significance is that it is another step along the way of people being able to re-form and re-structure life forms and in the long term it will have much greater significance. In short, we are in the process of re-creating, or at least re-forming life.

And so there are important theological questions tied up in this. Should we be 'creating life' in this way? Well, first of all, this is not 'creation' in the way that God creates. It is the re-formation of already existing matter. So we have not taken over God's job. But it does involve a design which is novel, and a form of life that is new.

Does this mean 'playing God'? Well there is a sense in which we are called to 'play God', that is, to represent God in the world. As God's stewards we are to use our intelligence and our wisdom to care for the world, and this means intervening in what is going on. It is not so much a case of whether we will affect the world but how we will do that. Will we do it wisely and carefully?

But should this stewardship involve creating new forms of life? Again, there is a sense in which we already do this. Creating a bacteria is not as significant as creating a new, unique human being, but that is what we do all the time. God has enabled us to produce new people – we are, to use the technical term, pro-creators. We procreate. Which means we, in a sense, stand in for God and make the decision about a new life.

But, of course, we don't control *the form* that this new life takes. Except that we have started to do that with genetic engineering, and, in various places, sex-selection and selection against embryos with genetic disorders.

In all of this we have to use our intelligence, wisdom and our creative abilities. Now some people will resist the idea of creating new forms of life, as usurping God's position. But others will think that being in the image of God mean that we are to be creative, just like God is creative. I think that is not unreasonable, although it is a profoundly important issue – one filled with all sorts of potential – good and bad.

In any case, I think – no, I am sure – that it is inevitable that we will move on to create other forms of life, and will modify and change exiting forms of life – including the form of the human person (again, something we are already doing with chemical and medical technology). So in that situation the question is how we bring Christian wisdom and Christian values to bear on the situation.

Questions that need to be resolved include discerning more clearly the nature and significance of 'species' and whether/to what extent there are boundaries that should not be crossed; and the appropriate rate of any change that is seen as helpful.

We need great wisdom as we embark on this stage of life and development.

If you want to read more on this topic click on the [Biotheology link](#) where there are a number of related articles.

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