

When a Pope really understands Luther!

Dr Thomas Schirrmacher

Associate General Secretary for Theological Concerns, World Evangelical Alliance

Some observations on a joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic prayer service held in Lund, Sweden on Oct 31, 2016, marking the commencement of a year of celebrations for the 500th anniversary of the publication of Dr Martin Luther's 95 theses.



Dr Thomas Schirrmacher (right) with Pope Francis (centre) and Bishop Ef Tendero, WEA CEO (left)

I have often referred to the signing of the document 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World' by the Vatican, the World Council of Churches, and the World Evangelical Alliance in 2011 as a crucial event in the history of the church. Now I was allowed to witness another event in Lund of at least equal importance. I am neither Catholic nor Lutheran. But what has happened here paves the way for all Protestant churches and confessions. And the presence of Orthodox representatives, even of the ancient oriental churches, such as the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Aphrem II, proves that the results are perceived even by uninvolved third parties.

In Lund the Reformation year was opened not only by the Lutheran World Federation, but also by the Catholic Church, represented by the Pope. The event took place in the Cathedral of Lund in front of 450 invited guests, including King Carl Gustaf and Queen Sylvia of Sweden, the Swedish Prime Minister as well as other members of the government, national and international representatives of the Catholic Church and of the Lutheran Churches. Also present were leading representatives of the so-called Secretaries of Christian World Communions, that is to say the leaders of almost all Christian international denominations and

umbrella organizations (from the Orthodox churches to the Salvation Army), among which the two largest, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), were represented by their Secretary Generals and a second delegate each.

On a larger scale, the Lund event can be seen as part of a process of peace making within global Christianity. One could argue that, in a sense, Catholics and Lutherans signed a peace treaty. They regret having used armies, secular powers, and disinformation to fight each other, and they now want to deal with their differences through peaceful discussion, no longer using non-spiritual weapons. They will stop trusting in money, culture, power, and the state, but will instead trust the future of the churches to the power of the gospel, to which every Christian will bear witness and pass on with kindness. From my point of view as an Evangelical Christian, this vision has to be welcomed wholeheartedly.

The so-called sell-out of the Reformation, which has been announced by all sorts of critics and conspiracy theorists, has simply not taken place. In the liturgy of the worship service in the Cathedral of Lund, everyone prayed 'Thanks be to you, O God, for the many guiding theological and spiritual insights that we have all received through the Reformation. Thanks be to you for the good transformation and reforms that were set in motion by the Reformation or by struggling with its challenges. Thanks be to you for the proclamation of the gospel that occurred during the Reformation and that since then has strengthened countless people to live lives of faith in Jesus Christ.' It cannot be said that Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan from

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WEA Leaders Meet with Community of Sant'Egidio



Brian Stiller and David & Diane Toycen

In November 2016 a variety of different evangelical leaders gathered at the main house of the Community of Sant'Egidio (<http://www.santegidio.org/index.php?idLng=1064>) for a time of fellowship, prayer and conversations about the work God is doing around the world and how we can better participate together in God's mission.

Rev Dr Brian Stiller (WEA Global Ambassador) helped bring the group of about 15 people together. It included leaders from World Vision International, A Rocha, the WEA and other organizations who strive towards justice, peace and showing Christ's love to all.

WEA TC Executive Secretary, Dr Rosalee Velloso Ewell said, 'The primary areas of discussion and conversation centred around (i) our Christian faith as it is modelled by our Lord and how we communicate it with others in an ever-changing world; (ii) prayer as a means of communication and communion with God and as a powerful tool against oppression and evil; (iii) the call to be with the poor and to learn to see Jesus in the least, the last and the lost of our

societies; and (iv) how can we engage in Christian mission in the 21st century in ways that take seriously the growing urban world that we live in with all the dangers it poses to all forms of life? What do peace and reconciliation look like in contexts of violence against those who are at the margins and against creation?'

Dr Ewell added, 'We did not gather to come up with answers to all our questions, but to learn to listen to one another and to pray that together we might be able to hear what God is telling us through the ministries and work of others.'

Changes to WEA Personnel and Structures

The Secretary-General of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), Bishop Efraim M. Tendaro, has announced significant changes to the personnel and structures of the WEA. Tendaro, who took his position about 18 months ago, said, 'The WEA has grown significantly over the last years and has added some two dozens of new initiatives, commissions and offices, but at the same time, it was noticeable that there was a need for some structural and organizational improvements in order for the WEA to become more efficient, sustainable long-term, and prepared for further growth.' There is now a raft of 7 leaders, known as 'Associate Secretary-Generals' each heading up a departments, four of which are program oriented and the rest, operational, the former of which 'still reflect the four major pillars, on which the WEA was founded in London in 1846.' They are Theological Concerns, Church in Community, Public Engagement, and Alliance Development. The other positions are Chief Operating Officer, Communications Officer, and Development Office.

Dr. Thomas Schirmacher has been appointed to lead the newly created Theological Concerns department that includes WEA's Theological Commission, its Office of Intra-faith and Inter-faith Relations, religious freedom including solidarity with persecuted Christians, and theological formation. Thomas has served the WEA in various capacities and took on his new role starting October 1, 2016, based in Bonn, Germany. He remains Executive Chair of the WEA Theological Commission.

Bp Tendaro also said, 'The Office of Intra-faith and Inter-faith Relations since the beginning of my term in 2015 has the task to establish liaisons to all other Christian World Communion. Prof. Thomas K. Johnson represents WEA to the Vatican and in principle we would like to establish a similar ongoing personal relation with every of the Christian World Communions, so that relations are not limited by the travel calendar of our top leadership.'

Other new appointments include Amanda Jackson (Church in Community), Christine MacMillan (Public Engagement), Godfrey Yogarajah (Alliance Development). The remaining positions are Chris Chou (COO), and Timothy Goropevsek (CCO). The position of Chief Development Officer is vacant.

Death of Pentecostal Pioneer - WJ Hollenweger

Rev. Dr Walter Jacob Hollenweger, a long-time professor of intercultural mission theology at Birmingham University in the UK and prolific author on the nature of the Pentecostal movement, died on 10 August in Krattigen, Switzerland. He was born in 1927. Having begun his ministry as a Pentecostal lay preacher in Zürich, he was ordained to the ministry of the Swiss Reformed Church following theological studies at the universities of Zürich and Basel. He received his doctorate from Zürich on the basis of a dissertation that became the 10-volume Handbook of the Pentecostal Movement. He was among the first to study Pentecostalism at a time when Pentecostalism was of little interest of scholars and regarded as a marginal topic.

From 1965 to 1971, Hollenweger served on the staff of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, Switzerland as that body's first secretary for evangelism, and then was mission professor at

Towards More Ethical Practices of Mission & Evangelism



Dr Rosalee Velloso Ewell

In October 2016 various members of the WEA-TC gathered in Rome to discuss practices of evangelism and perceptions of proselytism. The gathering was organized by the Global Christian Forum and included representatives from most of the Christian traditions, including Oriental and Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Protestant and Evangelical. From the WEA those present were John Baxter-Brown, Thomas Schirmmacher and Rosalee Velloso Ewell.

The Global Christian Forum put together this working group in order to help build relations between churches and more specifically to think through the ways in which some practices of mission and evangelism are perceived by other Christians as acts of proselytism or 'sheep stealing.' The working group hopes to produce a set of simple guidelines or recommendations that can be used by Christian mission organizations and churches around the world where there are such tensions.

Some of the hopes and objectives of the guidelines is that they will provide a context and space in which truthful conversations can happen between Christian leaders, where reconciliation can be promoted and where the kingdom of God might be proclaimed more clearly and more truthfully through the building up of Christian communities. Following the example of Paul's letter to the Philippians, it is only when Christians learn to work together and to reconcile with each other that our witness is strengthened and God's Spirit enables us to "shine like stars" in a very troubled world.

The working group will meet again in June 2017 in Ghana and hopes to have the draft guidelines ready by the end of 2017.

Death of Notable Biblical Scholar- William J Dumbrell

The noted Australian biblical scholar, William J Dumbrell died on 1 October, 2016. He was a pioneer in this country of teaching, in the context of a theological college, the discipline of biblical theology; that is, a wholistic approach to God's progressive revelation through the Scriptures.

Dr William J Dumbrell was born in 1926, converted when he was 25 in 1951 and began his studies at Moore Theological College four years later. He took out a BD externally from the University of London with First Class Honours in 1961. He later earned an MTh from the same university in 1966 and a ThD from Harvard University in 1970. He was ordained in 1956 and served in churches in Parramatta and Ermington (NSW) before lecturing at Moore College from 1963–66. Upon his return from Harvard, he lectured at Moore College in Old Testament from 1971 to 1984 and was Vice Principal from 1975–84. He then taught at Regent College, Vancouver, from 1984–88, before returning to teach at Moore College from 1988–1994. Bill and Norma then left for missionary service in Singapore, where Bill taught at Trinity College. Bill was initially trained in the specialist disciplines associated with the Old Testament, but he did not confine his interests to just one section of the canon.

Bill always showed a keen interest in the lives of his students and sought to encourage younger scholars. He leaves for the Christian community a lasting legacy of thoughtful scholarship and the example of godly Christian manhood for which we are greatly indebted and for which we praise God.

John Davies & Russell Powell, CEO, Anglican Media Sydney

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Cont. from p 2 Hollenweger

Birmingham University and Selly Oak Colleges from 1971 to 1989. There he introduced the term intercultural theology, relativizing the dominance and normativity of western theology for all cultures.

Also, he was among the first theologians to broaden the concept of theology by emphasizing the relevance of oral culture and narrative theology. This is next to his extensive academic work demonstrated in his enthusiasm for drama, plays and performance as he wrote many plays, most notable being the Bonhoeffer Requiem at the 1987 Kirchentag in Berlin.

Hollenweger published many scholarly articles and books, the best-known being *The Pentecostals and Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*. Among the innovations with which he has been associated is the Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership. At the Vrije Universiteit (Free University) of Amsterdam, the Hollenweger Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements, established in 2002, is named in his honour.

Adpated from <http://www.godgeleerdheid.vu.nl/en/research/institutes-and-centres/hollenweger-centre/index.aspx> and <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc-remembers-pentecostal-ecumenist-walter-j-hollenweger>

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Jerusalem, President of the Lutheran World Federation, and his Secretary General, Martin Junge from Chile, would have been willing to water down their Lutheran identity for the purpose of a big media event.

The Lutherans expressed their regret that the Reformation had been misused for political goals all too quickly and that the Protestants had not been able to prevent religious wars and the persecution of others. Both sides have distanced themselves from having spread lies about one another and from having been filled with hatred, which even led to war in many cases.

But the core concerns of Luther, *sola gratia* along with his call for reform, were acknowledged as ground breaking by all participants. The Pope said: 'The spiritual experience of Martin Luther challenges us to remember that apart from God we can do nothing. 'How can I get a propitious God?' This is the question that haunted Luther. In effect, the question of a just relationship with God is the decisive question for our lives. As we know, Luther encountered that propitious God in the Good News of Jesus, incarnate, dead and risen. With the concept '*by grace alone*,' he reminds us that God always takes the initiative, prior to any human response, even as he seeks to awaken that response. The doctrine of justification thus expresses the essence of human existence before God." Especially in modern Protestantism there are many who have not understood Luther as well as this statement and surely it also reminds us, that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.

Since the preparation of the event in Lund was of the utmost importance to the World Evangelical Alliance as well as to many other people, I not only talked with the leaders of the Lutheran World Federation very extensively, but also met with the Pope four times in recent weeks. From my personal observation and interaction, Pope Francis is aware, that in the 16th century, corruption did win over reform and is deeply convinced that the Holy Scripture, the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit possess the required power to lead the churches to a greater unity in the long term, if we put God's initiative and saving grace first, and to enable each Christian to personally witness about salvation and hope in Jesus Christ to a dying world.

Indeed, with his words the Pope was only drawing conclusions arising from the fact that the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation, after years of intense work, had agreed on a short definition of the doctrine of justification, which summarizes the NT view, especially Paul's. 17 years later, this accordance can lead to practical implementation, not hastily but in a prudent manner, not as if walking on thin ice but as a sustainable commonality. What is new is that the Pope sees justification as an absolute central question. Just shortly after his election I heard for the first time from Pope Francis that the common view of justification as salvation by grace and faith alone should be the centre of our shared commonalities and that on this basis further steps would have to be taken. As is usual, Pope Francis has made his announcements come true, even though they initially sounded quite adventurous.

At the same time, however, the fundamental recognition of Luther's basic concerns by the Catholic Church is no cause for Protestant triumphalism. It must be borne in mind that the Reformation led quickly to further divisions, to polarization, to religious nationalism, as well as to the spread of pride and hatred. The joint statement, which was signed during the Ecumenical Prayer in Lund, puts it this way: 'While we are profoundly thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, we also confess and lament before Christ that Lutherans and Catholics have wounded the visible unity of the Church. Theological differences were accompanied by prejudice and conflicts, and religion was instrumentalised for political ends.'

In essence, the event was a celebration of the Reformation, not only by the presence of the Pope, but even at his invitation. Beyond all doubt, it was a remarkable step the Pope took towards Protestants, both symbolic and substantial. Of course this gesture was not presented only by the Pope. Many leading Catholic theologians, bishops, and cardinals had been actively involved in the preparations for many years. Just in time, the pope tears down 500-year-old walls and replaces conflict by serious talks, self-criticism on both sides, and by the desire that the necessary disputes within Christianity should be shaped by love, not by the desire to defeat each other.

The Pope's moving appeal in the Malmo arena to intensify ecumenical cooperation did not mean a hasty overcoming of the remaining deep theological differences between Catholics and Protestants. Instead, these differences would have to be thoroughly discussed, although the similarities certainly predominate. In this sense, he called World Christianity to show solidarity to a suffering world, and together help the poor, the sick, the oppressed, and the persecuted. The signing of a far-reaching cooperation agreement between Caritas International and the World Service of the Lutheran World Federation, which took place during the ceremony, underlines what is meant by this. This is reminiscent of the great commonality shown by all churches especially in the course of international refugee aid. It makes clear that theological differences should not be discussed at the expense of the needy, but as a common struggle for truth.

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