

## Ukrainian seminaries respond bravely to horrors of war

Ukrainian theological schools have boldly remained faithful to Christ during the Russian invasion. On 17 March, the Eastern European Institute of Theology, the Overseas Council–United World Mission, and several other organizations amplified the voices of Ukrainian Christian leaders to the world through a stirring webinar.

Ivan Rusyn, rector of the Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary in Kyiv, explained that the school had implemented its crisis plan and evacuated staff and students. The campus functioned as a storage and feeding facility until shelling forced those services to relocate. ‘The war has brought us close’, Rusyn affirmed, describing the gratitude of Ukrainian soldiers when they received communion on the battlefield. He said the school was carrying out ‘incarnational mission’ while also restarting its educational programs online.

Valentyn Siniy, from Tavriski Christian Institute in the hard-hit city of Kherson, cited the book of Esther as a biblical example of ‘human evil that we can and must resist’. He noted that in one village near Kherson, an evangelical pastor and Catholic and Orthodox priests were coming together each day to bury the dead. Another church sheltered 57 children from a destroyed orphanage.

Stanislav Stepanchenko, dean of Lviv Theological Seminary in western Ukraine, had not seen bombings firsthand at that point, but his school was hosting 60 to 120 refugees daily as they escaped the war, most on their way to Poland. ‘Some of them can’t even use their cell phone because their hand and heart are shaking’, he explained. Seminary staff were welcoming refugees in the train station, offering guidance on next steps, and transporting groups of refugees to the Polish border in vans.

Finally, Oleksandr Geychenko, rector of Odesa Theological Seminary, told of a female student who had evacuated with her mother. ‘They have no place to live and no job’, Geychenko stated. Multiply this case by two million and you have an approximate estimate of what has happened in Ukraine.’ Geychenko bemoaned the mixed response by some theological educators in eastern Europe. He said the Russian Christians had opposed depicting the situation as ‘black and white’, although some had changed their perspective after the invasion began. Meanwhile, he explained, Christians were holding daily prayer meetings, opening church basements as shelters, and volunteering to dig trenches to help Ukrainians protect their neighbourhoods.

### JOURNALS AND NEWSLETTERS WITHIN THE GLOBAL THEOLOGY DEPARTMENT

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<http://jahrbuch.iirf.global/>

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#### **Jahrbuch für Religionsfreiheit [Yearbook on Religious Freedom]**

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<https://bonner-querschnitte.de/>

#### **WEA RLC Research and Analysis Report (periodic)**

<https://wordea.org/whoware/newsletter-signup>

## Major progress for Re-Forma

March was a busy month for Re-Forma, the global organization formed by Manfred Kohl to support the development of untrained pastors worldwide. Re-Forma leaders participated in strategic planning meetings, a Re-Forma board meeting, the launch of founder Manfred Kohl's festschrift (see next page), and the kickoff of the Galilean Movement (a leadership multiplication initiative also started by Manfred), all held in Dorfweil, Germany on 7–11 March.

From there, Re-Forma staff flew to Accra, Ghana for the Quality Assurance Institute for facilitators in that region, held on 16–18 March. The programme was repeated in Nairobi, Kenya on 17–19 March. Between the two events, 78 pastors who also serve as facilitators of groups enrolled with Re-Forma were intensively trained in facilitation and assessment skills.

The reports received from training participants were extremely encouraging. Re-Forma project director Reuben van Rensburg stated, 'I am confident that once they have completed the training of the pastors in their respective groups, the level of equipping amongst these undertrained or untrained ministry leaders will improve significantly.'

These institutes form part of the Re-Forma programme to address the fact that only 5% of all evangelical pastors have a formal qualification. Re-Forma is responding to this need by providing the first-ever global standard for non-formal ministry training. Its Certificate of Biblical Training for Ministry, issued when students can successfully demonstrate the stipulated programme outcomes, is underwritten by the World Evangelical Alliance.

The registration of Re-Forma USA has recently been completed; the organization was previously registered in Africa and Germany. Currently there are 1,144 enrolled groups in 76 countries and 22 languages. Manfred Kohl, President and CEO of Re-Forma, stated, 'More than two-thirds of our partner groups are from Africa, which is primarily the result of having our office and staff in Africa. We hope to have the same growth in Latin America, Asia, the Middle East and Eurasia. The right staff, office location and registrations must be worked out in the next one to three years. We plan to begin in Asia, probably in the Philippines, in 2022–2023.'

Re-Forma is also conducting a global survey of non-formal ministry training institutions entitled the GREAT Institutions Survey (that stands for Global Research on Evangelical And ministry Training). To date, no one has undertaken such a survey and, as a result, the number of ministry training programmes remains unknown.

The survey has two main purposes. First, it will help Re-Forma establish a registry for the many thousands of non-formal training institutions around the world. This, in turn, will enable Re-Forma to make contact with these training institutions in the hope of collaboration in ministry training. Second, it will provide valuable information on the state of the non-formal theological education sector globally, as well as to the WEA and the global church.

Please promote this global survey through your networks. The link to access the survey is <https://worldea.org/yourls/tn512a>.

## Poignant apology from Russian Evangelical Alliance leader

While some Russian Christians faced stiff criticism for failing to oppose the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, Vitaly Vlasenko, general secretary of the Russian Evangelical Alliance, released a heartfelt, deeply moving letter of apology.

In his letter to the world, Vlasenko, a pastor near Moscow, expressed 'sorrow, bitterness and regret for decisions taken by the leadership of my country, and a great compassion for those suffering as a result of this decision. Everything I could do to prevent war, I did in an attempt to stop this military invasion—including an open letter to Vladimir Putin pleading for a peaceful resolution.'

You can find Vlasenko's full letter here: <https://worldea.org/yourls/tn512b>.



WEA Secretary General Thomas Schirrmacher and Vitaly Vlasenko at the Conference of Leaders of Evangelical Churches in Russia in 2019 © BQ/Thomas Schirrmacher

## A remarkable book for a remarkable man

The World Evangelical Alliance honoured Re-Forma founder Manfred Kohl on his 80th birthday in March by releasing an extensive festschrift with 37 contributions from Kohl's admirers.

Kohl is widely recognized for his indispensable contributions to theological education, especially in the Global South. Primarily in his work for the Overseas Council, he visited nearly 500 theological schools. He also founded World Vision's operations in several European countries and continues to chair the Integrity Commission of the WEA and the Lausanne Movement.

Many of the contributions acknowledge Kohl's unique nature, which combines deep personal compassion with a stern professional demeanour as he both loves his Christian colleagues and challenges them to do their best possible work in God's service. His intolerance of sloppiness or second-rate work is aptly captured by the festschrift's unusual title, composed of several of Kohl's most frequent admonitions: 'Be Focused ... Use Common Sense ... Overcome Excuses and Stupidity.'

The book's sections contain essays from the various areas in which Kohl made major contributions: child development, theological education, integrity, biblical ministry and servant leadership in the church.

You can read these 550 pages of high-quality articles free by downloading the book here: <https://worldea.org/yourls/tn512c>



Dr Manfred Kohl during his speech at the celebration on the occasion of his 80th birthday © BQ/Martin Warnecke

## Seeking the Asian face of Christianity

Six months ago, when key leaders of the evangelical movement from all over Asia met for the Asia 2021 Congress, several sessions sparked a lively discussion on the relevance of contextualization in today's global context and for today's generation.

As a follow-up to the Asia 2021 Congress, on 26 February 2022, an online forum was convened to continue the conversation on the status of 'Contextualization of Theological Formation in Southeast Asia'.

The participants wrestled with the perplexing observation that Christianity in the region continues to be identified by its Western characteristics in both theology and practice. A select group of panelists helped to probe alternative approaches to local or regional theological formation and education that will characterize contextualization and, in some cases, de-colonization.

Should a church simply embrace its familiarity with Western forms of Christianity, Dr Samuel Law (Singapore Bible College) noted, it will alienate a large majority of the non-Christian population who are deeply rooted in their local cultures and languages. Dr Edwardneil Benavidez (Saleng Leadership Institute, Philippines) likened the issue to serving sandwiches and pizzas for lunch to Filipinos who would prefer a meal that comes with rice. For Dr Peter Nguyen (Asia Church Mission Society, Vietnam), doing contextualization in the diverse religio-cultural contexts of Asia requires the ability to see how God has been at work in the midst of Asian people since long before the arrival of Christian missionaries. But there is also a need to engage the present context, as Dr Tan Sooi Ling (Asia Graduate School of Theology, Malaysia) emphasized the need for a robust engagement with pervasive issues such as injustice, ethnic religious tensions, religious persecution, poverty and socio-economic equality.

Because contextualization will involve experimentation, Dr Gani Wiyono (Satya Bhakti Advanced School of Theology, Indonesia) suggested that seminaries are the best place to do so, but only if they can ensure that their creative work does not stay in the libraries but is worked out practically in the church. Samuel Lim (Overseas Missionary Fellowship – Mekong, Thailand) highlighted that this will demand a rethinking of how to do church in terms of the material, visual and spatial aspects of spirituality, engaging all the senses through celebrations and festivals. Dr Bennett Arren Lawrence (Asia Theological Association) highlighted the ATA's contributions in this regard, which include reading materials that address contextual realities, such as the *Asia Bible Commentary* series, and more recently textbooks such as *Asian Christian Theology*.

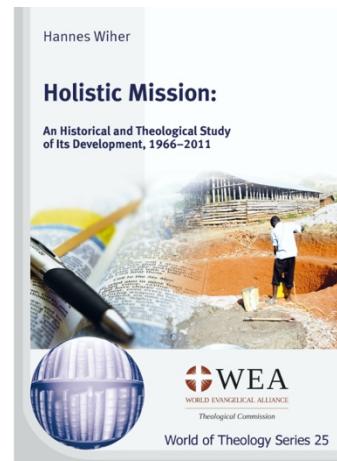
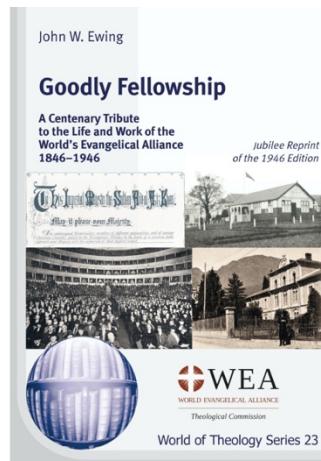
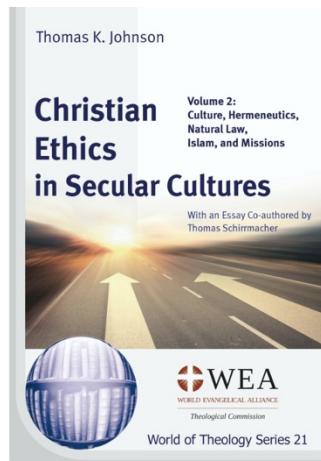
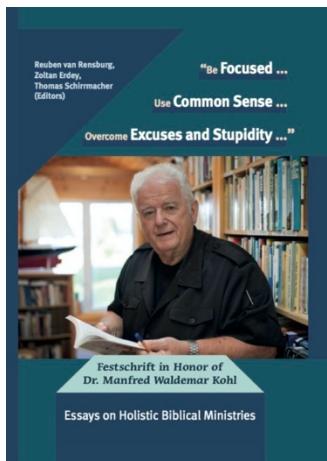
Rocelyn Anog-Madinger (Orality Strategies, Philippines) remarked that seeking the Asian face of Christianity requires 'a heart that acknowledges that all cultures are fallen and frail, not superior to anyone else, yet in each culture God's fingerprint is present. ...Together, different tribes and tongues, Asian or not, will join in the multicultural worship of the creative, diversity-loving, and magnificent God.'

The event was spearheaded by the Lausanne Movement in Southeast Asia and the Philippine Lausanne Committee. The WEA Theological Commission, through its coordinator, Rei Lemuel Crizaldo, provided support in organizing the forum, and Crizaldo also served as moderator and host. A link to the video recording of the presentations and the discussions is available at <https://worldea.org/yourls/tn512d>.

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## More new books



Along with the festschrift in honour of Manfred Kohl, the WEA World of Theology Series has also released these books:

- Thomas K. Johnson, *Christian Ethics in Secular Cultures* (vol. 2)
- John W. Ewing, *Goodly Fellowship: A Centenary Tribute to the Life and Work of the World Evangelical Alliance 1846-1946* (jubilee reprint of the 1946 edition)
- Hannes Wiher, *Holistic Mission: An Historical and Theological Study of Its Development, 1966-2011*

These books and many others are available for download at <https://worldea.org/yourls/tn512e>.

## WEA THEOLOGICAL NEWS

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