

# Theological Conference of FEET in Wittenberg, 2016

## The Reformation, a gospel work to carry on

'The Reformation, its theology and its legacy' was the general topic of the biennial conference of FEET (the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians) that took place in Lutherstadt Wittenberg (Germany) from 26 to 30 August 2016 in the very university in which Luther taught. Approaching the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, some 80 theologians from many European countries (and beyond) came together to reflect on the theological significance of the Reformation in face of present-day challenges which confront evangelical theology and churches in Europe. The conference was organised in partnership with the European Evangelical Alliance and the World Reformed Fellowship-Europe.

Each morning opened with prayer. Particularly moving was the session in which those present were invited to pray in their own languages. Properly, since it was the rediscovery of the Word of God that lay at the heart of the Reformation, the conferences were led each day through a study of the Epistle to the Romans by Christoph Stenschke. These highlighted those areas where the message of the Reformation needs to be rediscovered and those where the Reformers lacked light and where *semper reformanda* remains the catchword. On the Sunday, local churches were attended.

The main papers read at the conference concentrated on the question of guilt, shame and forgiveness as they were dealt with in Reformation times and how the Reformation approach based on justification by faith alone is a feasible answer to the post-modern reconstruction of guilt (C. Raedel); the tension between theological unity and diversity that was witnessed at the Reformation and how this tension is reflected in the contemporary Evangelical movement (T. Schirmacher); the question of truth and authority as it transitioned in Luther from being located in the Church to the Scriptures (A.T.B. McGowan); the concern on the training of leaders that was central to the Reformation and how that emphasis impacts the present-day challenge of leadership formation (P.B. Rothen); and the issue of secularism and the freedom of conscience (P. Wells). God willing, these papers will appear in a book early in 2017, which will also contain the texts of some workshop presentations on aspects of the Reformation such as visual arts, music and education.

Another important part of the conference was devoted to short papers addressing the history and relevance of the Reformation in various European regions, thus showing the historical impact and the unfinished task in focusing the life of the Church and the wider society on the biblical gospel. It was striking to hear that in some countries the Reformation did not take place at all! A highlight of the conference was the guided tour to the historical sites of Wittenberg such as the Castle Church, Luther's house and Melancthon's house.

The Reformation is not a museum to look at uncritically, but is a great source of inspiration as the Church moves into the Third Millennium. It was a great and extraordinary work of God's providence that needs to be carried on in every generation. Thus, Pierre Berthoud, conference chair, concluded the conference with an accent upon hope. He referred to G. K. Chesterton's comment that history has born testimony to the fact that when it seems that the Church is going to the dogs it is the dog that dies. Obedience and faithfulness is, therefore, the charge and, still, prophetic word must be accompanied by divine action. Thus, the hope of the Church remains hope in the power of the Word of the living God.