

Newsletter

June 2017

From the Chairman of FEET

Dear colleagues,
 If we were to qualify the cultural climate of the continent at the beginning of the 21st Century, it would be appropriate to speak of a divided Europe. The divide is not so much between left and right, as it is between the progressives and the conservatives, the elite and the people, the rich and the poor, those who hold to the European Union model and those who emphasize national sovereignty, those who promote a multicultural society and those who give priority to the cultural and historical identity of their country, those who are in favour of a globalized market economy and those who advocate protectionist economic measures in order to safeguard national interests...

It is now apparent that with the breakdown of the civil society it is increasingly difficult to speak within our democracies of a cultural and social consensus contributing to the unity and peace of the populations that make up our different European nations. As we witness the turmoil and distress in our midst, it seems that we are reaping in this late modern cultural climate the fruits of a man centered world and life view. The de-Christianization and the secularization of society have brought about major crises of our value system and moral standards.

As an example one can mention the headline of the cover page of last week's *Le Point*, one of the major French weekly magazines: *La défaite de la vérité* (The Defeat of Truth). "Is truth a social construction or does it have an objective existence"? Such is the fundamental question. In fact, for many of our contemporaries cognitive nihilism represents the core of the present 'post-truth' global climate. In other words, "since the 'official' understanding of truth has failed to achieve a consensus, everyone has the right to believe whatever

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pleases him however crazy and irrational it may seem. In this era of fake news, the web's main effect has been to amplify the growing distrust of the system".¹

Of course it is possible to appeal to common sense, not to say common grace, to argue that exposure to reality, or the process of critical evaluation and verification are a sure means to reveal the fictitious character and the falsehood of the alternative facts! But are we so sure that reality and truth exist, that critical evaluation and well defined arguments will make the difference and save the day? Could it be that our generation has missed the point that *truth has been defeated because God is dead*?²

Indeed, within the Christian world and life view, the infinite personal God is the ground for truth. The doctrine of creation accounts for an objective reality distinct of the Creator and, in stating that man is the image-bearer of God, it reminds us that he is a human person and that he is able to rightly, though not exhaustively, apprehend truth (Ps 115: 2–8). This means that truth cannot just be reduced to a social construction nor is it subject to

an act of the will or a fleeting feeling and opinion. In a nutshell, "God is. Reality is. Truth is."

As we seek to overcome the divisions that cut across our European democracies, truth, as it relates to trust, integrity, loyalty and justice, is essential to the reconstruction of peaceful civil societies (Jer 29:7). But such a change is only possible if we adhere wholeheartedly to the whole council of God as it is revealed in the Bible. We need to uphold both the world and life view which has as its apex the Creator and the word incarnate, even Jesus-Christ, the unique Lord and redeemer. They determine our identity and our mission as we participate in the furthering of the kingdom of God and the renaissance of the Christian faith in Europe. With the help of the Spirit we plan to further reflect on these issues during our next conference in 2018: *Christian Identity and Mission in a Divided Europe*.

With my warm greetings in Christ Jesus,

Pierre Berthoud, Aix-en-Provence, France

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 500th 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);

¹ Hugo Domenach, « Les platistes contre la NASA, » Le Point N° 2328, 2017, p 89.

² In 1966, Time Magazine featured on one of its covers the question, "Is God Dead?" In 2017, it featured a related question, "Is Truth Dead?"

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.



From the 2016 FEET Conference in Wittenberg

The Reformation in Greece and Bulgaria and its Relevance for Today: The Legacy of the Reformation among the Minorities in the Bulgarian Lands. The Work of the Union of Evangelical Congregational Churches

Rev. Stanislav Alexiev M.A. B.Div.

Let me start with a quotation from a very well recognized Internet Forum of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, where it says: “I invite all Protestant Christians to become real Christians (Orthodox) so that many other people are saved.”

As obscure as this invitation is, it shows the reality of the context the Orthodox Church creates regarding the sharing of the Gospel and the legacy of its virtues. It is merely an invitation, not a contextualization of the Christian values, it is not going out into society, but rather waiting for society to experience the salvation by going to the Church first.

In this context, the arrival of the Protestant, or Reformed, missionaries into the Bulgarian lands in the middle of the nineteenth century was aimed at changing this self-centred attitude.

The first efforts of the American and English missionaries were not focused on the Bulgarian territories but towards organising and establishing Christian churches in Syria and Palestine. However, prevented by different historical events the missionaries had to stay in the Bulgarian lands. At first they tried to help the Bulgarian Orthodox Church overcome some internal and external problems. Rejected by that Church, the missionaries were forced to establish new churches, entirely Protestant.

Historians are amazed how quickly they understood the society, learned the language and started living with the problems of the Bulgarians. The missionary activities were complex – establishing schools, publishing religious leaflets, magazines and newspapers, creating a network of traveling booksellers, etc. Those activities helped the missionaries to become integrated into the community and to bring the Christian faith and values to the Bulgarians. Although they worked in the old Bulgarian lands, which were under the Ottoman rule, the missionaries did not work only with Bulgarians. They were committed to fulfil the Great Commission (Mat 28:18–20) to go to every “ethnos” and to bring the Good News. The legacy of the Reformation reached even the minorities in our territories.

Work among the Jews

Expelled from Spain in 1492, many Jewish people came to the Ottoman Empire and were allowed by the Sultan to settle there. They were so grateful that they called these lands “the Heavenly Jerusalem”. By a special decree they were allowed to keep their faith. Travelers and traders, they brought the Western civilization to the oppressed Bulgarians.

But the missionaries knew well the apostle Paul’s recommendation: “... I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first...” (Rom 1:16, 17). The work among the Jews had two goals: sharing the Gospel with them on one hand, and preaching love toward them, on the other.

The “Svetlina” (or “Light”) Magazine was published and distributed among Jewish people as well as others. Small Bible study home groups were established. As a result, many Jews came to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Some of them became traveling booksellers and lay preachers (Mr. Zilberstein, Mr. Glikman), others became ordained ministers, like the first Jewish pastor – Rev. Joseph Isaakov.

In the period of 1939–1943, when the Bulgarian Kingdom was an ally to Nazi Germany, the Congregational Churches accepted Jewish people as members of the church. I personally have got copies of 22 baptismal certificates issued to Jewish families during just in one summer. The records of the Session of the Church expressively say that the Church would baptize only true believers among the Jews. Was that reality or not, no one knows.

In 1941 pastor Asen Simeonov baptized 56 Jewish families. When the pro-Fascist Bulgarian authorities learned about this, they arrested him on a Sunday, during the morning service, interrupting his sermon. He was imprisoned and tortured for his courage to try to save Jewish people.

During that period the Bulgarian government decided that the Jewish population of the capital Sofia

should be expelled into the provinces of the country. Some Jews had to go to the city of Samokov and to the villages surrounding it. The keeper of the premises of the Protestant Seminary in Samokov, (Mr. Kozuharov, allowed 200 Jewish families to live in the Seminary under his special protection. The local authorities protested against this, but without any effect. Later Mr. Kozuharov was expelled from the town, but the Jewish families remained there until after the War finished. Even in that way the Protestant Church served the Jewish people.

Today the legacy of the Reformation is still at work among the Jewish minority in Bulgaria. There are at least two Mission Agencies trying to reach the Jews with the Gospel. Many individual evangelicals also make efforts to share the truth that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah.

Work among the Armenian people

It is a historical fact that the Bible was translated into the old Armenian language in AD 428. However, the Bible was translated into the modern Armenian language in 1838 by the American Protestant missionary, Dr Elias Riggs, the same who translated the Bible into the modern Bulgarian language in 1871.

Armenian people came to the Bulgarian lands for the first time in 1890 when thousands of Armenians fled from Turkey to Bulgaria to avoid persecution. Here they found acceptance and hospitality, freedom and security. They settled mainly in the cities of Varna, Rouse, Plovdiv and Sofia.

Seconded by a German humanitarian agency, the Rev. Abraham Amirhanianantz in Varna opened a high school for orphans in 1896. Later other orphanages, schools and hospitals were opened mainly in Varna and Plovdiv. Several ministers were sent to Bulgaria by Protestant churches to serve the Armenian people. One from Basle was sent to Varna; some from Germany and Switzerland were sent to Rouse; one from Frankfurt am Main was sent to Plovdiv. These ministers of the Word did not only do humanitarian work, but they regularly visited the people they served. Not even a small shack was neglected. Starting with feeding people, dealing with their physical wounds, the missionaries shared the Gospel on every single occasion.

Small mission stations were planted and soon after that Armenian churches appeared in the cities of Varna, Rouse, Plovdiv and Sofia. New pastors were ordained and the hope for new life was at hand.

The work was blocked after 1945. During the Communist era these churches survived, although very small and fragile. Now in the new circumstances they continue their existence under the new trials and blessings. The legacy of the Reformation among the Armenian people in Bulgaria is still alive today.

The work among the Turks

The Protestant missionaries were unable to do evangelistic work among the Turks under the Ottoman Empire openly. There was a very strict, specific law, saying that every Muslim who would reject Islam was to



From the 2016 FEET Conference in Wittenberg

be sentenced to death. Nevertheless, such evangelistic work was being done.

The American missionary Miss Ursula Marsh started visiting the Turkish ladies in Plovdiv. She knew the Turkish language well and was very well accepted. Soon, a prominent Plovdiv Turkish lady by the name of Liuftie Hanam started showing genuine interest in the Gospel. Miss Marsh led her to Christ and Hanam became the first missionary to her own people. She visited Turkish homes and spent time sharing the Gospel with the Turkish ladies. Many knew the Lord secretly and had their spiritual life privately in their houses.

In the beginning of the twentieth century Rev. Johannes Avetaranian came from Switzerland to Plovdiv – born a Turk, he had just finished seminary training. His main occupation was to print Christian literature, but he also did some work among his people. In 1909 he met the young Mustafa Naziroff, a Muslim from Plovdiv. Avetaranian spent a lot of time with Mustafa; five years later he baptized him and in 1922 (another eight years later), he ordained him in pastoral ministry. Together they spent a lot of time visiting the local Turkish coffee shops and discussing the Gospel with the people there. Some, like one Turkish teacher, a nobleman, and even the mosque leader become interested in the Gospel. This led to the expulsion of the two ministers from the city. They went to live in Constantinople, facing many troubles and persecutions.

It was very difficult to continue to work among the Turks and the Turkish speaking Gipsies. But the results were astonishing. In Plovdiv, where many of the Turks were pickpockets and gamblers, those of them who met the Lord became good Christians – an example for their ex-friends. They became hard workers and good citizens with good families.

Today we have several Mission Agencies working among the Bulgarian Turks. The integration of the believing Turks is a challenge to the Evangelical churches.

The work among the Pomaks

Under the Ottoman rule a process of forced islamisation of the Bulgarian population started in the fourteenth century. In the sixteenth century, in the area of the Rodopa mountain one million Bulgarians were forced to accept Islam. These people were allowed to speak the Bulgarian language, but they had to dress like Muslims and behave like Muslims. They became known as “Pomaks”, which comes from the Bulgarian word for “oppression” or “torture” (“помъчени”).

After the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire, most of them went to live in Turkey. About 150 000 Pomaks stayed in our country. In 1913 the Bulgarian government with the cooperation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church started an initiative to Christianize the Pomaks from Chepino and Smolian. All of the people were baptized, but a few months later they were allowed to choose to remain “Christians” or to return to their old faith. All of them left the church.

The Protestant missionaries did not approach the Pomaks by force, but rather they worked with them individually. A foreign mission society asked the Bulgarian Evangelical Society to find a person to work among the Pomaks. The person chosen was Rev. K. Marvakov, who was born in Pomak area. He worked among them for seven years, travelled and preached 530 official sermons and gave out 1500 Bibles and New Testaments. However, the Pomaks just listened to him, took the literature and but did not accept the Gospel. When they went home, they used the pages of the Bibles to make cigarettes.

Even today the Pomaks are a very closed community. It is difficult to work among them. Efforts are made by foreign mission agencies, but the need to break into their way of thinking is still great.

The work among the Gipsies

There are several groups among the Gipsies in Bulgaria. There are Turkish-speaking Gipsies, Bulgarian-speaking Gipsies, Gipsy-language speaking Gipsies, Romanian-speaking Gipsies, etc. The Bulgarian-speaking Gipsies are Orthodox by faith, the rest are more or less Muslims.

The Protestant work among the Gipsies was successful in Northwest Bulgaria in the village of Veselinovo, near the city of Lom on the Danube River. The work started in a curious way. The Gypsy Bogdan Markov stole a Bible from a Bulgarian protestant family from the same village. Because he was illiterate, he gave the Bible to another Gipsy, Petar Punchev. Petar started reading it and became a Protestant by himself. Soon after that he was sent to study theology in Austria. After graduating from the seminary, he was ordained and worked as a pastor among the Gypsies in the village of Golinci. Unfortunately, he died very young. In 1927 Rev. P. Minkov came to the same village and under his ministry the first Gypsy Protestant church in Bulgaria was planted in 1930. The congregation built its own church building and had 30 members in the beginning.

Rev. Minkov sent two young people to study theology in Austria and when they returned, they took up the work in the village. Minkov continued his ministry among the Gypsies in Sofia. There he had to work among Muslim Gypsies, but together with his wife he had very fruitful ministry. He also translated many books and leaflets into the Gypsy language. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke and some hymnbooks were also translated.

Today in our denomination we have more than twenty church plants among the Gypsies, mainly in the Southeast region of Bulgaria (the area of Sliven). Problems that the Gypsies face today are illiteracy and lack of sufficient education. There is a high percentage of crime in the Gypsy areas and it is a sign that the Gospel is most needed there.

In conclusion, I would like to share a story: a journalist went to Central Africa and asked a local man: Why are you a Christian? The Christians, as the others, fight among themselves, do not live according to the Scriptures, exploit you, etc. Then why?

The man answered: Sir, the Christians are sinful as the rest, but you must know that 50 years ago our predecessors were cannibals. No white man could come

here, and if you were here then, you would be cooked in this big cauldron. Instead you are our guest today and you owe that to the Protestant missionaries who came to us and changed our lives with the Gospel.

As a Bulgarian I may say the same. If it wasn't for the first Protestant missionaries who came and lived in Bulgaria, I would not have been touched by the power of the Gospel. In this sense, every believer is a living legacy of the Reformation. The light of the Reformation made that possible. To have the privilege to read the Bible in one's own language and to be encouraged to apply it in one's own life definitely leaves a legacy. This is a legacy that changes people, nations and history. This is a legacy that continues to preach today the mottos of the Reformation: Sola fide; Sola Scriptura; Sola Christi; Sola gratia; Soli Deo gloria.

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The Reformation in Bulgaria and its Relevance for Today

Pastor Daniel Ignatov

It is commonly said that, “the Protestant Reformation made no impact upon the Orthodox Slavic peoples, except in a few isolated cases”.¹ Protestantism penetrated in Bulgaria much later, in the nineteenth century, when the country was still occupied by the Ottoman Empire.

Nevertheless, there are arguments to acknowledge some local “pre-reformational” roots in the *hesychasm*, which flourished on the Balkan Peninsula in the 14th century. Hesychasm was a spiritual movement with old traditions in the Eastern Church. Its doctrine of *theosis* (divinization)² emphasised the personal relation with God and moral purity through the individual ascetic endeavour, confident in God’s grace and without the mediation of the church institution. Furthermore, some historians consider the heretical movement of the *bogomils* in Bulgaria (and of the *cathares* in France), which appeared in the 11th century, as a precursor of the Reformation. In 1870 the American Methodist missionary Dr Albert Long wrote a eulogistic article on the bogomils, who were “the first to break through the thick crust of superstitions and prejudices” and “400 years before the first Slave martyr Jan Huss perished on the stake, took courage to proclaim the freedom of the individual conscience against all threats of the tyranny of the priests”.³ Putting aside the inadmissible ontological dualism of this heresy and its apocryphal doctrinal base, we may draw attention to some elements of its mentality and to the practice of their adherents, together with the later spiritual and cultural adjustments among the protestant people such as their anticlerical attitude, simplified forms of worship, rejection of images and symbols, and demands for social equity.

The new spiritual and political situation on the Balkans in the 19th century was favourable for the dissemination of Reformation ideas and theology in Bulgaria. In the same period a large movement for national independence from the Ottoman yoke and for spiritual independence from

the Greek high clergy arose, known as the “Bulgarian Renaissance”. More and more intelligent and active Bulgarians were thirsty to discover the origins of their Christian identity and to look for access to the Bible and other Christian literature in the contemporary language. The Bible translation from the 9th century in the old Bulgarian language was already incomprehensible. At the same time Bulgaria was opened up as a new missionary field by some wise and devoted American evangelists.

Without doubt, the activity of the American missionaries had been inspired by the challenges of the Revival movement in North America. Many young people, with new born conscience, decided to obey the Great Commission of Christ. With revivalist enthusiasm, some of them came to the Balkans, moved by zeal for the salvation of the Bulgarians. They were involved in the beginning of the Protestant movement in our country. Although the missionaries did not aim to establish a separate church apart from the Orthodox Church, that separation came, largely because of persecution inspired by part of the Orthodox clergy.

The first separate protestant evangelical churches, as the result of missionary activity, appeared in the main Bulgarian town of Sofia, as well as in Bansko, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora and Samokov, with the help of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM). The ABCFM developed its work on the south side of the Balkan Mountains (Stara Planina), in parallel with the work of the Board of Foreign Mission of the Methodist Church (BFMMC) in the north of Bulgaria, resulting in the foundation of churches in Veliko Tırnovo, Varna, Shoumen, Rousse, Lovech.

The American Board Mission to Bulgarians, Macedonians, and later Albanians, Serbians and Greeks, was a direct outgrowth of the mission to Turkey, which started in 1819.⁴ “It is evident that the earliest missionaries in Turkey little imagined that they would develop one of their most successful missions among

¹ MOJZES Paul B., *A History of the Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia*, Dissertation, 2 vol., Boston University Graduate School, 1965, p. 46

² According its Christianised interpretation by the Fathers of the Church

³ РАЙЧЕВСКИ Стоян, *Америка и българите до Учредителното събрание 1879 г.* София, Български бестселър – Национален музей на българската книга и полиграфия, 2003г., с. 167.

⁴ Ibid p. 54

the Bulgarians.”⁵ Later renamed as American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM), it was “the major Congregational agency, sending out missionaries of various denominations to many areas of the world”.⁶

In the beginning, the ABCFM had been created by Congregational churches in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Nevertheless, after 1812, the mission was opened for partnership with other denominations with a reformed confessional base.⁷ This probably explains why the missionaries from the ABCFM in Bulgaria were called “Presbyterians” in some contemporary Bulgarian newspapers.⁸

Meanwhile, the British Bible Society developed a notable activity for translation, publishing and spreading the Gospel in the current Bulgarian language. The American missionaries took the lead in this activity. As a result, in 1871 the first Bible in contemporary Bulgarian appeared, translated by Dr Elias Riggs (a Congregationalist), Dr Albert Long (a Methodist) and several Bulgarian authors, prominent figures of the Bulgarian Renaissance (with Orthodox identity).

In 1876, American missionaries started publishing the weekly newspaper “Zornitsa” (“Morning Star”), which became very popular in the whole Bulgarian society. It offered articles of spiritual character, as well as political information and analyses.

Both Missions were involved in the development of public education. Elisabeth Clarke established the first Institute for kindergarten teachers and organised the first kindergartens in Bulgaria. On both sides of the Balkan Mountains (Lovech and Samokov), high schools for boys and girls were founded, providing general and Christian education. Students from non-Protestant families were also admitted here.

In 1864–1866, as a result of repression in the Russian Empire, about 40 Baptist families of German origin left Ukraine to settle south of the Danube River in the Ottoman territory. They started the Baptist movement in Bulgaria.

The first Pentecostal communities appeared at the beginning of the 20th century in some towns at the Black Sea coast. They are planted by migrating Russian people coming from the United States.

In the first half of the 20th century some Bulgarian pastors who had studied in Western Europe and in America fell under the influence of liberal theology, but this did not spread widely among the evangelical communities in Bulgaria. In the personal archives of some pastors of that time we found books of the Unitarian movement, but again it is not certain whether they adhered to its doctrine.

II. After the Second World War, “the Christians in many communist-dominated countries, such as Bulgaria, were forbidden to maintain any interrelations with the Christians in the West.”⁹ The Bulgarian Congregationalists participated in the formation of the International Congregational Council with its headquarters in London, and in 1947 a Bulgarian Congregationalist representative went to England in order to help in the organisation of the Council. This was the sole personal contact of this Council with the Congregationalists of Bulgaria and soon thereafter all communications were broken off.¹⁰

The Communist state could not allow a vigorous Protestant minority to operate freely.¹¹ Gradually, restrictions were imposed. Religious education in schools and in churches was forbidden. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cults was to approve pastoral appointments. Printing of religious publications became increasingly limited. “The end of 1948 saw the climax of religious persecutions in most Eastern European countries,”¹² including Bulgaria. Many Evangelical ministers and prominent laymen were arrested, condemned and put in jail or in concentration camps. Among them are the pastors Vassil Ziapkov, Lambri Mishkov, Georgi Sivriev, Nikola Mikhailov, Yanko Ivanov, Georgi Chernev and Haralan Popov. “By unrestricted coercion, confessions

⁵ Ibid, p. 58, cit. BAGRIANOFF Tsvetko S., *The American Mission's Share in the Regeneration and Defence of Bulgaria* (n.p. American Bulgarian Good Neighbor League, 1947), p. 2

⁶ MOJSES P., op. cit. p. 4

⁷ In this way, in 1831 numbering 62 corporative members, 31 of them were Presbyterians, (only) 24 Congregationalist, 6 from the Dutch Reformed Church and 1 from the Associate Reforms.

⁸ ПАЙЧЕВСКИ С., op. cit. c. 177, cit. “Век” бр.17, 26. 04. 1876

⁹ MOJSES P., op. cit., p. 490

¹⁰Ibid., p. 496–497, cit. Ralph F.G. Galder to Paul Mojzes, London, Oct. 28, 1963

¹¹Ibid., p. 498

¹²Ibid., p. 510

of various alleged crimes were extracted.”¹³ Most of the accused were heavily sentenced as “spies of Anglo-American imperialism”. Some of them stayed more than 10 years in prison in horrible conditions.

During that time the churches continued their service led by “not so dangerous” pastors and laymen, who were under the control of, and endured different kind of brutal intrusions by, the communist authorities. In 1985 the pastors Hristo Kulichev, Dimitar Kulichev and the active members of the youth movement in the church of Sofia were arrested and incriminated for “opposition to the administration” and for “active religious work”.¹⁴

In that period the new preachers in the evangelical churches were either autodidacts or were formed in semi-legal courses. Their sermons were not brilliant with eloquence, but they were essentially faithful to the Gospel, not contaminated by liberal theology. In illegal ways, courageous people imported Bibles and Christian literature.

Bible teaching for children and for the youth was forbidden by law, but faithful Christian parents took their children to church and gave them Christian education at home from the earliest age. Even under these circumstances, revival campaigns took place in some evangelical churches and the number of believers grew gradually.

III. In 1989, after the political changes, the Evangelical churches in Bulgaria received more freedom. A spectacular wave of evangelisation meetings covered the country and produced an important rise in the number of adherents of all evangelical denominations. According to some statistics, the evangelical Christians in Bulgaria represent about 1.1 % of the population.

Nowadays evangelical churches in Bulgaria are confronted to several challenges, as for instance:

- The consumption-oriented mentality;
- Many Bulgarian people, including evangelical Christians, leave the country for economic reasons;
- Hostility and lack of tolerance towards the Protestant communities, especially in locations where they are newly established, which is based on cultural differences between the East and the West.

Evangelical Christians of twelve denominations have a partnership in the form of the Evangelical Alliance in Bulgaria. Most of them belong to the charismatic churches. Our relationships are very friendly but not sufficiently effective in addressing the evangelical message to the world.

At the same time, new internet groups appear, such as Harta.bg, sharing Christian values in a manner close to the evangelical one. There are cases of “bursting out” of new churches among young people.

Our presence in the media is limited. Nevertheless, on some occasions we are allowed to express an evangelical point of view on a national TV programme. Every year on the Day of Reformation our denomination has the opportunity to broadcast a short message with greetings through the first national TV channel. The evangelical “Studio 865” can broadcast daily though the national radio programme “Horizont” messages adapted from Trans World Radio. Several evangelical newspapers and magazines such as “Zornitsa”, “Evangeliski vestnik”, “Prozorets” (Window) and “Blagovestitel” (Good messenger) are trying to share the Christian values and an alternative point of view about the problems of the Bulgarian society.

The dialogue between evangelical and Orthodox Christians is deliberately blocked by the pro-Russian politics of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.¹⁵ However, good relationships exist on other levels – informal contacts, discussions on actual problems in society, partnership in the Bulgarian Bible Society, contacts of evangelical students in theological academic establishments with Orthodox orientation.

Despite many difficulties, there are numerous missions and interdenominational evangelical organizations acting in Bulgaria. Let us mention the publishing of books (New Man, Bible League, Dynamic Consult); multiple forms of social care: for children without parents, children at risk, young people with intellectual disabilities, drug addicts, low-income elderly people (social kitchens); evangelisation of children (CEF, Scripture Union); evangelisation of students and young sportsmen (Campus Crusade for Christ – Agape Bulgaria); evangelisation through cultural events; care for prostitutes (The Daughters of Bulgaria) and for prisoners.

In all this we pray for God’s guidance and we are confident in His promise to establish His Kingdom on earth.

¹³ Ibid., p. 511

¹⁴ KOULICHEV Hristo editor, *Heralds of the Truth. The History of the Evangelical Churches in Bulgaria*. 2nd enlarged ed. Sofia, Bulgarian Bible Society, 1994. (КУЛИЧЕВ Христо ред., *Вестители на истината. История на евангелските църкви в България*, 2-ро разширено издание, София, ББД, 1994).

¹⁵ As is known, the Synod withdrew from participation in the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, June 19–26 in Crete, contesting the clause about the relationships with other Christian denominations mentioned there as “churches” instead of “schismatics” or “heretics”.

The Reformation in Georgia and its Relevance for Today

Dr Tatiana Kopaleisvili

As you may know, Georgia is a country with a long history of Christianity and an Orthodox tradition. We already had a Bible translation into Georgian in the fifth century. Our national identity is closely linked to the Orthodox identity: being Georgian till today for the majority means to be Orthodox.

Yet representatives of other religions have also been present for centuries: Recently, the Georgian government recognised some of them as traditional religious minorities, such as Catholics, Muslims and Jews, and gave them some privileges. But evangelicals were left aside as a minority which is not old enough. This was not surprising as the Orthodox Church is still very hostile towards every religious minority. Our collectivistic society knows very little about other groups and is full of superstitions and fears towards different ones. Georgia has a culture which is oriented towards the past, which means that age here really matters. This reality creates the need and desire in us to dig into the history of the Protestant churches represented in Georgia, in order to find out their origins and history.

Disputed beginnings

From its formally recognised beginnings at Wittenberg, Saxony, to its arrival in Georgia, the development of Protestantism was complicated and at times, contradictory. Some 7000 German Lutherans who moved from Württemberg and Baden to Georgia in the year 1817 are traditionally seen as the first Protestants in Georgia. However, there are a few references which would appear to challenge these dates. Zakharia Chichinadze (1854–1931) writes in his historic overview *Lutheran Georgians in Georgia*: ‘[it was] from the early years of the sixteenth century, when Luther’s teaching was expatiate in Europe, it slowly started to spread among us [in Georgia]’. The author of this process, Chichinadze adds, was Mzechabuki, Prince of Samtskhe (1500–1516), who granted the Lutherans a place to live in his own city, Akhaltsikhe, and allowed them to participate at his table. According to references found by Chichinadze in *Missionary’s Diary*, Mzechabuki sympathised with their efforts to spread Lutheran teaching and very soon all his family considered themselves converts. Chichinadze mentions the names

of those who arrived in Georgia – they were professors from Tübingen University.

First appearances suggest that the reference is unrealistic – Lutheran teaching is widely thought to have been unknown even in Germany before 1517, and it cannot have spread in Akhaltsikhe after the date of Mzechabuki’s death. If the references are accurate, then the dates of Prince Mzechabuki’s reign require further scrutiny.

However, Stephen Runciman describes contacts between Lutherans and Georgians during the latter part of the sixteenth century, when the Augsburg Confession, one of the most important documents of the Lutheran Reformation, was translated and transmitted to the Georgian Orthodox Church. Moreover, preserved in the archive of *Propaganda Fide*, historian Ilia Tabaghua found a letter by Venceslav Budovic which dates back to 1580. This letter reveals that the sons of the governor of Samtskhe Kvarkvare had an interest in discussing Protestant ideas. This would suggest that Protestantism was known in Georgia early on; perhaps through another prince Mzechabuki, who reigned later (around 1570).

All these references point tantalisingly to evidence that both Lutherans and Lutheran ideas were known in sixteenth century Georgia and provide a base for continued academic research. If this theory turns out to be true, it will significantly change the attitude towards this religious group, as it will no longer be an imported American idea, enforced by some missionaries just recently in the twentieth century.

Early nineteenth century

While the presence of Lutherans in sixteenth-century Georgia may be a matter of dispute, their arrival by 1817, documented by materials held in archives, memoirs and other historical references, is well attested. Their migration was apparently caused by political and religious issues in their homeland (the Napoleon Wars, famine and the teachings of Pietists about the “end of the world” fast approaching), as well as influenced by the interests of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus region. At that time Georgia had recently been invaded and become part of the big Russian Empire. Motivated by economic ideals as well

as fostering loyalty, the Russian government took an interest in the settlement of Germans in the region. Despite early set-backs and in numbers greater than anticipated (instead of 50 families they got about 500), by 1819 German colonies had been established in the Tbilisi region at Marienfeld, Tbilisi itself, Alexandersdorf, Petersdorf and Elisabethahl. Large colonies were also established in the neighbouring countries Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Protection of religious freedom formed the main condition under which German migrants settled in Georgia and it was a major aspect in the development of the colonies. The majority of the groups who had adopted Pietistic ideas had a tradition of separation from a single authoritative church body and of independently elected spiritual leaders, who functioned as pastors.

With the aim of simplifying governance, the Russian administration tried to integrate the settlers under the single banner of the Lutheran Church. However, before the government was able to appoint suitable pastors, missionaries from the Basle Evangelical Society visited Georgia in 1822. Among them was a well-known representative of that society, Felician of Zaremba. Though the missionaries preached Pietism, the Augsburg Confession provided a framework for their successful reception. The missionaries from Basle were invited to come and serve as pastors by invitation of the Emperor's government. Gradually, church life in the colonies became more formally organised.

Mid nineteenth century

However, arguments and oddities concerning religious differences between the groups, which had begun before their migration from Germany, deepened in the 1830s and 1840s, eventually threatening the very existence of the colonies in Georgia. The differences led to schisms. One group of separatists stood under the leadership of a man named Kozer. Another leader, Adam Beple, was something of a Pietistic purist. Finally, in the autumn of 1842, an elderly lady named Shpon spread what she claimed was a prophecy among the colonies that Judgment Day was fast approaching. According to this prophecy, the Elect should set out for Palestine. With approximately 360 people planning to leave, a second prophecy occurred on 4 May 1843, saying that departure for Palestine should take place on 30 May – Pentecost.

Disillusioned by the failure of prayer to remove the soldiers whom the Russian authorities had put in place

to prevent the exodus, sectarian ideas subsided and by 1844 the breakaway groups had abandoned their former views and re-joined the Evangelical-Lutheran church. This marked the end of the long religious quarrels among the German colonists in Georgia. They remained a distinct and separate (if rapidly growing) ethnic and cultural group, but they began to recognise their settlement in Georgia as more permanent. Nevertheless, a policy of isolation and a tendency to reject integration with the host culture continued well into the twentieth century.

Late nineteenth century

In 1897, Tbilisi continued to be home to the largest Lutheran parish of the region and as a result built the grandest Lutheran church building in the Caucasus. It was later destroyed by the Soviet government, which used German prisoners of war to do so. Indeed, few nineteenth-century Lutheran churches remain in Georgia.

Despite a passive approach to engaging with and building relationships with local Georgians and the Georgian culture, the investment in education within the Lutheran communities shows that, at least by the second half of the nineteenth century, they had an active internal life. Thus, in 1872 a 'fund for widows and orphans of Transcaucasian Evangelical-Lutheran preachers and teachers' was established in Tbilisi. 1886 saw the establishment of the *Women's Evangelical-Lutheran Charity Society* which aimed to help those who were most vulnerable socially and financially such as the sick, widows and orphans. In order to support education, the *Schools' Friends Society* was formed both to give advice and to lend financial support to existing schools, while also overseeing the establishment of new schools.

Meanwhile, the German communities prospered and provided attractive working models for the local population as well as many technological advances. These included advances in grape production, mining, cooperage, joinery, cheese-making and brewing. Germans established a monopoly as pharmacists and came to influence Georgian architecture, with many well-known buildings being designed by German architects. Examples include the Tbilisi Town Hall (architect P. Schtern), the Opera House (architect L. Belfield), the Catholic Church (architect A. Saltzman) as well as almost all the old buildings in the Marjanishvili district.

Twentieth Century

However, on the outbreak of the First World War, the now 12,000 Germans in Georgia found themselves in an unexpected situation. They were subjected to a number of repressive laws, and the most radical intervention by the government was their deportation from border regions to inner provinces. Indeed, as the war dragged on, 1916 saw the aggressive deportation of ethnic Germans and Austrians from the shores of the Black Sea.

The history of the German Lutherans in Georgia continued in the same tragic way during the Second World War and during the times of Soviet Georgia. Deportations to Siberia or other inner parts of the empire continued for several decades. Those who remained either stayed through hiding their surnames or through being able to prove their loyalty to the existing government.

After the liberation from the Soviet Union, in 1995, with the help of donors from Germany, the Lutherans managed to build a new church in Tbilisi and began to organise house churches in smaller towns. Today, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Georgia has a membership of about 750 people. The church serves ethnic Georgians and Russians, worshiping in both languages.

Baptist Churches

The earliest known Baptist communities in the Russian Empire are those established by Germans who settled at the invitation of the Prussian-born tsarina Catherine II in the southern provinces (modern-day Ukraine): Kherson, Tavria and the Crimea. The nineteenth century saw the birth of a separatist group known as “Shtundists”, whose practice and belief incorporated aspects of the Baptists, Mennonites and Pietists. As evangelical Christian ideas reached the nobility of St. Petersburg, a *Society to Promote the Reading of Spiritual and Moral Literature* was instigated in 1876 by the Brit Lord Radstock, who was living in St. Petersburg at that time. A former colonel, Pashkov became successor to this group and as a result the Baptists in St. Petersburg became known as “Pashkovians”.

However, the Georgian Baptists, at least initially, emerged separately. Those who were out of favour with Church and State at the centre of the Russian Empire were evicted to its outskirts; among them were Molokans, Doukhobors and their offshoots including

Khlistians and Jumpers (“Prigunians”), as well as others; all these groups emerged as renewal movements from within Orthodoxy. Since 1830 these groups settled in eastern Georgia and it was from the Molokans in Tbilisi that the first Baptists in Georgia descended and found the most fruitful ground.

Though not intentionally, German settlers had also prepared the way for Baptist ideas to develop in Georgia. The Georgians became aware and accustomed to the existence of Protestant Christianity alongside Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Further, through the national Reforms of 1861, peasants gained the opportunity for education. Increased literacy among the poorest members of the Russian Empire made the Scriptures and religious literature more accessible at a personal level, leading to a significant growth in the numbers of those choosing to think freely and independently – though not necessarily wisely – on religious issues. To this end, the number of “Bookmen” or “Book Sellers” increased; they were particularly influential in the spread of Baptist teaching, with missionaries and societies publishing literature which was then dispersed throughout the Russian Empire.

Voronin

The Tbilisi resident Molokan leader Nikita Voronin has come to be considered the first Baptist. Eventually his beliefs came to resemble Baptist teaching closely, although he had no known contact with Baptists. However, through a German Baptist, Martin Kalviet, Voronin came to the conviction that he shared Kalviet’s religious views. At his request, Voronin was baptised at night by Kalviet in the Kura River on 20 August 1867. This event is considered the official birthday of the Baptists both in Georgia and in the entire Russian Empire. Shortly thereafter, Voronin established the first Baptist community in Tbilisi.

Gradually, as Baptist communities grew and spread, connections began to develop among them throughout the Caucasus and the entire Russian Empire. Baptists from Georgia took responsibility to organise the first Baptist conference in 1879, and on 7 October of that year, Baptists from the Caucasus region gathered in Tbilisi. When in 1907 the city of Rostov hosted a Baptist convention, a decision was made to publish the spiritual/ ethical magazine *The Baptist*; it should be noted that the editors and most of the contributors of these first editions were Baptists from Georgia.

While many early Baptists came from the lower classes of society, Voronin and his followers came from a background of prosperous merchants. As the social diversity of the Baptist movement increased, its ethnic diversity also grew. Initially the Tbilisi congregation consisted of a Russian majority, alongside those of German origin. Ethnic Georgians are not recorded among the Baptists until the early twentieth century.

Though young and inexperienced, this Baptist church in Tbilisi became a model for newly established communities all over the Russian Empire. It was financially independent from the very beginning, entirely supported by the donations and tithes of the church members. Donations were also used to found primary schools without school fees. Even so, it was only many years later that the first Baptist church in Georgia had its own building.

Identity

While the Georgian Baptists were evolving into an independent denomination, they simultaneously developed their attitude towards other religious groups. Self-identification was based on emphasizing the differences between their views and those of others, with a strict separation from other confessions; and – somewhat immodestly – a desire to prove their superiority. Yet despite hostility on theological issues, Baptists and Molokans co-operated on social projects: in 1880 both Tbilisi Molokans and Baptists collaborated on a common charity which established free schools for needy and orphaned children.

Although the Baptists categorically detached themselves from all who practiced infant baptism, they remained close to the Lutheran church.

Despite many differences between the Protestant denominations in Georgia, the most difficult relations were those between Protestant groups and the Orthodox Church. As the dominant State church with deep roots in Georgia, the Orthodox Church considered itself the only authoritative voice in religious matters, and saw rejection of Orthodoxy as a denial of national identity. While, for example, the approach of the Baptists towards government was largely positive, the State's attitude towards newly established Christian movements cannot be easily described because it constantly changed and evolved. Thus comparative freedom (1867–1880) was followed by years of reaction (1886–1905), liberalisation of the law (1905–1912) and another period of reaction (1912–1917). The initiator of

the reaction was always the Russian Orthodox Church, which considered the country exclusively as its own property and territory of influence.

Pentecostals

In the early twentieth century Pentecostals appeared. In 1917 families from Ukraine were settled in the Black Sea port cities of Poti and Batumi. In 1924 the Russian Empire supported the spread of their teaching by deporting unwanted citizens to the Caucasus and this is how churches were established in the both eastern and western parts of Georgia.

The Soviet period

The Soviet period was equally repressive for all religious groups. The atheistic government used different methods to control or clean up the country from free thinkers. In the 1930s and 1940s deportations and imprisonment were used against leaders of the evangelical churches.

In the 1950s the Soviet government changed the tactics and tried to collaborate through control. Churches got permission to register, but this meant to be controlled at every possible level. The churches faced a moral dilemma: choose to exist but be controlled – or go underground.

This policy brought a lot of separation and damage to evangelical unity, because the churches were split into two fighting parties: registered and non-registered ones. The government forced leaders of registered churches to use every possible method to convince the “rebels” to register their congregations. But overall this did not stop the churches from growing in numbers. When the “Iron curtain” was removed and the big wave of revival happened, the number of evangelical believers doubled through the efforts of the missionaries. Hundreds of missionaries visited Georgia as well as the other parts of the former Soviet Empire. The hunger for God and for spirituality was huge and it overflowed the churches of all denominations including the Orthodox Church.

In retrospect

Looking back to the history of 200 years of Protestants in Georgia helps us to understand the contemporary situation of the evangelicals in Georgia:

1. God was using politics and politicians, wars and even sectarian ideas to bring the ideas of the Reformation to Georgia.

2. Through the German Lutherans who lived side by side with local people, there was an impressive impact on the economical and urban life of the country.
3. Years and even centuries of control and oppression from the government also created the great separation between religious groups; especially between Orthodoxy and Protestantism, but among Protestant churches as well.

Temporary churches

The challenges that we are trying to overcome now are:

- learning how to cooperate with each other
- looking for our own unique identity: not defining ourselves by what we are not or how we differ from the Orthodox church
- finding forms of worship, serving God and the people in a way which is neither western nor assimilative.

Today the Protestants, whose total number in Georgia is not higher than 18,000, are living in a country with

constant political instability, revolutions and territorial conflicts. The Orthodox church, with its unliveable and dead tradition, may play a role as a peacemaker and a model for cooperation, reformation and progress. But for this to be successful the churches need to come back to the origins of the Reformation and to the basics of Christianity:

1. We need to understand again the power of unity – for which Jesus was asking at the garden of Gethsemane;
2. We need a solid theological foundation and to become a faithful guardian and promotor of the word of God in society as the Reformers were;
3. We need to take the chance and care for the growing numbers in society who are disappointed in the Orthodox Church by becoming culturally relevant and evangelistically active.

Reformation in the Georgian society has not happened yet but it is in the air. I hope that, when God gives this chance into our hands, we will use it boldly and wisely.

The Current Issue of the European Journal of Theology

In a fascinating contribution, Jonathan Marvin makes an end to much scepticism regarding our ability to understand the Bible (and other texts). He argues that the Christian doctrine of creation, properly understood, enables us to be more positive about the possibility of hermeneutics than many think.

Joel White argues shows how Paul may not be attacking slavery outright in his letter to Philemon, but how his careful arguments deconstruct the value-system on which slavery was based. By seeing the local church as a family and calling Onesimus a brother, the possibility of slavery is effectively killed off.

In the first of a series of two, Christoph Stenschke sheds light on the conflicts in Acts 1–8:3. These conflicts are not merely religious in nature, he shows, and other elements play a large role in Luke’s narrative.

Walter Hilbrands offers a careful survey of what has been written on the Book of Genesis in recent years. Although some still hold to the old sources J, E, D and P, the vast majority of scholars have now abandoned this hypothesis. Yet this does not mean that unity has been achieved on any aspect of the Book! It would be great if an article like that of Hilbrands could be complemented by articles which set out how scholars in other parts of Europe handle Genesis and other parts of Scripture – so here is an open invitation.

Finally – well, before the many book reviews – Joshua Searle argues that in the case of Russia and Ukraine, the term ‘Reformation’ applies more accurately to the nineteenth than to the sixteenth century and that the Russian and Ukrainian reformers in the nineteenth century had more in common with the ‘Radical Reformation’ than with Luther and Calvin. He concludes with suggestions for further ‘reformation’ of Protestant churches in the post-Soviet space.

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The Protestant Reformation in Italy and its Relevance for Today

Dr Leonardo De Chirico

We don't know what will happen in 2017, but for sure 2013 was the year that was celebrated in Italy. 2013 marked the 450th anniversary of the closing of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the most important event of the Roman Catholic Church in the modern era. If the Catholic Church will only commemorate the fifth centenary of the Protestant Reformation, it indeed celebrated the 450th anniversary of Council of Trent! The difference is no mere play of words.

Five centuries later, the Roman Catholic Church has definitely adopted a different pastoral and ecclesial "style" than that of Trent, but it has not substantially changed it, nor denied it in whole or in part. There is no point in which Vatican II moves away from the dogmatic teaching of the Council of Trent. At Vatican II, Trent was kept in the background and remained within the framework of Roman Catholicism. The "Tridentine paradigm" was put, so to speak, in historical perspective, but not forsaken nor forgotten. Vatican II has metabolised Trent but in no way abandoned it.

In such a peculiar historical context, how can the Protestant Reformation be celebrated and acted upon in Italy? In this brief presentation, I will consider three areas worth reflecting upon and summarised in the following bullet points: recovering the memory, upholding the heritage, re-launching the vision.

Recovering the memory

In its modern history Italy has had no religious Reformation nor political Revolution. The beginnings of the Reformation were basically stopped by the reaction of the Catholic Church that prevented the spreading of the gospel renewal movement and incorporated some of its concerns into its life patterns, although theologically accommodated to fit the Roman system.

The Council of Trent was the official response of the Catholic Church to the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. The issues of the Reformation (grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone) were rejected as they were affirmed by the Reformers (mainly Luther) and recast in a sacramental framework that highlighted the contribution of human works and the mediating agency of the church. Actually, Trent declared the incompatibility of the Reformation with what became

then the official doctrine of the Church of Rome and the unwillingness of Rome to undertake a process of radical revision in biblical perspective. In order to do that, Trent solidified the theology of the sacraments, hitting with a series of "anathemas" those who held Protestant beliefs. Trent intervened in clarifying the Roman position (through decrees and canons) and in launching a series of changes that would impact the life of the Roman Church.

Trent was not an isolated event. The post-Trent phase of the Roman Church was marked by a staunch polemical attitude, first against Protestantism, and then against modernity. If Trent was the Roman response to the Reformation, the later Marian dogmas (1854: immaculate conception of Mary; 1950 bodily assumption of Mary), and papal infallibility (1870) were responses to the ideological challenges of Modernity.

Italy has known the Counter-reformation without experiencing the Reformation as such. It has known the Reformation through the lenses and filter of the Catholic Reformation. The spiritual, cultural and ideological influence of Roman Catholicism has been basically unchallenged.

One task before us is to save the Italian Protestant Reformation from the *damnatio memoriae* that it has been confined to for many centuries. Think of the movement of the so-called "spirituali", who in many Italian cities were eager to read the Bible in groups and to discuss the ideas that were changing Europe. Think of the theological gem *The Benefit of Christ*, a short treatise on the doctrine of justification by faith alone which largely circulated in Italy and disseminated the ideas of the Reformation in many parts of the country. Think of individuals who paid the price of death or exile in order to maintain their faith: Bernardino Ochino, Pietro Paolo Vergerio, Jerome Zanchi. Think of Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562), peer to John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger, whose *Loci Communes* (*Common Places*) were a standard work for generations of Protestant pastors. These sixteenth-century Italian theologians have significantly contributed to the cause of the gospel worldwide.

The Italian Reformation and the Reformation in Italy are scholarly topics which have been studied in secular universities for decades. Delio Cantimori, Adriano Prosperi,

Massimo Firpo, Salvatore Caponnetto, Ugo Rozzo, and others are historians who have worked hard to unearth stories, debates, movements and books which have impacted the Peninsula in its attempts to stay close to what was happening in other parts of the continent. Their historical studies have tended to be marked by Marxist categories which downplay the theological and spiritual significance of the Reformation. More work needs to be done to highlight the theological import of the Reformation which these historians tone down.

This task has several directions: encouraging historical research on the Italian *evangelici*, publishing their works, but also disseminating the memory of the Reformation in our cities through naming streets after men and women of the Reformation. For example, in Padova alongside many streets named after popes and cardinals, there is now Via Pietro Martire Vermigli, a tribute to this student of the local University who became an influential theologian but who until recently was practically forgotten in the country. A couple of years ago a street named after Martin Luther was also officially opened in Rome. These are small seeds to recover the memory of the Reformation. I think that working on this symbolic dimension will be beneficial throughout Europe.

Upholding the legacy

It goes beyond the scope of this paper to argue what is the theological standing legacy of the Protestant Reformation. Conventionally, though, I will refer to the “formal” and the “material” principles of the Reformation as the shared, lasting, substantial message of the Reformation. The evangelical understanding of the gospel stands on two pillars: the authority of Scripture as God’s word written (the formal principle) and justification by grace alone through faith alone (the material principle). Scripture is the norm of the Christian life; justification is the ground of it. Without the norm of Scripture, our lives are shaped by false standards and deceived by false narratives. Without the ground of justification, our lives are built on sinking sand and will ultimately collapse under the righteous judgment of God.

Both principles were clearly rejected by the Roman Church and Italy has been deeply shaped by this anti-protestant theological framework. The result is a religious culture which does not have the basic grammar to appreciate the essentials of the gospel. Roman Catholicism is a religious system that is not based on

Scripture alone. It appeals both to Scripture and to its own tradition for its theological development. The Bible is only one source, but it does not stand alone, nor is it the highest source. It is merely one amongst others. According to Roman Catholic doctrine (e.g. Vatican II: *Dei Verbum*), God’s Revelation comes to us in the form of oral tradition that occurs in two forms: the written text of the Bible and the living voice of the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. According to this view, tradition precedes the Bible, is bigger than the Bible, and is not revealed through Scripture alone but through the ongoing teaching of the Church and its current agenda, whatever that may be. The Bible, therefore, cannot hold a place of supreme authority. If it is not given the final word, then it forfeits its ability to teach, to reprove, to correct or train. According to Roman Catholicism, the Bible is important, but it is not decisive and irrefutable. It is one form of revelation, but not the final form.

This serves to explain how it was possible for Rome to promulgate three new dogmas (i.e. binding beliefs) with no biblical support whatsoever. They are the 1854 dogma of Mary’s immaculate conception; the 1870 dogma of papal infallibility; and the 1950 Marian dogma of her bodily assumption. These dogmas do not represent biblical teaching, and in fact clearly contradict it. This does not matter, however, as Roman Catholicism does not rely on the authority of Scripture alone. The Church incorporates its own traditions, even when they contradict the plain teaching of Scripture. It may take 1900 years to formulate a new dogma, but because Scripture does not have the final say, the Catholic system remains open-ended, and therefore unreliable at its very core. This is the reason why in our context we have a lot of work to do in order to assimilate and to defend the “formal principle” of the Reformation by allowing God’s written word to be the supreme norm of all we do.

Then the “material principle” of justification by faith alone. Historically, justification has been the landmark of the evangelical faith since the times of the apostles. The church fathers maintained it, and while it was not their main concern, they fully endorsed it. The Reformation did not invent it. It simply restated it in more biblical and coherent terms, in times in which it had been obscured by medieval opacity. The sinner is saved by grace alone through faith alone, apart from good works, without any merit on our part. This has been a fundamental mark of the biblical faith throughout the centuries because it lies at the heart of the biblical gospel.

The Roman Catholic Church violently rejected it at the Council of Trent. Trent continued to use the word justification but filled it with a completely different meaning. For Trent, justification was a process rather than an act of God; a process initiated by the sacrament of baptism where the righteousness of God was thought to be infused; a process nurtured by the religious works of the faithful and sustained by the sacramental system of the church; a process needing to go through a time of purification in purgatory, before perhaps being enacted on judgment day. Rome reframed and reconstructed justification in terms of a combination of God's initiative and human efforts, grace and works joined together resulting in an on-going journey of justification, ultimately dependent on the "clay and iron" of human works and ecclesiastical sacraments. What was missing was the declarative, forensic act of justification, the exclusive grounding in divine grace, the full assurance of being justified because of what God the Father has declared, God the Son has achieved, and God the Spirit has worked out. Trent came up with a confused and confusing teaching on justification that has been misleading people since.

Many people say that the 1999 Joint Declaration (JD) between the World Lutheran Federation and the Catholic Church bridged the gap that was formed in the sixteenth century. The reality is that while the document is at times friendly towards a more biblical understanding of justification, it is nonetheless marked by ambiguity that mars its theological significance. Basically, the views of Trent are confirmed and then updated to appease the ecumenical agenda. As was the case with Trent, with the JD justification is enacted by a sacrament of the Church (baptism); it is not received by faith alone. Furthermore, it is a journey that requires contribution from the faithful and an ongoing observance of the sacramental system. There is no sense of the justice of God being imputed by Christ to the believer, thus there can be no assurance of salvation. Therefore the JD, through a careful juxtaposition of contradictory statements, is a clear example of the absorption process of the Catholic Church. It bends and shapes the system in order to be accommodating, but it never breaks under the pressure of Scripture's demand to reform. Moreover, the fact that Rome still dispenses indulgences (e.g. in the 2000 Year of Jubilee and in the 2015–2016 Year of Mercy), means that its basic view of salvation – that is dependent on the mediation of the church, the intercession of the saints, purgatory, etc. – is still firmly in place. It was the theology of indulgences

that triggered the Reformation, but even after the JD the Roman Catholic Church is still fully committed to it.

There is no better way to uphold the legacy of the Reformation than receiving afresh and acting upon the "formal" and "material" principles of the authority of the Word of God and justification by faith alone in our country that has known a confused and blurred gospel.

Re-launching the vision

The Reformation is not only a memory and a legacy; it is also an on-going task. The Church is always in a process of reformation according to the Word of God. The Reformation is not a relic but a source of inspiration to move forward in the missionary task entrusted to the Church by the Risen Lord. Looking forward, what does it mean for a Protestant minority to find inspiration in the sixteenth-century Reformation?

As a result of the Counter-reformation for centuries Bibles in the Italian vernacular language were prevented from being read by the lay people. The irony (or better: the tragedy) of our country is that it was regarded as a highly religious land and people, with deeply rooted religious traditions, but without access to the Bible and therefore total ignorance of the Word of God. The main concern of Evangelicals throughout the centuries has been the circulation of the Bible, the encouragement to read it, the setting up of various means to put the Bible at the centre of church, family and personal life. Eventually, after the unification in 1861, the outstanding literary and theological output of Giovanni Diodati's translation of the Bible into Italian (1607) reached Italians. For long decades prior to the Second Vatican Council, this activity was seen with a high degree of suspicion, if not opposed, by the Roman Catholic authorities, but the many hindrances were unable to stop it. Nowadays the Bible as a book is nearly everywhere, i.e. as gadget of magazines, in popular bookshops, in very nice and cheap editions.

However, centuries of biblical illiteracy cannot be overcome in few years. The Bible is fully available, but remains an "alien" book for most Italians. Evangelical churches need to come to terms with the challenge of being places that foster Biblical literacy, engagement with the Bible, fruition of the Scriptures, and application of the Word of God. In the past, this has mainly meant distributing materially millions of copies of the Bible. This is no longer the focus. Markets are full of Bibles. What is needed now are Christian communities nurtured by the Bible that live out and embody what difference

the Bible makes in people's lives. Evangelical theology is as relevant as ever in helping people to engage the Bible faithfully and in an impactful way. Most families now have a Bible in their home, but they do not know what to do with it. There is an ongoing need to stimulate interest and to show the vital importance of being taught, rebuked, corrected and educated by Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16).

Church planting is still a main challenge for the country. There are large areas without an evangelical church of any sort. Cities are also largely unreached both in terms of Gospel presence and impact. The nation's spiritual climate combines traditional Catholicism and modern secularism. Many think they are Christian because they were born in a "Catholic" nation. Many reject the Roman Catholic Church, confusing it with the Gospel. The standard gospel for them is the Roman Catholic account of it. We have to show that the biblical gospel is something different!

As my senior colleague at IFED, Pietro Bolognesi rightly argues, we have three main challenges before us: 1) identity, 2) unity, and 3) training. In a struggling minority situation, Christian *identity* has been largely defined not by who we are but by who we are *not* (e.g., not religiously Roman Catholic, not theologically liberal, not culturally secular). The overall perception has been

that evangelicals are a cult. There is a need, then, to better grasp our evangelical identity based on core gospel essentials rather than on subcultural features.

Then there's *unity*. Secondary distinctiveness has produced too much fragmentation. We need to do together what is biblically possible, knowing that most of the challenges ahead of us (e.g., public witness, church planting, quality training) cannot be faced on a local level alone or on a denominational level only.

Lastly there's *training*. In struggling and small churches, formation hasn't been viewed as a priority. Most leaders are self-taught and self-trained. Cultural engagement is often shallow. The situation won't improve if leaders don't emerge who are better equipped for ministry and if we don't have Christians better prepared for how to be faithful and missional in their vocations.

In these three areas – identity, unity and training/formation – the legacy of the Protestant Reformation is an essential step to ponder upon in order to move forward. We don't know if God will grant another season of biblical reformation in our continent. If He will, we hope and pray that Italy will be included in it. To this end, as Nehemiah did in his own time anticipating the time of the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem (1:8), we will gather materials and tools for it to impact the nation with the gospel for the glory of God alone.

8. FEET publishes book

The papers of the FEET conference 2016 on the Reformation are being published in a book, with the addition of an essay by Professor Gerald Bray. Like the conference, the book will be entitled **The Reformation. Its Roots and Its Legacy**.

The papers in this volume are less a commemoration of the Reformation than a discussion of its meaning in the era after 2017. What is being celebrated in 2017 is not the Reformation as such, but the *beginning* of the Reformation. It was the dynamics of the „new“ theology of Luther and Calvin that caused a radical change with global effects. Reformation is not just an historical event but an ongoing movement of renewal and change. The message of the Reformation constantly challenges us to think through positions, actions, attitudes, and programmes.

This book presents contributions by eleven experts from all over Europe, who deal with their various topics in the conviction that the essence of Luther's theology does not need to be adapted to make it relevant. The publisher is Wipf and Stock in the USA.

Yours truly,

Dr. Pieter J. Lalleman, Editor, European Journal of Theology, Tutor in Biblical Studies, Spurgeon's College, London

New Member of the Executive Committee



Dr. Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen

Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen was elected member of the Executive Committee of FEET at the conference in Wittenberg last year. Dr. Nikolajsen is associate professor and dean of research at Lutheran School of Theology in Aarhus, Denmark, adjunct professor at MF Norwegian School of Theology in Oslo, Norway, and chief editor of Danish Journal of Theological Studies. He is also a member of the European Evangelical Alliance's Theological Commission. He has published four books and several articles in international journals. Two years ago, he appeared as a featured author of European Journal of Theology. His research the past ten years has focused on three major themes: Christian church, Christian ethics and Christian mission in a pluralistic society. In the spring of 2018, he will, together with his wife and daughter, spend six months at Erlangen University in Germany as a visiting scholar.

We have asked him how he sees the future of FEET to which he said: "The church is challenged in Europe. Few doubt that. Therefore, it is important for evangelical theologians to get together and discuss these challenges and consider if this challenging situation may also hold a potential for a revitalization of the church. When it comes to FEET, my hope is that we in the years to come will see the number of members increase, more people attending our conferences, and that we can strengthen our journal."

Members of the FEET Executive Committee

Prof. Pierre Berthoud, France (Chairman)
Dr. Klaus Benschel, Germany (Secretary)
Mr. Gert. F. Hain, Germany (Treasurer)
Rev. Stanislav Alexiev, Bulgaria
Dr. Pavel Cerny, Czech Republic
Dr. Leonardo De Chirico, Italy

Dr. Stephen Dray, England
Dr. Gert Kwakkel, Netherlands/France
Dr. Hetty Lalleman, Netherlands/England
Dr. Pieter Lalleman, Netherlands/England
Dr. Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, Denmark/Norway

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The Greek New Testament

with Dirk Jongkind

Co-sponsored by

The Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians
Tyndale House, Cambridge
European Leadership Forum Theologians Network
The Reformanda Initiative

Overview

Surely there are many historical and social reasons why the Reformation had such an impact in 16th century Europe, but one of these was the effect of the direct access to God's Word that was so sorely missing before that time. No longer were the faithful led by priests who formed part of a chain of intermediaries leading all the way up to the divine, now they were served by ministers of the Word. And the publication of the Greek New Testament antedated the start of the Reformation by only a single year.

Since the first edition of the Greek New Testament by Erasmus of Rotterdam much has changed. New manuscripts have been and are being discovered, theories of transmission have been formulated and rejected, new methods have come online, and in recent years we have also faced the information explosion. As always though,

not all change is progress and modern-day ministers of the Word cannot delegate their responsibility to use the most precise form of God's Word wholesale to 'the scholarly class' or to those who are in the know.

At Tyndale House, Cambridge, a visionary project on the Greek New Testament is starting to produce tangible results. The first of these is a fresh edition of the Greek text, which is an edition that attempts to reflect the oldest possible wording, including some of its non-standard features. It is a project based on the premise that details matter, regardless of the extent of understanding by the editors: it opens up the possibility of raising new questions. Another result of the project is that the editors have become more and more excited to encourage students of God's Word to pay attention to the details of the text. Lessons can be learned, connections that are already signaled in the text can be recognized, and the message comes across even more clearly. For this reason a seminar will be held for 20–25 evangelical teachers and students who are involved in working with the Greek of the New Testament.

QUALIFICATIONS:

All participants will be actively involved in using the Greek New Testament in teaching or studies, and have a good grasp of Koine Greek with two-years of Greek or above.

COMMITMENTS:

In addition to submitting an application, in order to be accepted as a participant, you will need to commit to the following:

1. Attend a three-day seminar in Barcelona, Spain (4–6 December 2017, starting at noon and ending at noon)
2. Complete all retreat reading assignments by their assigned due dates
3. Pay the necessary fees: Retreat: 150 Euros / 100 Euros for Eastern Europeans.

2017 BARCELONA SEMINAR: All participants will meet in Barcelona for three-days from the 4th to the 6th of December, 2017. Participants must pay for their own travel expenses and the fee (150 € or 100 € for Eastern Europeans).



Dr Dirk Jongkind is academic vice-principal of Tyndale House, affiliated lecturer in the University of Cambridge, and a fellow of St Edmund's College. He is the editor of *The Greek New Testament as Prepared at Tyndale House, Cambridge* (Crossway; CUP; 2017) and is an elder at Eden Baptist Church, Cambridge.

Seminar: Topics

Some of the topics to be covered include:

1. Why do we need an 'edition' of the Greek New Testament.
2. Current issues and developments in textual criticism.
3. Meaning and the limit of translations ('not just translatable differences are important').
4. The blessing of the detail: sentences and paragraphs.
5. Word order matters.
6. Teaching and preaching from the Greek text.
7. The reliability of Scripture and textual variants.

Application Process

To apply:

1. Fill out an online application by clicking on this link: <https://euroleadership.wufoo.com/forms/me208v11kbjxv7/>
2. Once we receive your application with photo, your application will be considered complete. We will review your completed applications and let you know if you are accepted into the program within four to six weeks.

If you have questions contact us at initiatives@euroleadership.org

FOR YOUR DIARY

Conference 2018

The next FEET conference will take place in the Czech Republic, Prague on 24–28 August 2018. The theme of the conference will be '**Christian Identity and Mission in a Divided Europe**'. Main papers are being commissioned on the following subjects:

1. Pluralistic Europe as a challenge to the church.
2. Living with Scriptures in a pluralistic society.
3. Religious Freedom: threatened or a threat?
4. Mission in Pluralistic Europe.
5. Migrants as challenge and opportunity.
6. Nationhood in Christian perspective.
7. The public role of the church.
8. European Christianity: retrospect and prospect.

