

Newsletter

AUTUMN 2018

FROM THE EDITOR

United in Christ

'For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...'
(Ephesians 2:14)

In our time people are building walls around themselves to protect them from foreigners, bad influences, and so on. This can be literal: walls made of solid material. It can also be metaphorical: being very apprehensive about people whom we do not know, who are 'strangers'.

At our FEET conference in Prague in August of this year we discussed the theme 'Christian Identity and Mission in a divided Europe'. To me, one of the most valuable aspects of our FEET conferences is the richness and diversity of people whom God has called to be educators and scholars in his Kingdom. Not one nation, university or college can claim they know it all – we need each other to complement us in our thinking and to grow in our faith.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ has brought forth a unique kind of new people. In the time of Paul and the New Testament two groups were brought together which had thus far been explicitly separated: Jews and non-Jews. Christ has 'destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...', Paul writes.

I worship in a multi-cultural church in London, with people from a large number of different countries. I am still amazed about the unity Christ brings. Worshipping Him as our Lord and Saviour makes all the difference. There is no place for dividing walls in Christ's church because of ethnicity or different customs or habits.

FEET wants to embody the unity in Christ of the rich variety of European cultures. The Executive Committee of FEET searches for conference themes that enrich evangelical scholars from the West of Europe to the East and from the North to the South.

At our conference in Prague two women took part in the panel discussion at the end: Tatjana Kopaleishvili from Georgia and Vija Herefoss from Latvia, who works in Norway. In this Newsletter you find their contributions to the theme of the conference. I found their views and insights refreshing. I also realized, when I heard Tatjana speaking about the unique experience for her to meet so many evangelical scholars, how privileged we are in countries where there is a long tradition of evangelical scholarship. This is why we need each other in FEET: to encourage and be encouraged, to build up and be built up. All for the Glory of His Name!

Hetty Lalleman, London

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REPORT ON THE 2018 CONFERENCE OF FEET

Christian Identity and Mission in a Divided Europe

The biennial conference of FEET (the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians) was held in Prague (in the Czech Republic) from the 24th to the 28th of August 2018. Nearly 70 participants, theologians of various disciplines involved in theological research and training, came from countries as far afield as Ireland and Georgia, Norway and Italy to discuss the topic of “Christian Identity and Mission in a Divided Europe”.

There is little doubt that we are living in troubled times as far as Europe is concerned. From politics to society, from economy to religions, all these are areas where divisions in Europe are clearly seen. What is the responsibility of the Church in such a time as this? How can mission be done in Europe today? What can theology say in such a context? The Conference sought to offer some crafted theological reflection in addressing these questions.

Thus, the main papers read and discussed included topics such as “Pluralistic Europe as a challenge and an opportunity for the church” (Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen), “Religious freedom and pluralistic Europe” (Christof Sauer), “Living with Scriptures, living in a democracy” (Ad de Bruijne), “The challenge of Islam within the cultural diversity in Europe” (Bernhard Reitsma), “Perspectives on nation in a pluralistic Europe” (Mykhailo Cherenkov and Joshua Searle), “The public role of the Church” (Daniel Pastircak), The final paper wrapped up a wealth of historical perspectives intertwined with theological reflections under the title “European Christianity in retrospect and prospect” (Henri Blocher).

Another stimulating session of the conference hosted a dialogue between Tomáš Halík, the internationally renowned Roman Catholic Czech theologian, and Leonardo De Chirico on the theme of “Christian Mission in Pluralistic Europe”.



Several other topics were discussed in discipline groups where Old and New Testament specialists, teachers and students of Historical and Systematic Theology, Practical Theology and Ethics met together. Special workshops addressed issues such as refugees and reconciliation.

Significantly, the Conference was earthed in daily times of prayer and Bible expositions. On the Sunday the attendees worshipped together with the congregation of the Czech Brethren, hosted by Pavel Cerny in the heart of Prague.

Today's divided continent demands strong theological reflection to help European evangelicals to interpret the times with prophetic boldness and self-criticism and to relaunch a vibrant missional vision that will encourage the on-going witness to the gospel in our continent. Those who sponsored the Conference hope that their discussions will contribute to this end. Many of the main papers are due to be published in the European Journal of Theology.





Reflections on FEET 2018

Tatiana Kopaleishvili, Georgia

I come from a context where the evangelical church was marginalised. In contrast with Europe where the church was in power for a long time and now struggles to find its place and role – we have a challenge to understand who we are in a relatively peaceful period. I see the potential here to learn from each other.

These kinds of conferences, where the representatives are mostly from western and central Europe, are like travelling in a time machine. Because of the Soviet heritage we are 20–30 years behind of what is happening to the church in Europe. And it is very educational for me to see what you are harvesting today. So the issues that were raised at this conference – secularism, homosexuality, church identity, postmodernism, individualism – are just coming to our part of the world.

But there is a hope as well. I see where we will be in terms of solid theology, holistic approaches, more thoroughness and thoughtfulness, less black and white approaches and practices. Something is lacking now but will come with time.

There were particular issues that were the subjects of my reflection; one of those was **refugees**: It especially touched me when Hetty Lalleman was reading the text from Jeremiah 29 about God telling people that they should settle in the land of exile. For thirty years about 300,000 internally displaced people have been living in temporary houses in Georgia, integrating very poorly or not at all, because it was engraved into our national identity that refugees will go back. I was always interested in what should be the position of the church regarding the issue of refugees. I don't think we in the churches ever thought of the theological dimensions

to this issue. Yes, some churches provide first aid to help them, but through listening to colleagues and friends at FEET I understood that there is more than that needed.

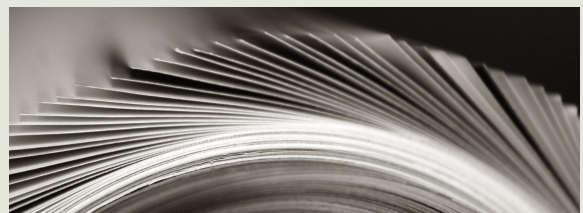
Another very important topic was **persecution** and the issue of religious rights. All minorities in Georgia are persecuted to some extent. What should be the position of the evangelical church, which is in a minority, towards Muslims when they are persecuted? Muslims are in a minority inside the country, but not outside of it: we have got more Muslim neighbours than Christians and their religious interests in our country are clear. The church is struggling to have a firm position on the issues. While reflecting on this, I really liked the phrase which Bernard Reitsma left on the screen about lighting the candle instead of fighting the darkness. This is something that our churches should stick to.

One of the biggest advantages of FEET is that it is a place for **networking**: Meeting like-minded people is especially encouraging when you come from an anti-intellectual background, where there is a certain fear of being too much educated. It is an encouragement to see people who are balancing well to be both intellectuals and practitioners. And this is what FEET should stick too – to make theology deep but as practical as possible in our churches. That it would be relevant for those like me – people in a practical ministry who work with students or teach kids at the Sunday school. I believe that solid theology which is practically applicable can prevent not only our churches but even the whole society from major mistakes and bring reconciliation.

PUBLICATIONS

The editors of the Newsletter would love to hear from you when you publish a book or an article. We will mention it in the Newsletter and some books might be reviewed in the European Journal of Theology.

Please send full details to p.lalleman@spurgeons.ac.uk



A personal reflection on the FEET conference

Vija Herefoss

These reflections are very much influenced by my background and current work situation. I have spent about ten years studying and teaching theology, but for the last three years I have been working at the Norwegian Human Rights and Mission organization Stefanus Alliance International. My tasks in the organization include following up projects that are designed to help the persecuted Christians in the Middle East and Central Asia. Therefore, my approach to the topics discussed during the Conference is one of a practitioner who constantly asks the questions: “How do theological ideas work in real life?” There are three main observations that I would like to share with you at the end of this conference.

First, listening to the presentations I was reminded that theology is a normative discipline. I was surprised to discover how many times such words as “must”, “ought” “should” have been used during the presentations. On the one hand this should not have surprised me because theology is in many ways an idealistic enterprise, dealing with the ideal reality, how things should be. On the other hand, having been working closely with Christians who live in a very difficult situation I have learned that reality is not as neat and well-structured as our systematic theologies. Reality is messy, people are often inconsistent and struggle to live up to their ideals. Therefore, some of the questions that I am sitting with after this conference are: “How do we overcome the gap between knowing what is right and actually doing it?” and “How do we make these ideal models and wonderful ideas applicable in reality?” As it was mentioned several times during the conference, the world around us seems to be in a constant change and this creates a sense of unpredictability, loss of stability and fear. Do we have a theology that helps us to make sense of these experiences? Or to put it differently, do we have a theology that we can live by?

If we as theologians fail to provide satisfying answers, people will come up with their own explanations and “theologies”. Sociologists of religion call this phenomenon “lived religion”. Lived religion is often informal and can differ considerably from the “official” theologies developed by theologians and church leaders. It is very often highly pragmatic and designed to help people to cope with the problems and challenges of life. There

are several sociologists of religion that have worked with this topic, such as Linda Woodhead, Meredith McGuire and Nancy Ammerman. They have identified several characteristics of lived religion, such as practical coherence over logical coherence (i.e. focus on practical solutions rather than logical consistency), coping with misfortune over importance of salvation (i.e. dealing with everyday challenges rather than thinking about the eternal life) , limited transcendence over absolute transcendence (i.e. turning for help to angels and saints rather than God the Creator who can feel too grand and difficult to approach).

As I mentioned before, these theologies are developed when the “official” theologies do not provide helpful answers or in the gaps that appear when theology chooses to ignore or overlook some of the important aspects of people’s life. One of the questions that I am wondering about is if theologians working in academic settings are aware of these lived theologies that are often being developed parallelly to the academic research and discussion. I think that it is well worth finding out more about them, engaging with them and seeing how they could enrich (and perhaps challenge?) the theologies developed by professional theologians.

Second, this conference has made me think a lot about the issue of Christian identity. It seems that there does not exist an agreement on what is meant by “Christian identity”. During several sessions the issue of Christians supporting right wing politicians in Europe (and USA) came up. Usually these Christians are also quite good at promoting their opinion and support for the “traditional family values” in the public sphere. Some of the participants were, however, eager to point out that these are not true or real Christians. In this light we have to ask ourselves: Who are the Christians who claim to represent the Christian values in the public sphere? What are the dominant narratives that they tend to promote? And if we claim that they are misrepresenting the Christian message, how do we reclaim the true Christianity? In what way do we challenge these dominant narratives and make the other voices heard?

Sometimes Christians like to refer to the theology of Two Kingdoms, claiming that the state and the church

have different responsibilities. I think that such distinctions can be helpful, but when we find ourselves in a situation when the state exhibits clear signs of intolerance, xenophobia, racism and support for inhuman treatment of certain groups in society, what do we do? Some Christians urge their fellow believers to remain neutral, but we have to remember that being neutral is also a choice. And as I recently read in a post on Facebook, "Neutrality does not help the victim, it only encourages the perpetrator." Besides, if we wish to see more young people in our churches we should not be afraid to stand up and challenge injustice. In my experience young people have a very acute sense of justice and wish to create a better world.

The questions about the Christian presence in the public sphere are related to another important issue concerning Christian identity, namely, who defines what "Christian" is. Here we have to remember that it is not only us who define who we are but also those who live around us and observe our actions. What are some of the most popular ideas that people in general have about Christianity? I was asking this question as part of my PhD research on views on church and Christianity "from the outside". What I discovered when I spoke to people who were non-Christians was that very often they associated Christianity with some of the ethical issues that have become identity markers for Christians, such as attitudes towards abortion and homosexuality. In the eyes of my respondents, Christian ethics was about forbidding things and judging others. None of them mentioned that the central characteristics of Christian ethics are

love, compassion, forgiveness, care for the weak, etc. The discrepancy between how Christians like to describe themselves and how they are described by others was striking. I think that it is important to keep it in mind when we try to understand what being "Christian" means in the contemporary European context. What are we being associated with? Is there anything that makes us stand out; both in a good and in a bad way? Are our attitudes and values unique or are we just like everyone else?

The third issue that I wanted to mention in relation to some of the discussion that took place during the conference, is the importance of paying attention to human agency in religion. The former UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief, prof. Heiner Bielefeldt, has often pointed out that religion does not exist as an abstract concept, it is always human beings that interpret it, preach it, live it, use and misuse it. This presumes that there is a great diversity among the believers, be it Christians or Muslims. In light of this I would like to suggest that those studying theology could benefit greatly from engaging with other disciplines that try to understand who human beings are and why they act the way they do. Here I am referring primarily to history, sociology of religion and psychology; but literature, music and arts can also teach us much about how human beings dream, love, suffer and hope. Engaging with these non-theological disciplines could be one of the ways to bridge the gap between ideals and reality and perhaps make our theology more practical and closer to everyday life.

BLOG

Did you know that members of the FEET Committee regularly contribute to a blog?

Go to <http://www.paternosterperiodicals.co.uk/european-journal-of-theology/blog> to read the latest!



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Recent Blog Posts

BROADENING THE MIND

"Do not put your trust in princes"

Acts 2 and the Continued Presence of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

BROADENING THE MIND

One of the pleasures of travel is that, one hopes, it broadens the mind; we begin to see a world through a different lens as we encounter cultures and situations very different from those we call 'normal'. The same is, of course, true when we delve (as I love to do) into the world of the past. There, too, we experience the strange and the 'alien'.

👤 Dr Stephen P. Dray 📅 21-Sep-2018 💬 0 Comments

The daughters of Zelophehad

Gabriele G. Braun – based on a morning devotion at the FEET conference

1. The initiative of the daughters of Zelophehad and God's response

Numbers 27:10–11 (ESV): *Then drew near the daughters of Zelophehad the son of Hopher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, from the clans of Manasseh the son of Joseph. The names of his daughters were: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. And they stood before Moses and before Eleazar the priest and before the chiefs and all the congregation, at the entrance of the tent of meeting saying, "Our father died in the wilderness... And he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers."*

Moses brought their case before the LORD. And the LORD said to Moses, "The daughters of Zelophehad are right. You shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brothers and transfer the inheritance of their father to them. And you shall speak to the people of Israel, saying, 'If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter. And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. ... And it shall be for the people of Israel a statute and rule, as the LORD commanded Moses.' "

The argument of the daughters of Zelophehad was that, as their father did not have a male heir, the family line would come to an end and the paternal inheritance be lost. Their line of argument was clear: having no male heir would result in loss of land and risk of impoverishment. As a consequence, they asked for their share of the land.

God's response was decisive: *"the daughters of Zelophehad have spoken rightly"*. Thus, God acknowledged that the daughters' request was justified and indirectly recognised that the legal practice then and there meant injustice for them. And so, the daughters were entitled to receive a share of the land. It should be noted that the case of the daughters of Zelophehad led to an amendment of current law.

2. The objections of their antagonists and God's response

Numbers 36:1–10 (ESV): *The heads of the fathers' houses of the clan of the people of Gilead, the son of Machir, son of Manasseh, from the clans of the people*

of Joseph, came near and spoke before Moses and before the chiefs, the heads of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel. They said, "The Lord commanded my lord to give the land for inheritance by lot to the people of Israel, and my lord was commanded by the Lord to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother to his daughters. But if they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the people of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers and added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry. So it will be taken away from the lot of our inheritance." ... And Moses commanded the people of Israel according to the word of the Lord, saying, "The tribe of the people of Joseph is right. This is what the Lord commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad: 'Let them marry whom they think best, only they shall marry within the clan of the tribe of their father. The inheritance of the people of Israel shall not be transferred from one tribe to another, for every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers.' " ... The daughters of Zelophehad did as the Lord commanded Moses.

The chiefs of the tribe of Manasseh, to which the daughters belonged, opposed the daughters' right to have land on the grounds that, if they married into another tribe, they would take with them their portion of land, which then their own tribe would lose.

God also acknowledged the request of the clan chiefs as justified, but he did not revoke his prior decision. Instead, the Lord specified that females should marry within their own tribe to prevent the loss of land. And that is what the daughters of Zelophehad did.

3. Interpretation

A feminist interpretation: the daughters claimed their inheritance and, in turn, equal rights for females. The daughters were forerunners for female emancipation fighting for an equal share of the land so that their family would not lose it. This right was claimed before God and people.

A patriarchal interpretation: the clan chiefs held that females could claim their inheritance only if there was no male heir. They conceded that females could

have their share of the land, provided they remained within the tribe to prevent the loss of land through marrying into other tribes.

A third suggestion: all parties were concerned at losing land, and all solutions given ensured that land would not be lost. Today we as Christians should ask ourselves, which land are we speaking of and how can it be preserved? Leviticus 25:23 says that the land belongs to God, and he allocates it to whom he wills. However, one should take into consideration the fact that there was the tribe of Levi, who did not have land, but rather received revenue from their priestly ministry. Their 'portion' was the Lord, and their 'land' was the service to him they were ordained to do (Deut 10:9 et al.).

4. Our situation

Today, we as Christians are in a similar situation to the tribe of Levi: we are without land. Likewise, our "portion" is the Lord, and our inheritance is the relationship with him and our service to him. As scholars – whether male or female – the portion of our inheritance is the Lord and his calling for us. And none of this "land" should get lost, because the land is the Lord's, and he allocates it to whom he wills.

As scholars serving the Lord in our respective countries, in Europe and beyond, let us hold on to our God-given inheritance and not be driven by fear in times as such, but rather compelled by the Lord's love. As male and female theologians let us encourage each other so that none of our God-given land and calling may get lost.

European Journal of Theology Europäische Theologische Zeitschrift Journal Européen de Théologie issue 27.2 (2018)

The latest issue of our Journal is an exciting and diverse one! After the Editorial, Gabriele Braun attempts to show the connection between God's presence and the praise of his people; she argues that such a connection occurs in the context of the covenant relationship between God and his people. Next Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen discusses the work of American theologian John Howard Yoder with special attention to the Church, and discusses some consequences of his hermeneutic position.

As usual drawing from world literature, Gordon Leah argues that the Tree of Knowledge from Genesis 3 is transformed into the cross of Christ. Martine Oldhoff examines the overlap between biblical and systematic theology by analysing the attitude towards the concept of the soul, or dualism, in contemporary biblical scholarship. She explores and exposes the roots of the current monist tendency as a metaphysical imposition on biblical scholarship.

In Norway's changed constitution the Church of Norway is no longer a state church. Egil Morland analyses the history and the consequences of this historical step. Our featured author Helge Stadelmann (see <http://www.paternosterperiodicals.co.uk/featured-author-prof-dr-helge-stadelmann>) reflects on the growing number of elderly persons whom the Christian message has to address and suggests holding integrative services which do not neglect the needs of seniors. The issue is rounded off by two longer book review articles and the usual shorter reviews.

To subscribe to this very affordable Journal please go to <http://www.paternosterperiodicals.co.uk/european-journal-of-theology/subscribe>



ABOUT FEET

The **Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians** was founded in 1976 in the aftermath of the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation to encourage fellowship and theological reflection in Europe. The late John Stott played a significant role in its foundation and chairpersons of the calibre of Klaas Runia, Howard Marshall and Henri Blocher have guided the Fellowship. The present chairman is Pierre Berthoud, emeritus professor at the Faculté Jean Calvin in Aix-en-Provence, France. The website address is <http://www.paternosterperiodicals.co.uk/european-journal-of-theology/about-feet>. If you are in agreement with the work we are doing and want to be involved, please join us! The membership application form is at <http://www.paternosterperiodicals.co.uk/european-journal-of-theology/feet-membership-form>.

The current members of the Executive Committee are:

Pierre Berthoud, France (chair)	Klaus Bensel, Germany (secretary: klaus.bensel@gmail.com)
Gert Hain, Germany (treasurer)	
Stanislav Alexiev, Bulgaria	Pavel Cerny, Czech Republic
Leonardo De Chirico, Italy	Stephen Dray, UK
Anne-Marie Kool, Hungary	Gert Kwakkel, Netherlands
Hetty Lalleman, UK – Netherlands	Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, Denmark

with Pieter Lalleman, editor of the European Journal of Theology, in attendance.

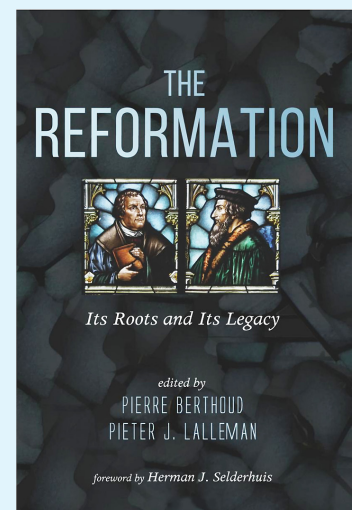
FIRST EVER FEET BOOK!

The papers and workshop notes of the 2016 FEET conference on The Reformation, which was held in Lutherstadt Wittenberg, have been published in a book: Pierre Berthoud and Pieter J. Lalleman (eds), **The Reformation: Its roots and its Legacy** (Eugene: Pickwick, 2017) xxiii + 22 pp., \$30.

Details can be found at <https://wipfandstock.com/the-reformation.html>.

A review of the book has appeared in the October 2018 issue of the European Journal of Theology.

Professor Henri Blocher, a former chair of FEET, said: “What surprised me when I read that symposium was not the solid scholarship that undergirds the various essays: I had heard several of them in Wittenberg, and I know most of the authors; I was struck, and pleased, by their *freshness*, beyond expectation (I confess). Five hundred years, but no mere exercise of memory. They open windows wide on our present. Discussions reveal relevant options. They offer rare and fascinating insights. They show the heritage alive, and life-giving.”



NEXT FEET CONFERENCE

The next conference of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians is being planned for August 2020. The theme and the venue will be decided in January 2019, but you can already make the decision to attend. Details will be announced at

<http://www.paternosterperiodicals.co.uk/european-journal-of-theology/conference-2020-introduction>