

NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2021

INTRODUCTION

The importance of sound teaching

From time to time I meet people in the church who are confused because they found something on the internet about the Bible which disturbs them. They read the opinions of ‘Bible teachers’ who tell them that certain things, which the church has taught throughout the ages, are wrong and that in fact the common Bible translations got it wrong as well. They claim that they are now telling the truth about how things ‘really’ are and should be translated or explained.

‘Laypeople’ who read these kinds of stories online get confused. Have they always held ‘wrong beliefs’? And how can they find out about the right translation as they do not know Hebrew or Greek? ‘Ordinary Christians’, if I may call them so, can be deeply worried about such reports of ‘mistakes’ in what they were taught in the church. The more I hear these things, the more I am convinced that good and sound teaching by those of us who teach students and teach the church, is essential for the health of the Christian church. The church needs sound, reliable teachers, theologians, experts in the biblical languages, in order to grow and not be deceived by whatever the internet presents to them.

The problem of false teaching is not new. Already the New Testament is very concerned about it, right at the beginnings of the church. The apostle Paul warns a young Timothy about false teachings: ‘For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine, Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn away from the truth and turn aside to myths.’ (2 Timothy 4:3–4)

The Revd Dr John Stott, one of the founders of FEET, was always very concerned that theologians should teach sound doctrine in order to build up the church. Let us follow in his footsteps and the footsteps of teachers like Paul and Timothy, so that Christ will be glorified by our teaching.

Hetty Lalleman, editor



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The transforming work of the Spirit in the personal life¹

Dr Pablo Martínez Vila

'God became man ... not simply to produce better men of the old kind, but to produce a new kind of man.'

(C. S. Lewis)²

Becoming a new person is the deep desire of many people. We often hear phrases like 'I wish I could start my life again' or 'How much I would like to be a different person.' Is this possible? Transformation is right at the heart of the message of the Gospel. Christianity is essentially a matter of transforming people into the likeness of Jesus.

We are before a very exciting reality, a great blessing. Being transformed by the Holy Spirit is at the core of Christian discipleship and becomes a powerful tool in our witness (evangelism). Wonderful ... but we need to approach this issue with much wisdom and, above all, in the light of the Scriptures. As John Stott reminds us, 'We must never divorce what God has married, namely his Word and his Spirit. The Word of God is the Spirit's sword. The Spirit without the Word is weaponless, the Word without the Spirit is powerless.'³

'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come!' (2 Cor 5:17). Paul's memorable statement is both the starting point and a magnificent summary of our topic. Nevertheless we cannot interpret this verse whimsically. If we don't understand it well it may cause more frustration than inspiration, more confusion than joy. Some Christians think that with the new birth they can start from scratch in every area of their lives. They would like the Holy Spirit to change them totally and instantaneously, wiping off everything that they do not like either in their temperament, their personality or their past memories. They expect to be born again in almost a literal sense! So we have to be careful. God does not promise us to remove our painful past or the limitations from our temperament and personality here on earth. The work

of the Holy Spirit within us is *not to destroy* our past but to build up our present and our future, to live a new life, the abundant life of Jesus (Jn 10:10). In this sense, the thorough work of the divine Comforter goes far beyond any human resource or technique because it is not something natural, but supernatural. A mysterious element is ingrained in this transformation in such a way that it transcends our human reasoning.

Three questions will guide us to understand this transforming work of the Spirit. Each of them will show likewise what is needed from our part, what is expected from us:

- What and what for? The *nature and purpose* of transformation. It is a great blessing. The need to be led by the Spirit
- How and how can I see it? The *dynamics and the evidence* of transformation. It produces a profound change. The need to remain in Christ.
- How far? *The limits and frustrations of transformation*. We are moulded and polished, but still jars of clay. The need of acceptance.

In between we will consider some hurdles that may hinder our progress in this process: the spirit of this age that opposes the work of the Spirit of God, the divine transformer.

1. THE NATURE OF TRANSFORMATION: A DIVINE METAMORPHOSIS

'And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18)

Our first question is 'What for?': the nature and purpose of our transformation.

When I was a child I was fascinated by the amazing transformation of the silkworm into a butterfly after a while hidden in the cocoon. There was something mysterious and exciting for the mind of a child in this incredible change. Every winter I would take care of the worms to later watch enthusiastically the butterfly emerge. At this

¹ This is an edited version of a paper read at the FEET Conference in August 2020.

² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 182.

³ John Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester: IVP, 1991) 34.

early age I learned my first lesson in theology! I remember my father, a pastor and theologian, explaining to me patiently that this change was called *metamorphosis* and that the same word was used for another amazing change which was even more fascinating. It was the change Jesus made in us, making possible that one day in heaven we could be as free and joyful as this flying butterfly. I never forgot the illustration and since then I understood the meaning and goal of the transformation started by Jesus Christ and performed by the Holy Spirit.

Let us see how this metamorphosis operates. When we are born of the Spirit we are given God's nature (Jn 3:6, 1:13), 'we participate in the divine nature' (2 Pe 1:4). It is like receiving God's DNA, the moral and spiritual code of God. As we hinted earlier, there is an element of mystery in this process that we cannot ultimately grasp. Wayne Grudem writes: 'The exact nature of regeneration is a mystery to us. We know what happens – the outcome, but neither how it happens nor what God does exactly to give us the new spiritual life.'⁴

Within this new nature there is a sort of seed, an embryo that keeps growing till its full development. This process is very similar to the growth of a child, to such an extent that Paul himself uses this metaphor: 'My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you' (Gal 4:19). It is a growth into maturity. In fact, the word 'mature' or 'perfect' – *teleios* – appears numerous times in this context of transformation. It is the same idea (and word) that we find in Philippians 1:6, 'Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion (maturity) until the day of Christ Jesus'.

What sort of maturity are we talking about? This leads us to the purpose of this transformation. 'We are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory' (2 Cor 3:18). It is growth into Christlikeness: becoming more and more like Christ every day is the goal of our transformation. So transformation is essentially 'Christ formation' within us.

We see a remarkable example of this transforming power in the apostle Paul: he was changed from being a persecutor to being persecuted. Also the apostles after Pentecost were so strikingly transformed that 'the people were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). This transforming influence has continued over the centuries, changing

countless millions. As a psychiatrist I can bear witness to dozens of men and women whose lives have been changed by the power of the Holy Spirit, a change that goes beyond any human resource or explanation.

Furthermore, this personal transformation has community implications. It is an individual change, but not individualistic. A historical example illustrates this idea. The ministry of William and Catherine Booth among the marginalized in London in the nineteenth century made such a social impact that Charles Spurgeon said, 'If the *Salvation Army* were wiped out of London, *five thousand extra policemen* could not fill the place in the repression of crime and disorder.'⁵ Hundreds of shipwrecked lives were rescued from the mud of delinquency and changed progressively into the image of Jesus. The transformation of the Holy Spirit indeed goes beyond the personal sphere to influence the whole of society. We are called to be like mirrors that reflect the moral character of Christ. This is a great blessing, a tremendous privilege. 'Indeed, the greatest gift the Christian has ever received, ever will or could receive, is the Spirit of God himself.'⁶

What is expected from us? A willingness to be led by the Spirit, 'live (walk) by the Spirit' (Rom 8:14, Gal 5:16, 18, 25). Like a sailboat unfolds its sails to be led by the wind, so we need to let ourselves be carried by the wind of the Spirit.

2. THE EVIDENCES OF TRANSFORMATION: A CHANGE IN THREE LEVELS

Our second question is 'How' and 'How can I see it?' **How?** The dynamics of transformation

The transforming work of Holy Spirit is a process which occurs in three layers:

- Being a new person: I get a new identity. Expressed in a new character (see, for example, the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5).
- Seeing from a different view: I get a new mind. Expressed in a new life purpose.
- Living a new life: I get new ethics. Expressed in a new behaviour. The Christian faith is something to believe as much as to be lived.

Being, seeing and living like Jesus becomes the core and the goal of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 701.

⁵ Henry Garipey, *Christianity in Action: The International History of the Salvation Army* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 57.

⁶ J. Stott, *What Christ thinks of the Church* (Milton Keynes: Word UK, 1990) 86.

How can I see it? The evidences of transformation
 This three layered transformation is unfolded, displayed, in many practical ways. They are the visible evidences of the transforming work of the Spirit. We can summarise them in two: We get a 'new heart': a radical and holistic change. Some of these changes are immediate and total, others are progressive and partial, but they are all radical. Radical in the original sense of the word, namely that they go deep into the roots of our person, our heart. This transformation reaches the whole of us; it affects every 'room' of our life. An existential, emotional and moral transformation is operated. C.S. Lewis put it this way: 'The regenerate man is *totally* different from the unregenerate, for the regenerate life, the Christ that is formed in him transforms every part of him: his spirit, soul and body.'⁷

This is why God said: 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you one of flesh' (Ez 36:26). Notice how the new names given to Abraham, Jacob, Peter and others after their personal encounter with God symbolise this new person.

We get new eyes: 'the mind of Christ'. As we are transformed by the Holy Spirit, we are gradually able to look at everything and everyone, including ourselves and our past, with new eyes because 'the old has passed away... the new have come'. This new look is possible because 'we have the mind of Christ' (2 Cor 2:16). The word mind here (*nóos*) does not mean so much thinking (*phronesis*) as perceiving. It is a new perception, a new look from new eyes. The way we see and understand the world is changed: different attitudes, a new perspective on life (our worldview), new priorities (a new set of values), new relationships, a new vision and hope for the future, and so on with a long list of 'new things', made new in Christ by the Holy Spirit. In sum, we 'walk in newness of life' (Rom 6:4).⁸

What is expected from us here? We need to remain in Christ. Being in Christ is the only condition (Jn 15). For this purpose we are equipped with two great resources which are the substance of our spiritual nourishment:

- Prayer: cultivating God's presence.
- The Scriptures: meditating God's word.

3. BE ALERT: THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN AND THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE AROUND

At this stage we need to answer a frequent question: what is the difference between the personal growth pursued by human sciences (psychology, philosophy, sociology) and the spiritual change operated by the Holy Spirit? Is there any difference? This question has profound implications because it points out the dangers we face in the process of transformation. Our change is heavenly operated, but it does not occur in a heavenly realm. It occurs in a world that pressures us with its own idols. Such idols may become a hurdle in our process of transformation.

Many people today long for change in their lives. In fact a certain kind of personal growth has become one of these idols of our time. A popular motto is: develop your full potential and reach your best life now. These are the secular messages we hear every day. This is why we need to pay attention briefly to another sort of spirit, the spirit of the age.⁹ Paul called it 'the pattern of this time' (Rom 12: 2) and, not by chance, it is also known as the *zeitgeist* (the ghost of the time). As the *Holy Spirit works within us*, we must be alert to the secular spirit around us. It behaves like a seducing force that entangles and deceives us with dreams of self-fulfilment and happiness. The spirit around can hinder the inner transformation performed by the Holy Spirit. Therefore we need to be aware of the pressure which comes from the secular worldviews. In their epistles Paul and Peter often warn us of the need to be alert. Discerning the *zeitgeist* is not a luxury reserved for a few intellectual Christians, it is a requisite for all believers in order 'to keep oneself from being polluted by the world' (Jas 1:27).

The divine change is radically different from the one offered by the secular worldviews. They differ in their starting point and in their goal. Remarkably, the sort of change preached by the world is a mirror of its values and idols. Its starting point is 'my rights' and it revolves around the ego. It is a selfish approach which we could summarise in three statements, each of them reflecting an idol:

- My right to be myself: the idol of *individualism*.
- My right to be happy: the idol of *hedonism*.
- My right to self-fulfilment: the idol of personal *success*.

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, 172.

⁸ This idea was thoroughly developed by some of the Puritans, in particular by John Owen who is known as 'the theologian of the Holy Spirit'. His contributions on the subject have been a source of inspiration to generations of Christians. See, for example, his *The Holy Spirit*.

⁹ For a further study of this issue see Ravi Zacharias and Vince Vitale, *Jesus among secular Gods* (New York: Faith Words Books, 2017).

The transformation of the Holy Spirit is just the opposite. The starting point is not my rights, but my needs; it revolves around Christ, not around myself (Gal 2:20); its aim is not to feel happier every day, but to be holier. It can also be summarised in three sentences, which reverse the previous ones, a sort of antidote to the seduction of the world's values:

- My need to become like Christ.
- My need to be holy.
- My need to fulfil God's will for my life.

I will know that the Holy Spirit is doing his work properly within me when my longing and my prayer is no longer 'to pursue my own dreams', 'to master my own life', 'to make a name for myself', 'to be independent and self-sufficient', but to imitate the Servant King and bring glory to God. Then, by so doing, I find true happiness and deep self-fulfilment; I am endowed with a deep well-being that no human worldview can provide. In a word, I come to experience that the Holy Spirit within is far more desirable than the spirit around.

4 THE LIMITS AND FRUSTRATIONS OF TRANSFORMATION: DIFFERENT TOOLS WITH ONE PURPOSE

At this point you may say, 'This is all very encouraging... but change is not always possible, at least not total change.' So our last question is 'How far? Are there any limits to this transformation?'

We need a balance between idealism and realism. This is very important for us to grasp. Why? The life of faith is a constant tension between two states: we are not the same as we were before, but neither are we yet what God intends us to be or what we ourselves long to become. We are no longer... but we are not yet. The work of the Holy Spirit in us is not free from this tension of faith that affects almost all areas of Christian life. This is a feature of the Kingdom of God here on earth, present but not complete, it is heavenly but not heaven. So we need to be careful with unrealistic expectations or super-spiritual approaches to faith. There is indeed a lot of triumph in our transformation, but there is no place for triumphalism. We are indeed new creatures, but we are still 'jars of clay' (2 Cor 4:7).

Nevertheless, when change is not possible, the Transformer continues his work anyway. There are no barriers for his power. The Holy Spirit does not resign! He performs his transformation in other ways. He uses

different tools with the same purpose, viz. that Christ is formed in us. He does it in three ways:

- Controlling.
- Moulding.
- Providing grace to accept .

Let us consider two examples: our temperament and our past life.

4.1 Our temperament: controlling and polishing our genetic framework

Temperament is the most genetic part of our character, being mainly determined by inherited factors. We are born with a given temperament. While temperament cannot be changed, it can indeed be moulded into the likeness of Christ and controlled by the Holy Spirit. We cannot expect a drastic change in the genetic makeup of our person, but we can expect the 'polishing' work of the Holy Spirit. Our realistic goal is to put the weaknesses of our temperament under his control so that it does not lead us to sin.¹⁰

Every temperament has its good side and its dark side. Notice that Jesus did not change the temperaments of the disciples after he had called them, not even after Pentecost. Peter, for example, continued to be an extrovert, spontaneous, impulsive person (even explosive sometimes!); the Holy Spirit did not alter his basic temper but he did polish and mould it. Peter did not cut any more ears off after Pentecost! While the new birth does not change our temperament, grace helps us to live with it. The Lord can use us not so much in spite of our weaknesses as through them.

4.2 Our past: grace to accept our biographical baggage

We cannot go backwards in life, we cannot change our past. This reality, however, should neither cripple us nor be a source of discouragement. Some people invest a lot of their spiritual and psychological energy in trying to shake off the past. It is better to stop struggling against your past and accept that God uses you, *together with* your past, however painful or difficult it was.

The Holy Spirit gives us new eyes to see our past in a new way. We view our past no longer as an enemy, but as an ally. An ally is someone with whom you work, regardless of whether you like them or not, in order to achieve certain purposes. This is part of the newness of

¹⁰For a detailed study of the influence of temperament and personality on our Christian life, see Pablo Martinez, *Praying with the Grain* (Oxford: Monarch, 2012) especially chapters 1-3.

life. The divine Transformer relieves the burden of our painful past because he lightens its weight, enlightens its darkness and removes its sting. This is demonstrated to us in the lives of the patriarchs and of many of the heroes of faith. Joseph and Paul are two striking examples of a wrong past with a right life *trajectory*, a painful past but a fruitful life.

Joseph was able to say: ‘You intended to harm me, but God meant it for good’ (Gen 50:20). All their harassment on Joseph was the raw material that God used to make a life story with purpose and fruit. Some of our past experiences may seem ‘garbage material’ to us, but not to God. God is able to recycle everything in our life; there is no waste material in his eyes.

This is the secret of acceptance, the conviction that God uses us not only in spite of our past but through it. The Holy Spirit will give us the grace that is needed for this sort of acceptance, because ultimately true acceptance is not only an emotional process but a spiritual experience. Remember one thing: God is the great specialist in recycling our garbage experiences and turn them into fruitful events. Indeed, this is part of the amazing work of the Holy Spirit in us.

CONCLUSION

I close with an illustration that reminds us of the practical pastoral implications of our topic.¹¹ Imagine that while driving a car you come to a sign: ‘Road works. Drive carefully. Be patient’. This is exactly our situation here and now: while on this earth we are in the ‘works’ part of the road, the transforming work of Holy Spirit. The sign ‘end of works’ will be on the glorious day of Christ. Then no more work will be needed because we will be fully like him. In the meantime *drive carefully*: ‘Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph 4:2–3). And when the path gets rough, don’t forget that you are not

walking alone. The great Transformer is also the great helper and intercessor. We are strongly encouraged because ‘the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.... the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.’ (Rom 8:26–27)

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¹¹This illustration was inspired by Billy Graham’s autobiography *Just as I am*.

Dr Oleksandr Geychenko

At the next FEET conference, in August 2022 in Prague, Dr Oleksandr Geychenko from Odessa will present a paper on ‘The hope of the arrival of the Kingdom of God and its practical implications for politics and the pursuit of social justice’. He will also respond to a paper by Professor Christian Stettler on ‘The hope of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting and its meaning for Christian life and witness today’. We asked Dr Geychenko to introduce himself to the members and friends of FEET.

Please tell us about your family situation.

I am married. My wife Tetiana and I have two grown up daughters, Alice and Taia. They are university students. Alice is finishing her course in Psychology and Taia have just begun studying Art.

Did you study anything else besides theology?

Besides theology I studied theory and practice of translation and I hold a BA and an MA in this area. I have translated several books from English into Russian.

Why did you want to be a theologian?

This was a slow process. When I entered the seminary, my initial intention was to study theology in order to serve the church after the graduation. During my studies I encountered a whole new world and this transformed my understanding of reality. I realised that doing theology is as important for the church as doing practical ministry. I was also lucky to find myself in the company of committed people who took both theology and ministry seriously. Friendship with these people and participation in different projects encouraged me to become a theologian.

Which posts have you held / are you holding?

All my academic posts have been in one school – Odesa Theological Seminary. I worked there as senior librarian for six years and then seven years as academic dean. Now I am the principal of this school. Besides that, I am involved in editing and publishing two theological journals. These are *Theological Reflections: Eastern European Journal of Theology* and *Bogomyslie: Odesa Theological Journal*. My area of specialism is Baptist Theology and Ecclesiology.

What is your most important publication and what does it offer us?

I hope my most important publication is yet to be published. At the moment the majority of my publi-



cations are in Ukrainian and Russian and they address local theological issues through dialogue with wider theological tradition. I hope this helps Ukrainian readers to expand their theological horizons and become aware of other starting points and approaches for doing theology.

Are you currently planning any publications?

At the moment I am preparing my PhD thesis on the Ukrainian Baptist understanding of the ecclesiological nature of associations of churches for publication in English and Ukrainian. In addition, I am at the initial stages of a project focused on the problem of reception of decisions among Baptist churches. As it is known, historically the dogmatic decisions of the councils became the truth not by the fact that they had been declared but also through a process of recognition and reception by the Church. My aim is to explore a Baptist

practice of reception and suggest a theory of reception based on Baptist ecclesiological principles.

Please comment on the state of church and theology in Ukraine.

The ecclesial situation in Ukraine is very diverse depending on what church constituency we are considering. There are tensions between different Orthodox jurisdictions caused by the recent recognition of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the Patriarch of Constantinople.

Evangelical churches in general are experiencing a generational change in the areas of leadership, liturgy and mission. They are also trying to find a way to witness in the public arena. Speaking about theology, I should admit that Ukrainian Evangelical theological thought is still relatively young and developing. It seems to me that it is trying to find its own voice by entering into

conversation with its western dialogue partners. A number of interesting and promising projects are under way. For instance, a project on sacramental theology by the Baptist theologian Sergiy Sannikov. Roman Soloviy, a Pentecostal theologian, is working on the theology of hospitality, whilst Eduard Borisov recently published his monograph on theosis and Pauline thought. We observe an emergence of community of practice that regularly interacts at seminars and conferences, and dialogues on the pages of the journal *Theological Reflections*. I hope that in the next decade or so we might see the coming of age of Ukrainian theological thought.

Do you have any good advice for FEET?

I'd love FEET to hold its conference in one of the Eastern European countries to engage local theologians in dialogue and to make them part of the community of European theologians.

Knut Kåre Kirkholm introduces himself

Dear FEET members,

My name is Knut Kåre Kirkholm. I was born in 1982 and work at Fjellhaug International University College in Oslo. Fjellhaug has trained missionaries for the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) since 1898, so we have a long and interesting history. I live on campus with my wife and three daughters. (The Norwegian letter å is pronounced as o in German and several other languages.) I grew up in the NLM in a family with several missionaries. Since childhood I have felt a calling to go into ministry or missionary work of some sort. Because of that, I chose to study theology at Fjellhaug, and my goal was to become a teacher of some sort in one of the countries where the NLM has missionaries. God's plans were slightly different, however, and when I had completed my master's degree at Fjellhaug in 2008, I was employed as teacher in Biblical Greek and Hebrew, and exegesis. Since 2016 I am also serving as Dean of Studies. So now I have the privilege of teaching and facilitating the training for young people who want to enter a Christian ministry.

As of late, I have turned my attention to practical theology, especially homiletics, and I plan to write a bit on preaching and homiletics. I hope to combine my interest and pleasure in Old Testament studies with my

interest in preaching. Currently I work on what I hope will become a couple of articles on how pastors in Norwegian congregations preach on the topic of persecution. This is a field that has hardly been covered at all, and I hope to bring some new knowledge to the table. Norwegian church life has always been dominated by



The Church of Norway, which was a state church until 2012. There are several free churches in Norway, among which the Pentecostal movement is the largest. In the second half of the 1800s many mission organisations were founded by members of The Church of Norway. The Norwegian Lutheran Mission was one of those and many of these organisations have strong ties to the evangelical movement in Europe, especially through the Lausanne Movement. As a result of the development in The Church of Norway, e.g., the introduction of a liturgy for gay marriages in 2017, many of these organisations have distanced themselves from The Church of Norway

and have planted their own congregations. My family and I worship in one such congregation. It is not unlikely that some of these organisations eventually will find together and form an independent Lutheran denomination.

I'm happy to be a member of FEET and of its Executive Committee. It is very stimulating to get to know evangelical theologians from different parts of Europe and learn from you all. In a time and age when secularisation is spreading even among Christians, I think it's important that we work together for the promotion of the gospel and sound theology.

Next FEET Conference: Prague 2022

The next FEET conference has been agreed for Friday, 26 August 2022 till Tuesday 30 August 2022 in Prague. Full details will appear here: <https://feet-europe.org/conferences>. The theme of the conference will be:

'Hope for the World: Eschatology as a Source of Life for the Mission of the Church'

The format will be similar to that of previous conferences. There will be Bible readings, discipline groups and – most importantly? – ample breaks for coffee, tea, meals and fellowship.

The discipline groups will probably Old Testament, New Testament, Systematic Theology and Church History, Practical Theology and Ethics/Apologetics; they will meet twice. Doctoral students are warmly invited; there will be a special group in which they can share experiences. Workshops will enable the delegates to work on the topic in smaller groups. On the Sunday we will worship in a local church, after which there are various opportunities to see the great city of Prague.

Most main papers will have respondents from another part of our continent. A remarkable element of the 2022 programme is the large number of speakers and respondents from Ukraine, as can be seen here:

Paper 1, '*Biblical essentials: Hope for the people of God and for the world according to the Old and the New*

Testaments'. Speaker Dr Julius Steinberg (Germany); response Dr Viacheslav Gerasimciuk (Ukraine)

Paper 2, '*Apologetics and mission: Characteristics of the hope cherished by people in secular Europe and how to deal with them in evangelism and apologetics*'. Speakers Dr Yannick Imbert (France) on the Western part of Europe, and Dr Fedir Stryzhachuk (Ukraine) focussing on the Eastern part of Europe.

Paper 3, '*The hope of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting and its meaning for Christian life and witness today*'. Speaker Prof. Dr Christian Stettler (Switzerland); response Dr Oleksandr Geychenko (Ukraine).

Paper 4. '*The hope of Christ's coming to judge the world and its meaning for preaching the gospel*'. Speaker Dr Jirí Bukovský (Czech Republic); response Dr Alexander Stavnichuk (Germany).

Paper 5, '*The hope of the arrival of the Kingdom of God and its practical implications for politics and the pursuit of social justice*'. Speaker Dr Oleksandr Geychenko (Ukraine); response Dr Myrto Theocharous (Greece).

First international ISFORB-conference (on Religious Freedom in Europe)

PRESS RELEASE 12/05/2021

Dr Tatiana Kopaleishvili

On 6 and 7 May 2021 the newly founded ETF Leuven *Institute for the Study of Freedom of Religion or Belief (ISFORB)* organized its first international (online) conference on **“Freedom of Religion in Europe Today: Under Critical Investigation”**. A multidisciplinary group of over 50 experts and interested individuals from about 20 countries addressed current FORB issues in Europe through presentations, discussions, and networking sessions.



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In his introductory keynote speech, Prof. Heiner Bielefeldt (University of Erlangen- Nürnberg), former UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, emphasized the immense importance of religious freedom as an essential human right. The other three main presentations dealt with current challenges to FORB in Europe: The Covid 19-crisis (Alexis Artaud de La Ferrière, University of Portsmouth), religious nationalism in Georgia (Tatiana Kopaleishvili, ISFORB/ETF Leuven) and secular discomfort with religion in Belgium (Jelle Creemers, ISFORB/ETF Leuven). Rich discussions followed these plenary presentations, which were complemented by 13 multidisciplinary small paper presentations. These allowed subsequent discussions on individual topics such as Islam, religion and law, tolerance, proselytism or secularity in European or national contexts such as Ukraine, Germany, Belgium, and Turkey.

The conference aimed to draw up a state of affairs on FORB research in Europe. The output from the various presentations will be included in an academic

publication. The conference offered numerous opportunities to interactively establish contacts and expand research networks. Various networking sessions and small groups enabled participants to exchange ideas and to connect to people with similar research interests. The positive feedback from the participants shows that – despite the physical distance – the conference was seen as a great success and can serve as starting point for further ISFORB activities. The next conference is planned to take place at ETF Leuven on 5–6 May 2022.

For more information on ISFORB/ETF Leuven or the conference, please contact us at isforb@etf.edu.

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European Journal of Theology

The European Journal of Theology (EJT) is published by Amsterdam University Press (AUP), see <https://feet-europe.org/european-journal-of-theology>. Issue 30.2 (October 2021) appeared on time and has the smell of the Low Countries: it so happens that most articles are somehow connected to The Netherlands and Belgium, and two even interact with the Dutch phenomenon of pillarisation.

Dutchman Jan-Martijn Abrahamse investigates how various Dutch newspapers responded to the 1954 evangelistic rally of Billy Graham in Amsterdam; he shows how the person of Graham overcame much of the initial scepticism. Addressing another form of scepticism and prejudice, Cornelis van der Kooi – a Dutchman again – argues that the Neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck is an important worldview which is highly relevant not only for the USA but for the Netherlands as well.

The Dutch theologian Henk van der Meulen presents a theological portrait of the German professor Helmut Thielicke (1908–1986), and so offers another article

which shows that the thinking of the past has continuing relevance for the present.

The Flemish-speaking Belgian scholar Geert Lorein provides an overview over the diverse views in Jewish writings from the intertestamental period on the relationship between believers and the society in which they live. Many of these views are recognisable and challenging for us. Geert is also our featured author. Thomas Christensen from Norway argues that Luke’s presentation of Jesus and the Kingdom of God entails a restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel, with the Gentiles incorporated into this eschatological Israel.

Once again the issue concludes with the book reviews, prepared under the responsibility of review author Hans Burger.

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The members of the Executive Committee of FEET are:

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Klaus Bense, Germany, secretary; email secretary@feet-europe.org

Gert F. Hain, Germany, treasurer; email treasurer@feet-europe.org

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Knut K. Kirkholm, Norway

Tatiana Kopaleishvili, Georgia

Hetty Lalleman, England / Netherlands, editor of the newsletter

Pieter J. Lalleman, England / Netherlands, editor of EJT

Roman Soloviy, Ukraine

Some of the members are due to stand down in 2022 and the Committee is looking for suitable candidates to succeed them.

Our website is <https://feet-europe.org/>

