Closing remarks WEA, Assisi conference 5-7 May 2025

The openhearted exchange and interaction between the different Christian world communions at the Assisi symposium have been encouraging, and helpful for deeper mutual understanding, as well as inspiring our own thinking in several ways.

We agree that when we consider the introduction on the Christian calendar of a Feast of Creation, our main focus should be on the Creator, whom we want to honour by taking care of His creation, and Whom we praise and thank for the sheer brilliance of it.

Evangelicals have traditionally been reluctant to put too much emphasis on creation. The concern has been that the core of the gospel as evangelicals understand it (that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried and raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and was then seen by many witnesses; 1 Cor 15:3 - 8) might be swallowed by a reduction to immanence or, to put it bluntly, “making man’s way to hell more agreeable.”

The phrase “social gospel” had become like a warning sign: “social” as in “reduced to immanence”, neglecting the dimension of eternity.

The historical phase in which the ecumenical movement seemed to increasingly replace the concepts of *evangelism and mission* with *dialogue* fed that concern, and this perception has remained as a prejudice with many evangelicals till today.

At the same time, however, evangelicals have committed a similar error of one-sidedness on the other side of the scale. The clear prophetic imperative of serving the poor and the powerless (helping the widows and orphans and setting the captives free, e.g., Is.1:17) has often been perceived almost as a threat to preaching the “clear gospel”. In this way, evangelicals have been neglecting the extent to which *social* and *economic justice* is an imperative *inspired by the same Holy Spirit* through whom Jesus sacrificed Himself and was raised again. That same Holy Spirit also, as evangelicals affirm, inspired the original Old and New Testament texts relating to care for creation.

As an organisation, WEA consists of its national alliances and other members, and as such it has no authority to speak into the ecclesiastical life of constituting churches. But we can issue recommendations with accompanying biblical reflections.

With the apostle Paul, evangelicals hold that we possess this earth, but not as if it would be our final and only home. We should increase our commitment to caring for creation, not out of fear but much rather out of faith, responsibility, and love for our fellow men.

I personally recommend the observation of a celebration of creation as part of the Christian calendar and will advise WEA accordingly. The generally agreed date among the Christian world communions would be the 1st of September or the Sunday closest to that. Most evangelicals do not observe formal liturgical calendars in the same way as some other churches do, but they share most key annual feasts such as Christmas, Pentecost and Easter. Most likely, trying to introduce a new formal feast comparable to those three might be less effective than encouraging a yearly celebration with a less formal status.

Our fellow men who do not have eternal and temporal hope through Jesus are often guided by fear of losing their only hope, a functioning immanent earth.

To help them see that Jesus means a hope and a future beyond the grave and pollution, those who confess Jesus’ name should be increasingly visibly identified with care for creation.   
  
And even though they who follow Jesus have the greater hope of the resurrection, we should not be ashamed to use a designation for the celebration that appeals to the fears of humanity. Feast of Creation, Earth Day, or whatever one calls it - by recognizing this event with a loving and concerned heart, as a missiological reflection, we would possibly honour the Creator more than by using his name, to which fearful humanity does not yet relate, in the celebration’s designation. It should be a celebration that could appeal to all.

The crisis of ecology is an opportunity.

On one hand it is an evangelistic opportunity, as we proclaim Christ who not only made the world that we spoiled, but is coming back and finishing His work, fulfilling His creation and till then giving hope and courage to change things within our responsibility and possibilities on this earth.

On the other hand, there is also a truly ecumenical potential here, as recognizing God’s creation provides a natural way of coming together without watering down one’s own theological identity.