

CHURCH/ECUMENISM—TOPIC SESSION

Topic:	The 2013 WCC Assembly in Busan, Korea
Convener:	Brian P. Flanagan, Marymount University
Moderator:	Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, Australian Catholic University
Presenters:	Stephen Bevans, Catholic Theological Union Edmund Kee Fook Chia, Australian Catholic University
Respondent:	Cheryl Peterson, Trinity Lutheran Seminary

This session centered around two papers on the speakers' experiences of the Tenth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Busan, Korea, in fall, 2013. In his paper, "Stumbling Into the WCC," Stephen Bevans began by relating the circuitous route by which he became involved with the WCC Assembly in Busan. Bevans served as a faculty member for the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI), an intensive institute for younger students, scholars, and pastors that began before the WCC Assembly and continued in parallel with the Assembly meeting. He also addressed the plenary session on Mission during the Assembly proper. He shared stories about the intensity of the GETI experience and the meeting overall, and the impact that the experience made upon his future commitment to ecumenism.

The remainder of his paper focused upon two recent documents of the WCC discussed at the assembly, on mission and ecclesiology. The first, "Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Circumstances," a WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism, approached the topic of mission within a broadly Trinitarian framework, but with a greater pneumatological emphasis than some past mission statements. Bevans noted with appreciation the document's focus on mission from marginalized Christians and communities to the world centers of wealth, affluence, and power, rather than the reverse. In Bevans's opinion the mission statement succeeds, with some deficiencies, in skillfully presenting an outlook for mission and evangelization for the coming decades. He then addressed the WCC convergence text "The Church: Towards a Common Mission," lamenting the fact that the simultaneous plenary discussions of the two documents prevented assembly attendees from studying the two texts together. The development of the church text over the past twenty years increasingly reflected upon mission as a constitutive part of ecclesiology, and on the nature of the church as "essentially missionary." While sometimes uneven in its integration of missiological concerns, the document overall succeeds in locating mission at the heart of the church rather than appending it to a self-enclosed ecclesiology.

Edmund Kee Fook Chia's paper, "The Ecumenical Pilgrimage Toward World Christianity," located the Busan Assembly within a wider history of the ecumenical movement and of Roman Catholic involvement in ecumenism. Chia also attended the Busan meeting as a faculty member of GETI. He drew upon the metaphor of pilgrimage to outline the growing "Southernization" of Christianity and of ecumenism from its beginnings in the early twentieth century, and the growing contextualization of Christianity and of ecumenical theologies and concerns over that same period. He retrieved marginalized voices and contributions from the early ecumenical movement from Asian and other global South churches, and from that built an analysis of contemporary world Christianities. These new churches, freed

from the stumbling block of colonialism, have grown in a newly polycentric world of contextual churches.

Chia then outlined some of the challenges and possibilities posed to the historically denominational ecumenical movement by the growth in independent, charismatic, and Pentecostal churches. These churches do not fit well with some of the institutional structures of established ecumenical bodies, but the ecumenical movement ignores their richness and their perspectives to its great peril. He concluded by calling for continued pilgrimage toward ecumenical forms able to hear the voices of world Christianities within their diversity of contexts and experiences.

Cheryl Peterson's response to the two papers from a Lutheran ecumenical and ecclesiological perspective named two common themes in the two papers. The first pairing was the shift noted by both speakers from Christological to Pneumatological emphases in ecclesiology and missiology. She asked what it would mean for ecumenism and ecclesiology to "to start with the Spirit," as the documents Bevans summarized and the historical shifts Chia highlighted suggest. She also noted how such a focus might be more open to the charismatic and Pentecostal churches identified by Chia. The second common thread Peterson identified was the shift towards receiving mission from the world's margins and from the contextualized Christianities of the global South, and she asked how that might focus ecumenical dialogue less on the controversies of the past than on the needs of the future. The subsequent conversation addressed many of these issues, and especially the challenges and opportunities for ecumenical dialogue posed by the Pentecostal and charismatic movement.

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