

Pope calls upon World Council of Churches to return to emphasizing evangelism

During his visit to the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva on the occasion of its 70th anniversary, Pope Francis, along with many kind words, urged the WCC to once again prioritize the task of evangelism and mission. Evangelism and ecumenical unity belonged together in the founding of the WCC and it remains true that there is no genuine unity of churches without the concern that all people should hear the gospel.

I sat three meters from the lectern, when the Pope said those surprising words (see photo), yet I had to wait until now, as now everything has been published and translated. The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) could not have said it more clearly. In all friendship and in the knowledge that the WCC is taking mission seriously again and that the WCC mission commission in its latest mission document of 2012/2013 gives a prominent place to the term ‘evangelism,’ one can only agree with the Pope’s concern.



But the WEA does not state this triumphantly, but also in parts self-critically, since for us also the question arises, whether the evangelistic momentum to mission, as it brought together the alliances 1846 and 1951, is indeed still formative today—especially in Europe. For example, the increasing number of Muslims in Europe is discussed politically and critically rather than practicing hospitality and inviting Muslim families to our homes.

The Pope has not so much criticized many issues in a pointed way, but rather hinted at them. But it is worthwhile listing these hints, because in Rome one obviously knows very well what is going on.

What the Pope rejects or criticizes:

- “ecumenism and mission” are “no longer so closely intertwined ... as at the beginning”
- “the missionary mandate, which is more than *diakonia* and the promotion of human development, cannot be neglected nor emptied of its content”.
- “In the face of the recurring temptation to tailor it to worldly ways of thinking, we must constantly remind ourselves that Christ’s Church grows by attraction.”
- “But what makes for this power of attraction? Certainly not our own ideas, strategies or programmes.”

- “Faith in Jesus Christ is not the fruit of consensus.”
- “the people of God shall not be downgraded to the rank of an NGO.”
- “We would not be faithful to the mission entrusted to us, were we to debase this treasure to a purely immanent humanism, adapted to the fashion of the moment.”
- “burying it for fear of the world and its challenges ...”

On the other hand:

- “It determines our very identity. The preaching of the Gospel to the ends of the earth is part and parcel of our Christianity.”
- “I am convinced that an increased missionary impulse will lead us to greater unity.”
- “Just as in the early days, preaching marked the springtime of the Church, so evangelization will mark the flowering of a new ecumenical spring.”

Downloads:

- [Appendix: ‘Selections from the Pope’s speech’ and ‘Extract from the declaration on mission and evangelism of the WCC’](#)