

Frank Hinkelmann

The World Evangelical Alliance: Committed to the Unity of Evangelicals

The Story of the Oldest
Protestant Unity Movement

Announcing the

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

of

EVANGELICALS

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Frank Hinkelmann

**The World Evangelical Alliance:
Committed to the Unity of Evangelicals**

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**The World Evangelical Alliance:
Committed to the Unity of Evangelicals**

**The Story of the Oldest
Protestant Unity Movement**

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Left: Invitation Leaflet for WEF Founding Conference (→ p. 35)

Middle: WEF 10th General Assembly 1997 (→ p. 55)

Right: Design on Silk. Handkerchief prepared to commemorate the founding of the Alliance in London, 1846 (→ p. 17)

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Foreword

Founded in 1846, the WEA was born out of an emerging need for united platform for fellowship, identity and mission among evangelical leaders by fostering collaboration and cooperation bridging theological diversity and differences. This book follows the unfolding narrative of the Alliance, and reveals a rich tapestry woven from the threads of individual commitment to the Gospel, networks of churches which evolved into, the intended and sometimes unintended growth of the WEA in its pursuit of gospel proclamation, religious liberty and holistic gospel expression and engagement through profound dedication to mission work across the regions of the world.

Throughout its history, the WEA has played a pivotal role in amplifying the voices of evangelicals on important global issues, from the enduring commitment to evangelism and discipleship to religious freedom and alleviation of human suffering to environmental stewardship. Evangelicals are now found in most if not all countries of the world numbering over 600 million in strength, with national alliances in 143 countries, seven regional alliances and numerous commissions, departments and partners engaged in holistic gospel expression.

While several papers, documents and even books have been written outlining the origins of the WEA, this account captures not only the milestones reached by the WEA but also the unfolding challenges it faced and may still face as it navigates the complexities of a globalized world. The story is enriched with reflections about the different leaders and players who have contributed to the Alliance's journey and legacy, demonstrating that faith can inspire profound historic impact.

As someone who has been involved for close to thirty years as a grass-roots member in a national provincial structure, to being president of a national and regional alliance, I am deeply inspired by the contributions of many individuals and organisations that helped bring WEA through over a century of commitment to the Great Commission proclamation, unity, collaboration and advocacy and by its unwavering acknowledging the role of the church in fulfilling its mission regardless of cultural or geographic boundaries. Dr Frank Hinkelmann as a reputable academic, historian and evangelical leader for several decades is one such example of an individual who has contributed to the narrative of the WEA in many ways but has with this book made a valuable contribution to the evangelical world in this brief history of the WEA.

In an era dominated by rapid globalization and social transformation, the power of collective faith and shared purpose cannot be overstated. This compelling history of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) serves not only as an account of an organization but as a testament to the enduring strength and influence of evangelicalism worldwide.

As we gaze into the two thousandth commemoration of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ in 2033 this historic overview gives us much heritage to celebration, many lessons to glean from and much needed inspiration to re-imagine a WEA that must a chapter of its unfolding history that may herald the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. As you delve into the pages that follow, may you find inspiration, encouragement, and a renewed sense of purpose—reminded that our shared faith unites us in our quest for justice, compassion, and truth in an ever-changing world.

Goodwill Shana
WEA Executive Chair
September 2024

Introduction

After several years of preparatory work, the time had come. On August 19, 1846, around 800 participants from all over the world met in London for the founding conference of the Evangelical Alliance (EA).

“The participants were overwhelmed by the awareness that they were at a turning point in the history of the relationship between Christians of different denominations. Many of them had been praying and working for Christian unity for years or decades. For them, the great hour had now come for their prayers to be answered, for their wishes to be fulfilled. It was not the first attempt to bring Christians together. Some of them had been involved in interdenominational works for a long time. [...] But this was the first time that an association had come into being which was not only held together by a narrowly defined program of action, but whose main purpose was also to outwardly demonstrate the unity existing among true believing Christians. Now truth and love had come to a happy union.”¹

Influenced by the awakenings of the late 18th and 19th centuries, which had swept through large parts of Europe and America, Christians increasingly suffered from the fragmentation of Protestant Christianity. At the same time, many leaders came to know and appreciate each other in the numerous interdenominational missionary organizations, Bible societies, tract societies and other Christian ministries.

“They set common work goals, worked together and understood each other. And they discovered how great the common bond of faith was among those who ‘loved the Lord Jesus Christ’.”²

After several preparatory conferences, this ultimately led to the founding of the Evangelical Alliance as a worldwide unity movement in August 1846.³ Even though it was individuals who came together there and not

¹ Hans Hauzenberger. *Einheit auf evangelischer Grundlage. Von Werden und Wesen der Evangelischen Allianz*. Gießen and Zurich: Brunnen: Gotthelf Verlag, 1986, 88.

² Erich Beyreuther. *Der Weg der Evangelischen Allianz in Deutschland*. Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1969, 8.

³ On the early history of the Evangelical Alliance cf. Gerhard Lindemann. *Für Frömmigkeit in Freiheit. Die Geschichte der Evangelischen Allianz im Zeitalter des Liberalismus (1846-1879)*. Vienna: LIT-Verlag, 2011, 23-205; J. B. A. Kessler Jr. *A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain*. Goes: Oosterbahn & Le Cointre, 1968, 13-78; Clive Calver. “The Rise and Fall of the Evangelical Alliance: 1835-1905”. In: Steve Brady and

churches as such, many of the participants held leading positions in their respective churches and organizations and represented large parts of Protestant Christianity shaped by the awakenings.

This essay presents an overview of the history and ministry of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) from its beginnings in the middle of the 19th century to the present day. It aims to give the interested reader an overview of the development and work of the oldest intra-Protestant unity movement.

Research Overview

A first comprehensive account of the history of the Evangelical Alliance was published on the occasion of its centenary in 1946, written by John W. Ewing, the long-serving General Secretary of the British section of the Evangelical Alliance.⁴ Not until 40 years later was a further historical overview of the evangelical umbrella organization, which in 1951 was renamed the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF), published,⁵ written by its former director David M. Howard.⁶ This was followed ten years later by another, more popular publication by W. Harold Fuller, then Vice-Chairman of the International Council of the WEF.⁷

In addition, the history of the Evangelical Alliance in the 19th century has been documented by the monumental work of Gerhard Lindemann⁸ as well as by Hans Hauzenberger,⁹ however, both works are available only in German. A more recent, academic appraisal of the entire global history of the Evangelical Alliance is still lacking. Numerous publications cover the history of individual national Evangelical Alliances, although here too

⁴ J. W. Ewing. *Goodly Fellowship. A Centenary Tribute to the Life and Work of the World's Evangelical Alliance 1846-1946*. London/Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1946. Reprinted by: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, Bonn, 2022. Available as a free PDF-Download under https://theology.worldidea.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/WoT_23_Goodly_Fellowship_978-3-86269-239-2.pdf. A short historical overview was given at the EA's 50th anniversary: A. J. Arnold. "These Fifty Years. 1846-1896. A Brief Epitome of the History of the Evangelical Alliance". In: A. J. Arnold (ed.). *Jubilee of the Evangelical Alliance. Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference Held in London, June-July, 1896*. London: John F. Shaw & Co, 1897, 43- 64.

⁵ From 1951 until the General Assembly in Kuala Lumpur in 2001, the name *World Evangelical Fellowship* was used. After the General Assembly in 2001, the name was changed back to *World Evangelical Alliance*. Cf. Donald M. Lewis and Richard V. Pierard (eds.). *Global Evangelicalism. Theology, History & Culture in Regional Perspective*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014, 114.

⁶ David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die. The Birth and Growth of the World Evangelical Fellowship 1846-1986*. Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986. Cf. also the more popular book: David M. Howard. *The Elusive Dream. The Eventful Story of the World Evangelical Fellowship*. Exeter/Grand Rapids: Paternoster Press/Baker Book House, 1989.

⁷ W. Harold Fuller. *People of the Mandate. The Story of the World Evangelical Fellowship*. Carlisle/Grand Rapids: Paternoster Press/Baker Book House, 1996.

⁸ Gerhard Lindemann. *Für Frömmigkeit in Freiheit*.

⁹ Hans Hauzenberger. *Einheit auf evangelischer Grundlage*.

most of the works are outdated.¹⁰ Some further publications deal with special topics, such as the Evangelical Alliance's commitment to religious freedom¹¹ or the history of some WEA regions.¹²

¹⁰ Some examples are: Erich Beyreuther. *Der Weg der Evangelischen Allianz in Deutschland*; Frank Hinkelmann, *Geschichte der Evangelischen Allianz in Österreich. Von ihren Anfängen im 19. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart*. 2.enlarged ed. Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2012; Ian Randall. "Schism and Unity: 1905-1966". In: Steve Brady and Harold Rowdon (eds.). *For Such a Time as This: Perspectives on Evangelicalism, Past, Present and Future*. London: Scripture Union, 1996, 163-177; Peter Lewis. "Renewal, Recovery and Growth: 1966 Onwards". In: Steve Brady and Harold Rowdon (eds.). *For Such a Time as This: Perspectives on Evangelicalism, Past, Present and Future*. London: Scripture Union, 1996, 178-194; Joel Edwards. "The Evangelical Alliance: A National Phenomenon". In: Steve Brady and Harold Rowdon (eds.). *For Such a Time as This: Perspectives on Evangelicalism, Past, Present and Future*. London: Scripture Union, 1996, 49-59; J. B. A. Kessler Jr. *A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain*.

¹¹ Karl Heinz Voigt and Thomas Schirrmacher (eds.). *Menschenrechte für Minderheiten in Deutschland und Europa. Vom Einsatz für Religionsfreiheit durch die Evangelische Allianz und die Freikirchen im 19. Jahrhundert*. Idea-Dokumentation 3/2004. Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2004.

¹² Frank Hinkelmann. "The Founding of the European Evangelical Alliance as a Counter-Movement to the World Evangelical Fellowship." In: *Evangelical Review of Theology* 44.2 (2020), 101-114; Frank Hinkelmann. "The European Evangelical Alliance: An Historical Sketch". In: *Evangelical Review of Theology* 45.1 (2021), 14-27.

The Prehistory of the Evangelical Alliance

In an address to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Evangelical Alliance in 1896, Secretary General A. J. Arnold stated:

“We meet today to celebrate the Jubilee of the Evangelical Alliance, and yet, to be strictly accurate, we may say the Alliance is fifty-one years old, for it was at the Conference in Liverpool, in 1845, that it was practically founded. Even for two or three years before that date correspondence was taking place between friends of Christian union in Scotland and England on the one hand, and like-minded men on the Continent of Europe and in America on the other. The desire for Christian union had long been keenly felt: earnest men of all the Churches realized that the bonds which united them were infinitely stronger than the questions which tended to separate them. Thus the longing for some outward manifestation of Christian unity grew in intensity.”¹³

The founding of the Evangelical Alliance must be understood in the context of the awakenings in various countries in Europe and North America.¹⁴ Gerhard Lindemann described in more detail what is meant by these awakenings.

“After Pietism, the awakenings were a further period of transnational piety movements initially aiming at the ‘conversion’ of individuals and the establishment of relationships with other ‘converted’, and ultimately aiming at an internal church reform, which swept through Protestantism in Europe and North America in the 18th and 19th centuries. In addition to the focus on individual rebirth, the aim was the re-Christianization and linked to this renewal of church and society as well as a renewal of spiritual life, which were seen as being in deep crisis.”¹⁵

From the early 19th century, the ‘awakened’, who saw themselves as part of an evangelical movement, worked together to start numerous societies dedicated to Bible distribution and missions. Common beliefs were identified, which the British church historian David Bebbington summarized with the keywords of biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism and activism.¹⁶

¹³ A. J. Arnold. “These Fifty Years. 1846-1896”, 43.

¹⁴ Cf. Ken Hylson-Smith. “Roots of Pan-Evangelicalism: 1735-1835”. In: Steve Brady and Harold Rowdon (eds.). *For Such a Time as This. Perspectives on Evangelicalism, Past, Present and Future*. London: Scripture Union, 1996, 137-147.

¹⁵ Gerhard Lindemann, *Für Frömmigkeit in Freiheit*, 25.

¹⁶ David Bebbington. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain. A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London: Routledge, 1989, 2-17.

The Founding of the Evangelical Alliance

These shared convictions and activities eventually led to the Liverpool Conference in October 1845, which developed into a preparatory meeting for a larger conference in London to which Christians from different parts of the world were to be invited. And so, beginning on August 16, 1846, between 800 and 1,000 participants¹⁷ gathered from Great Britain, the European continent and North America at the founding meeting of the Evangelical Alliance in London.¹⁸ At the founding meeting, the self-understanding of the Evangelical Alliance was also defined in more detail. The Evangelical Alliance understood itself as a ‘brotherhood of believers’ from various Protestant denominations from all over the world. At the conference, the participants adopted a resolution, preformulated by the Scottish Presbyterian Robert S. Candlish, which became the foundation for the work of the Evangelical Alliance, covering the following content:

The unity of Christians predetermined in Christ was to take on a visible form.

It was emphasized that they had not come together to create unity, but rather to express and confess the unity that is inherent in the church of Jesus Christ as His body.¹⁹

A common basis of faith was adopted.

The *Basis of Faith* adopted when the Evangelical Alliance was founded in 1846 comprised the following nine points:

1. “The divine Inspiration, Authority and Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures.
2. The Right and Duty of Private Judgement in the Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.

¹⁷ The numbers given in the different sources, vary. John W. Ewing speaks of “between 800 and 1000 an. Cf. John W. Ewing, *Goodly Fellowship*, 15. “Nearly 84% came from Britain, 10% from America and 6% from continental Europe.” Clive Calver. “The Rise and Fall of the Evangelical Alliance: 1835-1905”, 150.

¹⁸ Cf. Evangelical Alliance (ed.). *Report of the Proceedings of the Conference Held at Freemasons’ Hall, London, From August 19th to September 2nd inclusive, 1846*. London: Partridge and Oakey, 1847.

¹⁹ Cf. John W. Ewing, *Goodly Fellowship*, 16; A. J. Arnold. “These Fifty Years. 1846-1996”, 45.

3. The Unity of the Godhead, and the Trinity of Persons therein.
4. The utter Depravity of Human Nature in consequence of the Fall.
5. The Incarnation of the Son of God, His work of Atonement for sinners of mankind, and His Mediatorial Intercession and Reign.
6. The justification of the sinner by Faith alone.
7. The work of the Holy Spirit in the Conversion and Sanctification of the sinner.
8. The Immortality of the Soul, the Resurrection of the Body, the Judgment of the World by our Lord Jesus Christ, with the Eternal Blessedness of the Righteous, and the Eternal Punishment of the Wicked.
9. The divine Institution of the Christian Ministry, and the obligation and perpetuity of the Ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper."²⁰

However, as A. J. Arnold commented at the jubilee conference in 1896:

"A passing word needs to be said in regard to the basis of faith of the Alliance, which has been considered even by some Evangelicals as too narrow; but on the other hand, it has been widely accepted, and there is no doubt that it has been the strength of the Alliance. [...]"

We are one body in Christ—banded together for common purposes, and to manifest the real unity which underlies our great variety. We are all free to hold to our own views, in regard to subsidiary matters, but must all adhere to the cardinal principles of the Alliance. [...]"

The basis of the Evangelical Alliance is distinctly stated to be not a creed or confession, but simply a statement intended to indicate the class of persons whom it was desired to include in the membership."²¹

All Forms of superstition and unbelief, as well as Christian education and Sunday sanctification, should be pointed out.

Superstition was seen primarily in the rise of Roman Catholicism (ultramontanism), while unbelief was perceived in theological liberalism. The intention was therefore to gather targeted information about the rise of both Catholicism and unbelief, while at the same time campaigning for the public observance of Sunday.²²

National branches should be established.

The establishment of national branches was specifically encouraged, and national branches were soon formed in the United Kingdom, the United

²⁰ John W. Ewing, *Goodly Fellowship*, 17-18.

²¹ A. J. Arnold, "These Fifty Years. 1846-1996", 46.

²² Cf. Gerhard Lindemann, *Für Frömmigkeit in Freiheit*, 103-106.

States, Canada, France, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, New Zealand, South Africa, British India and Jamaica.²³

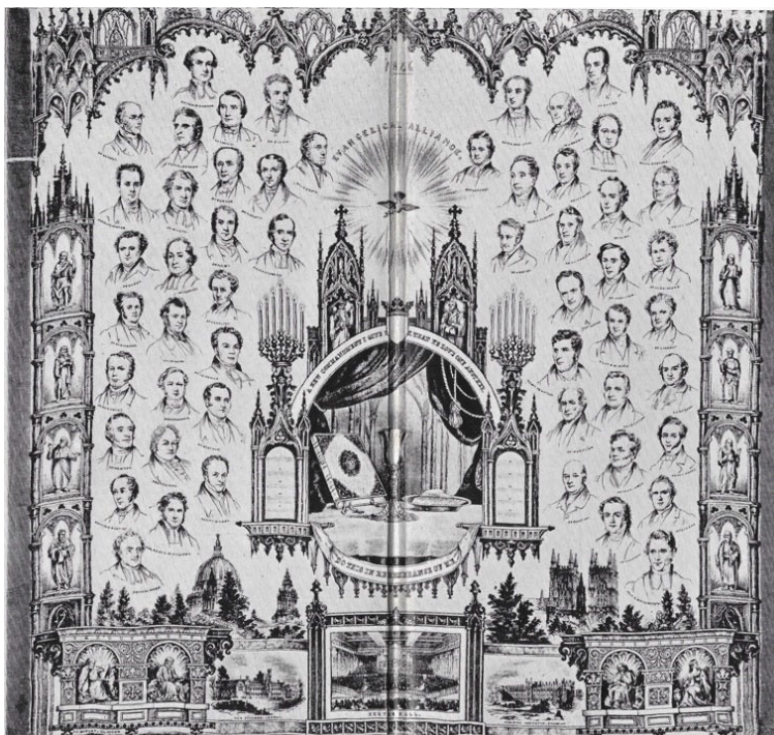


Figure 1: Design on Silk. Handkerchief prepared to commemorate the founding of the Alliance in London, 1846

However, while there were great hopes and dreams for Christian unity and cooperation at the London conference, there were also great setbacks. In his summary of the first 60 years of the history of the Evangelical Alliance, the former director general of the EA UK, Clive Calver, commented on the founding conference:

“In one sense, this conference represented EA’s greatest success. The mere fact that it took place, and brought together so many leaders from different

²³ Gerhard Lindemann, *Für Frömmigkeit in Freiheit*, 158–206. The official motions passed can be found in: Evangelical Alliance (ed.). *Report of the Proceedings of the Conference Held at Freemasons’ Hall, London, From August 19th to September 2nd inclusive, 1846.*

denominations, constituted a major achievement. Its supporters believed that such a gathering was unprecedented since apostolic times. It was greeted with great optimism by some who hoped that it might even inaugurate a new period in the history of the Christian church. [...] Then came a hammer-blow which produced the disintegration of all hopes for a world-wide alliance of evangelicals. [...] The problem resolved around a single issue—slavery. [...] As a direct result of this significant schism in its unity the conference concluded by abandoning the idea of an ecumenical alliance. Instead, the British suggestion of loosely-linked independent national organization, not accountable for each other's actions, was accepted. Humanly speaking, the idea of a world alliance was gone. [...] The dream had died.”²⁴

Officially, the issue was postponed for a later conference to deal with. However, this later conference never happened. This sadly shows that despite all spiritual intentions and good will, human motives always play a role in hindering Christian unity. At the same time, one first step was taken. The Evangelical Alliance was founded. Let us turn to the further development and activities of the Evangelical Alliance during the second half of the 19th century.

²⁴ Clive Calver, “The Rise and Fall of the Evangelical Alliance: 1835-1905”, 150-151.

The Further Development and Ministry of the EA during the 19th Century

As mentioned above, the Evangelical Alliance was founded as a loose movement of national branches without any central structure and authority. It did not bring together denominations, but instead was formed as a loose coalition of individuals. It also lacked a recognizable leader. “Shorn of its leadership, devoid of popular issues and deprived of its original vision, EA moved slowly forward—a vehicle of union, yet still searching for a cause that would unite evangelicals under its banner.”²⁵ These were later found in joined activities, of which the first was the annual Universal Week of Prayer in January. While between 1846 and 1858 it was mainly held in Britain, this changed in the late 1850s. A. J. Arnold reported:

“The programme for the Week has been adopted universally by Christians in all lands, and the observance has extended throughout the world, till now it is difficult to name a country where this Week of Prayer, in the early days of January, has not been introduced. The reports received from distant hands constantly tell of revivals of religion and increased spiritual life as following the observance. There are missionaries and others present to-night who could testify to the marvellous blessings which have followed the Week of Prayer, but eternity alone can reveal the full extent to which God’s seal has been set upon this one department of the practical work of the Alliances.”²⁶

And Ruth Rouse commented:

“Without question, the week of prayer has caused Christians of different Churches all over the world to realize that they are one in Christ, and has stimulated their sense of unity. [...]”

The annual celebration of this week of prayer once and for all disposed of the widely-held belief that even evangelical Christians belonging to different Churches could not conscientiously pray together. The Alliance laid the greatest stress on united prayer.”²⁷

²⁵ Clive Calver. “The Rise and Fall of the Evangelical Alliance: 1835-1905”, 152.

²⁶ A. J. Arnold. “These Fifty Years. 1846-1996”, 49.

²⁷ Ruth Rouse. “7. Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate”. In: Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill (eds.). *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*. London: SPCK, 1967, 321.

In addition to annual alliance conferences, first in Great Britain and soon afterwards in other European countries, the ten international alliance conferences that took place between 1846 and 1896 should also be mentioned here. Apart from the founding meeting, two more were held in London (1846, World Exhibition 1851), seven on the European continent (Paris 1855, Berlin 1857, Geneva 1861, Amsterdam 1867, Basel 1879, Copenhagen 1884, Florence 1891) and one in New York in 1873.²⁸ These alliance conferences were a novelty in the history of Christianity due to both their internationality and their interdenominational nature.²⁹ A. J. Arnold pointedly commented:

“These oecumenical assemblies have marked a distinct and unique feature in the promotion of Christian union in the wider international sense. They have all had far-reaching results, and not the least remarkable fact, perhaps is that these international conferences of Christians convened by the Alliance have been followed by numerous others—Y. M. C. A., for instance—and ecclesiastical bodies have not been slow to learn the lesson, as we see from Pan-Anglican, Pan-Presbyterian, and Pan-Methodist Councils, etc.”³⁰

Rouse therefore drew the following conclusion: “But the international conferences of the Evangelical Alliance, through their size, character, and representative nature, were of the greatest importance in stimulating a sense of unity amongst Christians of different Nations and Churches.”³¹

Evangelical Christendom, the monthly magazine of the (British) Evangelical Alliance, not only reported on Christian activities in numerous countries, but also proved to be a strong advocate for world missions. It was strongly committed to religious freedom and frequently reported on the difficult situation of Christians in other countries. In general, the commitment to religious freedom would develop into one of the most important fields of work of the British section of the Evangelical Alliance. There were countless articles on this topic in *Evangelical Christendom*, and the reports on both the state of world mission and the situation of religious freedom in various countries also took up a great deal of time at the world conferences, as the report volumes show. Ruth Rouse noted:

²⁸ Cf. <https://worldea.org/175/global-gatherings-since-1846/> [last access 31 July 2024].

²⁹ Cf. Ruth Rouse. “7. Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate”, 321.

³⁰ A. J. Arnold. “These Fifty Years. 1846-1996”, 50. We should not overlook that the term “ecumenical” was regularly used by evangelical alliance leaders as well. Cf. Ruth Rouse. “7. Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate”, 320.

³¹ Ruth Rouse. “7. Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate”, 321.

“It had one distinctive, strong and continuous practical activity: the defense of religious liberty. Again and again it successfully defended oppressed religious groups and persons, and secured government action in their favour, including, be it noted, non-Protestant groups—Roman Catholics, for instance, in Russia or in Sweden, or the Nestorian Church under Moslem rule in Turkey.”³²

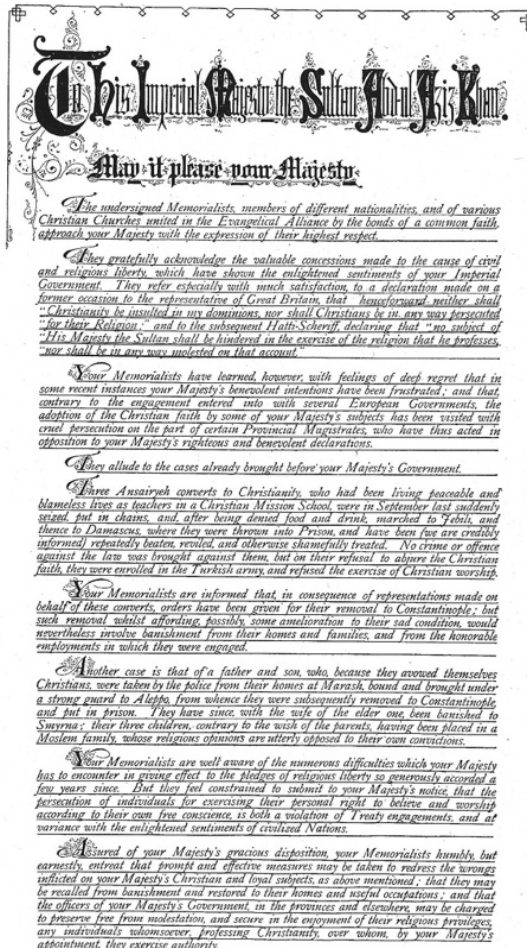


Figure 2: Religious Liberty in Turkey.
 Letter of Appeal from the Alliance to the Sultan 1855

³² Ruth Rouse. “7. Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate”, 322.

The last aspect mentioned by Rouse is particularly noteworthy. The Evangelical Alliance sent delegations to the Emperor of the Habsburg Empire in Vienna,³³ to the Ottoman Sultan to Constantinople,³⁴ and to the Russian Tsar. It sought religious freedom for Evangelicals and Protestants in general, and especially for denominations such as Baptists, Methodists and Nazarenes, or also for Lutherans in the Baltic states.³⁵ But beyond that, the alliance also stood up for Roman Catholics, followers of the Assyrian Church of the East ('Nestorians'),³⁶ or Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.³⁷ Lindemann drew the conclusion:

"With its commitment to religious freedom, the Alliance, whose Anglo-American wing was not satisfied with mere tolerance, but regarded the public profession of faith as a fundamental right, also rendered a notable service to the enforcement of civil liberties in the countries concerned and made a not insignificant contribution to the emergence of a European civil society."³⁸

The Jubilee Conference in London in 1896 marked the end of the first fifty years of the Alliance's history. Delegates from Great Britain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Hungary, Finland, Russia, Turkey, Greece, Malta, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Egypt and Palestine attended the conference.³⁹ Branches of the alliance had also been established in Japan, Syria, Gabon, Brazil and Chile.⁴⁰

From the 1880s on, the Evangelical Alliance increasingly moved in a theologically conservative direction,⁴¹ which expressed itself in a decided

³³ Cf. Frank Hinkelmann. "Freikirchen und Evangelische Allianz und ihr Einsatz für Religionsfreiheit in Österreich in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Eine Dokumentation anhand von Quellen". In: Johann Hirnsperger and Christian Wessely (eds.). *Wege zum Heil? Religiöse Bekenntnisgemeinschaften in Österreich: Vereinigte Pfingstkirche Österreichs (VPKÖ), Vereinigungskirche in Österreich (VKÖ) und Sikh Glaubensgemeinschaft Österreich (SGÖ). Mit Beiträgen aus anderen Religionsgemeinschaften. Theologie im kulturellen Dialog* 7e. Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2022, 152-162.

³⁴ Cf. Gerhard Lindemann, *Für Frömmigkeit in Freiheit*, 888-896.

³⁵ A. J. Arnold. "These Fifty Years. 1846-1996", 57.

³⁶ A. J. Arnold. "These Fifty Years. 1846-1996", 56-57.

³⁷ A. J. Arnold. "These Fifty Years. 1846-1996", 61-62.

³⁸ Gerhard Lindemann, *Für Frömmigkeit in Freiheit*, 943.

³⁹ A. J. Arnold. "These Fifty Years. 1846-1996", 482-483.

⁴⁰ This is the information provided for the late 1870s by Gerhard Lindemann, *Für Frömmigkeit in Freiheit*, 932-933.

⁴¹ Lindemann speaks in this context of a 'fundamentalization' of the Evangelical Alliance. Cf. Gerhard Lindemann, *Für Frömmigkeit in Freiheit*, 945.

rejection of biblical criticism and may also have contributed to the fact that C. H. Spurgeon, who had temporarily withdrawn from the Evangelical Alliance in 1864, became involved with it once again.

In a report in the newspaper *Rock* on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Evangelical Alliance, the author aptly summarized the organization's work and impact:

“For fifty years this Society has been exhibiting, with increasing success, the real unity that exists in the true Church of Christ. Recognising that the all-comprehensive love of the one Almighty Father embraces all, that the one stream of unending love, flowing from the very throne of God through the one Mediator, pulsates through every renewed soul; that the one Eternal Spirit inspired the one visible Guide, the Word of God, and is the one invisible, infallible Guide, enlightening the understanding—the Evangelical Alliance has urged Christians of every race and denomination to manifest this unity to the world, and gain the strength and blessing pertaining to it by uniting in prayer, especially during the first week of the year, and to aid those who are persecuted for conscience's sake in resisting error and diffusing rays of light.”⁴²

⁴² Cf. A. J. Arnold. “These Fifty Years. 1846-1996”, 21-22.

Years of Stagnation

It may seem surprising at first glance that the second fifty years (1896 to 1946) of the Evangelical Alliance were largely a period of stagnation. This can be attributed to both internal and external factors. Internally, there was a shift in emphasis within the Evangelical Alliance by the 1890s. At the center of the discussion was the question of what actually constituted Christian unity. An outward, ecclesiastical-organizational unity was clearly rejected.⁴³ Instead, the necessary rebirth of the individual was emphasized, and thus a more individualistic approach was generally adopted as a result. J. B. A. Kessler noted:

“At the founders’ conference in 1846 it was stated that the basis for Christian unity lay in a combination of love and truth and it was soon discovered that matters of practical holiness had to be added as well. The position taken in 1896 need not to have been contradictory because the new life imparted to the believer is also characterized by love, truth and holiness. Nevertheless the stand taken in 1896 did differ from that of fifty years earlier, because the later conference restricted this new life to the individual believer far more than did the earlier conference. [...]”

The result of limiting the new birth to the individual member instead of relating it to the whole body of Christ, was that personal experience and personal allegiance to Christ became the foundation stones of Christian unity. Provided that one member could recognize that experience and that allegiance in the other there could be unity. Inevitably then [...] the role of formulated truth became less and less important and the only thing that could still be done to extend Christian unity was to win fresh individuals for Christ. [...]

The results of the views propagated by the majority of those connected with the movement at this time were firstly that the forces of individualism were strengthened and secondly that the Alliance became a union without work in which the co-operative side-activities which previously had played such an important part in the life of the movement tended to wither away.”⁴⁴

There are also other aspects to consider. Since the beginnings in 1846, the British section of the Evangelical Alliance had always been the driving force of the World Evangelical Alliance; in many ways one can say that the British section of the Evangelical Alliance was the World Evangelical Alliance, especially since the British Alliance added the attribute “World” to

⁴³ Cf. A. J. Arnold. “These Fifty Years. 1846–1996”, 22.

⁴⁴ J. B. A. Kessler Jr. *A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain*, 80–81.

the international body when the British section of the WEA was incorporated and became legally registered in 1912.⁴⁵

The Chairman of the rather cumbersome “World Evangelical Alliance (British Organization)” stated at the London World Conference in 1907:

“When I reflect on the position of the Alliance, it appears to me capable of doing more than in the future than in the past. There is everywhere not only a prevalent softening of controversial spirit, but a desire amongst the people of God for more united effort in the cause of Christ and against the forces of evil.”⁴⁶

However, the reality soon looked different. The “World Evangelical Alliance (British Organization)” also experienced a period of weakness. On the one hand there were internal reasons for this. Clive Calver commented:

“In 1904 H. Martyn Gooch, the son of one of their council members, had been appointed to succeed Percy Field. He proved to be a ‘safe’ appointment, but one possessing little imagination or strategic insight. At the very time that the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 was lighting the fires of ecumenical enthusiasm EA was content to conserve its energies. Little went wrong but few gains were achieved. [...] H. Martyn Gooch was to remain in the post for forty-five years.”⁴⁷

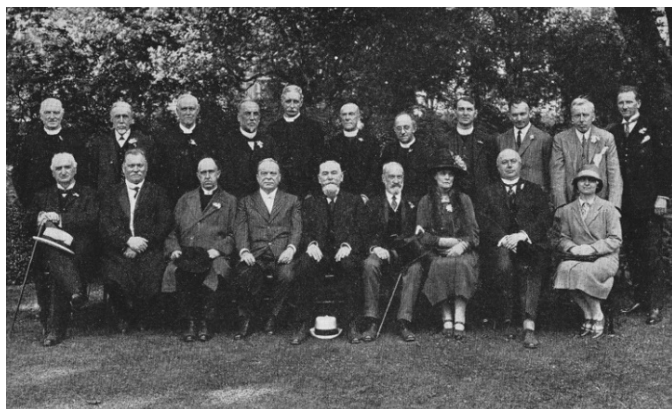


Figure 3: 80th Anniversary Celebration of the Alliance, 1927

⁴⁵ Cf. Frank Hinkelmann, “The Founding of the European Evangelical Alliance”, 103.

⁴⁶ Evangelical Alliance (ed.). *Maintaining the Unity. Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference and Diamond Jubilee Celebration of the Evangelical Alliance Held in London, July 1907*. London: The Religious Tract Society, 1907, 4.

⁴⁷ Clive Calver. “The Rise and Fall of the Evangelical Alliance: 1835-1905”, 159. However, Ian Randall comes to a more positive assessment of Gooch’s term as EA secretary. Cf. Ian Randall. “Schism and Unity: 1905-1966”, 163.

However, also external aspects played a decisive role. The First and Second World Wars led to at least a temporary setback for the work of the Evangelical Alliance, as national differences increasingly came to the fore.⁴⁸ Also, the alliance in these years lacked the outstanding leaders of the mid-19th century. What was true for Great Britain was similarly true for other countries with national Evangelical Alliances. In June 1926, just as in 1936, international conferences of the Evangelical Alliance were held in London,⁴⁹ without having a major impact on the Evangelical movement. The numerous trips abroad by the General Secretary of the “World Evangelical Alliance (British Organization)”, H. Martyn Gooch, to Russia, Finland, Sweden, Malta, Italy, Albania, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland and Germany in the inter-war years did nothing to change this.⁵⁰ The British church historian Ian Randall aptly summarized this phase with regard to the position of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain:

“The reaction of the Alliance to the First World War mirrored the reaction commonly found in British society. There was a tendency for evangelicals to equate the cause of the nation with the cause of righteousness.⁵¹ This was not so marked in the Second World War, and the position of the Confessing Church in Germany meant that the sympathies of the Alliance crossed national boundaries. [...] The most common view in the Alliance during both wars was that there should be an emphasis on prayer. In the inter-war years and in the period following the Second World War there were attempts by the Alliance, to rebuild the pan-European evangelicalism (including the Anglo-German sense of community) that had been shattered by the war.”⁵²

⁴⁸ Cf. Ian Randall and David Hilborn. *One Body in Christ. The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001, 165-170.

⁴⁹ Cf. John W. Ewing. *Goodly Fellowship*, 110-111, 113.

⁵⁰ Cf. John W. Ewing. *Goodly Fellowship*, 133-135.

⁵¹ The same certainly applied to countries on the European continent as well.

⁵² Ian Randall and David Hilborn. *One Body in Christ*, 181.

New Beginnings: The Founding of the World Evangelical Fellowship

In the closing chapter of a book commissioned by the “World Evangelical Alliance (British Organization)” on its hundredth anniversary in 1946, author John Ewing, then the Alliance’s vice president, wondered about the future:⁵³

“Now the questions arise, can the Alliance continue its usefulness? And is it likely to be needed under the changed conditions of this new time? That the conditions are changed admits no doubt. A hundred years ago the Alliance stood alone as a uniting Christian fellowship. Since that time many other uniting movements have sprung up.”⁵⁴

The annual report for 1946–1947 stated:

“For one hundred years the World’s Evangelical Alliance has had wide experience of contact and co-operation with fellow-believers in many lands. Its influence is world-wide and it is an organization capable of rapid expansion and readily adaptable to modern conditions. As it enters upon the second century of its existence, it plans, under God’s guidance, a great forward movement. [...] It seeks to enlarge its membership and to become increasingly a rallying centre for ALL evangelicals. It seeks to act as a liaison between Evangelical Churches and between Evangelical Societies. It seeks to strengthen the unity existing between Evangelicals of all nations, and for that purpose arranges interchange of visits, and plans to resume its International Conferences representative of Evangelicals and Protestants throughout the world. It is its purpose to spread the Gospel by all means within its power, more particularly in calling men to prayer. For prayers break down barriers between Christians. [...] Under God the Alliance seeks to continue to be the champion of Religious Liberty, and to defend the Faith against the enemies whether of creed or practice.”⁵⁵

However, only a few years later reality showed a different picture. In a document described as described as a transcript of talks among European

⁵³ The following is an abridged version of what was previously published by Frank Hinkelmann. “The Founding of the European Evangelical Alliance”, 102-110.

⁵⁴ John W. Ewing, *Goodly Fellowship*, 146.

⁵⁵ The World Evangelical Alliance (British Organisation). *The New Advance. 101st Annual Report 1946 – 1947*. London: WEA, 1947.

evangelical leaders at a meeting hosted by the German alliance in May 1952,⁵⁶ General Sir Arthur Smith of the British Alliance was quoted: “In recent years, in the UK the Alliance only had the week of prayer. We were only active on paper—that was all. When the Americans came and looked for a World Alliance, they didn’t find any.”⁵⁷ F. R. Cattell, General Secretary of the British section of the Evangelical Alliance, added, “The British Alliance did little if nothing except the week of prayer.”⁵⁸

Before this, in 1950, J. Elwin Wright, general director of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), reported a similarly dissatisfied perspective on the “World Evangelical Alliance (British Organization)” to the NAE’s board of administration:

“It was very evident at Clarens [a conference in Switzerland] in 1948 that it [the British EA] was not, as then constituted directed, at all adequate. While it was 103 years old it did not have the confidence and respect of the leading evangelicals, either in Europe or on the Continent. The principal reasons were (1) an executive secretary who had served 45 years and was in his dotage: (2) his ignorance of the issues between modernism and evangelicalism of the present day: (3) the lack of any constructive program which would challenge evangelical interest.”⁵⁹

These comments highlight the problems that the Evangelical Alliance was facing in the years following World War II. Since the Evangelical Alliance’s beginnings in 1846, the British Alliance had always been the driving force of the World Evangelical Alliance. *Evangelical Christendom*, the Evangelical Alliance’s magazine (itself published by the British Alliance), addressed this matter in a special edition in fall 1949:

“It has been revealed that there is a feeling that the Alliance is too much centred upon Britain and that the words ‘British Organisation’, which appear on everything printed here, are misunderstood in some countries as meaning that the World Evangelical Alliance is a ‘British Organisation’. This

⁵⁶ German original: *Niederschrift über das Gespräch zwischen dem Deutschen Komitee der Evangelischen Allianz in England, Dänemark, Norwegen, Schweden, Schweiz und Österreich anlässlich der Frühjahrssitzung des Deutschen Zweiges der Evangelischen Allianz im Erholungsheim Patmos in Geisweid in Westfalen b. Siegen vom 3.–5.3.1952*, German EA archives. All translations from German into English are by the author.

⁵⁷ *Niederschrift über das Gespräch*, 3–4.

⁵⁸ *Niederschrift über das Gespräch*, 4.

⁵⁹ Wright was referring to Henry Martyn Gooch, who became secretary of the British EA in 1904. Ewing continued to praise Gooch in his centenary tribute to the WEA. See John W. Ewing, *Goodly Fellowship*, 133.

tends to hold some back from closer co-operation with the parent body, and in some cases led to a national organisation being formed with the same aims and objects as the Evangelical Alliance but adopting another name in order to keep its national identity. In actual fact the words should be interpreted as meaning the 'British Section' of the World Evangelical Alliance."⁶⁰

In a "Memorandum on the Present Position of Evangelical Co-Operation and of the Place of the World's Evangelical Alliance in Possible Future Development", German leaders expressed similar concern about the Evangelical Alliance's lack of international effectiveness:

"It should be clearly understood that at the present time the WEA is not an internationally controlled organization, and there is no council or committee which has representatives of the different overseas movements serving on it. The last international conference was held in 1907. The organization in Great Britain is only responsible for the work carried on in this country [i.e. the UK], with a friendly link, but no authority, over any of the overseas organizations."⁶¹

The document further noted that the articles of association of the "World Evangelical Alliance (British Organization)" had been drawn up in 1912 and were substantially outdated. It became very obvious that the British Alliance was no longer in a position to be an international driving force. Instead, the NAE, which had been constituted in 1942, took a new lead.⁶²

A growing North American interest in Europe

Following the war, North American evangelicals became increasingly interested in cooperation with Christians in Europe⁶³ and beyond. The Na-

⁶⁰ *Evangelical Christendom*. Special issue. *The New Alliance* (October-December 1949). BGC archives collection 338, II. Secretaries/Directors, A. J. Elwin Wright, Box 12, Folder 13, Switzerland, 1948-1958.

⁶¹ *Richtlinien des gegenwärtigen Standes Evangelischer Zusammenarbeit und der Platz der Evangelischen Welt-Allianz in der zukuenftigen Entwicklung*. Unpublished document. No date. German EA archives, 2.

⁶² On the early history of WEF, cf. Brian Stanley. *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism. The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2013, 71-76; Ian Randall. "The Story of the World Evangelical Alliance". In: Brian C. Stiller, Todd M. Johnson, Karen Stiller, Mark Hutchinson (eds.). *Evangelicals Around the World. A Global Handbook for the 21st Century*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015, 210-213.

⁶³ Hans Krabbendam. "Introduction: American Evangelical Missions in Postwar Europe" in: John Corrigan and Frank Hinkelmann (eds.), *Return to Sender, American Evangelical Missions to Europe in the 20th Century*. Vienna: LIT-Verlag, 2019, 9-16.

tional Association of Evangelicals thus emerged as a key player in the further development and renewal of the evangelical movement.⁶⁴ The NAE held to the classic evangelical beliefs and to the authority of Scripture but rejected the polemical and separatist approach of fundamentalism. The so-called “new evangelicals” driving this effort included such key figures as Harold John Ockenga and Billy Graham.⁶⁵ As the NAE had its historical and theological roots in North American fundamentalism, it initially encountered reticence in Europe. In an April 1948 letter to the chair of the German Alliance in April 1948, British Evangelical Alliance secretary H. Martyn Gooch warned about “American fundamentalists” who had created “a lot of harm with their legalistic zeal” and their literal interpretation of Scripture.⁶⁶ He also stated that no American group was connected to the World Evangelical Alliance.

The National Association of Evangelicals initiates the founding of the World Evangelical Fellowship

A report in *Evangelisches Allianzblatt*, the German Evangelical Alliance’s magazine, in 1951 shed further light on the NAE’s growing influence and some recent developments:

“Already during the war, the NAE began to act far beyond the American continent as they got in touch with evangelical Christians in Central and South America as well as with brothers and sisters in faith on the mission fields of the Far East, in Indonesia, in India and Ceylon, in Africa, and

⁶⁴ Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again. The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 141ff., describes the founding of the NAE, showing why it did not represent simply a continuation of the EA of the nineteenth century. See also Robert L. Kennedy. *Turning Westward. Anglo-American Evangelicals and German Pietist Interactions through 1954*. PhD dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1988, 338ff.

⁶⁵ George M. Marsden. *Reforming Fundamentalism. Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995; Derek J. Tidball. *Who Are the Evangelicals? Tracing the Roots of Today’s Movement*. London: Marshall Pickering, 1994, 69–72; Garth M. Rosell. *The Surprising Work of God. Harold Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, Baker, 2008. On the NAE, see Denton Lotz. “The Evangelization of the World in this Generation”. *The Resurgence of a Missionary Idea Among Conservative Evangelicals*. PhD dissertation, Hamburg University, 1970; Mark Ellingsen. *The Evangelical Movement. Growth, Impact, Controversy*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, 98–102. Ockenga coined this new term “new evangelicals”; see David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 4.

⁶⁶ H. R. Leusser on behalf of Gooch to W. Zilz, 30 April 1948, German EA archives.

other places. [...] After the war was over, the NAE movement also crossed over to Europe. [...]

Automatically, the question arises, whether or not it would be appropriate and serving the purposes of God in the world in a much better way, when those two alliance movements, the Evangelical Alliance of 1846 and the NAE, join forces. The brothers in leadership in the British Evangelical Alliance took the initiative in this regard.”⁶⁷

In August 1948, the NAE leadership invited key international leaders to Clarens, Switzerland for a conference under the heading, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, clarity.”⁶⁸ Among the prominent participants were Gooch, Martyn Lloyd-Jones and J. Edwin Orr from the UK; René Pache and Gertrude Wasserzug from Switzerland; and Billy Graham, Torrey Johnson, Bob Jones, Harold J. Ockenga, J. Elwin Wright and Clyde Taylor from the US. Others, including the head of the German Alliance, received the invitation too late and could not obtain permission from the Allied forces in time to travel to Switzerland.

The goal of the conference, with sixty participants from fourteen countries, was to discuss how to strengthen cooperation among evangelicals.⁶⁹ In his report on the conference, Wright stated, “In general, the delegates were in accord on all important issues which were considered.”⁷⁰ General agreement was also reached at Clarens on adopting the NAE’s statement of faith for possible future cooperation. A follow-up conference was planned for 1949 in Zurich but, after a postponement, took place on 7–10 March 1950 at Hildenborough, England, with eighteen delegates from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Holland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States.⁷¹ This time the British Alliance was the inviting party. The following recommendation (amongst others) was agreed on at the end of the conference:

“The Conference agrees that there is a great need for Evangelical work and witness. This need is threefold: Personal, National, International. [...]

⁶⁷ “Weltweite evangelische Bruderschaft”. In: *Evangelisches Allianzblatt* 54 (1951), 152–53.

⁶⁸ Welcome letter to the Clarens conference participants, German EA archives.

⁶⁹ J. Elwin Wright to all invited delegates, n.d. See also Wright’s report on the conference, BGC archives collection 338, II. Secretaries/Directors, G. Clyde Willis Taylor, Box 27, Folder 5.

⁷⁰ Wright’s report on the conference, BGC archives, 2.

⁷¹ Report “*World’s Evangelical Alliance Conference held at Hildenborough, England, 7th to 10th March 1950*”, German EA archives. The joint secretaries of the British EA, H. W. Hall and Cattell, were also present, but not as delegates.

This International Committee will be formed of representatives of the National Branches of the World's [sic] Evangelical Alliance, of the National Association of Evangelicals, and of other Evangelical groups. Each member will undertake to agree either with the 1846 Basis of Belief of the W.E.A. or to the Statement of Faith of the N.A.E. The Committee will function until the ultimate objective of a fully constituted International Body can be brought into being, but it is clearly stated that this Committee is of advisory character, and will have no authority or control over the action of any country, all of which remain autonomous."⁷²

Also, a larger follow-up conference was planned for 1952. The following months were to be used to work through open questions while the British Alliance agreed to manage administration for the time being. Even the possible name of a new future evangelical body was discussed:

"Some considerable discussion took place over this very important question of the name. Drs Taylor and Wright, as a result of their visit to many countries, had come clearly to the conclusion that the name 'Fellowship' was what was really required, and would indicate the type of organization which was contemplated more clearly than any other word. This would at once remove considerable prejudice and fears that many countries had of another super organization. [...] This would thus make possible a name that was neither approaching 'World Evangelical Alliance' nor 'The National Association of Evangelicals'. Possibly, 'International Fellowship of Evangelicals' would be as good a title as any."⁷³

⁷² Report "World Evangelical Alliance Conference", 2.

⁷³ World's Evangelical Alliance, *Report of the Meeting of an Interim Executive Committee at Woudschoten, Holland, January 1951*, 2. BGC archives collection 338, II. Secretaries/Directors, J. Elwin Wright, Box 8, Folder 3, Cattell, F. Roy, 1951-1955.

Announcing the
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
of
EVANGELICALS

(of lands around the world)

WOUDSCHOTEN, HOLLAND

(near Utrecht)

AUGUST 5–11, 1951



Figure 4: Invitation Leaflet for WEF Founding Conference

On 5–11 August 1951, the planned conference took place in Woudschoten, the Netherlands, with about one hundred participants from twenty-one countries, of whom eighteen were counted as voting members.⁷⁴ On Tuesday, a motion was passed to constitute the World Evangelical Fellowship

⁷⁴ For the list of participants, see 'International Conference of Evangelicals. Woudschoten, Holland—August 5-11, 1951', BGC archives collection 338, II. Secretaries/Directors, J. Elwin Wright, Box 8, Folder 3, Cattell, F. Roy, 1951–1955. There are contradicting dates given on the date of the conference. While some sources say, August 5-11, others say August 4-10 or August 4-11. The minutes say that the meeting started on Saturday night, 4th August and ended on Friday, 11th August 1951.

(WEF).⁷⁵ Delegates from fourteen countries⁷⁶ agreed to constitute the WEF, while the national EAs were assured that they would keep their independence and national identity. This decision was to be brought for ratification to each national member. A statement of faith was unanimously accepted, which has not been changed since 1951, and which reads as follows:

“We believe in:

The Holy Scriptures as originally given by God, divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy; and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

One God, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit Our Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His divine miracles, His vicarious and atoning death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension, His mediatorial work, and his personal return in power and glory.

The Salvation of lost and sinful man through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith apart from works, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the believer is enabled to live a holy life, to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Unity of the Spirit of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ.

The Resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.”⁷⁷

The purpose of the newly founded WEF was described as follows: to further the gospel, to defend and confirm the gospel, and to fellowship in the gospel.⁷⁸ Here we see a major shift from the original purpose of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846. Neither the importance of prayer nor the emphasis on religious liberty played the dominant role which it had played before.

⁷⁵ See paper *The Motions Passed at the International Conference Held at Woudschoten, Holland, August 4-11, 1951*. BGC archives collection 338, II. Secretaries/Directors, J. Elwin Wright, Box 2, Folder 3, General Council Minutes; 1950-1967.

⁷⁶ The motion was passed by majority vote, 14 to 4. Those opposed were Denmark, France, Norway and Sweden. See *The Motions Passed at the International Conference Held at Woudschoten*, 1.

⁷⁷ Cf. <https://worldea.org/who-we-are/statement-of-faith/> [last access 5 August 2024].

⁷⁸ David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 31.

The Growth of the World Evangelical Fellowship

The protagonists took up their new task in the WEF with great enthusiasm. From 30 October to 9 December 1951, General Sir Arthur Smith from Great Britain and Oswald J. Smith, pastor of the People's Church in Toronto, toured the United States and held 37 major events to make the tasks of the newly founded WEF known to a broader evangelical public.⁷⁹ At the end of December 1951, J. Elwin Wright and Paul Rees, president of the NAE, set off on a world tour during which they visited 24 countries and covered over 31,000 miles.⁸⁰ "The purposes of their trip were, first, to have a spiritual ministry to evangelicals in other countries; second, to promote evangelical cooperation; and third, to learn of the needs of other lands where help could be provided through WEF."⁸¹ A subsequent report explained:

"The needs that impressed themselves most on the two men [...] were the need for training of national leadership and the need for adequate Christian literature.

In the course of this trip they were privileged to participate in the first annual meeting of the Evangelical fellowship of India, held in Akola. EFI was one of the earliest national fellowships to be formed and has proved over the years to be one of the best organized and best led members of WEF."⁸²

Soon the WEF grew as it offered the following options for membership:

"Membership as defined in the following categories, is open to all who accept without mental reservation the Statement of Faith.

Full members: National Fellowship of believers in any country which represents an adequate cross section of evangelical life and interests, always providing that they are truly interdenominational in character. These members alone have full voting rights.

Associate members: Similar fellowships, or small evangelical denominations or churches which represent only a section of evangelical life and interests in the area. Such members have all the advantages of full membership except in voting.

⁷⁹ Cf. Brian Stanley. *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism*, 74.

⁸⁰ David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 33; Brian Stanley. *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism*, 73.

⁸¹ David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 33.

⁸² David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 33.

Individual membership: Where no organization exists for the drawing together of evangelicals, individuals may be received into individual membership.”⁸³

There was also a change in membership compared to the previous WEA. Whereas the WEA saw itself as a “brotherhood of believers” and had no institutional membership, this was to change with the founding of the WEF, at both national and international levels. In many countries, evangelical denominations formed the membership at the national level, and also the WEF opened up to denominations, at least as associate members.

In terms of content, the WEF supported national evangelistic campaigns during this phase; promoted prayer, particularly through the annual Week of Prayer; and supported national conferences by providing well-known evangelical speakers. It also supported national theological training centers by providing theological books for their libraries. Between 1951 and 1954 alone, 8,000 volumes were sent to 48 Christian training centres in 26 countries.⁸⁴

From the very beginning, financial challenges have continued to the present day. This was stated in a report from 1962:

“Failure to establish an adequate program for financing the WEF has largely proven its undoing. Admittedly, the ideal is for the affiliates to largely provide the finances for the World Organization. Practically, this is impossible at this stage. [...]”

The WEF has proven to be most difficult to finance. Had we had finances to convene regular stated meetings, the organizational weaknesses plaguing us today have been faced and solved. [...]”

Had we had adequate financial support your International Secretary would have been free to spend much more of his time and effort on overseas ministry. As it is, most of his time has been used in the raising of funds.”⁸⁵

Ever since the WEF was founded, there have been numerous reports and references to the difficulties of raising sufficient funds to maintain its work, even though the Secretary General served on a voluntary basis until the 1970s.

It was planned that the International General Committee would meet for a conference every three years. It met in Switzerland in 1953, in Rhode Island (USA) in 1956, but then only six years later in Hong Kong in 1962.

⁸³ Quoted from David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 38.

⁸⁴ David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 39.

⁸⁵ Quoted from: David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 59-60.

This conference was attended by 17 delegates, eight observers and several guests.⁸⁶ A strategically important decision was also taken at the conference in Hong Kong: for the first time in 1963, the WEF initiated the establishment of a regional hub, the “Asia Fellowship”.⁸⁷ Although the European Evangelical Alliance (EEA) had already existed since 1951, it initially saw itself as a counter-movement to the WEF⁸⁸ and did not seek broader cooperation until the second half of the 1960s.⁸⁹

In the same year, the British Gilbert Kirby also took over the office of Secretary General, parallel to his function as the General Secretary of the British Alliance. The office of the WEF thus moved from the USA to London. Kirby soon focused on “Spiritual Unity in Action”, one of his main concerns. In an article in the *WEF Bulletin* of spring 1964, Kirby wrote under the heading “My Vision for WEF”:

1. “It should devote all its energies towards the encouragement of National Fellowships which shall be truly representative of evangelical life and witness, and which have a positive and effective programme.
2. It should avoid developing cumbersome organizational machinery, but should remain a loose federation of national evangelical fellowships, and avoid all unnecessary expenditure.
3. It should encourage national fellowships by making it possible for acknowledged Bible teachers to visit different countries from time to time for spiritual ministry.
4. It should build up a Scholarship Fund to assist a limited number of potential evangelical leaders to get further theological training where necessary outside their own country.
5. It should be prepared to accept, whenever practicable, invitation to send observers to ecumenical gatherings, and should always maintain an attitude of Christian courtesy in its dealings with other bodies.
6. It should adopt as its slogan—“Spiritual unity in action.””⁹⁰

The penultimate point in particular meant a change of direction. The WEF was deliberately conceived in 1951 as distinct from the World Council of Churches, founded in 1948. The WEF’s strong anti-ecumenical stance was also one of the reasons why numerous European alliances did not initially

⁸⁶ David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 58.

⁸⁷ David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 59.

⁸⁸ Frank Hinkelmann, “The Founding of the European Evangelical Alliance as a Counter-Movement to the World Evangelical Fellowship”.

⁸⁹ Frank Hinkelmann. “The European Evangelical Alliance. An Historical Sketch”, 16-17; J. B. A. Kessler Jr. *A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain*, 100.

⁹⁰ Quoted from: David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 63.

join the WEF but founded the EEA instead. Here, Kirby initiated a change of course by paving the way for dialog with ecumenical circles.

By the mid-1960s, there were three national evangelical alliances in Africa: the Sierra Leone Evangelical Fellowship, the Evangelical Federation of Upper Volta, and the Ivory Coast Evangelical Fellowship. “Other fellowships were soon to be formed, and the ultimate goal was to establish an evangelical fellowship of all Africa under African leadership. This was realized with the formation of the ‘Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar’ in 1966”⁹¹ which became a regional member of the WEF.

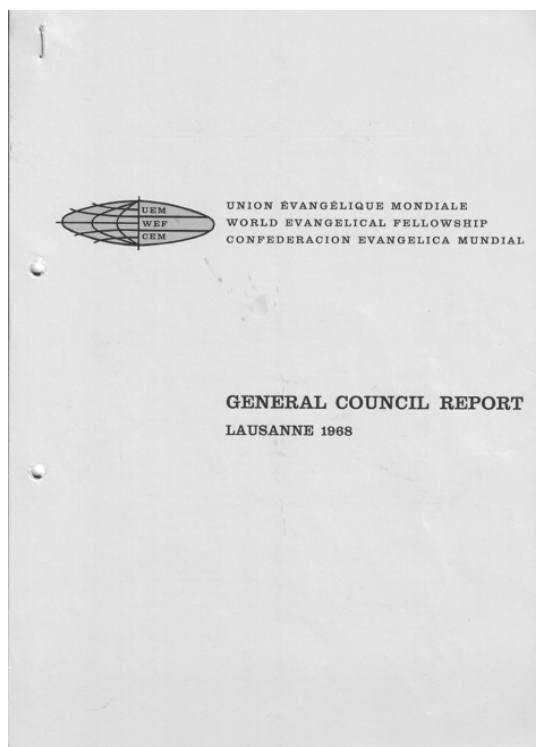


Figure 5: Report on the 1968 WEF General Assembly

The WEF Executive Committee also met at the World Congress for Evangelism in Berlin, initiated by Billy Graham in 1966. Following the resignation of Gilbert Kirby—who in the meantime had been appointed as principal of London Bible College—Dennis Clark, a British citizen living in Toronto,

⁹¹ David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 67

Canada, was appointed as the new WEF general secretary. In the years to follow, Clark's main concern was to give more space to the upcoming leadership from the non-Western world. He explained:

1. "WEF now has the potential of development into spiritual fellowship of evangelicals on a truly world basis [...]."
3. The WEF is concerned to assist younger churches in areas where they express their need for help.
4. WEF is a forum for discussion and action in areas of need [...] especially in the context of Africa, Asia and Latin America.
5. WEF can become a voice for evangelicals to the nations and to Christian Church groupings."⁹²

David M. Howard, who later also became general secretary of the WEF, commented aptly:

"Clark was thus sounding a strong note of internationalizing the ministry of WEF in a way which, up to this point, had not been realized. A major emphasis in his ministry in the coming years was to encourage this development of leadership from the emerging nations."⁹³

For the first time, the newly developed WEF logo was designed in three languages (English, French and Spanish). However, Clark, who was British, was soon accused of being anti-American or anti-missionary, and there were subsequent disputes, particularly between Clark and representatives of American missionary organizations, as his statements and behaviour came across as anti-American.⁹⁴ However, his main concern was to show acknowledge a new reality and to show respect for indigenous cultures outside the Western world. In the report to the General Assembly in 1968, Clark stated:

"It was felt that following the concluding stages of an era of missions originating in and controlled from the Western Hemisphere, a new period of international evangelical cooperation could be anticipated. This partnership would be characterized by respect for evangelicals in the host nation by those coming to minister in the name of Christ. Such partnership would require the closest consultation with local evangelicals before action, rather than a unilateral sponsoring of independent programmes controlled from alien territory. It would also mean a greater respect for local culture and

⁹² Quoted from: David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 72.

⁹³ David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 73

⁹⁴ Cf. David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 74-77.

custom, and avoidance of past mistakes, when foreign cultural accretions to the Christian message were introduced with the proclamation of the Gospel.”⁹⁵

At the same time, Clark also recognized his limited options. In his report to the 1968 General Assembly in Lausanne, he stated, among other things, “Being an international organisation, which has constituent national members, the WEF can be compared to a general with his staff, who is without an army.”⁹⁶

So how should we assess the work of the WEF in the first two and a half decades of its existence? Brian Stanley came to this conclusion:

“The effectiveness of the WEF as an expression of global evangelical identity was, however, hampered by three closely related restrictions.

The first problem was the lack of congruence between the theological and ecclesiastical perspectives of many, though not all, of the Fellowship’s American supporters, who were unsympathetic to evangelicals holding membership in historic and theologically ‘mixed’ denominations, and the reality that a large segment of the world evangelical constituency belonged to such denominations.⁹⁷ [...]

Secondly, the resourcing of the WEF has been a perpetual problem. [...]

Thirdly, as a body brought into existence largely through the initiative of the NAE, and being heavily funded, and to a lesser staffed, from American resources, the Fellowship struggled to divest itself of the image of being an extension into the global arena of a distinctively American and strongly conservative brand of evangelicalism.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ World Evangelical Fellowship. *General Council Report*. Lausanne 1968, 18.

⁹⁶ World Evangelical Fellowship. *General Council Report*. Lausanne 1968, 15.

⁹⁷ This tension is convincingly illustrated by the example of Francis Schaeffer’s early work in Europe; cf. Markku Ruotsila. “Francis Schaeffer in Europe: The Early Missionary Years”. In: John Corrigan, Frank Hinkelmann (Eds.). *Return to Sender. American Evangelical Missions to Europe in the 20th Century*. Vienna: LIT-Verlag, 2019, 17–31.

⁹⁸ Brian Stanley. *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism*, 74–75.

The Internationalization of WEF, Expansion and Setbacks

In 1968, Dennis Clark wrote in a report to the General Assembly, for which around 65 delegates from 36 countries gathered in Lausanne in May 1968:

“WEF stands at a new watershed. The challenge is to move forward with a positive programme that is truly international in scope and operation. Anything less than this is unthinkable, and if the challenge is not tenable the Council should consider dissolution of what could only be termed a façade. WEF must NOT operate like a ‘mission’, it must truly reflect a synthesis of international concern and opinion and action born and finances from the convictions of its affiliates.”⁹⁹

Dennis Clark was succeeded as interim general secretary by Clyde Taylor of the United States in fall 1971, Taylor also served as chairman of the NAE and executive secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of Missions Agencies. During this period, the International Committee on World Evangelization (ICOWE) prepared for a conference on world evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974. Taylor was closely involved in the planning from the beginning, and in June 1973 Billy Graham invited twenty international leaders to a “Post-Congress World Organization Consultation” meeting in Atlanta, USA. The invitation letter stated the purpose of the consultation:

“At that time, after a period of waiting upon the Lord for divine wisdom and guidance, we will discuss:

- the need for such a world organization of evangelicals
- all the various possibilities or organization and structure for such a world organization (such as the World Evangelical Fellowship, etc.);
- the steps to be taken to bring such an organization into being, etc.”¹⁰⁰

The ideas expressed there by the various participants about the future relationship between the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) and WEF were of a very different nature. A certain dissatisfaction with the structure and working methods of the WEF was repeatedly expressed in the reports. John R. W. Stott, for example, noted:

⁹⁹ Quoted from: David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 84.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted from: David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 101.

“My own hope is that the WEF will be revised and restructured. [...] I have my own very considerable hesitations about the wisdom of launching yet another world body. It would not ‘kill’ the old WEF, and the two would surely exist side by side resulting in embarrassment and wastage. [...] Nevertheless a radical overhaul of the WEF would be necessary, both to meet the new and wider needs envisaged and to win the confidence of the worldwide evangelical constituency.”¹⁰¹

National alliances such as the German Evangelical Alliance also had major reservations about another global organization. At the same time, however, there were differing ideas within the WEF about its future role and methods of working, and about the extent to which it would have to change and restructure in order to integrate the LCWE. WEF general secretary Clyde Taylor wrote in early June 1974, shortly before the congress in Lausanne:

“There is a tendency to believe that whatever comes out of Lausanne will probably be a committee, that in turn, will propose the setting up of an International Evangelism Fellowship, which will encourage evangelism, exchange information, and this type of thing. They want this set up on a regional basis. They have now discovered that that is the way the WEF plans to be set up. Therefore, we are exchanging a lot of information with the leaders of the Lausanne Congress, and Billy Graham told me personally that he thought perhaps the best thing could come out of it would be cooperation with the WEF.”¹⁰²

Directly after the Lausanne Congress, the sixth General Assembly of the WEF took place in Chateaux d'Oex, Switzerland, attended by 114 delegates, observers and guests.

“The major items considered during the next four days were the significance of ICOWE and the ways in which WEF could relate to its ongoing movement; the developing of commissions within the structures of WEF, the possibility of regional structures for WEF, revisions of the WEF constitution, the naming of a full-time International Secretary; and the election of the new Executive Council.”¹⁰³

In particular, the decision that the work of the WEF could best be implemented through the establishment of commissions would be of great im-

¹⁰¹ Quoted from: David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 102.

¹⁰² Quoted from: David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 106.

¹⁰³ David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 108.

portance for the future. The regionalization of the WEF was also to be specifically promoted. With regard to the “Lausanne question”, the following was decided after lengthy discussions:

“RESOLVED: That we communicate to the Continuation Committee of the International Congress on World Evangelization with a view to its consideration of the possibility that within the framework of the World Evangelical Fellowship the goals and wishes of the Congress which it is its objectives to carry out, may be achieved and in particular, we express the following opinions.

1. That channels of communication should be kept open between the Continuation Committee and the Fellowship.
2. That individuals involved both within this Fellowship and the Continuation Committee should seek to keep both in concert.
3. That it is undesirable that there be any duplication in international organizations.
4. That this Fellowship is willing to consider proposals for the alteration of its by-laws more effectively to achieve the goals of the Congress within its fellowship and constituent members.”¹⁰⁴

A close relationship with the LCWE was also consciously pursued in the following years, with numerous leading players becoming involved in both movements. At the seventh General Assembly of the WEF, which took place in Hoddeston, Great Britain, in March 1980, the question of integrating the LCWE into the WEF was once again on the agenda and the following resolution was passed:

“WHEREAS World Evangelical Fellowship has a deep and abiding concern for world evangelization, and is convinced that evangelism must involve and relate to the local church; and

WHEREAS our desire is to accelerate and not impede world evangelization; and

WHEREAS we are open to reasonable negotiations while reaffirming our commitment to the WEF Statement of Faith; and

WHEREAS it is our conviction that the time has come for initiatives to bring to an end the separate existence of two international evangelical organizations, to the satisfaction of both;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that we extend an invitation to the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization to become the Evangelism Task Force of WEF, and that we empower our Executive Council to enter into such negotiations on our behalf.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Quoted from: David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 110.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted from: David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 132-133.

However, the LCWE has to this day never merged with WEF. The reasons for this are complex, and it would go beyond the scope of this historical overview to go into them in detail. However, it can be stated that the North American, conservative-evangelical roots of the WEF definitely played a role that should not be underestimated.¹⁰⁶ The church historian Brian Stanley noted:

“This problem [the strongly North American conservative brand of evangelicalism] became most acute after the Lausanne Congress of 1974 had uncovered the extent to which evangelicalism was being dissociated from its historic North Atlantic centre of gravity [...]. Hence, when in March 1980 the WEF assembly [...] invited the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization to constitute itself as the evangelistic task force of WEF, the response from the Lausanne body was distinctly unenthusiastic. During the 1980s the gap between the two bodies narrowed considerably, in part because the Lausanne movement appeared to step back a little from the evangelical radicalism it had demonstrated in 1974, but mainly because the WEF, through its Theological Commission under the creative leadership of a New Zealander, Bruce Nicholls, undertook some serious theological thinking on the subject of holistic mission.”¹⁰⁷

At the beginning of 1975, the American Waldron Scott (1929–2006) was elected as WEF general secretary.¹⁰⁸ Scott began his tenure with a world tour together with his predecessor to get his own picture of the situation of the national alliances. He realized that while the WEF was appreciated by many evangelicals, it had a negative reputation among many leaders, even within the organization. This was partly because it was not really seen as representative of the new global evangelical reality and partly because it was perceived as a movement that was more concerned with its own structure than with ministry.¹⁰⁹ Scott quickly presented his priorities to the Executive Council:

¹⁰⁶ Cf. on the Lausanne Movement: Margunn S. Dahle, Lars Dahle, Knud Jørgensen (eds.), *The Lausanne Movement. A Range of Perspectives*. Oxford: Regnum Books, 2014 and on the relationship of the Lausanne Movement to WEF/WEA see especially the article by: Rose Dowsett, “The Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance”. In: Margunn S. Dahle, Lars Dahle and Knud Jørgensen (eds.), *The Lausanne Movement. A Range of Perspectives*. Oxford: Regnum Books, 2014, 399–410.

¹⁰⁷ Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism*, 75–76.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. David M. Howard, *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 112.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. David M. Howard, *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 113–114

“(1) That our emphasis in the immediate future must be on developing the functional aspects of WEF and its constituent members; (2) that this would be accomplished best by strengthening the national and regional bodies and by developing international commissions; (3) that this in turn would require a greatly enlarged financial base [...] and (4) that this base could be developed most quickly in North America and later extended to other continents.”¹¹⁰

Scott immediately turned his attention to implementing this vision. After the WEF General Assembly had already decided to set up commissions in Switzerland in summer 1974, various commissions were established:¹¹¹

Theological Commission

The Commission’s objectives were as follows: “The Commission supplies a forum in which distinguished evangelical scholars from every continent can work together to discern the signs of the time, preserve the heritage that has been handed to us from previous generations, and express our faith in modern patterns of thought.”¹¹² In addition, the Theological Commission set up six study groups (Biblical Doctrine, Contextualization, Mission, Ethics and Justice, Pastoral Care and Theological Education) and published several theological books as well as a newsletter.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Quoted from: David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 114.

¹¹¹ Cf. David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 114.

¹¹² [Brochure] *Vital Ministries of the World Evangelical Fellowship*. Colorado Springs, n.d. [ca. 1977]. On the history of the Theological Commission cf. also David Parker. ‘Discerning the Obedience of Faith’. *A Short History of the World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission*. 2nd updated edition. World of Theology Series 3. Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2014.

¹¹³ *Vital Ministries of the World Evangelical Fellowship*.

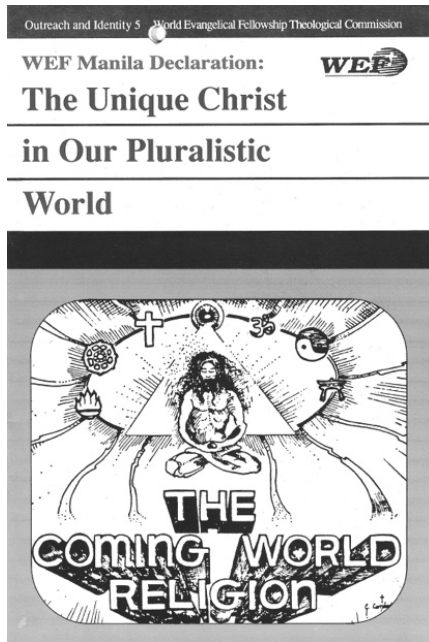


Figure 6: A Declaration of the Theological Commission from 1992

Mission Commission

The Commission for Mission was primarily concerned with building bridges between Western missionary societies and the new evangelical churches in the Global South in order to promote cross-fertilization and new collaborations.¹¹⁴

Communication Commission

The main focus here was on collecting and passing on information about Christians in the Global South who live in isolation and are persecuted for their faith.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Vital Ministries of the World Evangelical Fellowship*.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *Vital Ministries of the World Evangelical Fellowship*.

Women's Commission

This Commission “provides opportunity for women around the world to develop and utilize their gifts in Christ’s service. [It ...] also provides a framework for evangelical leadership on contemporary women’s issues.”¹¹⁶

Scott also engaged in intensive correspondence with national alliances. New national alliances were formed in Thailand, Malaysia, Italy, Greece, Angola and various other African countries, and many were interested in becoming members of the WEF. Two regional alliances, the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar and the Evangelical Association of the Caribbean, also asked to join. However, the tight financial constraints continued. A fundraiser was employed in the USA for the first time to raise new funds for the work, but it soon became apparent that this plan did not work out as the fundraiser proved unsuccessful in raising money and thus paying the person was a further financial loss for the WEF and the position had to be terminated. David M. Howard commented aptly:

“Once again WEF was facing its recurrent crisis of viability. Every leader that WEF had had since its inception had understood the vision and need for WEF, every one of them was totally committed to the concepts and goals; and every one of them faced frustration of lack of resources to enable him and his staff to carry out those goals.”¹¹⁷

Waldron Scott’s concern was to establish the WEF as an “open space” in which evangelicals could define for themselves what “evangelical” meant to them without unnecessarily restricting them—an idea that not all those with responsibility at WEF were able to support. The question of openness also led to a veritable crisis in another area: the WEF’s relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. With the approval of the Executive Committee, Clark had invited Ralph Martin, a leader of the charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church, and Msgr. Basil Meeking of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity as observers to the seventh General Assembly at Hoddeston and gave them the platform for a word of greeting. This provoked strong protests from the national alliances of Spain, France and Italy together with some Latin American alliances which felt that such invitations gave the Roman Catholic Church a stamp of approval. Howard explained the following developments:

¹¹⁶ *Vital Ministries of the World Evangelical Fellowship.*

¹¹⁷ David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 121.

“In response to the question as to why the Executive Council had authorized an invitation to such observers, President Armerding stated that delegates to the WEF General Assembly were considered mature enough to tolerate the coming of outside observers who would thereby gain a more accurate understanding of the nature of evangelical identity. Some felt it was both acceptable and desirable to have such observers present, but not to have them speak from the platform. Others were adamantly opposed to such representation.”¹¹⁸

Finally, the delegates agreed to the following statement:

“The WEF accepts as its first priority the maintenance and promotion of evangelical unity. It recognizes the need for sensitivity in any contacts with ecclesiastical, ecumenical, or political bodies. Its duty to be a witness to the evangelical faith to such bodies should be pursued. But where some may be offended or misunderstand what is being done such witness may at times need to be made by individuals and not in the corporate name of WEF. In the General Assembly, the involvement of representatives or observers from ecclesiastical, ecumenical or political bodies shall have the approval of the majority of the full membership, if necessary by postal ballot.”¹¹⁹

As a result of this decision, the Italian Alliance withdrew its membership temporarily and the Spanish Alliance suspended its membership. Meanwhile, a carefully assembled task force of theologians from all regions was set up to clarify the future relationship between the WEF and the Roman Catholic Church.¹²⁰ To this day, ecumenical relations remains one of the most controversial issues within the WEA.

The following years in the history of the WEF were again characterized by various crises. In 1980, Waldron Scott unexpectedly resigned as general secretary. The American Wade Coggins, who was also executive secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of Missions Agencies, succeeded him on an interim basis until the end of 1981. In 1982, Coggins handed the position over to David M. Howard, who no longer referred to himself as general secretary but took on the title of International Director. At the beginning of Howard's term of office, the WEF headquarters were relocated to Wheaton, Illinois (USA), where the NAE also had its national headquarters. This was followed by the opening of a WEF office in Sin-

¹¹⁸ David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 134.

¹¹⁹ Quoted from: David M. Howard. *The Dream that Would Not Die*, 134.

¹²⁰ Cf. David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 135.

gapore in February 1987.¹²¹ However, the challenges remained the same. David M. Howard wrote in retrospect:

“Every one of my predecessors had experienced some frustrations in fundraising for WEF. [...] For me, however, this became an area of constant tension. [...] I found it very difficult to define WEF’s role in a way that the general public could understand clearly. Since WEF deals in intangible concepts, such as unity, cooperation, and mutual identity, it is not easy to describe its functions to a pragmatic person who wants to see specific results.”¹²²

Above all, however, Howard realized that fundraising was not his personal area of expertise. The financial crisis continued to worsen, and the financial difficulties reached their peak in the fall of 1983. Several employees were laid off, and thanks to savings in personnel costs as well as targeted appeals for donations, it was possible to avert insolvency. However, the financial situation remained critical in the years that followed.

At the same time, the WEF made a renewed effort to reflect on and define its mission. In June 1984, the Executive Board drew up a new mission statement, which was adopted by the General Assembly in Singapore in June 1986. It stated:

“World Evangelical Fellowship is an alliance of national and regional evangelical bodies formed with the purpose of encouraging, motivating and enabling the local church to fulfill its scriptural mandates, constantly directing its work toward the local level. It does this by:

- Strengthening national and regional alliances where they exist and building an evangelical presence and leadership generally.
- Developing a sense of world movement by providing an international forum, ways for international fellowship to occur, and building a world evangelical identity.
- Serving a multi-directional conduit for information and resources, thus enhancing the interdependence of churches.
- Defining issues, articulating consensus, expressing compassion for the suffering church and humanity, and encouraging initiative through the work of its officers, commissions, and staff.”¹²³

In addition, it was outlined:

¹²¹ World Evangelical Fellowship. *Spiritual Unity in Action. 1988 Progress Report*, 2.

¹²² David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 150.

¹²³ Quoted from: David M. Howard. *The Dream That Would Not Die*, 156.

“WEF is not basically a think tank or a convener of conferences. It provides a structure with which evangelicals worldwide may voluntarily identify themselves. But unlike confessional world bodies, it represents the entire church that is faithful to Jesus Christ and his teaching. It is a worldwide body that is thoroughly evangelical and not a bureaucracy unresponsive to the churches that created it.”¹²⁴

The following graphic¹²⁵ shows the scope and organization of the WEF’s ministry in the year 1989:



Figure 7: Organigram of WEF in 1989

Howard’s term of office ended with the ninth WEF General Assembly in Manila, the Philippines on 21–26 June. In his report to the Assembly, he described both the WEF’s development during his ten-year tenure and his own personal pilgrimage. The following extended quotation offers a very honest insight into the WEF and his role as International Director:

¹²⁴ World Evangelical Fellowship. *Spiritual Unity in Action*, 4.
¹²⁵ Taken from: World Evangelical Fellowship. *Based on a Timeless Calling: A Mandate for the '90s*. 1989 Progress Report, 12.

“The years 1982 to 1985 were years of great frustration for me. [...] In August, 1985 I went back through my personal journal where I had been recording my thinking since taking the position. I discovered that from March, 1982 to August, 1985 I had thirty-five entries in my journal expressing frustrations almost once per month. Finally, on September 6, 1985, I wrote a lengthy letter of resignation to the Executive Council Working Group. This was subsequently shared with the full Executive Council [...]. As a result of this letter the Chairman, Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo, called an extra-ordinary session of the Executive Council held in Elburn, Illinois in January 1986. Three days were spent primarily in prayer, study of the Scriptures and consideration of what God wanted the future of WEF to be. They requested that my resignation be held in abeyance during the course of those meetings until we could determine together what God was trying to say to us.

At the outset of the meetings there was an oppressive sense of gloom. Some of the members were very negative suggesting that probably the time had come to fold up WEF and consider its ministry finished. [...] At one point, one member even mentioned the names of several younger leaders, who, according to him, were no longer interested in WEF and were going in other directions. He specifically mentioned Brian Stiller of Canada, Clive Calver of the U.K. and Ramez Attalah of Egypt. He said with the emergence of younger leaders of that caliber who had no interest in WEF, what was our hope for the future anyway?

At that very moment, I was called out of the room for a phone call. Brian Stiller calling me. He had heard that I had resigned and he was calling to protest vigorously. He said something like this: ‘David, I heard you have resigned. You can’t do that! You have no business resigning! We need WEF desperately. WEF is the hope of the future and you are the hope of WEF.’ [...]

Brian lectured me for ten or fifteen minutes on the phone, leaving no doubt in my mind where he stood on this matter. When I returned to the meeting room with the Executive Council and reported on this phone call, it was probably the most dramatic turnaround I have ever seen in a business session. God used that call to stop us dead in our tracks and turned us 180 degrees in direction. There was a renewed sense of vision and urgency on the part of the Council and desire to move ahead creatively and vigorously with the mission that God had given to WEF. [...]

By the end of those meetings they asked if I would be willing to withdraw my resignation. I was happy to do so; I had personally sensed a renewed calling from God to carry on and develop the ministry which he had given to us. [...]

As a result of this renewed vision plus the move to Singapore, I personally received a whole new lease on life. God renewed my sense of calling and gave me new vision to fulfill this ministry. This past five years have

been wonderfully happy and times of great blessing. There have still been difficulties in the area of finances but God has provided in new ways for us.”¹²⁶

At the 1992 General Assembly, the Filipino Agustin “Jun” Vencer was appointed as International Director. Trained as a lawyer, Vencer had previously served as executive director of the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches, the country’s national Evangelical Alliance.¹²⁷ This was the first time that a leader from the Global South took over the operational management of the WEF. Like his predecessors, Vencer was committed to strengthening and growing national alliances.¹²⁸ His term of office saw the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc and the founding of numerous new Protestant alliances in Central and Eastern Europe. “In Bulgaria, Vencer helped Evangelicals achieve recognition, after explaining to government officials that the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance, through the WEF, was part of a worldwide community of 110 fellowships.”¹²⁹ The year 1992 also marked the inauguration of the WEF’s Religious Liberty Commission, “the first of its kind globally at the time.”¹³⁰ Five years later, in 1997, the WEF was granted official consultative status at the UN as a non-governmental organization (NGO).

“This privilege allowed WEA to issue an annual report and make a summary oral statement at the plenary meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights. [...] This status in the UN gives evangelicals worldwide an important platform from which to speak out and act on behalf of those Christians who are facing religious persecution. Through the UN, the Religious Liberty Commission is able to interact directly with the decision makers from governments throughout the world, which gives the RLC the opportunity to build bridges directly with those who affect national policy decisions.”¹³¹

¹²⁶ *Report of the International Director World Evangelical Fellowship 9th General Assembly Manila, Philippines June 21-26, 1992*, 7-9.

¹²⁷ Ian Randall. “The Story of the World Evangelical Alliance”, 213.

¹²⁸ Cf. the article by Agustin “Jun” Vencer. Churches Transforming the World for Christ through the Strategy of National Evangelical Alliances. *Evangelical World*, May-June 1994.

¹²⁹ Ian Randall. “The Story of the World Evangelical Alliance”, 215.

¹³⁰ Email from Godfrey Yogarajah, founding board member of the commission, to the author dated 16 August 2024.

¹³¹ Email from the WEA Religious Liberty Commission to undisclosed recipients, dated 9 April 2002 with the subject line “UN report 2002”.

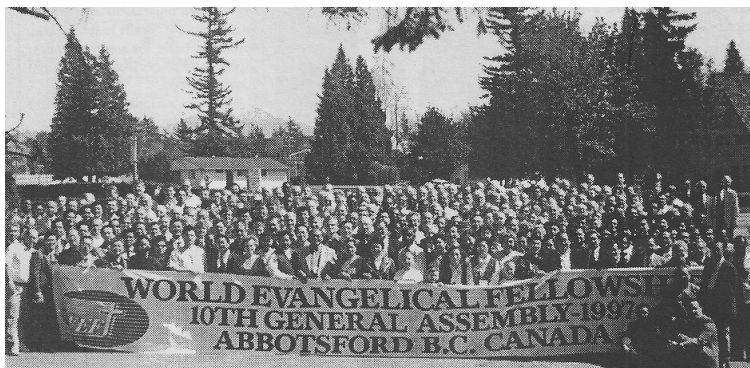


Figure 8: Word Evangelical Fellowship 10th General Assembly 1997

The General Assembly in Kuala Lumpur in 2001 marked the 50th anniversary of the WEF. During these years it had experienced growth in membership from 21 nations in 1951 to 75 nations in 1992 and 113 member alliances in 2001.¹³²

A strategic decision taken at the 2001 General Assembly in Kuala Lumpur was the formal acceptance of the geographical regions into the WEA. During the preceding years, the following regional entities had been established: The Association of Evangelicals in Africa with thirty national alliance members, the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia with seventeen national alliance members, the Evangelical Association of the Caribbean with eleven national alliance members, the European Evangelical Alliance with twenty-nine national alliance members, the Confraternidad Evangelical Latinoamericano with seventeen national evangelical alliance members, the Evangelical Fellowship of the South Pacific, composed of six national alliance members, and the WEF North American office, representing three national member alliances of that region.¹³³ A document outlined further the distinctives of the Regional Evangelical Alliances:

- “It is a regional association of national evangelical alliances/fellowships and other evangelical groups with a regional ministry.
- It is an independently incorporated body, governed by its own constitution.
- It is the regional partner with WEF in identifying ministry priorities and delivering services to the national alliances in their region.

¹³² Cf. Agustin B. “Jun” Vencer. *International Director’s Report*, WEF 11th General Assembly, 4–10 May 2001, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1.

¹³³ Cf. Agustin B. “Jun” Vencer. *International Director’s Report*, 10.

- It sustains mutual conceptual alignment and strategic partnership with the WEF vision and ministries.
- It contributes to the WEF planning process through participation in the International Team meetings.
- It subscribes to the WEF statement of faith.”¹³⁴

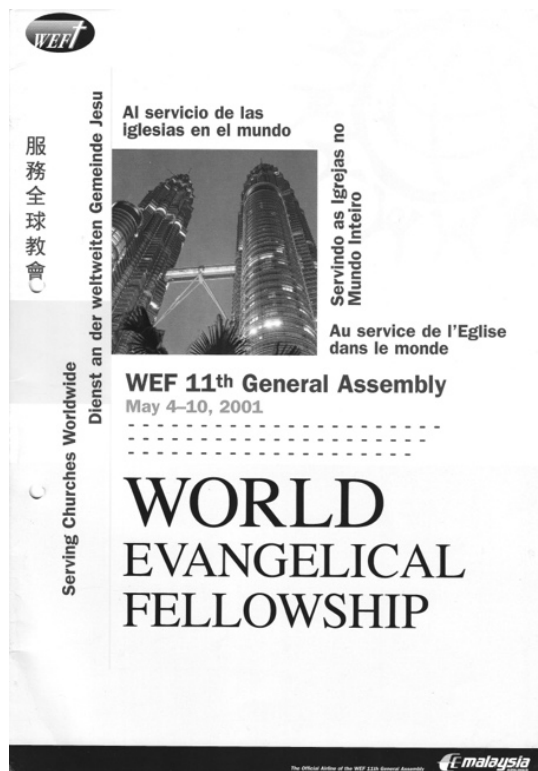


Figure 9: WEF General Assembly 2001 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

During the Assembly, the delegates also approved the renaming of the WEF as the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).¹³⁵ What were the reasons for this renaming in the course of a revision of the bylaws? The documents for the annual General Meeting, which contained all the proposed bylaw amendments, stated:

¹³⁴ Agustin B. “Jun” Vencer. *International Director’s Report*, 15.

¹³⁵ Ian Randall. “The Story of the World Evangelical Alliance”, 215.

“This amendment was also recommended by the WEF Staff believing that the change of name to World Evangelical Alliance is one of the most significant action items discussed during these staff meetings. The new name World Evangelical Alliance reflects our new, active spirit of partnership with the whole Body of Christ, rather than the more passive role of a ‘fellowship’. Historically, the word ‘alliance’ takes us back to our roots from 1846 and simultaneously creates the platform we need for the future while conserving the goodwill of our former name. This is not [a] new discussion for us; but we believe that the time has come to move proactively towards this new identity which expresses our direction as we enter a new millennium.”¹³⁶

There were also other reasons, such as possible confusion with the World Economic Forum, which was also abbreviated to WEF and which was increasingly featured in the media as WEF. Moreover, numerous national alliances, especially in Europe, Latin America, French-speaking Africa and the South Pacific, were using the term ‘alliance’ in their names.

The General Assembly in Kuala Lumpur in 2001 marked the completion of Vencer’s term of office as secretary general. Godfrey Yogarajah commented on his legacy:

“I believe Jun Vencer’s legacy was the Leadership Development Institute and mentoring of younger EA leaders. He consistently brought together General Secretaries from various nations, training them at the Eugenia Lopez Center on developing alliances. He also traveled to the regions, providing training sessions for regional alliances. He eventually selected a few leaders globally from the alliances to co-train with him [...]. This approach helped create a pool of alliance leaders who, in turn, trained others, particularly in the Caribbean, Asia, and Latin America.”¹³⁷

¹³⁶ World Evangelical Fellowship. Letter to all members entitled “Amendments to the WEF Constitution & By-Laws”, dated December 14, 2000, 1.

¹³⁷ Email from Godfrey Yogarajah to the author dated 16 August 2024.

The World Evangelical Alliance in the 21st Century

Agustin “Jun” Vencer was succeeded in 2002 by Gary Edmonds from the USA, who had previously worked for many years as a church planter in France. Long-time board member John Langlois, who was treasurer at the time, recalled:

“In 2001 Gary Edmonds became CEO and immediately looked at our financial situation which I had warned about but no one would believe as that sort of thing does not happen in evangelical organisations. Fortunately, Gary took it seriously and the first thing he did as new CEO was to engage professional forensic accountants to investigate the finances of the North American office in Wheaton. He was horrified to find out that fraud had occurred. [...] The office immediately closed, the staff left and all the members of the board of the North American corporation resigned. Gary did a commendable work and saved WEA from disrepute.”¹³⁸

However, the financial challenges remained so great that the WEA office in Singapore, the purchase of which had been made possible by donations from the German Evangelical Alliance, ultimately had to be sold.¹³⁹ Edmonds was also unable to realize his vision of restructuring and reorganizing the WEA. His plans to dissolve the commissions, among other things, seemed too radical to the International Council and Edmonds finally resigned as general secretary in 2004. At a crisis meeting convened at short notice in Orlando, Florida (USA), the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada agreed to support the Canadian Geoff Tunnicliffe financially as the WEA's new secretary general. Tunnicliffe succeeded in rebuilding an organization that was dead in all but name.

During his tenure as secretary general, the WEA experienced huge growth. A global partner category was introduced besides the full membership (national alliances) as well as associate membership. Also, the mission statement was once again revised:

“WEA exists to foster Christian unity and to provide a worldwide identity, voice and platform to evangelical Christians. Seeking empowerment by

¹³⁸ John Langlois. *Some Observations for IC Members in WEA History*. 5.

¹³⁹ John Langlois. *Some Observations for IC Members in WEA History*, 4; Ian Randall. “The Story of the World Evangelical Alliance”, 215.

the Holy Spirit, they seek to extend the Kingdom of God by proclamation of the Gospel to all nations and by Christ-centred transformation within society.”¹⁴⁰

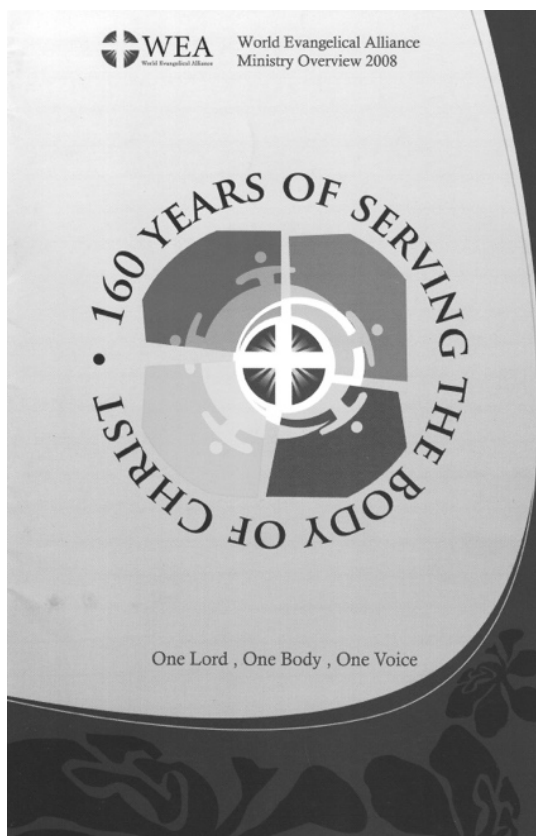


Figure 10: WEA Ministry Report 2008

Anyone who reads this statement carefully will notice an increasing shift in focus compared to the previous objectives. Whereas the emphasis when the WEA was founded at the beginning of the 1950s was on proclaiming the gospel and in the 1970s and 1980s on strengthening national evangelical alliances, an international, representational aspect now increasingly came to the fore. The 2008 annual report stated:

¹⁴⁰ World Evangelical Alliance Ministry Overview 2008, 2.

“WEA is the global voice of evangelical Christians to world institutions and governments, world media, and world faith bodies. It brings biblical truth to common concern that impact the body of Christ and the world.

A credible champion and voice of influence, WEA seeks to address global issues that have significant implication for the church and society at large based on the teachings of Scripture. WEA draws the world’s attention to the Gospel and issues such as poverty, religious freedom, HIV/AIDS, refugees, child protection, women’s issues and creation care.

A representative voice of evangelicals

It is often the most extreme, not the most representative, evangelical voices that are spotlighted by the media and consequently heard throughout the world. Hearing those extreme voices can create a false impression of the evangelical voice. Speaking from the accumulated voices of over 120 nations, WEA is uniquely positioned to declare in the public square who evangelicals actually are, what they believe and how they want to serve and care for the world. [...]

Bringing evangelicals together

WEA creates the impetus and the space for national, regional, and international evangelical agencies, networks, organizations, and denominations to connect and cooperate. As a result, evangelical leaders within communities, nations and around the globe have opportunities to build solid sustainable relationships.

WEA plays a catalytic role in identifying key global issues and trends and seeks to build consensus on appropriate responses from the evangelical community.”¹⁴¹

Here, the WEA saw itself as the representative of around 420 million evangelicals and wanted to exercise this representation in the political as well as the ecumenical and interreligious sphere. It is therefore not surprising that the WEA made a concerted effort to improve relations with both the Roman Catholic Church¹⁴² and the World Council of Churches (WCC) and had become one of the co-initiators of the Global Christian Forum,¹⁴³ an entity that brought together leading representatives of the WCC, the Roman Catholic Church, the Pentecostal World Fel-

¹⁴¹ World Evangelical Alliance Ministry Overview 2008, 3, 5.

¹⁴² Cf. Thomas P. Schirrmacher (Ed.). *Evangelical – Roman Catholic Dialogue. The Official Documents of the Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance*. World of Theology Series 26. Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2023.

¹⁴³ Cf. <https://globalchristianforum.org> [last Access 7 August 2024].

lowship, and the WEA and which held its first gathering in 2007 in Limuru, near Nairobi, Kenya.¹⁴⁴

Tunncliffe actively engaged with governments and interfaith leaders. The alignment of the WEA with the new vision was also reflected in the strategic plan for the years 2009 to 2012. This strategic plan comprised fourteen “visionary priorities”, which were formulated into fifty evaluable goals. The fourteen visionary priorities were divided into four main categories:

- “Serving Our Members”
 1. Assess, certify and serve national alliances
 2. Strengthen, equip and empower national alliances [...]
 3. Grow associate members, global partners and church network members
 4. Serve as catalyst for an evangelical global unity movement
 5. Identify the needs of the alliances and align the work of WEA Commissions and global partners to meet those needs
- Serving All Evangelicals
 6. Train national Alliances as advocates for religious freedom nationally and globally
 7. Define and articulate the role of WEA’s ‘global voice’ [...]
 8. Stimulate greater theological reflection
- Serving and Loving the World
 9. Clarify WEA’s unique role with social action and transformation ministries
 10. Partner with like-minded evangelical movements for world evangelization
 11. Engage with and expand our relationships with the wider Christian family
- Building Our Capacity and Sustainability
 12. Review and modify organizational structure and Leadership and staffing needs to fulfill the strategic plan
 13. Build the brand and create a robust communication strategy
 14. Build financial capacity and sustainability.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Cf. <https://globalchristianforum.org/about-us/our-history/> [last access 6 August 2024].

¹⁴⁵ WEA *Strategic Plan 2009 to 2012*. Internal document copy. Version 4.0 (January 8, 2010).

As of 2008, six regional alliances (Africa, Europe, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the South Pacific), 120 national alliances, twelve global partners and 108 agencies and denominations had joined together as associate members under the umbrella of the WEA.¹⁴⁶ There were also six commissions: Missions, Religious Liberty, Theology, Women's Concern, Youth, and Information Technology. The commissions were described as "ongoing working groups that convene round tables, think tanks, and task forces related to specific areas of ministry or need".¹⁴⁷

In 2014, the former secretary general of the Philippine Evangelical Alliance, Bishop Efraim Tendero, was appointed as the new secretary general of the WEA. Due to the lack of historical distance and the author's own involvement in the International Council of the WEA (and the unavoidable bias associated with that personal involvement), only a few important aspects of the last ten years of WEA history will be highlighted as examples.

Tendero took up his new post at the beginning of 2015. His first tasks included filling key positions in the WEA and setting up a new management structure. However, clarification of the future structure was not completed until 2018, when the "Office of the Secretary General" (OSG) was established as the highest management body at the operational level, consisting of the Secretary General and his two deputies: the Deputy Secretary General for Ministries and the Deputy Secretary General of Operations. A decision was therefore made in favor of team management with the Secretary General being the first among equals.

At the WEA General Assembly in Jakarta, Indonesia, in November 2019, a "Roadmap 2030" was adopted and a "Decade of Holistic Disciple-Making" was launched. The strategic plan for 2021 described the objective:

"Roadmap 2030 is our strategic adaptive to plan to guide the WEA worldwide community. We are united in love and devoted to following Jesus, fostering unity in the body of Christ for the Decade of Holistic Disciple-Making. We invite the WEA family of networks to align our efforts, join in collaboration, and increase our effectiveness to accelerate the health and growth of the church around the world."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ World Evangelical Alliance Ministry Overview 2008, 10-11.

¹⁴⁷ World Evangelical Alliance Ministry Overview 2008, 6. On the commission cf. W. Harold Fuller, *People of the Mandate*, 77-155.

¹⁴⁸ World Evangelical Alliance. Strategic Ministry Plan 2021. Internal document, 2.

The strategic priorities were described as follows:

1. “Developing strong regional and national Evangelical Alliances
2. Being an influential voice of advocacy
3. Fostering purposeful and broad collaborations
4. Building effective organizational structures for outcome-based ministry.”¹⁴⁹

In March 2021, the German theologian Thomas Schirmacher became WEA secretary general. Schirmacher focused his tenure primarily on visits to national evangelical alliances and on meetings with political and religious dignitaries. At the same time, the WEA’s financial situation worsened once again. Adding to the problems, the beginning of Schirmacher’s term of office coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, from which he himself eventually fell ill and subsequently suffered from long COVID symptoms. For health reasons, Schirmacher resigned as secretary general at the end of March 2024. Until the next WEA General Assembly in fall 2025, the OSG will be led on an interim basis by the chairman of the International Council, Goodwill Shana.



Figure 11: WEA’s International Council April 2024

As of summer 2024, the WEA has 143 national member alliances and around 100 partner organizations. The highest body of the WEA is the Gen-

¹⁴⁹ World Evangelical Alliance. Strategic Ministry Plan 2021. Internal document, 2.

eral Assembly, which elects the International Council every six years, which is responsible for the work of the WEA between the General Assemblies. The OSG, consisting of the Secretary General and two deputies, forms the operational leadership for the organization, which is currently divided into five ministry areas:

- Alliance Engagement
- Church Engagement
- Global Advocacy
- Global Theology
- Global Witness

Concluding Remarks

Anyone studying the more than 175-year history of the World Evangelical Alliance quickly realizes that it has been a story of visions and dreams, of opportunities and challenges, of difficulties and crises, but also of growth and blessings. What began in 1846 as a movement of individual evangelical leaders is today a global umbrella organization representing around 600 million evangelical Christians, making it the largest grouping within Christianity after the Roman Catholic Church. Its longevity lies in its strong biblical, and therefore apostolic, foundations. The WEA is a unity movement whose basic theological convictions have not changed in its more than 175-year history, despite vast changes in the social and global situation. The statement of faith adopted by the WEA in 1951 still undergirds its mission of uniting the body of Christ today.

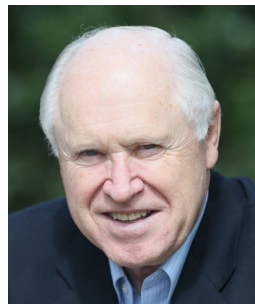
It is remarkable how, at least since its founding in 1951, one challenge has persisted and recurred: the WEA has never succeeded in establishing a solid financial basis for its work and all efforts to date have failed.

From a strategic point of view, one can observe, especially since the 2000s, that the actual focus of the WEA has shifted on several occasions, depending largely on the emphases of each secretary general. Whereas until the turn of the millennium, the WEA's primary vision and mission was to promote and support national evangelical alliances, since then the general secretaries have played a greater role in setting the WEA's agenda, making their respective interests and convictions the focus of the overall WEA ministry in doing so. These emphases have ranged from the desire to make the WEA a global player in both the religious and political spheres (Geoff Tunnicliffe), to the emphasis on discipleship (Efraim Tendero) or the approach of bringing together as many evangelical initiatives as possible under the umbrella of the WEA (Thomas Schirrmacher).

Unfortunately, this tendency has led to a partial estrangement between some national evangelical alliances and the WEA, and the question arises as to who should actually determine the future course of the WEA: the WEA itself or its member alliances? Currently there is an increasing plea from the regions for the WEA to focus more on supporting the national and regional alliance members.

Afterword by John Langlois

In his concluding remarks above, Dr Frank Hinkelmann has rightly pointed to the future, with the question “Who should actually determine the future course of the WEA: the WEA itself or its member alliances?” and then adds “Currently there is an increasing plea from the regions for the WEA to focus more on supporting the national and regional alliance members.” So what is that core mandate?



Today the national alliances, who are and always have been the “owners” of their global body, need to recapture the sense of excitement of the core mandate expressed by their predecessors at the founding conference in 1846, when they experienced the joy of being a global family, all one in Christ Jesus. Dr. John Ewing, in his history of the WEA to mark its centenary in 1946, expresses this excitement:

“On the second day, the Conference passed a resolution, declaring that it had met, not to create Christian union, but to confess the unity which the Church of Christ possessed as His Body. In moving the resolution Dr. Wardlaw expressed his belief, which was evidently that of the assembly, that when a sinner accepted Christ as his Saviour he became a member of the Lord’s body and became at the same moment one with all who were of Christ throughout the earth.”

“In the evening of the same day Dr. Buchanan moved that the members of this Conference are deeply convinced of the desirableness of forming a confederation, on the basis of great evangelical principles held in common by them, which may afford opportunity to members of the Church of Christ of cultivating brotherly love, enjoying Christian intercourse, and promoting such other objects as they may hereafter agree to prosecute together; and they hereby proceed to form such a confederation, under the name of ‘The Evangelical Alliance’.”

“Before the vote was taken Sir Culling Eardley asked all to stand and spend a few moments in silent prayer. This was done and the resolution was then passed unanimously. An extraordinary scene followed. The members of the infant Alliance, filled with joy, exchanged greetings by shaking hands with one another, Churchman with Non-conformist, Calvinist with Arminian, Briton with foreigner. It was felt to be ‘a jubilee of union and a time of sanguine hope’.”

After the unanimous passing of the Doctrinal Basis of the new Alliance, based on “the divine Inspiration, Authority and Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures”, the minutes state that *“the Conference sang, with deep, devotional feeling, the hymn “All hail the Great Immanuel’s Name, Let Angels prostrate fall.”* The conference then defined the work it set itself (its core mandate): *“Its great object was to be the promotion of Christian unity by the deepening of personal devotion to Christ to lead them to the cultivation of brotherly affection which is enjoined on all who, loving the Lord Jesus Christ, are bound also to love one another and so to seek the full accomplishment of His prayer, “That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in me and I in Thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me”.* One delegate put it this way *“It was felt that the Spirit of God had created among us a new and precious fellowship. In coming nearer to one another the members had come closer to the Lord Jesus.”*

To the delegates meeting in London in 1846, today’s world would take on the appearance of impossible science fiction – humans flying across the world like birds, horseless carriages travelling at unimaginable speeds, people holding a device to their ear and speaking to another person on the other side of the world, and even being able to see that person thousands of kilometres away in real time on their phone.

When I first joined the staff of the World Evangelical Fellowship in 1969, I flew to India – in the air like a bird! My normal mode of communication while there was air letter mail, which took a week or more to be delivered and a week or more to receive a reply. Only fifty years ago that was normal. At that time organizations like the WEA and missionary societies had a much-needed structural hierarchy in place to make global communications work, but in today’s Global Village, with instant and inexpensive communications, that structural pyramid has levelled out to become a flat network, a real world-wide-web.

So how do we go forward in this very different world?

Although we live in a vastly different world from our predecessors in 1846, our calling and mission remain the same. That is not just a challenge, it is a world-wide opportunity. It is the same opportunity that they expressed, an opportunity for sisters and brothers in Christ across the world to cultivate brotherly love, enjoy Christian fellowship and undertake projects together. Our 600+ million fellow believers have the opportunity to have instant fellowship with one another across the globe as never before, including instant access to prayer partners in times of danger and help and advice in times of distress.

The Body of Christ can function in our twenty-first century globalized world just as the Apostle Paul envisaged in 1 Corinthians 12-24 (with updated wording relevant to today):

For just as the human body is one and has many members, and all the members, though many, are one body, so also is the worldwide Body of Christ. For by one Spirit, we all were baptized into one body, whether [Africans or Asians, North or South Americans or Europeans] [...] the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not part of the body," it does not on that account cease to be part of the body [...] God has arranged the members in the human body, each and every one of them, as he desired [...] if all the members were feet, where would the body be? In the worldwide Body of Christ [a European] cannot tell [an African] "I have no need for you," or again [an Indian to a Canadian], "I have no need for you." [...] God did this so that there might not be any division in the body, but that the members might all have the same concern for one another. So, if one member suffers, all the members worldwide suffer with it, or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it. You are all the body of Christ, and as believers in every nation you are equal members of it."

With the Body of Christ functioning worldwide, a persecuted church, say, in Pakistan can have a direct connection through a phone call or internet message with a church in Uganda, or a believer in distress in Jamaica with a believer in Japan, or a small under-resourced national alliance with another alliance or individual churches – all without the need for nineteenth century structures.

Although the WEA has other important parts to play, its core mission must be the same as that of the members of the infant Alliance in 1846, a future of worldwide fellowship and helping another, all as redeemed sinners, all equal at the foot of the Cross, believers worldwide functioning in love as the Body of Christ as Jesus prayed in John 17.

John Langlois, September 2024

About John Langlois:

Immediately upon graduating from the London Bible College in 1969, John joined the full-time staff of the World Evangelical Fellowship as an administrative assistant to Bruce Nicholls, who headed up the newly established WEF Theological Assistance Programme (TAP – now the Theological Com-

mission). In 1970 John opened in Singapore the first office of what is now the Asia Theological Association, at which time he introduced Theological Education by Extension to Asia, under the guidance of his mentor, Ralph Winter, who pioneered TEE.

Unfortunately, just a year later, in 1971, the WEF went into financial meltdown and ceased to exist except in name. John was so committed to the theological work of WEA that he returned to his home island of Guernsey, Channel Islands, where he started a law practice, with just his secretary and himself, in order, like the Apostle Paul, as tentmaker, to earn the money he needed to continue his work with the WEF. He has done this for the past 53 years. God blessed his law practice which is now the largest firm in the world practising offshore law, with offices in ten jurisdictions across the world.

Throughout this time John's number one priority has been his divine calling to the work of the WEA. In 1980, a time of another crisis in the WEA, he was appointed both WEA Treasurer and Council Secretary, in which capacities he served until 2008, at which time the General Assembly appointed him Member for Life of the International Council. He was the founding chairman of the Religious Liberty Commission. In 2005 he was appointed an OBE (Officer of the Order of the British Empire) by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth for services to the community and charitable work, including work with the WEA.

Appendices

Appendix I: WEA Secretaries, International Directors and Secretaries General

- Roy Cattell (Great Britain) and J. Elwin Wright (United States), co-secretaries (1951–1953)
- J. Dain (Great Britain) and J. Elwin Wright (United States), co-secretaries (1953–1958)
- Fred Ferris (United States), International Secretary (1958–1962)
- Gilbert Kirby (Great Britain), International Secretary (1962–1966)
- Dennis Clark (Canada), International Secretary (1966–1970)
- Gordon Landreth (Great Britain), Interim International Secretary (1970–1971)
- Clyde Taylor (United States), International Secretary (1971–1975)
- Waldron Scott (United States), General Secretary (1975–1980)
- Wade Coggins (United States), Interim General Secretary (1981)
- David M. Howard (United States), International Director (1982–1992)
- Agustin “Jun” Vencer (Philippines), International Director (1992–2001)
- Gary Edmonds (United States), Secretary General (2002–2004)
- Geoff Tunnickliffe (Canada), Secretary General (2005–2014)
- Efraim Tendero (Philippines), Secretary General (2015–2021)
- Thomas Schirrmacher (Germany), Secretary General (2021–2024)
- Goodwill Shana (Zimbabwe), Executive Chair (2024–2025)

Appendix 2: WEF/WEA General Assemblies

- 1951 Woudschoten (Netherlands), 4–11 August
- 1953 Clarens (Switzerland), 27–31 July
- 1956 Rhode Island (United States), 27–31 August
- 1962 Hong Kong, 25 April–2 May
- 1968 Lausanne (Switzerland), 4–10 May
- 1974 Château d’Oex (Switzerland), 25–29 July
- 1980 Hoddesdon (Great Britain), 24–28 March

- 1986 Singapore, 23–27 June
- 1992 Manila (Philippines), 21–26 June
- 1997 Abbotsford (Canada), 8–15 May
- 2001 Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), 4–10 May
- 2008 Pattaya (Thailand), 25–30 October
- 2019 Jakarta (Indonesia), 7–14 November

Appendix 3: Regional Members of the WEA

- Asia Evangelical Alliance
- Association of Evangelicals in Africa
- Central Asia Evangelical Alliance
- European Evangelical Alliance
- Evangelical Alliance of the Caribbean
- Latin Evangelical Alliance
- Middle East Evangelical Alliance
- North America Evangelical Alliance
- South Pacific Evangelical Alliance

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The World Evangelical Alliance is the oldest Christian unity movement in the world. This book takes us on a journey through the eventful history of the Evangelical Alliance from its foundation in 1846 to its position today as a global evangelical umbrella organization with almost 150 national member alliances.



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