

# Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians Biennial Conference: Evangelical Perspectives on Spirituality

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## SUMMARY

This conference report also serves to introduce the articles in this issue. In 2008 FEET discussed the topic of

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## RÉSUMÉ

Ce compte rendu de la conférence 2008 de l'AETE sert d'introduction aux articles contenus dans ce numéro. La

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Konferenzbericht dient auch als Einleitung für die Artikel dieser Ausgabe. 2008 diskutierte die FEET das Thema Spiritualität aus biblischen, historischen, systematischen und praktischen Perspektiven.

Unter der Schirmherrschaft der Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians trafen sich Theologen aus West-, Zentral- und Osteuropa fünf Tage lang im August 2008 in der Nähe von Berlin, um Klarheit in das zuneh-

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Under the auspices of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians, theologians from Western, Central and Eastern Europe gathered outside Berlin, Germany, for five days in August 2008 in order to bring clarity to the increasingly popular issue of spirituality. The conference theme was 'Evangelical Perspectives on Spirituality'.

The main papers delivered in plenary sessions and the seminars sought to identify critical issues for evangelicals in contemporary spirituality and then to provide biblical and historical characteristics of evangelical spirituality in order to address these critical issues.

spirituality from biblical, historical, systematic and practical angles.

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conférence avait pour thème : « Perspectives évangéliques sur la spiritualité ». Les orateurs l'ont abordé de divers points de vue : biblique, historique, systématique et pratique.

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mend populäre Thema der Spiritualität zu bringen. Das Konferenzthema lautete: „Evangelikale Perspektiven zur Spiritualität“. Die Hauptreferate der Plenarsitzungen und die Seminare versuchten, die für Evangelikale entscheidenden Aspekte im Hinblick auf die gegenwärtige Spiritualität zu identifizieren und dann biblische und historische Charakteristika einer evangelikalischen Spiritualität aufzuzeigen, anhand derer man diese entscheidenden Aspekte angehen kann.

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## Critical issues

There is an undeniable resurgence of spirituality, largely heart-based, occurring in our world today. It is a needed corrective to the past. But as in all historical shifts, the pendulum swings too far with many distortions and unintended consequences. Evangelicals need to identify where they have failed and to identify the good parts of this current movement as well as its abuses and dangers. The call of this conference, therefore, was largely boundary setting: what are the parameters of biblical and historically rooted evangelical spirituality?

As a general operational definition of spirituality, the conference used Sandra M. Schneider's definition: "*Spirituality as lived experience can be defined as conscious involvement in the project of life integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.*"

### **Biblical and historical characteristics of evangelical spirituality**

Two categories of characteristics emerged from the papers and discussions: theological non-negotiables and experiential characteristics. Theologically, evangelical spirituality is biblically rooted, Christocentric, Spirit inspired and historically practiced. It is biblically rooted in three ways: it is the evangelical's primary source for teachings and examples of spirituality; these teachings and examples are authoritative; and it plays a central role in actually shaping and maturing the evangelical individual and community. Evangelical spirituality is thoroughly Christocentric. The infinite and personal God (YHWH) is the object of evangelical spirituality. Communion with him through Christ and the cross defines evangelical spirituality. Evangelical spirituality is also pervasively Spirit inspired. It is the Holy Spirit who initiates, guides and transforms. Finally, evangelical spirituality has a vast array of practices with historical precedence from such groups as the Reformers, Moravians and Pietists.

Experientially, evangelical spirituality is concerned with a wholistic approach, yieldedness, honesty, community and mission. It is wholistic in that it encompasses every aspect of a person rather than just some "spiritual" part. It is a "head, heart

and hands" spirituality that impacts every aspect of personal and communal life. Evangelical spirituality vigorously stresses a posture of yieldedness, submission, receptivity and responsiveness to and before God (*Coram Deo*). It is both a proper attitude of approach to God as well as the result of a true encounter with him. Honesty and vulnerability go hand-in-hand with yieldedness. Evangelicals present themselves unmasked, without pretence to God. Evangelical spirituality is a spirituality not just of the individual but also of the community. Deeper spirituality is pursued with others in the home and church as well as individually. Finally, evangelical spirituality is missional in its scope and application. The transformed individual and the transformed community overflow in missional and transformational ways within the home, church and city as well as in relation to the earth itself.

### **Evaluation**

This conference was largely *descriptive* in nature. There seemed to be the assumption that once evangelical spirituality is clearly defined then of course one can live it. But this conflates the goal and the means. It confuses knowing with doing. A clear description may point the way but it doesn't necessarily help one to get there. More work needs to be done on *how* evangelical spirituality is actually lived out in practice. Orthodoxy and orthopraxy must go together. What was lacking in academic rigour was compensated by the warm personal contacts. The special group to stimulate students, especially those working on doctoral dissertations, was very useful.