

## Union School of Theology - the lowest common denominator?

Wales Evangelical School of Theology (WEST) has evolved. Its vision has changed, its scope enlarged to 25 centres, it has formed new partnerships and its modus operandi broadened to support church planting globally, theological research and publishing.<sup>1</sup> Under the presidency of Mike Reeves, it is now called Union School of Theology (UST). It aspires to transform Christian education and ministry throughout the world in a manner that is 'theologically rigorous, biblically faithful and Christlike'.<sup>1,2</sup>

Intellectual rigour, whilst vital to true piety, is insufficient. Concerns have been expressed in this journal about the doctrine, character and associations of WEST.<sup>3</sup> Has UST inherited these characteristics or disowned them? We examine UST under three basic tests, and find it falls short of its claims.

**Pioneering Ecumenism.** The Lord Jesus repeatedly repudiated doctrinal error, and castigated those who stubbornly clung to it, as enemies of their own good. Most Evangelical Christians recognise the World Council of Churches (WCC) as the very antithesis of Biblical faithfulness, and Christ-like valour for the Truth. Not so UST's Foundation's latest chosen director,<sup>4</sup> Douglas Birdwell, who whilst overseeing the Lausanne Conference in 2010, invited the Gen Secretary of WCC for the first time, calling for all 'to be one'.<sup>5</sup> In fact, UST's directors have often been characterised by pioneering ecumenism, Frank Hinkelmann who fraternises with Roman Cardinals,<sup>6</sup> held post until September 2018,<sup>4</sup> perhaps this has something to do with his day job as President of the deeply corrupt European Evangelical Alliance. This looks like continuity not change. Lindsay Brown, director of the Lausanne Movement, had been a director of WEST until 2014.<sup>4</sup> We described WEST before as *Wales Ecumenical School of Theology*,<sup>7</sup> because of a vigorously ecumenical PhD thesis published by Roger Abbott, who remains as a research supervisor for UST,<sup>8</sup> the same assessment applies to its successor.

**Partnering Dialogue with Rome.** Leonardo De Chirico is a lecturer at UST, he serves as vice-chairman of the Italian Evangelical Alliance,<sup>9</sup> having been involved in deep level, fraternal dialogue with the Vatican, and with what fruit?<sup>10</sup> The chairman of European EA's theology commission recently concluded the Pope understands Luther's doctrine of justification better than many Protestants.<sup>11</sup> De Chirico leads the Rome Scholars Network (RSN) and its sponsor the Reformanda Initiative (RI).<sup>12</sup> UST's President also leads it.<sup>12</sup> Whilst softly critical of Mariolatry and the Lutheran-Vatican Declaration On [Obscuring of] Justification, on its website it sets alongside each other 'dialogue, evangelism and engagement' with Rome's own teachers.<sup>13</sup> Its critique of Rome's error is tentative and self-effacing. It is completely devoid of the vehemence of the Apostolic condemnation of idolatry or works righteousness (Gal.1.6-9, 5.18-20, 1 Cor.10.14, Rev.21.8). De Chirico

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.union-mission.org/our-impact> (Accessed 6/4/19)

<sup>2</sup> <https://youtu.be/aY4BRc0jI8g> By MR's advocacy of Divine Simplicity, he borrows from pagan Plotinus' Simplex and Aquinas' Summa, like other otherwise orthodox writers, [losing more than he gains](#).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bibleleaguetrust.org/the-right-direction/> see also [strateias.org/west.pdf](http://strateias.org/west.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/01987227/filing-history> (Accessed 6/4/19)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/speeches/greetings-to-the-3rd-lausanne-congress-for-world-evangelization> (Accessed 6/4/19)

<sup>6</sup> <https://youtu.be/em4A5WozCZI?t=840>

<sup>7</sup> [strateias.org/westinterfaith.pdf](http://strateias.org/westinterfaith.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20190703212525/http://www.research.ust.ac.uk/people/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.alleanzaevangelica.org/> (Accessed 6/4/19)

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/evangelicals-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20171017\\_comm-report-2009-2016\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/evangelicals-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20171017_comm-report-2009-2016_en.html) (Accessed 6/4/19)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.europeanea.org/pope-understands-luther-better-many-protestants/> (Accessed 6/4/19)

<sup>12</sup> <http://reformandainitiative.org/our-team/> (Accessed 6/4/19)

<sup>13</sup> <http://vaticanfiles.org/>

critically welcomes the desire of evangelicals for 'greater oneness' with Rome and the Orthodox churches.<sup>14,15</sup> Their promotion of 'Is the Reformation Over?' makes repeated reference to Lausanne and John Stott, who saluted Roman Catholics as Christian.<sup>16</sup> A careful reader may justly draw the conclusion the RSN/RI is a chameleon, it promotes itself as a resource for preparing apologetics against Rome, and contains some apparently plain, if mild reproofs, but simultaneously promotes close dialogue and engagement with Rome, and endorses Rome's profession to be Christ's as genuine. The RSN is a Trojan horse, grown from the Lausanne movement, and two of prominent teachers in UST are driving it. Is this not the spirit of Jezebel (Rev.1.20)?

**Leavened with Liberalism.** The wheat may be distinguished from the chaff, by trembling at God's Word or paying only lip service to its commands. Union's BAs and Masters are awarded under the Open University, its PhDs are awarded and supervised with the Free University of Amsterdam, whilst founded by godly Abraham Kuyper, adorned by dear Bavinck, a glimpse of their theology faculty and output shows just how like other academic, university faculties, they are now dedicated to liberalism.<sup>1,17,18</sup> Haggai warned communion between clean and unclean will swiftly defile the clean (Hag. 2.11-3). Relying on PhD supervisors from a nest of infidelity is not in the least 'biblically faithful or Christlike'. This journal expressed strong concerns about the Senior Lecturer in the New Testament at WEST for describing the Gospel of John as 'partially fiction'.<sup>19</sup> The lecturer has since claimed his language was 'unhelpful',<sup>20</sup> which hardly amounts to a renunciation of an outrightly liberal stance, let alone proper qualification for leading the studies of future aspirant to leadership. Cornelis Bennema whilst now more disciplined in his language, his interaction with liberal scholarship remains dialectic and questioning, never anathematising it for the damnable error it is.<sup>21</sup> Two PhD theses at WEST have been critiqued for containing the polonium of rank liberalism, the supervisor who warmly endorsed them, still serves in UST.<sup>22,23</sup> The infection is still systemic.

**Other issues to watch include theistic evolution, scotomatous hermeneutics, Piper/Keller-like antinomianism, carnal neo-Baal worship and gender/sexuality errors.** Whilst there is not space to enlarge on these snares here, like WEST's sister college in Poland, EST in Wroclaw, there are clear grounds for concern in all these areas in UST's faculty or its output.<sup>24</sup> UST often falls to the lowest common denominator in the trends that are corrupting churches that are 'evangelical' in name, but increasingly apostate in reality - it fails to warn, and is neither a safe nor sound place to commend to those contemplating ministry, and risks the shipwreck of young believers.

Charles Soper

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<sup>14</sup> [reformandinitiative.org/greater-oneness-in-christ-what-does-it-mean/](http://reformandinitiative.org/greater-oneness-in-christ-what-does-it-mean/) (Accessed 6/4/19)

<sup>15</sup> [vaticanfiles.org/ro/2015/12/118-salvation-belongs-to-the-lord-evangelical-consensus-in-dialogue-with-roman-catholicism](http://vaticanfiles.org/ro/2015/12/118-salvation-belongs-to-the-lord-evangelical-consensus-in-dialogue-with-roman-catholicism)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.isthereformationover.com/documents/Is%20the%20Reformation%20Over-%20A%20Statement%20of%20Evangelical%20Convictions.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.vu.nl/en/studiegids/2018-2019/master/s-z/theology-religious-studies/index.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> <https://research.vu.nl/en/publications/?pageSize=50&ordering=publicationYearThenTitle&descending=true&showAdvanced=false&andConceptIds=c44dd875-7638-4578-8b25-a452cbb1759b&allConcepts=true&inferConcepts=true&searchBy=RelatedConcepts> (Accessed 6/4/19)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.bibleleaguetrust.org/west-the-fourth-gospel-is-partially-fiction/>, see also [strateias/bennema2.pdf](http://www.strateias.org/bennema2.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20160526093951/http://www.affinity.org.uk/downloads/foundations/affinity-foundations-67-autumn-2014.pdf> see also, [strateias.org/comparison](http://strateias.org/comparison)

<sup>21</sup> <https://vimeo.com/297287528>

<sup>22</sup> [strateias.org/Expanding.pdf](http://strateias.org/Expanding.pdf) and [strateias.org/clean.pdf](http://strateias.org/clean.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.research.ust.ac.uk/people/> (Accessed 6/4/19)

<sup>24</sup> [strateias.org/wroclaw](http://strateias.org/wroclaw)