

Continued FIEC Cooperation with Polish Ecumenists

If there is justice in the claim that an obsessive attitude to separation results in withdrawals over lesser matters, it is equally true that a refusal to avoid evangelicals who ally themselves with error tends to degenerate into a position of not separating from error at all. A case in point is seen in the present position of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, which has recently blurred its definition of those from whom separation is necessary, while in practice cutting itself off from those whose efforts to remain separate from error remain unchanged.

The statement made by Richard Underwood, who at the time was General Secretary of the FIEC, that a missionary sent to Poland by a flagship FIEC church '[is not ecumenically compromised](#)' affords a striking illustration of the FIEC's current blithe indifference. We are, after all, talking about a man who in his own words for years '[started Catholic fellowships](#)' in Poland, a longstanding [faculty member](#) of a seminary that proudly styles itself a '[promoter of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue](#)'. No less astounding is the statement, made by one of the pastors of the sending church, that the missionary '[is quite happy to affirm the FIEC Statement on Ecumenism](#)'. The pastor would do well to explore the writings of the missiologist Paul Hiebert, who has exercised a profound influence on the missionary's teaching and practice, someone for whom the concept of having to adhere to statements of this kind was quite passé. What could be the explanation for this alarming display of apathy? Is this just a case of closing ranks, saving face or keeping up appearances; does it perhaps stem from a fear of being labelled 'hyper-separatist' – something which is sure to result from the use of epithets of this kind to critique secondary separation; or does the real reason have a far more sinister basis? The FIEC's 1996 [Statement on Ecumenism](#), which so plainly declared that the FIEC does not unite in public acts of worship and outreach with Roman Catholics, apparently left no room for doubt in the matter. However, the offending document is now no longer in force, and it is salutary to recall a remark made in reference to the 1996 *Statement* in an [article](#) in the July 2009 issue of the *Bible League Quarterly*: 'Let us hope this is also not shortly to be withdrawn.'

The FIEC's involvement in Poland has been steadily rising in recent years, mainly through its involvement with the interdenominational alliance *Razem dla Ewangelii* (Together for the Gospel) and the succession of FIEC speakers, including several of its most senior figures, at

conferences associated with RDE. Something these FIEC men all seem disconcertingly keen to play down is the ecumenical associations of some of RDE's leading figures. As an example it is sufficient to mention one of the alliance's four board members, Baptist theologian and pastor – and yet another product of the 'ministry' of the FIEC-endorsed missionary – [Mateusz Wichary](#). When he took over as editor of the aggressively ecumenical Baptist monthly *Słowo Prawdy* (Word of Truth) in January 2009, Mr Wichary used his [first issue](#) as a major position statement on the subject of ecumenism, in which he posed the rhetorical question 'Should we be afraid of ecumenism?', the answer to which was evidently a resounding no. This publication was followed by a blog entry in which Mr Wichary expressed [his unqualified support](#) for the [Manhattan Declaration](#). At the end of the same year, on 11 December 2009, Mr Wichary organised a conference at the Polish Baptist Union's theological seminary in Warsaw where [he is a lecturer](#), on the subject of John Calvin and his influence on Baptist thought. [The conference](#) included a paper read by Roman Catholic priest Radosław Kimsza of the Roman Catholic theological seminary in Białystok. At the Białystok seminary a month later, on 18 January 2010, what was called an '[ecumenical meeting](#)' was in turn held by Mr Kimsza, at which one of the guest speakers was Mr Wichary, instantly recognisable in [photographs of the event](#). The meeting, which was held as part of the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity organised by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, was concluded by a service of ecumenical vespers.

One wonders why the long stream of FIEC figures should be so keen to come and speak at Mr Wichary's conferences in Poland. Why, instead of seeking fellowship with committed ecumenists, do they not seek fellowship with those evangelicals in Poland who cannot and will not join in public acts of worship and outreach with Roman Catholics? – a stance the FIEC itself claimed until recently to represent. Do they not realise that in joining with these practicing ecumenists they have in effect separated themselves from Polish believers who are not associated with RDE because they feel compelled to stand apart from the ecumenical movement? One of the reasons given to one of us by one senior figure in the FIEC to justify coming to these conferences is that in so doing it might be possible to help these people turn from their error. In response to this seemingly plausible argument it has unfortunately to be said that if this is the case, these conference speakers surely have a high opinion of their influence. Has it not occurred to them that disabusing these people of their error *has already been tried*, and that those who have tried were arguably in a *much better*

position to be able to succeed? Whatever may be the case here, the effectiveness of this help should be evaluated in the light of an [article](#) in the April 2012 issue of *Stowo Prawdy*, in which we find that Mr Wichary's position has not changed one whit – writing in the context of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches, he states unequivocally that it is his practice to pray for unity in the spirit of the commonly accepted ecumenical understanding of *John 17:21*. In the meantime the FIEC has now removed its plain and public description of Roman heresy – we are drawn to inquire: who has influenced whom?

Over a decade ago now, three senior figures within the FIEC wrote a [series of articles](#) in which they set out their views on the question of separation. The description of second-degree separation offered in [the first of these articles](#) sadly muddies the waters, seeming to caricature not capture the practice of others. While the authors do not, unfortunately, attempt a formal definition of the separation they view as mandatory, they do claim to be following the practice of Martyn Lloyd-Jones. In their [third article](#) they approvingly quote a comment made about Lloyd-Jones' position: 'He deplored the thinking of Anglican evangelicals who justified deliberate involvement in ecumenism ... but his association and friendship with Anglicans opposed to that thinking remained to the end of his life.' Apparently the authors would have us believe they take the same position. However, it is of crucial importance to note that in these articles these authors present Lloyd-Jones as practising separation from or at least censure of *evangelicals who justified deliberate involvement in ecumenism*, and that the Anglicans with whom he maintained association and friendship were *opposed to ecumenism*. It is misleading of these authors to claim they are acting in this tradition, when in reality now at least two of them clearly are not – one in the case of Carey Baptist's missionary, the other in the case of Mr Wichary.

Of relevance here is the position of the European Missionary Fellowship. The EMF's supporters will not be aware of this, because they have not been officially informed, but on 2 July 2010 the mission's Director at the time, Daniel Webber, sent one of us an email containing the following assurances: that there will be 'no association and cooperation between members of the EMF and the Evangelical School of Theology in Wrocław', and that 'there will be no formal association and cooperation between members of the EMF and Mr Mateusz Wichary'. This situation was undoubtedly a cause of some embarrassment to the mission, because up to that point its supported workers had been very much involved in the activities of the alliance led by Mr Wichary. The EMF's reputation for taking a vigorous

theological position and avoiding involvement in the ecumenical movement took a serious knock, as by no means for the first time in the recent history of Polish missions it emerged that missionaries were saying one thing to their supporters and doing quite another thing on the field. Speaking at a personal level, one of us regrets finding it necessary to say that he too was greatly disappointed by the reaction of the senior EMF supported worker with whom he first took up this matter privately, and later by the reaction from England. A [subsequent unresolved matter](#) and an [earlier, related matter](#) are described online. The long and the short of the matter is, however, that the EMF has now commendably withdrawn, in Lloyd-Jones-like manner, both from the Hiebertian syncretist missionary and from the practising ecumenist who leads RDE. One is forced to ask why so many senior figures in the FIEC so persistently refuse to follow suit? Is it that their acceptance of men who publicly endorse serious errors of the kind the FIEC had until recently anathematised is the result of an assiduous care to avoid the charge of 'hyper-separatism'? Let us hope this is the only reason.

The stream of FIEC speakers is set to continue with a visit to Poland in June 2012 by FIEC notable [Basil Howlett](#). The document which has replaced the 1996 *Statement, Gospel Unity and Ecumenism*, is claimed to be stronger. Will its provisions be sufficient to produce the acts of love and separation in the Biblical tradition his three colleagues described – steps which Mr Howlett is duty bound to take both in the case of the missionary he has supported in Poland for decades and in the case of RDE's leading theologian?

Readers from the FIEC should also note that in inviting a series of FIEC speakers to conferences in Poland, it will not be long before RDE's leaders will expect their friends to reciprocate. Members of the FIEC should be aware that this can only lead to further tangible downgrade. What form might this take? Will the FIEC's statement on *Gospel Unity and Ecumenism* be further modified to accommodate RDE's own statement on the subject, [Jedność i społeczność chrześcijańska](#) (*Unity and Christian Fellowship*), which is so very significantly different from the current British document? Is it in fact the case that the absence of a reference to Roman Catholicism in the FIEC's new statement is a step preparing the ground to enable cooperation with 'evangelical' Catholics, despite their ecclesiastical connections, as practised wholesale by the FIEC-endorsed missionary and in accordance with RDE's position? Will we see one or more of the [staunchly ecumenical lecturers used by RDE](#) from the Polish Baptist Union's theological seminary speaking in the UK, at sessions of the

Prepared for Service course, for example, or supplementing the faculty at the Wales Evangelical School of Theology, at which [overtly ecumenical associates of theirs have enrolled](#)? Will we even see FIEC churches calling Polish pastors who have trained at the unashamedly ecumenical Polish Baptist seminary, bringing with them the openness to Rome they will certainly have imbibed? Or will representatives of RDE bring allusions to Roman Catholicism with them to FIEC conferences, such as elements they have imported into their own practice and worship? Is this an exaggeration? At last year's RDE June conference, the audience was treated to songs performed by the praise band Promise. Promise are to perform again this year, when Mr Howlett is to be the main speaker. One of the numbers they performed last year was entitled [Niechaj zstąpi Duch Twój](#). The words of this song, written by Roman Catholic Sister Franciszka Godlewska, are immediately recognisable by every Pole as a direct reference to the [famous words of a famous pope](#). Call us what you will, we won't be singing.

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