

WEA provides evangelical voice at World Conservation Congress

On 4 September, WEA Secretary General Thomas Schirrmacher presented an evangelical perspective on conservation of nature and biodiversity to the global community of experts who gathered in Marseille, France for the World Conservation Congress 2021. Schirrmacher participated in a high-level panel with other faith leaders on the topic of 'The Spirituality and Nature Dialogue: Responsibility, Inspiration and Behaviour Change'. He outlined a vision of caring for the environment based on the biblical view of man as steward of God's creation.

The dialogue was organized by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Schirrmacher participated as a representative of the WEA's global network of evangelicals in 143 countries, speaking alongside Cardinal Peter Turkson, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development of the Roman Catholic Church. Representatives of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and indigenous religions also took part in the discussion.

Schirrmacher stated that preserving God's creation is a core element of evangelical belief, pointing out that in the first chapter of the Bible, God entrusted humans with the responsibility of taking care of the earth (Genesis 1:26, 28). 'This has been and will remain true and valid always', he said. 'Therefore, the challenges related to climate change can only underscore this duty, but they did not create it.'

Schirrmacher noted that we have acquired extensive knowledge of the earth and the environment, but that the foundational understanding of the purpose of that knowledge has been lost. He compared our situation to that of a friend of his, who as a boy was given a violin, took it apart piece by piece to see every detail of how it was made, but was then unable to put it back together again and thus never learned to play the violin. 'Never before in history have we known more about the details of nature than we know today', Schirrmacher stated. 'We have cut the world into pieces more precisely than anyone in the past. But we have lost sight of the purpose and design of creation because we do not see it as God's precious creation that was entrusted to us.'



Cardinal Peter Turkson, Olga Letykai Csonka, Thomas Schirrmacher and Grethel Aguilar during the panel discussion © WEA/Esther Schirrmacher

Asked why evangelicals speak of 'sin' with regard to our relationship with nature, Schirrmacher drew a parallel to racism. 'It is more than simply bad behavior or ignorance. It is hatred coming out of the depth of our heart. Even if we could delete all racism in an instant, humans would just go on to invent some other evil out of the blue', he commented. Quoting Jesus, he stated that evil does not enter into man from the outside, but rather evil comes out of the heart of man and is then put into action (Matthew 15:17–20).

Schirrmacher stressed that humanity needs not just new rules and the correction of former mistakes, but a 'conversion' in our innermost being, which only the Creator can enable. 'This should not be seen as a cheap excuse, but an acknowledgement that changing away from envy, greed, gluttony and exploitation requires more than moral indignation against others and pointing fingers. It starts with our own critical self-reflection and repentance', he said.