



**Welcome Address by the World Evangelical Alliance  
upon the Occasion of the 50-year Anniversary of ERF Media  
(Gospel Broadcasting - Trans World Radio Germany), 24/10/2009**

The visits I made as a small child to ERF, when my parents would drive from Giessen to Wetzlar to make recordings at ERF, are among my earliest childhood memories. The gigantic reel to reel tape recorders and what at the time was massive sound insulation material, were both impressive. The ERF employees gave each of us children our own old audio tape, which we unwound for hours and used to wrap ourselves up in.

But you have not come here to listen to me talk about my childhood memories – if we were here to recount memories, and each of you were to have your turn, we would have to plan weeks for welcome addresses.

In point of fact, on behalf of Geoff Tunnicliffe, the International Director of the World Evangelical Alliance, in the name of my wife Christine Schirmacher, the speaker regarding Islam for the World Evangelical Alliance and as the speaker for human rights for the World Evangelical Alliance, I want to express our best wishes and gratitude from the World Evangelical Alliance and the estimated 420 million Christians the Alliance represents. As was recently discussed at a meeting in Bad Urach, the WEA's Religious Liberty Commission, the Mission Commission, and the Theological Commission all join with us.

Dear Jürgen (Werth) (*Chairman of the Board of Directors*),  
dear Horst (Dr. Horst Marquardt) – this with regard to the historical occasion (*long-standing Director*),  
dear Anton (Schulte) (founding member from 1959),  
dear Bernd (Bierbaum) (*Chairman of the Supervisory Board*),  
dear Members of the Board, Supervisory Board Members, Members of ERF,  
dear honored guests,

(1) The World Evangelical Alliance congratulates ERF on its birthday and wishes to thank it not only for everything that it has done for people in Germany, but also thank it for what it has provided around the world throughout the years. (2) The World Evangelical Alliance is also thankful for the fact that in its 50-year existence, ERF was often ahead of all of us with new and creative ideas when it came to using technological advances for the sake of the Gospel. (3) And finally, the World Evangelical Alliance wishes to thank

ERF for the well-disposed and positive role that it has played in holding together committed Christians during a time of enormous upheaval in Christianity over the past 50 years.

What TransWorld Radio and ERF do is truly (1) 'worldwide' (2) 'evangelical' and (3) 'Alliance-related'. Please let us expound on this.

(1) We are **worldwide** and global. Far from all racism, nationalism, or provincialism, the World Evangelical Alliance and ERF both view all people with their various languages and cultures as images of God, calling them together to form an international community which foreshadows the eternal community of those who praise God in heaven.

If we look back into the 1950s, there were actually only three media sources that were able to jump over national and political bounds without any difficulty: Bibles, records and radio waves. Thus it was that great change took place in international works which devoted themselves to Bible translation (with Wycliffe Bible Translators leading the way), the dissemination of records and later, newer sound recording media (with Gospel Recordings, in Germany Internationale Sprachenmission), and radio missions, with Trans World Radio leading the way. These three movements made the Gospel accessible in thousands of languages. And in an exemplary manner, ERF used each new technological possibility available to step over national and other borders, most recently with the use of television and the internet, for instance.

We are deeply thankful to ERF that from the beginning it not only produced German programs, but also programs in many other languages, generously helping its partners in all respects within Trans World Radio worldwide.

(2) We are **Evangelical**, but not first of all in any denominational or party sense. Rather, we are Evangelical in the literal sense of the word. ERF (Gospel Broadcasting), carries in its name the fact that we Christians have only one thing that is special, namely the Gospel of God's gracious mercy and forgiveness, Greek 'euangellion', the Good News. This has nothing to do with us, and it is nothing that we have to offer. Rather, it is the good news of what Jesus has done for us.

The English word 'Evangelical,' found within the name of the World Evangelical Alliance, seeks to first of all say that the Gospel and its proclamation unites us and that compared with this, everything else has to take a back seat.

(3) And then comes the fact that we are an **Alliance**. With the common concern of proclaiming the Gospel, the World Evangelical Alliance and ERF both seek to bring Christians of all stripes, and the efforts they undertake, together.

This unfortunately also means setting boundaries. (a) On the one hand, there is a boundary set in front of Christians who admittedly want ecumenism and alliance but no proclamation of the Gospel. (b) On the other hand, there is a boundary set before those who want to proclaim the Gospel but

who do not want to countenance an alliance, a coalition of all Christians, a bundling of forces.

ERF, in spite of its high degree of dependence on hearers from all camps, has in this point made a great achievement over its 50 years. It has played a significant role in bringing about a situation where German Christians stand together with more variety, breadth, and strength than in 1959!

ERF has, on the one hand, maintained a clear spiritual stand, which means that it deserves the 'Gospel' trademark and is truly Protestant and Evangelical in the original senses of the words. On the other hand, it has withstood all theological – and yes, often certain Evangelical – attempts to place special interests in the center and to allow itself to be exploited for one or the other cause. Largely, this story has primarily taken place behind closed doors, where the spiritual and theological course had to again and again be reviewed and decided upon, and this story will probably never be recounted. However, it has played a significant part in making ERF what it is today.

Naturally, we know that in the final event this peace and this tightrope walk have God's safeguarding and guidance to thank, but we also thank all the people at ERF who became personally involved in maintaining spiritual peace, and who for the sake of the Gospel did not lose sight of the chief aim of proclamation.

The conviction that the Gospel can be presented in a friendly and culturally relevant manner unites the World Evangelical Alliance and ERF. In itself that provides enough offense, and we would do well to not exacerbate this with unchristian bickering, our private tastes, or other things that are all too human.

With everything that we achieve in this world as Christians, we have to always remind ourselves of what Jesus said to his disciples the first time that they headed out on their own and came back enthusiastic about their authority over illness and evil:

"However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

It is not until the eternal state that we will experience what actual effect ERF had, when we meet people who came to faith in Jesus Christ through its programs, its music, its books, its web pages and through conversations with its pastoral care department.

Soli Deo Gloria – To God alone be the Glory!

We wish ERF God's rich blessing for the next 50 years!

Geoff Tunnicliffe, International Director of the World Evangelical Alliance,  
also on behalf of the International Committee

Thomas Schirmacher, Spokesman for Human Rights within the World  
Evangelical Alliance and member of the Religious Liberty Commission

Christine Schirmacher, Spokeswoman for questions on Islam for the  
World Evangelical Alliance

*(Read by Thomas Schirmacher at the jubilee reception in Wetzlar)*