

Budijanto becomes new AEA general secretary

Dr Bambang Budijanto of Indonesia was installed in February 2019 as the new general secretary of the Asia Evangelical Alliance, replacing Dr Richard Howell who had served in that role for 10 years.

Budijanto began his full-time ministry as a pastor in Central Java, Indonesia in 1983. Four years later, he launched a church planting ministry aimed at rural Indonesian villages. Since then he has helped to form numerous organizations involved in community development, Christian education and leadership development in his own country and across Asia.

Budijanto's service to the AEA started in 2008, when he was appointed director of its Mission Commission. He subsequently became vice chairman of the AEA Executive Council in 2012 and associate general secretary in 2015.

After earning his PhD in development studies from the University of Wales in 1997, Budijanto was Compassion International's regional vice president for Asia from 1999 to 2016. Author or co-author of seven books, Budijanto is married to Liana and they have three children.

New book asks: can evangelicals truly change the world?

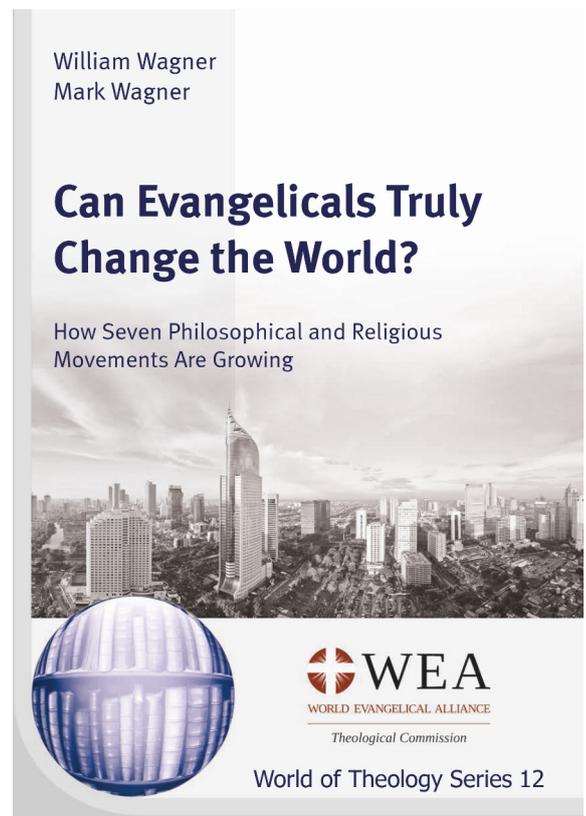
The WEA's Department of Theological Concerns has released the twelfth volume in its World of Theology Series: *Can Evangelicals Truly Change the World?* by William Wagner and Mark Wagner.

The book reviews seven contemporary global movements to determine why some are growing while others are stagnant or declining. It analyses the methods used by various groups with the purpose of informing better mega-level strategic planning towards fulfilment of the Great Commission. The scope is not limited to historic Christian organizations but includes other prominent forces such as the Mormons and gay advocates.

William Wagner described the need for the book in this way: 'Today Christian leaders seem to be in a fog in that they only study their own organizations ... [and] are not willing to look and see what other philosophical and religious movements are doing.'

Co-author Mark Wagner added, 'Seldom do we find any [evangelical] leader looking to develop strategies that change the fabric of society. Some do not see a biblical mandate for this. Others do not see the need. However, when we study some of the key movements that are shaping our world, our culture and society, we realize that a mega strategy is driving these movements. Why have we as evangelicals not been able to develop such a mega strategy that impacts and transforms each of the ten pillars of a culture? More often than not we are reacting to societal change rather than directing social change. This book shows us why we need to have mega strategies, how others are doing it and how we can begin to develop a strategy that leads not only to transformed people but to a transformed society.'

The book can be accessed online at https://www.bucer.org/fileadmin/dateien/Dokumente/Buecher/WoT_12_Wagner-Can_Evangelicals_Truly_Change_the_World.pdf.



What makes good Christian-Muslim dialogue?

'It doesn't take much to get into conversation with Muslims. All you need for a successful dialogue is a cup or two filled with tea. And through this hospitality we can make a vital political contribution to integration.' WEA Associate Secretary General Thomas Schirmmacher shared that message at a study day on April 6, devoted to discussing a paper by the Protestant Regional Church in Baden, Germany, on Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Schirmmacher has criticized the report for ignoring essential topics such as salvation and for uncritically transferring Christian concepts such as God's mercy into Islam. Contrary to claims that more progressive

Christian groups are the ones most involved in interfaith dialogue, he contended, 'On a worldwide scale it is precisely those Christians who are convinced of the truth of their own faith who conduct dialogue with Muslims most intensively.'

Among the doctrinal differences between the two faiths that should not be simply levelled out, Schirmmacher cited their different understandings of our closeness to God. 'That God or his Spirit dwells in the heart of a person is unthinkable for a Muslim believer', he stated. 'The Christian idea of fellowship with God and Jesus in eternity is also extremely alien to Muslims. Although Muslims imagine life after death as paradise, the closeness of God does not play a role. Muslims pray five times a day for their prophet Mohammed, because even he could not know whether he would one day be with God.'



Tobias Schultz, longtime director of Operation Mobilisation Germany, now working in the Arab world as well as in refugee work in Germany, delivers his presentation © BQ/Warnecke

Tobias Schultz, former director of Operation Mobilisation Germany and an expert on Islam, discouraged engaging in theological discussions about the Trinity or the divinity of Jesus with Muslims, because the framework of Islamic doctrine is so different. 'Discussions about the teachings of the two religions almost inevitably result in debates; biblical stories, on the other hand, reach the heart and can bring about change.' Schultz suggested highlighting, for example, miracle stories from the New Testament that demonstrate Jesus' special authority.

Religious freedom and harmony do not contradict absolute truth claims

Last November, the WEA's Thomas Schirmmacher delivered a brief message at a conference entitled 'From Interfaith and Inter-Civilizational Dialogue to Cooperation', held in Berlin with the embassy of Azerbaijan among the sponsors. Schirmmacher was asked to address the question, 'Do religious freedom, religious harmony and interreligious dialogue contradict absolute truth claims?' Following is his message, which is highly relevant to all situations where believers of different faiths interact.

Praise be to God, who created us and makes this day possible.

It is possible to advocate liberty, religious freedom and harmony, interreligious dialogue and freedom of conscience for others without holding their convictions to be true or sharing those convictions!

Advocating the human rights and religious freedom of others, thus working toward religious harmony, does not automatically require endorsing their claims to truth. In its resolution for religious freedom, the World Evangelical Alliance expresses this as follows: 'The WEA differentiates between advocating the rights of members of other or no religions and endorsing the truth of their beliefs. Advocating the freedom of others can be done without accepting the truth of what they believe.'

Dialogue is not the task of relativists who have lost deep convictions and are no longer really sure what the truth is. Dialogue, harmony and freedom come out of holy truth, and that truth pushes us towards seeking solidarity, peace and prosperity for all. If one is convinced of truth, one never

has to fear listening to others and exchanging good arguments. And he can engage in interreligious dialogue without accepting that the dialogue partner also knows the truth—otherwise, why should one dialogue?

The same is true the other way around. Religious freedom and harmony do not emerge automatically when religious communities or non-religious people give up their truth claims or come to agree that both sides know the truth already and there is nothing to discuss or dialogue. Governments can conduct war against each other even when they share the same religious convictions.

Even in the case of the two largest world religions, both monotheistic (Christianity and Islam), it is apparent that unity has not been achieved between the different theological schools in every detail. Denominations that stand quite close to each other in matters of truth nevertheless have frequently conducted religious wars against each other.

Think for a moment about the differences between Shiite and Sunni Islam or between Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic Christianity. Whenever these different wings are in a position to peacefully coexist in the same country, the reason is not because they agree about everything. Rather, it is either because they have been forced by the state to peacefully coexist (which hardly represents a permanent solution) or because they have themselves decided to limit their differences to the area of theology and to discussions about the faith and have decided to not argue it out in the political realm. Theological uniformity is not the condition of peace in the political realm.

The U.S. Declaration of Independence says, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.'

The USA did not live up to its standards at that time. Afro-Americans still were kept as slaves; religious freedom was enormous, but did not extend beyond many forms of Christianity and the Jewish faith.

Western individualism often seems to come close to the idea that every individual is his own ruler and lone cowboy. Yet in reality, to be isolated from all other humans can in itself kill people, as the torture of solitary confinement proves.

Yet I think the message of the Declaration is self-evident and true: Allah* created us human beings in a wonderful way and this must be the starting point for any discussion of human rights and politics. God created us not to be alone but to live in solidarity—with our nuclear and larger families, our communities, coworkers and tribes, the poor and enslaved.

One form of this solidarity is the State, where rulers protect all peaceful citizens from non-peaceful citizens. The State protects not only those likeminded, or of the same tribe or religious conviction, but all, as long as they do not question this monopoly of power. But solidarity also makes it necessary to protect the large number of peaceful believers from the small number of religious extremists who misuse the name of Allah and religion and often kill more people of their own faith than of others.

I thank Azerbaijan for doing such a great job in this kind of solidarity. Praise be to God.



Ramin Hasanov (Azerbaijan's ambassador to Germany), Grand Sheikh Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade (Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims' Board and Secretary General of the Baku International Centre for Interfaith and Inter-Civilizational Cooperation), and Thomas Schirmacher at the conference © BQ/Warnecke

* Because Allah is the word for God in some languages, Thomas Schirmacher considers it appropriate for Christians to use the word Allah in interfaith conversations. For more information see [Thomas Schirmacher: Is it appropriate that Arab Christians call God Allah? MBS Texte 142, 2010.](#)

Religious Liberty Partnership meets in Nigeria, calls for urgent action

The Religious Liberty Partnership—a collaboration among the major Christian organizations working for worldwide religious freedom—held its 2019 consultation in Abuja, Nigeria, to stand in solidarity with Nigerian Christians and draw attention to their plight amidst attacks by radical Muslims.

(For more information on the Religious Liberty Partnership, see the next article.)

The RLP's carefully worded statement noted that the increasing frequency of attacks cannot be explained in terms of clashes between farmers and herders. In addition to the abduction of Christian schoolgirls by Boko Haram, the RLP decried the violence 'perpetrated by a well-armed militia comprising members of the Fulani ethnic group' and the Nigerian government's inability to mount an effective security response.

At the same time, the RLP praised positive contributors including the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council, the many peaceful Fulani communities, and Abdullahi Abubakar, an 83-year-old imam who rescued more than 300 Christians during militia attacks in June 2018.

The RLP called on the Nigerian government 'to ensure that all of Nigeria's religious communities enjoy religious freedom, including the right to manifest and propagate their beliefs as enshrined in Article 38.1 of the Nigerian Constitution', as well as to pursue the release of the Christian schoolgirls still in captivity.

'This is a clear statement of the truly dire situation facing Christians in the North and Middle Belt of Nigeria', said Mervyn Thomas, chairman of the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) and CEO of CSW,UK. 'By holding our annual RLP consultation in Abuja this year, Christians from around the world were able to gain a clear understanding of the problems and to stand shoulder to shoulder with our Christian family in Nigeria.'

The full Abuja statement on the crises in Nigeria can be found at <https://rlpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Abuja-Statement-on-Nigeria-Final-Draft-with-Orgs-v3.pdf>.

Religious Liberty Partnership coordinator addresses successes, current plans

For the last 13 years, Christian organizations concerned for religious freedom have been coordinating their efforts through the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP), which helps organizations work together more intentionally in advocacy, assistance, research and raising awareness of religious restrictions globally. The RLP has nearly 100 full or associate members from all continents, including the WEA Religious Liberty Commission and the International Institute for Religious Freedom.

We asked RLP facilitator Brian O'Connell to talk about the RLP's impact and current plans.

What do you feel the RLP has achieved?

When we started, the first thing we talked about was the need for relationships, and specifically between CEOs of the participating organizations. There was no forum to develop such relationships, which are necessary to address competition issues that arise naturally when each organization is looking out for itself. We realized that connections between CEOs were critical to build the trust that would lead to collaborative initiatives. You can't begin by developing collaboration; you have to begin with relationships and trust.

We expected that this would take a long time, but we have been pleasantly surprised by the partnering among agencies that has arisen organically. At our Nigeria consultation this year, I asked

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how many people had developed collaborative initiatives over the last two or three years, and dozens of hands were raised.

We can't track all the collaborative efforts, but our member organizations pay membership fees, so if we weren't achieving what we set out to do, they would begin to opt out. Instead, we are seeing our membership increase each year.

You recently held your annual consultation meeting in Nigeria. What was the significance of that choice?

We intentionally went to a 'hot spot' where Christians are actively facing persecution. Testimonies were shared from Nigeria and several other African countries (including Sudan and Eritrea). The speakers shared what is happening in their locations, and they also demonstrated an inspiring vibrancy of faith.

We wanted to stand alongside the Nigerian church and show publicly that we support them. We had 40 to 50 pastors and denominational executives from Nigeria present. They came away knowing that Christians globally care about them and that they are not forgotten.

How does the RLP membership reflect the diversity of approaches to religious liberty?

How our member organizations handle advocacy and relationship with governments varies across a wide spectrum. Some are quiet, behind the scenes and more relational. Others are more confrontational and public in their dealings. In my opinion, all approaches are needed, especially depending on the culture. But that complexity can be frustrating at times, leaving people unsure about how to engage in a particular situation.

Nearly all advocacy approaches appeal to a shared morality (including international law), as the modern world expects. However, as Clarence Jordan said, "The intensity of persecution is geared not to the moral level of the non-Christians or to persecutors, but to the intensity of the witness of the Christian community." The church is growing and thus it is a threat to many.

Can you summarize your main current undertakings?

We have four active task forces. The first addresses apostasy laws. In this area, it was important to show that our whole partnership is behind the effort. We are beginning to see better response from the United Nations and other governments as we seek to get those laws off the books.

Second, our research task force is helping us to define common terms. For example, one source of frustration is the overuse of the word *persecution*, which can be applied to everything from discrimination



Brian O'Connell addresses this year's Religious Liberty Partnership consultation in Abuja, Nigeria.

JOURNALS AND NEWSLETTERS WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT FOR THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Evangelical Review of Theology (quarterly)
<http://www.worldevangelicals.org/tc/>

Islam and Christianity (English and German) (semiannual)
<https://www.islaminstitut.de/en/category/publikationen/journal/>

Jahrbuch für Verfolgung und Diskriminierung von Christen
 [Yearbook on Persecution and Discrimination of Christians]
 (German) <https://www.iirf.eu/journal-books/german-yearbooks/>

International Journal of Religious Freedom (semiannual)
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<http://www.worldevangelicals.org/tc/publications/TN.htm>

Bonn Profiles (twice a week)
<https://www.bucer.org/resources/bonner-querschnitte.html>

WEA RLC Religious Liberty Prayer News (monthly)
<https://worldea.org/whoweare/newsletter-signup>

Business & Ministry News (Business Coalition) (monthly)
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Bonner Querschnitte (twice a week) (German)
<https://www.bucer.de/ressourcen/bonner-querschnitte.html>

WEA RLC Research and Analysis Report (periodic)
<https://worldea.org/whoweare/newsletter-signup>

and harassment to torture and martyrdom. We may want to refer to the first two as 'religious liberty violations', to communicate the presence of problems without diluting the word 'persecution', so that when we use the latter word people know that we are talking about severe violence.

Third, a Gender and Religious Freedom Task Group is addressing the ways in which Christian women often face double persecution. We have conducted a number of events over the past few years (including one in Nigeria this past March) on the topic of gender and religious freedom.

Finally, we have a task force focusing on the specific issues that Christian believers from a Muslim background often face.

How has your work has had a notable impact?

In countries like Colombia, Eritrea and Uzbekistan, we have seen progress thanks to many different organizations working with governments or behind the scenes.

Over the last three years, global awareness of religious liberty violations and persecution has grown substantially, partly because our community is more able to communicate together. The US now holds an annual State Department ministerial on religious liberty, and the UK foreign office has asked for a report on the persecution of Christians specifically. Of course, this increased awareness is also due to the increase in religious liberty violations over the past several years.

Although it is composed of Christian organizations, the RLP advocates for religious liberty for all persons, not just Christians. Why is that important?

This emphasis is critical for us to maintain international credibility. In terms of religious liberty, we do not want special treatment; all we want is a level playing field. God can do the rest.

What are your primary goals for the years ahead?

We have been seeing more organizations from the Global South addressing international religious liberty and we certainly want to see them become more engaged with us, as they can be especially helpful in international advocacy. For example, given their relationship with Iran, leaders from Brazil, which is a model of religious liberty, can potentially speak to government leaders there in a way that entities associated with the USA or UK political context cannot.

Brian encourages everyone to go to <https://rlpartnership.org/rlp-members/>, click on one or more of the organization links, and find out how you can be more involved in supporting religious liberty. But he adds, 'Whenever I ask someone dealing with persecution how we can help, the first thing they say is that they need our prayers so that they can remain strong when attacked or asked to deny their faith.'

WEA THEOLOGICAL NEWS

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