

WEA initiates global online gathering on business response to COVID-19

On April 7, 2020, more than 50 experts from around the globe joined in a global online call to discuss challenges and opportunities facing businesses due to the coronavirus crisis. Timo Plutschinski, Director of the World Evangelical Alliance's Business Coalition, initiated and chaired this extraordinary online gathering, which was a promising start of a Business Working Group as part of the WEA COVID-19 Task Force.

The task force is led by David Boan, director of the WEA's Relief and Development Department, who contended that the guidelines released for controlling the spread of COVID-19 could not work in poorer countries. 'Especially in the Global South', Boan said, 'there will be much more economic disruption and the recovery of the business community will be much more difficult.'

Reuben Coulter of Nairobi, Kenya, CEO of the Transformational Business Network, separated the pandemic's impact on businesses into three categories: some will thrive, some will ride out the storm, and some will be massively affected. He proposed creating an Emergency Investment Fund to help businesses ride out the storm and emerge stronger from the crisis.

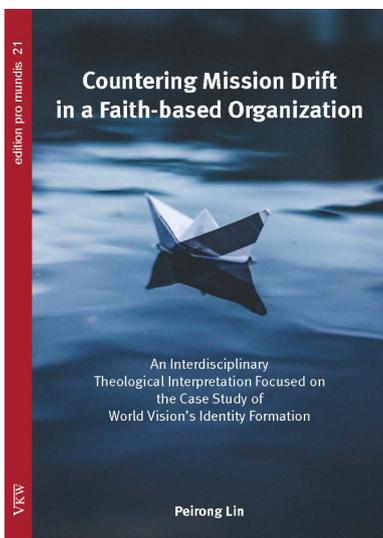
Chuck Bentley (Knoxville, USA), Chairman of the Christian Economic Forum, highlighted three pieces of advice: (1) forecast for the worst-case scenario for the short term; (2) over-communicate to everybody (board, investors, clients, customers, etc.); and (3) search for opportunities to grow your business.

Calling on his expertise with sustainability and disaster risk reduction, Matthias Boehning, director of the WEA Sustainability Center and WEA representative to the United Nations, asked, 'What can we learn from the humanitarian field that can be applied to the business sector?' In response, he emphasized the catchy claim 'Building back better'. Boehning said that a catastrophe reveals the best and worst within one's team and operations and can create a cleaning and revitalizing effect.



Rev. Timo Plutschinski © private

Peirong Lin's work on mission drift published



The German publishing house Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft (Culture and Science Publ., VKW) has released *Countering Mission Drift in a Faith-based Organisation* by Peirong Lin, human resource director and research coordinator for the WEA Department of Theological Concerns.

Lin's book examines World Vision as a case study of mission drift (or gradually moving away from the organization's founding mission, purpose and identity), a common phenomenon facing faith-based organizations.

A Singapore native, Lin is also an affiliated researcher at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit (Leuven, Belgium), where she completed her doctoral degree.

Pandemic calls for rethinking our relationship with nature, Sustainability Center says

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Evangelical Alliance Sustainability Center (WEASC) has called for a fundamental rethinking of our relationship with nature. As part of the global Christian 'Renew Our World' campaign, the WEASC published a statement calling for, among other things, stronger regulation of the global trade in wildlife products.

'The COVID-19 pandemic can be a real eye and heart opener', said WEASC director Matthias K. Boehning, 'if we read the signs of the times and let actions follow.'

The statement addresses, among other things, the problem of destruction and fragmentation of natural habitats and the unsustainable, often unregulated and often illegal use of wildlife and wildlife products, which contributes to the disruption of ecosystems. 'The fact that this also increases the likelihood of transmitting pathogens from wildlife to humans is an important message that must be heard and understood in times of the global COVID-19 pandemic', said Boehning.

Together with numerous other Christian organizations from all over the world working in the fields of development, justice and creation care, the WEASC affirms this statement contained in the text: 'We believe that God has created an interdependent world within which humans have a responsibility to use the gifts and resources contained in the natural world wisely, cautiously and sustainably.'



Dave Bookless and Matthias Böhning during the interview © WEASC

Archbishop Anastasios awarded Hemmerle Prize

Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, head of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania and one of the most important living Christian scholars, has received the Klaus Hemmerle Prize for 2020.

'Not only has he composed important writings on mission for 50 years; he has also brought missionary theology back into the Orthodox Church', said Thomas Schirmmacher, the WEA's head of theological concerns. 'The fact that he himself rebuilt the church in Albania from nothing over the course of three decades as a missionary and pastor demonstrates the deep conviction out of which he wrote.'

Archbishop Anastasios, originally from Greece and then a missionary and peace-maker in Africa, was sent to Albania in 1991 to rebuild the destroyed Autocephalous Orthodox Church after years of rigid state-sanctioned atheism.

The prize, awarded for the ninth time, commemorates Klaus Hemmerle (1929–1994), former Catholic bishop of Aachen, Germany. It honours 'personalities who, as bridge-builders, promote dialogue between churches, religions, and world views'. The selection jury noted Archbishop Anastasios' transforming role as a faith worker in a country emerging from communism and atheism and praised his commitment to dialogue between Muslims and Christians and his constant mediation between Christian confessions.



Thomas Schirmmacher (right) greets Hemmerle Prize winner Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos © BQ/Esther Schirmmacher

Radical Islamic violence in northern Mozambique

Dramatic attacks by the Islamic terrorist group Ahlu Sunnah wa Jamaa (ASWJ) in late March killed hundreds of people in northern Mozambique and have forced thousands to flee, according to reports from local sources.

ASWJ forces captured the Indian Ocean port town of Mocimboa da Praia on 23 March, taking possession of an army barracks. According to a local religious leader, an estimated 370 people were killed, with additional indiscriminate deaths in the nearby town of Quissanga.

The ASWJ's jihadist insurgency has been ongoing since October 2017. However, the March 2020 attack was their most significant success thus far.

During the 30-month insurgency in Cabo Delgado province, hundreds of villages have been destroyed and nine counties have come under the insurgents' control. About 150,000 dislocated villagers have been sleeping in the bush or crowding into towns with up to 50 people in a single home. However, the attack on Mocimboa da Praia forced them to flee again, with the seaport looking 'like a ghost town', according to sources.

Mozambican forces, with support from military contractors, reportedly mounted air attacks against the extremists on 8–10 April, according to security sources quoted by the *Daily Maverick*, an online publication from South Africa.

However, even if ASWJ's gains are reversed, the suffering of civilians in Cabo Delgado will not end soon. One local source said, 'The villages are being left empty, and people are not planting their crops—which means that there will be hunger, and we will have thousands of internal refugees.'

ASWJ's apparent goal is to control territory in northern Mozambique and neighbouring Tanzania and implement Shari'a law there. According to reports, the group is seeking to gain local support by distributing looted goods and money.

Dr. Fernando Caldeira Da Silva, deputy director of the WEA's Religious Liberty Commission, visited the area in 2018 and 2019 and hopes to return when pandemic-related travel limits have eased. Da Silva commented that living conditions had worsened greatly due to the Islamic attacks, which had impeded business from flourishing. 'Just about two weeks before my visit in 2018', Da Silva stated, 'the police had closed one mosque in Pemba after finding an arsenal of AK47s, ammunition, and other types of weapons there.'



Mozambicans uprooted by escalating violence gather for a food distribution in Mocimboa da Praia, in Cabo Delgado province, Mozambique, in December 2019 © UNHCR/Eduardo Burmeister

First open-access Evangelical Review of Theology almost ready

The first open-access issue of the WEA's quarterly *Evangelical Review of Theology* will be e-mailed to subscribers by August 1. To subscribe, send an e-mail to ERT and *Theological News* editor Bruce Barron at bruce.barron0@gmail.com with 'ERT subscription' in the subject line, giving your name, e-mail address, country and (optional) institution.

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- (3) Send a **cheque** to WEA Business Coalition, Achter de Weiden 47, 22869 Schenefeld, Germany

Benedict is mistaken here!

Commentary by Thomas Schirrmacher

In April 2019, Pope Benedict published a letter intended to explain how the abuse scandal within the Catholic Church came about. There were many responses, but rarely did someone discuss the content as a whole and the major thesis of the author.

The accusations of abuse by priests date back decades, if not centuries. Whenever Bishops' Conferences, as in Germany, commission investigations, they find cases going back decades. In the case of Germany, the files reach back to 1946.

Pope Francis assumes that this problem has existed for a long time and has never been tackled fundamentally. Furthermore, he presumes that it is a matter of 'clericalism' and abuse of power, not of factors that emerged only recently. He also sees parallels to attacks by priests and bishops on nuns—another severe problem of long standing.

Pope Emeritus Benedict has expressed a diametrically opposing view. As I read his letter, I thought that after the long silence since his resignation, it would have been better if Benedict had remained silent. I have read many brilliant texts by Benedict; this is by far his weakest.

From 1981 to 2003, Cardinal Ratzinger was Prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which has been responsible for cases of abuse and for the secularization of priests on account of moral aberrations. Thus nobody has been closer to the evidence than he was.

In his letter he now gives the impression that the problem of abuse did not originate in the church, but is really a problem of our modern, godless society that has only rubbed off on the church. It began, he suggests, with the state-prescribed and state-supported introduction of children and youth into the nature of sexuality. He states, 'A society without God—a society that does not know Him and treats Him as non-existent—is a society that loses its measure.'

Although that statement may be true in itself, with regard to the problem at hand I would rather agree with Pope Francis: it is a problem of the Church and not of society. And it will be solved only if the Church changes, not if society changes. And even if the impulse had come from the outside, what kind of church would it be that is so defenceless as to become submerged in such a rampant pattern of abuse within a very short time on a broad international level? At least, that is the pattern of infection that Benedict's letter seems to depict.

Benedict gives the impression that sexual abuse by priests and bishops (or homosexual relations in seminaries among future priests) have existed only since the mid-1960s and were a consequence of the sexual revolution. He maintains that a collapse of academic Catholic morality at universities also occurred as a direct consequence of this revolution.

However, no one has ever taught that priests are morally allowed to sexually assault minors! Even very liberal Catholic moral theologians have never taught this.

Benedict makes several points either directly or indirectly. First, he suggests that there was no sexual abuse of this kind before 1965, or at least it was not nearly so serious a problem. (He does not present proof of this assertion.)

Response: What about the trials that took place before that time in the Weimar Republic or in the German empire? All enemies of the Catholic Church made use of this topic—often for polemical purposes, of course, but this does not change the fact that they could refer to real, existing cases.

(Continued on the next page.)



The Pope receives books on the topic of the persecution of Christians
© L'Osservatore Romano

There is also another problem. The abuse scandal is a global one. How should the sexual revolution of the 1960s in Germany have led bishops in Chile or Mali to be misappropriating minors at the same time?

Benedict also says that in a very short time, the sexual revolution had a penetrating impact on the theology taught at universities to priests and bishops: 'At the same time, independent of this development, Catholic moral theology suffered a collapse.'

Response: Really? How could the sexual revolution, which took place mainly in the secular space and at first met with bitter resistance on the part of large parts of society, have moved thousands of priests and bishops overnight to abuse minors? Where is the connection here? And if there were a connection, then it would have taken some time for the sexual revolution to arrive in the lecture hall, influencing only those priests who began their primary education 40 to 45 years ago at most. In other words, any case of abuse involving a bishop or priest age 50 or older cannot be chronologically related to the sexual revolution.

The Australian Cardinal George Pell, born in 1941, received his theological diploma in Rome in 1967. How can his abuse be traced back to the sexual revolution? Were modern views of sexuality really taught in Rome as early as the mid-1960s? The founder of the Legionaries of Christ has fathered several children and abused seminarians in Mexico since 1960. A grand jury of the State of Pennsylvania counted 300 Catholic priests guilty of abuse since the 1940s.

Third, Benedict says that abuse takes place because and if there are no longer any strict sexual ethics. However, up to the present day perpetrators know that such abuse is wrong; otherwise, they would not hide such deeds or help to hide the deeds of others.

Fourth, Benedict says, 'Part of the physiognomy of the Revolution of '68 was that paedophilia was then also diagnosed as allowed and appropriate.' That statement is as correct as it is too general. However, let's suppose it were true: Is this to be the explanation given as to why priests abused minors?

I will conclude with two more remarks. First, the victims of the abuse are not mentioned in the letter. Most of them might find the letter strange. Second, whatever one may think of other theses and insights of feminist movements, they are certainly right on one point—namely, that rape and abuse are not varieties of sexuality but varieties of oppression and abuse of power that become even more terrible due to their sexual component. Therefore, Pope Francis is more likely to be on the right path by associating the problem with misuse of priestly authority than is Pope Benedict, who remains purely in the field of sexuality and does not address the question of power at all.

JOURNALS AND NEWSLETTERS WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT FOR THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Evangelical Review of Theology (quarterly)
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International Journal of Religious Freedom (semiannual)
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WEA RLC Religious Liberty Prayer News (monthly)
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WEA RLC Research and Analysis Report (periodic)
<https://worldea.org/whoweare/newsletter-signup>

A pandemic prayer

by Beth Felker Jones

Beth Felker Jones, theology professor at Wheaton College, USA and a member of the WEA Theological Commission, has authored a set of 24 devotions called Pandemic Prayers: Devotions and Prayers for a Crisis, available online. This is one of them.

As I write this morning, the view out my window is all fluffy snow and empty street. It's peaceful and beautiful ... and I'm not the only one going stir crazy anyway. My heart is unquiet. My temptations are to self-absorption. This suggests, to me, that it's time to pray.

'Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer' (Rom 12:2).

Julian of Norwich did her praying in the 14th and early 15th centuries. Though long dead Julian has been there for me in lots of trying times. Maybe you'll find that she's there for you too.

Her book, *Revelations of Divine Love*, is the first book of theology written by a woman in the English language. We don't know her real name, but we call her Julian because it was the name of her church.

Julian lived two lives. The first was a life in the world: a life of household concerns and running into neighbours on the street. We don't know for certain, but it's likely she was married and had children.

The bubonic plague ravished her town not once but twice in her lifetime. About a quarter of the population would have died. We don't know for sure, but it's likely she lost her family to the plague.

Then, Julian's life in the world ended. (As we may feel ours is ending, or at least is on a painful and indefinite pause.) Julian's second life was lived as an anchoress. She was walled away from the world.

Bear with me, because this is going to sound incredibly strange if you haven't heard of it before. The life of an anchoress was a dedicated ministry to a church and a town. The anchoress (or anchorite, if a man) was walled into a cell, or anchor-hold, attached to a church.

Julian would have stepped into her cell, and then stone walls went up. She wouldn't leave until her death. But this wasn't a burial alive, and even though it was a life set apart, it was still a life for the world.

In her little room, her anchor-hold, Julian would have had three windows. One to the street. One to the sanctuary. One to care for her needs. (Food. Laundry. Books. Presumably the chamber pot.)

Even though it was a life set apart, it was still a life for the world.

Julian was there to pray in place. To stay put in order to commit herself, body and soul, to prayer for those outside those windows. In 14th-century Norwich, you couldn't call your pastor or text a friend, but if you needed prayer, at any time, you knew where Julian would be, and you could talk to her through her window.

Imagine Julian. Perhaps she's walking back and forth in her 9' x 11' anchor-hold. Perhaps she's sewing. Perhaps she's looking through her window towards the altar in the church.

She's praying.

But is she feeling the warm presence of God? Is her face aglow with peace? Is she able to pray without her attention wandering?

Maybe. But maybe not.

Julian says that, when we pray, 'frequently our trust is not complete, for we are not certain that God hears us ... because we feel absolutely nothing (for we are frequently as barren and dry after our prayers as we were before' (*Revelations of Divine Love*, 41).

Reflecting on barrenness in prayer, Julian tells us that the Lord showed her something wonderful: 'I am the ground of thy praying.'

(Continued on the next page.)

Prayer isn't about us. It's about God. In this, says Julian, 'our good Lord shows a powerful encouragement. ... It is not our praying that is the cause of the goodness and grace that He does for us, but God's own characteristic goodness.'

'I am the ground of thy praying.' That's what God showed to Julian.

And she counsels us, 'Our good Lord wills that this be recognized by His lovers on earth, and the more that we recognize this, the more we shall pray.'

'Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints' (Eph 6:18).

Julian encourages us to 'pray inwardly, even though it seems to give thee no pleasure.' Pray, 'though thou sensest nothing ... seest nothing ... canst achieve nothing.' Julian wants us to find freedom and trust in knowing that God is the 'ground of thy praying.'

In quarantine, we're like Julian. We still have windows. I'm praying today that God would help me to turn to my windows and pray for the world.

Maybe this time and space of being walled in can become an anchor-hold.

Maybe we can find a new freedom for prayer. Maybe Julian's experience can set us free from our own desperate efforts to get our prayers right. In the truth that prayer is about what God does and not about what we are doing, Julian finds comfort from 'all our doubtful fears' (42).

I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God;
incline your ear to me, hear my words.
Wondrously show your steadfast love,
O saviour of those who seek refuge
from their adversaries at your right hand. (Psalm 17:6-7)

Loving Father, help us to lean on you in prayer. Help us to make our lives an anchor-hold. Help us to love the world through the windows you provide. And please, God, remind us of Jesus, whose work allows us to pray in confidence and trust, because he's made us your sons and daughters. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

WEA THEOLOGICAL NEWS

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