

## WEA Sustainability Center presents biblical approach to SDG implementation

In September, the WEA Sustainability Center released a probing series of studies entitled 'The Bible and the SDGs', containing devotionals and supportive content related to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The studies include reflections on Christian responsibility in the 17 SDG areas, authored primarily by WEA Mission Commission director Jay Matenga. The messages, packed with numerous biblical references, are accompanied by examples of featured projects and suggestions for practical action.

The reflections urge Christians to engage collaboratively with others in pursuit of the common good while pointing to Jesus Christ as the ultimate source of peace and harmony. As Matenga writes in the message for goal 17 on partnerships, the SDGs 'suggest a shalom-kingdom vision, while ignoring the King. What these secular aspirations see in part, we can see in full. Furthermore, we are empowered by the Spirit of God to achieve them. Followers of Jesus should therefore be leading the way in accomplishing these goals and lending our efforts to all those who share these aspirations.'

In a webinar on the project, Matenga explained, 'I think one of the critical elements missing in evangelical understanding of creation care, and a reason why the West easily dismisses it, is that we lack a robust theology of immanence. The Enlightenment led to a separation of the material world from spiritual realities in evangelical thinking, and Western thinking still tends to resist full integration of the two. ... If we can learn to perceive God's immanence in the world and our connection with it, that will transform our understanding of creation care and our commitment to sustainability issues.'

The webinar also included an impressive presentation by Apostle Vincent Anane Denteh of the Ghana-based Church of Pentecost, describing that denomination's use of the 17 SDGs to guide its commitment to holistic ministry. Denteh summarized Church of Pentecost projects responding to nearly every one of the SDGs. The projects include, amongst others, a microloan programme, sustainable agriculture development, construction of healthcare facilities, establishment of more than 90 schools, vocational training, safe water initiatives, and even building three correctional facilities to reduce prison overcrowding.

'The Church of Pentecost has presented a model of how the SDG language can be translated into actual work', Matenga commented. 'Theologians and theorists can come up with reasons to do it, but unless you see it practiced well, it is hard to understand how it can be done.'

Joseph Wumbee of AG Care, the Assemblies of God relief arm in Ghana, described his organization's outreach to young female victims of forced migration into Ghana's cities. AG Care has rescued 1,500 girls from the streets into a nine-month skills training and counseling programme that rehabilitates the girls and reintegrates them into their original communities. AG Care has also developed 80 schools that have become part of Ghana's national education system.

'The Bible and the SDGs' is available at <https://wea-sc.org/en/biblesdgs>.

The WEA has long been addressing sustainability issues, including the SDGs. Two prominent WEA-produced works on the topic are Ken Gnanakan, *Responsible Stewardship of God's Creation* (2014; <https://iirf.eu/journal-books/global-issues-series/responsible-stewardship-of-gods-creation/>) and Thomas Schirmacher and Thomas K. Johnson, *Creation Care and Loving Our Neighbors* (2016; [https://iirf.eu/site/assets/files/105856/wea\\_gis\\_17-thschirmacher\\_thkjohnson-environmental\\_ethics.pdf](https://iirf.eu/site/assets/files/105856/wea_gis_17-thschirmacher_thkjohnson-environmental_ethics.pdf)).



## Remembering J. I. Packer, former WEA Theological Commission senior advisor

A giant of the evangelical faith, J. I. Packer, passed away on 22 July at age 93. In his 75 years as a Christian believer, Packer inspired generations of evangelicals.

Born in England in 1926, he was admitted to Oxford in 1944 and completed his doctorate there, writing on Richard Baxter, in 1952. He proceeded to hold various teaching posts at theological colleges in Bristol, during which he had a decade-long interlude as warden (director) of Latimer House in Oxford, a clearinghouse for evangelical interests in the Church of England. In 1979, he moved to Canada to teach at Regent College, Vancouver at the request of the rector there, who had been his classmate at Oxford. In 1979, Packer married Waliserin Kit Mullett in 1954 and they raised three adopted children.

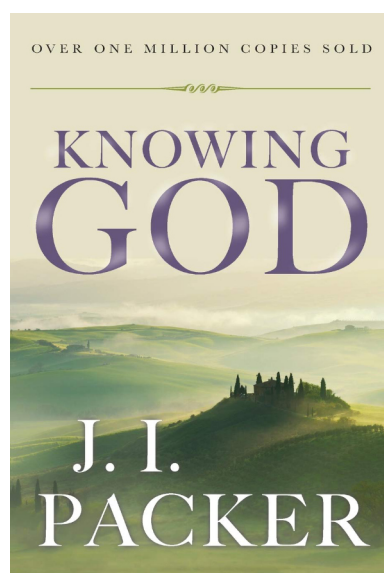
Packer believed in writing theology for the common people. Christianity, he believed, was a religion of the book and theology is about espousing God's point of view about every part of life. He considered John Calvin, pietist theologian John Owen and Richard Baxter as influential in his own faith development.

Packer resisted the idea that 'newer is better', tirelessly explaining Christian doctrines and calling out what he believed were lapses from these doctrines. He wrote or co-wrote more than 50 books, beginning with *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (1958), in which he defended the authority of the Scriptures as the main way God reveals himself.

Packer's hallmark book, *Knowing God* (1973), was written initially as a series of articles for a small magazine. He believed that 'ignorance of God lies at the root of much of the church's weakness today.' It was insufficient to know of God, he stressed; one needs to also know God. This involves 'turn[ing] each truth that we learn about God into matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God.' Packer also participated in the development of the English Standard Version of the Bible.



J. I. Packer, photo used with kind permission from Regent College, Vancouver



Packer worked with WEA Theological Commission member Thomas C. Oden to survey key evangelical statements related to sixteen different doctrinal themes in the book *One Faith: The Evangelical Consensus* (2004). The book sought to underscore the correlation and resonance between evangelical statements so as to foster unity amongst evangelicals.

The centrality of Christ remained as Packer aged. In his last book, *Finishing Our Course with Joy* (2014), he encouraged elderly Christians to continue in the good fight, stating, 'The Bible's view is that aging, under God and by grace, will bring wisdom, that is, an enlarged capacity for discerning, choosing, and encouraging.'

In a 2016 interview with his biographer, Leland Ryken (produced by Crossway and available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMo14MI0kyQ>), Packer stated, 'As I look back on the life that I have lived, I would like to be remembered as a voice—a voice that focused on the authority of the Bible, the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the wonder of his substitutionary sacrifice and atonement for our sins. I would like to be remembered as a voice calling

Christian people to holiness and challenging lapses in Christian moral standards. I should like to be remembered as someone who was always courteous in controversy, but without compromise. I ask you to thank God with me for the way that he has led me, and I wish, hope, pray that you will enjoy the same clear leading from him and the same help in doing the tasks that he sets you that I have enjoyed.'

Packer was exemplary in his dependence on Christ and his lifetime service to the Church. We thank God for Packer's wisdom and recognize that in many ways, we in the WEA Theological Commission stand on his shoulders today.

## Humanitarian Islam reader features WEA work

Nahdlatul Ulama, a major Indonesian-based Muslim organization, recently produced a *Humanitarian Islam Reader* containing documents on the Humanitarian Islam movement's 'global effort to curtail the spread of communal hatred, by fostering the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being'. This compilation was presented to prominent leaders in international diplomacy surrounding religious freedom, including US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and US religious freedom ambassador Sam Brownback.

Of the three most extensive analyses contained in the reader, one was WEA Theological Commission senior advisor Thomas K. Johnson's essay 'A Case for Ethical Cooperation between Evangelical Christians and Humanitarian Islam', which appeared in the August issue of the *Evangelical Review of Theology* (ERT). That article (along with all issues of ERT dating back to 2018) can be found at <https://theology.worlddea.org/evangelical-review-of-theology/>.

## Responding to conspiracy theories

*The fear and uncertainty that have accompanied this year's coronavirus pandemic have also spawned a new round of conspiracy theories, some of which have gained support within the Christian church despite the lack of evidence for them. Accordingly, the WEA Theological Commission has addressed the issue in the following Q&A text.*

**There have been different theories relating to the cause, spread and cure of the coronavirus. What should the church and believers in God do?**

As people of God, our actions bear witness to Jesus Christ. We currently live in a time of uncertainty, confusion, loneliness and fear of the unknown. Many questions regarding the cause, spread and cure of and responses to the coronavirus remain unanswered. This can lead to the birth of many conspiracy theories. The way we respond to these different theories reflects our witness to Christ.

We, as created beings, have limited knowledge that can be enlarged with collective research. Only the creator God is almighty and all-knowing. The general knowledge today is based on the collective knowledge of scientists, healthcare professionals and government agencies. In contrast, on what basis is the knowledge of conspiracy theories founded on? How do the theories match up with existing information?

We pray for truth to see the light. As creatures on this planet, we do not have a monopoly on what is absolutely right or wrong. When we pray, we acknowledge that only God knows all things and will reveal these things in His time. We should therefore hold loosely to different theories, recognizing the provisional nature of our knowledge. Often conspiracy theories pose themselves as the absolute. They are well communicated, appealing to one's emotions or through the credibility of the speaker, persuading the receiver of its validity.

We should search our hearts in the way we respond to these different theories. As Christians, we are promised the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit reminds us of God's daily presence with us in this challenging time, as well as his guidance and wise counsel. With the Holy Spirit's counsel, we can discern if our actions are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy.

Finally, we can be divided in our opinions but united in our response. With a crisis of this scale, it is possible that we might not all agree on what this pandemic means eschatologically, or whether our governments are credible. However, we can all agree and stand united in our response to this crisis as the hands and feet of Christ. We can continue in the work of bringing the gospel to all people, especially in a difficult time like this.

### THERE ARE THREE WAYS TO SUPPORT THE WEA DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS FINANCIALLY

- (1) Do a **bank transfer** to: WEA Business Coalition • IBAN: DE65 2005 0550 1363 1437 42 • BIC: HASPDEHHXXX  
• Hamburger Sparkasse, Ecke Adolphsplatz/ Großer Burstah, 20457 Hamburg, Germany
- (2) Donate **online** or per **credit card** via <http://business.worlddea.org/contact>
- (3) Send a **cheque** to WEA Business Coalition, Achter de Weiden 47, 22869 Schenefeld, Germany



## WEA becomes accredited member of UN Convention on desertification

As part of its increasing prominence on global issues, the WEA has received accreditation with the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). This accreditation enables the WEA to participate as an observer at official conferences related to this convention, thereby bringing the evangelical voice into the global fight against land degradation, desertification and drought.

Established in 1994, the UNCCD is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.

WEA Secretary General Bishop Efraim Tendaro stated, 'We are convinced that the UN's Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved without the involvement of faith-based communities. Therefore, we seek partnerships with UN organizations, such as UNCCD. We recognize integrated land and water management as an accelerator for achieving most of the Sustainable Development Goals. Through our global network we are in contact with local church communities and other communal bodies who are directly affected by land degradation and the effects of climate change on their livelihoods. As a partner of UNCCD, WEA sees itself as a bridge between those local communities and multilateral environmental governance and land management on the global level.'



WEA Secretary General Efraim Tendaro with Pradeep Monga, Deputy Secretary General of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification © BQ/Martin Warnecke

The WEA has launched a 'Living the Change Campaign' (<https://www.weacreationcare.org/living-the-change>) to equip and encourage Christians to make

personal sustainable lifestyle commitments motivated from a heart of faithful discipleship and the calling to care for creation. The Living the Change Campaign explains how Christians can reduce energy consumption, transition to renewable energy, use eco-friendly transport or eat a plant-based diet.

The Living the Change campaign contends that if millions of Christians made faith-consistent sustainable lifestyle commitments, our community would have a big collective impact for the better on creation, the climate, and the well-being of our neighbors, especially those suffering from poverty who are hurt the most by the effects of climate change, polluted ecosystems and degraded land.

### 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)  
<https://www.iirf.eu/journal-books/iirf-journal/>

Jahrbuch für Religionsfreiheit [Yearbook on Religious Freedom]  
(German) <https://www.iirf.eu/journal-books/german-yearbooks/>

#### DIGITAL ONLY:

Theological News (quarterly)  
<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)  
order from [business@worldea.org](mailto:business@worldea.org)

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>

## German government to report on hostility towards Muslims

On 1 September 2020, German Federal Minister of the Interior Horst Seehofer launched a twelve-member 'Independent Expert Group on Muslimophobia', including both scholars and practitioners. The committee's charge is to research the manifestations and incidents of hostility towards Muslims in Germany and to prepare a report within two years.

Seehofer's action closely followed a terrorist attack on Muslims in Hanau on 22 August. 'The terrible attack in Hanau is further proof that the poison of right-wing extremism reveals the evil in people. It is an attack on fellow citizens and friends, an attack on our common values which affects us all together. I will not accept this', Seehofer said.

Christine Schirmmacher, the WEA's Commissioner for Islam Affairs, was appointed to the panel. She is a well-recognized voice for religious freedom, having addressed the Human Rights Committee of the Bundestag (German parliament) on this topic in 2015 and having received a Bundestag appointment as a trustee of the German Institute for Human Rights.

## Global Christian Forum Youth Commission meets

The annual meeting of the International Committee of the Global Christian Forum (GCF)—held this year by Zoom—gave broad support to its Youth Commission and for creating a platform for direct exchange amongst young leaders of world Christianity.

The World Evangelical Alliance participates actively in the GCF alongside the other three 'pillars' of this framework for worldwide Christian discussion: the Vatican, the World Council of Churches, and the Pentecostal World Fellowship. At the 2018 GCF Global Gathering in Bogotá, Colombia, involving greater participation by the younger generation was identified as a high priority.

The GCF Youth Commission met for the first time in October 2019. Esther Schirmmacher, daughter to WEA Associate Secretary General for Theological Concerns Thomas Schirmmacher, represents the WEA on the Youth Commission.

### WEA THEOLOGICAL NEWS

WEA Theological News is published quarterly by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) Department of Theological Concerns led by Thomas Schirmmacher, Associate Secretary General for Theological Concerns, located in the WEA's Bonn office.

WEA is located in Church Street Station, P.O. Box 3402, New York, NY 10008-3402 and represented by its CEO, Secretary General Bishop Efraim Tendaro, Manila.

WEA Theological News is available at <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/tc/publications/TN.htm> and an email subscription can be ordered from [timothyg@worldidea.org](mailto:timothyg@worldidea.org).

The Department can be contacted at Friedrichstrasse 38, 53111 Bonn, Germany, fax +49 228 9650389.

**Editor:** Bruce Barron ([bruce.barron0@gmail.com](mailto:bruce.barron0@gmail.com)).

**Publisher:** Thomas Schirmmacher.

**Editorial Team:** Rosalee Velloso Ewell, James Nkansah-Obrempong, Thomas K. Johnson, Martin Warnecke, Peirong Lin, Johannes Otto.

### WEA DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

**The WEA Department of Theological Concerns is responsible for Theology**

- Theological Education • Intrafaith: Churches
- Christian World Communions
- Interfaith: Interreligious Dialogue • Islam
- Religious Freedom • Persecution • Christian Scholars
- Research • Business and theology

**The WEA Department of Theological Concerns consists of the following entities:**

- Theological Commission
- ICETE (International Accreditation)
- Re-forma (Untrained Pastors Training)
- Office for Intrafaith and Interfaith Relations (OIIR)
- Religious Liberty Commission (RLC)
- International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF)
- International Institute for Islamic Studies (IIIS)
- Business Coalition/Business and Theology
- Society of Christian Scholars
- Research Unit
- UN Bonn liaison office for interreligious dialogue