



## World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission

# WEA Theological News

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### WEA Plans for the Future

Key leaders of the World Evangelical Alliance met in Orlando FL USA May 1–3 to plan and strategize for the future under the leadership of Geoff Tunnicliffe, Interim International Coordinator and Ndabe Mazabane, Chairman of the International Council. About 40 International Council members, Commission leaders and members, representatives of Associate Members and Affiliates and Regional General Secretaries worked through a series of reports, papers and proposals designed to enable the organisation to move into the future after the recent resignation of its former Secretary-General. The international office, formerly located near Seattle USA, has been closed and all operations transferred to Toronto where they are being managed by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

Mr Tunnicliffe has been endorsed in the position of International Coordinator for a two year period. He will work in close cooperation with other leaders of the organisation, especially the Regional Secretaries, who cover Asia, Europe, Latin America, Caribbean, Africa and North America. There are now 124 national member alliances.

The WEA gathering was a prelude to the “Move the Stones—the Power of Alliance” conference held at the same location May 3–6, and attended by about 60 friends and supporters of the WEA drawn from mission agencies, seminaries and other ministries. The program included a number of keynote addresses by Regional Secretaries and others reporting on the work of evangelicals in various parts of the world. They included Godfrey Yogarajah (Asia), Gordon Showell-Rogers (Europe), Sam Olson (Latin America), Kyle Fisk (North America), Ndaba Mazabane (Africa), and Gerry Seale (Caribbean). Godfrey Yogarajah also gave a powerful presentation updating participants on the work undertaken by the Evangelical Alliance in Sri Lanka following the Tsunami and Johan Candelin, Director of the WEA Religious Liberty Commission, updated guests with an inspiring report on developments in many parts of the world. During the conference there were workshops on activities of the WEA Commissions and Regions which enabled delegates to discuss and contribute to the planning for work in these different spheres.

Announcing the conference, WEA said: “Like no other time in history, God’s people are facing major global issues on every continent. As Evangelicals, we have never had greater opportunities to impact the nations with God’s love.” Afterwards, Gordon Showell-Rogers commented “At this stage in history in our globalized world, we need to continue to find ways of connecting in formal and informal ways. This has deepened our understanding of each other and of our partnerships.”

### TC Plans for Annual Meeting and Joint-Consultation in Seoul, Korea

Preparations are underway for the 2005 annual planning and strategy meeting of the WEA Theological Commission. It will be held in Seoul, South Korea Sept 27-30 in conjunction with a consultation of the Korea Evangelical Theological Society (KETS). General Secretary of KETS, Dr Jae Sung Kim is in charge of local arrangements which will include visits by TC members to local seminaries for lecturing and fellowship. TC members will also present papers to the joint TC-KETS Consultation to be held Sept 30 and Oct 1. The theme for the Consultation is “The Task of Evangelical Theology for the Church of the 21st Century”.

An important item on the agenda of the Commission will be its program and future in the light of the revisioning of the World Evangelical Alliance at the recent Orlando summit. Other items will include the revision of the statement of faith, task force and consultation programs, dialogues and publications. Filling of membership vacancies and development of relationships with other organisations will also be on the agenda.

### TC Member Cameo: Per D. Pedersen



The WEA TC welcomed some new members to its panel at the last annual planning and strategy meeting. In this issue we feature the last cameo introducing them. Pastor Per Damgaard Pedersen serves with the Church of Denmark in its Mission in Armenia. Per was born 1967, and undertook theological studies in Aarhus, Denmark (The Lutheran School of Theology in Aarhus and Aarhus University) and Tübingen, Germany (Albrecht-Bengel-Haus and Eberhard-Karls-Universität), gaining the Master of Theology degree. From 2000 to 2004 he conducted theological research at the Lutheran School of Theology, Aarhus, Denmark, and is at present a doctor-grade student at the Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology in Oslo, Norway. Since 2004, he has been living with his family in Yerevan, Armenia, where he studies the Armenian language and theology, and prepares for his work as teacher at the theological faculty of the Armenian Church (Gevorkean Theological University, Holy Etchmiadzin). He is a theological advisor to the head of the Armenian Church, Karekin II. The TC warmly welcomes Per and commends his strategic work to the prayerful support of its friends.

## Theological Commission Releases New Book on its 30 Year History

The WEA Theological Commission has released a book telling the story of its ministry, which began officially thirty years ago but had a pre-history commencing in 1968. Written by Dr. David Parker, Director of Publications for the TC, the 140 page book titled *Discerning the Obedience of Faith: a short history of the WEA Theological Commission*, is an updated and expanded edition of articles first published in the *Evangelical Review of Theology* during the 30th anniversary year, 2004. It contains 24 photos illustrating most of the key leaders and events, a list of TC publications and an appendix with its main activities and events. It has been published for the TC by Theological Book Trust, Bangalore, India, and is available for purchase at a cost of US \$10 including postage from the TC Office in Australia (see contact details page 4).

In 1968 Dr. Bruce Nicholls was appointed Theological Coordinator for the World Evangelical Fellowship, and with Mr. John Langlois, began the Theological Assistance Programme which, in 1974, became the WEF Theological Commission with Dr. Bruce Nicholls as Executive Director. He was succeeded by Dr. Sunand Sumthra, Dr. Bong Rin Ro, and Dr. James Stamoolis. Currently, Dr. Rolf Hille of Germany serves in the dual role as Executive Director and Chair of the TC.

## WEA Response to Election of Pope

### *Statement the Executive Committee of the WEA International Council*

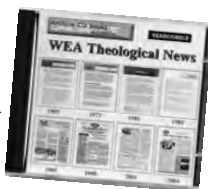
The World Evangelical Alliance extends congratulations to Pope Benedict XVI as the new leader of the Catholic Church. At this important time in history we recognize the need for all Christians to strive for Christian values and the proclamation of the Christian message in a secular world. It is critical that Christians around the globe promote a culture of life, care for the vulnerable, and justice for the oppressed.

WEA International Coordinator, Geoff Tunnicliffe, states, "There remain significant theological differences between Evangelicals and Rome, not least regarding the nature of the Church and its worship, the locus of its authority, and the status of non-Catholic Christians, particularly in regions where the Catholicism is dominant. Yet despite these differences, we hope that the significant dialogue and cooperative action between Evangelicals and Catholics which emerged under Pope John Paul II will continue and develop. We shall pray for the Catholic community in this time of transition."

## Theological News Now Available on CD-ROM

All issues of the TC newsletter, *WEA Theological News* since its inception in 1969 up to the end of 2004 are now available on CD-ROM. The CD which is available from the TC's Australian office (see contact details page 4) is fully searchable and also presents each page of the newsletter in its original format in PDF for easy reading. The CD costs US \$35 including postage.

During the 35 year period included on this CD, a wide range of news of evangelical theology and theological education has been covered, as well as information about the work of the TC itself. It therefore provides an invaluable easily accessible record of global activity. It will enable libraries and others who have not been able to receive the newsletter from the beginning to have the information it contains available to their readers.



## Evangelical Strategy Statement Gains Approval

Almost 90 evangelical leaders have given their approval to a document that calls conservative Christians to go beyond their usual issues, like abortion and homosexual rights, and involve themselves in such matters as poverty, justice and human rights. Titled *For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility*, the tome was crafted under the auspices of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). The project was commissioned by the NAE at its 2001 convention, and nearly two dozen leading scholars drafted the document. The NAE says it represents 30 million people in 45,000 churches and 52 denominations in the U.S. The American Family Association is examining the document, but chairman Don Wildmon said the ministry was already in agreement with the general sentiments of *For the Health of the Nation*. "Evangelical Christians in America face a historic opportunity. We make up fully one quarter of all voters in the most powerful nation in history," the document states. "Never before has God given American evangelicals such an awesome opportunity to shape public policy in ways that could contribute to the well-being of the entire world. Disengagement is not an option." *For the Health of the Nation* lays out seven principles it says should guide Christian political engagement. The full text is available on the National Association of Evangelicals' website. (<http://www.nae.net>)

Ed Vitagliano, Agape Press (Religion Today Summaries, May 17, 2005 [crosswalk.com](http://crosswalk.com))

## World Mission Conference Held in Athens

Tensions between Orthodox and Non-Orthodox churches surfaced during the first ecumenical World Mission Conference in Athens, Greece, May 9-16. Conservative members of the Greek Orthodox Church protested at the entrance to the conference centre against what they perceive as proselytism (sheep stealing) by Protestant missionaries. They described Protestants and Anglicans as heretics and demanded that conference participants leave the country. They also displayed posters saying "Orthodoxy or death".

The conference with 500 participants was organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC), which represents 347 Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican churches. The WEA Theological Commission was represented by Dr. George Vandervelde, convenor of the Ecumenical Issues Task Force.

It is the first time that an ecumenical world mission conference was held in an Orthodox country. Almost ten million of the 10.5 million inhabitants of Greece are affiliated with the Orthodox Church. Approximately 65,000 are Roman Catholics and 50,000 Protestants.

In his address to the mission conference the head of the Greek Orthodox Church, Archbishop Christodoulos, said his church had gladly extended the invitation despite bitter experiences in the past with aggressive missionary activities and hostile actions against our people.

The conference also aimed at integrating the growing Charismatic and Pentecostal movement into the ecumenical movement. So far, many evangelicals have been skeptical of liberal theological and ethical tendencies within the WCC. The WCC's general secretary Samuel Kobia urged traditional churches not to ignore the Pentecostal and Charismatic contributions to world mission any longer. (based on a news report from *Idea*)

# Verbum

## Modernity, Postmodernity, and the Gospel

by James Danaher, PhD

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We are told that we live in a postmodern age, but what exactly is meant by postmodern? Many seem to think that postmodern refers to some set of beliefs that offer an alternative to modernity. In fact, there is no consensus concerning a postmodern alternative, and its only unifying feature is a general rejection of modernity and the principles upon which it was founded. Modernity refers to the modern period of the 17th and 18th centuries which is often dubbed, The Enlightenment. The cornerstone of the Enlightenment was a belief in a new and enlightened form of science. This science maintained that not only was the world orderly, but that such an order was governed by mathematically precise laws that could be detected by the new science. Such a precise and certain understanding of the world, in time, became the great metanarrative and model for all right thinking. The Enlightenment vision was that as this new science acquired more and more knowledge it would eventual bring us to utopia.

Of course, from the start, the Enlightenment had its critics. What brought about the end of Enlightenment science as the great metanarrative, however, was not the criticism of poets and philosophers, but rather the history of the 20th century. After 300 years of putting our faith in scientific progress, the 20th century turned out not to be the utopia that the Enlightenment had promised. Quite the contrary, it witnessed over 100 million people killed in wars, and 35,000 to 40,000 thousand children dying each day from the effects of hunger and malnutrition. By the end of the 20th century the very existence of the planet was being threatened, and science did not seem able to do anything about it. The Enlightenment had failed to deliver what it had promised, and something else was obviously needed. This presents a great opportunity for the Gospel.

Not only are people searching for answers today in a way that they hadn't when science had all the answers, but, with the end of modernity, we no longer believe that knowledge must be objective and precise after the model of mathematics. Thus, room has been made for the kind of knowledge of which the Gospel speaks. A Christian understanding of God will always be based in a personal relationship with the risen Christ, and never the kind of objective and precise understanding that modernity insisted constituted real knowledge. The Christian God could never be discovered through the methods of science, but he is faithful to reveal himself to those who humbly seek him.

Of course, Enlightenment science did give us a technology that we might not want to be without, but it was not capable of leading us to the kind of truth and meaning that lies at the base of the Christian life. It certainly was not an appropriate model for intimately knowing a personal God, for modernity told us that we should rid ourselves of all bias in order to discover an objective truth untainted by our prejudice. The Gospel, however, tells us that we are to bring the prejudice of faith to every circumstance. Modernity provided us with a method that gave us a confidence in our certain and precise understanding, but the Gospel leads us to an understanding founded upon a divine beauty that we behold in humble awe. The truth of modernity was something we could get a hold of, but the truth of the Gospel is something that gets a hold of us.

Fortunately, we now know that the scientific reasoning that modernity insisted upon is not the universal form of right reason it had claimed to be but merely represents one form of reason. With that understanding, we are now free to pursue forms of rationality more compatible with a Gospel that is personal and mysteriously beautiful rather than objective and mathematically precise.

Contrary to what some have led us to believe, a postmodern world is not one in which all order, meaning, and truth is lost. Rather, all that is lost is the kind of order, meaning, and truth that modernity had insisted upon. The good news of the postmodern Gospel is that, with the end of modernity, we now have an ever greater opportunity to order our lives, not based upon an understanding of some universal, objective truth, but rather upon an intimate understanding of a truth that is personal indeed, a truth that is a person (John 14:6).

For further reading:

Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (Fordham University Press, 2001)

James Danaher, *Eyes That Can See, Ears That Can Hear: Perceiving Jesus in a Postmodern Context* (forthcoming)

**Verbum:** Welcome to this new feature in *WEA Theological News*—a page of comment and insight giving perspectives and overviews of topical issues. This feature is intended to stimulate thought. It will appear in both our print and on-line editions. Reproduction and wider circulation is encouraged. Please acknowledge as "Verbum: *WEA Theological News* July 2005"

Contributions from readers of ideas and articles (750 words) are warmly welcomed.

# The Book Shelf

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*On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition.*  
by Jon R. Stone. 1997; paperback ed., New York: St. Martins Press, 1999. x + 229 pp.  
Paper \$18.95.

A revised and expanded version of a 1990 University of California at Berkeley Ph.D. dissertation, this volume's primary contribution lies in its application of boundary formation theory to understanding the major spokesmen (in this case, the gendered noun is intentional) for North American evangelicalism. Building on the work of anthropologists Fredrik Barth, Mary Douglas and Arthur Cohen, Stone explores the social structural dynamics at work in this select segment of evangelicalism's perennial attempts to clearly demarcate its boundaries vis-à-vis developments in twentieth century modernity. He charts this quest beginning with the fundamentalist reaction to turn-of-the-century liberalism (Chap. 3); continuing through the emergence of the new evangelicalism from the 1940s through 1960s which reacted to the fundamentalist rejection of the modern world on the one hand even while struggling to check the leftward drift toward liberalism—symbolized by the ecumenical movement, social involvement, and neo-orthodox theology—on the other (Chap. 4); and concluding with the fragmentation of the evangelical coalition since the 1960s evidenced by in-house debates over inerrancy in the 70s and the emergence of progressivism within the evangelical movement in the 80s (Chap. 5). (I would also note that evangelicalism's concerns with open theism in the 90s further confirms the author's hypotheses about the movement). Throughout, Stone displays a deft handling of his sources, both primary and secondary, excellent judgment regarding the importance of the various issues, incidents, and persons relative to his argument, and expert sensitivity to the subtleties and nuances of evangelical rhetoric and polemics.

Stone's conclusion that there is no such thing as evangelicalism—since there are, in fact, a variety of evangelicals—should not be surprising to scholars of religion. Yet insofar as studies of evangelicalism conducted by evangelicals have neglected to focus on the ideological factors at work in establishing social, theological, and ecclesial identity, this volume alerts evangelical researchers themselves to the complexity of the movement's quests for boundaries. As important for readers of this journal are the suggestive lines of inquiry for the larger academic study of religion in general and new religious movements (NRMs) in particular. Certainly, the nature of sectarian and alternative religious movements has meant that scholarly work on NRMs inevitably confronts the question of the relationship between NRMs and modernity. Stone's work, however, throws into sharp relief the fact that this relationship is itself embedded in a dynamic social matrix which manifests a continuously shifting spectrum of mediating positions. Thus the ideological web of discourse reveals the unpredictable movement of boundary lines since former enemies can become partners and former friendships can become strained as new cultural situations emerge. Arguably, this boundary approach to particular NRMs along with their histories would both illuminate insider perspectives on their relationships with those outside, and provide further strategies to religious studies scholars for assessing the cultural and religious locations of such groups.

My only suggestion regarding Stone's method would be to enlarge the net to include more explicit attention to how religious practices and symbols function as boundary markers. Throughout the book, for example, the observation is made that evangelicals were clearly conscious of the differing responses to social action available to them between the sectarianism of fundamentalism on their right and the accommodationism of liberalism on the left. Here, discussion of distinctively evangelical social practices and socio-political actions would have highlighted particular efforts to construct and maintain boundaries. Another case in point concerns evangelical ecumenism. Here again, anti-ecumenical rhetoric did not always fall in line with evangelical activities and relationships. So the boundaries were definitely blurred by evangelically motivated ecumenism, yet the particularly ecumenical practices were themselves constitutive of evangelical understandings of such boundaries.

Finally, what about symbolic markers? Stone's book hints in various places about the important place of the Bible in the evangelical consciousness. Other symbolically charged items might include hymnals, stained glass windows, and conceptions of the world. More explicit attention to how such symbols function as boundaries would have enhanced this analysis. And it seems self-evident that the assessment of symbols, practices, and ideology together would advance current research on NRMs as well.

Reviewed by Amos Yong, Bethel College, St. Paul, Minnesota

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