



World Evangelical Alliance
Theological Commission

WEA Theological News

Published Quarterly ISSN 0260-3705

January 2006 Vol 35 No 1

Theological Commission Expands Membership

Applications invited for new membership categories

The WEA Theological Commission has expanded its membership categories and is now inviting those interested in participating in the new scheme to lodge their applications.

The TC consists of a core group of about 15 people known as Commissioners, representing a geographical and confessional cross-section of global evangelicalism. This body acts as the steering and management committee, and meets annually for planning and strategy. This arrangement has been in place for some years, and represents a down-sizing from the much earlier arrangement when the TC was composed of a membership of around fifty people with an executive. After a period of planning, which concluded at the TC's annual meeting last year, three additional categories of participation have been set up. They are Affiliates, Associates and Partners.

Affiliates are Theological Commissions or like bodies affiliated with National and Regional Fellowships of the World Evangelical Alliance (or bodies nominated by such Fellowships to represent them). The other two groups, **Associates** and **Partners**, are drawn from a wider circle and consist of individuals or institutions who are interested in the work of the WEA Theological Commission and who are desirous of supporting its objectives and programs financially, prayerfully and practically. Individuals are known as **Associates**, while institutions such as seminaries, theological associations, churches, denominations, or mission bodies are known as **Partners**.

All three new categories will involve the payment of an annual fee which will entitle participants to receive Commission publications (including *Evangelical Review of Theology* and *Theological News*), news of activities and to be involved in the study units and other programs of the TC. They will also be able to be involved at their own expense in the public meetings and events of TC. Affiliates and Partners will be able to nominate one representative and Associates will be able to participate personally as non-voting members at TC meetings.

In addition, Affiliates will be able to nominate a representative attending designated sessions of the Theological Commission to form (with the officers of the Theological Commission) an Advisory Panel to support and guide the work of the TC.

Dr Rolf Hille, Executive Chair of the TC, said, "We want to broaden the involvement of the evangelical theological community around the world in our work, and we are looking forward to much interest in this new scheme. We believe it will be a great help as we work towards our aim which is 'to promote biblical truth by networking theologians to serve the church in obedience to Christ'. We are grateful for the interest and encouragement we receive from many parts of the world and now this expansion of our membership will be a practical means to enlist people and institutions in our work of theological study, reflection and publication.

Further details and an application form may be obtained from the TC Australian office (email wef-tc@pacific.net.au). It is expected that arrangements for the new scheme will be fine-tuned as experience is gained. Membership fees are currently (2006) set at US \$75, \$150 and \$250 for small, medium and large organizations respectively, on a self-determining basis. Fees can be paid in US dollars or equivalent major currency.



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continuing to serve you

Promoting Biblical Truth by Networking Theologians

Grace and Transformation Theme for Ecumenical Gathering

“God, in your grace, transform the world” is the theme for the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches which will meet in the largest city of southern Brazil, Porto Alegre, 14–23 February 2006. The Assembly is the highest legislative body of the WCC, and meets every seven years. The last Assembly was held in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1998. The formal purpose of the Assembly is to review programmes and determine the overall policies of the WCC, as well as to elect presidents and appoint a Central Committee which serves as the chief governing body of the WCC until the next assembly. Over 700 delegates and their advisors, representing over 340 member churches of the WCC, will carry out their work in a programme that will include prayer, Bible study, thematic plenary sessions, hearings and committee work.

Alongside the committee work and business sessions for the delegates, the Assembly is also a time of sharing for the many thousands of other visitors expected at the event. A highlight of the 9th Assembly will be the ecumenical partnership programme which will include a range of presentations, exhibitions and discussions open to all Assembly participants.

For more information:

<http://www.wcc-assembly.info/en/about-the-assembly.html>



Lausanne 2004 Pattaya Forum Papers Available in Print

The Lausanne organisation has announced that the Lausanne Occasional Papers from the 2004 Forum for World Evangelization have been collected into a three volume compendium called *A New Vision, A New Heart, A Renewed Call*. The compendium is now available ordering from the William Carey Library (shaun.harding@wclbooks.com). The project has been carried out in partnership and with the assistance of the William Carey Library. The regular price is \$89.99 for the three volume set.

In commending the papers, John R. W. Stott, honorary Chair of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, said, “For more than twenty-five years my thinking about world evangelization has been enriched through my involvement with the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. It is a great joy to commend this new publication which contains all of the Lausanne Occasional Papers produced following the Lausanne 2004 Forum in Pattaya, Thailand. I pray that this fresh thinking of a new generation of mission theologians and practitioners will enrich your understanding of the mission challenges that are before us. Furthermore, I pray God will use them to inspire ‘the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.’”

LCWE ENewsletter October 2005
<http://www.lausanne.org/>

New Book Tackles Conversion in India



A new book tackles the problem of conversion in India from a theological perspective. Based on a M Phil dissertation at Andhra University, and published by ISPCK, it is titled *The Phenomenon of Christian Conversion with Particular Reference to its Theology in the Indian Context*. Written by James Chacko, Executive Director of New and Living Way Ministries, it investigates the subject from the Old and New Testament,

and also examines relevant issues pertinent to the Indian context and the continued influence of this issue in the life and theology of the church. Conversion is an emotive word, and is often misunderstood. In the Indian context, it is also often threatening due to deep-rooted historical and socio-political factors in the Indian context. The author claims that “Any open dialogue about conversion is possible only on the basis of the clear understanding of the theology of conversion in its Biblical and contemporary context”.

The small book is noteworthy because of the comprehensive nature of its analysis, which avoids common stereotypes and thereby appeals for a wide-ranging approach to the issue. It is hoped that the research embodied in the book will ignite lively discussion on the issue, develop an attitude to conversion which will promote peace and harmony among followers of various religions and encourage further research in India.

The book may be obtained from New and Living Way PO Box 259 Ashley IN 46705, for a minimum contribution of \$6 including postage, with proceeds being devoted to the equipping of church planters in India.

<http://www.newandlivingway.in>

Missiologist's claim: Millennium Development Goal Not Well-Grounded In the Bible

Professor Peter Beyerhaus, one of the best-known German missiologists, has urged Christians not to replace the proclamation of the Gospel with religious dialogue. “Evangelicals should seek dialogue without neglecting mission”, said Beyerhaus at a meeting of evangelical theologians in Blankenburg, Thuringia, in September, 2005.

It would be detrimental for the church to neglect or disregard the Great Commission, emphasized Beyerhaus. Christians should not bow to the pressure of popular expectations but rather preach an unabridged Biblical message. He criticized liberal theologians who reject the message of Christ’s atoning sacrifice as an affront to modern thinking. “It is inevitable”, said Beyerhaus, “that Christians meet with opposition. Jesus does not promise evangelistic success, but he takes responsibility for the fruit of evangelism”.

According to Beyerhaus the most important task of a missionary is to translate the Gospel message in such a way that it is clearly understood without harming the Biblical content. Missionaries should take care not to embrace unbiblical cultural or ideological concepts. Beyerhaus also sees the danger that the justified involvement in the alleviation of social need leads to a reduction of the Gospel message. As one example Beyerhaus mentioned the Millennium Development Goal of halving extreme poverty by 2015. Some evangelical organizations had turned this into a missionary objective. But this is, according to Beyerhaus, not well grounded in the Bible.

Evangelical news agency - idea.

Leading Theologian and Churchman Gives Prestigious Lectures on Jesus

Dr Peter Jensen, Anglican Archbishop of Sydney and former Principal of Moore Theological College, delivered the prestigious Boyer Lectures on the Australian Broadcasting Commission national radio network late in 2005. The Boyer Lectures have been given by prominent Australians for over forty years, and they provide a platform for the speakers to discuss a wide range of subjects affecting the community. Dr Jensen chose the topic "The Future of Jesus". In his introduction to the Lectures, Dr Jensen said, "The thesis is that Jesus is more important to the Australian values of 'a fair go' and 'mateship' than the stories of the Eureka Stockade and Gallipoli; in forgetting Him, as Australians we risk losing our core values now and in the future." He added: "I want to provoke a national debate with the Jesus of the Gospels," and he hopes to encourage people to read the Bible so that they can understand the importance of Jesus in the modern world.

The opening lecture was titled "Jesus the Prophet at the end of the World" and focused on bringing Jesus into discussion of values and how people need to examine their assumptions about the importance of Jesus. The second lecture, "Jesus, Religious Genius or Failed Prophet" examined the claims of Jesus and evaluations of him over history. Other topics were: "Jesus, was he Miraculous?"; "Jesus or Caesar, The Choice of Martyrs"; "Jesus and the Millennium Will He Never Come Back?" and "Jesus, Freedom and the Choices We Make?"

The Lectures are given over six weeks. Details, transcripts of the lectures with related feature programs, and information about purchasing audio and printed versions of the series are available on the ABC website, www.abc.net.au

Dr Jensen has been Archbishop of Sydney, the largest Anglican Diocese in the country, since 2001 and is Chair of the Anglican General Synod Doctrine Commission. He was principal of Moore Theological College for 16 years. His books include *The Revelation of God (IVP)*, *At the Heart of the Universe (IVP)* and *The Quest For Power*. In June 2005, he presented the inaugural TC Hammond Lectures in Ireland.

Theological Educators Interact in Moscow

Braving early winter snows, a hundred theological educators from forty institutions met in Moscow 24-27 October 2005 to interact on the theme: "The Role of Theological Education in the Life of Church and Society". This was the seventh bi-annual assembly of ICETE's newest member body, the Euro-Asian Accrediting Association (E-AAA), which links theological schools throughout lands of the former Soviet Union. The events allow participants to exchange opinions, discuss new trends in education, establish professional contacts and renew acquaintances. This time the occasion included vigorous interaction on the process of harmonizing E-AAA accreditation with the European-wide Bologna Process. Also E-AAAs President, Ivanus Shkulis from Lithuania, and E-AAAs Executive Director, Sergei Sannikov from Ukraine, gave organisational reports to the conference. The Assembly was generously hosted by the Eurasian Theological Seminary in Moscow.

More information is available at the E-AAA website: www.e-aaa.org

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New Faculty for Redcliffe College

Mission training centre, Redcliffe College, Gloucester has announced two new appointments to its academic faculty. Dr Kang-San Tan, from Malaysia, will become Head of Mission Studies in September 2006. Dr Tan has worked with OMF International for the last fifteen years, initially as Home Director in Malaysia, and more recently as Director of Mission Research. His main research interests are in the areas of Asian Theology and Religions (Islam and Buddhism). He is also a well-known speaker and writer on the international mission scene, along with his wife, Loun Ling who graduated from Regent College, Canada. She is also an experienced pastor and teacher and there will be opportunities for her to use her skills within the life of Redcliffe.

Commenting on his appointment to Redcliffe, Dr Tan said, "I am delighted to be joining the College's dynamic community. Redcliffe's willingness to appoint a non-Western colleague as Head of Mission Studies speaks of the College's bold efforts in charting new directions in mission training".

In a further appointment, Rob Hay of Generating Change has become Director of Research and Partnership Development. He will be integrating his existing research projects including the WEA ReMAP and Your Story studies into a new department which will resource and facilitate all Redcliffe related research. He will also be developing further teaching provision on leadership, good practice in mission and related areas.

Redcliffe College's Principal, Rev Dr Simon Steer said that this double appointment represents a further strengthening of Redcliffe's team and signals the College's commitment to prepare people effectively for God's mission in the world.

Press release from Mission training centre, Redcliffe College UK. www.redcliffe.org

Wesleyan Theological Society to Discuss Friendship and Hospitality

The 41st annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society will take place in Kansas City, Missouri, March 2-4, 2006, with the theme, "Friendship and Hospitality: Wesleyan Perspectives." In a call for papers (visit http://wesley.nnu.edu/wts/annual_meetings.htm) organisers explained, "Our gathering in this august body as Christians in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition is as much a 'friendship convocation' as it is for the benefit of theological, philosophical, psychological discussions and the interaction of Wesleyan/Holiness communion globally. The mystique 'friendship' is a profound and multifaceted aspect of life. And also is the grace of 'hospitality'. The givenness of friendship and hospitality is in the interaction between God and humans, between humans themselves, whether individuals or groups, and between humans and the creation of God in nature. This interaction is ongoing. From antiquity the concept of friendship and hospitality has been dynamic, profound and highly esteemed in both religious and secular thought. Our reflections should provide insight and wisdom in the relationship God envisions to have with us and our relationships with each other."

The last conference of WTS was held in Seattle, Washington, March 3-5, 2005 and focused on the theme of the Church. The Korean chapter of the society held a conference in May 2005 on "Wesley, Holiness and Culture: Trans-Pacific Perspectives for the 21st Century."

Verbum

Islam and the birth of Christ

Dr Anthony McRoy, Evangelical Theological College of Wales, UK



Many Evangelical Christians are surprised to discover that Islam believes in Jesus as the Virgin-born Messiah and Prophet. Indeed, it is interesting we have many professing Christian leaders who deny the supernatural birth of Jesus, but all orthodox and believing Muslims hold to it firmly. The starting point for any theological dialogue between Evangelicals and Muslims could be this common ground. However, there are important differences that must be recognised.

The chapters of the Qur'an are termed 'Surahs' (meaning 'fences'). Surah An-Anbiyaa 21:91 states: "And (remember) her who guarded her chastity: We breathed into her of Our Spirit and We made her and her son a Sign for all peoples". Similarly in Surah Al-i-Imran 3:45ff we encounter terms that resemble the Lukan Annunciation narrative: 45 (And remember) when the angels said: O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son

of Mary"47 She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal hath touched me? He said: Allah createth what He will... He saith unto it only: Be! and it is. Similar expressions are made in Surah Maryam 19:20.

Although there is this common ground, notice that Islam attaches no theological significance to the Virgin birth; Surah 3:59 states: "Lo! the likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! and he is. Muslims often state that Adam's creation was a greater miracle, since he had no parents at all! Moreover, there does not seem to be any compelling reason for the virgin birth in the Qur'an, since Islam denies original sin; the miracle is merely an arbitrary act of God's will, an expression of His power. However, one interesting point in the Hadith, the narrations of Muhammad (the second source of authority for Muslims), indicates the uniqueness of Christ's birth: Narrated by Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "When any human being is born, Satan touches him at both sides of the body with his two fingers, except Jesus, the son of Mary, whom Satan tried to touch but failed, for he touched the placenta-cover instead. (Sahih Al-Bukhari Hadith 4.506)

The meaning of 'spirit' in Surah 21:91 is uncertain. It can mean God Himself, although the title 'Holy Spirit' usually refers to the Angel Gabriel. The birth of Jesus is accompanied by Mary's retirement to a remote place under a palm-tree (Surah Maryam 19:23) not a journey to Bethlehem. The figure of Joseph does not occur. Many Muslims attempt to quote the medieval forgery the Gospel of Barnabas to persuade Christians that it is the true Gospel. One of its many failings is that it reproduces contemporary Catholic superstition about Mary that she experienced no pains in child-birth: "The virgin ...brought forth her son without pain... In contrast, Surah Maryam asserts that Mary did experience pain: "And the pangs of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of the palm tree. The canonical gospels are silent on the issue, but we may presume that the actual delivery was normal.

The Biblical infancy narratives are not reproduced in the Qur'an; instead we have the *wunderkind* of apocryphal gospels, with Jesus speaking in the cradle (Surah Maryam 19:19ff; cf the apocryphal Gospel of the Infancy) 1. ... Jesus spoke... lying in His cradle I am Jesus, the Son of God..." Surah Maida 5:110 presents Jesus performing the miracle of animating clay birds: ...thou makest out of clay as it were the figure of a bird ...and thou breathest into it and it becometh a bird... Again in Infancy 36. we read that the seven year-old Jesus: made figures of birds and sparrows, which flew when He told them to fly... Similar ideas are found in the Gospel of Thomas the Israelite.

It follows that Evangelicals must comprehend that when Muslims agree that Jesus was virgin-born and worked miracles, their understanding differs markedly from the Christian position. We Christians must relate the miracles to Christ's public ministry following the baptism, and explain the significance of the Virgin birth for Christians in terms of fulfilment of prophecy (Isaiah 7:14) and relation to the doctrine of Original Sin.

Further reading:

Peter Riddell & Peter Cotterell, *Islam in Conflict: Past, Present and Future* (IVP, 2003)

Samuel Zwemer, *The Muslim Christ* (Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1912)

Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (Macmillan, 1991)

Verbum: Welcome to Verbum—a page of thoughtful comment and insight giving perspectives and overviews of topical issues. It appears in both our print and on-line editions. Reproduction and wider circulation is encouraged. Please acknowledge as "Verbum: WEA Theological News January 2006"

Contributions from readers of ideas and articles (700 words) are warmly welcomed.

WEA Theological News
Published by WEA Theological Commission
Executive Chair: Dr. Rolf Hille

Editor: Dr. David Parker

Personal Subscription - Voluntary donation US\$15 for 2 years—cheques payable Theological Commission
Libraries/Institutions using a Commercial Subscription Service—US\$15 per annum

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On-line version published approx. monthly with overlapping content.
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