

# WEA Theological News



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## Theological Commission to Meet in Africa for First Time

### Featuring expanded membership and theological consultation

The annual planning and strategy meeting of the WEA Theological Commission for 2006 will be held in Kenya at the campus of Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School, Sept 20-24. This will be first time the TC has met in this way on African soil, even though some of its early founders and on-going leaders were from this continent. The event will feature a mini-consultation and opportunities for networking, fellowship and ministry with theologians, churches, missions and other bodies in the area. The consultation theme will be 'Theological Perspectives on Global Religious Fundamentalism'. 'Poverty and Social Responsibility' will also be on the agenda during the event.

It will be the first opportunity for those interested in the newly expanded membership of the TC to participate. The new scheme, which was announced at the beginning of the year, allows for three new categories—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 interested in the work of the WEA Theological Commission and 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.

The TC has planned these new categories to allow for a much wider range of involvement in its work. A spokesman for the TC said that it was particularly keen to contact national theological commissions wherever they exist so that a closer bond could be established for the sharing of resources and networking of personnel. The TC is also committed to encouraging the formation of national and regional TCs in areas where they do not yet exist. National evangelical associations are specially invited to contact the TC so they can be part of the 2006 meeting.

The September event will provide an ideal opportunity to launch the new scheme and develop the TC global programme. The TC is particularly interested in making effective contact with evangelical theologians in the strategic area of Africa.

Further details will be announced as they are finalised. Details of the meeting, information about membership (and application forms) may be obtained from the TC Australian office (email: [wef-tc@pacific.net.au](mailto:wef-tc@pacific.net.au))

## Asian Baptist Theologians Meet

From January 5-7, 2006 about 60 Asian Baptist theologians met in Bangkok, Thailand for a symposium on Christian Higher Education, with the theme, "The Church in Asian Society." The conference was sponsored by the Asian Baptist Federation and the Asian Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary (ABGTS). Dr. Lilian Lim is ABGTS President and Dr. Stephen Tam, Professor at the Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary is Administrative Dean.

The ABGTS was originally formed as a consortium of Baptist seminaries founded largely by the Southern Baptist International Mission Board. However, with the paradigm shift in missiological strategy, the ABGTS became independent and now is open to all Baptist seminaries in Asia. Professors and leaders came from eight countries.

The ABGTS is making a significant contribution to the theological education in Asia. ABGTS now has more than 250 students engaged in post graduate studies. At present it has its own accrediting system. Its doctoral degree is equivalent to those offered in North America. With changing times in Asia and the Pacific Rim becoming the world's economic powerhouse, Asian Baptist seminaries will need to effectively train young men and women in the ministry which is the purpose of ABGTS.

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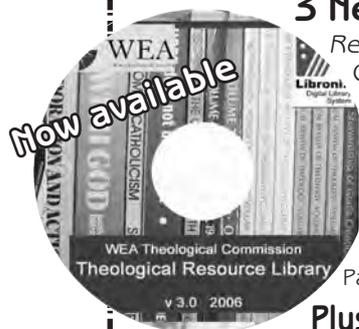
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Promoting Biblical Truth by Networking Theologians

# 'Transforming the World'

## Report on the World Council of Churches 9th Assembly Porto Alegre, Brazil

*by Rev Dr David Hilborn, Head of Theology, Evangelical Alliance UK  
Member, WEA Theological Commission*

The Assembly of the World Council of Churches took place from 14th–23rd February in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Although the World Evangelical Alliance is not a member of WCC, it was invited to send observers. WEA International Director Geoff Tunnicliffe and I duly attended, and gained valuable insights into the current state of the ecumenical movement.

The theme of the Assembly was 'God, in Your Grace, Transform the World'. Introducing this theme at the opening Plenary, WCC Moderator, Catholicos Aram I, stressed that it had been deliberately couched in the form of a prayer. The WCC Assembly, he said, was 'essentially a spiritual event', and the programme certainly featured a good deal of worship, praise and reflection. Participants gathered every morning in a large tent for common prayer, which drew on a wide range of styles and traditions; there were daily Bible studies based on the theme, and evening services were led by various confessional groups represented at the Assembly.

In addition to the normal plenaries and business sessions, the Assembly also featured a 'Mutirão' or 'meeting place' comprising ecumenical conversations, workshops, exhibits, drama and dance, and, of particular interest for me, a 'Theological Café', at which authors discussed their books in an informal setting. As the main business of the Assembly got under way, the new WCC General Secretary, Rev Dr Samuel Kobia, a Methodist from Kenya, highlighted the need for WCC to reach out to churches, organisations and networks that were not part of its structures.

The period leading up to the Assembly had seen a number of contentious issues rise to the surface. The Orthodox communities had expressed concern at a perceived intensification of the Council's familiar social justice agenda at the expense of 'faith and order' matters, and a special consultation with them had been organised in 2002. From an Evangelical perspective, this consultation secured significant assurances, not least on the Trinitarian and Christocentric bases on which the WCC officially operates.

Despite this, it was clear that tensions remain over the Council's approach to mission and other faiths. The Programme Book of the conference indicated clear disagreement on so-called 'wider ecumenism'—that is, the extension of non-convertive fellowship to other religions in preference to evangelism. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, gave a thoughtful and carefully balanced presentation on this question, but responses to what he said ranged from clear reaffirmations of the uniqueness of Christ and the centrality of his cross, to starkly pluralistic and even syncretistic soteriological statements. In a later session on Christian unity, Archbishop Desmond Tutu spoke movingly of the world Church's role in the defeat of apartheid, but disconcerted more evangelical participants with a reading of John 12:32 which suggested not only that all are loved by God, but that all would be saved (cf. John 3:14–15!).

The Porto Alegre Assembly marked the mid-point of the ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence, and many proposals and resolutions related to this concern. In a passionate speech, Olara Otunnu highlighted the appalling genocide presently taking place in northern Uganda, and called for more urgent action to halt it. Otunnu is a former UN under-secretary and current president of the LBL Foundation for Children, but he is also an Evangelical whose father was a leader in the East African Revival. While this issue proved uncontroversial from an evangelical point of view, a later presentation on the Middle East regrettably confirmed widespread Evangelical suspicions of WCC's political and theological bias. All the images of violence presented here were of Israelis harassing Palestinians; but we saw nothing of the carnage caused by Islamist suicide bombings. Similarly, although Rowan Williams had bravely broached the subject in his speech, the issue of the persecuted Church barely registered here.

While such partiality proved problematic and will need to be addressed if the World Council is ever significantly to broaden its Evangelical constituency, Geoff Tunnicliffe graciously chose to focus on common ground between WCC and WEA in a special press conference for Evangelicals and Pentecostals held on the Monday of the Assembly. In a prepared statement, he stressed WEA's commitment to integral mission, particularly as demonstrated by its sponsorship of the Micah Challenge programme to support delivery of the UN's Millennium Development Goals. 'If we ignore the world, we betray the Word', he said, 'But if we ignore the Word, we betray the world'. He endorsed the call for urgent action on Uganda, and underlined WEA's common commitment with WCC to the relief of HIV and AIDS.

Also on the panel at the press conference were Dr Michael Ntuny, chairman of the Church of Pentecost, Ghana, and Rev. Norberto Saracco, Director of the International Faculty of Theological Studies in Argentina and Pastor of Good News Church in Buenas Nuevas. Saracco is also International Deputy Director of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. Questions ranged widely, but Geoff Tunnicliffe fielded queries on what holds WEA back from fuller participation in WCC, on the perceived US domination of world Evangelicalism, and on the similarities and differences between Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism.

In response, he pointed out that only 10% of Evangelicals are from the United States, and that even these are not monolithic in their politics or theology. The centre of gravity for Evangelicalism, as for the Church in general, is shifting to the global South, he added. That shift is due substantially to the growth of indigenous Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, and less to the importation of American models of church and mission, influential and valued though these have been in some situations.

On the differences which persist with WCC, Tunnicliffe pointed to historic divergence on the authority of Scripture and the evangelistic imperative, and questioned the move in some strands of WCC towards an ecumenism of other faiths. However, he reiterated that despite these long-standing differences, WEA would seek to engage as constructively as



*Geoff Tunnicliffe (WEA), Dr Huibert Van Beek (WCC), Dr David Hilborn (TC)*

possible with WCC in future. As it does so, however, he suggested that it would not be helpful simply to compound Evangelicalism with Pentecostalism, even though most Pentecostals are Evangelical and many are members of WEA. Pentecostalism is a more obviously ecclesial tradition and so fits well into the existing structures of WEA, he said. Evangelicalism, by comparison, is a non-ecclesial, transdenominational movement which should be seen as parallel to WCC as a whole, rather than as a confessional sub-division of it.

This discussion of the similarities and differences between Evangelicals and Pentecostals also featured prominently in a joint meeting for the two groups, which was convened by Geoff Tunnicliffe and attended, among others, by Huibert van Beek of WCC's Geneva staff. Dr Van Beek acknowledged that since most Evangelicals relate to WCC as representatives of their respective denominations rather than as Evangelicals per se, it could be hard to discern a distinctively Evangelical voice. More work would need to be done on this in future.



*Dr J Norberto Saracco  
(LCWE)*

An honourable exception to this problem of Evangelical profile and voice was provided by Norberto Saracco. As well as speaking at the Evangelical-Pentecostal press conference, Saracco also addressed the plenary on Church Unity, where he powerfully advocated a 'new ecumenism for a post-denominational era'. The ecumenism of 'reports and papers' represented by the WCC had had value, he said, but it has now played itself out. Instead, the world Church needs to develop a more organic, grass roots ecumenism which recognises the need to proclaim the whole gospel to the whole world.

No doubt Evangelicals will continue to struggle with the prevailing ethos of the WCC, but it must be said that Geoff Tunnicliffe and I were warmly welcomed in the various meetings we had with key World Council figures in Porto Alegre. In the programme, and also behind the scenes of the Assembly, real efforts seemed to have been made to take our concerns on board. This was particularly true of the warm reception we received at a meeting for leaders of 'world communions'. It remains to be seen whether this effort will be consolidated, but we can surely pray that as God in his grace transforms the world, he will also transform the WCC so that it better reflects the shape and theology of an increasingly Evangelical world church community.

## **The Revival of Alexandria School of Theology**

*by the Right Reverend Dr Mouneer Anis  
Bishop of Episcopal/Anglican Diocese of Egypt*

Five years ago, Egypt started to rebuild Alexandria library which was burnt down in the 7th Century. This library was one of the wonders of the ancient world. The international community helped Egypt in this very important project. The library now stands as a magnificent building facing the Mediterranean Sea. This project was a great inspiration to the Episcopal Diocese of Egypt to revive the Alexandria School of Theology (AST) once again. The original Alexandria School of Theology was the first to be founded in the world in the 1st Century.

Our aim behind starting AST is to equip ministers and leaders for ministry. We adopt a very non-traditional way of teaching. It involves academic lectures and seminars over the weekends and practical placements of the students during the weekdays. These placements are in churches, hospitals, schools, prisons and community development centres. We want our students to be open-minded and have a better understanding of people from other faiths and denominations. Muslim Imams are invited to teach about Islamic faith and to respond to questions from the students. Bishops from the Orthodox and Catholic Church also lecture about their own traditions. This helps students to have respect for others and to understand better how they can dialogue with them.

The Episcopal Diocese of Egypt covers North Africa and the Horn of Africa. One of the objectives of the Diocese is to build bridges between different Christian denominations and other faiths. We also are keen to have a holistic approach towards ministry. This is why we have community development centres, schools, hospitals, clinics and other services. We hope that the AST will equip leaders who are capable of running such ministries.

In the future, we hope to provide short courses for overseas students in the area of Islamic studies, church history and Old Testament studies. Living in Egypt for the duration of these courses will help overseas students to understand the context of their subject matter better. We would appreciate your prayers and support for our new school of theology.

Level 6: Newsletter of Australian College of Theology  
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## **Evangelicals Will Not Take Stand on Global Warming**

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) has been unable to reach a consensus on global climate change and will not take a stand on the issue, the Washington Post reports. The decision disappointed environmentalists who had hoped that evangelical Christians would prod the Bush administration to soften its position on global warming. Over the past four years a growing number of evangelical groups have embraced environmental causes.

In October 2004 the leadership of the NAE, which is the nation's largest evangelical organization, declared that mankind has "a sacred responsibility to steward the Earth and not a license to abuse the creation of which we are a part." Rev. Ted Haggard, NAE president, called the environment "a values issue." But there has been some internal resistance; in a letter to Haggard last month, more than 20 evangelical leaders including Charles Colson, James Dobson, the Rev. D. James Kennedy, and the Rev Richard Land urged the NAE not to adopt "any official position" on global climate change, citing a 'lack of consensus among the evangelical community on this issue'.

Calvin DeWitt, a professor of environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin who is a leading evangelical supporter of environmental causes, called the statement "a retreat and a defeat."

Religion Today Summaries Friday, February 3, 2006

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# Verbum

## Speaking the Truth in Love:

### Evangelical Perspectives on Dialogue with Roman Catholicism

**Dr Tereso C. Casiño, Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology, Seoul, Korea drterry63@yahoo.com**

The Vatican Council II apparently opened opportunities for Evangelicals to engage in dialogue with Roman Catholicism. From 1993 to 2002, five significant international meetings were held between representatives of the World Evangelical Alliance and Roman Catholics. Contacts began in the 1970s, and the dialogues proved to be intentional and fruitful although definitely calculated. However, Evangelicals worldwide take different approaches to engagement with Roman Catholicism. Evangelicals living in Roman Catholic-dominated countries, e.g., South America, the Philippines, or parts of Europe, tend to take a rejectionist perspective, which makes dialogue next to impossible. They view Roman Catholicism solely through a theological grid, setting aside other bases of conversation like issues of peace, ethics, culture. To them, Roman Catholicism shares no common theological or missiological points with Evangelicals, which fortifies walls that divided Evangelicals and Roman Catholics for centuries. Other Evangelicals embrace a strictly conversionist perspective, which views Roman Catholicism as prime targets of evangelization. To them adherents of Roman Catholicism are nominal Christians, so they need to have a born again experience. Any attempt to dialogue with Roman Catholicism is considered counter-productive to the evangelistic mandate. Conversionists tend to dismiss any vestige of biblical truth within Roman Catholicism.



The post-Vatican II era witnessed a number of prominent evangelicals taking an accommodationist perspective. In North America, for instance, a group of leading Evangelicals co-sponsored and signed with the Roman Catholics a 25-page document, 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together' (ECT, 1992–1994). These leaders may have adapted to some of the theological stances of Roman Catholicism, but they refused to compromise their cardinal evangelical distinctives. In fact, evangelical participants in ECT managed to communicate their commitment to the nature of the church (three statements); sola scriptura; soul freedom of the individual believer; the priesthood of all believers; the essence of sacraments and ordinances; the nature of the Lord's Supper; objection to the devotion to Mary and the saints; and the biblical meaning of water baptism. Accommodationists seek to understand the complexities of Roman Catholicism, and, in the process attempt to communicate their own theological system. In this case, dialogue becomes a strategic tool to foster better relations and to increase mutual understanding. Some accommodationists, however, concede that Roman Catholics can be equal partners—not objects—of world evangelism.

Going further, some Evangelicals tend to adopt an integrationist perspective. This is notable among members of the academic community, but appears difficult to grassroots parishioners. Integrationists know what specific points to accommodate, reject, or integrate into their system. They stress the good points of Roman Catholicism and discard those that do not contribute to a wholesome evangelical lifestyle. Integrationists often embrace Roman Catholic stances on abortion, stem cell research, peace and conflict initiatives, community development, or even evolution. However, they politely refuse to surrender their biblical-historic formulation of justification by faith alone. Integrationists assess both convergences and differences, subject them to the scrutiny of the Scriptures, and delineate them for a more coherent theological system. For instance, evangelical students in the Philippines or South America study at Roman Catholic universities or seminaries, learn under influential Roman Catholic scholars, and interact with influential lay leaders (their classmates!); yet, they remain committed to evangelicalism in everyday life.

The document, 'Church, Evangelization, and the Bonds of *Koinonia*' (published in 2004), attests that Evangelicals and Roman Catholics could listen constructively to each other. Evidently, success of a dialogue depends largely on the new Pope, Benedict XVI, who, as Cardinal Ratzinger, is not a stranger to inter-religious matters. It also depends on the commitment of Evangelical leaders and scholars worldwide as well as the laity who live together with Roman Catholics in the same secular society. For future dialogues to have significant impact, conversation at continental, regional, and even national levels is necessary. A mere dialogue does not provide easy answers to centuries-old theological issues. Nevertheless, the question remains whether or not dialogue—a courageous attempt to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15)—can achieve the kind of unity that both Evangelicals and Roman Catholics have longed for in terms of doctrine, fellowship, and Christian witness.

Further Reading:

Noll, Mark and Carolyn Nystrom. *Is the Reformation Over?* (Baker, 2005)

De Chirico, Leonardo. *Evangelical Theological Perspectives on Post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism.* (Peter Lang, 2004)

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

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