

# WEA Theological News



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## Theological Commission Focus on Africa in 2006

The WEA Theological Commission's planning for its 2006 annual meeting at Nairobi, Kenya, continues to develop. The program will include a mini-consultation on the topic, 'Theological Reflection on Religious Fundamentalism as a Global Issue' for which ideas and contributions are welcome. There will also be networking sessions with local theologians and church leaders on matters of local interest, as well as the TC's planning and strategy meeting.

The event will be held Sept 19-24 at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology. Participants will include TC Commissioners drawn from around the world and for the first time, those who are participating in the new expanded membership scheme announced in January 2006. They include Affiliates (TCs affiliated with national Evangelical Fellowships/Alliances), Affiliates (seminaries and other institutions) and Associates (personal membership). Applications are continuously open for these categories and enquiries are welcomed. Local theologians are also invited to participate.

Another part of the program will be a workshop on 'Poverty and HIV/AIDS'. A small group of local church leaders and theological educators will participate in the workshop to be held at the start of the TC session and in parallel with part of it. It will attempt to understand the complex socio-economic processes at work in African societies, together with a conceptualization of poverty and development.. The TC will contribute to this process with biblical theological thinking and spell out some practical guidelines for action.

Organizer, Vice-Chair of the TC, Dr Ken Gnanakan, who is in conversation with World Vision to jointly conduct the workshop, said, 'It is recognized that one of the major issues facing people in Africa is HIV/AIDS. UNAIDS estimates in Sub-Saharan Africa for 2005 were 5.8 million (out of 40 million worldwide) living with HIV, 3.2 million (out of 4.9 million worldwide) new HIV infections, 2.4 million (out of 3.1 million worldwide) AIDS deaths.' Dr Ken Gnanakan said, 'It is critical for the church to explore the relationship between poverty and HIV/AIDS, through an understanding of the processes by which the experience of HIV and AIDS in households and communities leads to an intensification of poverty. Findings from the workshop will be of great value to the Christian community.'

TC member, Dr David Hilborn, who is Head of Theology for the Evangelical Alliance in the UK, has announced that he has been appointed Director of Studies on the North Thames Ministerial Training Course. He will be leaving EA UK in August after nine years in the post to commence his new full time appointment. Dr Hilborn directs the TC's Rapid Response Unit which provides advice on topical theological issues to the World Evangelical Alliance International Director.

## Lanka Bible College Graduation

More than two thousand people watched as 213 graduates received their diplomas and degrees at the Lanka Bible College (LBC) graduation ceremony held 15 November 2005 at the BMI Conference Hall, Colombo. The graduates included school teachers who received the Bachelor of Education degree (B.Ed), and those who received their Master of Divinity degree (M.Div). LBC offers university validated degrees in leadership development and education at Bachelors and Masters level. It has a faculty of 25 and over 400 students are enrolled through its main campus in Peradeniya, Kandy, and more than 200 through its Colombo-based Centre for Graduate Studies (CGS) which provides continuous training for urban churches in Sri Lanka. Courses included MDiv level modules for pastors, often featuring overseas visiting professors, and also practical courses for city church workers. An MTh program is also planned.



LBC offers a vital ministry for evangelical Christians in Sri Lanka. It was a host for a global day of prayer held on June 3. The main event took place in Colombo at an open air theatre, while a similar event occurred on the LBC campus for leaders of the central province. Other sessions were held in regional centres as well.

The college is also conducting a two day training programme on 'Multiplying House Churches' for up to fifty church planters across the nation. Given the present anti-Christian sentiment in the country, and the frequent and increasing destruction of churches, it is felt that multiplying house churches will be a key for the future. LBC has reported considerable disruption to its students due to the unsettling events in the country. Several graduates and families have been displaced due to violence in the north and east; many are living in camps until normal conditions return. The LBC prayer bulletin requests prayer for the college, its staff, students and graduates and the churches and people of the country (contact Lanka Bible College, P O Box 2, Christopher Road, Peradeniya, SRI LANKA lbc@slt.lk).

**Promoting Biblical Truth by Networking Theologians**

## New Position for Former TC Executive Director



Dr. James Stamoolis, Executive Director of the WEA Theological Commission 1998–2001, was installed as the Academic Dean of Trinity College and Trinity Graduate School on March 27, 2006. Students, faculty, and staff of Trinity International University were in attendance, as Dr. John Woodbridge, addressed Dr. Stamoolis with words of encouragement and advice. Trinity President Dr. Gregory Waybright presented Dr. Stamoolis with a

formal charge to love God and love the students and faculty of Trinity College and Graduate School.

Dr. Stamoolis earned his Master of Divinity and Master of Theology degrees from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, graduating with honors. He completed his Doctor of Theology with an emphasis in Missiology at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa.

Dr. Stamoolis has served in such positions as president of the American Society of Missiology and Graduate Dean of Wheaton College Graduate School. An ordained minister in the Baptist General Conference, Dr. Stamoolis served on the WEA TC for several years before becoming its fourth Executive Secretary.

## Death of Overseas Council (OC) Founder

Charles W. Spicer, Jr., 75, cofounder of Overseas Council International, Indianapolis, Indiana, died on December 13, 2005. Beginning in 1967, Spicer first served with OMS International for 19 years. In 1974, he and several business leaders organized Overseas Council, which he served as founding president, resigning from OMS in 1986 to work full time with OCI. Under Spicer's leadership, OCI raised funds to underwrite thousands of student scholarships and 71 major building projects. Retiring from OCI in 2004, he then founded Facilitators International, which focuses on training men and women from evangelical churches in the developing world who want to be missionaries. In his service as a ministry leader, he visited some 195 countries and travelled millions of miles in behalf of the Great Commission. Charles Spicer was a frequent participant in WEA Theological Commission activities in his role with Overseas Council where he made valuable contributions to its work.

*International Bulletin of Missionary Research, 30:2 April 2006, p 85*

## Africans Need African Theology

Christians in Africa need to develop their own theology, according to Joe Kapolyo, a theologian from Zambia. Instead, he believes, many of his African colleagues simply copy Western theology, which is influenced by rationalism, and fails to address specific African needs. Kapolyo gave the keynote address at the annual meeting of the German Association of Evangelical Missions (AEM) in Rehe near Frankfurt, February 28–March 2, 2006.

According to Kapolyo, a truly African theology must deal with subjects like poverty, tribalism, corruption, sexuality, and spiritism. Confrontation with the spirit world is a central element in African thinking. Western theology, on the other hand, regards demons as superstitious trash, said Kapolyo, although Jesus Christ himself drove out demons.

Despite its fast growth in Africa Christianity has not succeeded in penetrating African culture, said Kapolyo. In many instances Africans have only been touched superficially. They often mix the Christian faith with paganism: They are good Christians during the day and consult the witchdoctor at night. This can lead to grotesque situations. There are thieves in Nigeria, said Kapolyo, who pray for God's help in robberies and burglaries. They also 'tithe' from their loot, and pastors buy cars with the stolen money, said Kapolyo.

During the last five years Kapolyo has been rector of All Nations Christian College in London, England. Later in the year he will become pastor of an international church in the British capital.

## Death of Former TC Executive Secretary



Dr. Sunand Sumithra, a former secretary of the Theological Commission, passed away in his home in Bangalore, India on 12 May, 2006. Dr. Sumithra assisted Dr. BJ Nicholls as Executive Secretary of the WEA Theological Commission, in 1985 and then succeeded him in 1986, serving until 1989. He was 67 years old and had been weakened by several strokes over the past ten years. Sunand leaves behind his wife Beulah and four daughters.

Dr. Sumithra, a former engineer with a D.Theol. from the University of Tuebingen, Germany, had previously taught at Union Biblical Seminary, and was a minister of the Methodist Church in India. After his service with the TC, Dr. Sumithra worked with the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS) in Bangalore, and later engaged in significant research and writing ministries. He was a respected theologian and a sharp thinker within the evangelical movement in India. He wrote *Holy Father*, a text book on Systematic Theology, and edited *Doing Theology in Context: a Festschrift in honour of Dr Bruce J. Nicholls*, (both published by Theological Book Trust, Bangalore).

## WEA Missions Commission Consultation in South Africa

The WEA Missions Commission, which has not held a major event in Africa during the last two decades, held a global consultation June 18–24, 2006 at Rawsonville, South Africa. This was one of its three-yearly gatherings for its members and special invitees.

An MC news release said, 'It is our purpose to contribute directly to the development of the African mission movement in very specific ways. One of the singular agenda items of this event will celebrate the transition of MC leadership from Dr William Taylor to his successor, Bertil Ekstrom.'

The conference, with the theme 'Celebrating the Global Church', featured plenary sessions focusing on ministry in the context of HIV/AIDS, a final report on the ReMAP II research project, the theology of holistic mission, reports on China, Latin America and the vision and challenge of African missionary initiatives in cross-cultural mission.

Evangelical news agency idea. [www.idea.de](http://www.idea.de) 7 March 2006

# Evangelical Theology Working Group in Ireland

By Dr Patrick Mitchel, Chairman, Theology Working Group Evangelical Alliance Ireland

An Evangelical Alliance had never been established in Ireland (the Republic that is) until as recently as May 2004 when Evangelical Alliance Ireland (EAI) was launched, amid much celebration and thanksgiving by the 800 people present, to be a movement to engage Irish society with the good news of the Gospel. The formation of EAI may well be a seminal moment in the long history of evangelicalism in Ireland. It is a small, but encouraging sign (one of many), not only of growing numbers of a previously unnoticed and marginal minority, but of the increasing awareness within the Irish evangelical community of the need to work together to impact their nation for Christ.

EAI has several different 'strands' of which 'Theology' is one. In 2003, prior to the launch, EAI formed a Theology Working Group (TWG), composed of theologically informed men and women drawn from various streams within Irish evangelicalism. The brief of the group was to revolve around three main areas.

The first, essential matters, focused on the aim to speak or write on those matters on which evangelicals are agreed and which define both the centre and boundaries of the evangelical movement as it is represented in EAI. As part of this brief, the TWG was given the task of forming a Basis of Faith for the new Alliance, which would summarise essential beliefs that are shared by all evangelicals. We decided that it would be a positive affirmation and celebration of the Christian faith rather than a negative statement of what we do not believe. As the Basis of Faith of an Alliance that contains a wide variety of people, we wanted to focus on what is central, that which unites and defines what it means to be an evangelical Christian.

Taking the EA UK's 1970 Basis of Faith (which has since been revised) as a starting point the group met regularly over the next few months. Churchmanship included Baptist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, charismatic, Methodist, Anglican and independent many of whom did not know each other that well beforehand. As chairman, it was truly a joy to see how the group developed over the year. The group's meetings were marked by a high commitment to Scripture, a common sense of purpose and a gracious willingness to listen to one another. Meetings were marked by plenty of vigorous debate but always in an atmosphere of respect, humour and cooperation. The experience reminded me of two things. First, that as the Spirit unites believers together, the body works at a greatly increased capacity. Second, within evangelicalism, denominational differences are of little significance compared to a shared faith in Christ. In him we are bound together in a common faith and with a common purpose.

With the Basis of Faith agreed and adopted by EAI, the Group decided it would be helpful to produce a companion booklet. We were very aware that no statement can capture adequately all of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Each sentence within the Basis is brimful with content that needed some unpacking. So we wrote and published a booklet to set out clearly the beliefs that evangelicals consider as crucial to the Christian faith and which provide the foundation for them to work together in the service of God; to note and explain issues of belief and practice on which evangelicals differ and so promote better understanding; to inform readers unfamiliar with the world of evangelical Christianity what it is we believe and why. It was published in 2005 as *Together We Believe: A Common Faith, A Common Purpose*. (see [www.evangelical.ie](http://www.evangelical.ie)).

The Group's brief also extends to two other areas—disputed matters, working for understanding on and writing about those matters on which evangelicals disagree and which occasionally threaten unity, and also public issues. Working in co-ordination with other EAI committees (such as Media, Politics and Voice) the TWG seeks to develop theological reflection on and active response to national and social issues and the complexities of contemporary life which call for a united evangelical engagement and voice.

Our primary objective is to produce written resources for the media and voice groups in their public roles. Initial work has begun on producing briefing papers on a variety of issues. It is planned that some of these papers will also be extended and published as articles or a more in-depth theological treatments of issues of contemporary relevance to the Irish evangelical community.

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## WEA Women's Commission focus on AIDS

The World Evangelical Alliance Women's Commission Global Council met in Nairobi, Kenya on 1st-5th May 2006, and determined to focus its global efforts for the next two years on creating effective methods towards reduction and ultimate elimination of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The Commission is concerned about the problems caused by this pandemic including major health issues, fragmented families, children at risk, poverty, unprecedented suffering and loss of life. The Women's Commission will develop a biblical and theological response to this situation, which will address such issues as human dignity and worth, family life, male and female relationships, and sexual behaviour. The project will include a position paper for understanding and implementation of the findings through the WEA Constituency.

As part of the process it is anticipated that Leadership Awareness and Training Programmes will be established to assist all areas of leadership within the church including pastors and youth pastors. It is further anticipated that DVDs, CDs and videos will be produced to encourage use by churches and the media. A spokesperson for the Commission said, 'It is our expectation that people with relative expertise will need to be invited to partner with us, and that Donors will need to be invited to commit to funding the above two-year project.'

# Verbum

## The Challenge of Liberal Humanist Concept of Freedom

Carver T. Yu

China Graduate School of Theology, Hong Kong

For both the Christian and liberal humanist traditions, freedom is the core of our being human. However it is the concept of freedom that divides the two in the most fundamental way, revealing also a radical difference in the understanding of authentic humanity. The liberal humanist concept of freedom poses a forceful challenge to the Christian understanding of life as it should be. In this conflict, Christian tradition seems to be fighting a losing battle. Christian theologians have no choice but to confront the fundamental anthropological assumptions of liberal humanists.

Isaiah Berlin's *Two Concepts of Liberty* and John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* can be considered as the two most powerful essays in shaping the idea of freedom in our culture. Berlin defines freedom as negative liberty, i.e., freedom from constraints imposed on the individual whether by society or private persons, even for the sake of realizing the common good, which is preconceived by society as a whole. Berlin presented his essay as his inaugural address in 1958 for his professorship at Oxford when the world had barely recovered from the Second World War only to be confronted with the menace of communist totalitarianism. His idea of freedom was most probably formulated with the terror of totalitarian states in mind. To avoid any possible encroachment of the state or collective ideology, the idea of the common good has to be shunned. Liberty conceived in such a way confines itself to liberty as sufficient condition for something, and that something is in principle left undefined or indeterminate. It is a liberty with no definite moral discrimination, a liberty of indifference.

But can the absence of external interference be the sufficient condition for liberty? What about inner inhibitions preventing 'free' agents from materializing the choice of their will? What about the false consciousness already embedded in the 'free' agents, leading them to relinquish freedom for bread? Without self-understanding, a 'free' agent can hardly be truly free. But any suggestion of self-understanding for self-realization indicates a preconceived idea of authentic selfhood or authentic humanity.

Rawls follows Berlin's line of defense, but brings back the Romantic ideal of selfhood with radical autonomy. Freedom is defined as freedom for free agents to exercise their rights to define the good for themselves within the boundary of justice, which also means the categorical defense of such freedom for all. Freedom here can no longer be accused as empty—it is no longer merely 'freedom from', it is also 'freedom for'; it is freedom for realizing the ends, not pre-given but chosen out of the individual's autonomy at the core of their being. 'The self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it.'

What is the self? That may be a wrong question, for the self cannot be presumed to have a 'what' that defines itself as a self. The self with its autonomous will is the 'given' and in such a way as to define the 'what' of itself. The good cannot therefore have existence prior to the choice of the autonomous will. The autonomous self is therefore the Alpha and the Omega of all values.

Rawls gives absolute primacy to justice among all moral values. In doing so, one's right as a moral category is taken to be prior to the good and independent of it. Given its independent status, one's right constrains the good and sets its bounds. To have rights is 'to have something which society ought to defend me in the possession of it. In fact, so strong is society's obligation that one's claim of rights assumes the character of absolutism. The priority of right is of course derived from the concept of radical autonomy. The basis of moral laws is to be found in the autonomous subject, which is made the ground for all maxims of action. In a postmodern world where each subject constructs her own world with laws of her own, moral relativism is almost inevitable.

What would Christian theologians have to say about such a concept of freedom and the form of society being legitimated? A theological critique of the liberal humanist concept of freedom is badly needed, and at the same time, a positive concept of freedom from the Christian perspective is perhaps even more urgent.



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

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