

WEA Theological News



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George Vandervelde—A Tribute



The death of our friend and longtime colleague George Vandervelde on January 19, 2007 means deep pain and a great loss for us in the Theological Commission (TC) of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). His severe illness and sudden death were a great shock to us. Still, we would like to give thanks to our Lord for a warm human being and fine Christian brother who

was a rich blessing to us all personally and spiritually.

George was still with us in September 2006 at our annual study conference and business session. As always, he was a real enhancement to our sessions with his competence and his warm, friendly sense of humor. George was an excellent theologian, well-grounded in the Scriptures, and he had a broad perspective. He could critically analyze problems and give precise theological assessments.

This was especially evident in the way he handled the delicate contacts with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church as coordinator for the TC's ecumenical relations. He knew exactly the doctrinal differences between the two groups and was well aware of the detriments Evangelical Christians in countries with Catholic majorities have suffered throughout history and, to some extent, still suffer today. As a result, he also understood the great misgivings that exist in some national Evangelical alliances toward any dialogue with the Vatican's Council for Christian Unity. Nevertheless, this did not discourage him to seek dialogue in openness and mutual respect. Thus, he became a very respected partner, trusted by all. The seriousness with which he took his responsibility and the thoroughness with which he tackled the questions became apparent over the ten years of dialogue, which resulted in the production of the *Koinonia* document in the end.

This solid study shows ways how Evangelical and Roman Catholic Christians can further interact with one another in the future. I sincerely hope that the path George has forged will be taken in the long run by the entire WEA family. We are deeply grateful to George Vandervelde for his courage and his prudence and we see in the *Koinonia* document a lasting legacy which we are committed to keep alive.

Our prayers and sympathies go to his widow and to his children. We wish them the experience of comfort through the Risen Christ. George may now see what he believed.

Dr. Rolf Hille, Chairman, Theological Commission, World Evangelical Alliance, Tübingen, Germany

Dr Vandervelde Th.D. (Vrije Universiteit) served at the Institute of Christian Studies, Toronto Canada for 27 years from 1977. He wrote *Original Sin: Two Major Trends in Contemporary Roman Catholic Reinterpretation*, and many articles on the nature, mission and unity of the church. A collection of essays *That the World May Believe*, Margaret O'Gara and Michael Goheen (eds.) was published in 2006 in his honour. He was convener of the WEA Ecumenical Task Force from 1998.

TC-07—Studying Political Responsibility in Philadelphia

Dr Ronald Sider, head of the WEA's initiative on civic engagement, will be a keynote speaker at the WEA Theological Commissions annual session, TC-07 to be held in Philadelphia, USA July 30–Aug 3.

A one-day consultation on providence and political involvement will be held at Palmer (Eastern Baptist) Theological Seminary on July 31, where Dr Sider, a faculty member of the seminary, will speak. The second key-note speaker will be TC Member, Dr Claus Schwabach of Brazil, and discussion will be led by Dr Brian Edgar, Director of Public Theology for the Australian Evangelical Alliance. Expressions of interest for other short papers and contributions are also invited. The consultation will produce a statement for wide distribution and will also consider further study of the topic by the TC. Papers will be published in *Evangelical Review of Theology*.



Dr Sider was recently appointed by the WEA to head up a global effort to help national alliances in addressing the respective theological, political, ethnic, geographic, and gender issues of their country as they develop their own framework for evangelical civic engagement. He is president of Evangelicals for Social Action and co-author of 'A Framework for Evangelical Civic Engagement', a public policy statement developed for the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Other key local officials will also be invited. Others interested in the topic should contact the TC office for more information.

The three-day meeting of the Theological Commission will also feature networking sessions where the TC will meet with local theologians and other leaders to share information on current trends, and its regular planning and strategy discussions. An important item for consideration this year will be the appointment of new members for the TC to expand its scope and to fill vacancies. There will also plans for transitioning the leadership as the TC seeks to move forward into a new era of service. Invitations are extended from interested people for submissions about potential members and leaders of the TC.

Attendance at TC-07 will include TC Commissioners, participants in its Global Membership scheme involving National Fellowships, seminaries and individual theologians and invited guests. Registrations are now open. For more information, submission of ideas for TC work and networking, and registration, contact Dr David Parker, tc@worldevangelicalalliance.com

Promoting Biblical Truth by Networking Theologians

TC works with Lausanne Theology Working Group in Africa Consultation

The WEA TC contributed strongly to the first consultation of the recently reconstituted Lausanne Theology Working Group (LTWG) which attracted about 25 theologians from 15 countries to study the theme, 'Following Christ in a Broken World'. Dr Chris Wright, convenor of LTWG, who is also International Director of Langham Partnership International, led the conference which met 12–17 February at the Jumuia Conference Centre, outside of Nairobi, Kenya. Dr Rolf Hille, Rektor of Bengel Haus, Tubingen, Executive Chair of the WEA TC, was unable to attend, but was represented by Dr David Parker, WEA TC's Director of Publications and Administration. The TC team included Dr Matt Cook (Senegal), Dr Mike Glerup (USA) and Professor Yusufu Turaki (Kenya). Rev Doug Birdsall, Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) Executive Chair, was also an active participant through out the consultation. Professor Esther Mombo of St Paul's University, adjacent to conference venue, was the local organizer assisted by Mercy Ileri.

Six major papers were given over the course of the five day conference, supported by more than twice as many case studies drawn from the practical experience and ministry contexts of participants. Papers considered issues involved in discipleship in contexts such as areas of Power and Violence (J Bonk), Suffering and Disaster (I M Dau), Ethnicity (D Hughes), the Globalised Marketplace (C Wright), and questions related to the Uniqueness of Christ (J Azumah) and Jesus as the Truth in the Postmodern world (MLY Chan).



Case studies varied from those dealing with children and migrant workers, through 'the challenge of reaching the reached world' of Europe, mission in post-genocide Cambodia and in post-communist Romania, to ethnic reconciliation in Kenya and pluralism and post-modernism in Japan. Participants' experiences and insights from countries like Kenya, Senegal, Ghana, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines, and various parts of East and Northern Europe as well as the United States, Britain and Australia provided considerable extra material and understanding. TC contributions included case-studies by Dr Matt Cook on relativism in Senegal, Dr Turaki on Paganism in Africa and ministry amongst the aged by Dr David Parker. Numerous issues were raised that could not be covered in the time or within the framework of the consultation.

A detailed summary of the various presentations and resultant discussion was developed and became a working document for the conference. It is planned to publish the major papers in their revised form in the WEA TC's 'Evangelical Review of Theology'. It is also expected that some of the case studies will circulate in regional and specialist journals. Material will also be posted on the LCWE web site.

The consultation, the first to be held since the LTWG was reformed under the leadership of Dr Chris Wright, aimed to identify key theological issues relevant to the task of world evangelization in the lead up to the Lausanne III conference to be held late in 2010. The theme of the conference was therefore broad and the discussion comprehensive. Several common and important themes emerged during the proceedings which will become the subjects of further consultations to be held in succeeding years—focusing on the Whole Church (2008), the Whole Gospel (2009), the Whole World (2010).

At the conclusion of the intense and wide-ranging theological discussion, the final session was spent considering the strategic and practical implications of the ideas and convictions which had been raised.

TC Study Units

HIV Curriculum development and other projects

The HIV and AIDS Study Unit set up at last year's TC meeting in Kenya has progressed with a workshop held recently in Nigeria. The workshop, led by Dr Ken Gnanakan (India), met at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho, with over thirty participants. There was fruitful discussion following on from the keynote paper, and numerous ideas were presented to develop the guidelines established at the initial Kenya workshop (the Nairobi statement is on-line at <http://www.worldevangelicalalliance.com/tcstatements/>).

The consensus indicated the need for continued emphasis on workshops and development of curriculum materials. The International Council for Higher Education (ICHE) headed up by Dr Gnanakan will work on behalf of the WEA TC to produce a curriculum to integrate AIDS and HIV issues into regular courses and to encourage students and churches to initiate relevant action in their own areas. The curriculum will be made available to interested seminaries. Dr Gnanakan and Dr Danny McCain will work on developing a text book and a course studying the book of Romans in relation to the topic.

The TC is also sponsoring a Study Unit on Contextual Exegesis, led by Dr Matt Cook of Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire. The aim of this project is to develop insights, guidelines and material that will assist people in understanding and preaching Scripture within their own cultural context. Other TC projects currently underway or in planning include a dialogue with the Seventh Day Adventist Church (Session II to be held August 2007), a task force on the Uniqueness of Jesus in relation to Jewish Evangelism (due in 2008) and the next phase of the World Evangelical Alliance—Roman Catholic talks, recently approved by the WEA International Council. The TC invites submissions on other topics of concern that could become subjects of study for the TC.

LBC Publishing Progress

The head of LBC's Publishing Unit, Caleb Sri Karnaikumar, has been selected to represent the Sri Lankan college and seminary at a post-graduate diploma course in translation. The University of Peradeniya has selected thirty distinguished translators for this programme. A spokesperson for the college said they were delighted that LBC has met the criteria set by the University for selection into this special group, and looks forward to the benefits it will bring as they continue to spearhead theological publications in the country. LBC's theological text books are used by other seminaries and colleges in Sri Lanka, India, Hong Kong and Singapore.

This publishing work is backed up by a strong campus-based tuition program. Twenty senior pastoral candidates recently enjoyed Dr David Tan of Singapore lecturing in an MDiv module on the Acts of the Apostles. Dr Tan is one of many overseas scholars who visit the seminary to deliver modules. An invitation is given to other who have burden to equip the next generation of leaders through the Sri Lanka's premier training institution to contact LBC at P O Box 2, Christopher Road, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, or email lbc@slt.lk.

Invitation to Write on Evangelism

The Lausanne organisation has issued an invitation for readers to submit articles for consideration for publication in their journal, *Lausanne World Pulse* (<http://www.lausannworldpulse.com>). The titles and deadlines are as follows:

September: Unto the Least of These	1 June 2007
October: Reconciliation and Evangelism	1 July 2007
November: HIV/AIDS and Holistic Evangelism	1 August 2007
December: Evangelism and Worship	1 October 2007

Articles should be 1200–1800 words and should be submitted in English. Articles may also be sent in the native language of the author so that both versions will be posted online. Responses should be sent to Naomi A. Frizzell, (nfrizzell@lausannworldpulse.com) Director of Communications, Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, www.lausanne.org on

Summer School Marks Anniversary of Abolition of Slave Trade

Christian freedom and social responsibility will be the topic for the summer school graduate program at Liverpool Hope University (UK) 23 June–20 July, 2007. The theme marks the 200th anniversary of the passing of the British Abolition of the Slave Trade Bill at the initiative of such outstanding Christian leaders as William Wilberforce, Granville Sharp, Thomas Fowell Buxton, and Hannah More. Teachers include Richard Pierard (on evangelical awakenings), Dr Bruce Waltke (on Proverbs) and Ward Gasque (Interpreting Jesus: From St. Paul to The da Vinci Code). Course Director is Professor Irving Hexham whose topic is 'Exploring Britain's Christian Heritage'.

Although only given university status in 2005, Liverpool Hope is one of the oldest higher education institutions in north west of England with the history of its earlier component colleges extending back more than 160 years. It is the only explicitly Christian, fully accredited, trans-denominational university in Europe. Part of the British state university system, it serves over 7,000 students from 60 countries through a full range of BA and MA courses. Credit for the summer school courses may be applied to MA and PhD studies.

<http://www.hope.ac.uk/avcrad/tss/index.htm>

Participate with the TC—Global Membership

Join the TC's Global Membership—categories for individual theologians; seminaries, missions churches and other institutions; and National Evangelical fellowships and their theological units. Annual membership brings subscriptions to TC publications (ERT and TM) and the ability to share in the TC's annual conferences, networking and planning sessions, TC study units and task forces. For more information, contact tc@worldevangelicalalliance.com

Why Did Jesus Die?

Prolific New Zealand author and Bible teacher, Dick Tripp, is publishing a new book in his series 'Exploring Faith Today', *Why Did Jesus Die? What the Bible Says About the Cross*. Its 260 pages cover the biblical material comprehensively, with an additional section on how the cross relates to other topics such as the Trinity, the love and justice of God, suffering, Easter Saturday, the resurrection, discipleship, and other religions. It also contains sermon outlines. Former WEA TC Director, Dr Bruce Nicholls says that in this book 'we have a work of outstanding and lasting worth—an amazingly comprehensive reference to all the biblical texts that point to Christ's death, its meaning and significance for today's Church'. The text is already available on the author's website www.christianity.co.nz where the material may be freely used although permission is required for and printing or translation. Contact: Dick Tripp, R. D. 1, Lyttelton, New Zealand; Phone 64 3 329 9752; Fax 64 3 329 9525; email dick.tripp@christianity.co.nz

Book request

Robert Mdoka, Principal of Ecumenical Theological College, P/Bag 16, Zomba, Malawi has issued a request for books to assist his students who study for the three year Diploma in Theology. If any readers can help, please contact Principal Mdoka at the above address or at r_mdoka@yahoo.com

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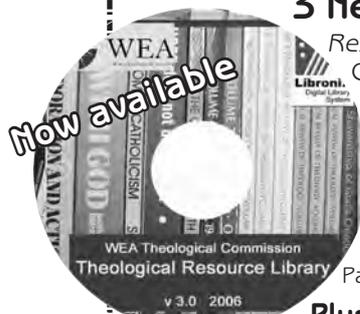
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Verbum

The Gospel As Public Truth



by Dr Brian Edgar

Director of Public Theology Australian Evangelical Alliance

The term 'public theology' is increasingly being used to make the point that biblical and theological principles have relevance outside the four walls of the church. Christian ministry to the world in which we live is more than ethics and evangelism. 'Public theology' covers social and cultural analysis, workplace ministry, political involvement and social ethics. It deals with the public relevance of Christian doctrine and aims at overcoming the privatized and domesticated view of faith which has long restricted Christian influence. A privatized view of faith has suited both secularists and many Christians who have accommodated to this demarcation of life's issues and focused on personal and family issues while leaving broader issues of public life alone.

But the past few years has seen a significant change in attitude, evidenced in the politicization of evangelical groups previously committed to being (at least nominally) a-political. Theologically, this fits well with the claim of theologian and ethicist Oliver O'Donovan in *Desire of the Nations* that 'theology must be political if it is to be evangelical.' Neither 'evangelical' nor 'political' is meant in a narrow way. By 'evangelical' he is referring to a way of thinking biblically and theologically and by 'political' he means the whole of our shared, corporate, social life together. It is a reminder that the gospel relates to all of life and that Christ is Lord of all. If theology it is not 'public' then it can be 'a good secret' but it cannot really be 'good news' for the poor, release for the captives, sight for the blind or freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18).

This new found freedom for involvement in the public sphere has brought a degree of political power to Christians and churches. This is attractive to many but it also constitutes a great danger as wielding political power as a means of social change can be inimical to the way that the gospel works. Jacques Ellul warned of Christians being drawn inappropriately into the political sphere 'like iron filings to a magnet' because of an unconscious mentality that public social action and political involvement by the church is the only real activity which will prevent the church becoming impotent.

One evidence of this sort of political seduction is the identification of 'the Christian position' with a specific place on the political spectrum. At different times Christian principles have been seen to be equated with both leftist, radical Christian socialism and rightist, conservative Christian nationalism. Individuals and, at times, Christian organizations or churches may align themselves with particular stances in order to achieve goals which are congruent with the gospel, but being authentically evangelical does not mean having a particular position on a left-right political spectrum. That sort of approach limits one's understanding of the work of God and, at the same time, is insufficiently radical in that the gospel must be seen as critiquing the most basic presuppositions on which our society operates.

Another indication of political seduction is the belief that it is appropriate that Christians control society. This sort of control existed in a medieval Christian imperialism and there are trends today towards various forms of Christian nationalism in which Christian principles are associated with a particular vision of a nation under Christian control. But as missiologist Rene Padilla has said, "There is no basis to believe that our duty as Christians is to install a State that will impose Christian morality." In an even stronger fashion O'Donovan reminds us that it is precisely the Antichrist who claims to 'unite earthly political rule and heavenly soteriological mediation'.

A genuinely evangelical public theology is one that maintains the supreme importance of 'the evangel', the gospel, the good news, for individuals and society. This not the same as the supremacy of the church or of Christian organizations. It is all about the supremacy of the gospel in the life of the church and in the church's public proclamation — in word and deed—of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Further reading:

Raymond Plant, *Politics, Theology and History*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2001)

Michael Schluter and John Ashcroft (eds), *Jubilee Manifesto: a framework, agenda and strategy for Christian social reform*, (Leicester: IVP, 2005)

Ronald Sider and Dianne Knippers (eds), *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005)

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 electronic versions. Reproduction and wider circulation is encouraged. Please acknowledge as "Verbum: WEA Theological News April 2007"

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

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