

WEA Theological News



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Theology for Political Responsibility & Ministry



Dr Ronald Sider, head of the WEA's initiative on civic engagement, will be a keynote speaker at the WEA Theological Commission's 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 Schwambach 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 a networking session at Westminster Theological Seminary on Aug 1, where the TC will meet with local theologians and other leaders to share information on current trends. This will take the form of a Symposium on the topic, 'Theology and Ministry—obsolete or necessary?' The keynote speakers will be Dr Peter Lillback, President, WTS and Dr Dennis Cheek, Vice President, Education, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. There will also be a round-table where members of the TC's global constituency will contribute insights from their own contexts. Dr Rolf Hille, Chair of the WEA Theological Commission will also present up to the minute details of the TC ministry and activities, and introduce participants to the ways in which they can be associated with its work.

The final part of TC-07 will be the regular planning and strategy discussions for the TC. 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. For further information contact tc@worldevangelicalalliance.com



TC Leaders Celebrate Milestones



Two TC leaders have celebrated important milestones on the same day, on opposite sides of the globe! In Germany, current TC Executive Chair, Dr Rolf Hille turned 60 on May 15, and in New Zealand, TC founder and former Director, Dr Bruce Nicholls, turned 80 on the same day.

A lecture symposium was held at Albrecht Bengel Haus, Tuebingen where Dr Hille serves as Rector, on May 17. About 120 guests attended and three of the four invited speakers were present. Each one of them gave special personal tributes to Dr Hille before beginning their lectures, relating their personal experiences with Rolf in his many years of Christian life and service. Former colleagues of Rolf at the Evangelical Christian magazine *idea* as well as Hartmut Steeb of the German Evangelical Alliance spoke warmly of his personal and professional excellence. Other tributes were shared by Dr Friedrich Schweitzer, Academic Dean of the Protestant Theology department of Tuebingen University, who lauded Dr Hille's steady, consistent work in promoting good will and relations between the Albrecht Bengel Haus and the theology department and the importance of the work of the Bengel Haus in preparing students for church ministry.

Beginning with cake and coffee in the afternoon, two guest speakers, Rolf's doctoral supervisor Dr. Hans Schwarz of Regensburg University, and Dr. David Hilborn of England representing the WEA Theological Commission, each gave presentations related to Rolf's interests in the theological challenges of secularism and pan-Evangelicalism. Dr Hilborn presented a gift on behalf of the TC, marking his 21 year association with the Commission, eleven of which as Chair. Between the lectures, musical interludes of both classical and contemporary selections were given by Naomi Kautt and the Albrecht Bengel Haus choir. Guests were invited to enjoy a delicious banquet in the dining hall, which provided a good time of fellowship for new and old friends and colleagues.

In the evening, retired Bishop Dr. Gerhard Maier, also Rolf's predecessor as principal of the

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Promoting Biblical Truth by Networking Theologians

New LBC Centre For Graduate Studies



The new Lanka Bible College Centre for Graduate Studies recently dedicated the first phase of its building in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Rev. Stuart Brooking, Executive Director of the Overseas Council Australia was the chief guest. A college spokesman said, 'We were fortunate to have had him at this very special event in the life of our College.' The service of dedication was witnessed by representatives of all denominations and church organisations in Colombo.

All graduate level programmes will now be offered through the new Centre. LBC already works with several universities and has been offering university validated degrees in leadership development and education at Bachelors and Masters Level. LBC invites anyone interested in teaching the Masters level programmes at LBCS, to contact the college at lbc@slt.lk

Evangelical Training Database

The Evangelical Training Database is a free searchable online database at www.trainforChrist.org with information on evangelical pastoral, theological and missionary training courses world-wide. It is available in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Any evangelical association can have its own free search-page in which members of that association are pre-selected in the search criteria. Searches can be carried out by subject category, keyword, academic level, country and region, and evangelical association. The database, coordinated by Ian Benson, is now open for all evangelical institutions to register as Training Providers, without charge on the website, It is integrated into the WEA home page— www.worldevangelicalalliance.com

Dr. John Stott Retires from Public Ministry

Dr. John Stott has announced that, having reached the age of 86 in April, he will retire from public ministry after speaking at the Keswick Convention in July 2007. He will move from London, where he has lived for more than thirty years, to a retirement community in the south of England. He continues to hold the titles that express his honoured role in several contexts, including: Founder and Honorary President of the Langham Partnership International; Rector Emeritus at All Souls Church, Langham Place; Extra Chaplain to the Queen; and Honorary Chair of the Lausanne Movement.

Coming from an atheistic background and studying at Cambridge University, he was ordained in 1945 and became curate and then rector of All Souls (his home church) until 1975. Dr Stott was well known for his strategic conference and teaching ministry around the world, especially with university students, making him one of the most influential international evangelical leaders. Dr Stott is also the author of many books including *Basic Christianity*, *The Cross of Christ*, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, *Evangelical Truth* and many expositional commentaries. His authorized biography was written in two volumes by Timothy Dudley-Smith (1999, 2001).

Dr Stott was a key leader in the Evangelical Alliance movement, coining one of its early slogans, 'The furtherance of the gospel, the defence and confirmation of the gospel, the fellowship of the gospel' and was responsible for the idea which gave birth to the Theological Commission's flagship journal, *Evangelical Review of Theology*.

Lausanne III Cape Town 2010 Announced

The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE, www.lausanne.org) has announced that the Third International Congress on World Evangelization, will be held 16–25 October, 2010, in Cape Town, South Africa. 'Lausanne III: Cape Town 2010' will gather mission and church leaders from around the world to address challenges and opportunities that are before the church with respect to world evangelization. LCWE Executive Chairman, Douglas Birdsall, says the year 2010 was selected to celebrate the centenary of the historic World Missionary Conference convened in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910 under the leadership of Dr. John R. Mott. The selection of Cape Town also has historic significance, as William Carey, considered the father of modern missions, first proposed an international missionary conference to be held there in 1810.

Mr. Lindsay Brown, International Director for LCWE, points to the dramatic shifts that have taken place in Christianity over the course of the last century. These shifts are reflected in the leadership of Lausanne III which includes Anglican Archbishop Henry Orombi of Uganda, chairman of the Africa Host Committee, Dr. Samuel Escobar from Latin America chair of the Lausanne III Advisory Council, Bishop Hwa Yung (Malaysia), chairman of the Participant Selection Committee and Program Committee chair, Rev. Ramez Atallah, Egypt.

'The pressing issues before us today, such as engaging worldviews increasingly hostile to Christianity, the threat of terrorism, and HIV/AIDS, coupled with new opportunities and new technologies, are very different from those issues faced in 1974,' Birdsall explained. 'New global challenges require thoughtful and prayerful global responses. We pray that Lausanne III: Cape Town 2010 will serve to unite and energize the Church with a new vision and a new commitment to partnership for the work of world evangelization for a new time.'

The WEA and its Theological Commission are playing an active part in preparation for Lausanne III in conjunction with LCWE. In particular, the TC is partnering with the Lausanne Theology Working Group in a series of annual consultations providing theological grounding for the 2010 Congress under the leadership of Dr Chris Wright. Other WEA personnel are also involved in preparation and planning.

Book reviews:



§ D.A. Carson (editor), *New Testament Commentary Survey*, 6th Edition (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007) (Pb, pp 160, Name index).

This useful *Survey* has been updated to be current as of early 2006. With clear explanations of the parameters used, it includes discussions about types of commentaries, the relative value of series in comparison with individual works, and listings of various sets, including those definitely worth noting through to those at the other end of the line, not omitting older classics. Another section reviews NT introductions and theologies (Marshall's 2004 work eclipses Ladd). Then follows the main part of the *Survey* with 21 parts on each of the NT books or groups. Recent and in some cases related books are covered with a frank, often extended, appraisal of each, including those that receive a negative comment, old, re-printed, and out of print titles. The aim, to enlighten 'theological students and ministers [not "the mature scholar"] with a handy survey of the resources, especially commentaries, that are available in English', is well met, providing account is taken of the author's own biases. However, each succeeding edition grows larger making the name index and especially the final chapter—'Best Buys'—increasingly useful. So for Mark it is France; Luke, Bock; John, Keener; Romans, Moo; 1 Corinthians, Thiselton; Philippians, O'Brien; Hebrews, Ellingworth; and Revelation, Beale.

§ David Killingray and Joel Edwards, *Black Voices: the shaping of our Christian experience*. Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2007. Pb, pp 170, Bibliog., index, illus.

This unusual but informative book consists mostly of a series of brief articles chronologically arranged (within topical sections) giving some biographical information about Christian people of African origin or descendancy in Britain and its colonies over the last 250 years, together with a piece of writing by them. The sections cover a wide range - conversion and evangelism, preaching and protest, and community services. The introduction by David Killingray gives a valuable historical overview of black people and their presence in Britain. There are a few illustrations, but the main strength of the book lies in the

quoted writing, which are all only very brief—usually no more than a page, often less. The authors range from the top of society (like Paul Boateng, the first black cabinet minister) to those of more humble circumstances—some are anonymous. All of the entries are documented and an extensive bibliography affords more strength to this anthology which is more than welcome in today's world and especially at a time when the abolition of slavery is being remembered.

§ Michael Nazir-Ali, *Conviction and Conflict: Islam, Christianity and World Order* (London: Continuum, 2006); ISBN 0-8264-8615-0; Pb., pp 186, ind.

In this book, Dr Michael Nazir-Ali, who holds Pakistani and British citizenship, presents his Scott Holland Lectures (Oxford, 2005) and provides a wide-ranging discussion of some of the key factors involved in Christian, Muslim (and Jewish) attitudes towards vital national and global issues affecting us today. The author, the first non-white diocesan Bishop in the Church of England, makes good use of his personal experience, learning and earlier writings in giving insight (increasingly from a Christian standpoint as the book progresses) on religious dialogue; ethnic, religious and national conflict; peacemaking; democracy; and terrorism and poverty. Key aspects of these faiths are examined to clarify their own internal dynamics, to understand relationships between them and to explain their impact on their own societies and the world. More importantly, the author proposes lines of thought, policies and practical measures to promote harmony and mutual respect. The penultimate chapter in particular is quite explicit in offering advice on political action to resolve endemic problems such as those plaguing the Middle East. Based on authoritative sources the material is readily accessible to the non-specialist (chapter 4 excepted). As such this book is a worthwhile guide for any Christian who is grappling with contemporary developments in the world from a religious perspective.

ERT CD-ROM - 2006 Supplementary Disk

A CD containing issues of *Evangelical Review of Theology* published in 2006 is now available.

The CD costs US \$10 plus \$5 pack and post. The files are in PDF format. The CD supplements the Theological Resource Library CD which includes all issues 1977–2005, which is on sale at US \$50 delivered.

For more information on payment methods and orders, contact tc@worldevangelicalalliance.com

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 TN) 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

cont. from page 1 Bengel Haus, lectured on biblical history, followed by Rolf and Dorothea's son, Peter Hille, who made a captivating multimedia presentation of 60 years of German history and culture artfully interwoven with images from Rolf's life. The evening was rounded out by a brief devotional from Rolf Scheffbuch, a longtime friend of Rolf, and an inspiring rendition of 'Amazing Grace' by Naomi and James Kautt.

Dr Nicholls' birthday was celebrated in NZ with a service on Sunday May 13 attended by 150 family and friends at St Andrew's church, Kohimarama, led by Rev Rob Yule. The service featured hymns which had been part of Dr Nicholls' life from Sunday school days, and music from a Tongan choir based at Dr Nicholls' own church. There were readings of selected Scriptures that helped shape his life, followed by the exposition of the magnetic power of the Cross in the sermon by his colleague when he served in India, Rev. Ian Kemp. A number of other people in their 80's joined Dr Nicholls and his wife of 54 years, Kathleen, in an act of rededication led by Rev. Max Scott. Dr Nicholls responded by sharing some of the stages in his pilgrimage. Dr Nicholls continues in his active retirement to work with *DayStar* magazine, editing the Asia Bible Commentary series and being part of the ministry team at St Mary's cooperating parish.

Verbum

Christian Origins and 'New School' Historical Scepticism

By Rob Haskell Director of Senderis robhaskell@gmail.com



Last March the world was subjected to yet another incredible revelation that challenged the foundations of Christianity. In a documentary aired by the Discovery channel, Canadian filmmaker Simcha Jacobovici presented his 'discovery' of the family tomb of Jesus, in which he claimed not only to have found the Lord's ossuary, but also that of his father, mother, brother, son, wife (you guessed it: Mary Magdalene) and disciple.

The theory was a little too incredible and was quickly dismissed by archaeologists (Jonathan Reed called it 'archeoporn') and minimized by the Discovery channel. But although it really was a ludicrous presentation, it would be a mistake to just roll our eyes and laugh it off, for it is just the tip of a very large iceberg. Let us not make a Titanic mistake.

Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* unleashed a new kind of historical scepticism on the world that popularized a whole range of criticisms of the orthodox story of Christian origins. Some were quack theories from books like Michael Baigent et al.'s *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, but others drew on the work of real scholars such as Elaine Pagels. The net effect of Brown's thriller was to fertilize the ground for the growth of a new scholarly cottage industry that specializes in reinterpreting Christian origins in the most radical way possible. Darrel Bock calls this the 'new school' and according to Craig Evans it makes old school sceptics Robert Funk and James Robinson look overly optimistic. Scholarly adherents like Marvin Meyer (*The Gnostic Discoveries*), Robert Price (*Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*) and Bart Ehrman (*Misquoting Jesus*) are busy putting out a healthy stream of publications, some of which make it to the best seller list.

According to Bock the tenets of this school are that (1) Christian history needs rewriting because of the discovery of new texts, especially the Nag Hammadi Gnostic writings. (2) Early Christianity was a range of expressions, all of which had equal claims to orthodoxy. This then becomes an implied polemic for religious diversity contra contemporary orthodox inflexibility. (3) History is written by the winners, and the winners were the orthodox only because they were the first to rise to political power under Constantine. (4) Numerous alternative texts were suppressed by orthodoxy.

In *The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth behind Alternative Christianities*, Bock makes the case that orthodoxy triumphed because it was consistent with the message of Jesus and the first Christians. In fact, the alternatives to orthodoxy in the second century were so different from the Jesus tradition of early Christianity that they never had a chance of becoming major influences in Christian communities—politics or no.

Other conservative scholars have also been making waves in these waters. Evans uses his considerable expertise in the area of the historical context of the New Testament to defend the reliability of the gospels in *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels*. But he also spends time pondering the personal sources of radical scepticism. Richard Baukham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* is more directed to the New Testament academy than to the refuting the 'new school,' but his argument is nevertheless a key piece that cuts to the core of the issues: that the gospels themselves bear the marks of eyewitness testimony and that the insertion of an anonymous transmission history is unwarranted. Ben Witherington takes a similar approach in his more popular level *What Have They Done with Jesus?* where he does a historical survey of the people who were closest to Jesus in the biblical accounts.

These four books were all published last year, so it is encouraging to see that the orthodox view is active, passionate and of substance. If current trends continue it seems possible that in the 21st century, history will take the place of philosophy and science as the primary front on which the battles and skirmishes of apologetics are fought. In any case, it is a happy irony to discover through these criticisms of Christian origins that many people do still think the past matters. That can't be all bad.

The Tomb of Jesus? Wrong on Every Count, by Craig Evans and Steven Feldman
<http://www.bib-arch.org/bswbKCTombbevansfeldman.html>
Misinformation About 'Misquoting' the Bible, by Darrell Bock
http://www.beliefnet.com/story/188/story_18803_1.html

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 July 2007"

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

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