

# WEA Theological News



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## Leadership Changes, Reflection and Networking for TC in Philadelphia 2007



Dr R Hille with Dr D Cheek (l) & Dr P Lillback (r)

Changes in membership and leadership, wide-ranging theological reflection and significant networking marked the WEA Theological Commission's 2007 meeting. 'TC-07' was held July 31 to Aug 2 in Philadelphia, USA, and involved a consultation at Palmer Theological Seminary, a Symposium and Networking event at Westminster Theological Seminary and a day of strategy and planning at a hotel conference room.

During the business session, Dr Rolf Hille (Tuebingen, Germany) who has led the TC since 1996, stepped down from his dual role of Chair and Executive Director to become chair, with Dr David Parker appointed as Executive Director. Dr Brian Edgar (Asbury Theological Seminary) was appointed Vice-Chairman, replacing Dr Ken Gnanakan (Bangalore, India) who had previously concluded more than twenty years of involvement with the TC. Dr David Hilborn (UK) had also previously concluded his

service and was replaced by his successor at UK Evangelical Alliance, Dr Justin Thacker. Dr James Nkansah (Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology) was appointed as an African representative, filling a long standing vacancy. Dr Chris Hall (Eastern University, Pa) was elected as a North American representative, with another position from this area to be filled later, thus replacing the loss of Dr George Vandervelde who passed away earlier in the year. Other appointments are also being considered. Decisions were also taken to plan for the further development of the TC with its new leadership and membership in association with initiatives from the WEA for several years into the future, with other decisions to be taken in October 2008.

The TC's annual mini-consultation was held at Palmer (formerly Eastern) Seminary on July 31 on the theme of theological bases for political involvement. The consultation, attended by about thirty people representing a number of different countries and interests, featured keynote addresses by Dr Ronald Sider (Palmer) and Dr Claus Schwambach (TC member from Brazil), several supporting papers and a lengthy discussion facilitated by Dr Brian Edgar (outgoing Director of Public Theology, EA of Australia). The summary statement (see elsewhere in this issue) stressed the universal consequences of the lordship of Christ and the kingdom of God for all aspects of people's lives and the need for proper stewardship of resources, while at the same time contributing humbly and faithfully to the broader society and patiently seeking God's will in hope. The major papers will be published in TC's journal, *Evangelical Review of Theology*

About thirty people also joined for a symposium on theology and ministry at Westminster Seminary on Aug 1 when the President, Dr Peter A Lillback spoke about the need for a commitment to divine truth with a sensitive realization of God's community as necessities for effective ministry. Dr Dennis Cheek, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, gave an energetic presentation of his recent study on theology and technology, emphasising the need to reflect critically on the widespread and pervasive influence of all forms of human work and invention.

Various initiatives and planned future events were under consideration at the strategy meeting. These included study units and task forces on Contextual Exegesis, dialogues, the theology of Jewish Evangelism, publications, preparations for Lausanne III, and many new possible task forces. A particular feature was the presentation by WEA International Director, Geoff Tunnicliffe, of the role and functions of commissions within the WEA structure and ways in which the TC could integrate with the work of the WEA. The serious need for additional funding of the TC was a matter of consideration. It was decided that the next annual meeting of the TC would take place in October 2008 in conjunction with the WEA General Assembly to be held in Pattaya, Thailand.

The week of events for the TC was also appropriately enhanced by participation in the mid-week prayer service of the Korean United Church of Philadelphia, led by TC member, Dr Jae Sung Kim, where Dr Rolf Hille was the guest preacher. The contribution of Dr Kim, his staff and his church in making local arrangements and providing logistics for the TC meeting and consultation are greatly appreciated.

Attendance at TC-07 included TC Commissioners, many of its Global Members including personal members, representatives of national evangelical fellowships and seminaries, and also several visitors, guest and observers. Global membership is open to individuals, seminaries and other institutions and national fellowships, and provides a way for anyone interested in the work of the TC to be involved on a continuing in-depth basis.

**Promoting Biblical Truth by Networking Theologians**

# A Statement on Evangelical Social Engagement

## The Philadelphia Statement, August 2007

*This statement was prepared by participants of a mini-Consultation on faith, providence and political involvement held on 31 July, 2007 at Palmer (Eastern Baptist) Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, USA. The consultation was conducted by the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance which has issued this brief summary of the discussion.*

### **The Lordship of Christ and Political and Civic Engagement**

The confession 'Jesus is Lord' has immediate political implications for the witness of the church in the world. This is as true today as it was in the time of the early church when declaring that 'Jesus is Lord' was a challenge to the idea that Caesar was Lord. An authentic recognition of the Lordship of Christ means seeing Him as Lord of All. He is not merely 'my Lord' or even just the Lord of the church. Rather, He is the Lord of the whole of creation which includes all social and political realms, rulers and structures in all nations. The Lordship of Christ provides the fundamental reason for Christian involvement in social, civic and political affairs. Consequently, both evangelism and social action are essential dimensions of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The kingdom (or 'the reign') of God which Jesus proclaimed is a spiritual entity which exists wherever God is obeyed. The kingdom of God is not a geographic or political kingdom but it has a profound impact on secular, national and political spheres of life. In humility Christians pray to the Father 'your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.'

### **The Providence of God**

We trust in the sovereignty of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—over the whole world. According to his wisdom and providential care, God uses governments to oppose evil and preserve his creation in good order. Being assured of God's providential care and knowing that God is in ultimate control of all things is a great comfort in the light of all personal and political difficulties and conflicts. It is encouraging to know that, despite the problems and limitations of our human nature and our social contexts, God can even use evil for good (Genesis 45:4–15). All of life exists under the providential sovereignty of God which relativizes all political systems.

A proper awareness of the providence of God which preserves, protects and enhances human life and society creates an attitude of humility concerning our own abilities and serves to remind us that God cares for all people—for all bear the image of God. It is important, therefore, to respect rather than demonize others, to avoid undue pessimism concerning the moral future of the world and to look for a consensus concerning social and political life with all who seek peace and the common good.

### **The Church and Social Transformation**

The church of Jesus Christ exists as 'a light to the world' (Matt: 5:14). It should not be a mere political critic but also a creative source to shape society, practicing biblical principles and models that enhance community life. Although cultural, social and political forms vary greatly, Biblical principles are always relevant. Christians are called to 'seek the welfare of the city' (Jer. 29:7) and make a contribution to society. In many cultures there is a strong history of a positive evangelical engagement with society and it is our responsibility to continue this.

Evangelical theology stresses the importance of a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ and sees the transformation of individuals as an important part of the transformation of the world. However, the notion of a purely privatized faith in which the gospel only affects individual, personal or family life but has no wider implications for society must be rejected as inadequate.

As people of faith we interpret everything in the light of

God's providential oversight for good. In hope, we stand firm in the most daunting conditions, desiring to do what is right while patiently resisting the forces of evil.

Holding firmly to the virtues of faith, hope and love we affirm Christian involvement in the political processes of local communities, nations, and on the international level and encourage Christians to consider professions whereby they are able to serve in the political and social sphere. We recognize that the massive transformations occurring in our modern world must be addressed in a discerning manner. As Christians and citizens of specific nations we care a great deal about freedom, justice for the poor, peace, marriage, the family, the sanctity of human life, and racial justice.

We recognize that process is also important, and the manner in which issues and solutions are presented must not contradict the values on which our priorities are based. We believe that our engagement should be a part of the mending and healing process locally, nationally, and internationally.

### **A Call to Kingdom living**

We believe the truth of God's revelation is indeed ultimate; yet our understanding of the truth is provisional and partial. As a result, in exercising our political responsibilities, we believe it is important to approach our task respectfully, prepared to listen and learn from those outside our religious and theological boundaries.

There are different forms of government, contexts and local issues that impact the implementation of the reign of Jesus Christ and it is important for Christians of different nationalities and political convictions to be in discussion about these variations. However, there are important areas common to most societies where followers of Jesus Christ must pray and work for the kingdom, such as seeking human rights and religious liberty, working against corruption, violence and war, alleviating poverty, protecting the family and the sanctity of life, and caring for creation.

The church, as the primary community in which the kingdom of God is manifested, ought to embody the graceful principles of that kingdom and bear witness in life, word and action to the power of the gospel to transform lives and societies. We Evangelical Christians must repent of our failure to live as a community of faith that demonstrates the kingdom of God. Then we must commit ourselves to the common life of faith and action which will lead to a transformation of the world in which we live. As the church lives out the life of the kingdom it can become an example of community life and be a credible basis from which to impact the political sphere. The church must not use political power merely as a means of self-protection, but should seek the benefit of the community in which it lives, with humility, repentance and in a spirit of unity.

Individuals, groups, congregations and national alliances are all called to participate in actions and programs which aim at overcoming social evil and which enhance the common good. We affirm the work of the World Evangelical Alliance in various areas of social and political action and particularly note the potential of the Public Policy Project aimed at helping national evangelical alliances/fellowships to develop an evangelical approach to political and civic engagement.

In exercising that responsibility to society which is fundamental to the mission of the Church we do not assume that everything depends on the action of the church in the world. Consequently, the church exercises its social responsibility not only by direct action in the world but also by witnessing to the redemptive work of Christ and looking forward to the consummation of all things in Him.

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## WEA and Adventists Agree on Joint Statement

Theologians representing the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and the Seventh-day Adventist Church met August 5 to 10 at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan (USA) for their second round of theological conversations. The initial session was held in Prague, Czech Republic, in August, 2006. The joint statement developed at Berrien Springs has been adopted by both sponsoring bodies for circulation to their constituents. The discussions were led by Rolf Hille, chairman of the Theological Commission of the WEA, and William G. Johnsson, assistant to the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for Interfaith Relations.

'We were able to share with the evangelical world the Adventist self-understanding in an effort to eliminate prejudice and clarify questions about our message,' said meeting organizer John Graz, secretary of the Adventist Council on Inter-church Relations. 'This allowed us face-to-face interaction to share where our church stands,' he said. The two institutions shared a 'large measure of theological agreement,' said Angel Rodriguez, director of the Adventist Church's Biblical Research Institute.

Adventist participants agreed with the WEA Statement of Faith, which focuses on the Bible as the Word of God, the Trinity, the person of Jesus Christ and his saving work, justification by faith, prayer, conversion, sanctification, and the Second Coming of Christ. However, several areas of disagreement became apparent between the two organizations regarding Adventist teachings including pre-Advent judgment, the role and authority of Ellen G. White, and the Sabbath as the day of worship for Christians.

Yet, it was agreed that there was enough in common to allow the two bodies to cooperate on issues such as prayer, Bible society work, and religious liberty. The joint statement says, 'Evangelicals and Adventists see the possibilities of working together on shared endeavours. At the same time, they recognize the right and even responsibility of all churches who may cooperate with each other to uphold and follow their own distinctive doctrinal teachings. The principles of religious liberty, tolerance, good will, and respect are to prevail in all cases.'

The Joint Statement is available on request (tc@worldevangelicalalliance.com).



*The TC Consultation on Political Involvement, Palmer Seminary*

## WEA Participates in Ecumenical Discussions on Conversion

The World Evangelical Alliance was represented at a gathering convened by the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church to discuss conversion between religions. Those representing the event which took place in Toulouse, France in 8–12 August were John Langlois (Channel Islands), Richard Howell (India) and Thomas Schirmmacher (Germany). There were also representatives of Pentecostal churches present at the consultation which was intended 'to produce a code of conduct on religious conversion commonly agreed among Christians by 2010'.

A press release for the consultation stated that an initial meeting 'affirmed freedom of religion as a "non-negotiable" human right valid for everyone everywhere and at the same time stressed that the "obsession of converting others" needs to be cured.' The Toulouse gathering was the second phase of a three-year joint study process, which unlike the previous meeting, was an intra-Christian discussion consisting of a high-level theological consultation entitled 'Towards an ethical approach to conversion: Christian witness in a multi-religious world'.

The WEA general secretary Rev. Dr Geoff Tunnicliffe 'gave his full approval' to the organization's involvement in the process so far sponsored by the WCC and the Vatican. According to WEA executive council member John Langlois, who reported positively on the consultation, the code of conduct should express 'repentance for past wrongdoings so as to make clear that the superiority mentality in regard to other religions has been overcome.' For Rev. Dr Tony Richie from the Church of God, a Pentecostal US-based denomination, the code of conduct is not about 'whether' Christians evangelize, but 'how' they do it. He advocated a 'dialogical evangelism,' ecumenically oriented and marked by an ethical approach.

Among the issues identified by the participants as elements upon which the code of conduct should be based are: common understandings of conversion, witness, mission and evangelism, and concern for human dignity; a distinction between aggressive proselytizing and evangelism; the balance between the mandate to evangelize and the right to choose one's religion. 'Although these are very preliminary findings, the fact that representatives from all these walks of Christian life have been able to meet and discuss such a complex issue, starting to build a consensus, is in itself a success,' said Rev. Dr Hans Ucko, WCC's programme executive for interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

Its promoters expect the code of conduct to fulfil several goals: be an advocacy tool in discussions with governments considering anti-conversion laws, to help to advance the cause of religious freedom, address other religions' concerns about Christian proselytism and inspire them to consider their own codes of conduct, and also help to ease intra-Christian tensions. None of the partners involved intend—nor have the means—to impose the code of conduct on their constituencies, but they all trust that it will be able to 'impact hearts and minds' and allow for 'moral and peer pressure.'

The next step in this study project jointly undertaken by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the WCC's programme on inter-religious dialogue will be a meeting in 2008 in which the code of conduct will be drafted, building upon the findings of the Toulouse consultation. Launched in May 2006 in Lariano/Velletri, near Rome, the project bears the name: 'An interreligious reflection on conversion: From controversy to a shared code of conduct'.



## Ethiopia Graduate School of Theology Marks 10th Anniversary

This year marks the 10th anniversary of EGST's constitution. In 1997, by God's providence, Dr. Peter Cotterell returned to Ethiopia at a time when Dr. Steve Strauss, Dr. Eshetu Abate and others were developing the idea of a cooperative graduate-level program. Many of the basic features of the school which were put in place at that time remain—a testimony to the wisdom of the founders and others who were involved in the establishment of EGST.

Even today, people from around the world comment on the situation, virtually unique throughout the world, in which a broad coalition of churches and organizations have worked to create a single graduate school of singular excellence for an entire country. But for all that remains the same in terms of the basic structures of governance and ethos of cooperation, much has also changed. Some of this change is seen in the outward 'face' of EGST.

When EGST was launched in 1997, it operated out of borrowed office, classroom and library space spread out over three locations. Now EGST owns its own property and is launching a major campus development project. There have also been significant changes in the programs available to students. The first 15 students were all accepted for the study of systematic theology. In subsequent years, programs and specializations were added. Today, EGST has three programs—the Post-Graduate Diploma (PGD), the Master of Divinity (MDiv) and the Master of Theology (MTh)—with an M.A. in HIV and AIDS Ministries to be launched later this year. MDiv and MTh Students specialize not just in Systematic Theology but also in Church History, Biblical Studies, and Missiology.

We expect that EGST's tenth year will also be marked by the completion of EGST's accreditation with the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA). The most significant development is also the least visible. In 1997, the dark days of the Dergue were still part of the recent past; only a handful of Ethiopians in Ethiopia had Masters level theological training. With this year's graduation there will be more than 80 graduates, more than 90% of whom remain in the country. Virtually all of the English-language theological training programs in Ethiopia are staffed in part by EGST graduates. EGST graduates serve churches from across the evangelical spectrum in various capacities, from pastoral ministry to denominational leadership.

EGST NEWS: The Newsletter of the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology - Vol. 5, No. 2 / June 2007

## Wide Circulation for Special Issue of *Evangelical Review of Theology*

The October 2007 issue of the Theological Commission's journal, *Evangelical Review of Theology*, featuring papers from a joint Lausanne/TC consultation, will circulate very widely around the world. The Consultation, which was held in February 2007 in Kenya under the leadership of Dr Chris Wright, convenor of the Lausanne Theology Working Group, was the first of a series of gatherings intended to provide theological foundations for Lausanne III to be held in South Africa in 2010. The special issue of the ERT contains the keynote papers and one of several of the case studies and many extra copies will be printed for distribution through various networks of evangelical seminaries, mission bodies and other interested groups. Writers represented include Chris Wright, John Azumah, Mark Chan, Dewi Hughes, Jonathan Bonk, Isaiah Dau and Athena Gorospe. Enquiries about obtaining the special issue may be lodged with Dr Wright [c.wright@langhampartnership.org](mailto:c.wright@langhampartnership.org) or Bobby Ryu [bobbyryu@yahoo.com](mailto:bobbyryu@yahoo.com)

## Theological Education in Asia and the Pacific

'Association strengthens the quality of education' was the view of thirty-six delegates from seventeen member schools who attended the 22nd biennial conference of the South Pacific Association of Bible Colleges, held 3-6 July 2007 in Auckland NZ.

Keynote speaker, Dr Craig Blomberg, (Denver Seminary, Colorado) explored 'Contemporary Trends in Hermeneutics and their Implications for Theological Education.' Noting the popularity of narrative, Dr Blomberg highlighted the renewed significance for spiritual formation of personal testimony as legitimate witness in a post-modern world. Each morning began with worship led by Donna Dinsmore of Vancouver using Trinitarian poetry and songs echoing Celtic and Gregorian roots. Another highlight was a discussion on Middle Eastern Christian education featuring Rev Dr Paul Sanders (Arab Baptist Seminary, Lebanon), Rev Alex Awad (Bethlehem Bible College) and Dr Heidi Campbell, an expert in Israel media-studies. Delegates appreciated the challenges they faced in taking opportunities for love and reconciliation in the midst of conflict. Dr John Sweetman, Principal, Malyon College, Brisbane was elected to the position of President succeeding Dr Peter Ralphs, Principal, Bible College of Queensland.

The Triennial Assembly of the Asia Theological Association, held in Manila Philippines Aug 6-10, brought together about 100 delegates from Japan to focus on the theme, 'Prophetic Voice of the Gospel in Contemporary Asia.' The opening session was led by Dr Brian Wintle who stood in following the death of former General Secretary, Pastor Derek Tan in whose memory a collection of essays and tributes was released in this session, titled: *The Pastor and Theological Education*.

Morning devotions were led by Dr. Nomer Bernardino and seven presentations on the conference theme were delivered by a range of speakers including Dr. Vinay Kumar Samuel, Mr. David Wang, Dr. Wong Kim Kong, and Dr. Calvin Chong. These papers will be published in *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology*.

Business reports indicated a growth to 196 member schools in 26 countries. Dr. Akio Hashimoto (Japan) was elected chairman. Dr Joseph Shao (Philippines) was installed as General Secretary. The lengthy service of outgoing Chairman, Dr David Sang-Bok Kim and Treasurer Dr Michael Shen was officially recognized. Also reported in the business session was the Asian Bible Commentary series, now with nine volumes in print, led by Dr Bruce Nicholls. Other sessions were devoted to curriculum development, accreditation and the work of the International Council of Evangelical Theological Education.

### WEA Theological News

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