

WEA Theological News



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New Faces for the WEA Theological Commission

At its annual meeting in Philadelphia in September 2007, the WEA Theological Commission was pleased to welcome several new members. They were Dr James Nkansah (Kenya), Dr Justin Thacker (UK), and Dr Chris Hall (USA). We are proud to present brief details of these new colleagues in this issue. The TC also noted that it had lost some members—including Dr George Vandervelde (Canada) who died earlier in the year, Dr David Hilborn (UK) who moved to a new ministry and was unable to continue, and Vice-Chairman, Dr Ken Gnanakan (India) who resigned after more than twenty years involvement. Warm thanks and appreciation were expressed for these people.

There are still vacancies on the TC which need to be filled as soon as suitable people are identified and funding can be arranged. These include people from Spanish-speaking Latin America, Francophone Africa, East or South East Asia and North America. In particular the appointment of women is a high priority. The TC is seeking recognised younger evangelical theologians who have a vision for its global work, and who have the ability to participate in its program of activities; funding for appointments is an important factor.

The TC also appointed Dr Brian Edgar as Vice-Chairman and Dr David Parker as Executive Director. With this development, Dr Rolf Hille, who has carried the dual role of Chairman of the Executive and Executive Director, relinquished the latter role. It is anticipated that Dr Hille, Rector of Albrecht Bengel House, Tuebingen, who has been with the TC for more than twenty years and chair for more than a decade, will step down from this role in the near future to concentrate on other matters.

Following the TC-07, Dr David Parker has moved into the role of Executive Director on a part-time basis, which is an expansion of his previous editorial and administrative work. As part of the comprehensive transition to younger and new leadership which is taking place and the development of a new forward plan, the TC is also wanting to find a suitable person to take over from Dr Parker. Expressions of interest and suggestions are invited. Details of the role and other arrangements are available from the TC office. It is hoped that a new team can be ready to take over from the 12th General Assembly of the WEA which will take place in October 2008.

The TC also strongly supported by the increasing number of Global Members, many of whom participated in TC-07. The Global Membership Scheme enables individual theologians, institutions like seminaries, churches and missions, and especially national Evangelical Fellowships and their theological associations, to be involved fully in the life and work of the TC. An annual subscription is payable which brings with it the TC publications including Evangelical Review of Theology and invitations for participation in consultations and study units. Further details may be obtained from the TC office.

Our New TC Members

Dr James Nkansah-Obrempong



Dr James Nkansah-Obrempong, a Ghanaian, is Professor of Theology at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) at which he took his MDiv and MTh in New Testament Ethics. He holds a PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary in Systematic Theology and Culture. Before taking up his present post, he worked with World Vision and Open Doors, and as a pastor and Bible School lecturer in USA. His published articles focus on cultural and African theology. Dr Nkansah proved to be of great assistance to the Theological Commission providing organisational help for our TC meeting at his school in Nairobi in 2006, where he also delivered an insightful paper on theological trends in Africa (see ERT (2007) 31:2, 140-150). He has also contributed several articles on local issues to the *African Bible Commentary*. He says, 'In my

philosophy of teaching, I seek to impart knowledge, skills and to equip students for ministry. I teach by example and develop model leaders for the African church. I teach to transform lives and build positive attitudes in students to be transformational leaders in society.'

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If you subscribe to our electronic Forum or receive TN On-Line, please advise us of changes of email address. We have quite a number of 'dead' addresses now which we would like to revive!

Promoting Biblical Truth by Networking Theologians

Dr Justin Thacker



Dr Justin Thacker is the Head of Theology at the UK Evangelical Alliance, the successor of our former TC member, Dr David Hilborn. Dr Thacker trained originally as a medical doctor, and he specialised in paediatrics, working eventually as leader of a team assessing healthcare provision for young offenders in England and Wales. Sensing a call to the ministry, undertook the Cornhill Training Course with the Proclamation Trust and then took his BA in theology at London School of Theology, and completed a PhD from King's College London. He is the author of *Postmodernism and the Ethics of Theological Knowledge*, which, as a response to the postmodern critique of Christianity, establishes the necessary integration of theological knowledge with theological ethics.

Justin is an ordained Elder of the United Reformed Church, has an active preaching ministry and is on the council of Scripture Union. His role with EA UK is helping formulate its position on a range of theological and public issues. Welcoming Justin, Evangelical

Alliance General Director Joel Edwards said: 'We're very excited to have Justin on board. He brings an invaluable combination of disciplines as well as drive and energy to build on all that has been achieved in this department over the years.' Justin said, 'The need for a clear expression of Christ-centred and biblically-rooted theology has never been greater. I'm thrilled to be part of what the Alliance is doing in communicating that message of grace to a world in need.'

Dr Christopher Hall

Dr Christopher Hall is Provost and Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Eastern University, St Davids, Pennsylvania, USA, where he has been on the faculty since completing his PhD (Drew Univ.) in 1991. He previously studied at Fuller Seminary, Regent College (Vancouver) and UCLA, undertook pastoral work in France and Canada, and hospital chaplaincy in New Jersey. His doctoral research was on Chrysostom and he has authored the volume on Mark in the Ancient Christian Commentary series of which he is an associate editor. Other books include *Reading the Scripture with the Church Fathers*, (1998), *Learning Theology with the Fathers* (2002) (both InterVarsity Press), *The Trinity*, with Roger Olson, (Eerdmans, 2002), and *Does God Have a Future?: A Debate on Divine Providence*, with John Sanders, (Baker, 2003). Dr Hall is a consulting editor of *Christianity Today*.



Thanks for Twenty Years of Service



At the 2007 annual meeting of the Theological Commission, it was announced that during the year Vice-Chairman, Dr Ken Gnanakan had concluded his service with the TC. He has been involved for more than twenty years in various roles, including Study Unit leader and more recently Vice-Chairman. In writing to Dr Gnanakan after TC-07, TC Chair, Dr Rolf Hille, said, 'It is a deep pleasure for me to express our appreciation for your great work on behalf of the TC. At our last meeting in Philadelphia, we publicly expressed our gratitude to you for your more than twenty years of dedicated service, creative vision, and world consciousness. I personally want to thank you for all the fellowship, advice, and perspective you gave to our work and I pray that you will continue with some of our study groups or task forces, mainly concerning the issues of HIV and ecological problems.' Dr Gnanakan lives in Bangalore, India, where he has received support from his organisation, ACTS, for some of his TC activity. As well as continuing to be involved with the wide-ranging activities of ACTS, Dr Gnanakan is actively promoting Christian higher education on a global scale through the new organisation, The International Council for Higher Education (<http://ichenetwork.org/>)

BWA plans international conference on theological education

Washington, D.C. (BWA)—The Baptist World Alliance will hold its seventh Baptist International Conference on Theological Education (BICTE) in Prague, Czech Republic, from July 26 to 29, 2008. Organized by the Academic and Theological Education Workgroup of the Division of Evangelism and Education, BICTE will focus on the theme, Probing the theological boundaries: The Baptist story from Amsterdam to tomorrow. Several topics are under consideration for the conference, including Baptist history from its founding in Amsterdam in 1609; shaping a theological curriculum for ministerial training; utilizing theological symbols and narrative in art, film and literature; addressing ecological threats; and responding to the exploitation of women and children.

Participants will include theologians and theological educators from the six continental federations of the BWA: Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America and North America. There will, in addition, be opportunities for worship and fellowship, as well as sessions for conferees to meet colleagues from other countries. The seventh BICTE conference will be held at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic, and will immediately follow the BWA Annual Gathering which is planned for the same city, July 21–26, 2008. BICTE, which is normally convened every five years, was last held in 2002 in Seville, Spain.

Evangelical Review of Theology Special Issue

'Following Jesus in our Broken World'

Now Out

October 2007 Issue with papers from the joint Lausanne TWG/TC consultation Feb 2007 developing theological foundations for Lausanne III Cape Town 2010

Featuring: Chris Wright, Jonathan Bonk, Athena Gorospe
Mark Chan, John Azumah, Dewi Hughes, Isaiah Dau

Limited number of copies available from TC Office
tc@worldevangelicalalliance.com

TC study program developing

The WEA Theological Commission study program is set for development in coming months, building on recent efforts in inter-church dialogues, religious fundamentalism, political involvement and HIV/AIDS.

Contextual Exegesis A group studying exegesis in context is gearing up for active production of papers. Headed by Dr Matt Cook, this project will address key issues necessary for developing guidelines for evangelical thinking in different cultural and geographic contexts while at the same time remaining faithful to universal biblical principles. The results of the consultation will be published in a book and in curriculum materials for seminaries, churches and pastors.

Dr Cook says, 'Contextualization is not a new topic for theology nor evangelicals. But the reason for this study group right now is that advances are being made on several fronts. First, Evangelicals are becoming more aware of and capable of articulating our prolegomenal issues concerning Scripture. It is the rule of faith. Second, contextualization is extremely popular among evangelicals and non-evangelicals, but in many parts of the majority world, non-evangelicals are publishing more and offering more creative ideas for contextualization—ideas highly appreciated by some evangelicals.'

'This study group is trying to understand some fundamental issues of contextualization from within the evangelical perspective,' Dr Cook added. 'To do this, we have this international team of 13 scholars from countries such as Thailand, Korea, Mali, Switzerland, Côte d'Ivoire, Congo, India, Costa Rica, UK and USA, addressing various aspects of the topic. Themes include contextualisation and syncretism, cultural backgrounds, models of contextualisation, and globalisation. Contextualization is not just a theological issue but one that affects all of Christian and church life. That is why we think this issue and this study group is worth the effort of the WEA-TC. While we do not anticipate that these issues will be definitively resolved by our interaction, we hope that the discussion can progress from an evangelical perspective. The future of this study group depends on the interaction and support of the evangelical community.'

It is planned to have a colloquium in August of 2008 to interact face-to-face on these issues. Also under consideration are ways for the findings and insights of the group to be widely disseminated through personal presentation in colleges and seminaries around the world, and through books, journals and curriculum and seminar materials. Funding is urgently needed for this project, especially for the writing session. Readers are requested to contact the TC office if they have ideas on ways to assist with this need.

Early African Christianity TC senior member, Dr Tom Oden (USA) heads up The Early African Christianity Project which is affiliated with the TC as a Study Unit. This project has the practical aim of suggesting a way of 'deepening African Christianity and strengthening it for the challenges of the 21st century' through rediscovering the teaching and life of the early church leaders who hailed from Africa and knew its culture and community intimately. Dr Oden says, 'Intellectually, these writers played a decisive role of the formation of Christian culture from its infancy. They profoundly shaped world Christianity and were instrumental in the formulation of some of the most decisive intellectual achievements of Christianity.' He adds, 'African Christian leaders figured out how to best read the law and prophets meaningfully, to think philosophically, and teach the rule of faith, long before the patterns became normative elsewhere. Lack of attention given to this distinguished literary and intellectual history has helped to propagate the erroneous claim that Christianity is late development in African religious history and therefore should not be considered an indigenous or traditional African religion.' Dr Oden will launch his new book on this topic, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind* early in 2008.

Expressions of interest invited Ideas are being developed also for further study units on such topics as how churches should understand and be proactive in issues relating to climate change, the development of sound principles and practices of pastoral care, conversion, unity and public theology. Expressions of interest are invited for involvement and contributions to these and related topics. Funding is also sought for these. The TC has also been authorised by the WEA International Council to resume the talks with the Roman Catholic Church aimed to greater understanding and clarification of differences and issues in common. Dr Rolf Hille, Chairman of the TC, has been appointed at the convenor of this study unit, following the death its former leader, Dr George Vandervelde, earlier in 2007. This project will take account, in particular, of recent initiatives in this area of thought by European Evangelicals.

Dr David Parker, Executive Director of the WEA TC, said, 'We are looking forward to a very productive period in the life of the TC. We invite people who have an interest and expertise in these areas to contact us with a view to becoming involved in these groups, and in suggesting further topics for consideration. We also need funding so that effective work can be done and distributed through print, electronic media and in workshops and seminars. We seek the assistance of our readers in this important section of our work.'

EA Adds Two New Member Bodies with Interests in Pastoral Ministries and Theological Education

The World Evangelical Alliance has recently added two new members with interests allied to the Theological Commission. One of these is TOPIC (Trainers of Pastors International Coalition <http://www.topic.us>) which will open the way to cooperation with the WEA's commitment to the pastoral ministry. TOPIC is an international coalition of pastoral training organizations accelerating pastoral training where the Church is growing.

Dr. Geoff Tunncliffe, the head of WEA, explained the meaning that this new partnership holds. 'The local church is God's instrument of transformation in a community. Obviously, pastors are the key in helping churches fulfil this vision. Training is needed but not often times available. That is why I am thrilled that TOPIC has become a global partner of WEA.'

WEA has also added the World Evangelical Theological Institute Association (WETIA) as a Global Partner. WETIA, based in San Francisco, CA (<http://www.wetia.org>) is a non-profit organization linking a global network of evangelical theological colleges and seminaries through the application of information technology. As a research and service organization, WETIA also supports a variety of educational and professional development needs of the evangelical higher learning community with tools to create and deploy online learning programs.

Verbum

Transforming Ecumenism? The Global Christian Forum.

by David Parker, Executive Director, WEA Theological Commission



Transforming Ecumenism is the subtitle of a book edited by Richard Howell, General Secretary of Evangelical Fellowship of India and member of the WEA International Council, to document the 'Global Christian Forum' which is claimed to be an historic development in the quest for Christian unity. This movement, which began in the 1990s, marked a significant milestone on Nov 6–9, 2007 at Limuru, Kenya where a gathering was held, with 250 people from more than 70 countries in attendance. This issue is important because the mission of WEA is 'to foster Christian unity'. Indeed, Evangelicals have been very prominent in the GCF up to this point. Pentecostals are also well to the fore.

The GCF began because it was realised that a large number of the world's Christians were not involved in the existing ecumenical movement, a fact accentuated by the decline of western Christianity and the startling growth in the Global South. Various reasons account for this including geography, doctrinal convictions, and inherited indifference and hostility. Yet although fragmented and fissiparous, evangelicals and Pentecostals do have their own convictions about unity—usually of a spiritual and pragmatic kind, and organisations like WEA, the Micah Network and the Lausanne movement express unity and provide practical means for cooperation in mission and social responsibility.

So in a bold move, it was decided that, to 'reconfigure ecumenism', new steps were required to 'create an open space wherein representatives from a broad range of Christian churches and interchurch organizations, which confess the triune God and Jesus Christ as perfect in His divinity and humanity, can gather to foster mutual respect, to explore and address together common challenges' (to quote the official GCF purpose statement).

Hence GCF was born in a series of regional forums where its principles were developed. It would have no membership, only participants on first name terms without regard to status, and only a basic infrastructure. The first item on the agenda of every conference would be attendees sharing their 'journey with Jesus'. This process provided an extraordinary level of trust as people came to recognize authentic faith and discipleship in each other, despite large differences in background and language.

The purpose of the Limuru event was to assemble a truly global group (building on the previous regional efforts) and create bonds of fellowship across as large a range as possible. It would assess whether there was a future for such a movement as an adjunct to other expressions of Christian unity. As the official statement indicates, the Forum succeeded in attracting what is arguably the most diverse group of Christians ever assembled, and providing them with a process to relate effectively to each other.

So, is GCF the breakthrough that is claimed for it, and will it succeed in 'transforming ecumenism'? So far it looks promising, bringing together the two most important trends in modern Christendom—Ecumenism, the 'great new fact of our time' (Temple) and Pentecostalism, 'the third force' of Christianity (van Dusen). It emphasises the stories (testimonies) of participants and also personal networking—both key characteristics of today's culture. In so doing it puts the important but difficult issues for existing ecumenism, doctrinal and organisation unity, into a new context. At the same time, respecting diversity, it envisages a flexible network suited for mission rather than a rigidly ordered structure.

According to theologian Sarah Rowland Jones, it does this by focusing on God and our engagement with him in Jesus Christ rather than on propositions about God and human structures. By emphasising the 'Servant King' and our discipleship, this 'renewed theology' undermines power, privilege and professionalism. It allows us to more easily learn with and from others, thus leading to a more dynamic and holistic approach to doctrine and faith which embraces emotional, spiritual, physical and social aspects of life as well as intellectual. This will restore prayer and worship to centre stage and so provide a means of enriching theological reflection.

So it seems that the Global Christian Forum offers a process with theological characteristics and practical procedures which invite serious consideration by the Evangelical Alliance movement committed as it is to 'Christian unity'. The crucial test will be if it can strengthen the many ad hoc expressions of cooperation in witness and mission that exist already at the local level.

Further reading:

Global Christian Forum: Transforming Ecumenism, edited by Richard Howell (Delhi: EFI, 2007)

The Global Christian Forum website:

<http://www.globalchristianforum.org>

The official statement from Limuru:

<http://www.worldevangelicals.org/news/view.htm?id=1518>

The WEA report on Limuru:

<http://www.worldevangelicals.org/news/view.htm?id=1515>

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 January 2008"

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

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