

WEA Theological News



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Networking Theologians - Executive Director Travels in South East Asia



Dr Parker with ATS & AGST faculty, Manila

During Feb 2008, Dr David Parker, Executive Director of the WEA TC, travelled in three countries in South East Asia to meet with various groups of local and international theologians, participate in conferences, visit seminaries and discuss TC work with leaders of national evangelical fellowships. In Manila, he took part in the 4th annual Theological Forum with its theme of poverty sponsored by Asian Theological Seminary in cooperation with other organisations, where he spoke on global evangelical perspectives. He also met with members of the Asian Graduate School of Theology and the Philippines Council of Evangelical Churches (see also separate story).

In Thailand, the main purpose of the visit was to participate in the Lausanne Theology Working Group's consultation which studied "The Whole Church" and also discussed proposals for the strategies and program of the third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation to be held in 2010. Dr Justin Thacker of EA UK also represented the TC at this conference (see separate story). Dr Parker visited the Chiang Mai Theological Seminary, a recently established school, presenting details of the TC program and discussing trends in theology and theological education.

Singapore was the final part of the two week travel program, where about 40 theologians from various seminaries were invited to Singapore Bible College for a morning of sharing and discussion on important issues facing the church in the region. Dr Parker spoke about contemporary developments in theology which the TC had tackled in recent years including evangelical social engagement, the theology of theological education, the environment and the church in Africa. Dr Parker also met with leaders of the Evangelical Fellowship of Singapore and its Theological Commission to explore ways in which there could be closer cooperation and the development of theological reflection in the area.

'Networking of theologians for the development of the church and sharing of the gospel is one of the important functions of the TC,' said Dr Parker, 'so experiences like these are of high priority in our work.' In April, Dr Parker will travel in South America to continue this activity and to make plans for the TC's annual event which is scheduled to be held in that region in 2009.

WEA TC and National Evangelical Fellowships—a fruitful partnership

National Evangelical Fellowships (NEF) are called to bring people, churches and para-church bodies together as an expression of Christian unity, fellowship, and joint witness for the sake of the Gospel. Their common ground is the lordship of Jesus Christ as unique Saviour and Lord, and the authority of Scripture as the Word of God. There are many ministries and services that NEFs develop to enable them to carry out their important role in the Kingdom of God. In this complex, ever-changing and multi-faith world in which we are called to live and serve, the ministry of NEFs is needed as never before. But if it is to be strong, well directed and dynamic and fruitful, it will of course need good leadership, but also solid foundations and healthy spiritual fibre—which is where the work of a TC can be vital.

A diverse team of well trained theologians can bring to an NEF the biblical and spiritual resources of its various member groups, the rich heritage of the Christian church and the keen awareness of the needs and opportunities presented by our social setting. By working together across denominational and even cultural boundaries, the members of a TC can harness the various perspectives on the gospel enjoyed by its members. With their training in understanding and applying Scripture, they are able to bring new treasures out of the old (Mt 13:52).

Their interaction in a missional and prayerful context as they wrestle together with difficult doctrinal and ethical issues, challenges to the gospel, and differences of opinion within the churches, can open up new approaches, develop fresh perspectives and find deeper roots for our common faith, discipleship and witness. Their participation together in their tasks of teaching, research and ministry can overflow into a greater sense of the unity of the Body of Christ in other areas of the life of the NEF and its members. This wide fellowship and rich understanding is enhanced even further as national bodies relate to the global scene through affiliation with the World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission's work. Our Global Membership scheme allows National Fellowships to participate directly in our work at our annual gatherings, through our study projects and by regular news and information from the TC. By taking out this membership, national fellowships can keep in touch with others and find stimulus and encouragement for regular activities and on-going ministry in their own areas.

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Promoting Biblical Truth by Networking Theologians

TC-08 Bangkok, Thailand



Plans are developing for the annual TC gathering for 2008, TC-08, to be held this year in Thailand. The TC will meet on October 23 and 24 in Bangkok for its regular strategy and planning sessions. The theological component of the gathering will be a symposium with local theologians involving presentations from both visiting and Thailand-based theologians. Details of the symposium are being worked out and will be announced as soon as they have been settled. At the conclusion of the gathering, participants will be able to travel to Pattaya for the General Assembly of the World Evangelical Alliance which will be held October 25–30.

The annual TC gathering is open to TC commissioners, Global Members and invited guests and observers. The Global membership scheme enables anyone interested in international evangelical theological activity to participate fully in the annual gathering of the TC and the rest of its activities. Membership and annual subscription details are available on request and those interested in TC-08 are invited to contact the TC office for more information.



Dr David Parker meets with theologians in Bangkok to discuss TC-08 plans

Dictionary of Evangelical Theology Launched in Italy

After 4 years of intensive work, the *Dizionario di teologia evangelica* (*Dictionary of Evangelical Theology*) was eventually released in 2007. It is edited by a team of Italian theologians (P. Bolognesi, L. De Chirico, A. Ferrari) and published by the largest Italian evangelical publisher. More than 200 contributors from around the evangelical world have contributed to this impressive 1000 page volume. More than 600 entries blend biblical, theological, historical and practical disciplines. 40% of the material comes from existing dictionaries, while 60% is fresh. The whole project has been developed from an Italian perspective which is open to the world-wide Evangelical theological community. The result is an outstanding tool for the cause of the Gospel in Italy, giving pastors, students, and scholars a major reference work to come to terms with Evangelical theology. The Dictionary is thoroughly evangelical in its theological orientation. Official presentations and panel-discussions are being held throughout the country in state and catholic universities, as well as in churches. The general response is positive. We strongly believe that the Dictionary will be a major asset for the future of the Evangelical witness in our country.

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Theological Forum on Poverty Held in Manila

'The Church and Poverty in Asia' was the theme of a highly successful theological forum conducted by Asian Theological Seminary (ATS) in Manila, Philippines, Feb 7–8, 2008. It was attended by about 900 people from a wide range of backgrounds who completely filled the venue, Union Church of Manila (UCM). One of the key features of the event was the well planned and deeply spiritual worship sessions which opened and closed the two day event, and included local music and rhythmic movement to the accompaniment of traditional instruments as well as classic hymns and liturgy.

There were three plenary speakers and almost thirty workshops presentations. Dr Charles Ringma, a well loved former faculty member of ATS, opened the forum with a wide ranging paper titled, 'Liberation Theologians Speak to Evangelicals: a theology and praxis in serving the poor.' Later Dr Samuel Jayakumar of India spoke with conviction using many personal illustrations on 'The Church's Solidarity with the Poor.' The closing address was given by Ms Ruth Callanta, President of the Centre for Community Transformation of the Philippines.

The workshops which attracted enthusiastic participants covered topics as diverse as local church involvement, biblical exegesis, children's interests, medical aspects, the role of radio, Christian education, and pastoral training. Dr David Parker, Executive Secretary of the WEA Theological Commission, discussed 'Global Evangelical Theological Perspectives on Poverty.'

Selected papers from the Forum will be published in book form in October 2008 by ATS in cooperation with OMF Literature Philippines. Papers from the three previous forums have also been published and are available from the publishers (www.OMFlit.com)

Forum organizer, Dr Timotheo Gener, said that he was extremely pleased with the event and expressed his sincere appreciation for the outstanding work done by ATS staff and volunteers to make the forum a success.

ATA was joined by UCM and Radio DZAS as co-sponsors. These groups and other Christian organisations had displays of their ministries and samples of their materials at the many booths throughout the building

For more information, contact info@ats.ph

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A Fruitful Partnership

NEFs with active TCs have found that these teams of dedicated theologians can supply much needed authority, maturity and resilience for the work of the whole body as it seeks to advance, confirm and defend the gospel (Phil 1) and thus provide a strong basis for Christian unity and the expansion of God's kingdom. Examples of projects undertaken include informative consultations and papers on controversial doctrinal topics like the after life and hell, revision of the EA doctrinal confession, comments for the guidance of members on social and public ethical matters, advice on new doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral trends and negotiations with other faith groups.

For more information on how to establish and manage a national or regional Theological Commission, and how to affiliate with the WEA Theological Commission, contact the WEA TC Executive Director, Dr David Parker, and visit our web site—

<http://www.worldevangelicalalliance.com/commissions/tc>

Africa's Vital Role in World Christianity

South African Theological Seminary sponsored a conference August 17–18, 2007 at Bryanston Johannesburg which tackled the key role of Africa in world Christianity. The topic was 'The Rest To The West-Now Is The Time For Africa!'

One of the key speakers, Floyd McClung, speaking about the historical development of missions and the task of theological educators forming World Christians, said, 'The greatest growth, the greatest openness and the greatest moves of God's spirit are happening in Asia, Africa, Latin America and increasingly, in the Middle East. We need to build our work among the people we want to reach and mobilize. There are hundreds and thousands of teachable, dedicated emerging leaders in the nations of Africa who are crying out for training and mentoring.'

He added, 'Africa has a pivotal role to play in reaching the world for Christ, beginning in Africa where poverty and war is the accepted lifestyle! There is a great hunger for the gospel in Africa and many Christian leaders are moving throughout the continent teaching, training and discipling, sometimes under quite difficult conditions.'

The 'Theological Higher Education' (THE) conference, which was attended by about 200 participants, comprising pastors, students and institution heads, is part of an annual series. According to the organisers, it is 'an effort to promote discussion and debate amongst Private Christian Higher Educators. We tend to select topics that are not particularly the "norm" in order to challenge Christian educators.'

Other speakers included Martin de Lange who covered the practices and faith of Muslims. 'Community Outreach' was the topic of Craig Rowe who advocated the development of an intellectual foundation for engagement with the community, and the integration of the key aspects mission, teaching and research of the higher education institutions' with service providers and communities.

Other topics were 'Fundraising for Missions' (Graham Wood), 'How Research Results benefit Missions' (Peter Vumisa), and 'The Pastor and Leadership Training' (Deryck Stone). In his paper, 'The Christian Educator in Global Christianity', Professor Arthur Song urged evangelical Christian educators to become aware of the multi-dimensional implications that Postmodernism imposes on Global Christianity.

The next THE conference will be held in August 2008 and will focus on 'The Bible and Ethics.' A call for papers has been issued. Submission of proposals in areas dealing with ethical questions related to topics such as bio-ethics, communications media, the government and politics should be made by 1 May, 2008 and sent to SATS at email: jenny@sats.edu.za.

Books by Noted Scholar Available

Dr Morris Inch, professor emeritus of Biblical Studies at Wheaton College, has made available copies of several of his books for overseas schools of higher education, providing they can be re-mailed from an U.S. address. Titles he is offering include, *In Christ and On Track*, *Chaos Paradigm*, *The Elder Brother*, *Man: The Perennial Question*, *Matthew in the Messianic Tradition*, *Signature of the Spirit*, and an apologetic series: *Why Take the Bible Seriously?*, *Why Take Jesus Seriously?*, and *Why Take the Church Seriously?* (<http://geocities.com/inchcraft>)

Dr Inch served for 24 years at Wheaton and also in other positions including President of the Institute of Holy Land Studies (now Jerusalem University College), Jerusalem, Israel, and has taught in countries such as Romania, Nigeria, and the Far East.. He has authored about 35 books in total, co-edited three volumes, and contributed numerous articles.

For more details, email: minch@centurytel.net

TC supports Lausanne Theology Group on 'The Whole Gospel'

The WEA Theological Commission supported the Lausanne Theology Group's (LTWG) consultation on 'The Whole Gospel' held at Chiang Mai, Thailand, Feb 12–15, 2008. More than 30 people from 24 countries participated in the conference, the second in a series to prepare for the Lausanne congress, Cape Town 2010. The previous conference was held in February 2007 and served as an introduction to the series. The WEA was represented at Chiang Mai by Dr David Parker, Executive Director of the Theological Commission, Dr Justin Thacker, TC member and head of theology for EA UK and Rose Dowsett (Missions Commission.) Other members of the WEA are involved in the program planning and participation for the Cape Town event as well as its overall direction. (See Dr Thacker's reflection in Verbum, page 4.)

Led by Dr Chris Wright, International Director, Langham Partnership International, and convenor of the LTWG, the Chiang Mai consultation listened to the series of plenary papers on major topics, supported by a number of short papers and case studies dealing with particular situations around the world. The plenary speakers included Jonathon Bonk, USA (Gospel and Ethics), Mark Chan, Singapore (Gospel and the achievement of the cross), Kwabena Asamuh-Gyadu, Ghana (Gospel and the power of the Spirit) and Ruth Padilla de Borst (Gospel in Mission and Culture). The opening paper was presented by Dr Wright on 'The gospel in biblical revelation.'

Case studies covered topics such as working with the poor in Philippines (Athena Gorospe), the Breakthrough ministry in Hong Kong (Philemon Choi), hospitality in USA (Joon-Sik Park), the songs of the Dinka people in the Sudan (Isaiah Dau) and proclaiming the gospel in an Eastern Orthodox context (Emile Bartos).

Members of the Lausanne Strategy Working Group were present at the conference and gave a detailed outline of their group's plans in the lead up to the Cape Town congress. Various reports and papers from the Chiang Mai conference are being submitted to those planning the Cape Town congress. Convenor Dr Wright said about the consultation, 'We took a step back to our biblical roots and to the historical roots of the Lausanne movement. In so doing we were taking a significant step forward in recalling the evangelical movement to articulate and demonstrate the wholeness of the gospel as we face the awesome challenges of the present world.'

The next consultation will be held in January 2009 and will feature as its subject 'The Whole Church.'

Verbum

The Whole Gospel

By Dr Justin Thacker, Head of Theology, Evangelical Alliance of UK

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Go therefore and make believers of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to believe everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

I assume that you noticed the deliberate alterations to these verses from Matthew 28. The so-called ‘great commission’ does not call us to make ‘believers’, but rather ‘disciples’. Similarly, we are not to teach them to ‘believe’, but rather to ‘obey’. If you did not spot the changes, it may be because all of us have a tendency, whether conscious or not, to interpret this commission as if it said what I have suggested. Yet, to reduce the goal of the commission merely to a transformation in a set of cognitive attitudes is to peddle, not the full gospel of Jesus Christ, but rather a partial gospel. Indeed, given that it questionable whether such a thing can exist—perhaps we should even say a false gospel.

For the whole gospel of Jesus Christ is not merely a certain list of doctrines to be ticked off one by one. If it were, then it certainly would be possible to proclaim the ‘gospel’ just in words, and our aim would simply be to persuade others to adopt a different belief system. However, that is not the full gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ was declared in advance to Abraham (Galatians 3:8), embodied in Jesus Christ (Luke 4:21), and transforms our existence (Romans 1:16). It is not so much a package that we can pin down, process and then deliver to unsuspecting wanderers looking for a new worldview. It is rather a river in which we find ourselves being carried forward, and into which we invite others to jump. It defines us, rather we who define it. And like a raging torrent, it is uncontrollable, and unstoppable, taking us to places that we could never imagine, and may not even want to go.

All of us know this, and when we consider the gospel in relation to our own lives we recognise the metaphor that I have advanced. Yet, for some reason when it comes to sharing this good news with others, it is as if we step out of the river collect just a sample of the water—and offer it up saying, ‘here it is, a life transforming gospel, why don’t you try some?’ No wonder, our unsuspecting hearer looks at us with bewilderment. We have been swimming in the riches of God’s grace, yet in reducing the gospel merely to a set of propositions, we offer them little in comparison.

This is not to suggest for a moment that such doctrinal formulations are unimportant, or even absolutely necessary for any full presentation of the gospel. However, it is to suggest that when, either implicitly or explicitly, we suggest that the ‘gospel’ is merely that set of propositions, rather than a life changing encounter with the Lord of the universe, then we have sold our listeners short. The whole gospel of Jesus Christ transforms us, and as a result causes us to be transforming. It captivates the whole of our being—mind, heart, spirit, soul and body—and in turning us inside out, redirects the whole of who we are to the worship of Jesus Christ.

It is precisely for this reason that the whole gospel can never just be proclaimed verbally—though it must be proclaimed verbally—but in addition necessitates a demonstration in practice of the love of Jesus Christ. To treat orthopraxy as additional or optional is to indicate that one has not been wholly transformed oneself by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and is therefore to peddle a partial gospel, if not a false gospel.

It is then for this reason that the call upon our lives is to teach others to obey, rather than merely to believe. For Christ did not die on a cross to save Cartesian minds. He died to save people—in all their cognitive, affective, spiritual and physical being. That is the whole gospel of Jesus Christ.

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