

WEA Theological News



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Theological Commission Makes Strong Progress on Contextualisation Project



Contextualisation Task Force

A task force of the WEA Theological Commission met for three days at Wycliffe Hall Oxford in August 2008 to discuss and refine a series of papers on contextualization of exegesis and theology. Under the leadership of Dr Matt Cook, FATEAC, Côte d'Ivoire, and administrative help of Rob Haskell (USA), 14 scholars from eight countries, refined their papers and made plans for their publication and other ways of sharing their findings. Included in the group were two representatives of the WEA Mission Commission which is also working on the same subject and will also produce essays and other materials. Participants were enthusiastic about the quality of the work and sharing of insights.

Dr Cook said, "The process worked very smoothly with each person giving their prepared paper, followed by responses and interaction. The tremendous benefit was the interaction of different cultural backgrounds, different fields of study, and different perspectives. The formal and informal interaction was laced with life transformative conversation, personal development, as well as problem

solving (on the theoretical level) of contextualization. At the end we worked together to list (and categorize) significant elements of contextualization. It may be that the greatest benefits of this conference, besides the book, will be the transformation of individuals (and our thinking about contextualization), the networking (an important goal of the TC), and this final listing of elements of contextualization."

Papers, which had been under preparation for many months prior to the consultation, covered topics such as culture, social settings, divine revelation and authority, globalisation, inerrancy, theological praxis, syncretism and others. It is anticipated that the volume from this consultation will relate to the work being done by the Mission Commission. Consideration is also being given to the translation of the material into several different languages so that it can be used in many places around the world.

Dr Cook said that the next phase of the project involves preparing curriculum materials which will serve as practical guides to the process of contextualisation for use at local church and seminary level. Dr Cook added, Continued on Page 3

Statement from TC Task Force on Jewish Evangelism

A declaration calling for "Renewed commitment to the task of Jewish evangelism" and "Recognition of the uniqueness of Christ as the crucified, resurrected and divine Messiah who alone can save from death and bring eternal life" has been issued by a task force of the WEA Theological Commission. The "The Berlin Declaration on the Uniqueness of Christ and Jewish Evangelism in Europe Today" was developed at a consultation in Berlin, Germany August 18–22, 2008. The statement may be read at [http://www.worldevangelicals.org/news/Berlin_2008_Statement_\(1\).pdf](http://www.worldevangelicals.org/news/Berlin_2008_Statement_(1).pdf)

The 1200 word document calls for reconciliation and unity amongst believers in Jesus, respect for religious conviction and liberty that allows frank discussion of religious claims and repentance from all expressions of anti-Semitism and all other forms of genocide, prejudice and discrimination.

The consultation, which was five years in planning, was called to address current concerns about the necessity and theological basis for Jewish evangelism especially in the setting of Germany and Europe as a whole. It involved 13 scholars from the Theological Commission, key seminaries and other organisations. It also included practitioners engaged in ministry amongst Jewish people, and Christians from Germany and Messianic Jews. A total of 13 papers were presented covering biblical, theological and practical matters which provided the background for the Declaration. A spokesman for the TC said that plans are in hand for the publication of the papers as an additional resource for those interested.

The Berlin Declaration 2008 follows in the wake of earlier documents produced by the WEA on Jewish evangelism. The first was the Willowbank Declaration of 1989 which was hailed at the time as a decisive statement and continues to be referred to as a landmark document. The second was a brief statement published and endorsed by the WEA reinforcing the validity and importance of Jewish evangelism which appeared in the *New York Times*

Continued on Page 2

Promoting Biblical Truth by Networking Theologians

TC-08 Bangkok



Plans are being finalised for the annual Theological Commission event to be held October 22–25 in Bangkok, Thailand in association with World Evangelical Alliance General Assembly which follows at Pattaya. It features

a mini-consultation on the topic, “Holistic Gospel in a Developing Community” with plenary papers by Dr James Nkansah (NEGST, Kenya) and Dr Justin Thacker (EA UK). These presentations will be followed by in-depth discussion on several areas of application of this theme in relation to the practical work of churches in Thailand. In addition there will be another English language discussion group which will focus on international aspects of the topic. Findings will be compiled into a document to be available from the TC display at the WEA General Assembly which follows TC-08 in Pattaya, Oct 25–30.

The annual TC gathering is open to TC commissioners, Global Members and invited guests and observers and other interested friends by arrangement. Plans are also progressing for the 2009 annual meeting and consultation to be held in Latin America.

On-Line Library Resources

Latourette Library of William Carey International University offers resources for people around the world in Bible, theology, missions, international development, and practical tools, according to an announcement by the Director of Library Services, Laura Raab. She explains, “The home page (<http://www.wciu.edu/library/>) links to non-password protected resources such as the Theological Journals Search of open-access journals and to our catalog. To find academic-level e-books that are open to anyone, scroll down our home page to Find Books. Click on our catalog link, then in the Location box type the word “open” and add any other search terms in the appropriate fields. Currently the catalog lists 1447 open-access books, but more are frequently added.

The reference page (<http://www.wciu.edu/library/reference.html>) provides links in many different categories and the web links database (<http://library.wciu.edu/links/>) has over 8500 links covering number of subjects.

The William Carey International University (associated with the U.S. Center for World Mission) is a small private university focusing on international development and offering MA and PhD degrees. These programs are field-based and may be taken in most regions of the world. Applicants must be affiliated with or aiming toward work with specific voluntary agencies (NGOs, non governmental organizations) involved in cross-cultural development, many of which are faith-based. Most WCIU students study in the location where they currently live and work.

cont. from page 1

WEA ...Statement

in 2008, with 54 signatures (and more added later).

TC Executive Director, Dr David Parker, said, “With the background of Willowbank and the NYT statement, it is our prayer that the Berlin Declaration 2008, signed by the thirteen members of the Task Force, will prove to be equally useful in supporting the work of taking the gospel ‘to the Jew first’ and also the rest of the world. We believe the European setting of our statement is particularly significant. We hope that this declaration will encourage many Christians to see the importance and biblical warrant for this important ministry. We would like to see the Berlin Declaration 2008 circulated as widely as possible amongst those who are engaged in and interested in this ministry.”



Jewish Evangelism Task Force at the Jewish Museum, Berlin.

While the Berlin Declaration 2008 is not an official document of WEA, the Theological Commission is distributing it for study and consideration. Comments and responses are welcome and can be directed to the Theological Commission at the addresses shown above.

Vulnerable Mission Conferences and Locations:

USA	Various locations Jan 13–30
UK	Feb 13 Andover, Mar 10 Peak District
Germany	Feb.18 Schorndorf, Stuttgart

Aim of conferences: to encourage Christian mission from the West to the non-West, that engages in ministry using the language and available resources of the people being reached.

For full information see www.vulnerablemission.com

Contact Jim Harries, Chairman, Alliance for Vulnerable Mission (jim@vulnerablemission.com) with papers for the Vulnerable Mission website, or submissions for the conferences.

How is the TC funded?

Although the TC is a commission of the WEA, its work is funded separately by interested supporters. Of its publications, only the Theological Resource Library CD-ROM produces any funding. Some of the study projects have attracted designated funding, and other donations are received occasionally. Some organisations have taken up particular parts of the overall program for support. The Global Membership scheme is self-funding, but is not a revenue source. In addition, people involved in the TC activities contribute their time and, in many cases, take care of their own expenses for travel and conference costs. We invite enquiries about how interested people can help us financially.

Baptist Theologians Meet in Prague



Dr Miyon Chung from Torch Trinity School of Theology, Seoul Korea at the Prague Conference

Leading Baptist theologians and scholars from around the world met in Prague, Czech Republic, for the seventh Baptist International Conference on Theological Education (BICTE). BICTE, an international conference planned by the Baptist World Alliance, and normally held every five years, took place at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague from July 26–29. Dr David Parker, Executive Director of the WEA Theological Commission, was one of the participants.

The 121 people from 34 countries listened to 15 papers on a range of historical, educational, theological, and spiritual topics from speakers representing many parts of the world. Some of those present were younger leaders from a special program inaugurated recently by the Baptist World Alliance. The overall theme reflected the forthcoming 400th anniversary of the Baptist movement with the title, "Probing the Theological Boundaries: The Baptist Story from Amsterdam to Tomorrow." Presenters included Ian Randall, Daniel Carro, Brian Harris, David Gushee, Louise Kretzschmar and Edna Grenz. There were also significant presentations made by official responders to the papers.

The program began with a session tracing Baptist theological footprints over the past 400 years. Subsequent sessions explored topics relating to ministerial formation and heard reports from member regions about the status of theological education around the globe. Participants were particularly challenged to consider how their institutions could address the contemporary ecological crisis; the exploitation of women and children; the changing forms of worship in the church; greater utilization of art, film, and other media in the classroom; and a radical spirituality that is open to fresh winds of the Spirit. At the end of the conference, participants endorsed a report and statement which emphasised the principle concerns of the group. The statement may be read at <http://www.bwanet.org/default.aspx?pid=3D865>



Jan Valeš, President Evangelical Theological Seminary, Prague

While in Prague, Dr Parker also met, Jan Valeš, President of the Evangelical Theological Seminary. A pastor of the Brethren Church (Free Evangelical Church), Mr Valeš was one of the first students of the seminary and has continued his studies at Charles University as well as serving a local congregation. He became director of the school in 2007, succeeding long-time principal, Rev Karel Taschner, and teaches biblical and doctrinal subjects. A special feature of the seminary is its twin focus on pastoral training and counselling and social work. Rev Valeš says that this combination is not only a matter of following church trends but "it is based on the fact that God makes himself known both by word and service." ETS has an interdenominational board and student body and is government accredited.

"Theologians Without Borders"

One of many innovations reported during the seventh Baptist International Conference on Theological Education (BICTE) held at Prague, July 26–29, 2008, was the program being developed by Dr Geoff Pound known as "Theologians Without Borders". Pound, a former New Zealander now serving as an itinerant theologian based in the United Arab Emirates, said, "Theologians Without Borders (TWB) is a ministry of the Baptist World Alliance that brings together seminaries that need short-term teachers and conventions that need preachers with people who are equipped and available to serve. While it has commenced among Baptists it is not exclusively a Baptist venture. Already expressions of interest and requests for help have come from people and seminaries representing different branches of the church."

A former Principal of Whitley College, Melbourne, Pound said, "The vision emerged out of my experience when I commenced in early 2006 as a volunteer seminary teacher and conference speaker. When my availability became known I not only received more requests than I could handle but many opportunities were in areas that were not my primary expertise. As we talked, we envisaged a flexible coordination group that could act as a clearing house for requests, various

ways we could sound the Macedonian call, 'Come over and Help Us!', a matchmaking service that could bring together people with the right skill and theological shade and a resource centre that prepares both teachers and the institutions that will receive them."

Theologians Without Borders is based on the biblical concepts of partnership and mutual encouragement. Teachers who teach at a seminary for a week or a month or preachers who speak at a Pastor's Conference generally come at their own expense or are supported by their seminary, convention or local church. The onus is on the receiving partner to meet the costs of food and accommodation.

TWB commenced in a small way, but requests have been received from a wide range of countries. The types of need vary considerably including teaching, administration, and leadership development. Offers of teachers are also increasing. Those who would like to be involved are invited to submit an expression of interest. Similarly, those who can assist with funding are welcome to contact Dr Pound. Further information is available at the TWB website <http://theologianswithoutborders.blogspot.com/>

cont. from page 1

TC...Contextualisation

I think this tremendous work will require another conference of about 10 individuals who would work on producing a single document of less than 20,000 words that would provide steps for contextualization, probing questions to assist the practitioner, areas where contextualization may be necessary in areas such as theological systems, folk religion and worship." Other participants reported on the benefits of the consultation, mentioned especially positive cross cultural discussion, fruitful interchange between theological disciplines, sharing between scholars in an open and constructive manner, and in particular, "theological reflection for the practicing church, not so much the academy." In summing up the consultation, he said, "This consultation was extremely beneficial for those able to attend, let us pray that its usefulness extends to the whole church through the published work and future projects."

Dr David Parker, Executive Director of the WEA TC, said, "We are extremely grateful to Dr Matt Cook who had the vision for this project and for his leadership in planning it. Rob Haskell's work on the administrative side has been invaluable, and Wycliffe Hall as a venue was ideal. We are also very thankful for those who provided funding for this consultation over and above our normal TC budget. We are now looking for ways to fund the later parts of the venture so its full benefit can be made available to churches around the world. It has been a milestone in our work and we look forward to the next stages of the project, including the association with the Mission Commission."

Verbum

Intelligent Design

By James Danaher, Nyack College, NY USA.

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Was there an intelligent design behind the creation of the universe? Many think that this is a question worth asking today, since we know that the world is considerably more complex than Darwin imagined it to be. The number of monkeys banging on typewriters needed to create the order we find in today's world would be exponentially greater than the followers of Darwin had imagined. Christians in particular, seem extremely pleased with this development, but I fail to see why. Adolph Hitler had a design for the world, as did Joe Stalin, George Bush, and Pope Alexander VI. Furthermore, they all had some sort of intelligence behind their designs.

So why would we necessarily be happy about the world having a designer? Perhaps if it were a matter of a benevolent designer, but order does not necessarily imply benevolence, as the above examples attest. Furthermore, even if the designer of the universe was benevolent, that does not necessarily mean that he/she/it had a benevolent design for my life. Indeed, I could be a mere pawn designed to create goods such as compassion, mercy, and charity in others.

I think the only meaningful question concerning design is whether there is a benevolent design for my particular life. This kind of design may seem hard to prove or support with evidence. In fact, however, we can have evidence for such a personal, benevolent designer, but it will not be the kind of modern, scientific evidence that we seek when trying to support the idea of intelligent design for the universe.

The evidence that there is a designer who wishes to give my life a more benevolent design than I could fashion myself only becomes visible when we follow Jesus' prescription and enter into a certain poverty. It is only in what we might call a state of poverty, where we are no longer capable of providing a design for our lives, that we become aware of a design and provision beyond what we create for ourselves. Most people in the modern developed world are able to create their own design for their lives in ways that people in poverty are not. It seems hard for us to imagine poverty being a good thing, but Jesus tells us that those who are truly blessed are the poor. Certainly there are aspects of poverty that are undesirable, but the one great advantage of poverty is that in such a state we are without the means to create a design for ourselves, and we are able to become aware of another designer and provider at work in our lives beyond ourselves.

Of course, as we have said, the evidence for such a designer is not the kind of which modern science would approve. It is not objective but requires the subjective commitment of a genuine seeker of truth. Like the pearl of great price for which we must abandon all else, the evidence we seek only comes when we have spent all of our resources, and are without the means to create a design for ourselves. So long as we are able to make provision and provide a design for our lives, we are unable to see God's design for our lives.

It is for that reason that Jesus so often mentions the blessedness of the poor, since it is only in our poverty that we can see a more intelligent design than the one we fashion for ourselves. Likewise, this is one of the reasons Jesus so often warns us against wealth, since wealth affords us the luxury of creating our own design, but such a luxury makes it extremely difficult to see God's provision and design for our lives.

Further reading:

The Way of the Heart. Henri Nouwen.

"The Saint." New Blackfriars. October, 2008.

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 October 2008"

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



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