

WEA Theological News



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Theological Commission Sees Transition at Bangkok Meeting



Int. Director, G Tunncliffe, congratulates Dr R Hille at the WEA General Assembly for 20 years' service to TC

The World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission saw a significant transition when it met for its annual session in Bangkok, Thailand, Oct 22-25 with the resignation of Dr Rolf Hille as chairman. He was appointed to the position in 1996, and for most of the time since then he was also the Executive Director. Warm words of appreciation were expressed for Dr Hille who initially joined the Executive Committee in 1986. In the dual position of "Executive Chairman", he played a vital role in steering the TC through a major re-organisation and re-focusing of its vision, while at the same time carrying a heavy load in his full time ministry as head of an important theological institution in Tuebingen, Germany. This significant achievement was all the more noteworthy because he was deeply involved in church, theological and Evangelical Alliance work in Germany and Europe, and had heavy family responsibilities. His theological insights, gracious Christian spirit and

foresight enabled the TC to pull through difficult times and its continuing ministry is a tribute to the sacrifice and vision of Dr Hille.

Dr Justin Thacker (EA UK) was appointed acting-chair and has since accepted the position permanently. Dr James Nkansah (Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology) was appointed Vice-Chair. Dr David Parker's term as Executive Director was extended.



Dr Justin Thacker



David Roldan

A new appointment to the core group of the Theological Commission was Rev David Roldan from Facultad Internacional de Educacion Teologica (FIET), Buenos Aires.

Representing the Spanish-speaking sector of Latin America, he joins Dr Claus Schwambach of Brasil to complete the representation from this important area of the world in time for TC to focus on this area in its annual meeting and international consultation next year in Sao Paulo, Brasil. David is Dean and Academic Secretary of FIET, and has served as National Secretary of ASIT (Accreditation Association of Seminaries). He is editor of *Revista Teología y Cultura (Theology and Culture Review)*. He holds two advanced degrees in theology and is engaged in doctoral level studies while also teaching advanced philosophy and holding membership in two important philosophy research teams. David is a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Argentina and has contributed many articles to theological and other periodicals. Dr David Parker said, "We are pleased to welcome David to the team—as a young man he has already developed a fine record of scholarship, pastoral concern and administrative leadership."

There were extensive discussions on the financial situation of the TC and there is an urgent on-going need for more support in order to stabilise and expand the work, especially in view of the severe impact of the world financial crisis on TC funds. The TC is looking for those who will partner them financially in the work. More information is available upon request.

There were reports of good progress in study projects over recent times, and a number of worthwhile suggestions were discussed about the study program for the future. The TC is seeking expressions of interest and ideas about topics and projects.

Reader Response Invited!

The Theological Commission is considering its budget for publications and specifically, the printed version of *Theological News*. We therefore invite you to respond to the questions below.

Indicate your preference by numbering the following questions 1 to 4 (first to last preference)

A No change—printed version quarterly, plus 2 e-versions (not suited for printing) with overlapping content

B Only high quality PDF version similar to current printed edition sent by email

C Only PDF version mounted on a website—email to notify its availability for download

D. No printed paper version—only current e-version twice a quarter as at present.

Send your responses to tc@worldevangelicals.org, or by mail to TC Publications, 17 Disraeli St Indooroopilly Q 4068 Australia, or by fax (country code 1 for US) 952-216-4838

Theological News has been produced since 1969 and in the earlier years was supplemented with a publication focused on theological education. The full run from 1969 to 2004 is available in searchable PDF format on a CD for sale through the TC office.

Subscriptions for the printed paper version for the year 2009 are now due—see details on Page 4

Promoting Biblical Truth by Networking Theologians

New Religious Freedom Publications

A large number of publications on Religious Freedom (IIRF) and other topics are being made available, many of them electronically, by the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) and the Martin Bucer Seminary.

The IIRF is publishing a bi-annual journal to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issue of religious freedom in general and the persecution of Christians in particular. Known as *The International Journal for Religious Freedom* (IJRF), this new publication is interdisciplinary, international, peer reviewed and scholarly, and contains research articles, documentation, book reviews and academic news on the issue. The first issue includes articles on researching persecution, a theology of persecution, and recent trends.

IIRF is affiliated with the World Evangelical Alliance and is a network of professors, researchers, academics and specialists from all continents, who work on reliable data on the violation of religious freedom. There are offices in Bonn, Cape Town, and Colombo. While other bodies, including the Religious Liberty Commission of the WEA, are engaged in practical ways, IIRF aims to work on a long-term basis and to insure that comprehensive studies are carried out and publicised for the benefit of those interested. The Director of IIRF and the Editor of the journal is Dr. Thomas Schirmacher, who holds doctorates in theology, anthropology and comparative religions. A small board of supervisors represents the German, European and World Evangelical Alliances and the Lausanne Movement.

Dr Schirmacher is an ethicist and Director of the Martin Bucer Seminary, Bonn which has available a wide range of books. The full list, which may be seen at <http://www.bucer.eu/books>, includes popular as well as scholarly level material. It includes several in the newly launched WEA Global Issues Series (<http://www.iirf.eu/index.php?id=95>). The books are obtainable from regular bookshops, and PDF versions are freely available on-line. To help those not able to purchase the books, they are offered without cost to qualified recipients.

Subscriptions for the journal IJRF may be directed to the South African office but the journal will appear on-line at www.iirf.eu a few weeks after the printed version is published. More information may be obtained from the website.

Seminary Positions available in Europe

Tyndale Theological Seminary is seeking highly qualified candidates to join its team of faculty and staff in their work of developing men and women as thinking, creative and prepared leaders for Kingdom service world-wide. This takes place in an exciting, cross-cultural and residential training situation. We are seeking three faculty members: one in Old Testament Studies, one in New Testament Studies, and one in intercultural studies and practical ministry.

Information about these positions is available at the following website: www.tyndale-europe.edu. All interested individuals must have the doctorate degree and be willing to provide full financial support. Interested individuals can also write Dr. Drake Williams at the following email address: drake@Tyndale.nl.

New Journal focuses on Croatian Christianity

A theological journal in two language versions is available twice a year from the Evangelical Alliance of Croatia. Known as *Kairos*, the journal is edited by Stanko Jambrek, General Secretary of the Alliance. It aims to be a channel for communicating the gospel, a support for evangelical scholars, a voice for Croatian evangelicalism and as a means of bringing articles from the around the world that are relevant and helpful for the Croatian church.

Articles may be from a wide range of disciplines including biblical, systematic and applied theology, ethics, Church history, and sociology of religion, philosophy and church life. Both peer reviewed and other articles are accepted. One section of the journal features new translations of biblical books, significant historical documents and excerpts from works of respected people of faith.

The journal is strongly focused on material which represents Croatian evangelical thinking or is likely to be important for the Croatian Christian community. The contact address for subscriptions is *Kairos*, Amruseva 11, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia. The web site is www.bigz.hr/kairos. The editor may be contacted at sjambrek@bigz.hr

TC-09 and International Consultation in Latin America

The WEA Theological Commission has announced that its major event for 2009 will be an international consultation to be held in Sao Paulo, Brasil on the general topic, "Church and Theology in Practice". It will be held July 22-25 with the annual TC planning and strategy session taking place prior to the consultation.

The consultation will be open to all those in Latin America who are interested in theological reflection, including seminary and Bible College faculty, students, pastors, missionaries and others. There will be opportunity for participants to present papers and join in wide-ranging discussion on topics of local, regional and international significance. Registration will be opened later but in the meantime, those interested in the consultation are invited to contact the TC for more information and to be placed on a mailing list.

The program is in the process of being developed and it is expected there will be a series sub-topics to be dealt with in plenary sessions with short papers by featured speakers, and other topics to be handled in many parallel break-out sessions where participants will be able to present their own work and concerns. Planning is underway for formal and informal fellowship with local churches, and the community.

TC Executive Director, Dr Parker, said, "We want to serve the church in Latin America by sponsoring this consultation in association with others. We look forward to working with as many people, seminaries, associations and churches as possible to make this a significant event. There are many strategic opportunities in this region and we hope that our visit will help bring a wide range of theologians together. We are deeply appreciative of the support and interest we have received for this consultation so far, and especially the endorsement of several key people and organisations. We are keen to receive suggestions about the program and supply details as it develops. Those interested are invited to contact us soon so they can keep in touch."

For more information, email tc@worldevangelicals.org

Pioneering Theological Gathering in Bangkok

The Fellowship of Theological Institutes of Thailand met for the first time as a forum to discuss theological issues when the WEA Theological Commission sponsored a consultation on the holistic gospel during the TC's recent annual meeting in Thailand. The consultation, held on Oct 24th at the Baptist Theological Seminary, Bangkok, was attended by faculty members of Thai colleges, church workers and many other people interested in the subject, "Holistic gospel in a developing society."

Plenary papers on biblical and historical foundations were presented by visiting TC scholars, Dr James Nkansah (Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology) and Dr Justin Thacker (Head of Theology, Evangelical Alliance of the UK). Small groups then discussed four topics which related to local issues, including politics and corruption, and ministry to HIV/AIDS sufferers, children and prostitution. At the reporting session, key issues emerged which led to lively interchanges between participants. Following devotions led by Dr David Parker, Executive Director of the WEA Theological Commission, a fellowship meal was served for all participants. It is expected that this well received consultation will be the first in a series of further meetings of theologians in Thailand, some of whom travelled long distances to attend.

In expressing appreciation for the warm welcome and response by local theologians to the idea of holding a consultation geared to local interests, Dr Parker said, "This kind of event is one of the most important aspects of the work of the Theological Commission, committed as it is to 'promoting biblical truth by networking theologians to serve the church in obedience to Christ.' We are greatly encouraged when we see those interested in the fellowship, confirmation and defence of the gospel meeting together to deepen the understanding of the church and expanding its vision. We pray that the work of theological reflection in Thailand will increase and develop greatly in the future."

During the consultation, Theological Commission members worked on a short statement on holistic ministry from an international perspective covering biblical principles, opportunities and challenges, and practical steps to implementation in churches. Copies of the statement, which may be freely copied and distributed, is available on the TC web site at <http://www.worldangelicals.org/commissions/tc/click.htm> or on application to the TC Executive Director (tc@worldangelicals.org).

Theological Factors in Official WEA Statements

Theological factors are basic to many of the official statements adopted by the World Evangelical Alliance at its 12th General Assembly which met in Pattaya, Thailand, Oct 25-30, 2008. The Assembly attracted more than 500 senior leaders from most of the 130 member national alliances and many other world Christian organisations. The six major resolutions set out evangelical responses to religious liberty, HIV and Aids, poverty, peacemaking, creation care and the global financial crisis.

"It is interesting to see how explicit theological assertions are a major part of the rationale of these statements, showing the importance of sound theological thinking for evangelicals and the way theological understanding can ground and motivate our action," said WEA Theological Commission Executive Director, Dr David Parker.

The statement "On the Care of Creation" referred to such issues as the theology of creation, sin, redemption and eschatology" and explained that "environmental problems are more spiritual than technological." It went on to call for people to make a "personal lifestyle choices that express humility, forbearance, self restraint and frugality."

Moral issues were emphasised in the statement on HIV. It said, "With brokenness we admit that as Evangelical Christians we have allowed stigmatisation and discrimination to characterise our relationships with people living with HIV. We repent of these sinful attitudes

and commit to ensuring that they are changed." The statement went on to call for churches to provide "a clear, biblical framework of biblical sexuality and life skills" and for them to "listen with understanding" to those affected by issues such as HIV "so that we can work together for a healthy and safe future."

The resolution on the current economic crisis stated that the "turmoil is, at its root, evidence of what happens when too many are captivated by greed and put their faith in, and entrust their security and future aspirations to a system animated by the maximization of wealth." It concluded that "Many legitimately feel betrayed." The document reaffirmed "our faith in God and acknowledge that He is in control." It added, "We repent when we have placed our trust in money, institutions and persons, rather than in God."

Key presentations at the General Assembly included addresses by Dr Joel Edwards on "Evangelicals as Good News People", Dr Richard Howell speaking on the gospel in a pluralistic age and Dr Ronald Sider outlining a "Biblically Shaped, Factually Informed Evangelical Political Framework."

The text of many of the documents and speeches given during the Assembly may be accessed on the WEA website <http://ga08.org/mediacenter/>

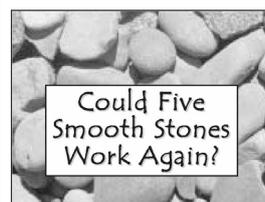
TC and Lausanne Theology Group

The WEA Theological Commission and the Lausanne Theology Working Group will work together in the third consultation leading up to the Cape Town 2010 Congress. The consultation on the topic, "The Whole Church", will take place in Panama late in January 2009 and will feature about 30 theologians.

The previous consultation on "The Whole Gospel" was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand in February 2008. Papers from this conference are being published in the January 2009 issue of *Evangelical Review of Theology*. Many extra copies of this issue will be distributed widely around the world. More information is available on application.

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Evangelicals—Good News People

By Joel Edwards, International Director, Micah Challenge

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The word 'Evangelical' has a very bad press. So no wonder many evangelicals are desperately looking for alternatives. But after twenty years in evangelical leadership it seems to me that this is only half of the story. I am keen to write about an agenda for change in which evangelicals can recover the idea of evangelicalism as Good News.

I have discussed with over thirty senior church leaders across the world what they feel about an agenda which presents Christ credibly, rehabilitates evangelicalism as Good News and challenges evangelical witness to become a long term movement for spiritual and cultural change.

Opinions varied: Tony Campolo said the word was beyond redemption: he was substituting 'Red Letter Christians'. Peter Jensen, the Archbishop of Sydney, thought it provides a rallying point for 'a certain type of Christian' and Bishop Tom Wright said it was 'one of the greatest words in the world.'

Understandably for a lot of people, 'evangelical' is another name for a moral myopia which carps on about abortion and homosexuals and never talks about poverty or exclusion. 'Evangelical' has become an American export which makes God a Republican mascot. But if people are going to think differently about evangelicals, the only people who will be able to get them to change their minds will be evangelicals themselves!

I am not talking about a mindless and unquestioning veneration of the word 'evangelical'. There will be no shrines built to an adjective! But my contention is that we can recover the idea. At least two surveys in 2005 made it clear that most people are still opened to be convinced. Words can change their meaning. Once upon a time the word 'gay' meant 'happy'! The WEA alone claims to represent 420 million evangelicals in over 130 nations. If all these people wanted it to happen then 'evangelical' could mean 'good news'. If we are to accomplish this there are some important challenges for all evangelicals—including those on the 'theological right' as much as those on the centre and left.

What we are about is a great deal more than a name. It's the Name. We must present Christ credibly. And in doing so we are faced with many serious challenges. There is a secular vendetta against the idea of God in the public square. In the constellation of gods Christ is now one among many. A credible response to our culture does not mean neutralising his Lordship. In a liberal democracy we should be free to say that 'Jesus Christ is Lord'. The claim that Jesus is God is the enduring strength of orthodox Christian faith. But his Lordship is not a truncheon with which to beat other people. Our task is not to pull down Mohammed, Krishna or Guru Nanak: it is to lift up Jesus.

A credible response should be prepared to undomesticate the Christ whom evangelicals have held captive by our myopic and fearful subcultures. I am not convinced that Jesus would be publicly identifiable with our moral agenda. I think He would be identified more quickly with Make Poverty History than any demonstration about sexual orientation. He belongs on the pavement but we have chained Him in our pulpits and locked Him in our pews.

Evangelicals are known to be activists, and with good reason. But there is no substitute for long term thinking. An evangelical agenda for change must develop a kind of biblical tenacity which is in for the long haul. Not even our passion for revival should detract us from our long term agenda for change. And we do this both by proclamation and by acts of kindness. The old dichotomy between words and works is dying. As Alistair McGrath told me, 'The social gospel got one thing right and everything else wrong.'

An evangelical church which takes its ministry of mercy seriously will have less concern about the idea of 'public benefit' central to our understanding of Christian citizenship is a radical commitment to serve other people not just to protect our own interests, power or influence.

So it turns out that an agenda for change begins—not in the world at large—but in our hearts and minds.

For further reading:

Joel Edwards, *An Agenda for Change: a global call for spiritual and social transformation* Zondervan, 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 January 2009"

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

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