

WEA Theological News



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Historic Theological Commission Consultation in Latin America Revised Vision Statement at 2009 Annual Session

The Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance gathered in Sao Paulo from the 22nd to the 25th of July for its annual business meeting and to conduct a symposium on the theology of the evangelical movement in Latin America.

The business meeting crafted a revised vision and purpose statement (see page 2). Dr Justin Thacker, the Chair of the TC, commented, "We believe that this year's annual meeting witnessed a turning point in the history of the theological commission. While in the past, our focus has rightly been the establishment of local and regional fellowships of evangelical theologians, this work is now largely completed. Therefore, looking to the future, the TC intends to focus on the big issues affecting our world and to speak to them with evangelical conviction in a way that is globally relevant."

In addition to its annual business meeting, the TC also hosted a symposium for Latin American theologians. Approximately eighty people took part, the majority of whom came from various parts of Brazil.

Key papers dealt with the nature of the movement and its current challenges: fragmentation, visibility of public witness, lack of an explicit systematic theology, and responsibility for keeping alive an evangelical spirit faithful to the 1974 Lausanne tradition. One key debate dealt with the way in which the evangelical movement should relate to neo-pentecostalism.

In addition, there was a major focus on fidelity to the legacy of the evangelical tradition, linked theologically to names such as John Stott, René Padilla, Samuel Escobar and the Latin American Theological Brotherhood, as well as on the importance of a renewed commitment to integral mission, understood within a trinitarian paradigm.

Standing out as one of the most important rediscoveries of the conference was Daniel Salinas's exposition of the "Galilee option" as a hermeneutical key for understanding the seminal contribution of the Latin American Theological Brotherhood, based on Jesus of Nazareth's deliberate and liberating choice of peripheral and minor socio-political regions of the Roman Empire.

David Roldán of Argentina emphasised the necessity for evangelical theology to consider the process of secularization and the key role of governments and national states in generating social justice and redistribution of wealth, with the aim of rethinking in that context the specific role of the evangelical movement in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and integral mission.

Valdir Steuernagel of Brazil set out future challenges for the evangelical movement with regard to the necessity of unfolding a dynamically trinitarian integral mission and a comprehensive approach to orthodoxy, orthopraxis and orthopathía. Right doctrine, the legacy of Protestantism; right practice, the legacy of Liberation Theology, and "right expression of love". Concerning this latter point, Steuernagel stressed the importance of our confessions of faith including love, passion and the learning of the love which represents one of its missing key foundations. Justin Thacker from the United Kingdom recognised that the questions being addressed by the various contributors were not problems exclusive to the Latin American evangelical population, but rather were typical global challenges, such as the temptation to measure the progress of evangelical witness and the Kingdom of God by mere pragmatic criteria, or the continual search to define 'what it means to be an evangelical'.

Thacker concluded his evaluation as the conference drew to a close with "two scenarios of hope": first, the diversity of evangelical groups in Latin America demonstrates dissent within the framework of a larger consensus. Second, the courage of the Latin Americans must be highlighted: faced with huge problems, they are prepared to recognise them and discuss them in a climate of mutual respect and love.

Amongst the contributors were Valdir Steuernagel, Ricardo Barbosa and Claus Schwambach from Brazil; Daniel Salinas from Colombia/Paraguay; David Roldán from Argentina; Luis Scout from United States/Mexico and international members of the Theology Commission, such as its president, Justin Thacker from the United Kingdom and James Nkansah from Kenya.

Vision and Purpose Statement Theological Commission

At its annual meeting in Sao Paulo, Brazil in July 2009, the WEA Theological Commission revised its vision and purpose statement. The revised statement appears below:

Providing theological reflection from a global perspective

Our vision:

To be a prophetic Evangelical voice that is globally representative, faithful to Scripture, theologically informed and which speaks with clarity and relevance to both the church and the world.

Our purpose:

In faithfulness to Christ and in order to serve the Church, the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance exists to provide international theological reflection on issues of importance affecting the church and society everywhere.

In order of priority, this will be accomplished by:

1. *Facilitating, convening and leading* theological reflection teams to address issues of worldwide relevance who will disseminate their findings both to the global evangelical community and to the world. Every theological reflection team must:

- Have both appropriate expertise and international representation
- Address an issue that is both important and of worldwide significance
- Identify appropriate means to disseminate its findings to a global audience
- Not duplicate the work of other international evangelical organisations, though it may be appropriate at times to work in partnership with others on issues of common interest
- Proclaim biblical truth and be accountable to the WEA statement of faith

2. *Encouraging* individual theologians and practitioners from across the world to engage in theological reflection on issues of global relevance and publishing their findings in print and electronic formats.

3. *Enabling* the networking of individuals, churches and organizations at a national and regional level to encourage theological reflection.

Structure and Organization

As of October 2009, the TC consists of an international group of theologians spread regionally and denominationally. As of Jan 2006, a system of extended membership was introduced allowing representatives of national Theological Commissions, seminaries and individual theologians and interested people to be members of the TC.

In addition Task Forces, Study Groups and other forms of activity are set up as required to work on specific long term or ad hoc projects. For more information: contact the TC Chair by email at tc@worldevangelicals.org

WEA Congratulates ERF Media on 50th Anniversary

The World Evangelical Alliance has officially congratulated ERF Media, the German branch of TransWorldRadio, on its 50th anniversary. The welcome address, signed by the International Director of the World Evangelical Alliance, Geoff Tunnicliffe, and the two World Evangelical Alliance spokespeople Christine and Thomas Schirmmacher, was read by Thomas Schirmmacher at the reception given by the Board of ERF Media and is now officially available on the WEA website in both English and German.

This global association, which speaks for 420 million Evangelical Christians, above all thanked ERF Media for bringing Christians from the most diverse range of backgrounds together for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel. For this reason the ERF justifiably carries its original name Gospel Broadcasting. The ERF has successfully distanced itself from forces that would have prevented a common, cross-border proclamation of the Gospel. In doing so ERF set boundaries, on the one hand, 'in front of Christians who admittedly want ecumenism and alliance but no proclamation of the Gospel' and on the other hand 'before those who want to proclaim the Gospel but who do not want to countenance an alliance, a coalition of all Christians, a bundling of forces.'

'ERF Media,' according to the words of the welcome address, 'in spite of its high degree of dependence on hearers from all camps, has in this point made a great achievement over its 50 years. It has played a significant role in bringing about a situation where German Christians stand together with more variety, breadth, and strength than in 1959!'

The conviction that the Gospel can be presented in a friendly and culturally relevant manner unites the World Evangelical Alliance and ERF. In itself that provides enough offense, and we would do well to not exacerbate this with unchristian bickering, our private tastes, or other things that are all too human.

With everything that we achieve in this world as Christians, we have to always remind ourselves of what Jesus said to his disciples the first time that they headed out on their own and came back enthusiastic about their authority over illness and evil: "However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

For the full text, visit <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/news/article.htm?id=2691&cat=main>



TC Leadership at Brazil Consultation, July 2009

International Theological Educators' Consultation Hungary, October 2009

ICETE (International Council for Evangelical Theological Education) held its 14th International Consultation for Theological Educators 5-9 October 2009 in Sopron, Hungary. Attendance, the largest since the consultations began in 1980, included representatives for 48 countries across the world.

Plenary presentations, interactive panels, seminars and workshops probed various aspects of the Consultation theme: 'Energizing Community: Theological Education's Relational Mandate'. For example, how might a theological college better embody biblical community in its institutional culture? How might students be more effectively equipped in relational competencies and community-formation skills?

Plenary speakers included: Hwa Yung, Bishop of the Methodist Church of Malaysia, Henri Blocher, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Faculté Libre de Théologie Evangélique in France; Oscar Campos, Academic Dean at the Seminário Teológico Centroamericano (SETECA) in Guatemala; Doug Birdsall, Executive Chair of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation (LCWE); Joseph Shao from the Philippines, General Secretary of the Asia Theological Association (ATA); David Baer, president of Overseas Council (OC) in the United States; Daniel Bourdannié from Chad, General Secretary of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), Riad Kassis of Lebanon, Overseas Council's Regional Director for the Middle East and Central Europe, and Chris Wright, International Director of Langham Partnership International (LPI).

All plenary presentations at the 2009 Consultation are available on the ICETE website, at: <http://www.icete-edu.org/hungary/>. ICETE's International Consultations are widely valued by leaders in evangelical theological education as the best available occasion to enjoy peer professional engagement at global level.

The Consultations are triennial; the next one will be held in 2012.

<http://www.icete-edu.org/news/may10.htm>



Dr Claus Schwambach, Brazil, addresses TC Consultation in Sao Paulo, Brazil, July 2009

Theological Commission Supports Lausanne Theology Group in Foundations for Cape Town 2010

The Lausanne Theology Working Group (LTWG) will hold its final consultation in February 2010 in preparation for the Cape Town Congress, with the support of the WEA Theological Commission. LTWG, led by Dr Chris Wright of Langham Ministries, has conducted consultations annually on the Lausanne theme covering the topics 'The Whole Gospel' and the 'The Whole Church'. The final topic, 'The Whole World' will be discussed at the consultation planned for Beirut Lebanon, 14-19 February 2010. Earlier meetings places were Panama and Chiang Mai, with a preliminary conference at Limuru Kenya.

The TC has supported the conferences with planning, participation by member theologians and by publishing papers from the conferences in *Evangelical Review of Theology* (see the issues for October 2007 and Jan 2009; papers from the Panama conference are due for publication in January 2010 and the final conference at a later time.) Many additional copies of these issues have been printed by the LTWG for wide distribution around the world. It is expected that this material will be an important part of the preparation for the 3rd Lausanne Congress when it meets in Cape Town in October 2010.

The final consultation will focus for its Bible studies on the letter to the Colossians, and will feature plenary papers on key topics with case studies devoted to related local issues. As with each conference, a summary statement of findings will be issued.

Call for papers: The War on Terror

The TC journal, *Evangelical Review of Theology*, is issuing a call for papers that would like to address this issue and any of its associated themes eg. just war theory, terrorism, torture and so on. We are also looking for book reviews that are pertinent to this topic.

Contact us for more details and for information about deadlines and our Style Guide by emailing tc@worldevangelicals.org. Please feel free to forward this email to any contacts / networks you have.

Recent issues of ERT have featured papers such as 'Growing Disciples in the Rainforest: a contextualised confession for Pygmy Christians', 'Transforming the Indian Culture of Poverty and Oppression', 'Worship-the Source and Standard of Theology', and 'Migration, Mission and the Multi-Ethnic Church'.

The January 2009 issue was comprised of papers given at the Lausanne Theology Work Group and TC consultation on 'The Whole Gospel' held in Thailand, February 2008. The 2009 consultation held in Panama will be featured in the issue of January 2010.

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Verbum

A Caricature of Evangelicals?

By Thomas Schirrmacher

Adapted from <http://www.thomasschirrmacher.net/blog/evangelicals-and-ethics/>

When the Green Party politician Volker Beck started a so-called 'small inquiry' in the German federal parliament into the 'Christival', a large evangelical youth convention, because of supposed workshops against abortion and homosexuality, one could have gotten the impression that Evangelicals are above all against abortion and practicing homosexuality. But does being pro-family and pro-child, actually capture the full scope of Evangelical ethics? Such a one-sided picture overlooks that it was the Evangelicals who brought about the first movement against slavery in England and in the USA. It was in this connection that the term 'Evangelical' was even first used in England! Other issues that could be mentioned include opposition to apartheid in South Africa, the fight against racism in India and the opium trade. It was the Evangelical Alliance in the 19th century that was the first large religious movement worldwide to call for the right to freedom of religion. And recently, the UN General Secretary praised the 'Micah Initiative'

Looking positively, ethics for Evangelicals is 'sanctification' – ie, God in Christ forgives every sinner and every individual can start a new life. Sanctification cannot be lived out of oneself; rather, every individual Christian lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ethical action is an expression of our existence as Christians.

In addition to personal ethics, Evangelicals' social ethics are above all demonstrated in the topics of marriage and family as well as in work with children and youth. Starting from that point, the other fields of social ethics are defined. For this reason, Evangelicals always view the fight against poverty to mean a fight against family poverty and the neglect of women and children.

The free church element attracts attention to itself by emphasizing the right of children to freely choose when to be baptized and become members, a precondition of religious freedom. It also shapes the equal rights of lay people, which led early on to a situation among Evangelicals where women were active as missionaries and social reformers, and where locals were able to advance to positions as church leaders earlier than in other Western missionary organizations.

A load-bearing element of the Evangelical social ethic is readily overlooked: the belief that conversion and awakening sets free enormous powers for change. Work around the world among alcoholics, drug addicts and among prison inmates makes clear that every Saul – a murderer – can become a Paul.

The Evangelical movement has enormous bandwidth. The reason for this lies in the fact that the priesthood of all believers and the reticence against centralized church structures are central elements found among Evangelicals. The ethical strength of the worldwide Evangelical movement is solidarity exercised upon a common basis. It has a strong ability to mobilize, which originates with personal relationships. It is unmistakably active, and so much so, that intellectual reflection regarding it occasionally tends to take a back seat.

There are also weaknesses - for example, there is too little discourse among Evangelicals on ethical issues. In light of the large diversity among Evangelicals, no one should behave as though they alone read the Bible correctly, but rather that an open and honest conversation should take place.

With the exception of the USA, there is practically nothing invested in true research. Furthermore, still too many Evangelicals oppose any kind of societal involvement whatsoever. The teaching of the 'prosperity gospel' has disastrous repercussions on questions such as the fight against poverty or how to address crises. Much remains also to be done in the field of publishing - there are some titles available including various ethical handbooks, yet too little has been done. In addition, there are a number of topics where there is a need to catch up, for instance medical ethics, terminal care, and the abuse of religious power.

So contrary to public opinion, evangelical ethics cannot be considered exhausted by the topics of abortion and homosexuality. On the contrary, Evangelicals, in their diversity and dissimilarity, have demonstrated a high level of societal involvement at all times. For them, faith in Christ is inseparably connected with 'right action.' What is missing is critical reflection and intellectual penetration with respect to ethics. However, the first steps have been taken. Therefore, one can hope that Evangelicals' ethical concerns can be presented in a more differentiated manner in the future.

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

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