

# WEA Theological News



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<http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/tc/>



## ***Progress for Theological Commission***

Dr Thomas Schirrmacher, of Bonn Germany, was appointed Executive Chairman of the WEA Theological Commission early in 2010 following the resignation of his predecessor, Dr Justin Thacker. Dr Schirrmacher is well known in WEA circles and elsewhere through his involvement in many activities including the International Institute for Religious Freedom, as the spokesman on Human Rights for WEA and the Bucer Theological Seminary (<http://www.bucer.de/>). (For more information <http://www.thomasschirrmacher.net/>) After a very busy time familiarising himself with the work of the TC and its people, he now provides this progress report. Dr Schirrmacher welcomes contact by email at [drthschirrmacher@me.com](mailto:drthschirrmacher@me.com)

I am very pleased to be able to report on progress with the work of the Theological Commission since I was invited by the International Director of WEA to take over leadership early in 2010. It was a heavy burden to come to understand the many aspects of the work so quickly, but I am happy to say that we are making good progress.

There have been a number of changes in people involved in the work of the TC. Some of the programs and activities have also changed. We expect to have a meeting of the TC early in 2011 to review recent events and plan for the future. I welcome input on these matters and will keep you informed of developments.

It is good to know that our journal, *Evangelical Review of Theology* is being published on time each quarter. Long-time editor Dr David Parker is back as Executive Editor, with myself as General Editor. Dr Parker is a good choice, as I feel well equipped when evaluating contributions from all over the world, but I am not a native English speaker (which is true of the majority of Evangelicals!). So I am glad to have a skilled English speaking editor on my side. We two also edit the *Theological News*. A new website with blogs and regular news will also be ready soon. *Theological News* will be maintained as a pdf file every three months. (for the issues published in 2009, visit <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/list/index.php?com=tc&id=24>)

One of my tasks as chair of the TC has been to visit high ranking leaders of non-Evangelical churches, like the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul, the Syrian and the Armenian Patriarchs in Istanbul, Cardinal Thurau in the Vatican or the Apostolic Vicar in Kathmandu, Nepal. The goal is not to weaken evangelical theology, but to give them a fair presentation of our views over a lot of prejudices around and to assure friendship for times of common need, eg. political persecution or press campaigns.

We also want to ensure that whenever theological consultations take place on an international level, we take part and present our case. We have been involved in some of these events recently, and we are now building up a list and network of people who can represent us. We were represented at the World Mission Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland 2010, and will be represented at the Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town. Dr Rolf Hille, former chair of the TC, is WEA's specialist for ecumenical relations and thus visits many ecumenical meetings. In this position he still belongs to TC and still speaks at our consultations.

In September 2009 three WEA commissions (Religious Liberty, Missions and TC) and the Lausanne Theological Working Group ran a consultation on the Theology of Suffering (see links at <http://www.iirf.eu/> for details).

The TC together with the RLC is an integral part of the ongoing process to draft a code of ethics for mission. Several meetings on Geneva and Rome brought this important document between Vatican, World Council of Churches and WEA near to final form. At the same time our own WEA code is under way and will be finalised after the bigger one has been launched.

I also had the privilege to lecture at the All-Asian TEE conference in Kathmandu. It was the first time they had met for 25 years! The TC of WEA (then still WEF) was instrumental in starting TEE in Asia around 1970 and I could pass on the greetings from John Langlois, who at that time helped to inaugurate TEE in Asia through the TC.

John Langlois visited the jubilee conference of the Asian Theological Association in Hongkong, which also came to life during his time with the TC (See the report on page 2).

Overall I am happy that we are making good progress, despite difficulties, and invite your support and response.

**Promoting Biblical Truth by Networking Theologians**

# **ATA's 40th Anniversary & Triennial General Assembly**

by Bruce Nicholls

'ATA has come of age' said Dr Joseph Shao, the General Secretary of the Asia Theological Association, speaking to the Triennial General Assembly in early August held at Cityview Hotel and China Graduate School of Theology (CGST) in Hong Kong.

'Though we live in Asia we are connected with the continents of the world,' he said. 'With our focus on the unchanging Word of God we continue to remind and challenge our members to bring the relevant and creative message of God to a suffering and ever-changing world. ATA is a catalyst for change, cooperation and unity in Asia.'

More than 200 theologians and church leaders, representing more than 100 theological institutions from 31 countries in Asia, the Middle East and the South Pacific, took part in this historic event which celebrated ATA's 40 years of ministry.

Dr Reynato Puno, retired Chief Justice of the Philippines, spoke of the new Asia, from the Pacific to the Russian western border and from the Arctic to the Indian oceans. 'The human ego is the cause of our woes, from political corruption to global warming,' he said, 'and the solution is a moral one.'

The pain of poverty was a recurring theme. The Asia Development Bank's estimate that 1.9 billion people struggled to live on less than US\$2 a day was seen as a tragic reality, calling for the churches' compassionate response.

Several contributors noted that global power was shifting from West to East, from North America and Europe to Asia and the Middle East. ATA's identity was in Christ, rather than in ethnicity. Massive human migration, for example 53 million Chinese lived outside of China, and the shift from rural to urban life, meant we lived in a 'world without borders.'

'Mission is not something the church does,' said theologian Ivan Satyavrata of Kolkata, India, but what it is. The church is always the church-in-mission.'

Delegates were challenged by Murli Menon of Bangalore and Luis Pantoja, a senior pastor of a mega church in Manila, to affirm their theological identity in

Christ and their confidence in God for mission to a post-modern world. In view of increasing suffering across the region, attorney Eugene Yapp of Malaysia, Makito Masaki of Japan and Jires Habash of Jordan each appealed for a theology centering on the church's identity in the Cross, which reveals suffering as the curse it is.

'Moral identity must precede moral choices and action,' said Yapp.

The Assembly discussed ATA's role as a platform for member colleges to achieve excellence in the training of future Asian leaders. The importance of ATA accreditation from BTh to PhD levels, in both residential and off-campus training, was recognised. The Assembly endorsed postgraduate training for faculty and pastors which was being undertaken by the Asia Graduate School of Theology's consortium of colleges in several regions. Dr Richard Hart of Jordan emphasised that 'shared vision energises educational innovation and educational renewal.' He called for the integration of new learning theory and electronic technology 'which we are already doing well.'

Dr Akio Hashimoto of Japan gave a challenging keynote address on 'New Era New Vision' and Dr Theresa Roco Lua of Manila, helped by ATA and CGST staff, coordinated the Assembly. Each morning began with worship, including studies on Paul's letter to the church at Colosse led by biblical scholars.

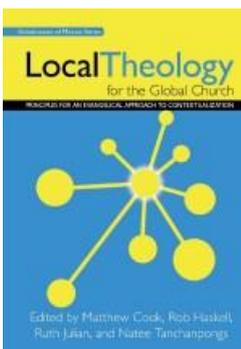
Editor Bruce Nicholls released three new ATA books—New Era New Vision: celebrating 40 years of ATA; Tending the Seedbeds: educational perspectives on theological education in Asia, and The Church in a Changing World: an Asian response. He also released three monographs and a commentary on Hosea, the eleventh in a 52-volume series of the Asia Bible Commentary. Several academic societies were formed to further academic research and publishing.

The Assembly was followed by two seminars, August 6-7, one on TEE and distance education, led by Richard Hart, and the other on 'Writing to Communicate,' led by Julie Belding and Pieter Kwant. Regional workshops are being planned for 2011.

## **New Book by TC Study Unit Addresses Rapid Church Growth**

A Study Unit of the Theological Commission led by Dr Matt Cook has published a book on contextual theology, *Local Theology for the Global Church*. The Study Unit prepared for the book by extensive email discussion and then met in Oxford in August 2008 to share papers. These papers have now been edited by some of the participants including Rob Haskell, Ruth Julian, and Natee Tanchanpongs under the leadership of Dr Cook. The 256 page book is published by William Carey Library (ISBN 9780878081110).

Subtitled, 'Principles for an Evangelical Approach to Contextualization', this welcome volume focuses on the need to develop local theologies which becomes more and more urgent in the light of the rapid growth of the church in the global south. It charts a path forward through exegetical, theological and cultural analysis by scholars who are wrestling with the issues in their own situations around the globe. Copies may be ordered through your local bookstore or direct to the publisher, <http://missionbooks.org/williamcareylibrary>



## Tribute to Glenn Penner

The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) of the World Evangelical Alliance pays tribute to the member of its Academic Board, Rev. Glenn M. Penner, MA, who succumbed to leukemia at the age of 48 on 25 January 2010. In his advisory function he focused on the theology of persecution and curriculum development.



Glenn has authored *In the Shadow of the Cross: A Biblical Theology of Persecution and Discipleship* (Bartlesville: Living Sacrifice Books, 2004), which has been translated into several languages, among others Chinese and Korean and will shortly be published in German by the IIRF.

He has also contributed a series on the biblical theology of persecution and discipleship to the International Journal for Religious Freedom since 2008, which he could unfortunately not maintain beyond two installments. As the Chief Executive Officer of Voice of the Martyrs in Canada, Glenn was the first to provide sponsorship for the major research project of the IIRF on theologies of suffering, persecution and martyrdom and followed the progress with great interest.

He also submitted a paper to the Bad Urach Consultation organized by the IIRF on the same topic in September 2009, but was kept from attending.

Glenn pioneered the teaching of a biblical theology of persecution as a regular course in theological education as a visiting Professor of Oklahoma Wesleyan University 2003-2006 and developed a curriculum for it. He has taught on this topic to Christian leaders in religiously restricted and hostile nations in South America, Africa and Asia as well as in seminaries and colleges in Europe and North America.

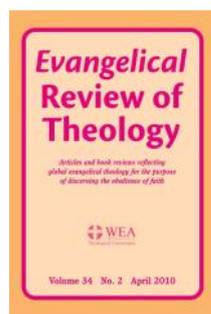
We remember Glenn Penner and his valuable and lasting contributions for the sake of the persecuted and to related academic research with deep gratitude. As Christians, we believe that Glenn has now been promoted to glory and gone ahead of us to be part of the 'cloud of witnesses and martyrs' who are watching on as we complete our race.

'Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely; and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.' (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Glenn wrote in this context: 'The testimony and example of those who have successfully faced and overcome persecution should provide inspiration and hope to those who are wavering, as it reminds them of the constancy of God.' (*In the Shadow of the Cross*, p. 232)

(This article is contributed by Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher and Dr. Christof Sauer as directors of the International Institute for Religious Freedom on behalf of its boards and staff)

## Contributions Invited



Contributions are invited for publication in *Evangelical Review of Theology*, the quarterly journal of the WEA Theological Commission, now in its 34th volume. Filling a unique role, this journal is a forum of global evangelical theology covering all fields including biblical, theological, historical, missiology, ethics and practical areas, which aims to assist its worldwide readership to 'discern the obedience of faith' (Rom. 1:5, 16:26). This means that articles take up some aspect of the faith, and, using rigorous discussion, show how it impacts on the life of the church and its members.

Papers are usually about 7000 words in length, while book reviews are about 700. A Style Guide is available on request to inform authors about the nature of the journal and the details of formatting and presentation. Previously published articles can also be used, if permissions are obtainable. The editors welcome articles from established authors and also from newly qualified theologians, especially from non-Western countries, although only English language material can be published.

Authors interested in contributing articles should contact the General Editor, Dr Thomas Schirmmacher [drth-schirmmacher@me.com](mailto:drth-schirmmacher@me.com) with initial proposals. Those interested in reviewing books, either from their own reading or on assignment, should also contact the Editor.

The journal is published by Paternoster Periodicals for the Theological Commission; for enquiries about subscriptions email [periodicals@alphagraphics.co.uk](mailto:periodicals@alphagraphics.co.uk)

## Doctoral Consultation

Representatives of leading doctoral programmes of the evangelical majority world held a historic first-ever meeting in Beirut, Lebanon, 3-6 March 2010. The event, hosted by ICETE and co-sponsored by Langham Partnership International and Overseas Council International, was designed to enable ongoing relational space for such programmes, and thereby to facilitate dialogue and collaboration in pursuing quality leadership formation at the highest levels.

Issues covered in the seminar included the variety, opportunities, and problematics of these emerging doctoral programmes in the majority world; validation, accountability, and quality assurance; contextual relevancy; trends at doctoral level in global academia; and modes for encouraging greater collegiality between evangelical doctoral programmes in the 'west' and in the 'south'. Participants in the Consultation also adopted the 'Beirut Benchmarks', which identifies common standards of achievement suitable for quality doctoral programmes anywhere in the world.

The Consultation was held on the campus of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut. Participants included invited delegates from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. A follow-up consultation is planned for October 2011.

# **Prosperity gospel teachings 'distort' Bible says Lausanne group**

by Audrey Barrick, Christian PostPosted: Friday, December 18, 2009, 9:03 (GMT)

The growing prevalence of the prosperity gospel around the world, and particularly in Africa, has prompted a group of theologians to release a statement of concern and a call for further reflection.

While recognising that 'there are some dimensions of prosperity teaching that have roots in the Bible', the Lausanne Theology Working Group says its overall view is that 'the teachings of those who most vigorously promote the 'prosperity gospel' are false and gravely distorting of the Bible'.

The statement was released this month through Christianity Today and is derived from a number of papers that were discussed at the group's meetings in October 2008 and September 2009.

The theology group, which includes the Revs Dr Chris Wright and Dr John Azumah, makes clear that its intent is not to be 'exclusively negative' regarding the health and wealth gospel and recognises the social realities within which the teaching flourishes. But the group finds the overall impact of the teachings on churches pastorally damaging, spiritually unhealthy and may even deflect people from the message and means of eternal salvation.

'We ... request the Lausanne movement to be willing to make a very clear statement rejecting the excesses of prosperity teaching as incompatible with evangelical biblical Christianity,' the statement reads.

Prosperity gospel, as defined by the Lausanne theologians, is the teaching that 'believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the 'sowing of seeds' through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings'.

Pentecostal churches are largely associated with the teaching. In a 2006 Pew Forum survey, a majority of Pentecostals in the 10 countries surveyed said they believed God would grant good health and relief from sickness to believers who had enough faith. In nine of the countries, most Pentecostals say that God will grant material prosperity to all who have enough faith. Higher majorities of African believers were found to embrace the teachings.

The prosperity gospel, however, is a phenomenon that cuts across denominational barriers, the Lausanne group acknowledges, and can be found in charismatic as well as mainstream Protestant churches.

Among some of the prosperity teachings the theologians reject is the notion that 'God's miraculous power can be treated as automatic, or at the disposal of human techniques, or manipulated by human words, actions or rituals'.

They also 'deplore the clear evidence that many of them have in practice moved away from key and fundamental tenets of evangelical faith, including the authority and priority of the Bible as the Word of God, and the centrality of the cross of Christ'.

While recognising the phenomenal growth of the numbers of professing Christians and the testimonies of those who have been positively impacted by prosperity teachings, the group observes equally the many people who have been 'duped' by the teachings into false faith and false expectations.

The Lausanne group also points out the flamboyant lifestyle and manipulative behavior of many leaders who promote prosperity teachings as unethical and idolatrous.

While the prosperity gospel enriches those who preach it, multitudes of people, particularly the poor, are left no better off than before and with the added burden of disappointed hopes, the statement adds.

The statement notes that much of the teaching comes from North American sources.

In the United States, six ministries that promote the prosperity gospel are being investigated by Senator Chuck Grassley following media reports and allegations of opulent spending and possible abuse of nonprofit status. They have been asked to submit financial records and answer questions regarding organisational and personal spending.

The ministries being probed include Joyce Meyer Ministries, World Healing Center Church, Without Walls International Church, New Birth Missionary Baptist Church/Eddie L Long Ministries, Kenneth Copeland Ministries, and World Changers Church International/Creflo Dollar Ministries.

The Lausanne Theology Working Group serves the Lausanne Movement, a Christian movement focused on world evangelisation.

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/prosperity.gospel.teachings.distort.bible.says.lausanne.group/24926.htm>

## **WEA Theological News**

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