

TC Executive Director Addresses Consultation on Prosperity Theology, Poverty And The Gospel

Exploring the implications of Prosperity Theology in the current decade



Dr Rosalee Velloso Ewell, Executive Director of the WEA Theological Commission, was one of the key speakers at a consultation on prosperity theology, poverty and the gospel. Her address was titled, 'Can We Offer a Better Theology?' and can be seen on-line at <http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/resources/detail/13571>.

Dr Ewell was one of about 40 specialists drawn from all continents—leading thinkers, pastors and practitioners—who met near São Paulo, Brazil, from 30 March – 2 April for the conference. The gathering was hosted by Valdir Steuernagel, a member of the WEA International Council and of the Lausanne Board of Directors. The consultation built on work already undertaken by the Lausanne Theology Working Group

on the Prosperity Gospel in Akropong, Ghana, from 2008-2009.

It is clear that there is no one single 'prosperity theology'. Prosperity theologies may be seen in different forms. The present major concerns are the forms which undermine the truth of the gospel, parody the grace of God, and attribute a power to the preacher, which is a travesty of the power of the Holy Spirit at work through the accurate preaching of the Scriptures. The false theology has found widespread appeal in the West. Femi Adeleye, based in Ghana, and Director of Church Partnerships for World Vision International, particularly noted the influence in this area of American televangelists.

It was also recognized, as is made clear in *The Cape Town Commitment* IIE, that God does indeed bless in material ways, and that there can be a true, biblical relationship between his blessing and human prospering.

Contributions in Atibaia examined historical, sociological, cultural, economic, and theological contexts in which prosperity teachings occur. Presentations brought well-researched and perceptive insights. They examined the nature of such contexts and the difficulties created, not least for the biblically illiterate who are unable to calibrate the teaching they hear. While such excesses are more graphic in some places than others, these excesses bring insidious expressions of an inadequate doctrine of creation, of sin, and of grace which pervades the church in many nations.

Each speaker demonstrated a deep knowledge of at least one continent, and plenary discussion drew further insights. The following presentations were delivered:

- A foundational paper (Valdir Steuernagel, Maicon Steuernagel)
- 'What is Prosperity Theology: A sociological review' (Paul Freston)
- 'The New Apostolic Reformation and Prosperity Theology' (Martin Ocaña)
- 'Giving for a Return in the Prosperity Gospel and the New Testament' (David Downs)
- 'Protestant Work Ethics and Prosperity Theology' (Paul Miller)
- 'A Critique of the Way the Bible is Used' (Femi Adeleye)
- 'The Search for Balance: Prosperity and Poverty in the Bible' (Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu)
- 'How is Prosperity Theology Penetrating the Theology and Practice of Mainline Churches?' (Daniel Salinas)

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New Book on Ethics in a Global Publishing Project

World of Theology—Christian Ethics in Secular Cultures



A book on *Christian Ethics in Secular Cultures* has been launched in the TC's *World of Theology* series. It is written by Thomas K Johnson of Global Scholars and Martin Bucer Seminary and focuses on the relationship between the moral principles Christians should follow within the Christian community and the ethics followed in the secular societies in which they live.

The author (PhD Ethics, University of Iowa) has lived in Prague since 1996 where he taught philosophy at Charles University and is now Vice President for Research at Martin Bucer European School of Theology.

He explained, 'Stated personally, our Christian moral dilemma is that we have received a revelation of God's moral will in the Bible and in creation which must shape our identity as believers over against unbelieving cultures, while our neighbors follow the ethics of other worldviews which should concern us deeply. Remember the Holocaust, where the ethics of a secular ideology wreaked de-

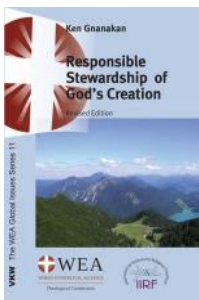
struction in an entire society. Christians must maintain a distinct Christian identity and also seek to contribute to the moral considerations that shape our cultures.'

This and other books in the series is available for free download at www.bucer.de/ressourcen/buecher.html. A statement issued by the WEA Theological Commission gives more details of this on-line publishing project. It reads, 'Because many millions of Christians suffer religious persecution or suppression and do not enjoy freedom of the press, they are denied access to Christian books and educational materials. However many persecuted Christian have access to the internet and are reading major languages. Therefore the Theological Commission is beginning to release more books and booklets as free downloads.'

It went on, 'In the past the Holy Spirit raised up some key Christian spokespeople from among the persecuted churches, but these spokespeople usually had access to quality Christian books. By the small step of publishing more books and booklets online the Theological Commission hopes to play its part in responding to Christian persecution and in helping to raise up Christian spokespeople within the persecuted church. We strongly desire to develop this process in multiple languages and multiple electronic formats.' The current list is printed below.

World of Theology Series

A listing of some of the titles



Thomas K. Johnson: The First Step in Missions Training: How our Neighbors are Wrestling with God's General Revelation

Thomas K. Johnson: Christian Ethics in Secular Cultures

Ken Gnanakan: Responsible Stewardship of God's Creation

David Parker: Discerning the Obedience of Faith: A Short History of the World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission (in preparation)

Thomas Schirrmacher: The Koran and the Bible

Thomas Schirrmacher (Ed.): William Carey: Theologian – Linguist – Social Reformer

Thomas Schirrmacher: Advocate of Love – Martin Bucer as Theologian and Pastor

Thomas Schirrmacher: Culture of Shame / Culture of Guilt

Thomas Schirrmacher: The Koran and the Bible

Thomas Schirrmacher" Fundamentalism

(Continued from page 1) **Consultation**

'Ethical Dimensions of Prosperity Theology' (Vinay Samuel; Joel Edwards)

'Can We Offer a Better Theology?' (Rosalee Velloso Ewell)

Michael Oh, Executive Director/CEO of The Lausanne Movement, gave the final address from Romans 12, titled 'Calling the Church to Humility, Integrity and Simplicity'. He ended his session with a call to joyful giving: 'How are we to give? Toward our financial poverty that many might have spiritual wealth. Leaders cannot shy away from talking about money simply from fears about the abuses of prosperity theology. We need to urge biblical, generous giving—sacrificial giving—or we too will be in error'.

Videos of the presentations will soon be available, and a statement from the consultation will be released later this month. A book bringing together a colloquium on issues raised is envisaged, as well as further resources for equipping the global church to respond to prosperity theology.

Source: picture and text (adapted) from <http://www.lausanne.org/en/about/news-releases/2248-prosperity-theology-poverty-and-the-gospel.html>

Bridge the Divide to Discuss Key Issues

Evangelism, Translation, Church Life and Hermeneutics



Rob Haskell will be representing the WEA TC at this year's 'Bridging the Divide' conference which will take place in the Middle East. 'Bridging the Divide' is a group of missionaries and scholars, sometimes described as 'scholar-practitioners,' that is dedicated to bringing the gospel to the Muslim world. The 'divide' that the group seeks to bridge is controversy surrounding the so called 'insider movements.'

One of the questions that the group handles is to what extent should Muslim converts to Jesus be expected to shed their Muslim identity? Some argue that since 'Muslim' is significantly a cultural descriptor, it is appropriate for follows of Jesus to still use this designation and participate as much as their new faith allows in their native culture as a Muslim. Others argue that believers in Jesus should clearly self-identify as 'Christian.'

Another important issue is to what extent Bible translation should be crafted for a Muslim audience. This touches on the question of whether 'Son of God' ought always to be rendered using 'filial language.' Rob Haskell was on the WEA Independent Bible Translation Review which last year concluded that 'the most directly equivalent familial words with in a given linguistic and cultural context' should be used to translate 'Son of God' and related terminology.

However, this issue is broader. For example, should the Old Testament use Muslim names for biblical characters found in the OT?

Another set of issues has to do with whether the Bible supports an 'insider' approach to outreach and church planting. Some see support for it in the OT testament stories of Naaman and Jonah among others, and NT accounts such as the Samaritan woman in John 4 and the Jerusalem council of Acts 15.

The purpose of Bridging the Divide is to provide space for representatives of both sides of the debate to discuss and debate these types of questions in a cordial and respectful manner, together seeking God's wisdom on these questions. At this year's meeting Rob Haskell will present a paper on the hermeneutics of the discussion, titled 'Insider Movements - An Exercise in Mere Hermeneutics.' The purpose of the paper is not to argue for one side or the other, but evaluate how scripture is being used in the debate and suggest some possible ways to move forward in the area of Biblical interpretation. It is expected that this paper will be published in the WEA TC's *Evangelical Review of Theology*.

For more information, visit, <http://btdnetwork.org/> <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/translation-review/>

(Continued from page 4) Evangelicalism

activities of the Christian Right, but all were affected. The existence of organizations like Sojourners and ESA was a reminder that contemporary evangelicals' politics did not all skew right. But by now the term "evangelical" often is popularly used to mean "politically activist conservative white Christians." This is a sad diminution of a rich legacy, and has helped to damage the evangelical "brand" in many quarters.

Tomorrow I will attend my first board meeting for Sojourners. This new role reflects my own ongoing commitment to evangelical Christianity, 24 years after I joined the staff of Evangelicals for Social Action and first encountered the evangelical world outside of the Baptist South. Both ESA and Sojourners actually predated, and opposed, the Christian Right. Both have always offered a "peace-and-justice" type evangelicalism, and both were among the first evangelical organizations to embrace moral agendas such as peace making, urban poverty, gender equality, racial justice and creation care, rooted in a passionate love of Christ and love for those Christ loved. Both embody what I find a compelling Christian vision.

It is clear that younger Christians as a whole are abandoning culture wars, embracing an inclusive spirit as wide as God's love, and seeking a holistic, nuanced faith. I often urge disillusioned younger evangelicals not to feel like they need to walk away from the evangelical community, even if they do not like what some of its most visible adherents do. Step up to help lead rather than washing your hands of what is still one of the more robust expressions of Christianity in the world.

The future does not look friendly to those congregations and religious institutions locked into denominational subcultures, labels and brands in a post-denominational age. As Christianity in general fades in the United States, all who care about a vital Christian future need to look broadly across the landscape to see where there are signs of life. I urge those not that familiar with the global and U.S. evangelical world to give it a closer look. Many readers of this column might be surprised to see how "at home" you would feel especially in the progressive wing of evangelical Christianity.

(Used by permission of the author. Originally printed <http://www.abpnews.com/news/item/28601-that-pesky-word-evangelical>)

Evangelicalism

By David Gushee

Each week someone in the news uses the words “evangelical” or “evangelicalism” as a description, epithet or lament. Often the most visible uses of the term occur when someone who is “in” wants out, as recently with young evangelical celebrities Rob Bell and Rachel Held Evans, or when in an election year some politician is said to be courting “evangelicals.”

As a Baptist with 25 years of experience in the “card-carrying” evangelical world, and as one asked to do a new book (with Isaac Sharp) for Westminster John Knox Press anthologizing the most important “evangelical” ethical voices of the last 70 years, I have both a scholarly and personal interest in clarifying understanding of this term.

At one level, evangelical is a church history term. It refers to renewal movements within Christianity that have sought greater spiritual passion, evangelistic-missionary fervor, moral seriousness and/or theological orthodoxy along one or another parameter. In one sense the term could be used to describe early Protestantism itself, which began as a renewal movement within Catholicism. It has often been used to describe other Protestant movements as diverse as German Pietism, Wesleyan Methodism, American revivalism or modern Pentecostalism.

Sometimes the term evangelical is defined theologically. British historian David Bebbington’s quadrilateral is widely used in this way: evangelicalism is characterized by, he says, biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism and activism (biblical authority, Cross-focused atonement theology, evangelism and effortful Christianity). While noting the Bebbington definition, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), America’s largest evangelical umbrella group, also offers a brief statement of faith affirming traditional Protestant beliefs about biblical inspiration/authority, Trinitarian theology and a final divine judgment. While evangelical sub-traditions vary, evangelicals are often able to agree on at least bare-bones statements of faith of this type.

American evangelicals are sometimes defined by their denominational affiliations or theological streams. The NAE website, for example, says, “Our community brings together Reformed, Holiness, Anabaptist, Pentecostal, Charismatic and other traditions.” A list of NAE member bodies can be found here. In this sense, evangelicals are Christians from various traditions sharing certain religious goals, beliefs and styles who, over time, have developed a sense of community and some shared enterprises and institutions. Still, the very breadth of the evangelical coalition, including groups with irreconcilable ecclesiologicals, often spells trouble for the preservation of evangelical unity.

These days, there is a strong *external* perception of evangelicals based on social-ethical issues. Evangelicals are viewed as anti-this and anti-that. You know the list. Casual observers don’t know or care about theological characteristics as much as these perceived social tendencies.

It didn’t start off that way, either in the deepest historical origins of evangelicalism, as we have seen, or in more recent American evangelicalism.

What came to be known as “American evangelicalism” in the 20th century coalesced during World War II. It was itself a renewal movement, this time within American fundamentalism. Though the evangelicalism of figures like Carl F.H. Henry never did find rapprochement with mainline Protestantism as one found it at the National Council of Churches or its member bodies, American evangelicalism did seek to move beyond the rigidity and separatism of fundamentalism. These Christians wanted to be known for what they were for, not against.

Eventually, American evangelicalism became its own religious-institutional subculture, with colleges, seminaries, magazines, musicians, publishing houses, youth/college ministries, relief and development organizations and thousands of congregations. Some of these long-predated the birth of modern American evangelicalism, others were its products. You know you are an evangelical if your religious subculture includes institutions like *Christianity Today*, Baker Books, NAE, Young Life, Campus Crusade, Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, Thomas Nelson, World Vision, Sojourners, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Wheaton College, Calvin College, Fuller Seminary, Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA), Messiah College, Biola University and so on. (I mention all of these affectionately; my life/work has intersected with each of these institutions.)

It was the rise of the highly politicized Christian Right in the late 1970s that dramatically changed public perception of evangelical Christianity in the United States. Most of the early leaders of the Christian Right, such as Jerry Falwell, were better described as fundamentalists than evangelicals — but unlike older fundamentalists, they decide to engage the public square rather than remain withdrawn. They went culture warring.

The older institutions of American evangelicalism, not to mention global evangelicalism, did not all respond favorably to the

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