

Re-Forma's Outcomes for Biblical Ministry Get a Fresh Update

Paul Hemming, Associate Project Director, Re-Forma

Re-Forma, an organization affiliated with the Global Theology Department of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), has established global standards for biblical ministry. These standards are based on biblical learning outcomes, freely available in over 60 languages. The outcomes, known for their simplicity, accessibility, and contextual adaptability, serve as the foundation for the Re-Forma Certificate, which is underwritten by the WEA. In this way, Re-Forma provides validation for partnering training programs and recognition to successful students worldwide.

In 2023, Re-Forma embarked on its inaugural review of the outcomes. Overseen by project director Dr. Reuben van Rensburg, a diverse committee representing the major regions of the world, church streams, and theological education sectors convened for this purpose. The participants included the head of a Pentecostal seminary in Central America, an American who leads an institution conducting both formal and non-formal training programs around the world, a Singaporean woman, Re-Forma facilitators from Kenya and India, an evangelical Zambian theologian, and a Reformed Bible teacher from South America. Following a thorough review process, which included consulting other experts and existing facilitators, the revised version of the outcomes received approval from the Re-Forma Board.

This review process, conducted every seven years as part of standard educational practice, led to several notable additions and adjustments to the outcomes. These enhancements include such areas as prayer, worship, women's roles, creation care, church administration, overcoming spiritual evil, the 'Big Story' of the Bible with Jesus at its centre, the superiority of the biblical worldview, and conflict resolution. Additionally, the committee reorganized the outcomes into four ministry-related categories for improved usability.

Furthermore, Re-Forma has developed assessment guidelines for each outcome, equipping training facilitators with valuable tools to effectively evaluate students' competency for ministry in the church. This ensures that individuals trained using the Re-Forma framework develop Christ-like character and are proficient in handling the Word.

The newly revised outcomes underscore Re-Forma's ongoing commitment to equipping competent men and women worldwide for effective ministry. These updates not only enhance the relevance of the outcomes but also reinforce the organization's mission to establish a global standard for biblical ministry.



Paul Hemming, Dr. Miguel Alvarez, Dr. David Durey, Dr. Rachel Rajagopal, Margaret Gichuki, Benny Chippala, Dr. Lazarus Phiri, and Dr. Daniel Eguiluz © Re-Forma



Abundant Community Theology: A decolonial approach to environmental and economic sustainability

Maria Andrade and Clark Buys, Tearfund's Theology and Network Engagement Team

Environmental justice and economic sustainability are two often siloed issues. To help Christians think about integrating them, Tearfund launched a new theological framework, Abundant Community Theology, on March 27. It included a response from renowned theologian Prof. Musa Dube and an insightful exploration of 'The Future of Creation Care Theology' by Dr. Dave Bookless.

Envisioned as an integrative framework, Tearfund embarked on an uncommon research process that involved an extensive series of regional consultations across Latin America, Africa, and Asia. It prioritized dialogue with voices from the Majority World that are all too often marginalized in mainstream theological discourse. It engaged Indigenous communities, women theologians, youth perspectives, and frontline practitioners, among others. Across contexts, participants consistently underscored that visions of authentic, holistic prosperity require other economic measures that prioritize social and ecological wellbeing over merely material accumulation.

The environmental theology section directly reckons with Christianity's complicated historical roles in contributing to ecological devastation through problematic interpretations of dominion theology that have promoted exploitative human relationships with the wider created order. It also recovers alternative scriptural visions for reframing humanity's sacred vocational calling as tenderly caring for, stewarding and serving rather than dominating God's natural world. The economic theology section advocates bold structural solutions, moving beyond charity and ethical business practices. It proposes alternative economic indicators such as the Happy Planet Index to fundamentally re-envision economic "progress" and "growth" as inextricable from holistic social and ecological wellbeing.



These strands coalesce into Tearfund's proposal of an 'Abundant Community Theology' rooted in three interconnected premises: (1) our core identities are fundamentally communal rather than individualistic; (2) economic markets should reflect our shared humanity and common home rather than enabling exploitation; and (3) faithful Christian living rejects cultures of greed, instead generously distributing resources, power and decision-making for the holistic flourishing of all creation. This integrative theology posits that God's world contains enough resources for all creatures' needs, but requires humanity to radically transform entrenched patterns of overconsumption, extraction, and ecological harm.

While Tearfund's theological process was inevitably imperfect, it aimed to model pluriversal discourse done collaboratively across diverse linguistic, cultural, and geo-political contexts. We hope this framework can catalyze further global dialogue on how core worldviews powerfully shape unjust systems that perpetuate poverty, inequality, and environmental breakdown. Moreover, Tearfund earnestly invites others to uncover new equitable practices for decolonizing not just theologies themselves, but the very processes of how theologies are conceived and developed worldwide.

The research report and the recording of the public launch event can be found at this link: <https://learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/research-report/abundant-community-theology-working-towards-environmental-and-economic-sustainability>.

New Issues of the Evangelical Review of Theology

Dr. Francis Jr. S. Samdao, Assistant Editor, Evangelical Review of Theology

Asian Christianity is undeniably rich in religion and culture; in fact, Asia is the hub of world religions. Although this feature makes doing theology in the region interesting, it also presents challenges as to how to live as faithful Christians amidst such diversity.

Dr. Richard Howell addressed this and related questions in the February issue of the *Evangelical Review of Theology* (ERT). In his article 'Faithfulness in an Asian Multi-Faith Context', he proposed ways in which Christians in Asia can reflect Jesus' love and share the gospel without a triumphalist attitude. While the essay focuses on Asian contexts, its relevance goes beyond Asia, as 'Western Christianity also encounters a multi-religious context of Eastern mysticism including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam.' Dr. Howell, formerly the Asia Evangelical Alliance General Secretary, is convinced that 'witness must engage with the issue of identity and otherness in the context of social realities.'

ERT is the theological journal of the World Evangelical Alliance. The two issues published this year (February and May) contain numerous thought-provoking articles like Dr. Howell's. Some of the essays:

- 'Orthodox and Evangelical Missional Interaction'
- 'A Biblical Theology of Singleness in an Increasingly Single World'
- 'Poetry and Theology'
- 'A Model of Competency-Based Theological Education for Intercultural Contexts'
- 'Opening the Scrolls: Understanding the 'Cries' of Federico G. Villanueva'
- 'Islam as a Theological Mosaic'
- 'The Case for Creative Cultural Engagement'
- 'The Beauty of Christ: Evangelicals and Clerical Clothing'

The journal is open-access and a Spanish-language version is also produced. All issues from 1977 to the present are available for download at this link: <https://theology.worlddea.org/evangelical-review-of-theology/>.

As part of our effort to represent global evangelicalism, ERT encourages submissions from the Majority World and offers editorial support to non-native English speakers. You may submit your articles, following the style guide available on the ERT web page, to:

- Dr. Bruce Barron, Executive Editor: bruce.barron0@gmail.com
- Dr. Francis Jr. S. Samdao, Assistant Editor: francissamdao@worlddea.org
- Dr. Andrew Messmer, Spanish-language: amessmer@worlddea.org

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Landscape Study of Theological Education in Pakistan

Dr. Qaiser Julius, General Secretary, Theological Educators' Forum

This January 2024, the Theological Educators' Forum (TEF) released a public report that looks into the present state of theological education in Pakistan, the decline in the quality of education, the emergence of new theological institutions, and the need to register these new institutions within a centralized body.

This is a welcome development in view of the deteriorating quality of theological education in the country, which is becoming a significant concern. The report features a comprehensive study of the entire landscape of theological education, which discusses the nature and dynamics of the problem at hand.

Among the key themes in the research project is the recent surge in the number of theological seminaries and Bible colleges and its overall impact on theological education. The study sought to understand the educational methods and procedures followed by these institutions, the problems they faced as theological education providers, and also the changes needed to enable improvement.

A critical finding was that of the 50 participating institutions, only two have programs accredited by the Asia Theological Association (ATA): Open Theological Seminary and Zarephath Bible Seminary. This is an important piece of information, since accreditation is crucial in ensuring the quality of education provided by an institution and in driving continuous improvement in its programs and services. Within ATA, for example, there are specific standards by which theological institutions are evaluated for accreditation. These standards cover vital elements of learning such as library resources, facilities, and the skills and education of the faculty members. Most of the theological education providers in Pakistan have yet to meet such standards.

The report also made the following recommendations in the context of Pakistan:

- Ongoing and regular contact between seminaries and the church is important to learn the needs of the church, which is the ultimate beneficiary of the kind of theological education provided by seminaries.
- There is a need for targeted training of institutions at different levels of development so that skills gaps are filled, such as in professional development. Also, a professional network of educators is necessary for prayer, fellowship, encouragement, and growth.
- There is a need to move towards in-country M.Th and Doctoral studies, but contextualized curriculum is absolutely necessary.

Formed in 1993, the Theological Educators' Forum (TEF) is a national platform in Pakistan with a vision to identify ways to enhance academic excellence in theological education. The new study is one example of how TEF has been contributing to the development and improvement of theological education in the country. Dr. Theresa Lua, general secretary of the Asia Theological Association, remarked, "TEF is making a significant contribution not only to strengthen theological education in Pakistan but also to promote unity among the different theological education providers."



Dr. Qaiser Julius © WEA

What is Evangelicalism in Asia?

Who exactly are ‘evangelicals’ in Asia? To look into this question, the World Evangelical Alliance convened a select team of specialists from a variety of disciplines to bring in perspectives from theology, history, interfaith studies, and sociology. Together as a panel, Dr. Simon Chan, Dr. Jung-Sook Lee, Dr. Samuel Richmond, and Dr. Jayeel Cornelio explored the current landscape of evangelicalism in Asia:

Revisiting the Bebbington quadrilateral, which has identified four characteristics of ‘evangelicalism’ (commitment to the Bible, emphasis on the cross of Christ, necessity of conversion, and activism in spreading and living out the gospel), some tweaks and additions were identified as necessary by the panelists:

- In certain places in Asia with sensitive religious contexts, the word ‘transformation’ would fare better than the term ‘conversion’. Instead of an emphasis on one’s transition from one religious affiliation to another, transformation communicates the lifelong process and pursuit of Christian discipleship. More so, it captures the holistic dimension of change the Gospel brings not only at the personal level but also in the broader structures and systems of society.
 - Unlike the strong emphasis on individualism in the West, evangelicalism in Asia offers a complementary corrective with its strong sense of being a collective community. Within this orientation to community lies a deep sacramental dimension of spirituality, brought about by a rich background of Asian primal religious traditions. Ritual actions are shared formative practices that are deeply transformative in people’s lives.
 - There is also a very strong emphasis on the harmonious relationship among men and women, between people and the rest of God’s creation, and between people of different generations (with special attention to the younger generation). Mindful of how faith has declined in the West, evangelicals in Asia are preoccupied with how to give the younger generation an experience of a truly radical discipleship.
- (article continues on next page)*



JOURNALS AND NEWSLETTERS WITHIN THE GLOBAL THEOLOGY DEPARTMENT

Evangelical Review of Theology (quarterly)

<https://theology.worldea.org/evangelical-review-of-theology/>

Islam and Christianity (English & German) (semiannual)

<https://www.islaminstitut.de/en/category/publikationen/journal/>

Jahrbuch für Verfolgung und Diskriminierung von Christen [Yearbook on Persecution and Discrimination of Christians]

<http://jahrbuch.iirf.global/>

International Journal of Religious Freedom (semiannual)

<https://ijrf.org/>

Jahrbuch für Religionsfreiheit [Yearbook on Religious Freedom]

<http://jahrbuch.iirf.global/>

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Theological News (quarterly)

<https://theology.worldea.org/theological-news/>

Bonn Profiles (twice a week)

<https://bonn-profiles.net/>

WEA RLC Religious Liberty Prayer News (monthly)

<https://worldea.org/whoweare/newsletter-signup>

Business & Ministry News (Business Coalition) (monthly)

order from business@worldea.org

Bonner Querschnitte (twice a week) (German)

<https://bonner-querschnitte.de/>

WEA RLC Research and Analysis Report (periodic)

<https://worldea.org/whoweare/newsletter-signup>

While these and other features have allowed evangelicalism to thrive in Asia and are worth celebrating, there are also challenges that demand continuous and careful reflection.

While having a shared set of practices across countries, evangelicalism in Asia is a 'dynamic cultural movement' constantly embedding itself in the broader society. Dealing with a variety of contexts and issues, evangelicals face the question of how to engage as distinct communities of faith: and whether to be confrontational or more accommodating as they negotiate and navigate the tensions.

For example, on the question of how evangelicals in Asia have managed the foreign face or the colonial perceptions associated with the evangelical movement as it developed in the West, the panelists noted how evangelicals in Asia were vigilant to maintain a certain distance between the faith they have embraced and the culture in which this faith is lived out. At the same time, evangelical communities in Asia have shown the capacity not only to develop theology from local contexts and form indigenous movements but also to indigenize even the things they have adopted and embraced. The conversation generated very interesting and important questions from the participants. Subsequent reflections should continue looking into how the key to experiencing the vibrancy of evangelicalism in Asia rests on celebrating its diversity in expression, on one hand, but also its fidelity to what it shares in common with Christians of older traditions in different parts of the world.

The event was hosted by Dr. Peirong Lin (deputy general secretary of the WEA) and Dr. Theresa Lua (director of the WEA Global Theology Department) with support from Rei Lemuel Crizaldo (WEA Theological Commission coordinator). A recording of the conversation can be found at this link: <https://youtu.be/dlDxEFPx2CU>. This was the first of a series of regional conversations in the 'What is Evangelicalism?' Project, a joint initiative by the World Evangelical Alliance and the Kirby Laing Center. For more about this partnership, visit this link: <https://kirbylaingcentre.co.uk/klc-wea-what-is-evangelicalism-project/>

WEA THEOLOGICAL NEWS

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