

## ***New Structure under way for WEA Theological Commission***



The WEA Theological Commission is in the process of developing a new structure. According to a letter to WEA regional bodies from the Executive Secretary, Dr C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell and the Executive Chair, Dr Thomas Schirrmacher, this move is intended 'to strengthen the ties between the TC and the Regional Alliances.' They said, 'It is our prayer that with such stronger ties we will better be able to serve the church and strengthen our Evangelical witness for the sake of the kingdom.'

The new arrangements focus on official representatives, called Commissioners, appointed by the regional groups of the World Evangelical Alliances to form the leadership team of the Theological Commission, along with the Executive Chair and Executive Director of the TC. These regional commissioners will serve 5 year terms and are appointed by the regional alliance's own theological commission. It is normally expected that these appointees will be chair or secretary, but others can be nominated. The new scheme allows for a total of 18 commissioners from the 9 WEA areas.

The letter from the WEA TC says that these plans have been in place for some time, but as a result of actions at the International Leaders' Forum of the WEA earlier in 2015, the process has now been activated. Regional WEA groups are encouraged to be 'mindful of maintaining a balanced diversity of country, gender, age and denominational affiliation' in choosing their nominees. The announcement welcomed 'suggestions of others who might not serve as commissioners but who could make a significant contribution to the TC, perhaps as part of a working group.'

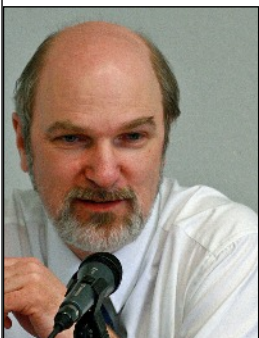
The responsibilities of the Commissioners include participating (electronically) in one or two meetings per year, voting on policies and top level plans, representing the WEA TC at meetings in the regional areas, promotional activities, contributing to *Evangelical Review of Theology* and reporting on local activities.

The WEA also appoints Senior Advisors who are 'well-known and well-respected theologians and missiologists from around the world called on to advise the TC on particular matters within their field of expertise.' There are currently 9 of these who are nominated by the Executive Chair and Executive Director and approved by the Commissioners and the WEA Secretary General. Many have served the TC in the past and continue to be active in their regions.

The Working Group is the third part of the new structure, comprised of the Executive Director and the Executive Chair of the TC along with others from around the globe who have expertise in different areas. This group is responsible for the day-to-day workings of the TC, including its service to the WEA Executive Team and other commissions and initiatives. Its activities include helping to maintain a strong evangelical biblical-theological foundation to all of the work of the WEA, drafting speeches and essays for the WEA senior staff, representing the WEA and the TC at conferences and meetings, according to the expertise of the member and contributing to the TC's publications, conferences and consultations.

As part of this new move, the TC has endorsed its vision statement, first introduced at Vancouver in 2000. Under this statement, the primary goal of the TC is to promote biblical truth by: networking theologians to serve the church in obedience to Christ; internationalizing theological frameworks; encouraging original theological reflection and research; defending and confirming the gospel; focusing discussion on practical and relevant themes in varied contexts; articulating biblical truth in forms accessible to all Christians. Processes include networking evangelical theological organizations and theologians worldwide, organizing theological reflection teams, task forces, study groups, dialogue groups and other international gatherings, and disseminating theological reflection about biblical truth for use at by the church at all levels.

The full statement may be found on the TC website at <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/tc/intro.htm>



**Promoting Biblical Truth by Networking Theologians**

## Reformation Year Celebrations take Shape



The 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 is attracting increasing attention as different groups are planning commemorative events. The focus will be on Wittenberg, Germany (officially Lutherstadt Wittenberg) and 31 October which is remembered as the day Dr Martin Luther posted his famous 95 theses on the door of the castle church, although many events will take place at other times and there will be a broad coverage. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, chair of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany writes, 'In summer 2017 we will together celebrate the fact that the strength of Christian faith can change the world. Back in 1517 the theologian and monk Martin Luther rediscovered the strength gained from God's love. He sparked a debate and changed society and the world as thoroughly as he changed the churches. Strength from faith helps to "move mountains". This has become a common idiom not least thanks to Martin Luther's translation of the Bible. Together we Christians can shape the world and society and commit ourselves to life. In 500 years of Reformation history we have learned that it helps to work with rather than against one another. That is why we are celebrating the Reformation anniversary ecumenically with all Christian churches.'

The 36th German Protestant Kirchentag (assembly) will take place in Berlin and Wittenberg in May 2017 in association with other events, and those attending will participate in a river bank service within in view of the key buildings in Wittenberg associated with Luther and the

Reformation, including the Castle Church, and the church of St Mary. 'Reformation Summer' will also include an exhibition, united worship services, and events for youth and children.

Recognizing the widespread effects of the Reformation far beyond Germany, the 'European Roadmap' will commence in November 2016 covering many places in Europe including the Netherlands, Hungary, Slovenia and Ireland, as well as Augsburg, Worms and the Wartburg. During stops of 36 hours, events will take places focusing on Reformation related locations and personalities. (For more information - visit [www.r2017.org](http://www.r2017.org))

It will also be celebrated by many Protestant denominations, including Swiss churches and the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The World Reformed Fellowship is organising an international conference at the Luther Hotel in Wittenberg to be held 25-30 October (watch for more information at [www.WRFnet.org](http://www.WRFnet.org)).



(Photos: Top - Castle Church tower, and bottom, Castle Church door showing the 95 theses. D Parker)

## Asian Mission Leadership Conference TC at Orthodox 'Good News' Initiative

Dr. Thomas K Johnson represented the Theological Commission at a meeting of the Asian Society for Missiology, July 7-9 in Bangkok, Thailand <http://www.asianmissiology.org/> under the theme, 'Leadership Development for 21st Century Asian Missions,' Johnson spoke on 'Leadership in the Context of Religious Repression' and challenged the participants to consider not only the leadership role of individuals but also the leadership role of the entire evangelical movement in relation to other religions and ideologies, such that Evangelicals are able to communicate strong convictions and truth claims while simultaneously attempting to protect the rights of other religious communities to communicate their convictions and truth claims. Some other religions and systems of belief do not give place for religious freedom for others, whereas protecting such freedoms for others has a place in evangelical theology and ethics, which gives Evangelicals the opportunity to exercise global leadership in relation to other religions and ideologies.

Some of the theological background for Johnson's speech was previously published in the *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, vol. 6: 17-24, available online at [http://iirf.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Journal/IJRF\\_Vol6-1.pdf](http://iirf.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Journal/IJRF_Vol6-1.pdf).



TC Executive Director, Rosalee Velloso Ewell, and Senior Consultant on Evangelism & Mission,

John Baxter-Brown, served as official representatives of the WEA at the 3rd International Lausanne - Orthodox Initiative, held at the Sofia Centre in Helsinki, Finland during the first week of September. This important gathering included church leaders from around the world who met to pray together, to discern and to better listen to the ways in which God is calling us to work together for the sake of a suffering world. The theme of the consultation was 'Gospel as Good News.' Dr Velloso Ewell presented at one of the plenary sessions and a lively discussion followed.

The gathering was greatly impacted by the images and stories of refugees fleeing the wars in Syria and Iraq that were in the news that week. We agreed that despite the differences between our traditions, God's call to mission in such dire circumstances requires a faithful and united approach to be the hands of Christ in such contexts. Further regional gatherings are planned as follow-ups to this international meeting.

## ***Symposium in Leeds on 'Christian Witness' Document***



Prof Kristeen Kim organised a one day colloquium on the joint WEA, WCC and PCID document on the ethics of evangelisation, 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct'. The meeting was held at Leeds Trinity University, UK on Wed Sept 16, 2015.

It had among its participants key scholars and church leaders from across the UK. John Baxter-Brown and Rosalee Velloso Ewell were both present and were asked to

give some background information on the process and use of the document since its launch in June 2011.

It was a stimulating discussion about the ethics of bearing witness to Christ in contexts of religious pluralism and in the contemporary world of religious persecution and violence. It is the hope of the organizers that the symposium will lead to further research and contextualizing of the document in the UK and beyond.

## ***TC Chair Represents WEA on Middle East Issues***

Dr Thomas Schirrmacher, Executive Chair of the TC, has recently represented the WEA on key Middle East issues. One of these was the opening of the new Genocide Museum in Byblos, Lebanon and the official centennial commemoration of the Armenian genocide held by the Armenian Orthodox Church. Dr Schirrmacher spoke on behalf of the General Secretary of the WEA, Bp. Efraim Tendero, assuring the gathering of patriarchs and leaders of churches from the Middle East that they can count on the solidarity and support of the WEA. In an appeal, signed by WEA officials and presented by Thomas Schirrmacher, the WEA challenged Christians from the entire world to work together to prevent the complete expulsion of Christian churches from the areas where the very first Christian churches were planted.

The head of the Armenian Orthodox Church, Catholicos Aram I, proposed that the Armenian Genocide of a century ago set the stage for the situation of Christians across the Middle East today, a situation in which Christians are being 'dramatically shaken.' Many believers have been able to give a clear witness to their faith 'in life and in death.'

In a related move, the Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, S. H. Moran Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, thanked the World Evangelical Alliance for its intensive efforts for discriminated and persecuted members of his church and its members on all levels - through prayer, through humanitarian help, through the media, on the political front, and with the UN. The General Secretary of the WEA, Bishop Efraim Tendero, had recently met with the General Secretary of the United Nations and had urged setting the situation Christians face in the Middle East at the top of the agenda.

Upon the occasion of an official visit of the Patriarch to Germany Thomas Schirrmacher gave an address demonstrating solidarity and expressing good wishes on behalf of the WEA. This occurred within the framework of the Church Congress of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch in Germany, which took place in the St. Jakob v. Sarug cloister in Warburg/Westphalia. During the Church Congress, Dr Schirrmacher also took part in a panel discussion on the question: 'Christians in the Middle East – an End to their History?' Dr Schirrmacher emphasized that the political discussion of whether the killing of Oriental Christians 100 years ago was genocide or not is bad enough in itself. 'What is particularly bad is that this is taking place in light of the fact that IS and other forces want to complete what was not completed 100 years ago. The genocide of Syrian Christians is in full swing. It was just a few days ago that the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia called for there to be no more churches in the Arab world in ten years. For Christians it does not matter if it is IS or Saudi Arabia which stands opposed as an enemy, even if the latter is officially fighting against IS. In the end, the goals are the same.'

Thomas Schirrmacher made it clear that in his view there are basically two alternatives: Either there will be serious protection offered Christians on-site, or the countries of Europe will have to "seriously open the doors for refugees." If instead one waits a couple of years, there will simply no longer be any local Christians. And leaving the refugee catastrophe to the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey is something which cannot be done for a longer period of time. At least Jordan and Lebanon, where in the meantime the number of refugees in parts makes up more than 25% of the population, are not in such a position to handle the situation, and in time one would have to worry about the political stability of these countries.

During the Church Congress, an exhibition relating to the genocide of Syrian Christians was opened. Not least of this exhibition were the striking images of the displacement and murder of up to 500,000 Syrian and Armenian Christians at the end of the Ottoman Empire. Since in contrast to the genocide of Armenians there has been little material which has been published on Sayfo, which is the name Syrian Christians have given to the genocide, Thomas Schirrmacher has opened discussions with the initiator and author of the exhibition in order to make the material relating to the exhibition available in book form.



## Doing Theology Within the Global Church

By David Turnbull, Senior Lecturer in Intercultural Studies, Tabor Adelaide, South Australia



'The centre of Christianity is shifting. It is moving south and, to be precise, is nearing Timbuktu in Mali' (David Blair, Centre of Christianity Moves to Africa, (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/southafrica/1484450/Centre-of-Christianity-moves-to-Africa.html>)). Approximately 63% of the 2.2 billion believers come from the majority world. Europe and North America are being left behind, (<http://www.operationworld.org/regions>).

Through immigration Australia is a recipient and a beneficiary of this demographic change. In the last census over 50% of the overseas born believers came from the majority world, not Europe and New Zealand, a real change from similar data in 1986. As a result, our churches are becoming increasingly multiethnic. This, in turn, raises questions about the nature of Christian life and the Christian community, and what it means to be authentically multicultural. One area that needs to be explored is theological development and expression. True inclusion means doing theology together through mutual invitation and dialogue. We should be aware that significant theological developments have been taking place in the majority world, especially in the past 40 years or so, leading to the development of distinctive voices which can contribute to our global theological and biblical discussions.

The presentation of theology in Australia will evolve and change through the influence of majority world believers as they continue to develop their identity and own theology and adjust this to fit their new contexts. A key question, therefore, is how willing are we to sit at the table, to engage with and listen to the diasporic communities which are present in our congregations and Christian communities, and to participate in the resultant theological conversations?

In terms of my own journey (including time spent in Africa and Asia and participating in Christian international conferences) I have seen that there is much we hold in common around 'non-negotiables' in the areas of theology, Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, eschatology, soleriology and missiology. And there are benefits and blessings, not least of which is the possibility of growth that can be gained from listening to the differences and the distinctives. For example, after teaching at a theological college in northern Nigeria for a year my eyes were opened to the realities and dynamics of the spirit world, something which Paul discusses frequently but which is often overlooked in our western, modern, 'scientific' theologies. Likewise, my understanding of God, particularly his might and power, has been enriched by students who have come from tribal and African Traditional religious background.

In recent years a number of books have been published which can help westerners engage with and learn from the richness and diversity of contemporary global theology. Particularly significant are Timothy Tennent's *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's many books on theological themes from a contextual and ecumenical perspective, and Jeffrey Greenman and Gene Green's *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission*.

With the availability and accessibility of such foundational literature and contextual theologies from the regions, there are no excuses for the conversations not to begin with listening to the theological voices from the majority world in churches and theological education institutions. We should celebrate the commonalities and the differences.

Barriers can be overcome in the journey of theological reflection and learning through intentional discipling, mentoring and training. Christian leaders need to be equipped formally and informally for this growing theological movement. An example of this is Tabor Adelaide developing a new subject in 2015 entitled 'Doing Theology within the Global Church'. Students will explore theology from the perspectives of major theological strands in the global church and different geographic regions and will discover that there is much to be celebrated as God is at work.

*Posted on Manna (Resources for life and ministry from Tabor Adelaide's School of Ministry, Theology and Culture) on 11 June 2015 by taboradelaide.mtc (<http://tabormtc.com/2015/06/11/doing-theology-within-the-global-church/>)*

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