

My Experience in Busan

The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches took place in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 Oct to 6 Nov 2013. TC Chair, Dr Thomas Schirmmacher, shares his thoughts about this important gathering.

The Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance (with the help of four staff members of our International Office



Dr Thomas Schirmmacher, Chair of TC, addresses the WCC General Assembly

and two staff members of the International Institute for Religious Freedom) was much involved in the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan. Dr Rolf Hille was a member of the programme committee, I myself a member of the public issues committee. Within this committee I chaired the sub-committee writing a declaration against religious fanaticism and for religious freedom, that was accepted and published by the business plenary of the WCC. In some plenaries and many workshops we got the chance to present an evangelical perspective. Thus our director Dr Roslae Velosso Ewell gave a presentation on theological education from an evangelical perspective. Together with the fact that we

have a standing representative of the Mission Commission of WEA on the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, the changes compared to some decades ago are amazing.

We also were warmly welcomed by the WCC leadership and by many church leaders from all over the world. Especially the Orthodox and Eastern church leaders took time to meet us in private. Clearly the WCC leadership did not want us just to say polite words, but to present our case and be involved in the discussions. Two times there were special 'confessional' meetings in the official programme, among them one for 'Evangelicals' (WEA), in which we could discuss our strategy and other things among ourselves!

This General Assembly was much different from earlier gatherings. There was a much wider room for ecumenical guests like us. There was no syncretism—that is, in the official programme there were no religious ceremonies or prayers from adherents of other religions; they only gave some short word of greetings. Also other hot topics that constitute problems for Evangelicals decades ago have changed. Thus the WCC leadership did not give any statement on homosexuality. With the exception of a strong statement by a Russian Metropolitan in the business plenary, the topic was left to private discussion.

Of course the programme was diverse in theological positions. Overall the Bible studies were very good and close to our understanding. The business plenaries were constructive and well planned. The topical plenaries differed from each other in theological perspectives; the mission plenary lacked a section on verbal evangelism.

My plenary speech (see photo) was a difficult task. On the one hand I had to distance myself from ugly demonstrations against the WCC that were taking place outside the General Assembly and thank the WCC for its willing cooperation and for giving so much time to present our case; on the other hand, I had to explain our differences, including a strong statement against the human rights situation in North Korea. As there had been some heated debate over the new mission statement of WCC, I explained that the statement does not contain anything we could not sign, that it contains several 'evangelical' paragraphs on mission and the verbal communication of the gospel, but that we would have given the different topic a much different emphasis.

For more information on the General Assembly, visit the official website wcc2013.info The World Evangelical Alliance will hold its next General Assembly in October 2014, in Seoul, Republic of Korea.



David Gitari—a Tribute

Rev Dr David Gitari was chair of the WEA Theological Commission 1980-86 and an active participant in many of its consultations. He died on 30 Sept 2012 after a short illness, aged 76.

He was also a former General Secretary of the Pan-African Fellowship of Evangelical Students, and of the Bible Society of Kenya, and Anglican Bishop of Mt. Kenya East from 1975, and Bishop of Kirinyaga Diocese from 1990; in 1997 he became Archbishop of Kenya, retiring in 2002. Strongly influenced by the Lausanne Congress, he was a leading advocate of holistic witness in Kenya.

Rev Dr Bruce Nicholls, who was Executive Secretary of the TC 1975-86 and worked closely with Dr Gitari wrote this tribute.

David Gitari, one of Africa's truly great men of God died on 30th September 2013 after a short illness, aged 76. I remember visiting Embu, where David was bishop of Mount Kenya, East diocese, and I was greatly inspired by his vision for church planting, and the theological training on his clergy. He had a great sense of humor, and a raucous laugh.

He was well known for his evangelistic missions to university students. He was a committed defender of the evangelical faith in an age of theological liberalism. He fearlessly opposed corruption in the church and in the government. Three times he had to escape in the middle of the night by those who tried to kill him. He served as Archbishop, and Primate of the Anglican Church of Kenya, from 1997 until his retirement in 2002.

When the World Evangelical Fellowship formed its Theological Commission with 28 members, in 1975, Bishop David Gitari was one of three Africans appointed. He faithfully served the Commission for 10 years, and was Chairman from ?? until his retirement to 1986. He took part in several consultations, and contributed significant papers to them.

We thank the Lord for his vision, his wisdom, and his leadership in the world of theological education, along side his churchmanship. We send our sympathy to his bereaved family.

Dr Gitari wrote the following articles for *Evangelical Review of Theology*: 'The claims of Jesus in the African context' (October 1982 215-223) and 'Church and Politics' (July 2004 220-231).

Invitation to National & Regional Theological Commissions

The WEA and its Theological Commission invites all board members of theological commissions (or groups with similar status) of national or regional evangelical alliances to attend the General Assembly of WEA to be held in Seoul in October 2014. The General Assembly will involve leaders of Evangelical Alliances, members and partners of WEA commissions and initiatives, WEA associate members and global partners, member church networks and denominations, as well as global and local invited guests. For more information visit <http://www.worlddea.org/ga2014>

We will participate in the general agenda (including many plenaries and workshops planned by the TC), but every day we will have special planning meetings and discussion times to deal with our own agendas and issues of the TCs. This is the first time in history when all the boards of all the regional and national TCs will be able to meet one another face to face. Such personal interaction is fundamental as we seek to strengthen the service and work of the TCs for the coming years. Please contact TC Executive Chair, Dr Thomas Schirmacher with your RSVP and for more information chair_tc@worlddea.com

TC Publications

The flagship publication of The WEA Theological Commission is the quarterly scholarly journal, *Evangelical Review of Theology* (click [here](#) and see page 4) available from Paternoster Periodicals. We also publish this Theological News quarterly which is available for download from our [website](#) and it is also made available to those interested by email.

The two most recently published books are *Jesus, Salvation and the Jewish People: Statement and Papers from Consultation on Jewish Evangelism* edited by David Parker (Paternoster, 2011) and *Local Theology for the Global Church: Principles for an Evangelical Approach to Contextualization* edited by Matthew Cook et al. (William Carey, 2010)

Plans are in hand to update the history of the Theological Commission, *Discerning the Obedience of Faith* by David Parker to cover the period since its original publication in 2005. A new series, *Global Issues*, is also under planning.

In addition to these books and newsletters, the TC has issued a number of papers and statements from its consultations. For more information on these and earlier publications, visit our [website](#) or contact the [Executive Director](#)

TC Executive Director joins UBS



Dr Rosalee Velloso Ewell has recently been voted onto the Global Council of the United Bible Society. Dr Velloso Ewell took part in recent Global Council meetings called to discuss various policy and strategic planning matters for UBS and to elect the new officers of the council. Dr Velloso Ewell's main responsibility is to facilitate collaboration with evangelical and independent church leaders from around the globe.

In a statement about the meetings, Dr Velloso Ewell said, 'It is indeed a great honour to be part of such a wonderful team and to work with people from around the world on behalf of biblical literacy. My work with the UBS Global

Council fits in very well with the Theological Commission's commitment to Scriptural engagement and our work towards promoting theological education in churches, seminaries and Bible colleges. It is my hope that in this new role I will also be able to help national alliances better connect with national Bible societies so as to strengthen the churches and the witness of Christians worldwide.'



Bill Prevatte (Oxford Centre for Mission Studies), Corneliu Constantineau (president of the host seminary in Bucharest), John Baxter-Brown (WEA-TC).

'Reimagining the Seminary'

Earlier this term, Mr John Baxter-Brown, member of the TC Working Group, and Dr Rosalee Velloso Ewell served on the planning committee and as facilitators at a consultation in Bucharest, Romania, "Reimagining the Seminary". The aim of the conference was to promote better conversations between presidents of seminaries in Eastern Europe and to examine the insights from the Child Theology Movement on the curriculum of those seminaries. The proceedings of the consultation will later be published and will include a series of essays on "best practices" in theological education.

New Rector for International Baptist Seminary

A Scottish Baptist educator and former pastor, Stuart Blythe, has been named rector of the International Baptist Theological Study Centre in Amsterdam, a school owned by the European Baptist Federation in the process of relocating from the Czech Republic. Stuart Blythe, currently interim principal of the [Scottish Baptist College](#), is a 1989 graduate of the seminary will be the first IBTS alum to lead the school established in 1949 to rebuild and unify European Baptists following World War II.

[IBTS](#) moved to Prague in 1997, in response to changes in the European Baptist landscape after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Last year, trustees responded to declining revenues and costs associated with maintaining an aging campus by voting to establish a Baptist house, embedded in [VU University of Amsterdam](#), to concentrate on doctor of philosophy study in Baptist/Anabaptist studies and mission and practical theology. The shift also recognizes that local seminaries have sprung up to offer undergraduate and master's degrees, but there is a continuing need for doctoral studies. Baptist students could still study toward master's degrees at IBTS, but they would be awarded by VU University, a public school started by Dutch Calvinists that already hosts several seminaries, including the Baptist Seminary of the Netherlands.

Blythe received a Ph.D. in homiletics from the University of Edinburgh in 2009. On faculty at Scottish Baptist College since 2005, his primary areas of teaching and research are in practical theology. Parush Parushev, a native of Bulgaria who has served as interim rector since former rector Keith Jones' appointment ended this year, has warmly welcomed Blythe's selection.

Source: Adapted from a report by Bob Allen on [ABP News](#)

Filling the Gap—Studies in Early Christianity

By Dr Raymond J. Laird, Honorary Fellow of the Centre for Early Christian Studies, Brisbane, Australia

The Early Christian Centuries Conference, held 3-5 October 2013, at the Centre for Early Christian Studies (Australian Catholic University) Melbourne, Australia in conjunction with Asia-Pacific Early Christian Studies Society, brought together fellow researchers in Early Christianity from around the world. It testified to the widening interest in patristic studies by scholars from non-Catholic and non-Orthodox situations. I remember well the huge gap in the curriculum given to me some decades ago when first lecturing in church history. It seemed that, apart from a few fourth and fifth century Church Councils, little of significance had happened since the apostolic era, as we rushed through a few notables in the second and third centuries, focused on Nicaea in the fourth and Chalcedon in the fifth, and then skimmed across a millennium to the Reformation. This may sound extreme, as students may have been able to take further units in church history, but the reality was that the usual concentration on the fourth and fifth centuries in one subject, and upon the Reformation in another, significant as these were in the life of the church, in one sense intensified the problem.

Thus, at this conference it was interesting to note that beside the Catholic and the Greek and Russian Orthodox participants, there were Lutheran, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, Anglican, Coptic, Baptist, and Church of Christ personnel making contributions. This phenomenon was matched by the universities from which faculty members and researchers had come, especially the six Japanese universities at which some form of Christian history could be studied. Not so surprising, but unexpected enough especially in our recent cultural drift, were the eleven Australian universities where the same applied.

The quality of the plenary addresses and the sessional papers, for the most part, were of a high standard. As the theme of the conference was on Men and Women, attention tended to lean towards the roles of women, marriage and sexuality, and the methodological problems arising therefrom in interpreting the primary texts. An outstanding address on opposing positions on the moral and theological status of sexuality in the fifth century CE was presented by Professor Mathijs Lamberigts from the Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, Belgium. Professor Elaine Wright from the University of Auckland was also in fine form in her presentation on weaving together a complex web of the various traditions of New Testament studies and those of Early Christian studies concerning women, focusing upon the methodological issues in such a task. Professor Claudia Rapp from the University of Vienna also left the conference participants with much to ponder in her paper on blood ties in late antiquity and the elements involved in recasting of these social relations by Christianity.

Participants had a rich feast of papers laid out for them from which to choose in the sessional groups. Forty-two papers, in three parallel sessions at each sitting allowed each participant to attempt to absorb fifteen papers in the two and one-half days. The sessions I attended were closely related to my main research interest, John Chrysostom, but there was time also to hear a paper on "Augustine of Hippo as public advocate of women's rights", by Hubertus R. Drobner from the University of Paderborn in Germany, and a few papers by various participants on Maximus the Confessor, the seventh century monastic theologian, who was tortured and exiled by Emperor Constans II for his defence of Chalcedonian Christology. At the beginning of the Conference, Andrew McGowan, Warden of Trinity College at the University of Melbourne, and the Joan Munro Professor of Historical Theology, Trinity College Theological School, gave a thought-provoking keynote paper on the construction of liturgical practice in early Christianity, taking the ritual of foot-washing as a case in which gender probably determined what could be allowed to be admitted into the liturgy.

The conference may have commenced with a focus on women, but it was to close with the final keynote paper on the projections of male grandeur onto God and their reciprocal reinforcement of men as divinely sanctioned values. This was presented by William Loader FAHA, from Murdoch University, Western Australia. It raised some interesting questions on the New Testament text, suggesting there are ironic elements which are subversive of male grandeur, both in Mark's passion story, and Paul's self critiques and his spiritualities. Loader claims that great care is required in the handling of the biblical text: "At stake is the construction of human personhood and the nature of God."

All in all this was an outstanding conference, well organised, rich in its content, and of lasting worth. I have long felt that to live in ignorance of our past is to open ourselves to poverty in wisdom, and that to lose our collective memory is to expose our civilisation to taking paths that lead to disintegration. However, if the trends reflected in this conference, its topics and attendees mean anything, they could point to the deep psychological yearning of a growing number of hearts to explore not only the whole range of heritage builders and wardens of the Christian faith, but also to discern and restore the fast fading foundations and fabric of the civilisations which emerged from embracement of Christianity.

My own contribution was a paper entitled "It is all in the mindset: John Chrysostom and the great moments of personal destiny", which in an expanded form is soon to be published as part of a selection of the Conference papers.

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