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of these facts that need to be made known. The Trinity is key to the holding together of the present activity of the Holy Spirit along with the work of God and Jesus Christ of the biblical records. They work together and not separately.

4. A proper eschatological affirmation will be imperative. Once again our whole approach to eschatology has been very western with our students required only to affirm a particular position rather than to draw out implications for our immediate context. A totally futuristic eschatology with no present implications, of the kind that was encouraged alongside otherworldly attitudes, will not have any meaning within our context today. The new earth and new heaven must relate to the present earth, or else we will not be true to the biblical teaching of God's heart for his world today.

TWO MAJOR CHALLENGES

The context and the theological themes we have spelled out above will help in dealing with two major challenges that we confront in Asia, **P. 368** even worldwide. These are first, the communication of God's word within the plurality of religions and cultures that we confront today, and second the response to the environmental challenge within Asia. All else, i.e., poverty, religion, modernity, urbanization etc., are only factors that help us to understand these issues within our context.

Dr Ken Gnanakan is Executive Director of the Asia Theological Association, Bangalore, India. p. 369

Opening Address

Bong Rin Ro

It has been my privilege to work for the WEF Theological Commission (TC) since 1990 as its director, after serving the Asia Theological Association for 20 years. I have travelled to different countries to visit seminaries, met many theologians and attended theological consultations. For the past eight months I have been on my sabbatical leave from Korea to the United States, teaching module courses at five different theological seminaries.

The world and the church of the 21st century have many similarities with the world and the church of Martin Luther's time in the 16th century. Even in the theological field, the anthropocentric modern theological development with its emphasis on contextualization has become an increasing challenge to the evangelical church just as the Roman Catholic medieval theology of faith and reason and of superstitions became a stumbling block to Luther and other reformers. Therefore, just as Luther emphasized his doctrine of sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, and solus Christus to bring the erring church back to the biblical doctrines, we in our day need to go back to the Reformation faith from our theological confusion existing not only in the liberal camp but also in the evangelical community around the world.

I

THE WORLD OF MARTIN LUTHER AND TODAY

A. Materialism and secularism

The tremendous impact of modern materialism, especially in the consumer oriented capitalistic society, has captured the hearts of the people. As the increasing number of countries in Asia, particularly in the Pacific Rim nations, have been experiencing material prosperity for the last 20 years, many Asians are also deeply affected by materialism. In my own experience of travelling throughout Asia for the last 25 years for the ministry of theological education, I have seen the gradual changes in economic development in almost every country. Nevertheless, we still see millions of starving people in the Third World, and these poor people are also naturally **p. 370** inclined to regard material possessions as their goal.

Secularism on the other hand has gripped the minds of the people and changed their world view. Many sense no need of God's real intervention to establish peace for the world and believe that they can do it by themselves. The materialism and secularism of this world have greatly affected the Christian church and created many nominal Christians. Consequently, the moral decadence of our society even in Christian workers has weakened the witness of the church.

Martin Luther faced a similar situation in his time. The new discovery of America by Columbus (1492), Vasco Da Gama's trip to Cape Town, South Africa (1498) and to India (1499), the Portuguese discovery of Brazil (1500) and other explorations developed trade and caused the rise of western colonialism; consequently, modern capitalism was born. The late medieval Renaissance introduced humanism and the revival of Greek and Latin learning which contributed to the growth of scepticism and secularism. The Roman Catholic Church with its internal divisions, materialism and humanism, and moral corruption of the church leaders was in need of reformation. Martin Luther responded to that call of God.

B. The rise of other religions challenges the church

Both the Western and Eastern Byzantine Empires during the time of Luther were under the threat of the Islamic Ottoman Empire. Western powers confronted eastern religions through their exploration from the 16th century. Today, the Christian church is facing enormous challenges from the living religions of the world. Under the national government policy of the resurgence of traditional cultures the traditional religions have been reviving and have made their impact even on western nations.

Therefore, many liberal theologians have tried to accommodate these religions in our Christian thinking through religious dialogue and religious pluralism. Many contextual theologies have been introduced into the theological arena since 1970 and caused theological confusion at theological institutions throughout the world. More interestingly, in recent years some 'evangelicals' theologians have encouraged other evangelicals to be sympathetic towards other religions and to accommodate the teachings of other religions. Certainly, religious syncretism and pluralism would be the dominant theme of theological discussion in the 21st century.

C. Theological confusion in the church

Luther had theological problems in his time with the Roman Catholic church such as in the sale of indulgences, salvation, mariology, infallibility of the papacy, many forms of superstition, etc. He wanted to bring the erring Roman Catholic Church back to the

teachings of the Scripture. Today, we have our theological issues within the Christian church. **p. 371** With the emphasis on contextualization in theological studies in the post-colonial period, we have seen a list of contextual theologies in Asia, Africa, and South America which have brought theological confusion in the church.

Even among evangelical theologians there has been an increasing division on many of the theological issues especially related to evangelism and social responsibility, religious pluralism and other morally related subjects. The WEF TC has a God-given responsibility to deal with the pressing theological issues of our days and to provide the theological direction to the world-wide church.

II THEOLOGICAL AGENDA FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

I see four main areas of theological discussion that will take place and should take place in the next century, and I would like to see our TC devoting itself to dealing with these issues in the future.

A. The theology of religions

The uniqueness of Christ and the Bible in the midst of religious pluralism will be continuously challenged both inside and outside the church. Even some of the 'evangelical' theologians such as Clark Pinnock have challenged the traditional concept of the uniqueness of Christianity; therefore, the theology of religions will be the dominant theme of theological discussion in the 21st century.

B. Christian social responsibility

The theological issues of Christian social responsibility in the world of hunger, poverty, suffering, and injustice especially in the developing world have been extensively discussed for the last 25 years producing tons of materials. This theme will continue to be on the theological agenda of the 21st century, and TC ought to give a unified evangelical voice on important social issues of our days.

C. Moral issues in society

One area which the evangelical theologians have not adequately and cooperatively discussed has to do with controversial moral and ethical issues of our society today: abortion, homosexual marriage, AIDS, euthanasia, feminism, etc. The time has come for evangelical theologians around the world to have in-depth theological discussions on these topics in order that they might search the Scriptures once again and find out where they agree and disagree. Many Christians at the grass-roots level are theologically confused about their beliefs on these issues. I believe that the WEFTC must find out the evangelical consensus (common denominators' doctrines) on these controversial theological issues and help lay Christians with their beliefs.

D. Biblical concept of Christian ministry

Another crucial area in theological discussion is pastoral theology. Many pastors today are in crisis in terms of their relationship with the **p. 372** laity of the church. The average length of service which the pastor renders at one church in the United States is between four and five years. The rise of lay power in the church in the late 20th century has jeopardized the sanctity of Christian ministry. Therefore, the average lay person's respect for his pastor as an 'ordained servant of God' has been lost; in other words, the deep

respect and honour which the people of God in the Old Testament rendered to their priests and prophets and by which the early Christians in the New Testament time paid tribute to the apostles have disappeared; consequently, there is a crisis in Christian ministry today. We must recover the 'biblical concept of Christian ministry' from the Scripture. This is one of the tasks of the Theological Commission in the future.

CONCLUSION

We are living in the midst of materialism, secularism, humanism, pluralism, and theological confusion. There are amazing similarities of challenge to the Christian church during the time of Martin Luther and our time. As Luther wanted to recover biblical Christianity with sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, we also need to emphasize Luther's slogan for our days in order to go back to the biblical teaching for the problems which we face today. We have faith in Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord; therefore, we have hope for eternal salvation and for the establishment of his kingdom in this world.

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Our Theological Task: Preparing for Mission in the 21st Century

Bruce J. Nicholls

As we prepare to enter the 21st century the present trend of world events suggests that we will face situations for good and evil whose magnitude will eclipse anything known in human history. The rapidity of cultural change, the expansion of human knowledge, economic development and prosperity, the development of the information highway and global travel are some of the positive benefits that await us. But alas, they will be matched by racial and communal violence, the widening of the gap between rich and poor, diseases with no known cure, the continuing breakdown of marriage and family life, amoral sexual behaviour and an expanding network of bribery, corruption and terrorism. In the midst of religious pluralism, secular humanism will give way to old and new forms of paganism in desperate attempts to save the world from ecological disaster. The conflict between the City of God and the City of Man so dramatically portrayed in the visions in the book of Revelation is becoming as relevant now as it will be in the last days.

We gather for this consultation in the faith and expectant hope that the Living Creator-Redeemer God of biblical revelation will triumph in the cosmic battle between good and evil. The victory won on the cross and demonstrated in the resurrection will be fully revealed when Christ returns to inaugurate the descent of the New Jerusalem ([Rev. 21](#)) and the creation of the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness ([2 Pet. 3:13](#)). God's kingly reign is now visible in his church in-so-far as the church lives under