

Evangelical Review of Theology

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Volume 28 · Number 3 · July 2004

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical
theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by



PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS



for
WORLD EVANGELICAL
ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

‘Discerning the Obedience of Faith’ A Short History of the World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission Part 2: 1986-1994

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KEYWORDS: *Publications, administration, theological education, accreditation, evangelism, ecumenism, ethics, internet, scholarships, uniqueness of Christ, environment*

New leadership—Sunand Sumithra

As Sunand Sumithra stepped into his new unexpected role as the Executive Secretary of the Theological Commission¹, he had first to set up his office. This involved moving records and documents from Holland and from New Delhi to Bangalore where he lived, first

to his home and then later to a separate office, where he had some clerical assistance, including that of his wife. There were also the formalities associated with registering the TC in India, although it was hoped that some of the financial aspects would be handled ultimately through the WEF International office which within a year moved to Singapore.

Taking over the administrative leadership of the TC after the long period of development by its founder, Bruce Nicholls, was a big task in itself, without the additional problems of merging and relocation of operations—Nicholls and Sumithra were very different personalities and had different background experiences. Furthermore, as Sumithra himself knew only too well, his strengths were in teaching and theological reflection, not administration, international travel and networking within global evangelicalism. However, his few months

1 The sources for this history are mostly the official records of the WEF/A Theological Commission. For this section, acknowledgement is made also to J. Allan, R. E. Bell, R.W. Ferris, K. Gnanakan, R. Kemp, P. Kuzmič, J.E. Langlois, J. Mudditt, C. Sugden, C. Weber, T. Zaretsky and others who have assisted in a variety of ways.

working alongside his predecessor had given him valuable insights into the work and strengthened his vision for its value and importance. So he set about his new responsibilities with determination and enthusiasm, strongly supported by his friends and colleagues in the WEF constituency, and especially the WEF International Director, David Howard who took an active personal interest in his activities. But due to many factors beyond his control, such as poor phone communication, problems of interference with mail and bouts of health problems for Sumithra and his family, it was virtually two years before the administration settled down and he felt that the work was ready to flourish.

One of his most obvious tasks was the preparation of *Evangelical Review of Theology (ERT)*, now as sole editor. He changed its format to focus on a particular theme in each quarterly issue, covering a range of topics such as the nature of the theological task, evangelicalism, contextualisation, materialism, and the mission and relevance of the church. Similarly, he was now also sole editor of *Theological News (TN)*, which needed to keep track of a wide range of developments in the third world—seminaries, accreditation, conferences, books and church movements—with both reports and editorial comment. There was also *Theological Education Today (TET)*, printed as a supplement to *TN* and containing usually just one article; it was edited for the first year by Robert Youngblood for the ICAA.

The journals were all published by Jeremy Mudditt of Paternoster Press. However, a major part of the responsibility fell to John Allan, part-time Sec-

retary of Publications for the WEF. He was appointed after the adoption of new policies for WEF publications in 1985, and was based at the Exeter office of Paternoster. He had to work within a complex framework of relationships. Furthermore, due to distance and poor communications with Bangalore, and other factors, it was always a difficult task to collect suitable material, put it into a form suitable for publishing and keep up with deadlines. He also had to deal with the steady stream of book manuscripts and other publishing projects that were coming in for the TC and other Commissions.

Other prominent TC activities during this triennium were the Scholarship Fund which assisted many faculty members, and the Biblical Library Fund, helping seminaries and colleges by providing books at much reduced prices. These also fell to Sumithra despite plans to transfer them to the ICAA.

TC and ICAA

Theological Education continued to be a vital part of the TC's interests. At the 1986 meeting, Rolf Hille of Germany, took over as convenor of the TC Theological Education Study Unit, which had previously been led by TC staff workers, commencing with Miss Patricia Harrison, and most recently by Robert Youngblood. Hille, who would later figure very prominently in the TC work, adopted a policy of close cooperation with ICAA to avoid unnecessary duplication.

The ICAA itself was now led by Robert Youngblood. In July 1986 he had concluded his part-time assign-

ment assisting in the organization of the WEF General Assembly, and moved to Sequim, Washington, USA, where he set up the ICAA office as full time General Secretary. Youngblood, who was previously dean of a community college in the United States and had served as a missionary with the Presbyterian Church of America, first joined WEF in 1979, where he worked from the Netherlands as a Project Officer and WEF representative in Europe.

During the following months, work progressed on developing ICAA's system of recognition of accreditation services, and the encouragement of accreditation work in Latin America. Papers from consultations were published,² and a consultation was held at Unter Weissach, Germany, 23-27 June, 1987, to focus on the renewal of theological education through accreditation.

But all of this positive work was overshadowed by ongoing tension over the relationship of the ICAA to the TC and, more generally, to the WEF. At its 1986 meeting, the TC had suspended ICAA's participation in the TC budget pending clarification of relationships between the two bodies. ICAA believed this issue had been resolved earlier

and therefore regarded the TC's unexpected action as a serious problem. This episode raised the question of the precise meaning of the clause in ICAA constitution stating that it 'operates with internal autonomy under the sponsorship' of the TC. It also raised wider issues of accountability in the WEF movement and its organizational framework. This resulted in a strong push over a lengthy period to make the ICAA genuinely an 'affiliate' of WEF (as WEF literature at the time officially classed it), thus making it a parallel organization to the TC.

On the other hand, some in WEF wanted to reform ICAA to limit its role to a Board of Accreditation, and to assign all other theological education functions to the TC through its Theological Education Unit. However, others, including the ICAA, said such a proposal seriously misunderstood the nature of accreditation which was not a regulatory system, but 'a true catalyst for renewal' touching all areas of theological education.³ It was also argued that this wider role for ICAA as

2 ICETE publications form a series called *Evangelical Theological Education Today*. Titles are *Evangelical Theological Education Today: An International Perspective*, Paul Bowers, ed. (1st ed. 1982; 2nd ed. 1994); *Evangelical Theological Education Today: Agenda for Renewal*, Paul Bowers, ed. (1982); *Reader in Theological Education* Robert Youngblood, ed. (1983); *TEE Come of Age*, Robert Youngblood, ed. (1986); *Excellence and Renewal in Theological Education*, Robert Youngblood, ed. (1989); *Text and Context in Theological Education*, Roger Kemp, ed. (1994).

3 Tite Tiénou, 'The Future of ICAA', *ERT* Vol 14 No 1 (Jan 1990), pp. 86-91, in which he called for the movement to 'recover and expand [its] original vision'; ICAA, 'Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education', *ERT*, Vol 8 No 1 (Apr. 1984), pp. 136-143 (later revised in 1990 and 2002); Robert W. Ferris, *Renewal in Theological Education: strategies for change* (Wheaton: Billy Graham Center, 1990); for B. J. Nicholls' views on global theological education see his 'Theological Education and Evangelization' in J. D. Douglas, (Ed.), *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland Official Reference Volume* (Minneapolis, Minn.: World Wide Publications, 1975), pp. 634-645.

a full service agency for theological education was part of the original vision when it was established in 1980. This tension over relationships between the ICAA, the TC and WEF was not fully dealt with until the end of the triennium in 1989, but at least at its next meeting in 1987, the TC Executive reversed its decision on the original 1986 motion to suspend financial support for the ICAA.

The first Executive Committee meeting in Sumithra's term was held 31 March to 2 April, 1987 at Korntal, Germany. Despite the administrative and logistical difficulties Sumithra had experienced so far, he approached this meeting positively, calling in his report for the TC (which, he reminded members, had both a servant and prophetic function), to focus more on key theological issues, better communication and to relate more closely to local church ministry. But it was still a difficult time for him as he continued to come to grips with the extent and nature of the work and his responsibilities as the Executive Secretary.

The meeting grappled with financial structures and administration which were still in a serious condition. As a result, a delegation consisting of Dr Robert Youngblood (who brought his assistant, Betty Froisland) and the WEF Administrator, Dr David Tan was sent to Bangalore in May 1987 to assist Sumithra in setting up a new organizational system for the TC office. The TC Executive Committee also dealt with membership issues and reviewed the by-laws to improve the structures and functions of the organization.

Study program advances

One of the most significant actions of this 1987 meeting was to set up a new Task Force to provide an official WEF response to the 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry' document which had been produced by the World Council of Churches in 1982. There had been discussions within WEF circles for some time about making a response in view of the fact that virtually every denomination in the world was taking up the invitation to comment officially on the paper by mid-1989. One of the problems for WEF was that, being an interdenominational body, it did not have an official ecclesiology, and therefore discussion of the topics covered by the WCC document was likely to be controversial. But finally it was decided that the issue was of such importance that the WEF should make a contribution to the debate, even though the time for the preparation of a response before the WCC deadline was now short. So a task force was set up, headed by Dr Paul Schrottenboer who had so successfully led the Task Force which reported to the 1986 General Assembly on evangelical perspectives on Roman Catholicism. His group, consisting of eight people representing seven countries, worked effectively to produce a carefully worded 8000-word statement in time for the WCC's process of review.⁴

4 P. G. Schrottenboer, (editor), 'An evangelical response to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry', *ERT* Vol 13 No 4 (Oct. 1989), pp. 291-313; Paul Schrottenboer (editor), *An Evangelical Response to 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry'* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992).

The most important of all TC activities continued to be the Study Units and Task Forces. There had been seven of these in the previous period, all of which were retained in 1986, with a new one added. Perhaps the most effective was Faith and Church,⁵ led by Dr Donald Carson, which continued its productive activities with a consultation on prayer at Cambridge, UK, 6-10 November 1986, involving twenty-five participants from fifteen countries. Its papers were published in 1990 under the title, *Teach us to Pray*, the third in the series from this unit. Two years later, November 3-6, 1988, it met again in Cambridge with twenty theologians discussing papers on the theme of justification. The papers appeared in 1992 as *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World*.

Bishop Michael Nazir Ali of Pakistan was appointed in 1986 as the leader of the Ecumenical Issues unit, but due to his removal to UK soon after, there had been no activity. This area of work was subsequently included in Dr Paul Schrottenboer's task force preparing the response to the WCC book.

Patrick Sookhdeo, who led Theology of Evangelisation prior to 1986, had some projects on Islam to complete so it was more than a year before the new leader, Dr Ken Gnanakan of India, took over. Gnanakan had been appointed to the TC in 1983. An evan-

gelist in his own right, he was also well known for his pioneering work in establishing in Bangalore a training institution on holistic principles known as The ACTS Institute, and for his involvement in ATA.⁶ He conducted workshops for the Theology of Evangelization Unit in UK, USA, Japan and India during subsequent years, focusing on the issues of secularism and other ideologies related to the West and world religions.⁷ Gnanakan retained his connection with the TC over many years and eventually became Vice-Chairman.

As the result of the response to Rene Padilla's paper at the Singapore consultation on the new ecclesiology in Latin America, an additional Study Unit was named to focus on 'New and Emerging models of the church'. In response to a request for ideas, Guillermo Cook of Costa Rica had submitted the names of several who were interested in the topic with himself as convenor, but the details were not recorded in the original minutes. However, he had proceeded to develop plans for the group to work on the topic at a consultation in June 1988. But

⁵ D. A. Carson, (editor) *Teach us to Pray: Prayer in the Bible and the World* (Exeter/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Baker, 1990); *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World* (Carlisle/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Baker, 1992).

⁶ See the Festschrift in honour of Dr K. Gnanakan's retirement, B. Wintle, et al (eds.), *Work, Worship and Witness* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 2003), which includes a bibliography and brief biography. See also W. Harold Fuller, *People of the Mandate* (Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Baker/Paternoster, 1996) pp. 118-121.

⁷ See *TN* Vol 22 No 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1991) for a report on the US session, held Sept. 1991, and also, Ken Gnanakan, *The Pluralistic Predicament* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1992), pp. 223-225, notes 1-3.

when he sought funding, his application was disallowed on the grounds that official sanction had not been obtained previously; however, finances were offered after the event which took place under other auspices.

There was a change in the leadership of the Ethics and Society Study Unit—Dr Ronald Sider's term had expired and he was replaced by Rev. Dr Chris Sugden. While working in India in relief and development work, Sugden had been a partner of Unit member, Rev. Vinay Samuel; he had also been involved in the 1980 Hoddesdon, 1982 CRESR and Wheaton 1983 consultations in this field. He had published some of his own studies⁸ and soon became a close partner with Sider in the Ethics and Society Unit.

The Unit continued its record of energetic activity, having met in Kenya in August 1987 and added a new member, Dr Bong Ho Son, who was the founder of the Christian Ethical Practice Movement in his native Korea—he would later become convenor of the Unit. The Unit co-sponsored a consultation on evangelical social activists and charismatics at Pasadena, California, 12-15 January, 1988 where the coordinators were Ronald Sider and Michael Harper.⁹ Seminars were held in Korea and the papers from the 1983 Wheaton consultation on the church in response to human need were pub-

lished.¹⁰ The Unit continued to publish its journal *Transformation* until mid-1988.

In 17-21 October 1988 in Hong Kong, the Church and State in Asia Consultation, which became part of the Ethics and Society Unit, was organized by Dr. Jonathan Chao of the China Church Research Centre (now China Ministries International) in Hong Kong in conjunction with Partnership in Mission.

However, the Ethics and Society unit was also the centre of concern over their plans for a visit to South Africa. At the 1986 TC meeting, attention had been drawn to the serious situation of evangelicals in South Africa. Accordingly, members of the Ethics and Society Unit had discussed the possibility of a fact-finding visit there to alert the wider evangelical community to the situation and to provide some encouragement to those in South Africa who had been severely affected by media and communications restrictions imposed by the apartheid regime. Although the Unit had believed their plans had been arranged properly in

8 *Social Gospel or No Gospel* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1975); *A Different Dream—Non-Violence as Practical Politics* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1976); *Radical Discipleship* (Basingstoke: Marshalls, 1981).

9 *Transformation* Vol 5 No 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1988).

10 Vinay Samuel and Christopher Sugden (editors), *The Church in Response to Human Need* (Grand Rapids/Oxford: Eerdmans/Regnum Books, 1987). (Previously published as *Selected papers from Wheaton '83, a conference convened by the World Evangelical Fellowship at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill., from June 20 to July 1, 1983* (Monrovia, Calif.: MARC, 1983). Arrangements were also made for a Spanish translation. Bruce Nicholls' book on the 1983 Wheaton consultation dealing with the nature and mission of the church had been published earlier under the title, *The Church—God's Agent for Change* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986).

cooperation with the TC leadership, the report of these developments to the 1987 Executive Committee meeting resulted in serious misunderstandings. It was a sensitive issue for the WEF leadership which interpreted the efforts of the Study Unit as conflicting with WEF processes and related activities. The visit ultimately took place in April 1989 under the auspices of INFEMIT,¹¹ although the team included some people from the WEF constituency.¹²

Consultations and contacts

The TC was also involved in two important consultations during this period. The first was on conversion which, in continuity with a number of similar efforts previously,¹³ was arranged in cooperation with the LCWE Theology Working Group. It attracted about thirty participants from 14 countries, and was held in Hong Kong 4-8 Jan. 1988. This consultation was regarded by all concerned as a valuable and highly successful event, and produced a nine-page statement, *The Hong Kong call to conversion*.¹⁴ The papers were not published, but the main points of the consultation were summarised in *Turning to God: Biblical conversion in the modern world*, edited by David Wells,

who had done a similar job for the previous consultation on the Holy Spirit and Evangelisation.¹⁵

Wider contacts were also involved in the second consultation held 26-29 April 1989 in Willowbank, Bermuda on the Gospel and Jewish people. It was sponsored by the WEF with the unofficial support of LCWE, and chaired by Vernon Grounds of Denver Seminary. The participants included a number of well known theologians and Christian agency heads, including representatives of the WEF and its TC.¹⁶ This consultation arose in response to strong trends in some Jewish and Christian circles towards a view based on the idea of the two covenants—one for Christians and the other for the Jews—that rendered evangelism of the Jews unnecessary and illegitimate. One major denomination was already moving officially towards that view. As a result of the discussions and the skilled work of James I. Packer and Kenneth Kantzer, a 2500 word declaration was adopted and quickly released to the media in time to influence Christian opinion on the matter. This consultation had another outcome—conversations which took place at that time between the TC Executive Secretary and Tuvya Zaret-sky, of the Jews for Jesus movement in

11 The International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians (INFEMIT), formed in 1987.

12 See report of the visit in *Transformation* Vol 6 No 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1989), pp. 19-23

13 They included Gospel and culture 1977; Simple lifestyle, 1980; Nature and mission of the Church, 1983; and Holy Spirit and evangelization, 1985.

14 *ERT* Vol 16 No 3 (Jul. 1992), pp. 262-270

15 David F. Wells, *Turning to God: Biblical conversion in the modern world* (Exeter/Grand Rapids; Paternoster/Baker, 1989). David F. Wells, *God the evangelist: how the Holy Spirit works to bring men and women to faith* (Grand Rapids/Exeter: Eerdmans/Paternoster Press, 1987).

16 They included T. Adeyemo, H. Blocher, Bong Ro, and S. Sumithra.

USA, created the idea of a TC Study Unit on the topic. These ideas were developed and came to fruition at the 1990 TC Executive meeting.

Sumithra travelled extensively as part of his work as TC Executive Secretary. As well as many visits around India, he was in Europe in August 1986 for the FEET conference and then in Singapore to plan for the consultation on conversion. He was back in England in November 1986 to participate in the Faith and Church session at Cambridge. The next year, he was in Singapore again for an ATA conference, but plans for a visit to Australia and New Zealand earlier that year failed due to visa problems. He had in mind visits in the future to other countries as well.

Early in 1988 he travelled to USA for the ICAA Executive Committee meetings, joining Dr Rolf Hille in his position as convenor of the Theological Education Study Unit in planning joint activities and in particular, seeking to develop better relations between the two bodies. As well as making good progress in developing ideas for a joint consultation on the theme, 'Renewal and Excellence in Evangelical Theological Education through Biblical Contextualization', the meeting adopted several strong resolutions about the need for reform of the WEF structures as they impacted on the ICAA.

Sumithra took the opportunity while in USA to promote the work of TC. He was not able to visit seminaries as he intended because the WEF North American office did not have adequate contacts in this area, but he did make contact with many WEF donors. He was more successful with theological colleges in the UK leg of this tour, which also included a visit to Pater-

noster Publications for a rare opportunity of face to face consultation about the publications.

He considered these international travels a vital part of his contribution to the core work of TC—theological reflection and networking; he supplemented these efforts by writing, lecturing and conference participation in various settings. As he reported to the 1988 Executive Commission, this was all giving him a wider and more substantial vision for the Commission: '... more than ever before, I am convinced of the crucial role our Commission has to play in the defence of the Gospel'.

Vision fades

The 1988 Executive Committee meeting was held March 15-18, 1988 in Bangalore—the first time it had been held in the home city of the TC, although three of the members were not able to attend. Sumithra was able to report positively about the process of reorganization and financial administration, feeling that the worst was behind them. Steps were under way for smoother operation of the Study Units, and the streamlining of administration, by-laws and budgeting. He had made many contacts in his travels and had a better understanding of the global context.

So he was looking forward to the next year or so leading up to general meeting and consultation due at the end of the triennium in 1989. He had gathered many suggestions for topics for theological reflection including the need for pastoral care in relation to family relationships. He was also concerned about 'the need for real theological discernment against the grow-

ing influence of various kinds of false teachings'—a topic which would be treated in detail at the next consultation. However, he regretted that the papers from the 1986 consultation on 'Christ the Liberator and Redeemer' had not been published. (In fact, they never were.)

The relationship between the TC and ICAA was again on the agenda, with Dr Robert Youngblood in attendance to present his case. Dr Rolf Hille, as convener of the TC Theological Education unit, also reported. The work of the ICAA was commended, but the TC Executive declined to accept the idea of the ICAA as an autonomous, parallel (or 'affiliate') organization, at least until it could be discussed more fully the following year. However, in a decision that resulted in virtually the same outcome, it was agreed that the work of the TC Study Unit on Theological Education should be related closely to the ICAA and that the two bodies should hold a joint international consultation in 1989 (possibly in Yugoslavia). Soon after, the WEF leadership confirmed that the description of the ICAA's status as 'affiliate' had been an administrative oversight and that the ICAA General Secretary should continue to report through the TC Executive Secretary to the WEF.

The publication and administration of *Transformation* by the Ethics and Society Unit was also a matter of discussion at Bangalore. At its meeting held soon after, the WEF Executive voted to carry through on its earlier decision that *Transformation* should not appear under the auspices of the WEF. The WEF's audit problems were now stated as an extra reason for this decision. So from mid-1988, *Transfor-*

mation passed out of TC hands.

At end of the 1988 Executive meeting, the pathway for the future was taking clearer shape—the scene was set for better relationships with the membership and for a more clearly defined Study Unit process and program. Furthermore, uncertainties concerning the Ethics and Society Unit's proposed visit to South Africa were aired and it was endorsed as a low key personal tour for information purposes.

The by-laws were updated and some of the growing administrative problems addressed, but issues related to finances, budgeting and fund raising were still major (and escalating) causes of concern. Some of these were attributable to lack of training, and poor staffing, facilities and communication on the part of the TC, but there were also implications for the overall WEF administration. Although he was aware of these and other difficulties, Sumithra himself relished his experience with the TC, stating that 'my horizons in theological discernment as well as Christian spirituality have been much extended due to my one and half years in this office ... for which I am sincerely grateful to God'.

However, this impetus was short lived, and in a rapid turn of events, the prospects for both the TC and ICAA were soon under a cloud. First of all, in September 1988, Robert Youngblood resigned from the ICAA, one year short of his term, in difficult circumstances at the end of a long period of personal and organizational tension over his role and the status of the ICAA. This meant that the ICAA had to scale back on its joint-consultation plans for June 1989. Even though much planning had been done, it declared that with

reduced staffing, it could stage only a limited mini-consultation, restricted to its own members and those of the TC Executive and Theological Education study unit. The involvement of both the TC and ICAA and many from their constituency in the important Lausanne II consultation in Manila about the same time added pressure for this decision.

In the circumstances, the TC decided to delay its consultation and general meeting by one year. However, it was agreed that the Executive Committees of both the organizations would still meet in June 1989 and that there would also be some joint sessions to resolve the problem of their mutual relationships.

Then, when the TC Executive itself met in June 1989, it was presented with the resignation of Dr Sunand Sumithra, even though only a year or so earlier he had spoken positively about his vision for the TC, his personal commitment and how 'the work of the Commission is becoming more exciting to me as the days go by'. Early in 1989, he had presented a detailed and positive report covering the activities of the TC Study Units, and his travel, involvement in conferences, writing and teaching, and ministry and organizational plans for the future. He had been particularly stirred by a conference of evangelicals and ecumenicals on mission, sponsored by the ELCW in Stuttgart, Germany that he and other WEF and LCWE people had attended. Discussions there highlighted the great importance of the theological grounding of the church; he came away 'convinced ... that WEF, through its Theological Commission at least, has a vital and unique role in keeping the purity of the gospel in this age of growing secu-

larism and pluralism'.

He was conscious of his struggles with the administrative side of the work, but in the light of his convictions about the value and importance of the TC, hoped that some solution could be found for this problem, such as reducing the complexity of his role by dividing the theological work from the educational, or securing administrative assistance for him. However, the Executive accepted the resignation, effective September 30, 'with profound regret, recognising his gifts in the areas of teaching and writing, in gratitude to God and deep appreciation of his Christian maturity in all his dealings, and urging him to maintain the closest tie possible with the Theological Commission in the future'.¹⁷

Although when first appointed, he had not expected to be handed the full work of the Executive Secretary on his own, he was deeply committed and had made a determined effort to carry out the work to the best of his ability. Considerable physical and logistical limitations of the Bangalore base made his task extremely difficult, and his period in office had been a time of great pressure within the TC because of factors outside his control. He had made a worthwhile contribution on the theological level with his writings, editing and lecturing; even after the conclusion of his duties, he completed editing a *Festschrift* in honour of his mentor

¹⁷ Dr Sumithra soon found an academic post with post-graduate and research centre, The South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS) in Bangalore, and later engaged in significant research and writing ministries.

and predecessor, Dr Bruce Nicholls.¹⁸ However, in the latter part of his period of office the pace of TC work had slackened considerably and its administration was in a poor state, leaving the TC Executive Committee and the WEF leadership with the urgent task of making arrangements for a successor to restore it.

Despite these issues, the ICAA mini-consultation focusing on 'Perspectives on the Future' was held in 14-17 June 1989 at Wheaton College, Illinois. During the sessions, Dr Roger Kemp of Australia, a former missionary working in theological education in Africa, was installed as the new part-time General Secretary of the ICAA.

The executives of the TC and the ICAA agreed on a policy of mutual communication and cooperation, which included sharing in membership of each other's executives. This made them virtually parallel organizations, which is what the ICAA had requested all along. Furthermore, as the convenor of the TC Unit on Theological Education pointed out, this policy meant that his Unit could be dissolved or incorporated into the ICAA. It was decided also that the joint TC/ICAA consultation planned for 1989 on the theme, *From Text to Context*, would be deferred to 1991.

Bong Ro called in

The major issue for the members of TC

Executive and the WEF leadership at these meetings was to fill the vacancy left by the resignation of Dr Sunand Sumithra. They appointed ATA General Secretary, Dr Bong Ro, currently on furlough in USA, as interim Executive Secretary on a part-time basis. He would be assisted in some of his work by Dr Paul Schrotenboer.

Ro, a Korean who studied in USA at Wheaton College, Covenant Seminary and Concordia Lutheran Seminary, originally began working with OMF at the Discipleship Training Centre, Singapore in 1970. In 1974, he became Executive Secretary of the Asia Theological Association, with his office in Taiwan, where he became extremely well known for his energetic leadership of ATA. He had therefore been intimately associated with the foundations of TC as it emerged from the 'Theological Assistance Program' and had worked extensively with Dr Bruce Nicholls, who endorsed his new appointment. Ro was strongly supported by the WEF International Director, Dr David Howard, who continued to take an active part in guiding the TC; Howard and other TC leaders hoped that Ro would take on the position permanently. He was interested in this possibility, but realized he could do so only if there was someone to replace him in the ATA post; he had also another major responsibility—Dean of the ATA's Asia Graduate School of Theology.

Bong Ro began work by reviewing the Study Units with a view to reviving and expanding them. One immediate issue to deal with was the resignation of Donald A. Carson who had served a lengthy term on the Executive and especially in leading the Faith and

¹⁸ *Doing Theology in Context: a Festschrift in honour of Dr Bruce J. Nicholls*, edited by Sunand Sumithra (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1992); an earlier plan for this to be a TC publication did not materialise.

Church unit. He stood down from the Executive in 1990, but wanted to continue with the Study Unit until the series of five books was complete.

Ro needed no persuading that publications were a critical part of the TC program. He was also aware that success would continue to depend on the dedicated and sacrificial contribution of Jeremy Mudditt and his family firm, Paternoster Press—especially during this transitional period when the practical aspects of their production were extremely difficult to manage. There was increased pressure from mid-1990 when John Allan ceased his role as WEF Publications Secretary, and was no longer able to bolster *ERT* and *TN* as he done before. To deal with this problem, Dr Bruce Nicholls was called on once again; he took over in January 1991 with a welcome improvement in quality. On the other hand, Bong Ro planned to handle the editing, production and distribution of *Theological News* himself, changing it into a glossy magazine with many photographs—a style which he had used so successfully over many years for the ATA newsletter. However, it took some time to achieve this. After an embarrassing break of one full year when the newsletter was not published, the first of the new style issues finally appeared in mid-1990.

However, the biggest and most urgent task for Ro was to organize the next TC consultation, postponed from 1989 and now set down for mid-1990—just a year away. He was well experienced at this type of work and by early in 1990 had confirmed eight paper writers, with plans for others well advanced.

‘Theological Issues of the 90s’

The Consultation was held at Wheaton College 18-22 June 1990 with about 80 people from 21 countries in attendance. The theme, ‘Theological Issues of the 90s’, echoed concerns expressed earlier by Dr Sunand Sumithra about the threat posed by the growth of unorthodox theologies and religious movements. Major papers were delivered by theologians from US, Netherlands, India, Germany, Philippines, Romania, Yugoslavia on such topics as the ‘New Age’ movement, Process Theology, the ‘Minjung’ theology of Korea, resurrection and religious pluralism, Suffering and Martyrdom, sacrifice and blood in African Theology, the person and work of Christ in Latin America. Reports were given on current developments in theological education in Europe, Africa, the South Pacific, Asia and North America.

The triennial TC general meeting was also scheduled to be held during the Consultation program, but recent changes in the leadership and the associated interruptions to activity impacted this important event. With only sixteen members out of the total number of 42 present, a postal vote was needed to ratify the business conducted. Due to unsettlement in the latter part of the triennium, it was decided that the membership of those appointed in 1986 would be extended to the next meeting planned for 1992.

Executive Committee business could not be completed either due to lack of a quorum. Ward Gasque of Canada and Pedro Arana were nominated as members to replace D.A. Carson and E. Nunez; Bishop Nazir Ali had also indicated his wish to retire. Most important

of all, the ATA agreed to release Ro from his position as General Secretary, so the WEF appointed him permanently as TC Executive Secretary, but on a part time basis until a replacement was found for him at the ATA.

Study Units, Electronic Networking and Scholarships

Despite the slow down in TC work during the previous period, the Study Unit convenors gave reports on up to twelve areas that indicated considerable activity—both past and anticipated. In fact, the need was expressed for a manual of procedures so that the many different streams and initiatives could be handled effectively.

Ethics and Society Unit members had been in Korea for lectures, conferences and as WEF observers at the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Conference (March 1990). The conference of charismatic and evangelical social activists in Pasadena January 1988 was followed up in London two years later, giving birth to the Spirit and Kingdom dialogue. A process of studying Christian faith and economics had been established in 1987 and 1990 in Oxford and the attention of the unit would now be given to business ethics, the environment, and issues relative to Eastern Europe.¹⁹

The Ecumenical Issues Unit, led by Dr. Paul Schrottenboer, which had successfully completed two projects during the last decade, was now starting work on the third, an evangelical response to the recent WCC report,

'Toward a Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith'. The report needed to be finalised in 1992 if it was to be included in the WCC review process. In addition, there had been brief private discussions in 1988 in Jerusalem between the International Director Dr David Howard and Dr Schrottenboer for WEF and Roman Catholic representatives about the evangelical statement on the Catholic Church which had been produced in 1986. It was decided that further discussion was needed to understand the issues more satisfactorily. These were set for October 1990 in Budapest, involving Dr Schrottenboer (USA) and Dr George Vandervelde (Canada) for the WEF and two representatives of the Vatican. These talks identified some of the key issues, which indicated clearly the need for more extensive study still.

Dr. Ken Gnanakan of India, convener of the Theology of Evangelization Unit, reported that a 150 page document had been drafted to encapsulate the findings of its earlier workshops.²⁰ Two new Task Forces were also set up within this Unit to cover important areas of evangelization—New Age Theology, with Dr. Gordon Lewis (Denver Seminary), as convener, and Evangelization of the Jews, a group led by Rev. Tuvia Zaretsky, of Jews for Jesus, which had its origin at the Willowbank conference held in Bermuda 26-29 April 1989 on the Gospel and Jewish people. Zaretsky's organization had made a formal proposal for the Task Force and guaranteed support for its

¹⁹ *Transformation* Vol 5 No 4 (Oct-Dec 1988); Vol 7 No 3 (July 1990); Vol 4 No 3 (July 1987); Vol 7 No 2 (Apr 1990)

²⁰ This manuscript was never published, due to difficulties with the WEF publications process.

work. The final papers would be presented by May 1991.

During the consultation in Wheaton, the participants endorsed the establishment of some additional study projects. A task force on Eastern Europe Needs and Issues would also be established under the leadership of Dr Peter Kuzmič to identify critical theological issues related to new opportunities opening up in Eastern Europe. Similarly, the new world situation called for more attention to be given to non-Christian religions, so initial plans were made for a task force on this topic as well.

Dr Peter Lewis (UK) was requested to develop an international initiative on preaching as a result of a report from the Study Unit on Pastoral Ministries. However, there was misunderstanding about the prospects of another proposal — pastoral counselling because the Director of the Pastoral Counselling Institute had been led to understand his organization could act alone under the TC auspices rather than being part of a more comprehensive Task Force.

A sign of future trends was also discussed at the Wheaton meetings, when Dr David McKenna, President of Asbury Seminary, with the strong recommendation of Dr David Howard, presented ideas for an electronic network of theologians and seminaries, under the control of the TC and acting as 'an extended Publications Committee'. No action was taken at the meeting, but the idea was promoted on several occasions in later years, especially under the leadership of Dr John Bennett of OC who was coordinator of a working group on the project. Well before the time of Bennett's premature death in

1999, the TC had found its electronic home as part of the WEF's website, and the ideas proposed by Dr McKenna were overtaken by the ready availability of email and e-conferencing.

During the year 1989-90, the Scholarship Fund distributed \$38,000 to 17 students. At the 1990 meeting, \$50,000 was allocated to six Africans and eight Asians, and \$30,000 was allocated to Asia Graduate School of Theology and Eastern Europe colleges for scholarship aid. However, signs of change were noticeable when, in response to an approach from the Langham Trust, there was active discussion about cooperation between the two bodies. There was also some discussion of Library Fund matters, but soon after this work was handed to the ICAA.

Plans were also laid for a full scale consultation in conjunction with the WEF General Assembly scheduled for 1992. There had been protracted discussions with the LCWE Theology Working Group to hold a joint consultation, but it had not been possible to reach agreement, so the TC decided to go ahead alone with a consultation on the Uniqueness of Christ and religious pluralism.

Korean base for TC

Now in his permanent role as Executive Director, Bong Ro concluded his furlough and returned to his homeland of Korea in August 1990, setting up the TC office in ACTS seminary. He had already relocated his ATA office to Seoul in May 1990. He would continue to have joint responsibilities for the TC and ATA until February 1991 when the ATA appointed Dr Ken Gnanakan

(India) as General Secretary and Rodrigo Tano (Philippines) as Accreditation Secretary. Ro thus concluded twenty years with the ATA, but retained the position of Dean of AGST.

Ro, assisted strongly by his wife Alma, took up his work with characteristic enthusiasm. As he noted, the challenge he faced was to think globally—not just about Asia. It was a new situation for him and also for the evangelical constituency because he had been so much associated with his famous slogan, 'Train Asians in Asia'. As one who had been immersed in theological education and publications for so long, Ro would also need to expand his thinking about the role of the TC as encompassing more than these functions. However, his efforts at restoring the thrust of the TC were hampered for months by difficulties in setting up his office and securing clerical and other staff to assist him; it was also interrupted by frequent travels and by his other responsibilities.

The early 1990s proved to be one of the most active periods for TC work for years, although political and military events in the Balkans were beginning to impact on Executive Committee chairman, Dr Peter Kuzmič, whose seminary had to be relocated in September 1991 due to the war.

The Fire

At the same time as Ro was re-establishing himself in Korea, another event happened far away which would have a continuing impact on the TC and WEF generally. A fire in the new warehouse of Paternoster Publishers on the night of 15-16 August, 1990 destroyed a huge quantity of material, which

included the entire stock of WEF publications, not least of which was *ERT* and all the TC books and monographs. The value of WEF material was over \$50,000, although that was only a fraction of the total lost by STL, the subsidiary of OM which had moved into the warehouse less than a year earlier and used it as a base for its extensive distribution network for several major UK publishers, including Paternoster. The only surviving WEF materials were those held by Baker Book House in USA, who had begun distributing new WEF books in 1987. Half of the US stock would be shifted back to UK, but it was a major setback, although it did provide an opportunity for the reassessment of WEF publications.

Study Units at work

Recognizing the importance of the Study Unit program of the TC, Ro gave this work a high priority. Faith and Church held its fifth consultation in Tyndale House, Cambridge, UK, 18-20 October 1990 to finalise its series of books; this one focused on the topic of worship.²¹ The previous book on justification was about to be printed, but stocks of the first three had been destroyed in the fire. Dr J. I. Packer (Regent College, Vancouver) had been approached as convenor to replace D. A. Carson, and had given his informal agreement. But he withdrew in October 1991 before any more projects had been undertaken. This marked the end of a long period of effective work by this study unit.

²¹ D. A. Carson (editor), *Worship: Adoration and Action* (Carlisle/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Baker, 1993).

The newly formed Jewish Evangelism Task Force held its first session 2-5 May 1991 at Oakbrook, Illinois, with 17 participants. The Task Force commissioned 14 papers to be published under the title: 'To the Jew First: The place of Jewish evangelism in the ongoing mission of the church'. However, these publication plans never materialised,²² and the Task Force did not meet again.

The Ethics and Society Unit was working on plans for a major consultation in association the Au Sable Institute in US for 1992 focusing on the environment, and the ICAA was planning its next consultation for July 1991.

Changes and challenges

However, the strong dynamic that had energised the Ethics and Society Unit from the beginning was now beginning to be focused on other organizations. The impending retirement of Donald Carson from the Church and Faith Unit also signalled the end of a second important plank of TC work. The growing concentration of theological education interests in the ICAA and its consequent development as a viable organization operating in parallel to the TC removed yet another significant element. These three developments, coupled with pressures on the leadership, shortages of finance and uncertain relationships with the WEF, meant that the TC was facing a difficult future.

The AD 2000 movement, a third major world evangelical organization alongside the Lausanne movement and WEF, which began to take shape from the late 1980s was also destined to have an impact on the prospects for the TC and the WEF generally. A conference scheduled for 1994 involved key TC personnel in its theology track, including the TC Chairman, Peter Kuzmič and Executive Secretary, Dr Bong Ro. A report in *Theological News* indicated that Ro saw the new interest as complementary to the TC because it would work at the grass roots level of the churches rather than with theologians and seminaries, but as time passed, this distinction was not so clear.

With the massive changes taking place around this time in the communist world, Eastern Europe was becoming a focus of concern for theologians and theological educators as well as other strands of Christian work. There was even more interest for the TC because of the increasingly prominent role its chairman, Peter Kuzmič, was taking in this area of ministry which affected his homeland so intensely. WEF International Director, David Howard, TC leaders Peter Kuzmič and Bong Ro together with the head of Overseas Council, Charles Spicer, made an extensive tour of six countries in May 1990 to assess the situation, and to introduce the ministries of WEF to evangelical leaders in these countries with the possibilities of the formation of their own evangelical alliances. Ro reported on this important trip: 'With such a rapid church growth taking place in every Eastern European country except Albania, leadership training and Christian pub-

²² The papers from the Willowbank conference, 1989, were never published either.

lications are two most urgently needed ministries. The WEF Theological Commission must pick up the challenge to assist theological education in Eastern Europe.²³

On the other hand, there was an opportunity to expand TC and ICAA interests in Latin America with a visit there by ICAA General Secretary Roger Kemp in June 1990. This and later initiatives eventually led to the formation of AETAL (The Evangelical Association for Theological Education in Latin America) in July 1992 with 80 founding members covering thirteen countries in four regions, an additional regional member for ICAA.

TC goes 'Down Under'

The first meeting of the TC Executive after Bong Ro took over the full leadership was in Canberra, Australia to coincide with the 7th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 7-20 February 1991. The theme of the Assembly was of interest to many evangelicals, 'Come Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation', and several were present, some with TC connections. A statement of evangelical concerns was issued at the end of the Assembly and a separate report was presented to the WCC leadership calling for changes to give evangelicals a greater voice. The statement acknowledged that evangelicals were challenged by various themes that emerged in the Assembly, including the call to unity, the needs of indigenous and marginalised people, the role of women, issues of syncretism and for care and skill in dealing with

the complex theology of issues related to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. This was the first experience for the TC of a major world event and the ability to make informed comment, especially in the form of a publication two years later which would be a resource for interested members of the evangelical constituency.²⁴

The TC Executive meeting, held in Canberra 15-16 February 1991, just prior to the WCC Assembly, was the first (and only one so far) to be held in the southern hemisphere. It was also the first for new members Dr Ward Gasque (North America) and Rev. Pedro Arana (Peru); the vacancy caused by Bishop Nazir Ali's withdrawal was filled with an invitation to Bishop E. Gbonigi of Nigeria. While the financial situation was not serious, Tony Lee, WEF Administration Director and TC Treasurer, was present to give advice, reminding the Executive of the need to keep good control of expenditure, and to seek more funding, especially from North America.

With the next general meeting and consultation only a year away, it was decided to extend once again the term of TC members appointed in 1986—this time to 1995, and to plan for a wider representation by appointing additional people. Dr Ro was making some progress in his position, but he had been hampered by delays in relinquishing his ATA responsibilities and in the arrival of office assistance.

Dr Bruce Nicholls continued the thematic plan for *ERT* and encouraged

23 *TN* Vol 21 No3 (July 1990), pp. 2-3.

24 TC officials such as Dr B. J. Nicholls had been in attendance at earlier WCC events, including the 5th Assembly, Nairobi, 1975.

convenors of study units to contribute material. Discussion centred on ways to reduce subscription prices and to broaden the circulation base with subsidies for needy institutions, greater publicity, and cheaper printing and postal arrangements outside the UK. It was decided to continue the preparation of the monograph series, which Ro would take up with considerable enthusiasm later.

There had not been much time for more activity from the Study Units since the previous meeting, but plans for various projects were well in hand. However, concerns were expressed about the health of the convenor of Ecumenical Issues, Dr Paul Schrotenboer. The Theology of Evangelization Unit was planning to follow up its earlier workshops with a session at Fuller Seminary in September 1991, focusing on the broader framework of the Kingdom of God in the context of secularism and atheism, while another group would meet in Japan.²⁵

Dr. Peter Kuzmič gave a moving report on the urgent need to develop the Task Force on Eastern Europe and to supply teaching faculty, libraries and text books in national languages in order to respond to the new opportunities and pressures for ministry and training in the countries of Eastern Europe.

ICAA

The work of the ICAA was also an important item of business, with General Secretary, Dr Roger Kemp present throughout the meeting. There was considerable discussion once more

about relationships between the TC and ICAA. The convenor of the Theological Education Unit, Dr Rolf Hille, and Dr Bong Ro were asked to set up discussions with the ICAA with 'a view to closer identity'. Plans were endorsed for the joint consultation to be held in July 1991 at the London Bible College on the theme, 'From Text to Context in Evangelical Theological Education'. The papers from the conference, which proved to be a successful event, including several by TC personnel, such as Donald Carson, Bong Ro and Rolf Hille, were published by the ICAA in 1994.²⁶ However, it was apparent that the close connection between the TC and the ICAA was starting to dissolve.

Another significant development was noted by Bong Ro in a report on a conference he attended in April 1991,²⁷ which he described as 'somewhat different' from others he had attended. He was referring to the 4th INFEMIT Conference held at Osijek, Yugoslavia which discussed the 'biblical mandate for socio-political concerns of the Christian church and formulated the biblical evangelical theology of social justice and political freedom'. What struck Ro first of all was that conference participants were 'committed evangelicals who believe in the historical-biblical faith of the Christian church with much concern for Christian social responsibility'. He found that the 'discussion widened the scope of

²⁶ R. Kemp (editor), *Text and Context in Theological Education*, (ICAA Monograph Series No. 4) (Springwood: ICAA, 1994).

²⁷ *TN* Vol 22 No 3 (Apr.-June 1991); *Transformation* Vol 8 No 3 (July-Sept. 1991), pp. 1-6.

evangelism, church ministry and social concerns'. A second point was that, unlike many other conferences where westerners usually dominated, this one was led mainly by the two-thirds world theologians and church leaders, including in this case Vinay Samuel, Rene Padilla, Samuel Escobar and Kwame Bediako (although Ronald Sider and Chris Sugden were also present)—all of whom had strong links with the Theological Commission.

Such ideas may have been 'somewhat different' for Ro, but they had been on the TC agenda at least since the early 1980s and especially in the establishment of *Transformation* magazine by the Ethics and Society Unit. These views had been vigorously encouraged in the early days of the TC by a previous WEF General Secretary, Waldron Scott, who was noted for his robust belief in the positive relationships between mission, discipleship and social justice. While in the WEF office, he adopted the policy that WEF should function as an 'umbrella' organization, 'providing a place for evangelicals of all persuasions to come together ... in an "open space" without undue restrictions'.²⁸

28 David Howard, *The Dream that would not Die: the birth and growth of the World Evangelical Fellowship 1846-1986* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), p. 123; Scott, who served at various times with The Navigators, LCWE, American Leprosy Mission and other groups, was General Secretary of WEF, 1975-81; see *Transformation* Vol 8 No 4, 1991 pp. 16-18, 22 for his biography and work with Holistic Ministry International, and his *Bring Forth Justice: a Contemporary Perspective on Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); he was also the author of one of the TC monographs, *Karl Barth's Theology of Mission* (1978).

What was true about Ro's observation was the growing influence of such views on social justice in the wider evangelical community and the way some TC members and others were developing their relationships and their ideas on third-world missiology through the INFEMIT organization and allied bodies. This was particularly noticeable in the journal *Transformation* and its associated research institution, the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, with which INFEMIT was associated.²⁹ Such developments were not encouraged by the current WEF leadership.

'The Uniqueness of Christ'

The focus of TC interest was increasingly directed to the next consultation and general meeting originally planned for Bogor, a resort centre outside Jakarta in Indonesia, in June 1992 as part of the 9th WEF General Assembly. However, visa and other problems led to it being transferred at relatively short notice to the Philippines, first at Lake Taal but then, on account of potential volcanic activity in the area, it was moved first to one site in Manila and then finally to the Hyatt Regency Hotel.

Despite all this dislocation, the TC Consultation went smoothly with 85 present from 28 countries. Twenty papers were presented in a packed program, focusing sharply on the theme, 'The Unique Christ in our Pluralistic

29 See the article by Dr C. Sugden, 'Mission Leadership and Christian Theological Research' elsewhere in this issue for developments and thinking that led to the formation of INFEMIT and the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

World'.³⁰ Veteran TC leader, Dr Bruce Nicholls, introduced the topic in his keynote address by stressing the importance of understanding the exact meaning of Christ's uniqueness and effectively relating this to all aspects of Christian life and culture. The plenary speakers presented a summary of their papers, covering the uniqueness of Christ in relation to various sub-topics: plurality of religions, the challenge of modernity, diversity and unity of church understandings, political ideologies, the hope and judgement of the world and peace and justice. A 6500 word declaration was produced and ultimately the papers were published, thus making them available to a wider audience.³¹

Reports indicated that *ERT* was in good condition, although the subscription rate was considered to be still too high. Ro had been discussing with Overseas Council how the Scholarship Program could be extended. Two more consultations were being planned—one on Eschatology with the AD2000 movement (which did not eventuate), and another on Evangelization of the Poor. There were positive reports from the Expository Preaching Unit led by Dr Peter Lewis(UK), Evangelisation (Dr Ken Gnanakan) and Ethics and

Society (Dr Chris Sugden). Outside the TC orbit, but involving the efforts of both the chair and the Executive Secretary, there would be the GCOWE II (Global Consultation on World Evangelization), sponsored by the AD2000 movement, in June 1994.³²

A major item of business was the adoption of the report of the Ecumenical Issues Task Force on the 'Confessing the One Faith' project. The Convenor, Dr Schrotenboer, made recommendations about further studies covering Scripture and Tradition, Evangelism and Salvation in Inter-Church relations and Evangelicals and Visible Unity. The first of these would be the subject of the Unit's next project. He also foreshadowed that the WEF Executive had agreed to further talks with the Roman Catholic Church to address in depth some of the issues arising from the 'Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives on Roman Catholicism' report of 1986. Following up on the introductory sessions held in 1988 and 1990, it was clear that the earlier report had dealt only with the familiar polemic doctrinal differences between evangelicals and Roman Catholics rather than the underlying issues such as Scripture and tradition, and the nature of the church. These would be the subject of the ensuing talks.

It was reported that the long delayed book of papers on the WCC assembly, *Beyond Canberra: Evangelical Responses to Contemporary Ecumenical Issues*, edited by Nicholls and Ro, had met with the disapproval of the

30 The Asia Theological Association shared in this consultation.

31 Bruce J. Nicholls (editor), *The Unique Christ in our Pluralist World* (Carlisle/ Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Baker, 1994). Some of the papers were also published in *ERT* Vol 17 No 1 (Jan. 1993), which was devoted to the topic of the 'Uniqueness of Christ' and the statement was published as one of the TC 'Outreach and Identity' Series monographs in 1993.

32 The date was later changed to 17-25 May, 1995.

WEF Executive. It was decided to appeal for a reversal of this decision, but if this failed, then the editors were free to find another publisher.

At the conclusion of the 1992 meeting, over fifty names were proposed as TC members and a new Executive was appointed. The study program was also changed so that the work was given to Task Forces which were grouped into a simplified system of four Study Units.³³ Two key Study Units came under new leadership—Chris Sugden was suddenly replaced in his work with the Ethics and Society Unit by Dr Bong Ho Son of Korea, while Rolf Hille of Germany took over leadership of the Faith and Church Unit. Other units were Theology of Missions and Evangelism (Bishop Gbonigi) and Church and Ministry (Rev. Rene Daidanso). The next consultation was set down for Guatemala in 1995, but many other events intervened to prevent that idea ever coming to fruition.

Ethics and Environment

A second major consultation for the year took place 26-31 August, 1992. It was conducted by the Ethics and Society Unit, and led by the outgoing convenor, Chris Sugden, in conjunction with the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies at its centre near Mancelona, Michigan, USA. The conference was attended by sixty people from eight countries, with the theme, 'Chris-

tians caring for creation'. Initiated at the 1990 TC meetings, it was planned as a global response to issues that had been largely neglected by evangelicals and as an opportunity to present an alternate and more biblically balanced view than those which had emerged in other settings.³⁴ This consultation was the last productive effort of the Ethics and Society Unit, concluding a long series of stimulating projects.

Change of focus

The previous two or three years had been filled with a busy round of activities and initiatives which were effectively restoring the thrust of the Commission as a global organization committed to advancing evangelical theology as a basis for discerning the obedience of faith. However, late in 1992, there was an announcement of an important development which was intended to result in a significant new focus for its work. The concept had much to commend it, but in the context of the changes and challenges already facing the organization, it would have a disturbing effect.

At a WEF Staff meeting in December 1992, Dr Augustin ('Jun') Vencer³⁵

³³ The Executive was Dr P. Kuzmič (chair), R. Daidanso (vice-chair), R. Hille, W. Gasque, E. Gbonigi, P. Arana, Bong Ho Son (replacing W. Chow), with Bong Rin Ro as Executive Director, R. Kemp (ICAA) and B. J. Nicholls (Editor, *ERT*).

³⁴ A lengthy statement, 'Evangelical Christianity and the environment' was prepared and published in an expanded version of *ERT* Vol 17 No 2 (April 1993), along with eleven papers; the statement was also published as No. 7 of the TC 'Outreach and Identity' monograph series in 1993; see also *Transformation* Vol 9 No 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1992), pp. 27-30.

³⁵ Jun Vencer with John Allan, *Poor is no Excuse: the story of Jun Vencer* (Exeter/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989).

who had become the WEF International Director at the General Assembly earlier in the year, presented his vision for the entire organization in terms of 'new target'. By this he meant that the work of the WEF would become strongly directed towards strengthening National Evangelical Fellowships (NEFs), of which there were now about seventy.³⁶ His strategy involved global networking, defining programs and replicating WEF ministries at national level, and especially leadership development at national and local levels. The Commissions were an integral part of this plan.

This meant that the emphasis of the TC would now be not so much on working with theologians, seminaries and theological associations. Instead, as *TN* reported,³⁷ it would 'work closely with NEFs which in turn would strengthen the respective national theological commissions', although as the report conceded, the TC 'must not also overlook the existing regional theological associations with which it had been associated in past years ...'. It would also need to change from working on traditional theological topics to focus on training national church leadership, and on the development of faculty, library and plant in seminaries.

These plans, which reflected views on theological education published by Vencer much earlier,³⁸ were adopted

strongly by Bong Ro. In his efforts to 'change the status quo' of the TC, he was supported by the WEF North American Director, Galen Hiestand, with whom he had conferred at length.

³⁹ The pair of them had extensive discussions with Overseas Council about the future of the scholarship scheme. These new ideas were presented to the TC Executive during 1993 in the form of recommendations about an 'Evangelical Leadership Development Fund'.

One important consequence of this plan for the TC to be much more directly involved in theological education would be overlap with the ICAA and its constituency. However, the TC did not have the ability to generate the resources needed to fund such ambitious plans as these, which was left to other more specialized groups such as OC and the Langham Trust.

At the time, the ICAA itself was moving more towards its goal of being a 'full service agency' for evangelical theological education, rather than merely an association of accrediting agencies. This process was advanced by its 1993 Consultation held 19-23 July in Bangkok, Thailand on the theme, 'Affirming the Spectrum: Doing Theological Education Together'. Thus there was less reason for the TC

36 See also Jun Vencer, 'Churches transforming the nations: the DNA vision', *ERT* Vol 24 No 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2000), pp. 301-327; 'New Direction for Theological Commission', *TN* Vol 25 No 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1995), p. 5.

37 *TN* Vol 24 No 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1993), p. 1f.

38 *TN/TET* Vol 19 No 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1987).

39 *Evangelical World*, July 1993, p. 7. 'Up to now, the TC has been issue oriented.... But after these two years of thinking and reflection, Dr Ro is to change the status quo.... Dr Ro would like to see the WEF Theological Commission, working closely with regional and national evangelical associations, identify and adopt theological institutions in each country and develop them to a level where they can offer good theological education.'

to work in this area. This trend, together with the decline of key study units like Faith and Church and Ethics and Society, meant that TC would need a new vision to avoid losing its way altogether.

The TC's relationships with the theological associations and other institutions in various parts of the world were also becoming more tenuous, especially in the light of the continuing reluctance by some of the current WEF leadership to support the values they fostered. The inevitable result was that these regional associations found other more supportive allegiances. In any case, the regional theological associations had their own distinctive history and ethos, and there was no official organizational relationship with TC which could be used to foster support for its work.

In these circumstances, the only hope of formal support for the TC was by relating to the NEFs. However, as reports of the previous decade acknowledged, many of them were not strong, and few had any kind of theological work as part of their program.

A TC Executive meeting at which this change in focus could have been discussed was planned to take place in association with this ICAA consultation in Thailand in July 1993, but it was cancelled due to the inability of several members to attend. This denied the TC the decisive leadership it needed to cope with the challenges of the proposed new direction and the distinct slow down in Study Unit activity at that time. However, the TC Scholarships committee did meet to consider the applications that had been received, but shortage of funds meant that little progress took place.

Publications and Consultations

Despite this, 1993 was a year of advance in the publications. Bong Ro was responsible for a significant expansion of the monograph (or Occasional Papers) 'Outreach and Identity' series which had not seen any activity for a decade. He added five titles in this period.⁴⁰ Although there was some misunderstanding about the status of the series and the propriety of this move, the rush of publications was welcome, especially since some important statements of TC consultations were made available to interested readers. But no more followed, and the series itself was not developed.

The volume on the WCC Assembly, *Beyond Canberra*, was also published by Regnum Books (Third world publishers associated with the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies) in association with Lynx Communications (SPCK) in March 1993, and the papers from the 1992 TC Consultation were being edited. Executive member, Pedro Arana (Peru), also translated some of the monographs into Spanish for wider distribution in Latin America.

Bong Ro was busy preparing a large number of entries for his *World Direc-*

⁴⁰ They were: *The Unique Christ in our Pluralistic World* (The 1992 WEF Manila Declaration); *An Evangelical response to 'Confessing the one Faith'* (WEF TC Ecumenical Issues Task Force, 1992); *Evangelical Christianity and the Environment* (WEF TC Ethics and Society Study Unit and Au Sable Institute consultation, 1992); *Toward a Theology of Theological Education* by Dieumeme Noelliste (ICAA Consultation, 1993); *Sharing the Good News with the Poor* (1993 WEF Consultation Statement).

tory of Theological Institutions, an enlarged version of similar directories that he had produced earlier for the Asian region. However, all seminaries were listed, regardless of their theological positions, and so it was not endorsed as an official TC publication when it was published in 1994, or in its second expanded edition in 1995.

One other successful venture in 1993 was the consultation on the 'Evangelization of the Poor', originally sponsored by the Ethics and Society Unit, following up an idea originally made by the AD2000 movement and building on earlier efforts by evangelicals to 'discern the theology of evangelization that is expressed in the practice of Christian ministries among the poor, and the practice that best expresses a biblical theology of evangelization among the poor'. The new Study Unit convenor, Dr Bong Ho Son, was not able to organize it, so Dr Bruce Nicholls took over this task. It was held 17-23 October in New Delhi with 25 people, including theologians, relief workers and pastors gathering from ten countries, who presented papers and also made field trips to development projects and slum areas to gain a first hand understanding of the topic. Participants were struck by the abject poverty of slum dwellers in many parts of Asia and the world and the corresponding lack of interest shown in their spiritual needs. So they saw an urgent need to re-evaluate the theological basis for Christian social ministries, and to establish an emphasis on evangelism and church planting as well as provision of food and shelter. This would mean local churches should be involved in Christian social responsibilities in their areas and that

pastors and church leaders should be better trained in understanding poverty and suffering.⁴¹

Another continuing sign of significant activity was seen in the Ecumenical Issues Task Force. Following the preliminary talks between the WEF leadership and the Roman Catholic Church in 1988 and 1990, the next phase in the conversations between the two bodies took place at Venice—21-25 October 1993, consisting of a carefully prepared consultation. The topics discussed were Scripture and Tradition, and Justification by Faith. No official statement was made, but the papers and responses to them were subsequently published in *ERT*.⁴² These talks indicated that there were two other pressing topics that divided the groups meriting discussion: the nature of the church as communion, and the nature and practice of mission and evangelism. These would be the subject of later meetings.

The early 1990s had been a busy and productive time for the TC under the energetic leadership of Bong Ro, but as the organization approached its twentieth anniversary in 1994, there would be a striking change.

(to be continued)

⁴¹ Papers were published in *ERT* Vol 18 No 2 (Apr. 1994), and in B. J. Nicholls and Beulah R. Woods (editors), *Sharing Good News with the Poor* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996).

⁴² *ERT* Vol 21 No 2 (April 1997), pp. 101-154) under the theme, *Justification, Scripture and Tradition*.