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‘Discerning the Obedience of Faith’

A history of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance 2nd edition

Part II

David Parker

Introduction

This article contains the second part of the final two chapters of the second edition of the history of the WEA Theological Commission, ‘Discerning the Obedience of Faith’ published in 2014 to mark 40 years of activity by the Commission.¹ The first part was published in our previous issue, *ERT* (2015) 39-3, 271-279. These chapters cover the ten year period since the first edition was issued. The text of the earlier part is unchanged. It was originally published in book form and also in the pages of this journal (2004, 28:2, 100-118; 2004, 28:3, 196-219, 2004, 28:4, 292-314). The period covered by this extract involved many changes for the Theological Commission which continues its vital, although new, role within the World Evangelical Alliance, which

is also undergoing a transformation as it comes under new leadership in 2015.

*Dr Thomas Schirmacher,
Executive Chair, TC of WEA.*

IX Bangkok 2008

The annual gathering for 2008 was planned for Bangkok to be followed by the GA at Pattaya. There was high expectation that this event would see further consolidation and progress. The usual multi-pronged program had to be modified because of the WEA GA being held immediately after the TC meeting. There would only be opportunity for a modest consultation involving local theologians and some informal fellowship.

The consultation was held at the Baptist Seminary on 24 October on the theme, ‘The Holistic Gospel in a Developing Society’. There was a wide range of local theologians and guests in attendance to hear papers by James Nkansah (Kenya) and Justin Thacker

¹ A PDF version of the full text is available on-line without charge at <http://www.bucer.de/ressource/details/discerning-the-obedience-of-faith.html>

(UK), to join in small group discussions of several key aspects of the theme, and for fellowship over a shared meal. A statement was prepared for publication.² The consultation was held in conjunction with the inaugural meeting of the Fellowship of Theological Institutes of Thailand

Business was dominated by a sudden change in TC leadership. It was expected that Dr Brian Edgar would take over the role of chairman as planned in 2007. However, the concerns that he had expressed at that time about the organisational relationship between the TC and the WEA had escalated. In June 2008, WEA International Director, Geoff Tunnicliffe, had visited Australia and there had been intensive discussion between him and Dr Edgar on the issue. Dr Edgar had not been convinced and, being unwilling to commit himself to working as chairman of a commission in such an arrangement, he withdrew his agreement to become chair and also withdrew from membership in the Commission.

Therefore, when the TC met in Bangkok, it was necessary to re-think its leadership planning. Dr Hille was no longer available to continue as chair so Dr Thacker of UK was appointed acting-chair with Dr James Nkansah as vice-chair. Dr Justin Thacker, who had joined the TC in 2007, was a medical doctor with specialisation in paediatrics and had served for some time in Africa. He studied at London School of Theology and gained a PhD from King's College London. He was currently head of theology at EA UK, having succeed-

ed David Hilborn in that post. Dr David Parker's appointment as Executive Director was extended to 2009, but if no replacement had been found by then, it would be extended again for another year.

The membership of the TC core group was extended with the appointment of Rev. David Roldan as a representative of Spanish speaking Latin America. He already had a fine record of scholarship, pastoral concern and administrative leadership as Dean of Facultad Internacional de Educacion Teologica (FIET), Buenos Aires, Argentina, editor of a theological journal and a former National Secretary of the Accreditation Association of Seminaries. His appointment brought the representation from Latin America up to full strength. There was also discussion on the possibility of appointing a suitably qualified theologian from the WEA Women's Commission to redress the gender balance of the TC.

The Berlin statement on Jewish evangelism was endorsed and consideration was given to possible new projects now that the existing ones were coming to their successful conclusion.

After the end of the TC meeting, several members attended the WEA 12th GA at Pattaya. There was little formal involvement by the commissions at this event, but the TC display stand attracted favourable attention. It was supplemented by a range of material from Oden's Early Christianity project.

The sudden change in leadership prospects at Bangkok was disappointing, but there were other positive developments so the TC ended the year planning on forging ahead with its program, especially the much anticipated consultation in Brazil in 2009.

² The papers are accessible at [http://www.worldangelicals.org/commissions/tc/PDF%20\(TC\).pdf](http://www.worldangelicals.org/commissions/tc/PDF%20(TC).pdf).

In 2009 Dr Rolf Hille was appointed as ecumenical relations spokesperson for the WEA, which meant that responsibility for the dialogues would officially pass from the TC to the WEA itself, but the TC resolved to maintain good informal relations with Dr Hille in this important area of work. Meanwhile, Dr Hille was making preparation for the first session of the new round of the talks with the Roman Catholic Church scheduled to be held in association with the TC gathering in Brazil later in the year.

With new younger leadership hopefully in place soon, together with the filling of the remaining vacancies, it was hoped that there could be considerable growth in the next few years even though the budget was likely to be affected by gloomy world financial situation. After Latin America, there were possibilities of holding consultations with annual gatherings in southern Europe or the Middle East in 2010 and in West Africa in 2011. There would also be the finale of the TWG conferences and active participation in Lausanne III. There was talk also of linking up with other theological societies and expanding the publications more widely by electronic means, and the possibility of a new relationship with the Lausanne TWG.

X Publications

Meanwhile, publications continued to be a significant part of the TC program. Books from the contextual theology and the Jewish evangelism projects were under way, but would take some time to appear. The quarterly *Theological News* was still produced regularly, with more the 700 copies being posted

to seminaries, individuals, and the WEA family in all parts of the world; the entire run of back issues from 1969 to 2004 was available for purchase on a CD. There was also an electronic version emailed twice each quarter and a regular update for Global Members, all of which helped promote the TC activities and invite helpful responses. The CD of *ERT* and other TC publications was due to be updated with more recent material.³ However, a sudden steep increase in cost while this move was being actioned meant that the update did not go ahead.

There was considerable concern about the journal, *Evangelical Review of Theology*. There was a regular supply of articles and reviews which were the responsibility of the TC, but difficulties were beginning to develop with the production of the journal.

From the beginning of the journal in 1977, the generosity and vision of Jeremy Mudditt, Managing Director of Paternoster Press had been a significant factor in its success, but his health problems in the late 1980s meant that Paternoster Press became part of Send the Light (STL), a large Christian literature distribution agency, which had originally been associated with Operation Mobilisation; it later merged with the International Bible Society (now Biblica) to create a huge global business. Paternoster periodicals, includ-

³ Additional material included the extra volumes of *ERT* up to 2005 (Vol 29), and 3 books, *Responsible Stewardship of God's Creation* by Ken Gnanakan, *Hope does not Disappoint — textbook on eschatology* edited by Jochen Eber, and *Discerning the Obedience of Faith: A short history of the WEA Theological Commission* by David Parker.

ing *ERT*, were part of the Authentic Media division of STL with Jeremy Mudditt as Publishing Manager. From 1995, further health problems meant that Jeremy Mudditt became a consultant to STL, but was still heavily involved, and remained highly supportive of *ERT*.

However, in 2008 the global financial crisis and difficulties with a new computer system combined to cause severe difficulties for STL's operations in the UK. One of many steps that it wanted to take was to cease production of its journals. Not wanting to see this happen, Jeremy Mudditt succeeded in arranging for AlphaGraphics, a company in Nottingham which had already been producing a lot of Paternoster materials, to take over the management; *ERT* was one of only four journals that AG considered viable.

So from January 2009, *ERT* was produced by AlphaGraphics with the TC continuing to provide content as before. However, there were considerable logistical difficulties in making the transfer, and the first two issues of 2009 were delayed considerably. This was an embarrassment to the TC because one of those was a special TWG issue which was needed for the continuing series of conferences; problems with this issue were also aggravated by difficulties in TWG supplying art work. One positive development from the transfer to new production arrangements was the availability of on-line subscriptions; electronic versions of *ERT* were also available but not at any discounted pricing.

There were more difficulties for *ERT* when Jeremy Mudditt's wife, Mag, became seriously ill thus curtailing Jeremy's involvement; she died late in

2009, only to be followed by his own illness, and then his death a short time later on 21 April 2010. Meanwhile, the business prospects of STL deteriorated even further, going into administration in December 2009 and being liquidated a year later. Parts of the company were sold off in December 2009 with Authentic Media (including Paternoster) being acquired by the Australian book distributor, Koorong which purchased its intellectual property, contracts and other parts of the business. However, these developments had no direct impact on *ERT* because the 'Paternoster periodicals' continued to be produced by AlphaGraphics in Nottingham as a virtually separate operation.⁴

In the early part of 2009, the TC was involved with some other conferences. The TWG took place in Panama City, in late January with the theme, 'The whole church', again involving about 25 participants from 12 countries, including Dr Rolf Hille, Dr Justin Thacker and Dr Daniel Salinas (Paraguay) for the TC.

In Africa, Matt Cook was the TC representative at a conference on 'The future of Evangelical theology in Francophone Africa' held in Bangui, Central African Republic, May 17-21, 2009. At this event, funded by the Overseas Council and others, the need for contextual theology along the same lines as the TC's own project was fully recognized. Further information about Lausanne III in Cape Town was expected mid-year after a conference of leaders in Seoul, South Korea.

⁴ AlphaGraphics Nottingham was sold in 2014 to AlphaGraphics Stockton on Tees but no changes in day to day operations were anticipated.

However, the major event for 2009 was the long awaited consultation in Brazil, but before this a major change took place.

XI Change in Leadership

Soon after the 2008 meeting in Bangkok, following discussion with UK EA, it was confirmed that Justin Thacker would be able to take over as chairman of the TC. He would have no trouble maintaining his regular work as head of theology for EA UK as well as fulfilling his role with the TC because the TC chairmanship was an honorary position which was mainly concerned with the annual meeting and the general operation of the TC as a committee and not the day to day work of the TC or its contacts with the WEA. This contrasted with the position of Executive Director, however, which was normally full time, appointed by and answerable to the WEA ID; also unlike the chairmanship, the position of Executive Director was officially recognised in the WEA organisational structure.

However a few weeks later, early in the following year, Dr Thacker began to seek ways in which he could secure funding to enable him to work part-time as both Chairman and Executive Director. In anticipation of this development, he started to take active control and to involve himself in the day to day affairs of the TC.

This meant that the activities of the current Executive Director were restricted and so in April 2009, Dr David Parker indicated to the WEA ID that he would be concluding his work and would hand over all operations to Dr Thacker. Dr Parker's involvement with the TC, which first began in 1986,

ended on 30 June 2009. Old records were sent to the Billy Graham Centre Archives which housed other TC and WEA material, while current records were sent to London.

Dr Thacker now took over all the normal administrative activities, editorial work on *ERT*, *TN* and the website, the Global membership scheme, relationships with the WEA and other outside bodies; in particular, he was responsible for planning of the annual gathering and consultation in Brazil.

One of the new developments was the immediate cessation of the production of *Theological News* as a printed publication because it was considered to be expensive and outmoded as a form of communication. It was planned instead to commence a website with varied content with which theologians around the world could interact.

XII Sao Paulo, Brazil 2009

The 2009 annual gathering was held as planned in Sao Paulo, Brazil, 22-25 July, consisting of the annual business meeting and a symposium for theologians of the region. Attendance by global members was smaller than usual.

A major concern for the business session was Dr Thacker's role in the TC. He was still officially the chairman only, but after discussion it was agreed that the TC would recommend to the WEA that he be appointed Executive Director for a period of 5 years. Under this scheme, the TC would provide funding to the EA UK to cover 30% of his time, while EA UK would provide additional funding, so that he could devote 50% of his time to TC work; Thacker would remain as an employee of the British body rather than the TC or WEA.

Another important part of the business session was to reassess the vision and purpose of the TC in the light of the recent changes to its leadership and to plan for the future. The representation of various parts of the world on the TC core group was also a matter for discussion. The meeting was told that there were now many networks of theologians and institutions which had not existed in earlier times, and that there was now no longer any need for the TC to focus on developing these kinds of groups. Instead it should be more focused on the global situation and in providing theological insights relevant to the serious issues facing the church in the world. One way of expressing this new direction, it was decided, was to have *ERT* concentrate more on thematic issues in the future.

In what the chairman said was a 'turning point' for the TC⁵ the meeting developed a new vision statement to state what was unique about the TC, deciding on the slogan: 'Providing theological reflection from a global perspective'. In other words,

In faithfulness to Christ and in order to serve the Church, the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance exists to provide international theological reflection on issues of importance affecting the church and society everywhere.

Therefore the TC would aim 'to be a prophetic evangelical voice that is globally representative, faithful to Scripture, theologically informed and which speaks with clarity and relevance to both the church and the world.'

These new goals would be carried

out by representative teams of expert theologians addressing major issues, working in partnership with other groups as appropriate and disseminating their findings as widely and effectively as possible. It would also encourage others groups and individuals to do the same.

The consultation was attended by about 80 participants, mostly from Brazil, and dealt with the state and nature of contemporary evangelical theology in Latin America. Main addresses were given by Ricardo Barbosa, Daniel Salinas and Marcelo Vargas, while other significant contributions came from TC members Claus Schwambach, David Roldan and James Nkansah with Valdir Steuernagel and Norbeto Saracco also presenting addresses.⁶

A wide range of issues was raised by the papers and discussion, such as fragmentation of evangelicalism, the visibility of public witness, and a lack of an explicit systematic theology. There was also concern expressed about the responsibility for keeping alive an evangelical spirit faithful to the 1974 Lausanne tradition, and the way in which the evangelical movement should relate to neo-pentecostalism. Overall there was a major focus on maintaining the legacy of the evangelical tradition, especially as linked to the pioneers of Latin American evangelical theology.

XIII Chairman's Resignation

There was little follow up to implement the new 'vision' for TC adopted at this meeting in the remainder of the

⁶ Some of the papers were published in *ERT* 34:4 (Oct 2010).

year, and even the regular activities declined; there was little involvement by the core or global members. *ERT* continued to be produced but *TN* did not appear in either print or electronic form. However, the TC was represented by Dr Thomas Schirmmacher and Dr Rolf Hille at a conference held in Bad Urach, Germany in September 2009 on the theology of suffering jointly sponsored with the WEA Religious Liberty and Missions Commissions and the Lausanne Theology Working Group; the statement and papers from this consultation were published in *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom - Theological Reflections* edited by Christof Sauer and Richard Howell.⁷ The final Lausanne TWG conference took place in Beirut, Lebanon 14-19 February 2010 with the topic, 'The whole world', although without formal TC representation; the papers were published in the July 2010 issue of *Evangelical Review of Theology*.

There was unexpected and serious development when in February 2010, when overnight, Dr Thacker resigned from his position with EA UK for personal and family reasons; as a consequence, he was also obliged to resign from his role with the TC. None of the arrangements which had been made at the last annual TC meeting in Brazil for Dr Thacker to share his time between the EA UK and the TC had ever been formalised and he had not been formally appointed as Executive Director.

Part 2 Re-Building – An Integrated Unit 2010-2014

I Restoration and New Leadership

To deal with the emergency created by the sudden vacancy in the leadership and administration of the TC, the International Council, with the full recommendation of the International Director, appointed Dr Thomas Schirmmacher of Bonn, Germany, at very short notice as Executive Chairman. Dr Schirmmacher, a prominent German evangelical scholar and religious liberty activist, was well known in WEA circles through his involvement in the IIRF, as spokesman for Human Rights and in ecumenical discussions. He had also been active in regional and national theological associations including FEET and ATA, as well as lecturing at various seminaries and conferences around the world. Since 1996, he was the Rector of the multi-campus international Martin Bucer Seminary, based in Bonn.

Even though Dr Schirmmacher had not been a member of the TC before, he was quite familiar with its earlier ethos and aims, and with the wider WEA family. After quick consideration, Dr Schirmmacher agreed to accept the appointment, with the determination to do what he could to restore the TC, although, by necessity, it would be a rather different kind of operation for the immediate future at least. His immediate brief was to make the TC a part of the day to day operation of the WEA.

He faced a daunting task – not only did he already have many existing responsibilities, but the suddenness of

⁷ Bonn: VKW, 2010 (Religious Freedom Series Vol 2); see also *Bad Urach Statement* edited by Christof Sauer (WEA Global Issues Series Vol 9 Bonn: 2012).

the transition meant that there was no opportunity for the normal smooth transfer of information and records. In addition, many contacts had been lost, much of the activity that had been built up over the previous few years had been wound down in the previous months and the proposed website for *Theological News* had not functioned. These difficulties were exacerbated because Dr Thacker had concentrated all of the main functions of the TC into his own office, but he also had extensive responsibility for his role with the EA UK which severely limited the time he was able to give to the TC.

One of the most pressing issues was the production of *ERT*. An issue of *ERT* featuring papers from the recent final session of the TWG conference was due to be finalised very soon after Dr Thacker's resignation. Dr Schirmmacher turned to Dr David Parker and asked him to assist with the role of 'Executive Editor' working with Dr Schirmmacher as General Editor. Due to a misunderstanding, Chris Wright and the paper writers from the TWG were not aware that their material was required so quickly. However, with the failure of the recent change of *ERT* editorial policy to attract contributions for a highly focused thematic series, there was no other material available. So some quick work by contributors and the new Executive Editor, together with a short postponement of the copy deadline, saw the issue to the press in good time.

There was a similar problem with *TN* which had been suspended as a printed publication for almost a year. Dr Schirmmacher decided that it should be restarted as a valuable means of reporting and promoting the activities

of the TC. Dr Parker was invited to take on responsibility for this project as well. Over the next few months, all the missing back issues were made up (although one was a combined number) and regular publication resumed. However, it was distributed as an electronic version, emailed and downloadable from the website, rather than in printed form posted to the large number of recipients as previously.

One of the first issues of *TN*, dated July 2010, carried a statement by Dr Schirmmacher outlining the current situation and future plans for the TC. He pointed out that there had been many changes in the people involved in the TC, but that with the publications in hand, efforts could continue to re-build. The existing TC web site had been updated with information about these developments.

Dr Schirmmacher's announcement also stated that one of his main responsibilities as chair had been 'to visit high ranking leaders of non-Evangelical churches [and] to give them a fair presentation of our views over a lot of prejudices around and to assure friendship for times of common need'. Another major aim had been 'to ensure that whenever theological consultations take place on an international level, we take part and present our case. We have been involved in some of these events recently, and we are now building up a list and network of people who can represent us.' One such occasion was the World Mission Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland 2010, and another would be the Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town later in the year.

Taking the evangelical voice to other groups and presenting the evangelical case at conferences constituted

a new mode of operation for the TC which contrasted with its traditional role as a network of theologians. Another important function also received greater emphasis - assisting the WEA in the preparation of statements which required theological insight. Dr Schirmacher was much in demand as a speaker and travelled widely, often dovetailing his new TC role with his other commitments in religious freedom and as an evangelical spokesman in his own region.

The core membership of the TC had been reduced significantly in the previous year with the departure of several of its key leaders, although Vice-Chair, Dr James Nkansah, Kenya, remained in his position. However, it was still anticipated that a regular meeting could be held in 2010, as planned, at the Lausanne Cape Town conference. Dr Schirmacher contacted the remaining members in the hope that many of them would be at the conference and it would be a simple matter to conduct at least a short meeting. While many were expected to be at the conference in some capacity, it was soon found that it would be virtually impossible to organise a meeting due to the difficult logistics and security considerations. Plans for the meeting were therefore abandoned, and it was hoped that there could be one held sometime in early 2011. However, this never eventuated and the membership dispersed. The Global Membership scheme was not maintained either.

II The Theological Commission at Cape Town 2010

Many of TC members were at the Cape

Town conference, including Dr Rolf Hille; Dr Carver Yu was one of the featured speakers⁸ who made a presentation on the truth of the gospel. Dr Schirmacher spoke at some ancillary gatherings, met many friends of the TC and distributed quantities of TC literature and CDs from a large display booth. He also conducted a workshop on the code of ethics for mission and spoke at the assembly of the WEA Mission Commission. Dr Rosalee Velloso Ewell of Brazil, who had strong links with TWG and Langham ministries, was on the statement committee. The TC acted as theological consultant to the WEA in its role as a co-sponsor of the conference, advising on the drafting and endorsement of the documents. A meeting of the WEA International Leadership Team was also held, involving the TC.

A major anticipated outcome of the Cape Town event was a much closer relationship between the WEA and the Lausanne Movement. There was a feeling that there ought not to be two global evangelical bodies vying for the attention and support of the evangelical constituency. The two groups had worked together closely in the lead up to Cape Town with WEA being recognized as working in 'collaboration' with the LCWE for this event—although the lead was always taken strongly by the LCWE. The cooperation between the theological groups of WEA and LCWE was stronger, so there was much anticipation that the groups might merge or at least continue to work closely together after Cape Town.

All this meant that plans for the

⁸ See report *TN* 39:4 (November 2010), 2.

growth and re-development of the TC would need to take into account the possibility of an entirely new set of arrangements in which the TC would be joined by LCWE personnel. Therefore there was some hesitation in restoring the activities and organisation of TC to their former states, with the expectation that further changes would soon be necessary.

III Executive Director Appointed

However, towards the end of the 2010, it was becoming clear that without an active membership and staff, the burden of maintaining the work of the TC in its current form, let alone restoring it to its earlier method of operation or planning for a new context, was a heavy responsibility for the chairman alone. So attention was turned to securing assistance. The efforts which had taken place so far to keep the core of the TC functional had provided assurance of continued financial support which meant that appointing a new Executive Director was the best way to go; filling this position was one of the priorities that the WEA International Director had assigned Dr Schirmmacher at the beginning. By December, Dr Schirmmacher had written to the members stating that he was recommending Dr Rosalee Velloso Ewell for the post;

Dr Velloso Ewell, a daughter of pastor, was a Baptist theologian from Brazil, who gained her PhD at Duke University (USA) and for the previous 7 years had been Professor of New Testament Theology and Ethics at the South American Theological Seminary in Londrina, Brazil. She currently served as New Testament editor for the *Latin*

American Bible Commentary project, and was a member of the Lausanne Theology Working Group. She was expecting to move to UK early in 2011 where her husband would be engaged in doctoral studies. If approved, Dr Velloso Ewell's appointment, as a theologian from the Global South, would be a good balance for Dr Schirmmacher.

TC members gave their tacit approval and the appointment was made by the WEA International Council in November 2010; however, an announcement was delayed until April 2011 to allow time for re-settlement in UK. Dr Schirmmacher said, 'I have already had the chance to work together with Rosalee on WEA projects as well as in discussions with the Vatican in Rome, the World Council of Churches in Geneva and other international conferences. I am convinced that we have made a good choice. Rosalee is deeply convinced of Evangelical values, but open to learn from others. She has a clear stand point where needed, but is open to work together with the wide range of the Evangelical family.'

In a further winding back of the changes discussed in 2009, he advised that the new Executive Director's 'first task will be to connect to as many as possible of the theological commissions of national and regional alliances, or to the alliances themselves, where there is no network of theologians as of yet'.

By now it was also clear that the mooted changes to the TC work due to a merger with LCWE would not materialise because, during further discussions, it became apparent that there was little, if any chance, of progress on this plan. It soon became bogged down in uncertainty about the role and distinctive ethos of the two parent or-

ganisations and the practicalities of how such a relationship could be made to work organisationally. At the level of the theological groups themselves, there was even less prospect because the TWG lacked strong leadership after Chris Wright, who had so expertly guided its activities in the build-up to Cape Town, withdrew from any further involvement so that he could give his attention to his work with Langham Ministries.

The future for the TC was also becoming more assured because of developments within the WEA. During the latter part of 2010, the WEA organisation was clarifying the role of commissions and their chairs, a process that affected all commissions but particularly TC because of Dr Schirmmacher's dual role as Executive Chairman.

IV Progress for the New-look TC

So although there was considerable clarification of the context in which the TC would operate in the immediate future, hopes of further meetings of the core membership receded. Carver Yu resigned his membership in November 2010 because of dissatisfaction with the process by which the Executive Director was appointed, due in large part to difficulties in communication at the time.

Dr Velloso Ewell took up her new role as Executive Director more fully and worked with the Chairman by writing and publishing papers. The two leaders participated extensively in conferences and meeting with key leaders, which was an important means by which the TC took up the 2009 vision of dealing with the big global issues.

Their activities covered a wide range of topics. They participated for example in the development of a code of ethics for mission which involved both the Vatican and the World Council of Churches; this was launched in June 2011 at the WCC headquarters as 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct'. In 2012 Dr Velloso Ewell presented this code to the Baptist World Alliance in her role on the Baptist-Muslim relations task force of the Freedom and Justice Commission; this role also saw her in Nigeria giving lectures and workshops.

Another important project was the statement, 'Evangelism: The Hallmark of Evangelical Faith' which was incorporated in the address by the WEA Secretary General, Dr Geoff Tunnicliffe, at the Vatican Synod of Bishops in October 2012. Dr Schirmmacher attended this Synod and was also present at the inauguration of the new pope in 2013.

Both Dr Schirmmacher and Dr Velloso Ewell participated in the Global Christian Forum, Manado, Indonesia in October 2011. They were together again for the WCC General Assembly in Busan, South Korea in October 2013. The two TC leaders were regular visitors to consultations of the groups like ICETE, FEET, ATA and the Micah Challenge, as well as meetings of other WEA commissions. They participated in the Evangelical-Orthodox dialogue which took place in 2013 in Tirana. Dr Velloso Ewell gave many lectures to theological associations including the Scottish Evangelical Theological Society, while Dr Schirmmacher made presentations at the 2011 gathering on Theological Education by Extension in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Nearly two years after his appoint-

ment as Chair, following a WEA Leadership meeting, Dr Schirmmacher was able to report that he and Dr Velloso Ewell had made considerable progress in restoring the work of TC, despite the wind down in membership and older activities. There had been many discussions with former TC personnel and with leaders of seminaries and associations which had links with the TC in the past, while visits to conferences and the regular meetings of some of these groups opened the way for further cooperation and interest.

The regular publications, *ERT* and *TN* continued to appear and the two books from the task forces finally appeared.⁹ There were also plans for further development including a new website with weekly commentary and a news blog, a series of small publications on ‘Global Issues’ to be circulated electronically, and the re-establishment of the Global Membership scheme. It was also anticipated that there would be plans for consultations, and for working together with other WEA commissions.

The three key personnel, Dr Schirmmacher, Dr Velloso Ewell and Dr Parker met in mid-2011 and again in 2013 to discuss publication and other plans. Some ‘Senior Advisors’ were also appointed, including Dr Chris Wright, Dr Bruce Nicholls, Dr Thomas Johnson and Dr Ken Gnanakan.

So while the TC was operative during this period, the earlier pattern of a

core membership facilitating the development of a global network of evangelical theologians and institutions had not been restored. Instead, the new mode was more like the pattern that had been called for much earlier—the TC was a small unit operating within the WEA structure representing it on various platforms, and providing advice on theological matters. The sudden changes of 2010 had provided the opportunity for this pattern to be implemented although it had been rejected by the TC at the time. The other alternative presented then, for the TC to become virtually an independent international theological society only loosely connected to the WEA, had never been totally dismissed.

Although the new form of the TC was gradually consolidating, there was still much more that could be done. There was an addition to the ‘Global Issues’ series¹⁰ and in 2013 the ‘World of Theology’ series was launched. The TC had also successfully cooperated with the Missions Commission and the Religious Liberty Commission in another publication, *Sorrow & Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom*, with chapters by 62 authors from 23 countries. This book was launched on 27 September 2012 by WEA Secretary General, Dr Geoff Tunnicliffe, at the Religious Freedom Roundtable in Washington

⁹ *Local Theology for the Global Church* (William Carey Library) was published in 2010; *Jesus, Salvation and the Jewish People* was published in 2011 by Paternoster despite its parent company undergoing many financial and corporate issues.

¹⁰ *Racism* by Thomas Schirmmacher with an essay on ‘Caste in India’ by Richard Howell was published in 2012 as volume 8 of the ‘Global Issues Series’; this series had commenced in 2008 under the general umbrella of the World Evangelical Alliance and the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF).

D.C. and the first copy was given to Scott Felipe, Deputy Director for Policy and Research at the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).¹¹

The new web site was still not operative, and there were issues confronting the TC's flagship publication, *ERT*. Rapid changes in print publishing of academic journals meant higher subscription costs and lower circulation, leading the publisher, AlphaGraphics to consider a much improved web-site for their journals. However, this would involve considerable amounts of extra work by the TC which it was not well placed to supply and for which there would be little return; the TC continued to supply all the material for *ERT* without any charge, but it was the publisher who received the financial returns! Furthermore, there was a smaller contact pool, due to the loss of the previously extensive mailing lists and diminished relationships with theologians and societies across the world, which meant that the supply of material for both *ERT* and *TN* was sometimes critical.

Another of the TC's success stories had also been impacted due to changes in technology and the fortunes of the TC. With the change in leadership and staffing of the TC, it was no longer possible to manage retail sales of the *Theological Resource Library* CD which had produced good revenue for the organisation over several years. So from 2010 it became a wholesale operation only. Then in June 2011 Logos Bible Software who produced the CD an-

nounced that, in response to general trends in the industry, it would change to on-line delivery only; the TC would continue to receive the royalties on sales, but these proved to be much lower than under the previous arrangement.

In the wider evangelical world, there were many developments and activities such as the 40th anniversary of ATA (which was an original project of TC), the appointment of a theological leader in Africa, Langham ministries moved into Francophone Africa, and the regular conferences of ICETE. The TC kept in touch with many of these bodies and was often invited to be present at and participate in many of their activities.

Preparations were being made for another round of dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church, led by Dr Rolf Hille. After the initial preparatory meeting at the Vatican in 2008, the first discussion session was held in Sao Paulo, Brazil from 26 July to 1 August, 2009. The focus was on convergences between Catholics and Evangelicals on doctrinal matters and contemporary ethical issues. The second meeting was held 12-17 September, 2011 at the Vatican, with close attention paid to scripture and tradition in the life and mission of the church, with attention to the particular ways in which each side understood these authorities. Wheaton, Illinois, was the venue for the third round the next year where soteriology was the central topic; many of the differences had been already overcome by the 'Joint Declaration on Justification', which was worked out between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation. However, the

¹¹ It has its own website: <http://www.sor-rowandblood.com/>

role of the Church was not discussed in this context, and therefore this question was still open in the ecumenical context.

The next round of discussions was held in Guatemala City 1-7 September 2013, where surveys conducted by both Catholics and Evangelicals were used to examine how religious minorities were treated. The aim was to encourage a more mature expression of religious freedom on the part of the leadership of the two groups in areas where tension had often been apparent; the question of collaboration was also under discussion. The final session in this series is due in September 2014 in Bad Blankenburg, Germany where the papers and statements will be finalised for publication.

WEA participants included Dr Rolf Hille (Germany) as convenor, Dr Leonardo de Chirico (Italy), Rev José de Segovia Barrón (Spain), Dr Joel C. Elowsky (USA), Dr Timoteo D. Gener (Philippines), Dr James Nkansah-Obrempong (Kenya) and Dr Claus Schwambach (Brazil), with Dr Solomo Strauss (Germany) as a regular guest.

Conclusion: Forty Years of Witness

Since its official formation in 1974 (with a pre-history going back to 1968), the TC has been through many phases. It has established a good record in sponsoring conferences, encouraging TCs and associations, creating a fellowship of theologians, operating a scholar-

ship fund, publishing books, journals and newsletters. Over the years it has been able to voice evangelical concerns and be a bellwether on crucial issues, speaking on its own behalf or in co-operation with others. During all this time, it kept firmly in mind the aims of its founders – developing national theological commissions and regional associations and strengthening evangelical theological education.

At its peak, it involved 50 or more members from all parts of the world, and at other times, it was effectively linked with many national and regional theological groups, seminars and individuals, all contributing to its goal of 'promoting biblical truth by networking theologians'. However, recent changes have seen the organisation transformed into a small working unit integrated into the structure of the WEA, providing theological insights and presenting the evangelical perspective on a wide range of issues in many different forums on behalf of its mother organisation.

As it marks 40 years of witness, the context is vastly different from the days of its origins, and many problems remain. However, there is still a need for a unit such as the TC to be, as the proposed Vision Statement of 2009 put it, 'a prophetic evangelical voice that is globally representative, faithful to Scripture, theologically informed and which speaks with clarity and relevance to both the church and the world'.