

Survey shows strong core beliefs, geographic differences among evangelicals

In conjunction with their webinar titled “What Is Evangelicalism?” on 20 September, the WEA and the UK-based Kirby Laing Centre conducted a global electronic survey. The 996 responses, though not statistically representative due to the non-random nature of the survey, provide important insights regarding the status of the evangelical movement today.

Here are some of the significant results:

- Although 95% of respondents identified themselves as evangelical, only 43.3% said their current perception of the term ‘evangelical’ was positive, with 12.1% holding a neutral view, 9.4% negative, and 35.3% conflicted.
- 96% considered the Bible ‘extremely important’ or ‘very important’ as a source of information about God and the world.
- 85.1% strongly supported the statement, ‘You must be born again by the Holy Spirit to be saved.’
- 74.1% endorsed the local church as the primary institution for God’s people to make a difference in the world.
- Over 80% said women should be able to preach from the pulpit. The strongest opposition to this statement (29.1%) was in North America.
- Overall, nearly 15% said gay marriage should be acceptable in the church. This sentiment was far stronger in Europe (30.7%) than in North America (5.6%), Asia (3.5%), or Africa (2.6%).
- Only 5% supported legal abortion, though another 61.1% were open to the possibility of moral or legal exceptions that might permit abortion in special cases.
- Respondents exhibited a strong social-justice streak, with 65.1% agreeing that ‘Income and wealth should be more evenly distributed than they currently are’ and 64% affirming that ‘Caring about the gospel includes equally caring about justice.’
- 21.2% agreed that ‘Christians should be as passionate about creation care as they are about evangelism’, but with significant variation across continents (35% in Asia, 11% in North America). Only 2.3% said ‘Christians should not be distracted by discussions about creation care.’



Darrell Bock, a fellow with the Kirby Laing Centre who helped to construct the survey, noted the strong levels of doctrinal agreement among evangelicals and added, ‘The one inconsistent result I see is the lower percentage who view the church as the primary institution for doing God’s work. A robust role of the church is a prerequisite for addressing the lack of discipleship that some people feel.’

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Singapore hosts consultation on contextualization in the Majority World

by Dr. Samuel Law, Singapore Bible College

Much of the work on contextualization in the 20th century has come from a Western perspective. For example, works by Steven Bevans and recently by Scott Moreau have provided a variety of approaches and addressed issues on the topic.

But what might contextualization look like in the Majority World as the demographic centre of Christianity moves south and east? Although there are overlaps between the Western and Majority World perspectives, there are nevertheless areas which do not overlap. Moreover, the Majority World is not monolithic; neither are the 'Asian', 'African', and 'Latin American' perspectives as each of these encompasses distinct cultures, histories, schemas and hybrid communities.

To gain deeper understanding of Majority World contextualization approaches, supported by a Templeton Foundation sub-grant, Singapore Bible College's Helix Center for Integrative Research and Advancement convened on 11–13 September a symposium with 10 participants: three Bible scholars, three theologians and four missiologists from Africa, North America, and Asia. (We were unfortunately unable to secure an appropriate representative from Latin America.) We examined issues of honour and shame as a case study. Our multi-disciplinary, multicultural approach sought to integrate both 'emic' (insider) and 'etic' perspectives and to reduce cultural blind spots. The symposium held morning public presentations including interaction from on-site and online audiences totalling about 150 participants. In the afternoon, we engaged in closed roundtable consultations to delve deeper into the issues of contextualization and honour/shame.



Participants at the Singapore consultation. Front row: Narry Santos, Bishop Hwa Yung, Christopher Flanders, Samuel Law, Kenosi Molato; back row: Claire Chong, Kiem-Kiok Kwa, Rei Lemuel Crizaldo, Justin Joon Lee; not pictured: Jerry Hwang. © WEA

Among the critical questions asked about contextualization, we considered 'Are there other pathways to contextualization than, for example, Paul Hiebert's critical contextualization approach?' and 'How is contextualization occurring in the Majority World?' With regard to the case study of honour and shame, we asked, 'Are current models of honour/shame appropriate, especially as they are defined by Western taxonomies and theoretical frameworks?' and 'How do Majority World cultures view honour and shame, guilt and innocence, and fear and power from their internal schemas?'

The presentations and roundtable consultations are expected to be published in 2024, but interested parties may access the morning presentations at these links: Contextualization: Current State in Southeast Asia': <https://www.youtube.com/live/Z9QAYLjADcs>; Day 2, 'Honour and Shame in Scripture': <https://youtube.com/live/E0Qfro2HxxA>; Day 3, 'Honour and Shame Transformation': <https://youtube.com/live/1Su6PkdcJXA>.

Rei Lemuel Crizaldo, WEA Theological Commission Coordinator, served as one of the plenary speakers.

African theological education group holds first-ever General Assembly

The Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA) convened its inaugural General Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, on 25–29 September. ACTEA is a regional member of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), a global partner of the World Evangelical Alliance. ACTEA's mission is to strengthen theological education through accreditation, research and support services to serve the church and transform society.

The event, attended by 164 participants from more than 30 countries, highlighted the theme of 'African Theological Education: Retrospect and Prospect'. Keynote speakers included PLO Lumumba, a lawyer from Kenya; Jehu Hanciles, a Sierra Leonean professor at Emory University's Candler School of Theology; Yacouba Sanon, a Burkinabé scholar living and teaching in Côte d'Ivoire; and Elvira Moises da Silva, a scholar from Angola. The topics covered included marriage and family, modern slavery and human trafficking, urbanization and the slum crisis, religious extremism, formation, sustainability, new shifts in education, and grassroots training.

The speakers challenged participants to envision theological education in light of the challenges facing the church and society in Africa today. They reiterated that the health of the church and the transformation of society depend on robust contextual theological education offered in various forms and 'spiced with African culture, worldview, philosophies and personalities'. Theological education that will change Africa, they agreed, must be rooted in the African soil.

The event was followed by a consultation organized by ACTEA and the Association of Evangelicals in Africa on scaling up theological education through non-formal means. This conference, on 1–4 October, had 117 participants from 21 countries representing 30 theological institutions and 50 non-formal curricula. Participants showcased their work and invited collaboration.

David Tarus, ACTEA's executive director, urged participants to embrace generosity and collaboration. He stated in his closing remarks, 'We need a return to our African spirit of generosity. Our generosity will accommodate all African peoples wherever they are—people who speak Portuguese, French, Amharic, Swahili, English, etc.; our people in diaspora; and those who have no home because they have been displaced.'



New book: *Why Evangelical Theology Needs the Global Church*

Stephen Pardue, program director of the ThM and PhD in Theological Studies at the Asia Graduate School of Theology, has released Why Evangelical Theology Needs the Global Church (Baker). By defending five theses accompanied by case studies, he shows both why Western evangelical theology must engage with the global church and how to do so meaningfully. We asked Dr. Pardue to talk about his work and his vision for this book.

(article continues on next page)

Q: How has your experience of both Asian and Western Christian cultures affected your development as an evangelical believer and your understanding of the global church?

Pardue: My story begins with growing up in a vital evangelical church in the southern Philippines. This was where I met Christ, developed my faith and started asking theological questions. So when I went to study at Wheaton College (USA), I was primed to see theological issues differently and ask different questions from those of my North American colleagues. I was more alive to questions of theology and culture than people who have lived in only one cultural context. Also, Filipino colleagues such as Tim Gener, Rico Villanueva and Theresa Lua have impacted my thinking. They cast a vision for doing evangelical theology in the service of the church's mission, in deep dialogue with Scripture and culture.

Q: Your first thesis emphasizes the need to rely on Scripture, and then your case study is on liberation theology, which has been criticized for inadequate reliance on Scripture in favor of Marx or other tools. What positive and negative applications do you draw from this case study?

Pardue: This case study encapsulates so well both the challenges of the 'contextual theology' project as it has existed up to now and the great potential for an evangelical contribution. Liberation theology is the best-known offspring of the 'turn to context' in theological studies. What started as a grassroots revolutionary movement in a few Latin American countries in the 1970s ultimately flourished and multiplied globally. Prominent versions of the movement appear not just throughout Latin America, but also in Africa and Asia. In the Western academy, 'theologies of liberation' have become almost ubiquitous, dominating not only discussions of economics but also of race, class and other concepts.

And yet liberation theology carries a ring of irony, because the downtrodden people for whom the movement was supposed to be a word of hope have largely rejected it as a mode of conceiving and practicing their faith. As one observer put it, 'Liberation theology opted for the poor, and the poor opted for Pentecostalism.' In a way, this is a story of contextual theology gone awry. At least in its first generations, it failed to take Scripture very seriously and ended up with very little to offer to Christians who love the Bible and have a high view of God and his revelatory work in the world (which is a large percentage of the growing and vital Majority World church).

On the other hand, evangelical Latin American theologians such as René Padilla and the Latin American Fraternity took the 'turn to context' utterly seriously, recognizing the profound need for theology that connected with the dire situation on the ground in Latin America. But they refused to choose between a commitment to genuinely contextual theology and fidelity to the biblical text. Instead, they saw that through deeper attention to Scripture, the church could be equipped to address the profound challenges of poverty, injustice and social evils. They also argued that their cultural context and commitments actually helped them see things in Scripture that the rest of the evangelical church was ignoring.

The result was a much more effective and vital vision of contextual theology. Because of Padilla and his colleagues, evangelicals all around the world now largely agree that Scripture calls us to seek justice, love mercy and care for the poor. This is a great case of how evangelical contextual theology can bring something unique to the table—a vision for theology that takes culture seriously while also remaining faithful to Scripture as its primary authority.

(article continues on next page)



Stephen Pardue © private

Q: What are the main factors keeping evangelicals from learning from their counterparts in other areas of the world, and how can this difficulty be addressed?

Pardue: There are several challenges. In both the West and the Majority World, evangelicals can tend to see 'cultural theologies' as inherently relativistic and therefore threatening to the purity of the good news. This approach comes from a healthy instinct to preserve the gospel from cultural idolatry and unhealthy syncretism, but it's fundamentally a mistaken solution because God works in and through cultures to reveal himself, and he chooses to redeem people through the repair and perfection of their cultures rather than through abolishing cultural distinctions. This means that in the church, God calls us to discern what it means to be faithful to him in our culture, and then to work that out alongside our brothers and sisters of every nation. Theology exists to help the church accomplish its mission, which includes cultural engagement.

Aside from this big theoretical problem, there are lots of other smaller ones. Language is of course an issue, and perhaps more important than that is relational proximity. We instinctively gather with people who are like us, and sometimes we can even forget that we have done this when we theologize.

Q: What do you hope will change as a result of your book?

Pardue: I hope that evangelical theologians and leaders will recognize that they have a special contribution to discussions of contextual theology, and that they will engage with that world rather than withdrawing from it. As for the church, I hope that Christians will be encouraged to think more deeply about how they can connect the gospel to their local culture, while also becoming more aware of how people from other cultures grasp the gospel in different and important ways. One easy way to start is by reading authors from cultures different from our own. Even better is to engage in authentic partnerships with Christians who are culturally different from us.

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