

## Exploring Evangelicalism in the 21st Century

The World Evangelical Alliance and the Kirby Laing Centre (KLC) have come together to explore and begin a conversation about what being an ‘evangelical’ means for the twenty-first century.

Key parts of this joint project are a global survey, the initial results of which were presented in the [previous issue of the Theological News](#), and a series of panel discussions that will further probe the current state of evangelicalism in different parts of the world. The first panel discussion happened in September 2023, followed by a second in January 2024. Panelists included Samuel Chiang, Rei Lemuel Crizaldo, Peirong Lin, Master Matlhaope, and Brian Stiller from the WEA and Darrell Bock, Craig Bartholomew, and Bruce Ashford of the KLC.

Conversations so far have revolved around the challenge of defining a movement that has become global and continues to have a growing presence across the Majority World. Definitions and perceptions of evangelicalism vary across different regions, forcing us to understand and articulate what it means to be an evangelical in a diverse and changing religious landscape.

Discussants acknowledged that the term “evangelical” has faced negative perceptions in some regions, and it has become associated with political and cultural movements that may not reflect the movement’s core values. This has led to a fracturing among evangelical communities in particular parts of the world. In response, we must effectively outline and define a set of core values that better represent the worldwide evangelical community.



The panelists considered the hallmarks of evangelicalism today, starting from the features in the classic ‘Bebbington quadrilateral’ (commitment to the Bible, cross-centred, conversion and activism). Two ideas emerged as most prominent in the discussion about what is not present in Bebbington’s definition:

1. the transdenominational, trans-confessional, multinational, polyphonic (multi-voiced), and contextual character of evangelicalism as a global movement;
2. the Holy Spirit and a spiritual focus as central to the dynamic of a movement rooted in theology, outreach, and spirituality.

Interested parties may access the recording of the panel discussions at these links:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAG8NHRQjgg> (September 2023)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=veUJCbgtLo> (January 2024)

Subsequent conversations in different regions are set for the coming months.

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# ACTEA Announces a New African Theology Journal

by Joshua Robert Barron & David Tarus

In 1973 in Limuru, Kenya, Byang Kato convened a meeting of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (AEAM, now known more simply as the Association of Evangelicals in Africa or AEA). At that meeting, Kato issued a call to help mitigate what he called African Christianity's 'theological anemia'. He proposed the formation of two graduate-level theological schools, one to serve the Anglophone region of Africa and one for the Francophone region; a quality assurance entity to support theological schools; a specialized ministry for youth and children; and a theological journal to serve the churches and theological education programs. Through his vision, various AEA projects including the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA) were founded.

Since then, Africa has seen the launch of many theological journals; a few of the older ones are still active. Of the others, though many are of good quality, some function as institutional organs, some exist only in physical copies, and others have a regional focus. Although institutional and regional journals are important and have their place, ACTEA determined that Kato's vision could still be answered more fully by creating a new venue to address the concerns of Christianity in Africa, one that will maintain the highest academic standards and is easily accessible. Thus ACTEA is happy to announce the launch of its open-access academic journal, *African Christian Theology* (ISSN 3006-1768).

The mission of ACTEA is to strengthen theological education through accreditation, scholarship, and support services to serve the church and transform society. The journal is one way in which ACTEA engages theological educators and church leaders in addressing relevant issues facing the church and society in Africa. As ACTEA's journal, *African Christian Theology* will be committed to an evangelical perspective, but it is deliberately ecumenical and welcomes articles by scholars from various Christian traditions. *African Christian Theology* will serve the whole continent, providing a venue for conversations between different regions of Africa. Following in the footsteps of Byang Kato, Kwame Bediako, Kä Mana, Lamin Sanneh, Andrew F. Walls, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Isaac Zokoué, and many others, the journal is committed to deep scholarly engagement with African contextual realities while promoting both evangelical commitment and global perspectives and serving as an organ through which African voices can address world Christianity at large.

The inaugural issue is themed 'African Christian Theology: Retrospect and Prospect' and will be published, God willing, in March 2024. It is scheduled to feature contributions from Jesse N. K. Mugambi (Kenya), Jehu Hanciles (Sierra Leone), Yacouba Sanon (Côte d'Ivoire), Joel A. Carpenter (USA), Esther Mombo (Kenya), Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Ghana), and Tite Tiénou (Burkina Faso), among others. The journal will initially publish articles and book reviews written in English, French, and Portuguese; each article will have abstracts in all three languages. The journal will also feature a robust book review section, featuring both critical review essays and short reviews in book note style. While the majority of books reviewed will have been published recently, as is customary, we will sometimes publish retrospective reviews of select older texts.

The journal will be available digitally at <https://AfricanChristianTheology.org>; a print edition will also be available. Submissions may be sent to [submissions@AfricanChristianTheology.org](mailto:submissions@AfricanChristianTheology.org) and queries may be addressed to [Editors@AfricanChristianTheology.org](mailto:Editors@AfricanChristianTheology.org).



## Two Conferences, Two Declarations, One Message

Thomas K. Johnson, WEA Senior Theological Advisor and Envoy to Humanitarian Islam

In the closing weeks of 2023, there were two meetings of senior religious and academic thinkers addressing overlapping problems. The first was the 'R20 International Summit of Religious Authorities (ISORA): Religion's Role in Addressing Middle East Violence and Threats to a Rules-based International Order', held in Jakarta on 27 November. Second, on 15 December, a conference at Princeton University, USA issued the 'R20 Princeton Declaration: Towards a Global Consensus that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Embodies a Civilizational Vision that the World's Diverse Peoples, Faiths, and Nations Should Strive to Fulfill'. I had the privilege of assisting with both events.

The first meeting was a response to the crisis between Hamas and Israel; the second conference celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). These may sound like unrelated topics, but they are not. What if the current crises of humanity have to do with the dysfunctional roles of religions in society, and also with a loss of moral



UDHR 75th Anniversary Conference at Princeton University, USA  
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foundations for the rules-based international order established after the Holocaust and World War 2? What if the central problem of our day is that some use religion as a weapon against the rights of other tribes, rather than religious communities supporting rights and duties of a universal nature? What if these two problems, dysfunctional religions and a quaking international order, are two sides of the same coin? Key propositions of the two documents point in this direction:

ISORA claims:

*Whereas religion is not only about true and false gods or beliefs, but also moral and spiritual insights that drive us to realize a better future for all humanity;*

*Whereas in the past religions often functioned—or were made to function—as a basis for consolidating distinct identity groups within a context of violent “tribal” competition, which was once integral to the construct of human societies, and civilizations, worldwide; ...*

*Whereas globalization renders it impossible for identity-based communities to isolate themselves from the rest of humanity; ...*

*Whereas awareness of the urgent need to develop a world order capable of neutralizing conflict and ensuring international peace and security emerged among world leaders in the wake of the First World War; and was partially realized after WWII in the form of the international consensus represented by the UN Charter, the establishment of the United Nations Organization in 1945, and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948; ...*

*It is, therefore, eminently feasible for religions to acknowledge the principles of this international consensus and incorporate these principles within their respective teachings and worldviews.*

The Princeton Declaration says:

*These senior religious and academic leaders concluded that the post-World War II international consensus—represented by the UN Charter and the UDHR—embodies, reflects, and even provides a political structure for realizing the most fundamental and noble values promoted by all religions, including universal love and compassion (Arabic: rahmah; Hebrew: rachamim; Greek: agápē; Sanskrit: karuṇā), equality, honesty, justice, and peacemaking; ...*

*Whereas it is, therefore, eminently feasible for religions to acknowledge the principles of this international consensus and incorporate these principles within their respective teachings and worldviews; ...*

*Whereas there is an urgent need to apply religions' ethical and humanitarian teachings to the treatment of others, and affirm that all human beings, without exception, and not only members of one's own community, are entitled to benefit from the application of these teachings, including love, compassion, equality, honesty, justice, and peacemaking; ...*

*Whereas religious authorities have a moral and spiritual responsibility to ensure that their respective faiths serve as vehicles of mutual understanding and reconciliation rather than perpetuate the primordial cycle of identity-based hatred, tyranny, and violence; ...*

*Whereas the international consensus embodied within the UN Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides the only currently existing and viable framework for resolving identity-based conflicts — including those that occur between religions, and violence perpetrated in the name of religion;*

*Whereas the failure of global actors to respect and uphold the post-WWII international consensus as embodied in the UN Charter and UDHR framework is a primary cause of instability and conflict worldwide.*

These documents claim that the world would be much better if people and nations followed the UDHR and the UN Charter; and that therefore, responsible religious communities should include these topics in their teaching. What seems distinctive in these declarations is the strongly worded request that religious communities teach about universal human rights. That is why these declarations merit mention within theology. In other words, these texts are a request to theologians to include human rights in our teaching about ethics and society.

Whether or not we agree with every historical interpretation in these documents, I think that Protestant theologians should say 'Yes!!' These documents fit with our emphasis not only that all humans are created in the image of God, but that many people are aware of their uniqueness in the world. These documents fit our normal claim that practical ethics are different from the explanation of the gospel. The issues addressed in these texts correspond closely with the problems we often call 'the engines of religious persecution'. And teaching about the UDHR by religious bodies leads to emphasizing the excellent statement about religious freedom in the UDHR. If followed, the message of these conferences would reduce the intolerance and persecution faced by so many of our Christian sisters and brothers.



## Wisdom for Evangelical Mission Conversations

The Fourth Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization will take place in September of this year. The gathering will bring together thousands of key global mission influencers from every nation on earth. It also marks the 50th anniversary of the Lausanne Movement. As a ‘backgrounder’ in preparation for this momentous gathering, Dr. Charles Ringma, professor emeritus at Regent College (Canada) and professor at Asian Theological Seminary (Philippines), has prepared an incisive article worthy of dissemination and collective reflection.

‘There are a lot of present-day concerns about the well-being and sustainability of those who serve in the church and in mission. It is possible that much more attention needs to be given to psycho-social health, diet, exercise, sabbath and other spiritual practices, formation, discipleship, mentoring, cooperation, and so much more’, Ringma observes. Unfortunately, the relationship between mission and spirituality, while fundamental, is not always straightforward. Among evangelicals, in particular, the two are often ‘put into separate boxes’ and ‘one has often been placed above the other’. In response, Ringma identifies some pointers to improve clarity in definition, sources for reflection, models for formulating courses of action, and a proposal of a kind of ‘missional spirituality’.

Throughout the article, he highlights how the dynamics between the Majority World and the Minority World will be critical for conversations across global evangelical Christianity. Here are a few of his provocative comments:

- ‘We need to be careful that we don’t elevate the Western “banking system” of training in relation to formation and discipleship, and particularly not when we apply this to mission. So much learning takes place *in situ*. As a consequence, I remain mystified why more training for global mission does not take place in the settings in which one seeks to serve. If one is called to serve in Myanmar, there are seminaries in that country!’
- ‘Christian spirituality in the Minority World will be different to that of the perspectives of those in the Majority Worlds and their diversity. To create a monolithic perspective risks reductionism. Is it possible to create a voice that reflects *unity in diversity*?’
- ‘Is the fundamental concern to lay the basis for evangelical thought and practice in order to deal with too much diversity? Is the task thus a normative one to give a new cohesion to global evangelicalism? Is this basically a conservative rather than a prophetic move?’

The full article is available at <https://bit.ly/tn531c>.

### JOURNALS AND NEWSLETTERS WITHIN THE GLOBAL THEOLOGY DEPARTMENT

#### Evangelical Review of Theology (quarterly)

<https://theology.worldidea.org/evangelical-review-of-theology/>

#### Islam and Christianity (English & German) (semiannual)

<https://www.islaminstitut.de/en/category/publikationen/journal/>

#### Jahrbuch für Verfolgung und Diskriminierung von Christen [Yearbook on Persecution and Discrimination of Christians]

<http://jahrbuch.iirf.global/>

#### International Journal of Religious Freedom (semiannual)

<https://ijrf.org/>

#### Jahrbuch für Religionsfreiheit [Yearbook on Religious Freedom]

<http://jahrbuch.iirf.global/>

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<https://bonn-profiles.net/>

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order from [business@worldidea.org](mailto:business@worldidea.org)

#### Bonner Querschnitte (twice a week) (German)

<https://bonner-querschnitte.de/>

#### WEA RLC Research and Analysis Report (periodic)

<https://worldidea.org/whoweare/newsletter-signup>

## The Changing Landscape of Theological Education in Asia

A new study highlights important changes in the way leaders are being prepared and equipped theologically in Asia.

The report was prepared by a task force on leadership development and theological education led by Dr. Theresa Lua, director of WEA Global Theology, and composed of Dr. Kwa Kiem-Kiok (Associate Professor, Singapore Bible College), Prof. Wailes Rangsa (Principal, College of Christian Theology, Bangladesh), Dr. Chia Choon Chuah (Dean of Doctoral Studies and Mission Initiatives, Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary), Dr. Purevdorj Jamsran (Principal, Mongolian Bible School), and Rei Lemuel Crizaldo (WEA Theological Commission Coordinator). The findings were presented at last year's [regional consultation](https://bit.ly/equippingforasia) of the Asia Evangelical Alliance (October 24–27, 2023 in Indonesia). The report is available here: <https://bit.ly/equippingforasia>.



Theresa Lua and Rei Lemuel Crizaldo presenting the findings of the study

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The report describes how new forms of training leaders for ministry and new educational pathways are responding to very specific training needs that do not readily receive full attention in traditional seminary education. Amidst the widespread recognition that there is no longer one way or one model of how best to do theological education, the call is to work towards more, not less, equipping and training in a new, emerging landscape of leadership development.

Here are some of the key findings of the study:

- **Diversity.** Alongside formal certifications and diplomas, specific training in particular skill sets that can be learned on demand are now considered equally valuable and indispensable, especially for those already engaged in ministry. No equipping program can accomplish everything; hence the increasing shift toward life-long learning.
- **Simultaneity.** Things are no longer in neat boxes as they were five years ago. Theological education looks more and more blended today. Those in the non-formal learning spaces are now moving towards granting formal degrees, and those in the formal sector have also begun to offer non-formal training programs.
- **Flexibility.** Amidst the variety of emerging needs, approaches, and opportunities, a greater degree of flexibility and mobility in terms of providing training is needed. This will involve the capacity to be agile, adaptive and also prophetic in responding to changes in different societies in Asia. Tweaking of the curriculum will have to be an ongoing process.
- **Inclusivity.** It may no longer be helpful to think of the usual binaries and classifications, e.g. formal and non-formal, on-site and online. It would be more appropriate to think of a spectrum, with some theological and training organizations choosing to have a wider or narrower spectrum than the others, as demanded by the context they are in.

- **Connectivity.** A new and broader landscape of ministry and mission in Asia calls for more than what can be presently seen in the field of leadership training and theological education, but it also cannot be any less than what is available now. This calls for more interaction, collaboration, and building a community that embraces the different learning spaces in Asia.
- **Concern over False Teachings.** There is an increasing awareness and appreciation of the value of theological education, in light of growing concern over false teachings and heresies sprouting especially online.
- **Training for the Whole People of God.** Theological education has to overcome the elitism of past years and become more inclusive and accessible. For example, it should encompass the training and equipping of lay people, even children. The church needs more soldiers than generals.
- **Theological Resources from Asia and for Asia.** Theological education in Asia continues to depend on materials from the West. More context-rooted and locally developed resources are needed.
- **Upskill Bible Teachers.** Bible teachers need to be more equipped not only for Asian modes of theologizing but also with new techniques and tools for online learning and blended or hybrid models of education.

All these issues point to the deep need for a collective effort across Asia in discerning new priorities and fresh ways of supporting and retooling how God's people are nurtured for faithful service in the church and good works in the world.

## WEA THEOLOGICAL NEWS

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