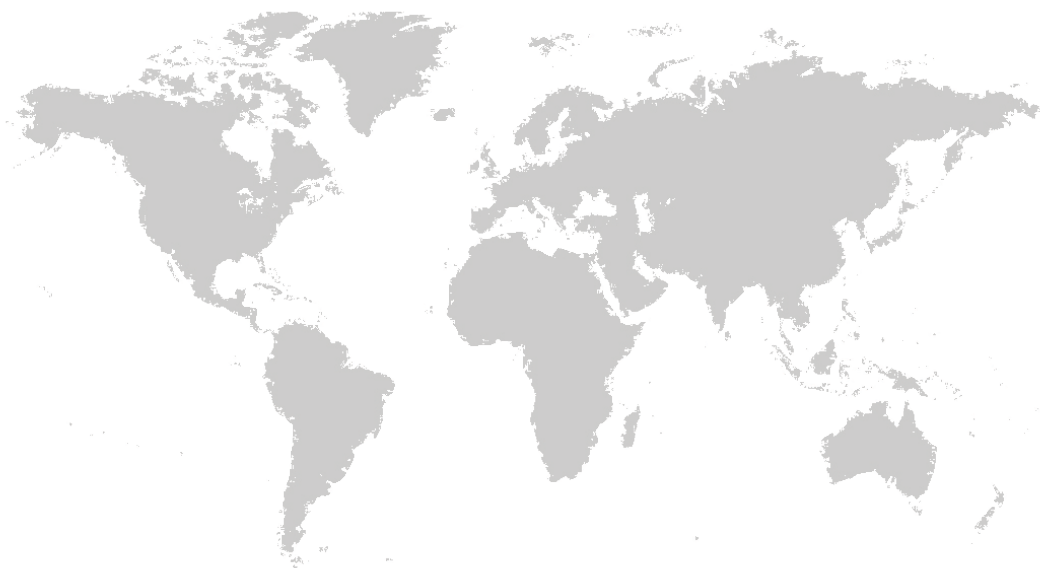


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Introduction:

Articles with a Long Shelf Life

Although I have greatly enjoyed guiding the *Evangelical Review of Theology* into its new era as a freely available, open-access journal, there's one area where I hope to see more improvement. We are publishing interesting and useful articles from all over the world, but I wish that more world-class thinkers wanted to write for the World Evangelical Alliance's primary journal. I would like to see evangelical leaders value *ERT* as one of the best ways to reach a global audience.

Perhaps this issue will advance that vision, because it contains some articles that should remain in circulation for a long time.

The first article, by Andy Messmer (editor of the forthcoming Spanish-language version of *ERT*), is longer than what we usually publish, but it is so coherent, significant and easy to follow that I saw no good reason to break it into two parts. Andy traces, across four major time periods from the early church to the present, what Christians have said about the ideas of biblical inspiration, authority and inerrancy. I hope this essay will become a valuable, widely read resource for evangelicals everywhere.

Glenn Davies, a recently retired Anglican archbishop from Australia, offers a succinct, compelling, scripturally grounded explanation of the continuity in God's administration of law, grace and required obedience across both the Old and New Testaments. When someone claims that the two testaments must not have come from the same God, here is your answer.

Dennis Petri, as international director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom, is one of the world's most important voices on persecution of Christians. His article on Christians in Cuba provides valuable insight into a country where believers have lived under constant restriction and risk of bureaucratic harassment for so long that it seems normal to them.

WEA deputy secretary general Peirong Lin shares an eye-opening, heartfelt message on how theological reflection shapes her daily life as a woman and a migrant now living in Europe.

Two articles contribute enlightening Global South perspectives. Ebenezer Blasu and Joshua Settles consider how attitudes toward mission have changed and how they still need to change as Africa becomes arguably a more Christian continent than Europe. D. Apostle, responding to the eschatological speculations that arose when India suffered a locust invasion last year, compares this modern experience to the one described by the prophet Joel. Finally, James Reiher probes the background of Paul's letter to Philemon and its contemporary applicability.

To expand our capacity to attract high-quality articles, I have wanted to share my role with someone more closely connected to theological education than I am. We have found a great candidate: Francis Jr. Samdao, a pastor and seminary teaching fellow currently completing his ThD in the Philippines. I expect to continue reviewing submissions and copyediting articles as part of my service to the WEA.

Happy reading!

— Bruce Barron, Executive Editor

Paul Was a Religious Extremist Too

Thomas Schirrmacher,
WEA Secretary General

As an evangelical theologian, I affirm that the ‘evangel’, God’s gospel of love and forgiveness, is the sole message of hope for this world. Because God loves this world, we can hope to overcome not only individual but also structural hatred. Through the gospel, not only private enemies but even opposing groups and warlords can achieve reconciliation and justice.

The New Testament demonstrates this by highlighting the conversion of one of the leading religious extremists in first-century Jerusalem. We can easily forget that Paul’s conversion involved not just a personal transformation but a major shift in his view of the relationship between religion and violence.

Before his conversion, Paul believed it was God’s will for him to persecute followers of Jesus with the power of the state and of his religious communion, and even to stone them. Thus he took part in the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, who (like his master Jesus Christ) said, ‘Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they do’ (Acts 7:60).

After his conversion, Paul viewed his former violent behaviour as the clearest expression of his sinful heart and acts (Gal 1:1–3; Phil 3:4–9; 1 Tim 1:13). Instead of killing others, he now was willing to become a martyr for his faith—as he eventually did—without using force to defend himself. His only defence was his personal witness to the gospel.

Interestingly, *Paul never blamed his extremism on Jewish religion or theology, or on his Jewish upbringing or affiliation; rather, he blamed it on his own sinful heart.* He had committed the greatest sin possible and therefore was the first among all sinners (1 Tim 1:15), not worthy to become an apostle (1 Cor 15:9). Paul explained that he had misunderstood God before his conversion and that he had misused and put to shame the name of God as a Jew. He said it was not the Jewish faith but his own heart that made him an extremist and murderer.

Moreover, Paul did not say that as a Christian he would automatically become a peaceful, nice guy. Instead, he reminded his readers again and again that he had left religious extremism behind only by the grace of God and that only the same grace could continuously keep God’s love in his heart. ‘So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!’ (1 Cor 10:12). Paul knew that danger for the church comes more from our sinful heart than from the outside, and that out of the midst of church leadership come wolves that could kill the sheep (Acts 20:29–31).

May we continue to respond to today’s religious extremists with love, for ‘God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God remains in Him’ (1 Jn 4:16).