

New leaders to guide the WEA and its theological work

This issue introduces a new set of leaders in the World Evangelical Alliance and particularly in its global theology and advocacy activities.

Thomas Schirmmacher (Germany), formerly director of the Department of Theological Concerns, became the WEA's Secretary General as of 1 March. Peirong Lin (Singapore), who was human resource director and research coordinator for the department, has taken on the role of Deputy Secretary General for Operations. Brian Winslade of New Zealand is Schirmmacher's deputy for Ministries.

The previous leaders have not gone away. Efraim Tendero (Philippines), who preceded Schirmmacher as Secretary General, has been designated as a WEA Global Ambassador; Ray Swatkowski (US), formerly deputy for Operations, is now the WEA's chief financial officer; and Godfrey Yogarajah (Sri Lanka), the previous deputy for Ministries, has been named chair of the Asia Evangelical Alliance and a member of the WEA's governing International Council.

We have two more leaders to introduce. Schirmmacher's former leadership role in theology and religious freedom has now been split between two highly regarded and influential women: Theresa Lua (Philippines) in Global Theology and Janet Epp Buckingham (Canada) in Global Advocacy.

To mark the occasion, this issue of *Theological News* contains excerpts from Schirmmacher's inauguration message, an article based on an interview with Lua, and an essay from Buckingham.

Schirmmacher: Sharing the DNA of Christianity

This article is excerpted and lightly edited from the message Thomas Schirmmacher delivered on his inauguration as Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance on 27 February 2021.

When Anglican priests and the Salvation Army started to work together in the nineteenth century, people thought that would not be possible. When German Lutheran pastors and professors invited Methodists from the United States to preach the gospel in Germany, that was unheard of.

Today, we are even more diverse confessionally, ethnically, and in language and culture. We have churches in the Brazilian rainforest where they worship ten meters above the ground in high trees, and we have churches on the 20th floor of skyscrapers in Malaysia.

What, then, does it mean to be evangelical?

Well, I can tell you one thing: evangelicals never agreed on politics! You can see this around the globe. There are countries with evangelical members in Parliament on the government side and in the opposition. We did not agree on politics in 1846 either. This is not the secret of the evangelical movement.

For me, to be evangelical implies enthusiasm for the DNA of Christianity. But this requires us to search for the DNA of Christianity.

For example, if someone questions whether the resurrection of Jesus or the story of Pentecost happened, we evangelicals stand for the historicity of our faith. But we do not treat this belief as something specific to us alone. Rather, we think it's the DNA of Christianity that we owe everything to what Jesus did and what the Holy Spirit does.

We are deeply convinced that the Bible is the confession of the Church. But the idea of a paper document that would rule the people comes from the Old Testament. For the ancient Hebrews, the Torah was above the king and everyone else. Some people mock us and say the Bible is our 'paper Pope'. We are proud to have a paper Pope, because it assures us that none of us, including me, are above the Word of God.

The Westminster Confession of 1647 states, ‘The supreme judge by whom all controversies of religion are to be determined and all decrees of councils or opinions of ancient writers and doctrines of man and private opinions are to be examined and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other...’—and now you would expect it to say ‘than the Scriptures’. But no! In 1647, they said the supreme judge ‘can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture’. We believe the Holy Spirit is ruling His Church, but this is not *in opposition* to Holy Scripture. Rather, the Spirit is the author of the Holy Scriptures and is using His constitution, the Scriptures, to rule the Church. That for us is the DNA of Christianity and it is what evangelicals are all about.

Evangelicals have always emphasized that each believer should share the message that Jesus died on the cross for us and that only in Him can we find communion with God and eternal life. But let us look at the 2011 document ‘Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World’, co-authored by the World Evangelical Alliance, the World Council of Churches and the Vatican. It begins by stating that ‘mission is the very being of the Church’ and speaks about every believer being obliged to witness to others about the gospel. Is this emphasis, then, specifically evangelical or is it generally Christian? It is Christian insofar as all churches agree now that mission is the very being of the church. This is the task that Jesus Christ handed to us. Insofar that not everybody is happy about putting it into action, it might be seen as a particular concern of evangelicals. But we have to be very careful about thinking that as evangelicals, we automatically do what Jesus said. Mission is not always the essence of our local churches. We evangelicals often have to be reminded as well to put witnessing to the gospel at the centre of our work.

As another example, let us consider religious freedom and persecution. In 1846, the World Evangelical Alliance was the first large religious body ever to speak up for religious freedom. That meant speaking up against state churches, against Christian nationalism—which is still a hot potato today even within our own ranks—and against the state pressing its religion and its thoughts on the people.



Screenshot of Thomas Schirmacher during his inauguration speech.

At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church said exactly the same thing: that religious freedom is not just a political principle but part of the DNA of Christianity. So is this view evangelical? Well, we have stood for it for a long time. But we did not stand for it as a confessional item, but because we viewed religious freedom as an essential part of pure Christianity. God wants us to trust Him with our lives, but He does not want us to pray to Him because we are forced to or because someone paid us to do it. He wants our trust, our heart and our love, and love is something that cannot be forced.

So I am convinced that the evangelical movement stands up for specific things in the Christian world, but that these things are not specific in the sense that they are owned by us and distinguish us from others; rather, they are the DNA of the Christian faith itself. And when we strive for unity within evangelicalism, if we want to bring the Anglicans, the Pentecostals, the Reformed, the Salvation Army and all those groups in our midst together, we can do it only around the DNA of Christianity. We are open to any other church outside our movement joining us in affirming these aspects of Christianity’s DNA, and we hope wherever possible to extend our vision to many other churches around this world.

I am privileged to serve the World Evangelical Alliance. I know all of us are sinners, and we all come under Holy Scripture, which defines when we fail in what we do. And so I am deeply convinced that only the prayers of millions—along with the prayers of close friends who know my needs more fully—make it possible for me to take over a task that is too big for just one human being.

Meet Theresa Lua, the WEA's new head of global theology

Theresa Roco Lua wanted to get seminary training so she could teach Sunday school and Bible studies. But her performance put her on a pathway of increasing leadership responsibility, culminating in her appointment in February as the World Evangelical Alliance's new Director of Global Theology.

Lua became active with Campus Crusade while an undergraduate student at Far Eastern University in Manila. She entered Alliance Biblical Seminary's M.Div. programme in Christian education in 1987, while continuing to serve as director of Christian education at her home church and conducting Bible studies among the nearby urban poor.

During her last year in seminary, the school's administration encouraged her to pursue doctoral studies. Lua completed her EdD in 1998 and joined the Alliance faculty. She was named academic dean there in 2001. Five years later, she became dean of the Asia Graduate School of Theology's (AGST) consortium of eight post-graduate institutions in the Philippines.

Lua's education leadership role brought her into contact with the Asia Theological Association (ATA), which consists of 361 training institutions in 33 Asian nations, united by a desire to enable Asians to receive high-quality theological education without leaving Asia. She was active in the ATA's accreditation and value-added services before becoming its general secretary in 2016.

'Theological education should serve the church's mission', Lua emphasized. 'I want to make sure that our schools are really equipping church leaders to be effective agents of social transformation.'

Lua commented that Asian seminaries, like many elsewhere in the world, have sometimes been strong in theology but weaker in practical education. 'There was a perception that if you went to seminary, you didn't actually learn much', she said. As one of the few school administrators with a concentration in education rather than theology, she was frequently invited on accreditation visits.

'My contribution has been to make sure that seminary programmes are relevant', Lua explained, 'and to develop contextually appropriate curriculum.'

While at AGST, Lua specialized in developing academic programmes that responded to practical needs of the church, including PhD tracks in holistic child development (in partnership with Compassion), peace studies and transformational development.

As ATA general secretary, Lua has implemented collaborative, multi-year faculty workshops in conjunction with Global Associates for Transformational Education and has led a thorough revision of the ATA accreditation manual, with an emphasis on positioning theological schools to serve the church. She has also contributed to the expansion of the AGST model, with new consortia being launched in Nepal and northeast India.

Lua hopes to replicate globally the ATA's success in fulfilling its goal of 'training Asians in Asia'. She also recognizes that being a rare female leader in theological education opens up special opportunities.

'When I visit other schools, women often thank me for showing that it is possible to be a woman in leadership', Lua commented. 'I want to open doors for other women. But sometimes women in leadership have a tendency to act like honorary males, adopting male qualities in order to survive. I want to encourage women to apply their unique ability to empathize, to be caring and compassionate, and to connect with others with both mind and heart.'

Lua is a board member of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) and of Re-Forma, the WEA-affiliated effort to establish a global standard for pastor training. Her husband, Fernando, is a professor and Vice President for Administration and Finance at the Asian Theological Seminary, a member of the AGST-Philippines consortium.



Dr. Theresa Lua © WEA

IIRF creates new North American office

The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) has established [a new branch in Vancouver](#), in partnership with the Religion in Canada Institute (RCI) of Trinity Western University. The new office will be led by Janet Epp Buckingham, the World Evangelical Alliance's director designate for global advocacy.

'We are excited that the partnership with the RCI adds a new office for a major global region', said Christof Sauer, one of the IIRF's founding directors.

The IIRF now has a presence on five continents, having started with offices in Europe, Africa and Asia in 2006 and having added a Latin American office in 2017.

The RCI, founded in 2007, is run by Buckingham and Paul Rowe, both Trinity Western professors.

'The study of religious freedom has entered a pivotal phase, in which scholars have begun to debate how essential and important this key freedom is for contemporary societies', said Rowe. 'At this point in history, it is vital that people of faith learn to articulate why religious freedom is so important and what it means to the larger expansion of freedom in North America and throughout the world.'

WEA Secretary General Thomas Schirmmayer, a former IIRF director, expressed his appreciation for the partnership. 'The WEA has now bundled its advocacy activities into one department', he stated. 'Our work to help the persecuted church, our religious freedom institutions and human rights advocacy, all our UN offices in New York, Geneva and Bonn, come together under Global Advocacy. These institutions and activities have diverse histories in different departments and contributed in their own unique ways, and the new structural setup will strengthen them as they will benefit from more direct collaboration.'

As for Buckingham's dual role with the WEA and IIRF, Schirmmayer said, 'Over the last three decades, Janet has been involved with most of these various efforts and thus is well equipped to form a unity out of a vibrant staff and busy organizations.'



IIRF Vancouver is represented by Janet Epp Buckingham. Paul Rowe is co-director of TWU's Religion in Canada Institute. © TWU



JOURNALS AND NEWSLETTERS WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT FOR THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Evangelical Review of Theology (quarterly)
<https://theology.worldea.org/evangelical-review-of-theology/>

Islam and Christianity (English and German) (semiannual)
<https://www.islaminstitut.de/en/category/publikationen/journal/>

Jahrbuch für Verfolgung und Diskriminierung von Christen
 [Yearbook on Persecution and Discrimination of Christians]
 (German) <https://www.iirf.eu/journal-books/german-yearbooks/>

International Journal of Religious Freedom (semiannual)
<https://www.iirf.eu/journal-books/iirf-journal/>

Jahrbuch für Religionsfreiheit [Yearbook on Religious Freedom]
 (German) <https://www.iirf.eu/journal-books/german-yearbooks/>

DIGITAL ONLY:

Theological News (quarterly)
<https://theology.worldea.org/theological-news/>

Bonn Profiles (twice a week)
<https://www.bucer.org/resources/bonner-querschnitte.html>

WEA RLC Religious Liberty Prayer News (monthly)
<https://worldea.org/whoweare/newsletter-signup>

Business & Ministry News (Business Coalition) (monthly)
 order from business@worldea.org

Bonner Querschnitte (twice a week) (German)
<https://www.bucer.de/ressourcen/bonner-querschnitte.html>

WEA RLC Research and Analysis Report (periodic)
<https://worldea.org/whoweare/newsletter-signup>

Advocacy and theology must work together

by Janet Epp Buckingham, Director designate for Global Advocacy

It is a privilege to serve the World Evangelical Alliance in the newly created role of Director for Global Advocacy. In many ways, it brings me full circle. I worked with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada as Director of Law and Public Policy from 1999 to 2006. During that time, I advocated for those who were persecuted for their faith in Canada. I also had the opportunity to travel to Geneva for two weeks a year to advocate with Johan Candelin at the United Nations.

In 2006, I felt a strong calling to move to an academic role with Trinity Western University. I have been the director of the Laurentian Leadership Centre, an extension program in Ottawa, Canada, for 15 years. During this time, I have been delivering conference presentations and writing academic articles and books on religious freedom. I have also been on the Academic Advisory Board of the International Institute for Religious Freedom and on the Editorial Board for the *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, for which I became editor in 2019.

My new role with the WEA brings together my advocacy and academic activity, which have been my life's work since I earned my law degree.

I look forward to working with the strong team already in place in Geneva and New York. I would like to see national evangelical alliances better equipped on being advocates in their own countries. I would also like to ensure that they are effectively connected with the international advocacy work of the WEA.

One of the challenges we face as the WEA is to overcome our internal practical and theological differences. The pandemic has made our internal differences quite apparent. COVID-19 has become the rationale for some of the most widespread limitations ever imposed on religious freedom, as governments have required houses of worship to restrict their gatherings or suspend services completely. In Canada, evangelical churches have responded to government restrictions in very different ways, based largely on their theology.

On one hand, many churches followed the model of Romans 13:1: 'Be subject to the governing authorities.' We are in a pandemic, after all; governments are not closing churches for no reason. Churches that followed government restrictions have also felt that they were applying Mark 12:31 and loving our neighbours as ourselves. It is important to protect the health of our neighbours, particularly those who are vulnerable.

Some churches, however, have taken as their New Testament model Acts 5:29, where Peter declared, 'We must follow God rather than men', to the authorities who told him not to preach in Jesus' name. A crisis is a time for churches to be open, particularly for those who are vulnerable. Moreover, some churches hold to a theology according to which the state should be clearly separated from the church. As a result, these churches believe that the state cannot dictate how they will operate, particularly in the area of worship.

Christian leaders on each side of this question have been very critical of those who have taken a different path. Churches have gone to court over the restrictions. Some have faced very high fines. One pastor was arrested and jailed.

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has been asked to advocate for both sides of this issue. This puts them in a very challenging position as they seek to advocate for religious freedom. It is most difficult to take an advocacy position when churches are fighting amongst themselves.

This example demonstrates why there must be good collaboration between theology and advocacy. I look forward to helping the WEA strengthen such collaboration in my new role.

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Remembering Ward Gasque (1939–2020)

W. Ward Gasque, a greatly respected biblical scholar and former member of the WEA Theological Commission, changed his address to heaven on 29 December 2020. He is survived by his wife Laurel and daughter Michelle.

Gasque was the founding professor of New Testament and biblical studies at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada, where he taught for 22 years. ‘Ward was a tireless champion of the emerging vision of biblically serious, intellectually rigorous and truly holistic theological education for the whole people of God’, said Jeff Greenman, Regent’s president.

As an active member of the Brethren Assemblies, Gasque was committed to the training of lay leaders and, perhaps surprisingly, an advocate for women in church leadership.

Amongst the many contributions for which Gasque will be remembered are his internationally acclaimed *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (1989) and works co-authored with other Regent faculty, including *A Guide to Biblical Prophecy* (2001) with Carl Armerding and a commentary on the Pastoral Epistles (1995) with Gordon Fee.

‘Ward Gasque impressed me with his strong physique and even more with his broad theological knowledge’, said Rolf Hille, former chairman of the WEA Theological Commission. ‘As a member of the Commission, he contributed to the success of our deliberations through his balanced judgement and prudence.

‘I particularly appreciated his humour and vision, which were combined with biblical depth. I will never forget the Commission’s visit to Vancouver, where we also had the opportunity to meet his dear wife Laurel as a committed host. We were grateful to Ward for his many good contributions and valued advice.’

Long-time Theological Commission member John Langlois added, ‘He was a tremendous encouragement to so many, including me. He was so extraordinarily busy doing other things, but the very fact that he associated with us was a huge endorsement of the cause in which we were engaged.’



Ward Gasque © Ken McAllister/Regent College

Corneliu Constantineanu, influential Romanian theology leader, dies

Corneliu Constantineanu, a prominent member of the WEA Theological Commission and a giant in evangelical academic and theological leadership in Eastern Europe, died on 17 March after being diagnosed with COVID-19. He was 53 years old and leaves behind his dear wife, Ioana, and daughters Carmen and Anamaria.

Prof Constantineanu pioneered important post-graduate programmes in Christian public theology at Arad State University in Romania and mentored students at various other institutions around the globe. Among his many publications, he served as general editor for the *Central and Eastern European Bible Commentary* and as co-editor for *Mission in Central and Eastern Europe: Realities, Perspectives, Trends* (Regnum). He also wrote in the areas of theology, mission and justice for children at risk, and Paul’s theology of reconciliation.

‘Corneliu was a true servant of God who lived with great integrity, always witnessing to the good news of the kingdom of God with joy, strength and humility’, said Rosalee Velloso Ewell, executive director of the Theological Commission. ‘His unmistakable laughter will be sorely missed.’

Frank Hinkelmann, president of the European Evangelical Alliance, stated, ‘Corneliu has been one of the most prolific evangelical theologians in Eastern Europe, a great networker and to many of us a great friend. His wisdom and experience were greatly appreciated by many of us.’

Speeches from WEA religious freedom diplomacy available

Thomas K. Johnson has been representing the WEA in religious freedom efforts of the US State Department by speaking in Zoom conferences for religious leaders and diplomats from several countries. Two such speeches are available online. [Understanding Religious Persecution](#) was Dr Johnson's contribution to a panel discussion in which he was the Christian speaker, along with Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist participants. [Religious Communities as Good Neighbors](#) was a response to a speech by Shaykh Abdallah bin Mahfudh ibn Bayyah, the main thinker behind some of the recent less extreme Muslim statements coming from the United Arab Emirates.

New WEA theology books; ICETE consultation published

The WEA World of Theology series continues to produce high-quality volumes of contemporary relevance. Here are the newest releases:

- Thomas K. Johnson, senior advisor to the WEA Theological Commission, has released two books. *The Protester, the Dissident and the Christian* is a collection of nine essays on human rights issues. *Humanitarian Islam, Evangelical Christianity, and the Clash of Civilizations: A New Partnership for Peace and Religious Freedom* examines the tenets of the Indonesia-based movement with which the WEA is collaborating and explains the reasons for this partnership.
- Peter Lawrence's *Fellow Travellers* is a fascinating comparative study of the identity development experienced by messianic Jews, Arab evangelicals and Muslim-background believers in the Holy Land. Lawrence shows that although the three groups have face unique challenges and follow very different paths in their spiritual development, they have a strong sense of connection and belonging when they encounter each other as fellow evangelical believers.

These books and all others in the WEA World of Theology Series and Global Issues Series can be downloaded at <https://www.bucer.de/ressourcen/wea-cd.html>.

In addition, Langham Publishing has just released *Whole-Life Mission for the Whole Church: Overcoming the Sacred-Secular Divide through Theological Education*, with material drawn from an International Council on Evangelical Theological Education consultation. The essays from various regional contexts include one by WEA Director of Global Theology Theresa Lua on Asia. Details on the book are available at <https://langhamliterature.org/books/whole-life-mission-for-the-whole-church>.

WEA THEOLOGICAL NEWS

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