

Join in the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, 6 or 13 November

by Janet Epp Buckingham, WEA Director of Global Advocacy

From its founding 175 years ago, religious freedom has been front and centre for the World Evangelical Alliance. One of our core beliefs is that everyone should have the freedom to choose what they believe. Sadly, many people around the world do not have that freedom. Christian minorities face coercion from governments that force the majority religion on everyone. Communist governments repress all religions.

The annual International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP) is an opportunity for Christians to stand with other Christians around the world. Whether you live in a country that respects religious freedom or you face discrimination or persecution, we are all called to pray for those who are persecuted for their faith.

In 2022, the theme for the IDOP is *standing firm* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

The focus countries for the IDOP this year are Afghanistan, Algeria, India and Sri Lanka.

Afghanistan is the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. When the Taliban took over a year ago, most of the small Christian population had to flee or go into hiding.

Algeria is a Muslim state in North Africa. Churches have been forced to close and church leaders have been charged with blasphemy, proselytizing and conducting church activities.

India is a majority Hindu nation where Christianity has been under increasing pressure. Social and family pressure on Christians is on the rise. Governments in 11 states have introduced anti-conversion laws, making it a crime for Christians to share their faith.

Sri Lanka is a majority Buddhist state. Christians have faced violence for many years. This includes incidents of discrimination and intimidation by state officials and instances of harassment and violence by members of the community. Sri Lanka currently faces the additional challenge of a financial crisis.

The WEA encourages churches around the world to pray for fellow believers who face discrimination and intimidation for their faith and to observe the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church on the first or second Sunday of November. You can download resources at idop.org. This year, IDOP will livestream a worship service online on the IDOP.org site on Sunday, 6 November.



THERE ARE THREE WAYS TO SUPPORT THE WEA GLOBAL THEOLOGY DEPARTMENT FINANCIALLY

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- (3) Send a cheque to WEA Business Coalition, Achter de Weiden 47, 22869 Schenefeld, Germany

Asian Theologians Consider the Digital Turn in Education

by Rei Lemuel Crizaldo, coordinator, WEA Theological Commission

The restrictions that came with the COVID-19 pandemic led theological educators to move their classes and learning activities online. As these restrictions are being lifted, educators are asking how to make sense of the digital experience in learning. Should the digital turn usher in a new kind of theological education or is it just an upgrade of the old kind?

The 2022 Triennial Assembly of the Asia Theological Association (ATA), held on 26–30 September in Penang, Malaysia, sought to address that question. Over 200 theological educators from all over Asia and beyond participated, including David Tarus, executive director of the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa. ‘I hope to see Asian scholars collaborating with African scholars on issues that affect the church and society in both Asia and Africa’, Tarus said. ‘We cannot address our blind spots because we can’t see them. Someone else from outside our view must make us aware of them.’

The gathering itself provided a full experience of the diverse and creative ways in which digital technology has become an integral part of theological conversations and learning. WEA secretary general Thomas Schirmmacher kicked off the event with a video greeting from Germany. Heidi Campbell, the world’s leading scholar of digital religion, shared her keynote address from the US; Alexander Chow, a pioneer in the growing field of digital theology, spoke from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland in his closing plenary session.



The conference planning team: Rei Lemuel Crizaldo and Theresa Lua (WEA), Tan Sooi Ling (Asia Graduate School of Theology), Chua Chia Choon (Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary) © WEA

The plenary sessions provided critical examinations of theology, witness, discipleship, community and collaboration in digital education. Twelve workshops explored narrower issues in detail, such as spiritual formation, instructional design, and faculty development. Five theological training organizations shared reflections on their experiences: Asian Theological Seminary (Philippines), Bangkok Bible Seminary (Thailand), Singapore Bible College, South Asia Institute for Advanced Christian Studies (India), and the Program for Theological Education by Extension.

The sessions and discussions provided a deep look into the implications of digital technology and the digital culture that comes with it. Some of the important insights and action points highlighted include the following: the need to affirm the real and lasting human connections possible in digital spaces; the importance of ensuring that educational outcomes and design drive the learning process more than the technological innovations do; the need to stress authenticity and integrity to keep us human and humane amidst an environment increasingly dependent on AI; and a warning not to romanticize either the pre-digital life or being highly digital, since every iteration of technology from the printing press to the metaverse offers both opportunities and pitfalls for the cause of the gospel. Learning needs in a digital age demand more interactivity, context sensitivity, and deep relationality—tasks that call for greater collaboration and collective responsibility within the theological education community.

Ironically in view of the topic, one of the great joys of this triennium was that it took place in person, not virtually. ATA General Secretary and WEA Director of Global Theology Theresa Lua commented, 'Thank God for making it possible for us to gather in person! It is great to be able to hug, shake hands, and laugh together. While you look good on zoom, you look much better in person.'

The triennial assembly provided a timely opportunity to launch the newest titles published by Langham and the ATA:

- Jerry Hwang, *Contextualization in the Old Testament: Between Asian and Western Perspectives*
- Aldrin Penamora and Bernard Wong, *Asian Christian Ethics: Evangelical Perspectives*
- Kiem-Kiok Kwa and Samuel Ka-Chieng Law, *Missions in Southeast Asia: Diversity and Unity in God's Design*

These landmark books by leading Asian theologians can be ordered at <https://langhamliterature.org/>.

WEA partner feature: International Alliance for Christian Education

The International Alliance for Christian Education (IACE) is a network of educational institutions and organizations united by their mutual commitments to Christ-centredness and confessional solidarity. Founded in 2019 with about 60 charter members, IACE today counts among its membership 71 educational institutions and 24 like-minded evangelical organizations. IACE's efforts to engage and serve the global evangelical community have resulted in attracting members from Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia as well as North America.

"We are thankful to participate as partners with the World Evangelical Alliance," IACE President David S. Dockery said. "In the same way as WEA seeks to connect global churches, IACE brings together Christian educators on multiple continents."

Dockery became IACE's founding president in 2019 after a distinguished career that included serving as president of Union University, Trinity International University and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Representatives from primary and secondary schools, gap-year programs, Bible colleges, Christian comprehensive universities, divinity schools and seminaries, in addition to organizations committed to intellectual discipleship and the support of Christian educational entities, can be found among the current IACE membership.

IACE initiatives address the complex challenges of a secularized, specialized, pluralized and privatized 21st-century world.

From its inception, IACE never has sought to supplant or compete with existing alliances or organizations. It seeks instead to complement and partner with those entities whenever possible. At the same time, it maintains a unique focus centred on four key initiatives:



IACE conferees confessing the Nicene Creed together
© WEA



Christ-centred convictions. IACE members and partners focus on the distinctive mission of Christian education by strengthening confessional commitments, Christian worldview focus, and shared efforts to reclaim and advance the best of the Christian intellectual tradition. The leadership of IACE institutions and partners reaffirms commitments to the truthfulness of Holy Scripture and the transformational power of the gospel, affirming both the Nicene Creed and the Lausanne Covenant.

Collaborative and cooperative partnerships. IACE creates collaborative partnerships and network alliances to help connect all sectors of Christian education in a comprehensive manner, in order to encourage cooperation in addressing common challenges.

Cultural engagement and renewal. IACE prepares members for the ever-changing and challenging 21st-century context in which we live, including providing partners to support advocacy efforts as needed. IACE institutions and partners reflect a faithful Christian witness committed to biblical orthodoxy and historic Christian teaching regarding cultural engagement and renewal of the foundational social order, including marriage and family.

Communication, encouragement, and development opportunities. IACE provides a context for meaningful fellowship and encouragement for institutional and organizational leaders. One aspect of this effort supports regular communication to members and partners regarding updates, scholarship and research related to Christian education. IACE seeks out development opportunities for next-generation leaders who can thus become better prepared to serve the church and society.

IACE convenes an annual conference each February, at which attendees discuss a wide array of topics that have a direct impact on their work as educators and administrators. In May, IACE hosts an annual faculty development conference, which offers multiple tracks for new and veteran educators.

This year, IACE has initiated a program that allows students from member schools to pursue educational programs in Washington, DC. It has also begun offering online courses.

More information is available on the IACE website at <https://iace.education>.



IACE President David Dockery with Jerry Kulah, Dean and Vice President at Bishop Innis School of Theology in Liberia © WEA

JOURNALS AND NEWSLETTERS WITHIN THE GLOBAL THEOLOGY DEPARTMENT

Evangelical Review of Theology (quarterly)

<https://theology.worldea.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/>

DIGITAL ONLY

Theological News (quarterly)

<https://theology.worldea.org/theological-news/>

Bonn Profiles (twice a week)

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

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://bonner-querschnitte.de/>

WEA RLC Research and Analysis Report (periodic)

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

All Christians should be either suffering or vicariously suffering. There should be no innocent and neutral bystanders!

Message by Thomas Schirrmacher for the 2022 International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (Scripture text is Hebrews 10:32–35)

In verse 32, the author of the letter to the Hebrews starts with the words, 'Remember those earlier days.' He seeks to embolden his readers in times of suffering, reminding them of how God helped them in previous times of suffering. This is as true on a small scale, in private and family life, as it is in all of church history: God carries his Church forward in the midst of suffering.

What is truly interesting in this text, however, is that the letter to the Hebrews designates all readers as those who have 'endured in the great contest in the face of suffering', independent of whether this occurred through suffering or through vicarious association with suffering!

This description of all Christians as either suffering or caring deeply for those who suffer precisely reflects the objective of the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP), started by the World Evangelical Alliance long ago and shared by a large number of churches, partners, networks and organizations. Christians who suffer and Christians who stand side by side with those suffering seek to build a community of suffering in prayer. Prayer occurs simultaneously in countries where there is persecution of Christians and where there is no persecution of Christians, and any shade in between.

If we do this—if we stand together—then, whether we are hard hit by persecution or not, all of us together 'do not throw away our confidence', and it is this *shared* confidence, according to verse 35, that 'will be richly rewarded'.

A Christian never lives without experiencing the persecution of Christians! Either he is persecuted or he suffers with the fate of those who are persecuted. And whoever suffers, suffers at the same time with others who, perhaps, are suffering even more! Often, the suffering of Christians takes so many different forms that people might pray for a specific suffering church in one place while that church is praying for those suffering in a different area.

The possibility that someone would simply ignore the suffering of another individual or church and just enjoy the fact that things are going well for him, without this turning into thankful and compassionate involvement for the sake of others, is totally foreign to the mind of the writer of Hebrews!

IDOP is a perfect opportunity for all of us to inform ourselves about the global situation of the body of Christ and—at least through prayer—to have fellowship with those who suffer.

Once a Chinese government official told me that China fears being prayed out of office, much as happened to the regime in East Germany at the end of the Soviet empire. And yes, prayer and peaceful actions in many churches played a major role in the fall of the Berlin Wall and other parts of the Soviet empire. But too many Christians relaxed after 1990 and had the impression that the age of persecution of Christians was over. They overlooked the worsening situations in large countries such as Iran and Pakistan, forgot that communism in China did not end, and forgot that not only atheists but also fundamentalist wings in Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism discriminate against and persecute Christians and others. As a result, the religious freedom specialists of the World Evangelical Alliance decided to begin calling publicly for prayer on the largest possible scale. One Sunday a year for the persecuted church—that should be possible for every local congregation!

Even though there are still too many churches and Christians who never think about their suffering sisters and brothers in Christ, thousands and thousands of churches have started to pray once a year. What have the results been? I see three fruits of a quarter-century of IDOP.

1. To suffer with the suffering no longer is something for specialized agencies or special interest groups in congregations, but more and more it has become an ongoing interest for every Christian, just as it should be according to the New Testament. IDOP probably more than anything else has established awareness that persecution is not a rare or local thing that happens from time to time here and there, but is a permanent companion of preaching the gospel, planting churches and helping the needy.

2. IDOP has had a uniting effect. When people suffer or even die for Christ, it is not the time to discuss our differences. United in prayer, evangelicals, including all their friends such as Baptists or Pentecostals, along with Christians of other traditions, realized that we all live and die for the same Saviour Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, the 'ecumenism of martyrs' has helped to correct ecumenism where it tends to be built on the lowest common denominator.

3. IDOP has borne great political fruit. The German Evangelical Alliance started a German version of IDOP from the beginning and installed the Sunday into the church calendar of Germany. Some days before the recognition of IDOP, the largest German newspaper quoted me on its cover. The reaction in the political world was immense. Shortly after that, our federal parliament discussed the persecution of Christians. We had planned only to pray, but God had planned much more.

IDOP has become the largest regular religious freedom event worldwide. Beyond praying for Christians, IDOP has made the situation of other religions and of adherents of non-religious worldviews in countries of concern more widely known to an audience of millions than any other tool. So even though it is a Christian worship service, the effects have benefitted many other people of good will as well. Several governments have taken up the topic of religious freedom for all after years of IDOP in their country, as they know that this topic will come up regularly, again and again.

Hopefully we are like Esther, who did what the letter of Hebrews speaks about centuries before it was written. She was not neutral and selfishly looking out for her own future. She was willing to offer her life to become active on behalf of the endangered people of God. And she organized the people of God to pray on a large scale.

Then God chose to change the situation by himself: 'In that night the king could not sleep' (Esther 6:1). God changed everything without Esther or anyone else in one night. But after that, Esther was needed again. She went back to the king, told the missing part of the story and helped to save God's people. And once again, she called for a large-scale day of prayer by all of God's people.

God can change everything without us. We cannot change anything without God. But God wants us to ask him, in community with all God's people, and then, when he changes things, he graciously makes us a part of his initiatives.

Remembering Brother Andrew, fearless servant of the persecuted church (1928–2022)

Andrew van der Bijl, better known as Brother Andrew and the founder of Open Doors—one of the leading Christian organizations serving the persecuted church—died on 27 September 2022. Brother Andrew first sensed his life calling in 1955, as a young Dutch missionary, when a Christian bookstore owner in Poland told him about the lack of Bibles in the Soviet Union. Determined to get the gospel to places where it was forbidden, he began smuggling Bibles and Christian literature into the Soviet Union, Cuba, China and other countries.

The World Evangelical Fellowship (predecessor to the current WEA) gave Brother Andrew its Religious Liberty Award in 1997. The WEA works closely with Open Doors to obtain and disseminate information on the status of Christians facing persecution around the world.

New WEA book on applying the Ten Commandments today

WEA senior theological advisor Thomas K. Johnson has co-edited with William S. Barker a provocative new book in the WEA World of Theology series. Called *The Decalogue Project: Disciples from Six Continents Engage God's Ten Commandments*, it contains 18 original essays by Christian leaders. We asked Dr. Johnson to explain the importance of this book, which will become available online this month.

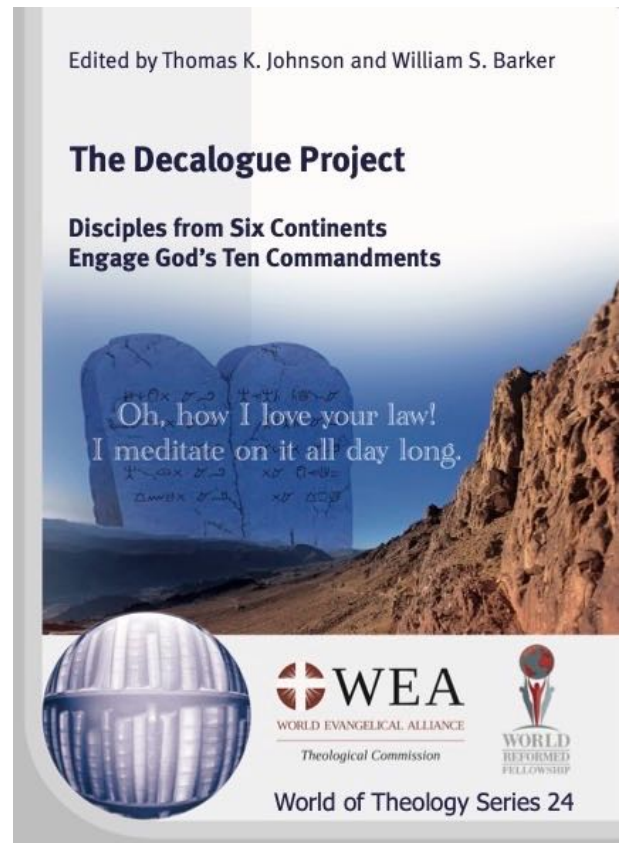
Why should Christians in the 21st century, living in hundreds of nations and lands and speaking more languages than we can count, engage an ancient text from more than 3,000 years ago, written in a script that feels strange to our eyes? Because as disciples of Jesus, we must engage with and respond to God's commands as Jesus did.

By the distinct way in which Jesus arranged the setting of his Sermon on the Mount, as well as by the themes he addressed, Jesus called our attention to the similarities and differences between the Ten Commandments, given to Moses at Mount Sinai, and Jesus' definition of discipleship as preached by the Sea of Galilee. At Sinai the people cried, 'Now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will consume us. If we hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore, we shall die' (Deut 5:25). They did not all die immediately, but Moses went up Mount Sinai to represent the people and receive God's law. In stark contrast, God incarnate sat down with his friends in Galilee. 'For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (Jn 1:18). But when Jesus began to teach, he said, 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets' (Mt 5:17). He then corrected destructive misunderstandings of God's commands, pointing out how they were always addressed to the deepest desires of our hearts.

In this book, as our team of 18 scholars, pastors, ministry leaders, and experts in different fields discusses God's commandments, there is constant interaction with the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ. The diversity of callings among the authors leads to a variety of writing styles, and the wide range of themes in the Ten Commandments lends a certain comprehensiveness to the project. Our entire team recognizes that our embrace of God's law can never be separated from trust in his gospel of forgiveness.

The contributors to this project were recruited by Dr. Sam Logan, retired director of the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF), as a gift to the WEA Theological Commission. All the authors have some connection to the WRF, but there is still significant denominational variety among them. We discuss the classic topics raised by the Ten Commandments, but with significant new wrinkles, such as how the church deals with addiction to pornography, abortion and the abuse of women.

We call this book a 'project' not just because it was a significant undertaking for us, but because we believe God's people should be continuously engaged in the life-long project of relating God's Word to God's world. May this book help you do so. Soli Deo Gloria!



WEA co-sponsors Weekend of Prayer and Action Against Hunger

God calls all of us to be generous to the poor. 'Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed' (Proverbs 19:17). Right now, 45 million people, including 21 million children, are at risk of experiencing famine due to a deadly mix of conflict, climate change and COVID-19's devastating economic impacts.

Moreover, the war in Ukraine has dramatically increased the costs of commodities, fuel and fertilizer, supercharging the hunger crisis and creating the potential for mass starvation across hunger hotspots in many parts of the world.

Churches worldwide are joining together for the second Weekend of Prayer and Action Against Hunger on 14–16 October 2022, coinciding with World Food Day on 16 October. This is an opportunity to pray for the poor and consider how believers can aid the hungry in our communities and around the world.

A global virtual prayer event will occur on 14 October, at 9:00 a.m. GMT and again at 5:00 p.m. GMT. Rei Lemuel Crizaldo, coordinator of the WEA Theological Commission, will be among the participants. You can register for the prayer event and get resources for churches at <https://www.wvi.org/emergencies/hunger-crisis/weekend-of-prayer>.



WEA THEOLOGICAL NEWS

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