

## About Lausanne

What is Lausanne?  
Lausanne History  
Lausanne Timeline  
Support Lausanne  
Contact Lausanne

## 2004 Forum

2004 Forum Information  
2004 Forum IG Sign-In

## Lausanne Documents

Lausanne Covenant  
Manila Manifesto  
Other Statements  
Occasional Papers  
Archives

## News and Events

LCWE Newsletter  
News Releases  
Upcoming Events  
Past Events

## Links

Lausanne Women's Network  
LC for Jewish Evangelism  
Other Links

## Search the Site

## Other Important Links

**Who is Jesus?**  
**How can I personally know Jesus?**  
**MisLinks (links to missions-related web sites)**



Lausanne Committee  
for World Evangelization

[www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org)

## Statement to the Churches on Nominality

*from the Lausanne International Consultation on Nominalism (High Leigh, Hoddesdon, U.K., December 1998)*

### 1. The Consultation

1.1 In December 1998 65 men and women from 15 countries and all six continents met to discuss ministry in relation to nominality among people who identify themselves as Christians. Those gathered represented a wide range of denominations and traditions. They shared a common concern about the challenges in pastoral care and evangelisation posed by nominal Christianity.

1.2. The Consultation was organised by Christian Research of the UK under the auspices of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. The process involved Bible study and discussion as well as input from church leaders, theologians, leaders of Christian organisations and researchers from many places. A central feature of the Consultation was discussion with five people who agreed to be identified as nominal Christians.

### 2. Nominality

2.0 The Consultation considered nominality from various viewpoints: theological, sociological, historical, statistical and pastoral. The definition used in the Studies of Biblical characters was those who appear to belong to the people of God but by their behaviour and attitudes cast doubts on that identification (Luke 6:46; 2 Timothy 3:5; and Revelation 3:1). Nominality takes a variety of forms throughout the world, depending on the relationship between church and society. For the ease of discussing nominality, the following three headings were used.

#### 2.1 Nominality among those who have never attended church

2.1.1 Several researchers spoke of people who identify themselves as Christians, for example in surveys or censuses, but who are not actively involved in the life of churches. There are no accurate figures on church attendance around the world. However, it has been estimated that in 1995 there were 1,614 million people who would identify themselves as Christians. Only 909 million of these were members of churches or frequent Mass attenders. This means there were 705 million people who were not in these categories, 44% of the whole.

2.1.2 The proportion of people who identify themselves as Christians but do not attend a church is probably larger than that. For example, in Australia, 70% of the population

identified themselves with a Christian denomination in the 1996 government census, but church surveys showed that on a typical Sunday only 10% attend a church.

2.1.3 There are many reasons why people describe themselves as Christians but do not attend churches. Some feel that Christian values and principles are important, but church attendance is not. Some want the rites of passage but are not interested in further involvement. Others are uncomfortable in the churches, either because they feel socially or culturally different, because they have other priorities, or because they sense their morals or lifestyles are unacceptable to those who attend.

2.1.4 Others do not attend because they have never been invited, or their friends and family do not attend, or because they have never felt attracted to a church.

## 2.2 Nominality among those who have ceased to attend church

2.2.1 In many countries, large numbers are leaving the churches. While some leave because faith is no longer meaningful, others are disillusioned. Some are put off by the style of church life, or problems such as poor leadership or inappropriate handling of church finances. Many leave because they feel burned out and no longer capable of giving of themselves personally.

2.2.2 For example, a survey in 1994 in Costa Rica showed that 81% of people who joined a Protestant church left within five years. While many of these returned to Catholic churches, about half cut their links with all religious groups. One British study showed that 62% of those who left church did so because they found it lacked relevance. Another British study showed that 40% of those who left returned to church after an average of 8 years away.

## 2.3 Nominality among those who do attend church

2.3.1 The consultation recognised that faith is more complex than statistics can explore. Many people attend church whose faith may be described as nominal in that it has little influence on their daily lives, habits or personal devotion. Others attend but their conviction or commitment is weak. In this context, it was acknowledged that no community of faith, or individual, whether ordained or lay, demonstrates fully the life that God desires for the People of God.

2.3.2 Nominality, in some instances is demonstrated when church attendance is combined with worldviews, moral values and spiritualities, or with practices and attitudes which are antithetical to the Christian faith. For example, while 92% of youth in Nairobi attend church, 40% admit holding ethical views contrary to the Biblical teaching in their churches and thus are in danger of becoming nominal.

2.3.3 Many people attend church merely because it is seen either as socially appropriate or is tied to their ethnic, class, national or other group identity. Some people attend only to conform to the desires of their parents, families, or peer group.

### 3. Issues Raised by Nominality

3.1 At the Consultation several people who agreed to be identified as nominal Christians were interviewed. It was evident that many consider churches and their spokespersons as judgmental and lacking care and understanding, for example, in relation to sexuality. Churches are sometimes seen as insensitive to the complexity of life and as being simplistic, rigid, arrogant and exclusive. Churches which have no place for doubt make other people suspicious. Some churches appear more concerned with internal issues such as theological agendas, power structures and bureaucracy, rather than with the issues of life outside.

3.2 Those who do not attend may be open to spirituality and Christian values yet be suspicious of institutional religion. Many stereotypes about the Christian faith and churches have been fed by the media and traditions. However, the churches need to appreciate the perspectives of those who do not attend, and recognise their doubts about the value of church structures and the relevance of Christian beliefs.

3.3 It was recognised that the churches themselves must accept some responsibility for those who have left. They may need to reappraise forms of government and administration and use of facilities to avoid burn-out and disillusionment. Ways must also be found to develop gifts and involve lay people in ministry while recognising the variety of pressures in life.

3.4 In ministry to those who attend churches, the Consultation affirmed the importance of helping people to work through the implications of faith in their daily lives. Churches should be encouraged to help Christians discern and resist the relentless pressures of the modern world, consumer cultures, mass media and self-centred values. Christians should be encouraged to review their use of time and money, attitudes to relationships in family and community life, and their service of others, particularly those with special needs. Those in ministry in churches should model and encourage Christians to take seriously personal devotional life, prayer, Bible study and meditation, to value the presence of God and to seek a deeper understanding of the Bible.

3.5 The Consultation acknowledged that the ways in which worship is expressed and Christian education is conducted may sometimes discourage people from involvement. It stresses the importance of providing worship and Christian education in forms which are culturally comprehensible and relevant to the lives of those involved.

### 4. Ministry in relation to nominality

4.0 Those at the Consultation recognised the need to present practical implications to the churches. The following issues seemed to be of particular, wide-spread relevance for ministry.

#### 4.1 Culture

4.1.1 Around the world, most cultures are being impacted

by globalization and are experiencing unprecedented change. The Consultation affirmed strongly that the churches need to grapple with the changes taking place in their context, and find both appropriate Christian responses to the ways of life and appropriate cultural forms for Christian education and worship. It must consider issues such as the breakdown of traditional family structures, and the ways in which people increasingly identify with a range of relational networks other than the community where they live.

4.1.2 As part of the process of responding to cultural change, the Consultation affirmed the need to discern the nature and consequences of these changes and to think through the appropriate responses. Further work is needed in many places to identify those groups in the population who feel alienated from the church and its structures by reason of culture, age, gender, race, physical, mental or economic disadvantage, or levels of formal education. It is important to identify ways of being the church which are inclusive and which express faith relevantly to every group within the population.

## 4.2 Children and Young People

4.2.1 It was noted that in most places these cultural changes are having the greatest impact upon children and young people resulting in a growing distance between the lives of young people and the churches. In Costa Rica, 65% of children in Protestant churches leave before they reach adulthood. Similar problems exist in many parts of the world. Urgent attention needs to be given not only to evangelising children without church connections but also to supporting parents and churches in the passing on of faith to their children. Traditional forms of ministry among children are proving totally inadequate in a mass media age. Churches must develop new and appropriate forms of church life and support for Christian nurture of children and young people within not only the church context but also the family environment so that children grow into mature adult Christians.

## 4.3 Communication

4.3.1 Churches should encourage openness and dialogue in communication, by urging those who attend to be vulnerable, to admit to struggles and doubts, and to seek intellectual honesty in open engagement with those who have other points of view. Churches should also encourage the demonstration of faith in unconditional love, non-manipulative friendships, and unselfish care. At the same time, there is great value in ordered, structured and intentional teaching programs through which the Christian Gospel is communicated. Various examples of fresh ways to effectively communicate the Gospel were shared at the Consultation.

4.3.2 Churches need to ensure that their forms of communication keep pace with cultural and technological

changes, while remaining faithful to the Gospel of Christ.

#### 4.4 Leadership

4.4.1 During this period of change innovative leadership is sorely needed in every part of the world. The churches must identify people called of God who understand the culture and can proclaim Christ and live out their faith relevantly within it. In many places, theological education is doing little to equip future ministers to struggle with the issues of life and society. In-service training is needed to convey new insights and skills to meet contemporary challenges. The Consultation affirmed the need to facilitate leaders at every level within the churches, both clergy and lay, to equip the whole people of God to function effectively in their contexts.

#### 5. Conclusion

5.1 The Consultation recognised that there is no sharp distinction between ministry in relation to nominality and all other ministry. God continually invites all people to a deeper faith in Christ and a growing commitment to follow Him, responding to and being sustained by the grace which has been shown in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and inspired by the indwelling Spirit. The prayer of the Consultation was that God would revitalise the whole Church, transforming the cultures and societies of the world, placing the Good News of the faith before all people, and drawing nominal Christians to a life-transforming faith in Christ.

5.2 This statement is an agreed summary of the findings of the Consultation.

End of Statement

#### *Addendum*

The following papers written for the Consultation are available from Christian Research in a book entitled *They Call Themselves Christian*, edited by Heather Wraight. It is available from Christian Research. See contact information below.

1. Brierley, Peter, "Numbering the Nominals"
2. Chandran, Emil, "Nominality and City Youth: A Case Study of Nairobi, Kenya"
3. Finney, John, "Evangelism in the 21st Century"
4. Gibbs, Eddie, "Introduction & Literature Review"
5. Gibbs, Eddie, "Nominality in the West"
6. Gomez, Jorge, "The Costa Rican Experience"
7. Hille, Rolf, "German nominality"
8. Houston, Tom, "Biblical character studies of Lot, Esau, Saul, Judas and Simon Magus"
9. Hughes, Philip, "Nominality in Australia"
10. Macdonald, Fergus, "The Challenge of Nominality"
11. Osei-Mensah, Gottfried, "Nominality in Africa"
12. Morris, Doug, "The Roman Catholic Lapsed"
13. Sine, Tom, "Why are the Nominals Nominal?"
14. Skaaheim, Anfin, "An Historical Perspective"

During the Consultation five people willing to be identified as nominal Christians were interviewed. These interviews were video taped. Contact Christian Research

for information about their availability.

*Further information: Christian Research, Vision Building, 4 Footscray Road, Eltham,  
London, SE9 2TZ UK.*

*Tel: +44 (0)20 8294 1989. Fax: +44 (0) 20 8294 0014. E-mail:*

*[Admin@christian-research.org.uk](mailto:Admin@christian-research.org.uk) Web: [www.christian-research.org.uk](http://www.christian-research.org.uk)*

*One copy of any translation of this statement must be lodged with Christian  
Research.*

*Copyright © 1998 Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and Christian  
Research.*

## **"The Whole Church Taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World!"**



Alliance Member  
Gospel Communications Network  
Report problems to [asm@lausanne.org](mailto:asm@lausanne.org)