



The Thailand Statement
Consultation on World Evangelization
Pattaya, Thailand (June 16-27, 1980)

Introduction

We have gathered at Pattaya, Thailand, for the Consultation on World Evangelization, over 800 Christians from a wide diversity of backgrounds, nations and cultures.

We have spent 10 days together in a fellowship of study, praise and prayer. We have celebrated God's great love for us and for all humanity. We have considered before him and under his Word the command of our Lord Jesus Christ to proclaim the gospel to all people on earth. We have become freshly burdened by the vast numbers who have never heard the good news of Christ and are lost without him. We have been made ashamed of our lack of vision and zeal, and of our failure to live out the gospel in its fullness, for these things have lessened our obedience and compromised our witness. We have noted that there are hard places where opposition is strong and evangelism is difficult. At the same time, we have rejoiced to hear how God is at work in his world, and how he is making many peoples receptive to his Word.

Our consultation has been held in the ancient Kingdom of Thailand, and we are grateful for the welcome which we have received from the hospitable Thai people. In particular we have enjoyed fellowship with Thai church leaders, and have sought to share the concern of their hearts that, after more than 150 years of Protestant missions, considerably less than 1% of their country's 45 million people confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Close by, on the country's eastern border, are hundreds of thousands of refugees from neighbouring countries. They symbolize both the political ferment of the world and the tragic suffering of millions of human beings. We denounce the injustice of which they are victims, and have struggled to understand and feel their plight. We thank God for those Christians who have been among the first to go to their aid. We thank him also that growing numbers of them, uprooted from their ancestral homes and cultural inheritance, are finding in Jesus Christ a new security and a new life. We have made a solemn resolution to involve ourselves more actively in the relief and rehabilitation of refugees throughout the world.

The Mandate for World Evangelization

We believe that there is only one living and true God, the Creator of the universe and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; that he has made all men, women and children in his own likeness; that he loves all those whom he has made, although they have rebelled against him and are under his judgment; and that he longs for their salvation. He sent his Son Jesus Christ to die for sinners and, having raised him from the dead, has given him universal authority, that every knee should bow to him and every tongue confess him Lord. This exalted Jesus now sends us, on whom he has had mercy, into the world as his witnesses and servants.

As his witnesses he has commanded us to proclaim his good news in the power of the Holy Spirit to every person of every culture and nation, and to summon them to repent, to believe and to follow him. This mandate is urgent, for there is no other Saviour but Jesus Christ. It is also binding on all Christian people. As the Lausanne Covenant declares, the evangelistic task requires the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world (para. 6).

We are also the servants of Jesus Christ who is himself both the servant and the Lord. He calls us, therefore, not only to obey him as Lord in every area of our lives, but also to serve as he served. We confess that we have not sufficiently followed his example of love in identifying with the poor and hungry, the deprived and the oppressed. Yet all God's people should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression (Lausanne Covenant, para. 5).

Although evangelism and social action are not identical, we gladly reaffirm our commitment to both, and we endorse the Lausanne Covenant in its entirety. It remains the basis of our common activity, and nothing it contains is beyond our concern, so long as it is clearly related to world evangelization.

The Primacy of Evangelization

The Lausanne Covenant declares that "in the church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary" (para. 6). This is not to deny that evangelism and social action are integrally related, but rather to acknowledge that of all the tragic needs of human beings none is greater than their alienation from their Creator and the terrible reality of eternal death for those who refuse to repent and believe. If therefore we do not commit ourselves with urgency to the task of evangelization, we are guilty of an inexcusable lack of human compassion.

Some two-thirds of the world's four and a half billion people have had no proper opportunity to receive Christ. We have considered the value of thinking of them not only as individuals but also as people groups who perceive themselves as having an affinity with one another. Many are within easy reach of Christians. Large numbers of these are already Christian in name, yet still need to be evangelized because they have not understood the gospel or not responded to it. The great majority of people in the world, however, have no Christian neighbours to share Christ with them. They can therefore be reached only by cross-cultural messengers of the gospel. We confidently expect that these will increasingly come from all countries, as the Christian mission becomes universalized, and we will work to keep this challenge before the churches.

Some Vital Aspects of Evangelization

At Lausanne our theme was Let the Earth hear his voice; in Thailand it has been How shall they hear? So we have searched the Scriptures daily in order to learn more about the God who speaks, the message he has spoken, and the people to whom and through whom he speaks.

We have reaffirmed our confidence in the truth and power of God's Word, and our desire to let his voice penetrate our cultural defences. We have recognized the local church as the principal agency for evangelism, whose total membership must therefore be mobilized and trained. We have heard the call to be sensitive to other people's cultural patterns and not to try to impose on them our own. We have also acknowledged the indispensable necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit, and of prayer to the sovereign Lord for boldness to speak for him.

For five of our ten days together we have divided into 17 mini-consultations, all of which have concentrated on how to reach particular peoples for Christ. These mini-consultations have built upon a lengthy study programme in which hundreds of groups throughout the world have been involved. Our purpose has been to consider important issues of theology and methodology, in relation to our approach to different peoples, in order to develop realistic strategies for evangelism.

Many of the reports have called for a change in our personal attitudes. The following four have been particularly emphasized:

The first is *love*. Group after group has asserted that "we cannot evangelize if we do not love." We have had to repent of prejudice, disrespect and even hostility towards the very people we want to reach for Christ. We have also resolved to love others as God in Christ has loved us, and to identify with them in their situation as he identified himself with us in ours.

Secondly, *humility*. Our study has led us to confess that other people's resistance to the Gospel has sometimes been our fault. Imperialism, slavery, religious persecution in the name of Christ, racial pride and prejudice (whether anti-black or anti-white, anti-Jewish or anti-Arab, or any other kind), sexual oppression,

cultural insensitivity, and indifference to the plight of the needy and the powerless—these are some of the evils which have marred the church's testimony and put stumbling blocks in other people's road to faith. We resolve in future to spread the gospel with greater humility.

Thirdly, *integrity*. Several groups have written about the character and conduct of the message-bearer. Our witness loses credibility when we contradict it by our life or life style. Our light will shine only when others can see our good works (Matt. 5:16). In a word, if we are to speak of Jesus with integrity, we have to resemble him.

The fourth emphasis has to do with *power*. We know that we are engaged in a spiritual battle with demonic forces. Evangelism often involves a power encounter, and in conversion Jesus Christ demonstrates that he is stronger than the strongest principalities and powers of evil by liberating their victims. Strategy and organization are not enough: we need to pray earnestly for the power of the Holy Spirit. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of boldness.

Cooperation in World Evangelization

We have been deeply concerned during our consultation to strengthen evangelical cooperation in global evangelization, for no single agency could accomplish this enormous task alone.

We joyfully affirm the unit of the Body of Christ and acknowledge that we are bound together with one another and with all true believers. While a true unity in Christ is not necessarily incompatible with organizational diversity, we must nevertheless strive for a visible expression of our oneness. This witnesses to Christ's reconciling power and demonstrates our common commitment to serve him. In contrast, competitive programmes and needless duplication of effort both waste resources and call into question our profession to be one in Christ. So we pledge ourselves again, in the words of the Lausanne Covenant, "to seek a deeper unity in truth, worship, holiness and mission" (par. 7).

It is imperative that we work together to fulfill the task of world evangelization. Cooperation must never be sought at the expense of basic biblical teaching, whether doctrinal or ethical. At the same time, disagreement on non-essentials among those equally concerned to submit to Scripture should not prevent cooperation in evangelism. Again, cooperation must never inhibit the exercise of the diverse gifts and ministries which the Holy Spirit gives to the people of God. But nor should the diversity of gifts and ministries be made an excuse for non-cooperation.

Yet obstacles to cooperation remain, which involve genuine problems and complex issues. Some of these reflect either the social, political, geographical and cultural circumstances or the ecclesiastical traditions from which we come. Others reflect tensions between different forms of ministry (e.g. between traditional church structures and those which are not directly accountable to churches) or between different evangelistic strategies and methodologies. These and other tensions are real and must be frankly faced. They do not release us, however, from our responsibility to explore with creativity different levels of cooperation in evangelism. We are determined to work more closely together. The Scripture urges us to "stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27).

We believe that God has given a special role to the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization to act as a catalyst for world evangelization. We desire therefore to give it a further mandate to stimulate evangelism throughout the world, on the basis of the Lausanne Covenant, and in growing cooperation with others of like mind.

Our Commitment to Christ

In the light of his clear command to go and make disciples of all nations, his universal authority and his love for all humanity, we solemnly make the following commitment to Christ, which we shall seek his grace to fulfill:

1. We pledge ourselves to *live* under the lordship of Christ, and to be concerned for his will and his glory, not our own.
2. We pledge ourselves to *work* for the evangelization of the world, and to bear witness by word and deed to Christ and his salvation.
3. We pledge ourselves to *serve* the needy and the oppressed, and in the name of Christ to seek for them relief and justice.
4. We pledge ourselves to *love* all those we are called to serve, even as Christ loved us, and to identify with them in their needs.
5. We pledge ourselves to *pray* for the church and for the world, that Christ will renew his church in order to reach his world.
6. We pledge ourselves to *study* God's Word, to seek Christ in it, and to relate it to ourselves and our contemporaries.
7. We pledge ourselves to *give* with the generosity of Christ, that we may share with others what he has given to us.
8. We pledge ourselves to *go* wherever Christ may send us, and never to settle down so comfortably that we cannot contemplate a move.
9. We pledge ourselves to *labour* to mobilize Christ's people, so that the whole church may take the whole gospel to the whole world.
10. We pledge ourselves to *cooperate* with all who share with us the true Gospel of Christ, in order to reach the unreached peoples of the world.
11. We pledge ourselves to *seek* the power of the Spirit of Christ, that he may fill us and flow through us.
12. We pledge ourselves to *wait* with eagerness for Christ's return, and to be busy in his service until he comes.

We believe that God, who has uniquely exalted his Son Jesus Christ, has led us to make these pledges to him. With hope and prayer we invite all Christ's followers to join us in our commitment, so that we may work together for the evangelization of the world.