
World Missions Following San Antonio and Manila

Statement of the European Convention of Confessing Fellowships at its meeting in Frankfurt, March 1990

Introduction

Twenty years ago, on March 4, 1970, the Theological Convention of Confessing Fellowships published its widely acclaimed "Frankfurt Declaration on the Fundamental Crisis of Missions". At its 44th meeting, March 6-8, 1990, the Theological Convention addressed itself anew to a theological understanding of Christian world-mission in the modern age, for the following three reasons:

First of all, the Convention wanted to reflect upon and to reconsider that earlier event and what lay behind it. Secondly, it appeared necessary to the Convention to clarify the concept of mission in the light of various projects for increased missionary endeavour at the approach of the third millennium. Thirdly, the Convention was spurred on by two international conferences which have given new impetus to world mission in the past year. The first of these was the World Missions Conference sponsored by the **World Council of Churches**, held in **San Antonio**, Texas, May 21-31; the other was the Second International Congress for World Evangelization, convened by the evangelical **Lausanne Movement** and held in **Manila** (Philippines) July 11-20.

In reflecting upon these conferences, we were guided especially by the question whether the fundamental crisis of world Mission, as indicated by us in 1970, had in the meantime been resolved. Is there perhaps a growing theological consensus between the two mission movements, at that time so divergent, a consensus which may promise future cooperation and eventual unification? In response to this key question the European Convention of Confessing Fellowships was led to present the following statement of its position.

I The Results from San Antonio

A What awakened evangelical hopes

1 Not since the Willingen Conference of 1952 had biblically-minded participants of such a congress been able to bring in significant scriptural statements about the content and goal of mission, and that even in the first of the four sectional reports ("Turning to the Living God"). Particularly important here are the references to the Triune God as the Author and Sustainer of the mission of the Church, to God's merciful disposition to us in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord and Saviour, as well as to the commission of the Church to present a united witness to God's reconciling love in Him.

2 That the biblical understanding of salvation was able to get a hearing at this juncture was primarily due to the fact that the drafting of this Sectional Report was done by an evangelical theologian, Professor David Bosch. Numerous

representatives of the Orthodox Churches, especially the Greek missiologist Bishop Anastasios of Androussa,¹ exhibited the same spirit.

3 The attention drawn by Bishop Lesslie Newbigin to the special challenge which the secularization of the modern world poses to Christian mission - a point not included in the official agenda - was specially welcomed by evangelical participants as a necessary admonition to the Geneva Ecumenical Movement that it should address anew the question, "How can the West be converted?"

B What still challenges us to be on our guard

1 In San Antonio the former director of the WCC Division for World Mission and Evangelism, Dr Eugene Stockwell, and his successor, Dr Christopher Duraisingh, clearly displayed their openness to a new understanding of salvation in social and political terms and to Utopian ideas of a renewed world-order.²

2 Above all they posited an alleged saving revelation of God in the non-Christian religions as well. They arrived there by such offensive statements as "Jesus is the only way by which most of us have found the way to God ... But in our encounters with people of other faiths we cannot deny that many of them have a profound relationship with God."³ This is a direct contradiction of the statement of Jesus in John 14:6, "No one comes to the Father, but by me", as well as of the basic apostolic message in Acts 4:12, "There is salvation in no one else ..."

3 The report of Section II (Participating in Suffering and Struggle), set alongside the Section I report as having equal importance, brings to light a massive social-revolutionary reversal of the message of Christ. Derived from this is a political commission to the disciples of Jesus "to join with the oppressed in the struggle for the transformation of society".⁴ The commission of Jesus, according to Mt 28:18-20, stands fundamentally opposed to this.

4 In the same Section the "Intifada", the Arab revolt against Israeli sovereignty, is described uncritically as "an authentic manifestation of the creative power" (of the church).⁵ In contrast to this partisanship for the Palestinians, the key significance of Israel in the saving purpose of God (Rom 9-11) was not mentioned at all.

5 The Section I report commends the "Conciliar Process" which like the New Age Movement, has as its goal a world which is politically, economically and religiously unified.⁶

6 For the first time at an ecumenical conference on mission, representatives of other religions were invited to San Antonio, not just as observers, but also as consultants. In the sections and in the plenary sessions they participated fully in the conversation.

7 We recognize that there were in San Antonio some good insights and worthy individual contributions. But to our sorrow, because of the points we have listed above, we are not able to identify any change of direction in the Geneva Department for World Mission and Evangelism. Those in charge are obviously continuing to follow the course set since Uppsala (1968), with which we first took issue in our Frankfurt Declaration of 1970.

C The “bridge-building” of some Evangelicals was premature

1 In an attempt at bridge-building a group of about 160 participants at the San Antonio Conference “representing evangelical concerns” signed an Open Letter to the impending Lausanne Congress in Manila.⁷ The letter contains a report of their “many good experiences” at the ecumenical conference. It also makes a plea for an acknowledgement of the social and political involvement of the World Council of Churches, and recommends, on the basis of an alleged “consensus” between “Ecumenicals” and “Evangelicals”, that the Geneva Commission on World Mission and the Lausanne Movement hold their next world conferences in partial cooperation, at the same time and in the same place.

2 In the light of the results from San Antonio the European Conference of Confessing Fellowships is not able to share the concerns and the viewpoint of this Letter. For this reason it expresses its appreciation to the Lausanne Executive Committee for not having adopted its proposal. Because of the existing theological attitudes such a coming together of the two movements would lead to unhealthy confusion. Indeed, on the evangelical side it could mean a disastrous distortion of world mission today.

II The Significance of the Manila Congress

A A good continuation of Lausanne I

Taken as a whole we find the course and the results of the Second International Congress for World Evangelization to be a cause for great thanksgiving. The “Manila Manifesto” provides hope for us that the evangelical movement will remain true to its stated programme in the “Lausanne Covenant” of 1974. We welcome especially the following aspects of the Manila Congress:

1 Lausanne II upheld with the utmost clarity the biblically-revealed uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father for all mankind. Thus the Geneva understanding of mission and dialogue was clearly rejected.

2 The assembly emphasised strongly the urgency of witnessing to Christ among people who have not yet been reached with the Gospel. In keeping with the Lausanne Covenant Para 6, the assembly thus held firmly to the propriety of proclamation in the overall task of mission.

3 Underscored at the same time was the special responsibility of Christian witnesses toward the physical and social needs of the recipients of the message. The millions of handicapped persons were identified as a frequently overlooked mission-field.

4 The Church of Jesus Christ as a whole was viewed as the mediator of the evangelistic witness, and the responsibility of the local congregation was emphasised.

5 More clearly than in earlier times the Lausanne Movement in Manila took its stand with brothers and sisters suffering persecution for Jesus’ sake.

6 The Lausanne Executive Committee, following the appeal from Os Guinness, adopted the slogan “Mission in the modern world without worldliness in

mission” to express the central challenge of the years to come.

B Weaknesses appearing at the Congress

Despite our appreciation of Lausanne II in Manila we do not overlook the theological vagueness which the Congress occasionally showed. In particular the following questions were not satisfactorily answered:

1 Does the biblical order of things, with its greater emphasis on salvation than on physical well-being (Mk 1:34-38; 2:5) remain intact if, in the framework of Manila’s “integrated” understanding of mission, the physical need of the person carries the same weight as his/her spiritual need?

2 Which theological understanding of “the poor” is presupposed, where the poor are especially declared to be the recipients of the message about Christ? What constitutes that poverty which the Bible addresses?

3 What theological understanding of “fulness of the Spirit” applies when this appears as the prerequisite for empowered evangelism? Moreover, what is the relationship of “signs and wonders” to the missionary message, when the Scriptures often associate these with the deception which will occur in the last days (Mt 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:4f; Rev 13:13)?

4 What is the relationship between the Kingdom of God, in its present and future form, and the Church of Jesus Christ?

5 By what right does the Congress apply the term “incarnational” - a term which stems from the doctrine of the Son of God becoming flesh - to the requirement for mission to adapt itself to the social and cultural environment?

6 In the perspective of the Bible and of the Reformation, what interpretation do the non-Christian religions receive, particularly as touching their demonic side (1 Cor 10:20f; 2 Cor 6:14-16) - an aspect which is frequently overlooked?

7 What is the significance of biblical eschatological prophecy for the orientation and form of evangelism? It is precisely at this point that the Congress fell short of giving full answers to the theme which it set for itself, “Proclaim Christ until he comes!”

C Signs of threatening influences

Along with a certain theological weakness the Manila Congress also brought to light some alien influences affecting the Lausanne Movement. These could, if they remain unchecked, pose a serious threat to the further course of the Movement as a healthy institution. There are in particular three sources of danger which we see here:

1 The first is the steady advance of the “Charismatic Movement”, which sees itself as a spiritual renewal movement. Especially in its “third wave” it lays claim to being the decisive force for the renewal of Christendom as a whole, and as an eschatological empowering for its mission. Apart from this rather presumptuous self-assessment in comparison with other renewal movements and traditions, the Charismatic Movement directly endangers the biblical understanding of mission. For there is a shift here in the central proclamation, away from Christ Crucified

(1 Cor 1:22-23; 2:2) toward the manifestations and gifts of the Holy Spirit. This leads to a certain loss of spiritual reality and balance. The practical danger to mission begins where, with this new quest for the Spirit - who according to the Johannine witness is the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17; 15:20) - there is no consequential enquiry into biblical truth and sound doctrine (1 Tim 1:3; 4:1,16), nor a compliance with the command to discern the spirits (2 Cor 11:4; 1 Jn 4:1-6).

2 Second, and of equal note, is the no less determined effort of the so-called "radical evangelicals" to set up a "Kingdom Theology", which arises out of an "integrated" understanding of salvation and mission (see above, II B 1). What is dangerous here is the levelling-out of the divinely-ordained eras in salvation history which have to do with the final realization of God's saving purpose. For the most passionate advocates of this theology the corresponding view of mission is very close to that of the social revolutionaries in the Geneva Ecumenical Movement. This further encourages attempts at "bridge-building".

3 Finally, questionable influences are also present where individuals and organizations attempt to calculate and contrive in advance their missionary results according to their own set goals ("AD 2000"). They rely on carefully calculated statistics and the use of modern strategies and technologies. What is dangerous here is an excessive trust in human ability to achieve something which God alone can grant, and a resulting perversion of God's mission into a human mission.

III Towards a biblical "heilsgeschichtlich" view of Mission

Our position as so far explained has shown, on the one hand, our concern for the direction of the Geneva Division of Missions, in which it has calmly estranged itself from the biblical view by locking mission into a "here and now" exhibition of salvation and unity. On the other hand, regarding the Lausanne Movement, we have expressed our appreciation, while at the same time addressing the theological weaknesses and external influences which could endanger its scriptural basis.

Therefore the future of efforts toward international mission appears promising to us only in so far as both streams, by rejecting any anti-biblical spirit and resisting all alien influences, come to a renewed and deepened consciousness of the biblical "heilsgeschichtlich" ie salvation-history view of mission. This present statement is to be understood as an earnest call to such a consciousness, in thankful indebtedness to a heritage which was grounded in the missiology of the Reformation and of classical Pietism. We are reminded of the fact that representatives of this heritage - men such as Karl Heim, Karl Hartenstein and Walter Freytag - once desired to integrate this in a helpful and corrective way into the ecumenical theology of mission. In the present discussion about the commission of the Church of Jesus Christ in this world there are above all ten key affirmations concerning the biblical "heilsgeschichtlich" thought about mission, which appear to us to be crucial:

1 The Source, Content and Goal of Mission

Mission arises out of the biblically-revealed plan of salvation of the Triune God (Jn 3:16; Eph 1:9-10; 1 Tim 2:4), and proclaims the good news that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19-21). Through this established work of reconciliation people are rescued out of their sinful and lost condition, brought under the merciful rule of Christ (Col 1:12-14; 1 Pet 2:9), and prepared for the coming glorious Kingdom of God (Mt 25:34; 1 Cor 15:24-28). The ultimate goal is “that God may be all in all”. Mission, then, is to concern itself, first and last, with giving glory to the holy God!

2 Mission’s Message of Hope

Mission addresses a message of true hope to a humanity which has fallen prey to spiritual ruin and, as a result, is also increasingly threatened by external disaster (Acts 2:40; Gal 3:15; Eph 2:1ff; 1 Tim 4:10; Tit 1:2). The “poor in spirit”, that is, those who realize their full helplessness and humbly acknowledge that they can make no demands upon God (Mt 5:3; Is 57:15), are the ones who accept the gospel and experience its joy. Having been reconciled to God through Christ, our persistent trust in Him allows us to bear patiently the sufferings of the present age (Rom 5:1-5; 8:17-25) and encourages us at the same time to alleviate or to prevent the suffering of our fellow human beings (Lk 12:35-48; Gal 6:9f; Jas 2:14-17).

3 The Empowering for Mission

Mission is only possible through reliance upon the personal presence of the exalted Son of God, promised to his messengers (Mt 28:20), and upon the help of the Holy Spirit, who is responsible for the effective delivery of the message (Jn 16:8-11; Acts 1:8). Since the task of mission can only be accomplished in the closest possible fellowship with the Triune God, a firm steadfastness in Him and in His Word and Sacrament (Jn 6:53-58; 15:1-8; 1 Cor 11:26) is the basic prerequisite for all missionary activity. In addition to this the prayers of the missionary church are extremely important (Eph 6:18-20).

4 The Battlefield of Mission

Just as the Son of God came into the world to free it from its demonic occupying forces through his own obedience unto death (Jn 12:31; 1 Jn 3:8b), so also does Jesus send his disciples (Jn 20:21) into the world as sheep among wolves (Mt 10:1,16). Christian mission bears in mind the fact that the people of this fallen world, in every area of their lives, their religions and their cultures, all stand within the devil’s sphere of influence (Lu 4:6; Jn 14:30; 1 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2; Rev 12:9). Only by accepting for themselves the victory won at Golgotha (Rev 12:11) is it possible for those who come to faith to be saved from this perilous situation (Acts 14:15; Heb 2:14). This missionary battle against the cunning spiritual powers of darkness must not be confused with political battles; it can only be fought with spiritual weapons (Eph 6:10-18). Already during this period of evangelization the redemption of the world to its Creator is occurring by stages (Mt 22:44; Lu 10:18; Jn 12:31; 1 Cor 15:24-28; Rev 12:8f), so that various cultures

may enjoy its benefits (Phil 4:8; Rev 21:24). The ultimate overthrow of the devil will not, however, take place until the Lord returns with his heavenly host (Rev 12:12; 19:11-20; 21:24). At that time the Lord will separate for ever the saved from the disobedient (Mt 24:31-46).

5 Mission, the Holy Spirit, and the Discerning of Spirits

Mission follows the biblical admonition to discern the spirits (1 Jn 4:1-3), for Satan is able to masquerade as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:3-4,14). The Holy Spirit does not seek personal glory, but rather glorifies Christ (Jn 16:13f). With a positive watchfulness we must distinguish the Holy Spirit from the human spirit, as from all living and deceitful spirits of demons (Acts 16:16-18), which, with all their many manifestations, are forerunners of the coming Antichrist (2 Thess 2:7-12; 1 Jn 4:3).

Since the Holy Spirit, by whom all born-again Christians are baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13), apportions gifts to each member of the body as He wills (v11), we have no right to strain after a supposed "fulness of the Spirit" which necessarily shows itself in the reappearance of all the early Christian miracles. The authorization which Jesus promised his disciples for their mission is much more to be seen in the continual assistance of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will fill us and guide us (Gal 5:18; Eph 5:18), so as to lead us into all truth (Jn 16:13; 14:26), and through our witness convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement to come (Jn 16:7-11). To those authorized by Christ the Spirit gives power for the preaching of the Word, so that all who believe can make their own the priceless gift which Christ himself purchased for us on the cross, namely the forgiveness of sins (Jn 20:22f).

6 The Prospects for Mission

It is sufficient for the messengers of the Lord to know that while spiritual fruit is indeed promised for their faithful service there can be no guarantee of full success within the present order (Jn 15:16). Rather we have to be prepared to meet increased spiritual struggles and persecutions as well as to suffer rejection (Mt 10:16-25; Jn 15:18-21). According to Jesus' prophecy, his return - which we are not able to calculate - will not be preceded by a Christianization of the world but by a great falling-away (Mt 24:9-13). Therefore a readiness for sacrifice and martyrdom, together with an active brotherly sympathy for those who suffer because of their witness to Christ, will be positive proof of our own faithfulness (1 Pet 5:8; Rev 2:10; 12:11).

7 Church of Christ, Kingdom of God and Mission

By mediating the Lord's own Gospel of the Kingdom (Mk 1:15) mission prepares the way for God's sovereign rule which he will set up when he returns in glory (Mt 24:31). His church gathered together throughout the world represents the new humanity (Rom 5:14; 2 Cor 5:17f; Eph 2:14-16) and already constitutes in this passing age the merciful dawning of that kingdom of Christ. As a truly alternative fellowship - that is, a fellowship which has been renewed by the Holy Spirit - the Church provides a foretaste of the coming kingdom of peace (Is

2:2-4) through its activity of love (Rom 13:8-10; 2 Pet 1:7) and justice. In this way, by the power of God's act of reconciliation in Christ, the church contributes to change in the world and in society from within (Mt 13:33; Philemon; 1 Pet 2:9f; Jas 2:14-17).

8 The Temporary Nature of the Social Achievements of Mission

In respect of the role that we as Christians are commanded to fill in the bringing about of more human standards of living (Jer 29:7; Mt 5:13-16), mission soberly recognizes the limited and temporary nature of all efforts which have as their goal the preserving and reorganizing of conditions in the world (Mt 26:11). Mission is aware of the inevitable end of the first creation, as a result of sin and the power of death which have invaded it (2 Pet 3:7-10). The promise of a "holistic salvation" will not be realized until the future redemption of our bodies (Phil 3:20f), in connection with the eschatological renewal of the entire creation which "groans until now" (Rom 8:18-25). For this reason a "holistic salvation" cannot merely form the content of a "holistic programme of mission".

In the same way, the solidarity which mission ought to display with suffering humanity must not be allowed to lead us into involvement with selfish power-struggles. It is for this very reason that we are not able to call such solidarity "incarnational", for Christ's own incarnation took the exact opposite direction, namely the renunciation of power (Phil 2:5-8)!

9 The Urgency of Mission

Mission is spurred on by a sense of holy urgency precisely because it awaits the complete fulfilment of the biblical promises of salvation at the return of Christ (Heb 9:28b). Jesus linked his second coming, for the completion of his redemptive work, with a preceding testimony to his Gospel among all peoples, including Israel (Mt 24:14; Acts 1:6-8; Rom 11:25-27; 1 Cor 9:16). At the same time mission is carried out in the awareness of the seasons of salvation history - "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk 21:24b; Acts 16:9f) - which God has personally set for the proclamation of the Gospel and for its saving effects in those who receive it. At the time when the full number of the Gentiles have entered into salvation, then all Israel will be saved and God's purpose will have reached its triumphant goal (Rom 11:11-15; 25-36).

10 The Confidence of Mission

Mission takes place in the joyful confidence that Jesus Christ, on the basis of the victory he has already won (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14-16) and of his approaching final victory at the Consummation (1 Cor 15:25f; Rev 19), will guide the work of his commissioned messengers step by step toward the fulfilment that God has prepared (Phil 1:6). There is no human or superhuman adversary who can thwart this victory (Is 46:9f; 55:8-13; 1 Cor 15:57f)!

The Outlook

We came together in Frankfurt at a time when striking events seem to be on the increase, not only in the political history of nations - as witness the break-up of the former "Eastern Bloc" - but also in the natural order and in the life of the

churches. The fact that at the same moment in Seoul, South Korea, the "World Convocation for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation" was meeting gave us pause for reflection. For at that conference the "Conciliar Process", given its initial impulse in Germany, attained for the first time a global ecumenical dimension. In our judgement the Conciliar Process presents a threat to the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ, in the form of a radical concentration on worldly issues which leads to a perversion of the Church's redemptive commission.

More important for us, however, was the gratifying news of newly opening doors to areas in which the gospel could not be freely proclaimed up to now.

Such a combination of circumstances at this time holds for us the force of a divine admonition, to respond all the more carefully and obediently to the mandate of Jesus for mission and evangelism. Indeed, Jesus himself urged us to discern the signs of the times (Mt 24:32-33; Jn 21:7-31). We are aware that only God the Father knows the final hour of history (Mk 13:32), but we are commanded to be always ready (Lu 12:39f) and to prove ourselves to be faithful servants in the carrying out of Christ's commission, calmly and soberly, until He comes again. Jesus Christ has promised, "Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing" (Lk 12:43).

Therefore we unanimously uphold the theme of the Lausanne II Congress: "Proclaim Christ until he comes!"

References

- 1 As the conference moderator he gave a keynote address to San Antonio - which unfortunately was hardly discussed by the Conference - printed in the Conference Report: International Review of Mission, Vol LXVIII, Nos 311/312 (July/October 1989): pp 311-328
- 2 Cf the papers by Dr E Stockwell ("Mission Issues for Today and Tomorrow", *ibid*, pp 303-315) and Ch Duraisingh ("San Antonio and some Continuing Concerns of the CWMA", *ibid*, pp 400-408)
- 3 E Stockwell, *ibid*, p 343
- 4 *Ibid*, p 357
- 5 *Ibid*, p 365
- 6 *Ibid*, p 356 Cf P Beyerhaus/L E.v. Padberg (editors): *Der konziliare Prozess - Realitat und Utopie*, Asslar 1990
- 7 IRM (July/October 1982): pp 431-435

This statement was accepted unanimously by the participants of the EUROPEAN CONVENTION OF CONFESSING FELLOWSHIPS and signed on behalf of the INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN NETWORK by the Rt Rev Oskar Sakrausky (Honorary President) and Professor Dr Peter Beyerhaus (President).

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