

The Lausanne Covenant

INTRODUCTION

We, members of the Church of Jesus Christ, from more than 150 nations, participants in the International Congress on World Evangelization at Lausanne, praise God for his great salvation and rejoice in the fellowship he has given us with himself and with each other. We are deeply stirred by what God is doing in our day, moved to penitence by our failures and challenged by the unfinished task of evangelization. We believe the Gospel is God's good news for the whole world, and we are determined by his grace to obey Christ's commission to proclaim it to all mankind and to make disciples of every nation. We desire, therefore, to affirm our faith and our resolve, and to make public our covenant.

1. THE PURPOSE OF GOD

We affirm our belief in the one-eternal God, Creator and Lord of the world, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who governs all things according to the purpose of his will. He has been calling out from the world a people for himself, and sending his people back into the world to be his servants and his witnesses, for the extension of his kingdom, the building up of Christ's body, and the glory of his name. We confess with shame that we have often denied our calling and failed in our mission, by becoming conformed to the world or by withdrawing from it. Yet we rejoice that even when borne by earthen vessels the gospel is still a precious treasure. To the task of making that treasure known in the power of the Holy Spirit we desire to dedicate ourselves anew.

(Isa. 40:28; Matt. 28:19; Eph. 1:11; Acts 15:14; John 17:6, 18; Eph 4:12; 1 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 12:2; II Cor. 4:7)

2. THE AUTHORITY AND POWER OF THE BIBLE

We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. We also affirm the power of God's word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. The message of the Bible is addressed to all men and women. For God's revelation in Christ and in Scripture is unchangeable. Through it the Holy Spirit still speaks today. He illumines the minds of God's people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole Church ever more of the many-colored wisdom of God.

(II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:21; John 10:35; Isa. 55:11; 1 Cor. 1:21; Rom. 1:16, Matt. 5:17,18; Jude 3; Eph. 1:17,18; 3:10,18)

3. THE UNIQUENESS AND UNIVERSALITY OF CHRIST

We affirm that there is only one Savior and only one gospel, although there is a wide diversity of evangelistic approaches. We recognize that everyone has some knowledge of God through his general revelation in nature. But we deny that this can save, for people suppress the truth by their unrighteousness. We also reject as derogatory to Christ and the gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies. Jesus Christ, being himself the only God-man, who gave himself as the only ransom for sinners, is the only mediator between God and people. There is no other name by which we must be saved. All men and women are perishing because of sin, but God loves everyone, not wishing that any should perish but that all should repent. Yet those who reject Christ repudiate the joy of salvation and condemn themselves to eternal separation from God. To proclaim Jesus as "the Savior of the world" is not to affirm that all people are either automatically or ultimately saved, still less to affirm that all religions offer salvation in Christ. Rather it is to proclaim God's love for a world of sinners and to invite everyone to respond to him as Savior and Lord in the wholehearted personal commitment of repentance and faith. Jesus Christ has been exalted above every other name; we long for the day when every knee shall bow to him and every tongue shall confess him Lord.

(Gal. 1:6-9; Rom. 1:18-32; I Tim. 2:5,6; Acts 4:12; John 3:16-19; II Pet. 3:9; II Thess. 1:7-9; John 4:42; Matt. 11:28; Eph. 1:20,21; Phil. 2:9-11)

4. THE NATURE OF EVANGELISM

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world.

(I Cor. 15:3,4; Acts 2: 32-39; John 20:21; I Cor. 1:23; II Cor. 4:5; 5:11,20; Luke 14:25-33; Mark 8:34; Acts 2:40,47; Mark 10:43-45)

5. CHRISTIAN SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all people. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression. Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, color, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an

unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.

(Acts 17:26,31; Gen. 18:25; Isa. 1:17; Psa. 45:7; Gen. 1:26,27; Jas. 3:9; Lev. 19:18; Luke 6:27,35; Jas. 2:14-26; Joh. 3:3,5; Matt. 5:20; 6:33; II Cor. 3:18; Jas. 2:20)

6. THE CHURCH AND EVANGELISM

We affirm that Christ sends his redeemed people into the world as the Father sent him, and that this calls for a similar deep and costly penetration of the world. We need to break out of our ecclesiastical ghettos and permeate non-Christian society. In the Church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary. World evangelization requires the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world. The Church is at the very centre of God's cosmic purpose and is his appointed means of spreading the gospel. But a church which preaches the cross must itself be marked by the cross. It becomes a stumbling block to evangelism when it betrays the gospel or lacks a living faith in God, a genuine love for people, or scrupulous honesty in all things including promotion and finance. The church is the community of God's people rather than an institution, and must not be identified with any particular culture, social or political system, or human ideology.

(John 17:18; 20:21; Matt. 28:19,20; Acts 1:8; 20:27; Eph. 1:9,10; 3:9-11; Gal. 6:14,17; II Cor. 6:3,4; II Tim. 2:19-21; Phil. 1:27)

7. COOPERATION IN EVANGELISM

We affirm that the Church's visible unity in truth is God's purpose. Evangelism also summons us to unity, because our oneness strengthens our witness, just as our disunity undermines our gospel of reconciliation. We recognize, however, that organizational unity may take many forms and does not necessarily forward evangelism. Yet we who share the same biblical faith should be closely united in fellowship, work and witness. We confess that our testimony has sometimes been marred by a sinful individualism and needless duplication. We pledge ourselves to seek a deeper unity in truth, worship, holiness and mission. We urge the development of regional and

functional cooperation for the furtherance of the Church's mission, for strategic planning, for mutual encouragement, and for the sharing of resources and experience.

(John 17:21,23; Eph. 4:3,4; John 13:35; Phil. 1:27; John 17:11-23)

8. CHURCHES IN EVANGELISTIC PARTNERSHIP

We rejoice that a new missionary era has dawned. The dominant role of western missions is fast disappearing. God is raising up from the younger churches a great new resource for world evangelization, and is thus demonstrating that the responsibility to evangelize belongs to the whole body of Christ. All churches should therefore be asking God and themselves what they should be doing both to reach their own area and to send missionaries to other parts of the world. A reevaluation of our missionary responsibility and role should be continuous. Thus a growing partnership of churches will develop and the universal character of Christ's Church will be more clearly exhibited. We also thank God for agencies which labor in Bible translation, theological education, the mass media, Christian literature, evangelism, missions, church renewal and other specialist fields. They too should engage in constant self-examination to evaluate their effectiveness as part of the Church's mission.

(Rom. 1:8; Phil. 1:5; 4:15; Acts 13:1-3, I Thess. 1:6-8)

9. THE URGENCY OF THE EVANGELISTIC TASK

More than 2,700 million people, which is more than two-thirds of all humanity, have yet to be evangelized. We are ashamed that so many have been neglected; it is a standing rebuke to us and to the whole Church. There is now, however, in many parts of the world an unprecedented receptivity to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are convinced that this is the time for churches and para-church agencies to pray earnestly for the salvation of the unreached and to launch new efforts to achieve world evangelization. A reduction of foreign missionaries and money in an evangelized country may sometimes be necessary to facilitate the national church's growth in self-reliance and to release resources for unevangelized areas. Missionaries should flow ever more freely from and to all six continents in a spirit of humble service. The goal should be, by all available means and at the earliest possible time, that every person will have the opportunity to hear, understand,

and to receive the good news. We cannot hope to attain this goal without sacrifice. All of us are shocked by the poverty of millions and disturbed by the injustices which cause it. Those of us who live in affluent circumstances accept our duty to develop a simple life-style in order to contribute more generously to both relief and evangelism.

(John 9:4; Matt. 9:35-38; Rom. 9:1-3; I Cor. 9:19-23; Mark 16:15; Isa. 58:6,7; Jas. 1:27; 2:1-9; Matt. 25:31-46; Acts 2:44,45; 4:34,35)

10. EVANGELISM AND CULTURE

The development of strategies for world evangelization calls for imaginative pioneering methods. Under God, the result will be the rise of churches deeply rooted in Christ and closely related to their culture. Culture must always be tested and judged by Scripture. Because men and women are God's creatures, some of their culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because they are fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic. The gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture. Missions have all too frequently exported with the gospel an alien culture and churches have sometimes been in bondage to culture rather than to Scripture. Christ's evangelists must humbly seek to empty themselves of all but their personal authenticity in order to become the servants of others, and churches must seek to transform and enrich culture, all for the glory of God.

(Mark 7:8,9,13; Gen. 4:21,22; I Cor. 9:19-23; Phil. 2:5-7; II Cor. 4:5)

11. EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP

We confess that we have sometimes pursued church growth at the expense of church depth, and divorced evangelism from Christian nurture. We also acknowledge that some of our missions have been too slow to equip and encourage national leaders to assume their rightful responsibilities. Yet we are committed to indigenous principles, and long that every church will have national leaders who manifest a Christian style of leadership in terms not of domination but of service. We recognize that there is a great need to improve theological education, especially for church leaders. In every nation and culture there should be an effective training program for

pastors and laity in doctrine, discipleship, evangelism, nurture and service. Such training programs should not rely on any stereotyped methodology but should be developed by creative local initiatives according to biblical standards.

(Col. 1:27,28; Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5,9; Mark 10:42-45; Eph. 4:11,12)

12. SPIRITUAL CONFLICT

We believe that we are engaged in constant spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers of evil, who are seeking to overthrow the Church and frustrate its task of world evangelization. We know our need to equip ourselves with God's armor and to fight this battle with the spiritual weapons of truth and prayer. For we detect the activity of our enemy, not only in false ideologies outside the Church, but also inside it in false gospels which twist Scripture and put people in the place of God. We need both watchfulness and discernment to safeguard the biblical gospel. We acknowledge that we ourselves are not immune to worldliness of thoughts and action, that is, to a surrender to secularism. For example, although careful studies of church growth, both numerical and spiritual, are right and valuable, we have sometimes neglected them. At other times, desirous to ensure a response to the gospel, we have compromised our message, manipulated our hearers through pressure techniques, and become unduly preoccupied with statistics or even dishonest in our use of them. All this is worldly. The Church must be in the world; the world must not be in the Church.

(Eph. 6:12; II Cor. 4:3,4; Eph. 6:11,13-18; II Cor. 10:3-5; I John 2:18-26; 4:1-3; Gal. 1:6-9; II Cor. 2:17; 4:2; John 17:15)

13. FREEDOM AND PERSECUTION

It is the God-appointed duty of every government to secure conditions of peace, justice and liberty in which the Church may obey God, serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and preach the gospel without interference. We therefore pray for the leaders of nations and call upon them to guarantee freedom of thought and conscience, and freedom to practice and propagate religion in accordance with the will of God and as set forth in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We also express our deep concern for all who have been unjustly imprisoned, and especially for

those who are suffering for their testimony to the Lord Jesus. We promise to pray and work for their freedom. At the same time we refuse to be intimidated by their fate. God helping us, we too will seek to stand against injustice and to remain faithful to the gospel, whatever the cost. We do not forget the warnings of Jesus that persecution is inevitable.

(I Tim. 1:1-4, Acts 4:19; 5:29; Col. 3:24; Heb. 13:1-3; Luke 4:18; Gal. 5:11; 6:12; Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-21)

14. THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Father sent his Spirit to bear witness to his Son; without his witness ours is futile. Conviction of sin, faith in Christ, new birth and Christian growth are all his work. Further, the Holy Spirit is a missionary spirit; thus evangelism should arise spontaneously from a Spirit-filled church. A church that is not a missionary church is contradicting itself and quenching the Spirit. Worldwide evangelization will become a realistic possibility only when the Spirit renews the Church in truth and wisdom, faith, holiness, love and power. We therefore call upon all Christians to pray for such a visitation of the sovereign Spirit of God that all his fruit may appear in all his people and that all his gifts may enrich the body of Christ. Only then will the whole church become a fit instrument in his hands, that the whole earth may hear his voice.

(I Cor. 2:4; John 15:26;27; 16:8-11; I Cor. 12:3; John 3:6-8; II Cor. 3:18; John 7:37-39; I Thess. 5:19; Acts 1:8; Psa. 85:4-7; 67:1-3; Gal. 5:22,23; I Cor. 12:4-31; Rom. 12:3-8)

15. THE RETURN OF CHRIST

We believe that Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly, in power and glory, to consummate his salvation and his judgment. This promise of his coming is a further spur to our evangelism, for we remember his words that the gospel must first be preached to all nations. We believe that the interim period between Christ's ascension and return is to be filled with the mission of the people of God, who have no liberty to stop before the end. We also remember his warning that false Christs and false prophets will arise as precursors of the final Antichrist. We therefore reject as a proud, self-confident dream the notion that people can ever build a utopia on earth. Our Christian

confidence is that God will perfect his kingdom, and we look forward with eager anticipation to that day, and to the new heaven and earth in which righteousness will dwell and God will reign forever. Meanwhile, we rededicate ourselves to the service of Christ and of people in joyful submission to his authority over the whole of our lives.

(Mark 14:62; Heb. 9:28; Mark 13:10; Acts 1:8-11; Matt. 28:20; Mark 13:21-23; John 2:18; 4:1-3; Luke 12:32; Rev. 21:1-5; II Pet. 3:13; Matt. 28:18)

CONCLUSION

Therefore, in the light of this our faith and our resolve, we enter into a solemn covenant with God and with each other, to pray, to plan and to work together for the evangelization of the whole world. We call upon others to join us. May God help us by his grace and for his glory to be faithful to this our covenant! Amen, Alleluia!

THE STORY OF THE LAUSANNE COVENANT: CASE STUDY IN COOPERATION

by Rev. Tom Houston, Lausanne International Director (1989-93), Minister-at-Large (1994-98)

The [Lausanne Covenant](#) has been a significant development in cooperation between Christians. The way it was drawn up in 1974 and followed through is a case study on cooperation.

THE MIRACLE

That the Lausanne Covenant was agreed upon by 2,300 people from 150 nations from all branches of the Christian church in the space of ten days is one of the miracles of contemporary church history. Some say that if we attempted it now, it would not be possible. So we need to understand how it came to be adopted at the time and afterwards.

THE SECRET

Humanly speaking, the Covenant was adopted with such wide agreement because it broadened the world view of evangelicals in such a way as to put together in one document an acceptable statement about matters that had been increasingly in tension both in the experience of individuals and in relationships between groups. How this came about was a significant work of the Holy Spirit in our time.

THE QUESTIONS

Someone has said that a theology is a set of answers based on the Scripture to the set of questions that any generation is asking. At Lausanne, the Christians faced their current questions and found answers in Scripture that provided new impetus towards the evangelization of the world. The coming together of different Christians from so many cultures made it possible for us to widen our concerns to include the burning questions of the day.

- The relationship of evangelism and social concern, raised by the rapid growth in awareness of poverty and injustice in the world and the effects of (natural and human-made) disasters.
- Unity, diversity and cooperation among Christians, raised by the post World War II development of the ecumenical movement in the World Council of Churches.
- The uniqueness of Christ, raised by the advocacy of tolerance of other religions.
- The validity of missions, raised by the call for a moratorium of missions that had been issued by some Two-Thirds World church leaders.
- The work of the Holy Spirit in evangelism, raised by the rapid growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.

- Religious liberty and human rights, raised by heightening awareness through modern media of the infringement of these rights in many parts of the world.
- The relationship of the Gospel to culture, raised by its spread into many cultures and the self consciousness of these cultures in the post imperial independence movements.

THE METHOD

- Those present were closely involved in the process of drawing up the Covenant. The Congress papers were sent to participants months before the Congress and response to the papers was made almost as a condition of attending. The papers and the responses to them were analyzed and from this the first draft of the Covenant was produced near the beginning of the Congress. Participants were asked individually and in groups to comment in writing on this and one other draft before the final document was produced. This meant that there were no surprises and it made agreement easier at the end.
- The document was for evangelical leaders as individuals and it was to be a covenant to pray, plan and work together for the evangelization of the whole world. This gave the happy combination of belief and practice that is found in the Bible.
- The common ground held by evangelical leaders was reaffirmed in contemporary language.
- The raw material for the discussion was not only Scripture, it was experience as represented in the scores of workshops and seminars given by practitioners on every conceivable aspect of evangelism.
- The questions being asked were legitimized. Where there was agreement, it was stated. Where there were disagreements they were

noted as areas that required more work, rather than reasons for going separate ways.

- Commitment was asked for. It was a commitment to world evangelization on the basis of the beliefs and practices spoken of in the Covenant. This commitment was private and has never been published. Some took months to send in their commitment because they had to adjust things in their lives before they could conscientiously sign it.
- A group was authorized to continue the work begun. The Lausanne Continuation Committee was its first name.

OWNERSHIP

The Committee has never regarded itself as the Custodian of the Covenant. This was given freely to the world and allowed to make its own way.

- The Covenant has been translated locally into more than 20 languages.
- It has been adopted by hundreds of churches and parachurch agencies as their basis of operations and cooperation.
- It has led to formations of a number of national and regional movements in Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa, North America and Latin America. It has stimulated movements such as the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE) and the Chinese Coordinating Committee for World Evangelization (CCCOWE).
- It has been the basis for international consultations on more than 30 subjects, many of whose findings are published in Lausanne Occasional Papers.

All of this has meant that people worked at its concepts and made them their own locally. The Covenant has become a catalyst for many cooperative movements, mostly ad hoc and short term and non-competitive with others.

COOPERATION

The words in the Covenant that relate to cooperation were a significant help towards its realization. It blessed the "wide diversity of evangelical approaches". It admitted that we have some "Ecclesiastical Ghettos" that we need to get out of. It spoke about churches sometimes being in bondage to culture, rather than to Scripture.

It admitted that "Visible unity is God's purpose", but was quick to say that many of the forms of organizational unity do not necessarily forward evangelism.

Individualism is called sinful and duplication is called needless. These were new words for some in an evangelical document.

Maybe the most daring statement was that our disunity undermines our gospel of reconciliation. Time is proving this to be true. It is becoming apparent that the way we do evangelism actually sows the need for reconciliation later instead of planting the means of reconciliation earlier. To evangelize is to help a person to receive and follow Jesus Christ. On the other hand to proselytize is to say: "Join us!". On this definition there is a fairly strong element of proselytizing in a lot of our evangelism. It is not unnatural. Fellowship is vital for Christian growth. The local church is a reality and a necessity. Yet it tends to become a box it is hard to get out of to relate to others who are not in our box.

In some countries, where community arrangements led to people who were all also from one tribe coming into a denominational box, the gospel of reconciliation has reduced our ability to combat tribalism.

In the face of that kind of reality, the Covenant's pleas for unity in truth, holiness and mission, though just a few words, helped us towards the cooperation we need.

Cooperation can be at different levels and based on different criteria, depending on the objective. There are some places where we are better off to have separate activities. The world we have to reach is so diverse that it needs the distinctiveness of all of us to reach it.

There are areas where we need at least to know what others are doing as we do our thing. For one local church this came when it realized that it could not pray for revival only for itself. The local church is not our local denominational church. The local church is the aggregate of true believers in any given place. It is the whole that must be renewed and grow, not just our part, especially at the expense of others. They had to work out a way of giving meaning to this truth. It led to a weekly contact with some brother pastors to make sure that their struggles and triumphs were regularly shared with its people in the weekly prayer bulletin. Now that was not cooperation but it did lead to the kind of strategic planning that the Covenant calls for and it reduced duplication.

Then there are areas where we need to have joint activity where we need each other to pursue common goals. The late Francis Schaeffer talked about it being possible to be co-belligerents even if we could not be allies.

The unrecognized genius of the Lausanne Covenant is that it makes cooperation essential. If it is all accepted and followed, it makes it inevitable that we start to have a Christian Vision for the place we live. That vision will include belonging to a church that is winning people to Christ and growing in numbers, character, understanding of the truth, internal and external relationships, and our impact on the community. We will be supportive of those who are trying to clean up and run well the political units to which we belong. We will be active in caring about the relief and development of the poor in our neighborhood and we will be contributing money and people for evangelistic and social purposes in other countries that are not yet reached by the gospel.

Now if that is the vision, we cannot do it on our own. We need to cooperate with all other Christians in the place. If however our vision is more limited and we are only looking for converts and new members for our church, of course we don't need others. We can probably manage better without them.

THE CHALLENGE

Clearly, the [Lausanne Covenant](#) gave evangelicals a bigger worldview within which they could work together in the work of evangelization. Cooperation requires that people operate from within compatible worldviews and that the obstacles to effective cooperation can arise from a clash of worldviews. The challenge is to be ready, in the cause of cooperation, to compare, reconsider and perhaps amend or expand our worldviews. If our mission is to mobilize the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world, then surely such a radical approach is justified.

For more information visit www.lausanne.org