

The Frankfurt Declaration of the Fundamental Crisis in Christian Mission

*"Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!"
1 Corinthians 9: 16 RSV*

The Church of Jesus Christ has the sacred privilege and irrevocable obligation to participate in the mission of the triune God, a mission which must extend into all the world. Through the Church's outreach, His name shall be glorified among all people, mankind shall be saved from His future wrath and led into new life, and the lordship of His Son Jesus Christ shall be established in the Expectation of His second coming.

This is the way that Christianity has always understood the Great Commission of Christ, though, we must confess, not always with the same degree of fidelity and clarity. The recognition of the task and the total missionary obligation of the Church led to the endeavor to integrate missions into the German Protestant churches and the World Council of Churches, whose Commission and Division of World Mission and Evangelism was established in 1961. It is the goal of this division, by the terms of its constitution, to insure "the proclamation to the whole world of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to the end that all men may believe in Him and be saved." It is our conviction that this definition reflects the basic apostolic concern of the New Testament and restores the understanding of mission held by the fathers of the Protestant missionary movement.

Today, however, organized Christian world missions is shaken by a fundamental crisis. Outer opposition and the weakening spiritual power of our churches and missionary societies are not solely to blame. More dangerous is the displacement of their primary tasks by means of an insidious falsification of their motives and goals.

Deeply concerned because of this inner decay, we feel called upon to make the following declaration.

We address ourselves to all Christians who know themselves through the belief in salvation through Jesus Christ to be responsible for the continuation of His saving work among non-Christian people. We address ourselves further to the leaders of churches and congregations, to whom the worldwide perspective of their spiritual commission has been revealed. We address ourselves finally to all missionary societies and their coordinating agencies, which are especially called, according to their spiritual tradition, to oversee the true goals of missionary activity.

We urgently and sincerely request you to test the following theses on the basis of their biblical foundations, and to determine the accuracy of this description of the current situation with respect to the errors and modes of operation which are increasingly evident in churches, missions and the ecumenical movement.

Seven Indispensable Basic Elements of Mission

I.

"Full authority in heaven and on earth has been committed to me. Go forth therefore and make all nations my disciples; baptize and make all nations my disciples; baptize men everywhere in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to

observe all that I have commanded you. And be assured, I will be with you always to the end of time. " (Matt 28: 18-20)

We recognize and declare:

Christian mission discovers its foundation, goals, tasks, and the content of its proclamation solely in the commission of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ and His saving act as they are reported by the witness of the Apostles and early Christianity in the New Testament. Mission is grounded in the nature of the Gospel.

We therefore oppose the current tendency to determine the nature and task of mission by socio-political analyses of our time and from the demands of the non-Christian world. We deny that what the gospel has to say to people today at the deepest level is not evident before its encounter with them. Rather, according to the apostolic witness, the gospel is nonnative and given once for all. The situation of encounter contributes only new aspects in the application of the gospel. The surrender of the Bible as our primary frame of reference leads to a shapelessness of mission and a confusion of the task of mission with a general idea of responsibility for the world.

II.

"Thus will I prove myself great and holy and make myself known to many nations; they shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 38:23)

"Therefore, Lord I will praise thee among the nations and sing psalms to thy name. " (Psalms 18:49 and Romans 15:9)

We recognize and declare:

The first and supreme goal of mission is the *glorification* of the name of the one God throughout the entire world and the proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ, His Son.

We therefore oppose the assertion that mission today is no longer so concerned with the disclosure of God as with the manifestation of a new man and the extension of a new humanity into all social realms. Humanization is not the primary goal of mission. It is rather a product of our new birth through God's saving activity in Christ within us, or an indirect result of the Christian proclamation in its power to perform a leavening activity in the course of world history.

A one-sided outreach of missionary interest toward man and his society leads to atheism.

III.

"There is no salvation in anyone else at all, for there is no other name under heaven granted to men, by which we may receive salvation. " (Acts 4: 12)

We recognize and declare:

Jesus Christ our Savior, true God and true man, as the Bible proclaims Him in His personal mystery and His saving work, is the basis, content, and authority of our mission. It is the goal of this mission to make known to all people in all walks of life the gift of His salvation.

We therefore challenge all non-Christians, who belong to God on the basis of creation, to believe in Him and to be baptized in His name, for in Him alone is eternal salvation promised to them.

We therefore oppose the false teaching (which is circulated in the ecumenical movement since the third General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi) that Christ Himself is anonymously so evident in world religions, historical changes, and revolutions that man can encounter Him and find salvation in Him without direct news of the gospel.

We likewise reject the unbiblical limitation of the person and work of Jesus to His humanity and ethical example. In such an idea the uniqueness of Christ and the gospel is abandoned in favor of a humanitarian principles which others might also find in other religions and ideologies.

IV.

"God so loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not die but have eternal life." (John 3: 16)

"In Christ's name, we implore you, be reconciled to God." (II Cor 5:20)

We recognize and declare:

Mission is the witness and presentation of eternal salvation performed in the name of Jesus Christ by His Church and fully authorized messengers by means of preaching, the sacraments and service.

This salvation is due to the sacrificial crucifixion of Jesus Christ, which occurred once for all and for all mankind.

The appropriation of this salvation to individuals takes place first, however, through proclamation which calls for decision and through baptism which places the believer in the service of love. Just as belief leads through repentance and baptism to eternal life, so unbelief leads through its rejection of the offer of salvation to damnation.

We therefore oppose the universalistic idea that in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ all men of all times are already born again and already have peace with Him, irrespective of their knowledge of the historical saving activity of God or belief in it. Through such a misconception the evangelizing commission loses both its full, authoritative power and its urgency. Unconverted men are thereby lulled into a fateful sense of security about their eternal destiny.

V.

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, and a people claimed by God for his own, to proclaim the triumphs of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (I Peter 2:9)

"Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world." (Romans 12: 2)

We recognize and declare:

The primary visible task of mission is to call out the *messianic, saved community* from among all people.

Missionary proclamation should lead everywhere to the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ, which exhibits a new, defined reality as salt and light in its social environment.

Through the gospel and the sacraments, the Holy Spirit gives the members of the congregation a new life and an eternal, spiritual fellowship with each other and with God, who is real and present with them. It is the task of the congregation through its witness to move the lost - especially those who live outside its community - to a saving membership in the body of Christ. Only by being this kind of fellowship does the Church present the gospel convincingly.

We therefore oppose the view that the Church, as the fellowship of Jesus is simply a part of the world. The contrast between the Church and the world is not merely distinction in function and in knowledge of salvation; rather it is an essential difference in nature. We deny that the Church has no advantage over the world except the knowledge of the alleged future salvation of all men.

We further oppose the one-sided emphasis on salvation which stresses only this world, according to which the Church and the world together share in a future, purely social, reconciliation of all mankind. That would lead to the self-dissolution of the Church.

VI.

"Remember then your former condition: ... you were at that time separated from Christ, strangers to the community of Israel, outside God's covenants and the promise that goes with them. Your world was a world without hope and without God." (Ephesians 2: 11-12)

We recognize and declare:

The offer of salvation in Christ is directed without exception to all men who are not yet bound to Him in conscious faith. The adherents to the non-Christian religions and the world views can receive this salvation only through participation in faith. They must let themselves be freed from their former ties and false hopes in order to be admitted by belief and baptism into the body of Christ. Israel, too, will find salvation in turning to Jesus Christ.

We therefore reject the false teaching that the non-Christian religions and world views are also ways of salvation similar to belief in Christ.

We refute the idea that "Christian presence" among the adherents of the world religions and a give-and-take dialogue with them are substitutes for a proclamation of the gospel which aims at conversion. Such dialogues simply establish good points of contact for a missionary communication.

We also refute the claim that the borrowing of Christian ideas, hopes and social procedures - even if they are separated from their exclusive relationship to the person of Jesus - can make the world religions and ideologies substitutes for the Church of Jesus Christ. In reality they give them a syncretistic and therefore anti-Christian direction.

VII.

"And this gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the earth as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matthew 24: 14)

We recognize and declare:

The Christian world mission is the decisive, continuous saving activity of God among men between the time of the resurrection and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Through the proclamation of the gospel, new nations and people will progressively be called to decision for or against Christ. When all people have given their answer to it, the conflict between the Church of Jesus and the world, led by the Antichrist, will reach its climax. Then Christ Himself will return and break into time, disarming the demonic power of Satan and establishing His own visible, boundless messianic kingdom.

We refute the unfounded idea that the eschatological expectation of the New Testament has been falsified by Christ's delay in returning and is therefore to be given up.

We refute at the same time the enthusiastic and utopian ideology that either under the influence of the gospel or by the anonymous working of Christ in history, all of mankind is already moving toward a position of general peace and justice and will finally - before the return of Christ - be united under Him in a great world fellowship.

We refute the identification of messianic salvation with progress, development, and social change. The fatal consequences of this is that efforts to aid development and revolutionary involvement in the places of tension in society are seen as the contemporary forms of Christian mission. But such an identification would be a self-deliverance to the utopian movement of our time in the direction of their ultimate destination.

We do, however, affirm the determined advocacy of justice and peace by all churches, and we affirm that "assistance in development" is a timely realization of the divine demand for mercy and justice as well as of the command of Jesus: "Love thy neighbor."

We see therein an important accompaniment and verification of mission. We also affirm the humanizing results of conversion as signs of the coming messianic peace.

We stress, however, that unlike the eternally valid reconciliation with God through faith in the gospel, all of our social achievements and partial successes in politics are bound by the eschatological "not yet" of the coming Kingdom and the not yet annihilated power of sin, death, and the devil, who still is the "prince of this world".

This establishes the priorities of our missionary service and causes us to extend ourselves in the expectation of Him, who promises, "*Behold! I make all things new.*"
(Revelation 21,4 RSV)

Unless otherwise indicated, biblical quotations are taken from the New English Bible.

This declaration was unanimously accepted by the "Theological Convention", a regular meeting of theologians who want to be faithful to the scripture and confession, at their session on March 4, 1970, in Frankfurt/Main, Germany.