

Evangelical Review of Theology

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Volume 25 • Number 1 • January 2001

*Articles and book reviews original and
selected from publications worldwide for
an international readership for the purpose
of discerning the obedience of faith*



Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS



for
**WORLD EVANGELICAL
FELLOWSHIP**
Theological Commission

Amsterdam 2000

The Amsterdam Declaration: A Charter for Evangelism in the 21st Century

Keywords: Strategy, evangelism, leadership, theology, truth, pluralism, culture, Scripture, church, prayer, social responsibility, suffering, unity

Preamble

As a renewal movement within historic Christian orthodoxy, transdenominational evangelicalism became a distinct global reality in the second half of the twentieth century. Evangelicals come from many churches, languages and cultures but we hold in common a shared understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, of the church's mission, and of the Christian commitment to evangelism. Recent documents that express this understanding include the Berlin Statement (1966), the Lausanne Covenant (1974), the Amsterdam Affirmations (1983), the Manila Manifesto (1989), and *The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration* (1999).

At the invitation of Dr. Billy Graham, some 10,000 evangelists, theologians, mission strategists and church leaders from more than 200 countries have assembled in Amsterdam in the year 2000 to listen, pray, worship and discern the wisdom of the Holy Spirit for the unfinished task of world evangelization. We are stirred and encouraged by the challenges we have heard and the fellowship we have shared with

so many brothers and sisters in Christ. More than ever, we are resolved to make Christ known to all persons everywhere.

This Amsterdam Declaration has been developed as a framework to surround the many action plans that are being made for the evangelization of the world. It is based on the principles set forth in the documents referred to above, and includes these three parts: A charter of commitments, definitions of key theological terms used in the charter, and a prayer of supplication to our Heavenly Father.

Charter of Commitments

This charter is a statement of tasks, goals and ideals for evangelism in the 21st century. The order of topics reflects the range of our concerns, not the priority of these themes.

1. Mission Strategy and Evangelism The mission of the church has at its heart world evangelization. We have from our Lord a mandate to proclaim the good news of God's love and forgiveness to everyone, making disciples, baptizing, and teaching all peoples. Jesus

made it clear in his last teachings that the scope of this work of evangelism demands that we give attention not only to those around us but also to the despised and neglected of society and to those at the ends of the earth. To do anything less is disobedience. In addition, we affirm the need to encourage new initiatives to reach and disciple youth and children worldwide; to make fuller use of media and technology in evangelism; and to stay involved personally in grass-roots evangelism so that our presentations of the biblical gospel are fully relevant and contextualized. We think it urgent to work toward the evangelization of every remaining unreached people group. (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8)

*We **pledge ourselves** to work so that all persons on earth may have an opportunity to hear the gospel in a language they understand, near where they live. We further pledge to establish healthy, reproducing, indigenous churches among every people, in every place, that will seek to bring to spiritual maturity those who respond to the gospel message.*

2. Leadership and Evangelism

We affirm that leadership is one of Christ's gifts to the church. It does not exist for itself; it exists to lead the people of God in obedience to our Heavenly Father. Leaders must submit themselves in humility to Christ, the Head of the church, and to one another. This submission involves the acceptance of the supreme authority of scripture by which Christ rules in his church through his Spirit. The leaders' first task is to preserve the biblical integrity of the proclamation of the church and serve as vision carriers of its evangelistic vocation. They are responsible to see that

vocation implemented by teaching, training, empowering and inspiring others. We must give special attention to encouraging women and young leaders in their work of evangelism. Leaders must always be careful not to block what God is doing as they exercise their strategic stewardship of the resources which Christ supplies to his body. (Ephesians 4:11-13; Mark 10:42-45; Colossians 1:18)

*We **pledge ourselves** to seek and uphold this model of biblical servant-leadership in our churches. We who are leaders commit ourselves afresh to this pattern of leadership.*

3. Theology and Evangelism

Christian theology is the task of careful thinking and ordering of life in the presence of the triune God. In one sense, all Christians are theologians and must labor to be good ones rather than bad ones. This means that everyone's theology must be measured by biblical teaching from which alone we learn God's mind and will. Those called to the special vocations of evangelism, theology, and pastoral ministry must work together in the spread of the gospel throughout the world. Evangelists and pastors can help theologians maintain an evangelistic motivation, reminding them that true theology is always done in the service of the church. Theologians can help to clarify and safeguard God's revealed truth, providing resources for the training of evangelists and the grounding of new believers in the faith. (Mark 7:13; 2 Timothy 2:15, 3:16)

*We **pledge ourselves** to labor constantly in learning and teaching the faith according to the Scriptures, and in seeking to*

ensure (1) that all who preach the gospel are theologically equipped and resourced in adequate ways for the work they have in hand, and (2) that all professional teachers of the faith share a common concern for evangelism.

4. Truth and Evangelism Under the influence of modern rationalism, secularism, and humanism (modernity), the Western intellectual establishment has largely reacted into a relativistic denial that there is any global and absolute truth (post-modernity). This is influencing popular culture throughout the world. By contrast, the gospel which is the authoritative word of the one, true and living God, comes to everyone everywhere at all times as truth in three senses: its affirmations are factually true, as opposed to false; it confronts us at every point with reality, as opposed to illusion; and it sets before us Jesus Christ, the co-Creator, Redeemer, and Lord of the world, as the Truth (that is, the one universally, real, accessible, authoritative, truth-telling, trustworthy Person), for all to acknowledge. There is a suspicion that any grand claim that there is one truth for everyone is inevitably oppressive and violent. But the gospel sets before us one who, though he was God, became man and identified with those under the bondage of sin to set them free from its enslavement. This gospel of God is both true for everyone and truly sets people free. It is therefore to be received in trust not suspicion. (Romans 15:16; Galatians 1:7, 2:14; 1 Corinthians 9:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; John 8:31-32)

We **pledge ourselves** to present and proclaim the biblical gospel and its Christ, always and

everywhere, as fully sufficient and effective for the salvation of believers. Therefore, we oppose all skeptical and relativizing or syncretizing trends, whether rationalist or irrationalist, that treat that gospel as not fully true, and so as unable to lead believers into the new divine life that it promises them. We oppose all oppressive and destructive uses of God's wonderful truth.

5. Human Need and Evangelism

Both the law and the gospel uncover a lost human condition that goes beyond any feelings of pain, misery, frustration, bondage, powerlessness, and discontent with life. The Bible reveals that all human beings are constitutionally in a state of rebellion against the God who made them, and of whom they remain dimly aware; they are alienated from him, and cut off from all the enjoyment of knowing and serving him that is the true fulfillment of human nature. We humans were made to bear God's image in an endless life of love to God and to other people, but the self-centeredness of our fallen and sinful hearts makes that impossible. Often our dishonesty leads us to use even the observance of religion to keep God at a distance, so that we can avoid having him deal with us about our ungodly self-worship. Therefore all human beings now face final condemnation by Christ the Judge, and eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord. (Romans 1:18-32, 5:12, 18a; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Genesis 1:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:9)

We **pledge ourselves** to be faithful and compassionate in sharing with people the truth about their present spiritual state, warning them of judgment and hell that

the impenitent face, and extolling the love of God who gave his Son to save us.

6. Religious Pluralism and Evangelism Today's evangelist is called to proclaim the gospel in an increasingly pluralistic world. In this global village of competing faiths and many world religions, it is important that our evangelism be marked both by faithfulness to the good news of Christ and humility in our delivery of it. Because God's general revelation extends to all points of his creation, there may well be traces of truth, beauty and goodness in many non-Christian belief systems. But we have no warrant for regarding any of these as alternative gospels or separate roads to salvation. The only way to know God in peace, love and joy is through the reconciling death of Jesus Christ the risen Lord. As we share this message with others, we must do so with love and humility, shunning all arrogance, hostility and disrespect. As we enter into dialogue with adherents of other religions, we must be courteous and kind. But such dialogue must not be a substitute for proclamation. Yet because all persons are made in the image of God, we must advocate religious liberty and human rights for all. (Romans 1:18-20; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Mark 10:41-45; James 1:20; Genesis 1:26)

*We **pledge ourselves** to treat those of other faiths with respect and faithfully and humbly serve the nation in which God has placed us, while affirming that Christ is the one and only Savior of the world.*

7. Culture and Evangelism By the blood of the Lamb, God has purchased saints from every tribe and language and people and nation. He

saves people in their own culture. World evangelization aims to see the rise of churches that are both deeply rooted in Christ and closely related to their culture. Therefore, following the example of Jesus and Paul, those who proclaim Christ must use their freedom in Christ to become all things to all people. This means appropriate cultural identification while guarding against equating the gospel with any particular culture. Since all human cultures are shaped in part by sin, the Bible and its Christ are at key points counter-cultural to every one of them. (Revelation 5:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 9:19-23)

*We **pledge ourselves** to be culturally sensitive in our evangelism. We will aim to preach Christ in a way that is appropriate for the people among whom we witness and which will enrich that culture in all appropriate ways. Further, as salt and light we will seek the transforming of culture in ways that affirm gospel values.*

8. Scripture and Evangelism The Bible is indispensable to true evangelism. The Word of God itself provides both the content and authority for all evangelism. Without it there is no message to preach to the lost. People must be brought to an understanding of at least some of the basic truths contained in the Scriptures before they can make a meaningful response to the gospel. Thus we must proclaim and disseminate the Holy Scriptures in the heart language of all those whom we are called to evangelize and disciple. (1 Thessalonians 2:13; Acts 2:14-39, 13:16-41)

*We **pledge ourselves** to keep the Scriptures at the very heart of our evangelistic outreach and message, and to remove all known lan-*

guage and cultural barriers to a clear understanding of the gospel on the part of our hearers.

9. The Church and Evangelism

There is no dispute that in established congregations regular teaching for believers at all stages in their pilgrimage must be given, and appropriate pastoral care must be provided. But these concerns must not displace ongoing concern for mission, which involves treating evangelistic outreach as a continuing priority. Pastors in conjunction with other qualified persons should lead their congregations in the work of evangelism. Further, we affirm that the formation of godly, witnessing disciples is at the heart of the church's responsibility to prepare its members for their work of service. We affirm that the church must be made a welcoming place for new believers. (1 Corinthians 14:13-17; Matthew 28:19; 2 Timothy 2:2)

*We **pledge ourselves** to urge all congregations in and with which we serve to treat evangelism as a matter of priority at all times, and so to make it a focus of congregational praying, planning, training and funding.*

10. Prayer and Evangelism God has given us the gift of prayer so that in his sovereignty he may respond in blessing and power to the cries of his children. Prayer is an essential means God has appointed for the awakening of the church and the carrying of the gospel throughout the world. From the first days of the New Testament church, God has used the fervent, persistent praying of his people to empower their witness in the Spirit, overcome opposition to the Lord's work and open the minds and hearts of those who hear the message of Christ. At special times

in the history of the church, revivals and spiritual breakthroughs have been preceded by the explicit agreement and union of God's people in seasons of repentance, prayer and fasting. Today, as we seek to carry the gospel to unreached people groups in all the world, we need a deeper dependence upon God and a greater unity in prayer. (Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4; Acts 4:23-30, 12:5; Ephesians 6:18)

*We **pledge ourselves** to pray faithfully to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest field. We also pray for all those engaged in world evangelization and encourage the call to prayer in families, local churches, special assemblies, mission agencies and trans-denominational ministries. (Matthew 9:37-38)*

11. Social Responsibility and Evangelism

Although evangelism is not advocacy of any social program, it does entail social responsibility for at least two reasons. First, the gospel proclaims the kingship of the loving Creator who is committed to justice, to human life and the welfare of his creation. So evangelism will need to be accompanied by obedience to God's command to work for the good of all in a way that is fitting for the children of the Father who makes his sun shine on the evil and the good and sends his rain on the righteous and the unrighteous alike. Second, when our evangelism is linked with concern to alleviate poverty, uphold justice, oppose abuses of secular and economic power, stand against racism, and advance responsible stewardship of the global environment, it reflects the compassion of Christ and may gain an acceptance it would not otherwise receive. (Psalm 47:7; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation

17:14; Galatians 6:10; Matthew 5:45; Deuteronomy 24:10-13, 14-15; Luke 1:52-53, 4:18-19; James 5:1-6)

We **pledge ourselves** to follow the way of justice in our family and social life, and to keep personal, social and environmental values in view as we evangelize.

12. Holiness and Evangelism

The servant of God must adorn the gospel through a holy life. But in recent times God's name has been greatly dishonored and the gospel discredited because of unholy living by Christians in leadership roles. Evangelists seem particularly exposed to temptations relating to money, sex, pride, power, neglect of family and lack of integrity. The church should foster structures to hold evangelists accountable for their lives, doctrine and ministries. The church should also ensure that those whose lives dishonor God and the gospel will not be permitted to serve as its evangelists. The holiness and humility of evangelists gives credibility to their ministry and leads to genuine power from God and lasting fruit. (1 Timothy 3:2-13; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; 1 Timothy 5:11-13, 19-20)

We **pledge ourselves** to be accountable to the community of faith for our lives, doctrine and ministry, to flee from sin, and to walk in holiness and humility. (1 Corinthians 6:18; 2 Timothy 2:22)

13. Conflict, Suffering and Evangelism The records of evangelism from the apostolic age, the state of the world around us today, and the knowledge of Satan's opposition at all times to the spread of the gospel, combine to assure us that evangelistic outreach in the twenty-

first century will be an advance in the midst of opposition. Current forms of opposition, which Satan evidently exploits, include secular ideologies that see Christian faith as a hindrance to human development; political power structures that see the primacy of Christians' loyalty to their Lord as a threat to the regime; and militant expressions of non-Christian religions that are hostile to Christians for being different. We must expect, and be prepared for, many kinds of suffering as we struggle not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Acts 13:6-12; Ephesians 6:11-13, 14-18)

We **pledge ourselves** ever to seek to move forward wisely in personal evangelism, family evangelism, local church evangelism, and cooperative evangelism in its various forms, and to persevere in this despite the opposition we may encounter. We will stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ who suffer persecution and even martyrdom for their faithful gospel witness.

14. Christian Unity and Evangelism

Jesus prayed to the Heavenly Father that his disciples would be one so that the world might believe. One of the great hindrances to evangelism worldwide is the lack of unity among Christ's people, a condition made worse when Christians compete and fight with one another rather than seeking together the mind of Christ. We cannot resolve all differences among Christians because we do not yet understand perfectly all that God has revealed to us. But in all ways that do not violate our conscience, we should pursue cooperation and part-

nerships with other believers in the task of evangelism practicing the well-tested rule of Christian fellowship: "In necessary things, unity; in non-essential things, liberty; in all things, charity." (Ephesians 4:1-6; John 17:21-23; Romans 11:34; 2 Peter 3:15; Romans 14:14, 23)

*We **pledge ourselves** to pray and work for unity in truth among all true believers in Jesus and to cooperate as fully as possible in evangelism with other brothers and sisters in Christ so that the whole church may take the whole gospel to the whole world.*

Definitions of Key Terms

The message we proclaim has both a propositional and an incarnational dimension—"the Word became flesh:" to deny either one is to bear false witness to Christ. Because the relation between language and reality is much debated today, it is important to state clearly what we mean by what we say. To avoid confusion and misunderstanding, then, we here define the following key words used in this Declaration. The definitions are all Trinitarian, Christocentric, and Bible-based. (John 1:14)

1. God The God of whom this Declaration speaks is the self-revealed Creator, Upholder, Governor and Lord of the universe. This God is eternal in his self-existence and unchanging in his holy love, goodness, justice, wisdom, and faithfulness to his promises. God in his own being is a community of three coequal and coeternal persons, who are revealed to us in the Bible as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Together they are involved in an unvarying cooperative pattern in all God's relationships to and within this world. God is Lord of history,

where he blesses his own people, overcomes and judges human and angelic rebels against his rule, and will finally renew the whole created order. (Genesis 1:1; Exodus 20:11; Psalm 24:1-2, 33:6; Acts 4:24-30; Psalm 90:2, 119:42; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Daniel 7:1-28; Acts 2:23-24, 4:28; Ephesians 1:9-10)

2. Jesus Christ The Declaration takes the view of Jesus that the canonical New Testament sets forth and the historic Christian creeds and confessions attest. He was, and is, the second person of the triune Godhead, now and forever incarnate. He was virgin-born, lived a life of perfect godliness, died on the cross as the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins, was raised bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, reigns now over the universe and will personally return for judgment and the renewal of all things. As the God-man, once crucified, now enthroned, he is the Lord and Savior who in love fulfills towards us the threefold mediatorial ministry of prophet, priest and king. His title, "Christ," proclaims him the anointed servant of God who fulfills all the Messianic hopes of the canonical Old Testament. (Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrew 1:8; John 1:1, 14; Hebrews 4:15; Romans 3:21-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 1 Timothy 3:16; Philippians 2:9-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Acts 2:26; Romans 1:1-3)

3. Holy Spirit Shown by the words of Jesus to be the third divine person, whose name, "Spirit," pictures the energy of breath and wind, the Holy Spirit is the dynamic personal presence of the Trinity in the processes of the created world, in the communication of divine truth, in the attest-

ing of Jesus Christ, in the new creation through him of believers and of the church, and in ongoing fellowship and service. The fullness of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in relation to the knowledge of Christ and the enjoyment of new life in him dates from the Pentecostal outpouring recorded in Acts 2. As the divine inspirer and interpreter of the Bible, the Spirit empowers God's people to set forth accurate, searching, life-transforming presentations of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and makes their communication a fruitful means of grace to their hearers. The New Testament shows us the supernatural power of the Spirit working miracles, signs and wonders, bestowing gifts of many kinds, and overcoming the power of Satan in human lives for the advancement of the gospel. Christians agree that the power of the Holy Spirit is vitally necessary for evangelism and that openness to his ministry should mark all believers. (John 3:8; 14:16-17; 14:26; 16:13-15; Acts 2:1-4; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Acts 2:43, 5:12, 6:8, 14:3, 15:12)

4. Bible The 66 books of the Old and New Testaments constitute the written Word of God. As the inspired revelation of God in writing, the Scriptures are totally true and trustworthy, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. In every age and every place, this authoritative Bible, by the Spirit's power, is efficacious for salvation through its witness to Jesus Christ. (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; Luke 1:1-4; John 14:26; 1 John 1:3)

5. Kingdom The kingdom of God is his gracious rule through Jesus Christ over human lives, the course of history, and all reality. Jesus is Lord of past, present, and future,

and Sovereign ruler of everything. The salvation Jesus brings and the community of faith he calls forth are signs of his kingdom's presence here and now, though we wait for its complete fulfillment when he comes again in glory. In the meantime, wherever Christ's standards of peace and justice are observed to any degree, to that degree the kingdom is anticipated, and to that extent God's ideal for human society is displayed. (Daniel 7:14; Luke 11:20; Hebrews 13:8; Luke 22:29; Luke 6:20; Matthew 5:3)

6. Gospel The gospel is the good news of the Creator's eternal plan to share his life and love with fallen human beings through the sending of his Son Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of the world. As the power of God for salvation, the gospel centers on the life, death, resurrection and return of Jesus and leads to a life of holiness, growth in grace and hope-filled though costly discipleship in the fellowship of the church. The gospel includes the announcement of Jesus' triumph over the powers of darkness and of his supreme lordship over the universe. (Romans 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:2; Acts 2:14-39; 13:16-41; Romans 1:1-5; Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:22)

7. Salvation This word means rescue from guilt, defilement, spiritual blindness and deadness, alienation from God, and certainty of eternal punishment in hell, that is everyone's condition while under sin's dominion. This deliverance involves present justification, reconciliation to God and adoption into his family, with regeneration and the sanctifying gift of the Holy Spirit leading to works of righteousness and service here and now, and a promise of full

glorification in fellowship with God in the future. This involves in the present life joy, peace, freedom and the transformation of character and relationships and the guarantee of complete healing at the future resurrection of the body. We are justified by faith alone and the salvation faith brings is by grace alone, through Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 5:9, 3:21-26, 8:30; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:12-13, 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:43; 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10; Mark 4:42-48; Romans 4:4-6; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7; Romans 11:36, 15:9; Philippians 1:11)

8. Christian A Christian is a believer in God who is enabled by the Holy Spirit to submit to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in a personal relation of disciple to master and to live the life of God's kingdom. The word Christian should not be equated with any particular cultural, ethnic, political, or ideological tradition or group. Those who know and love Jesus are also called Christ-followers, believers and disciples. (Acts 11:26, 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16)

9. Church The church is the people of God, the body and the bride of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The one, universal church is a transnational, transcultural, transdenominational and multi-ethnic family, the household of faith. In the widest sense, the church includes all the redeemed of all the ages, being the one body of Christ extended throughout time as well as space. Here in the world, the church becomes visible in all local congregations that meet to do together the things that according to Scripture the church does. Christ is the head of the church. Everyone who is personally

united to Christ by faith belongs to his body and by the Spirit is united with every other true believer in Jesus. (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 5:25-27, 32; Matthew 28:19; Romans 3:27-30; Revelation 7:9-10; 1 Corinthians 1:2)

10. Mission Formed from *missio*, the Latin word for "sending," this term is used both of the Father's sending of the Son into the world to become its Savior and of the Son's sending the church into the world to spread the gospel, perform works of love and justice, and seek to disciple everyone to himself. (John 17:18; 20:21)

11. Evangelism Derived from the Greek word *euangelizesthai*, "to tell glad tidings," this word signifies making known the gospel of Jesus Christ so that people may trust in God through him, receiving him as their Savior and serving him as their Lord in the fellowship of his church. Evangelism involves declaring what God has done for our salvation and calling on the hearers to become disciples of Jesus through repentance from sin and personal faith in him. (Luke 4:18; Romans 1:15-17)

12. Evangelist All Christians are called to play their part in fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission, but some believers have a special call to, and a spiritual gift for, communicating Christ and leading others to him. These we call evangelists, as does the New Testament. (2 Timothy 4:5; Ephesians 4:11)

Prayer

Gracious God, our Heavenly Father, we praise you for the great love that you have shown to us through the redeeming death and

triumphant resurrection of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that you would enable us by the power of your Holy Spirit to proclaim faithfully the good news of your kingdom and your love.

Forgive us for failing to take the gospel to all the peoples of the world. Deliver us from ignorance, error, lovelessness, pride, selfishness, impurity, and cowardice. Enable us to be truthful, kind, humble, sympathetic, pure, and

courageous. Salvation belongs to you, O God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.

We ask you to make our gospel witness effective. Anoint our proclamation with the Holy Spirit; use it to gather that great multitude from all nations who will one day stand before you and the Lamb giving praise. This we ask by the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Revelation 7:9-10)

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