

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

Fourth Japan Congress on Evangelism Declaration, June 30th, 2000

The Church Responsible for Evangelizing 21st Century Japan Living Together in the Gospel of Reconciliation

Keywords: Reconciliation, unity, creation, ecology, history, war, militarism, peace, forgiveness, family, church, society, hope

Introduction

We are committed to the evangelical faith, and desire the advancement of the gospel. Seeking to increase this mutual understanding and cooperation among the churches, we have held three previous congresses on evangelism, sponsored by the Japan Evangelical Association (JEA). The first congress took place in 1974 in Kyoto. There we affirmed the biblical basis for our faith and the need to cooperate in evangelism. We made clear our existence as a group of people in Japan who seek to put into practice our biblical faith. Again, in 1982 the second congress was held in Kyoto. At that time we confirmed our conviction that evangelism is the church's core ministry, explored issues related to evangelism in Japan, and sought to develop answers and strategies concerning these issues. In 1991 the Third

Congress on Evangelism took place at Shiobara. There we focused not only on our local areas, but also the world, affirming that we must be involved in evangelism in Japan and also reach out to Asia and the rest of the world.

Building on the three previous congresses and prayerfully seeking to deepen our relationships and cooperation, the Fourth Congress on Evangelism has been held, guided by an executive committee which was expanded to include non-JEA participants. As we straddle two millennia, we are aware of the important time in which we live. We believe that this Congress will have made an important contribution, helping us to reflect on our experience in the 20th century and gain a perspective concerning the church's walk in the 21st century.

It is in the providence of God that

this Congress has taken place in Okinawa. By gathering here, we have reflected upon the special history of suffering Okinawa has experienced because of Japan. As followers of Christ we have sought to better understand that suffering and to share that suffering within the biblical and evangelical perspective.

The theme of this Congress has been 'The Church Responsible for Evangelizing 21st Century Japan—Living Together in the Gospel of Reconciliation'. We affirmed that this gospel of reconciliation appropriately expresses the essential nature of the biblical teaching concerning salvation. Especially in this age of religious pluralism we must hold fast to the truth that reconciliation to God through Christ is the only way to obtain salvation. In this 21st century, with society filled with divisions and fighting, and with the danger of environmental destruction, we must understand that reconciliation between God and man also relates to humans in relation to one another, and touches all of creation. We have been given the mission from God to intercede in prayer for reconciliation, to preach the gospel of reconciliation, and to live the gospel of reconciliation.

In order for the Japanese church to preach the gospel of reconciliation and live together in the gospel of reconciliation in this coming 21st century, we publicly declare at this congress the following as a summary of our understanding, repentance, desires and prayers.

Chapter 1 Confirming Together the Gospel of Reconciliation

1. Reconciliation with God

Humankind, even though made by the Creator of all things, the one true God, and declared good, has sinned and broken relationship with God, becoming God's enemy. Being sinful, humankind has entered into a condition where it cannot atone for its sins, nor repair the broken relationship with Righteous God. But God, through his great love, sent the Lord Jesus Christ to earth. Through his atoning sacrifice and resurrection from the dead God promises to release the sinner from the bonds of sin, and bring the sinner back to a correct relationship with him. This reconciliation with God can only be received through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the essence of the Gospel, revealed as the main theme of the Bible, the inspired Word of God.

This 'Gospel of Reconciliation' is the only way that sinful people can obtain salvation; there is no other way. It is completely unique and based on the unilateral love and grace of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We as Christ's followers have entered into this perfect relationship with God and are sent out into the world for the glory of God to preach the Gospel of reconciliation with God to the world, and live by the Gospel in this world.

2. Interpersonal reconciliation

We speak of interpersonal reconciliation as that which happens when people make mutual concessions and end their conflict. Often this only ends merely with a cessation of conflict, without a restoration of the relationship. But followers of Christ whose sins have been forgiven through the love of God, have become, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and following the example of Christ's love, people who forgive.

On the basis of this unilateral love we seek to repair broken relationships with our neighbors, and positively strive to develop these into healthy relationships.

We are deeply concerned about human relationships which have been damaged by sin. We believe that when the followers of Christ live as peace-makers in the love of God, damaged relationships will be healed, and humans made in the image of God will develop mutually healthy relationships in our homes, churches, communities, society, nation and the world.

3. *Reconciliation of creation*

Humankind was made by the Creator of all things to be his representatives, ruling the earth, and acting as stewards of this earth. But humans, being separated from God because of sin, have rebelled against the will of God, have instead taken the earth that they were supposed to rule, and used it to fulfill their own desires and profit. In so doing, humans have created problems such as environmental destruction, the depletion of natural resources, and global warming. At the end of this 20th century 'the groaning of the land' has spread throughout the earth, as all creation waits for the salvation brought by the appearing of the children of God. The followers of Christ, having been restored to fellowship with God, as God's intended representatives, especially at this time, feel keenly the need to make a true contribution in all areas of life. This includes efforts for liberation of this earth in the areas of politics, economics, education, science, and medicine. We must utilize our God-given gifts to their full potential in this world, while we ultimately wait for the coming of God's Kingdom

which will be ushered in by the glorious return of Christ. At that time his rule will extend throughout the world.

Chapter 2 Living Together in the Gospel of Reconciliation--in Times like These

We live 'in times like these.' Therefore we must understand these times in which we live, in order to rely on this Gospel of reconciliation, proclaim it and live together in this Gospel.

1. As those with history written on our hearts

We live in a time in which the twentieth century is coming to an end. During this twentieth century, there were two world wars, colonial battles, confrontations between races, and an ideological cold war between East and West, among other calamities. It was a century of confrontation and war. Especially in the last ten years there has been an intensification of fighting between ethnic groups involving religion, including Christianity, resulting in many refugees. We have rebelled against God, and this broken fellowship has resulted in our becoming self-centered, fighting among ourselves for our own profit. Taking a hard look at this condition makes us understand how important the Gospel of reconciliation is.

Because this congress took place in Okinawa we were able to experience Okinawa's history, and understand more deeply the meaning of the Gospel of reconciliation. Okinawa had been invaded by the Satsuma Domain, and was then forced to be part of the Japanese Empire and the Emperor system when the Meiji government broke up

the Ryukyu Kingdom. During the Pacific War Okinawa suffered much, becoming the last-stop defense line for the rest of Japan. After the peace treaty ended the war, the island became a trust territory under the U.S.A. military administration. Even though in 1972 the administration authority reverted back to Japan, even now 75% of the American military bases in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa. This continues to force many restrictions and hardships on the people's lives. We confess and repent that most of us have failed to understand or even care about their situation.

This problem has not resulted just because of a deficiency of historical knowledge. The sin that gave birth to the war and strife lies concealed within our present lack of knowledge and interest. The sin that led the Japanese Empire into invading Asia, now in somewhat different form appears in many of our hearts when we deny responsibility for the invasion and war. Sin always robs people of the power to enter into the pain of others, and destroys relationships with one another.

Starting with Okinawa, we must face the problems throughout Japan and Asia. It is necessary also to direct our attention to the indifference and enmity found in our families, churches and society. We must also reflect upon the problems close at hand, noting the ways we have selfishly sought our own prosperity, and ignored our relationships with others.

2. *As those who make history*

We have been given the mission not only to study the past, but to also shape our future history.

Our first mission mandate is to proclaim the Gospel of reconcilia-

tion. Wars, strife, hostilities and hatred, the many kinds of evil and crime, all come from humankind's sin as enemies of God. Therefore, we urge people who are estranged from God to receive his reconciliation. We know that only the proclamation of the Gospel can bring peace to this new century.

Only those who have been forgiven by God can, on the basis of that forgiveness, forgive one another. We who have been made peacemakers seek to do God's will in history. Of course, peace is not possible by our efforts alone. The Bible teaches that as we approach the end times and the fulfilling of God's ultimate will, the evil in this world will increase. Having said this, we cannot brush aside this evil. As those who have experienced salvation and anticipate that final completion of our salvation in the last day, we work to fulfill God's righteousness and love. We have confidence that this labor is a testimony to God's wonderful salvation, and in the Lord this will ultimately not return void.

In order to proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation to this world and to live the Gospel of reconciliation in this world, we as the Body of Christ must be united. We must repent of our past indifference, self-centeredness, jealousy, and feelings of rivalry. We must forgive one another, and through this forgiveness enter into fellowship with one another. We believe that this forgiveness and fellowship in Christ can indeed be the basis for shaping history.

So we reaffirm the church's unity, and we pray and strive to carry out the will of God for this world in the place to which God has sent each of us.

Chapter 3 Living Together in the Gospel of Reconciliation--in Places like These

We are to live together in the Gospel of reconciliation in the actual places where we reside; our home, church, local society. This also includes the broader area of Japan and the whole world.

1. In our homes

Having been made in the image of God, we are not intended to live in solitude, but to live together in a family setting. However, because of humankind's sin the family life which is intended to be lived in loving fellowship is being destroyed. This is evidenced by marital discord, adultery, divorce, neurosis in children, abuse of children, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, etc. The home has become not a place of peace, but a place filled with pain. We keenly feel the need for families to again be able to live by the Gospel of reconciliation.

Reconciliation within the family begins with one person, whether husband or wife, parent or child, older or younger sibling, asking and trusting God to enable him/her to live and serve in meaningful, fulfilling human relationships. When we seriously wrestle with the problem as our personal problem, we enter into fellowship with others who also suffer from the same problem. The church must spiritually develop, providing a biblical perspective of the family which will help to regenerate the home, and provide a place for fellowship, sharing and counseling. The peace of God can be modeled in the Christian home, and as the church reaches out to help those struggling with family problems, this becomes an opportunity for evangelism.

We have not necessarily been successful in evangelizing families. We must recognize ourselves as imperfect human beings whose sins have been forgiven, and accept each family member as they are. With a posture of love we can become ministers of reconciliation in our families. Trusting that the salvation of one family member will lead to the salvation of the entire family, we must have patience and continue to uphold our families in prayer.

2. In our churches

We, the church, have been saved by Christ, and are a community which serves in love. The church testifies to the Triune God, and makes clear the Gospel of Christ. In contrast to the hatred and discrimination, confrontation and fighting which is ruining our society, we the church are to serve as a community of reconciliation.

However, at this very point we must pause for reflection. Discord and schism within the church have often not just been the result of a zealous desire to preserve the truth of the Gospel, but have been caused by the weakness of the flesh. In order to guard our particular convictions we have caused division, clinging to things that are not essential, and by being overly cautious concerning different ways of thinking, we have destroyed the fellowship. We repent of these actions and long for a biblically-based unity in the church. We do see examples of movement toward unity at the local level with mass-media, crusade evangelism, city-wide Christmas activities, pastors' meetings, early morning prayer meetings, cooperation in times of disaster, etc. We will strive to achieve even greater unity in the future.

It is sad that today differences in

understanding the work of the Holy Spirit have caused divisions in our fellowship and injury to both sides. While acknowledging our differences we must strive to reestablish our fellowship in the Lord. We acknowledge not only the disunity found within church associations and denominations, and among churches, but also often found within local churches themselves. We give testimony to the riches of the Gospel of reconciliation when fellow church members, fellow pastors, pastors and church members, men's groups and women's groups, the elderly and the youth all serve one another.

The unity of the church also needs to be seen in the relationship between churches and para-church groups and among para-church groups themselves. We must throw away our attitude of exclusivism and indifference towards others, and develop mutually agreeable guidelines, which will build positive relationships of cooperation. Also, we will pray and cooperate in developing evangelism programs geared to each age level, media evangelism, efforts to establish a more just society, educational institutions based on a Christian world view, pastoral training, believers' training and the creation of Christian culture.

We will seek to deepen our unity in the Lord between missionaries who have sacrificed much to serve the Japanese church and Christians. Evangelism in Japan was begun by missionaries. We are thankful for this historical blessing, and remember that Japan remains a mission field. We rejoice to work together with missionaries from other countries.

As was emphasized in previous evangelism congresses, we are conscious of the universal nature of the Church, and have sought to increase

our fellowship with churches in Asia and around the world. But as this age continues to become more globalized, we must, while guarding our individual uniqueness, more earnestly think, pray and cooperate with the many churches and missions around the world.

3. In our local society

We believe that evangelism will make progress as we live together in the Gospel of reconciliation in our local communities. At the second Kyoto congress the issue of the contextualization of the Gospel in Japan was presented, but we acknowledge that our understanding and efforts in this area have been inadequate. We must remember that the local area is our first place of evangelism, and a weak connection with the community negatively affects our evangelism. We must seriously consider how the church can more actively and practically develop better community relationships.

As the number of children continues to diminish, coupled with the growing aging population of the 21st century, the church is being called upon to work to meet the needs of the elderly and to work for a society in which physically and mentally handicapped people can live a life of hope. We must also make efforts to meet the spiritual and physical needs of those who are socially handicapped (e.g. those who suffer from prejudice, the homeless, foreigners, etc.). Even though the following problems go beyond the normal scope of the church, we must consider how best to serve our communities in problem-areas such as juvenile delinquency, the public gambling institutions, child-raising concerns of younger parents, and families who have suffered from cult activities.

4. In Japan

Because of our love for Japan, we are concerned about the problems facing our society, and desire that God's righteousness and love be realized in this country.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, and the Gospel of reconciliation offered in the Bible is the Gospel of peace, exhorting us to also seek peace. In contrast to that peace, Japanese *Wa* (Harmony) seeks uniformity which has created a society of discrimination. Hence, by feeling the pain of those who are being discriminated against and standing with them, we expose the source of this prejudice which is built into the Japanese *Wa*. By understanding the pain of the Okinawa people we are led, not to settle for a stability based upon the sacrifices of others, but to pray for the eradication of war and the establishment of peace. By helping those who are handicapped we challenge the basic nature of Japanese society which emphasizes only wealth and prosperity. We also need to address the competition and discrimination that is built into the educational system.

We are aware that the 21st century church in Japan must begin with the fundamental issues and grapple with the country's condition which has been based upon the emperor system, to pray concerning the problems within our government and economy, and as believers to be faithful to our consciences. Further, we must take serious note of the government's nationalistic tendency as seen in their steamrolling through the Diet, the bill to officially recognize the national flag and anthem, the compulsory use of the *Hi no Maru* and *Kimigayo* at educational institutions, the bill to inaugurate 'Showa Day,' and the prime minis-

ter's statement concerning Japan being a divine country centered in the emperor. While being vigilant concerning the government, we must endeavor to diligently work for peace.

We as Christians in Japan are to always be involved in politics, economics, education, the arts, welfare work, science, technology, information communication, etc. We believe that along with evangelism we are called to hold a Christian world view which practically touches all areas of life, and impacts all of society.

5. In the world

We hold a vision for world missions. The world is divided into rich and poor societies, with more than one billion four hundred thousand people in hopeless poverty. Also over two billion people are living in areas which have no contact with the Gospel. We are called to pray and minister to meet this need, especially since a large percent of the poverty and unevangelized areas are concentrated in Asia.

We keenly feel the responsibility to send missionaries around the world. There are places in the world where Japanese can enter, while Western missionaries have difficulty. Even in countries that refuse missionaries we can send teachers, technical experts, medical personnel, etc. who can be involved in missions through their work place.

In order to live together in the Gospel of reconciliation we must actively reach out to those suffering from famine and disaster, providing emergency relief and assisting them to become independent. Also, we are being called on to protect the rights of those who are suffering from fighting and those minorities who are being oppressed, and to

eliminate the gap between the rich and poor nations. We have a responsibility to pray that God's righteousness and love be active in international politics and economics, and to train and send out people to work in these fields.

Living together in the Gospel of reconciliation in the community, Japan and the international society are all closely related aspects. For instance, when the church becomes involved with the problem of international famine, it can include other people in the area, which in turn touches the community, and has the potential of changing Japan itself. We believe that when the church becomes a true community, putting into practice God's righteousness and love within the local community, it will change the community, change Japan, and has the power to reform the whole world.

When we turn our eyes to the world around us, we have no room for optimism. Therefore, we will hold strongly the hope of Christ's Second Coming, fully trusting the sovereignty of the Almighty God. We will trust the work of the Holy Spirit, and join together to pray for and dedicate ourselves to the ministry of the Gospel of reconciliation.

We have been given the mission from God to preach the Gospel of reconciliation, live together in it, and to intercede on behalf of this reconciliation, to stand in the gap for this world and pray.

Prayer

O God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Forgive us for our sins in that we did not obey Christ, the Prince of Peace, during this 20th century, but made it a century of war.

We repent of our sins, having dis-

placed Christ from his throne, and having been deceived by that which is centered on human, racial and national thinking. We have failed to seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness.

O God of peace. As we enter this 21st century, fill us with your Holy Spirit, and make us messengers of the Gospel of reconciliation. Help us to proclaim the Gospel in the places you have placed us, and make us peacemakers there.

O God of love. Set us free from the hatred that leads to war, discrimination, prejudice and hostility, and fill us with love for our neighbors.

Help us to lead the families which you have given us to be families which worship your name, and serve you in peace. May the whole world become the family of God.

O God of righteousness. Make us into priests who are prophets, people who can pray for your blessings on this nation. Guide us that we will never again sin by making the emperor god, and thus fall under your anger.

Make us into people who will daily look to you as the Prince of peace, the Christ, Lord of history, so that this 21st century will truly be a time of peace. And now, in this place, make us those who will fulfill the Gospel of reconciliation.

'Here am I. Send me' (Isaiah 6:8).
'Amen. Come Lord Jesus'
(Revelation 22:20).