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# **World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission**

## **The Philadelphia Statement, August 2007**

*This statement was prepared by participants of a Consultation on faith, providence and political involvement held on 31 July, 2007 at Palmer (Eastern Baptist) Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, USA. The consultation was conducted by the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance which has issued this brief summary of the discussion. This statement may be reprinted freely in its full unedited form. Also available in other languages—see <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/tcstatements/>*

### **The Lordship of Christ and Political and Civic Engagement**

The confession 'Jesus is Lord' has immediate political implications for the witness of the church in the world. This is as true today as it was in the time of the early church when declaring that 'Jesus is Lord' was a challenge to the idea that Caesar was Lord. An authentic recognition of the Lordship of Christ means seeing Him as Lord of All. He is not merely 'my Lord' or even just the Lord of the church. Rather, He is the Lord of the whole of creation which includes all social and political realms, rulers and structures in all nations. The Lordship of Christ provides the fundamental reason for Christian involvement in social, civic and political affairs. Consequently, both evangelism and social action are essential dimensions of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The kingdom (or 'the reign') of God which Jesus proclaimed is a spiritual entity which exists wherever God is obeyed. The kingdom of God is not a

geographic or political kingdom but it has a profound impact on secular, national and political spheres of life. In humility Christians pray to the Father 'your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.'

### **The Providence of God**

We trust in the sovereignty of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—over the whole world. According to his wisdom and providential care, God uses governments to oppose evil and preserve his creation in good order. Being assured of God's providential care and knowing that God is in ultimate control of all things is a great comfort in the light of all personal and political difficulties and conflicts. It is encouraging to know that, despite the problems and limitations of our human nature and our social contexts, God can even use evil for good (Genesis 45:4-15). All of life exists under the providential sovereignty of God which relativizes all political systems.

A proper awareness of the providence of God which preserves, protects

and enhances human life and society creates an attitude of humility concerning our own abilities and serves to remind us that God cares for all people—for all bear the image of God. It is important, therefore, to respect rather than demonize others, to avoid undue pessimism concerning the moral future of the world and to look for a consensus concerning social and political life with all who seek peace and the common good.

### The Church and Social Transformation

The church of Jesus Christ exists as 'a light to the world' (Matt. 5:14). It should not be a mere political critic but also a creative source to shape society, practising biblical principles and models that enhance community life. Although cultural, social and political forms vary greatly, Biblical principles are always relevant. Christians are called to 'seek the welfare of the city' (Jer. 29:7) and make a contribution to society. In many cultures there is a strong history of a positive evangelical engagement with society and it is our responsibility to continue this.

Evangelical theology stresses the importance of a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ and sees the transformation of individuals as an important part of the transformation of the world. However, the notion of a purely privatized faith in which the gospel affects only individual, personal or family life but has no wider implications for society must be rejected as inadequate.

As people of faith we interpret everything in the light of God's provi-

dential oversight for good. In hope, we stand firm in the most daunting conditions, desiring to do what is right while patiently resisting the forces of evil.

Holding firmly to the virtues of faith, hope and love we affirm Christian involvement in the political processes of local communities, nations, and on the international level and encourage Christians to consider professions whereby they are able to serve in the political and social sphere. We recognize that the massive transformations occurring in our modern world must be addressed in a discerning manner. As Christians and citizens of specific nations we care a great deal about freedom, justice for the poor, peace, marriage, the family, the sanctity of human life, and racial justice.

We recognize that process is also important, and the manner in which issues and solutions are presented must not contradict the values on which our priorities are based. We believe that our engagement should be a part of the mending and healing process locally, nationally, and internationally.

### A Call to Kingdom living

We believe the truth of God's revelation is indeed ultimate; yet our understanding of the truth is provisional and partial. As a result, in exercising our political responsibilities, we believe it is important to approach our task respectfully, prepared to listen and learn from those outside our religious and theological boundaries.

There are different forms of government, contexts and local issues that impact the implementation of the reign of Jesus Christ and it is important for

Christians of different nationalities and political convictions to be in discussion about these variations. However, there are important areas common to most societies where followers of Jesus Christ must pray and work for the kingdom, such as seeking human rights and religious liberty, working against corruption, violence and war, alleviating poverty, protecting the family and the sanctity of life, and caring for creation.

The church, as the primary community in which the kingdom of God is manifested, ought to embody the graceful principles of that kingdom and bear witness in life, word and action to the power of the gospel to transform lives and societies. We Evangelical Christians must repent of our failure to live as a community of faith that demonstrates the kingdom of God. Then we must commit ourselves to the common life of faith and action which will lead to a transformation of the world in which we live. As the church lives out the life of the kingdom it can become an example of community life and be a credible basis from which to impact the political sphere. The church

must not use political power merely as a means of self-protection, but should seek the benefit of the community in which it lives with humility, repentance, and in a spirit of unity.

Individuals, groups, congregations and national alliances are all called to participate in actions and programs which aim at overcoming social evil and which enhance the common good. We affirm the work of the World Evangelical Alliance in various areas of social and political action and particularly note the potential of the Public Policy Project aimed at helping national evangelical alliances/fellowships to develop an evangelical approach to political and civic engagement.

In exercising that responsibility to society which is fundamental to the mission of the church we do not assume that everything depends on the action of the church in the world. Consequently, the church exercises its social responsibility not only by direct action in the world but also by witnessing to the redemptive work of Christ and looking forward to the consummation of all things in Him.

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