

BRUSSELS CONSULTATION ON... SOCIAL CONCERN... CHRISTIAN WHOLISTIC MINISTRIES... COMPASSIONATE MINISTRIES... CHRISTIAN SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY... EVANGELIZATION AND SOCIAL ACTION

BRUSSELS STATEMENT OF AGWM – by Doug Peterson, 1998

Preamble

As those committed to world missions standing at the threshold of a new millennium we are experiencing a significant time within the Assemblies of God. There is an overwhelming sense that we have arrived at a juncture where our response to a hurting, hungry, oppressed, and lost world must be reaffirmed and expressed with clarity and conviction. The Church's proclamation and demonstration of life in its fullness, available through the person of Jesus, grows ever more urgent as our world society becomes more broken and fragmented.

Throughout our history men and women called by God and anointed by the Spirit expressed their call by reaching, planting, training and touching the world's people. Visible expressions of "touching" meant feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, pouring oil on the wounded, and in general, continuing the compassionate ministry of Christ. We have pursued these ministries broadly, long term, and with passion. However, while "touching" is firmly embedded within our mission statement, it is felt that our actions in compassionate ministries should be clearly enunciated as part of our intentional theology and strategy.

Abstract

To affirm both the historical and contemporary commitment of our missionary family to the wholistic ministry pattern of Jesus and of the early Church, a multinational consultation met in Brussels, Belgium, May 27-30, 1998. Under the Spirit's leadership, and as we begin the 21st century, the time has come to reaffirm and clarify the biblical and theological grounds on which a wholistic approach to ministry and mission is supported. This will empower us to rise to the full potential the Lord of the Harvest has ordained.

Jesus and the Kingdom of God

The theme of the Kingdom of God provides a fruitful starting point to begin formulating principles of a biblically based theology of church mission aimed at the integration of evangelism and social concern.

Jesus identified His mission, ministry and message with the inauguration of the Kingdom of God_ the time of God's messianic salvation (Mk 1:15). In the teachings of Jesus, it is clear that He proclaimed that the Kingdom of God is both a future event (Matt. 13:36-43; 47-50), and a present reality (Luke 11:20; 12:32). In the ministry of Jesus the "signs" that the Kingdom of God had already broken into the present were demonstrated when He cast out demons, healed the sick, performed miracles, brought good news to the poor, proclaimed freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and the release of the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19; 7:21-23). He responded to sickness and disease with healing and wholeness, to hunger with food in abundance,

and to death with hope in the resurrection. His exemplary ministry and the sacrifice of His life on the cross became a summons for service for all of His followers.

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God, while dynamically demonstrated in His ministry, is also in the future. The Kingdom of God "already" present is "not yet" fully consummated. There remains the eschatological fulfillment when the messianic salvation will be perfectly accomplished in the age to come (Matt. 24:29-31).

To enter the Kingdom requires a radical transformation in which through repentance and faith the rule of God is established in human lives (Mk. 1:15; Matt. 18:1-4). Such a response to the message of the King and the subsequent change of life means "being saved" or "born again" (Eph. 2:8-10; John 3:3). This entry into the blessings of the Kingdom is a gift; it comes as God's initiative and depends solely on His grace. Becoming a Christian, entering the Kingdom, is open only to those who are willing to deny themselves and their own selfish interests in order to acknowledge God's lordship over the totality of their lives (Mk. 8:34-37).

The Kingdom of God and the Power of the Holy Spirit in the Early Church

The Pentecostal narrative in Acts is integrally connected to the Kingdom of God and mission of Jesus. The experience of the Holy Spirit and the eschatological hope in the return of Jesus Christ were the two energizing realities that inspired and shaped early Church mission, and in turn, the twentieth century Pentecostal movement, with a zeal for global evangelism. The connection derived from Acts between church mission, the empowerment of the Spirit and the eschatological hope provides a theological vantage point from which to view a biblically-based integrated understanding of evangelism and social concern in action. While the Gospels focused on the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus; Acts described the activity of the Holy Spirit in the early Church, the Body of Christ. The same Holy Spirit that had anointed and empowered Jesus of Nazareth was outpoured to empower the disciples to enable the Church to continue Jesus' mission, ministry and message; to do "all that Jesus began to do and to teach (Acts 1:1).

In the power of the Holy Spirit the early Church, following the example of Jesus, proclaimed the good news of God's redemptive reign in Christ. Miracles, signs and wonders were performed and acts of compassion were practiced in light of human need. The established social and religious orders were challenged and economic, racial and cultural barriers within the community of faith were overcome. In the same way, Spirit filled believers in every age and in every nation can expect to proclaim and demonstrate the transforming power of the Gospel to the peoples of the world.

Life Under the Rule of God (or Life in the Kingdom of God)

The ethical teaching of Jesus describes what life looks like when people respond to God's gracious rule. The moral imperatives that Jesus identifies in His ethics, such as love, mercy, peace, justice, respect of persons, and generosity are not prescriptions of law. They are descriptions of grace. The mission of the church is to give visible evidence of the Kingdom and its ethics within its own community and in its ministry to the world.

To enter the kingdom and come under God's rule is to be incorporated into the new order where love is normative. Because men and women are created in God's own image (Gen. 1:26-28), each person is loved by God and possesses a unique value, therefore the dignity and freedom of all need to be affirmed.

Love is much more than an emotion. It must be demonstrated in an act. God showed the sacrificial nature of His love by the death of His Son on the cross (Rom 5:8). His love for us elicits a response of love from us (I John 4:19) which is shown in acts of worship, prayer, praise, service and the fulfilling of the Great Commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-40). This love for neighbor reaches across every boundary that divides people, bringing reconciliation, restoration and wholeness. Such love bears witness that those who claim to live in the Kingdom are God's people who belong to him. This unconditional love is reflective of God's own character and is to be translated into human deeds enabled by God's gracious gift of salvation and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The Church Bearing Witness to the Kingdom

The community of the local church is God's ordained instrument wherein His presence dwells. The local church is called to be God's visible and corporate entity bearing witness to His kingdom in mission and reconciliation between people (Eph.2:14-18). The transforming impact of this reconciliation on all dimensions of the lives of those who are part of God's redeemed community provides an observable signpost to the reign of God (Acts 2:42-47) and is a powerful witness to the world of the redemptive mission of God (2 Co. 5: 18-20).

In Jesus' ministry, which is our model, He used many different ways to introduce people to God's offer of salvation. Jesus ministered to people in a manner that met their needs, challenged them, and invited them to come under the rule of God. In the Gospels, for children it meant dignity, for women self worth and justice in marriage, for the sick it meant healing, for the self-righteous Pharisee it was the challenge to lay down legalism, have a childlike faith and humbly ask forgiveness and accept the gift of eternal life.

The Church bears the responsibility for the spread of the Gospel. As the Spirit-empowered church extends the offer of salvation to all people, it will reflect the same diversity in methods and means as seen in the ministry of Jesus. To follow Jesus' example, the community of faith must therefore address spiritual, personal, social, economic and physical needs (Mt. 25 :31-46).

The Return of the King (or The Consummation of the Kingdom or The Fulfillment of the Kingdom)

The hope of the return of the Lord makes demands on our life and service in the present. While we long for the coming of the King, we shall not be passive. The promise of His return, our Blessed Hope, compels us to continue our work of proclaiming the Good News, engaging the powers of darkness and showing the compassion of Jesus to the suffering. When our vision is focused upon the coming of

our Lord, with its assurance of His triumph, we are given new strength to carry on even amidst difficult circumstances.

The Church of Jesus Christ knows it is not home yet, it is still on the journey towards the eternal city. But the One who came preaching the Kingdom of God and calling us to be His followers, will come again in power and glory to fulfill His kingdom and establish the new heaven and the new earth. In the new heaven and the new earth there will be no war, no oppression, and no poverty. There will be no sickness or people bound by demons. Until then the Church is to be faithful in fulfilling the mission of the Kingdom of God, for Jesus has said: "and this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Mt. 21:14). May we, the faithful servants of the King, be able truly to respond: "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Conclusion

We celebrate the long history of ministries to the poor and needy of the world which Assemblies of God believers have pioneered and continue through ministry endeavors. We rejoice in the ever broadening impact of our ministries of compassion and affirm them as an integral part of the Gospel and our missionary mandate.

Our faith and action are rooted both in God's self-revelation in Scripture and in the value and worth of all persons because they are created in His image. These foundational truths are fulfilled in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, carried out by the Church, and are evidenced by the dynamic work and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. These fundamental affirmations within Pentecostal theology provide an integral framework for wholistic ministry-reaching, planting, teaching, and touching.