

Global Consultation on World Evangelization 1997: Presidents and Academic Deans Declaration

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During June 20-July 5, 1997, along with approximately 4,000 mission and church leaders from more than 150 nations, I took part in the Global Consultation on World Evangelization (GCOWE '97). Participants were divided into ten parallel tracks, each of which focused on the overall task of a church for every people and the gospel for every person on planet earth.

Sandwiched between plenary sessions on Monday and Friday, each track met morning through night for three consecutive days in various churches located throughout the city.

Of particular interest to EMS members is the declaration that emerged from the Presidents and Academic Deans (PAD) track. Unlike missions professors, who often revise their syllabus after attendance at a consultation of this nature, presidents and deans are empowered to reshape in their entirety the institutions they lead. Early reports indicate that already the ten theses printed below are reshaping ministerial training in multiple institutions around the globe to conform to the vision which was articulated at Pretoria.

Two hundred and fifty Presidents and Academic Deans (PAD) representing theological schools from 53 nations gathered at the Doxa Deo Church in Pretoria, South Africa, July 1-3, 1997 to consider ways in which the schools they lead can further the goal of "a church for every people and the gospel for every person." Theological educators have tremendous potential to bless, but also to damage the church, to enhance, but also to hinder the fulfillment of the commission. Out of the worship, plenary addresses, workshops, testimonies, prayer, discussion, and informal fellowship the following ten theses have emerged:

1. The primacy of missiological concern for world evangelism must be recognized and focused in the total curriculum of ministry training.
2. Partnership at all levels and in multiple forms is essential for reaching the unreached people of the world.
3. Formal, non-formal and relational approaches to learning are to be seen as complementary rather than competitive.
4. The content of ministry training must uphold the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the necessity of personal faith in Him as Lord and Saviour. This is especially imperative in the light of the increasing pluralistic environment which has been brought about by the resurgence of non-Christian religions hostile to the advance of the gospel, by the erosion of historic Christianity in the West, and by the increasing prevalence of secularism almost everywhere.
5. Ministry training must aim to produce practicing supernaturalists who minister effectively in the power of the Holy Spirit, relying on prayer and complete trust in the Word of God.
6. Basic to all ministry training is spiritual and character formation in the life of the student, in part facilitated by the example of the teacher.

7. Approaches to ministry training must reflect concern for the whole counsel of God wisely contextualized and sustainable by local and national resources.
8. Academic accreditation may serve to guarantee quality control and encourage institutional effectiveness. At the same time it should not be allowed to impede the spiritual and missiological thrust of theological education. Every effort must be made to assure that accrediting structures affirm and promote commitment to world evangelisation.
9. Serious consideration should be given to the training of both husband and wife for their mutual effectiveness in ministry, and accessibility to ministry training broadened to include all who can benefit from it.
10. A permanent PAD track has been incorporated into the AD 2000 movement and another consultation will be convened.

Looking to the future, we call upon college residents and Academic Deans and commit ourselves to put the vision of "a church for every people and the gospel for every person" at the heart of ministry training. We resolve to explore together new paradigms of partnership in theological education that training schools share their distinctives and resources to accomplish the goal of global evangelization. We shall continue to press the claims of the kingdoms as we move towards the consummation of history and the coming of our Lord in the glory of God.

HALLELUJAH, THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY REIGNS!