

“Christians and citizens, hope and responsibility”

Strasbourg, 2008

Declaration of the organizers of the Second European Evangelical Protestant Ethics Congress

Introduction

Evangelical Protestants of various origins, we reaffirm that the Gospel is above all the Good News of the salvation of God in Jesus Christ that can never be reduced to a moral or political recipe that should be imposed on human beings. We are reminded that the love of God concerns the whole person just as it does every human being. We cannot therefore be unconcerned about the way in which we live in society. That is why,

- proclaiming the sovereignty of the eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Creator and Judge of all human beings, who desires for them justice, reconciliation, and deliverance from all forms of oppression,
- committed to the Holy Scripture, Old and New Testaments, whose divine inspiration, truth and authority we affirm,
- trusting in the grace of God,
- in the spirit of the Lausanne Declaration of 1974,
- convinced that socio-political involvement is a part of our duty as Christians,
- following the examples of William Wilberforce, Henri Dunant, Charles Péan, Martin Luther King, and many others,

we want to endeavour to promote justice, peace and interpersonal relationships of integrity in society, on the local level and more widely, for the good of the human community.

Committed to the neutrality of the State in matters of religion, we claim no privilege or special right for ourselves, other than, as for every citizen, the right to express our convictions and to be involved in all aspects of public life.

1. A realistic commitment

We affirm that love for our neighbour necessarily leads us, in a spirit of service to the community, to play an active role as citizens, because faith without works is dead. Christians, through their involvement in public life, want to be witnesses of the Kingdom of love, justice and peace desired by Christ, a Kingdom that He asks us to demonstrate here and now, but that only He will fully establish when He returns. This involvement can take many forms: individual acts, involvement in community groups, exercising an elected office, etc. Of course, given that human nature is marked by sin and that power exposes those who exercise it to many temptations, and because situations are complex and changing, we recognize that political involvement, as such, will always be imperfect. But we affirm that this understanding should not be a pretext for the Church to remain passive when faced with a good that can be accomplished or an evil that must be resisted. This understanding goes hand-in-hand with the hope that we place in the living God. We know that nothing is impossible for Him and that He can make a way where there is no way.

2. Shared convictions

As evangelical Protestants, we hold in common several beliefs that unite us because their source is Biblical revelation itself. We draw our inspiration from this common source as the foundation of our thought and our action. Nevertheless, we do not idolize any particular current of thought or party, even when it claims to be based on the Gospel, and we welcome, even among ourselves, a legitimate diversity of political choices insofar as they remain consistent with the values of the Gospel.

3. The importance of the human person

We affirm the absolute value and dignity of every human person, because we believe that each human being is created in the image of God. The respect for the human being, from conception to natural death, must remain our priority. Because they themselves do not have the means to defend their cause, we must pay special attention to those who are vulnerable or who are made vulnerable by age, sickness, social status, foreign origins etc. – in other words we must support the weak and the oppressed.

4. The individual and the common good

We are reminded that the individual has duties as well as rights within the community. That is why, as Christians, we want to work for the common good and to challenge all forms of individualism that are destructive of the common life of the community. Nevertheless, we are firmly reminded that it is the well being of people that must be the goal of all politics. The economy in particular has as its vocation to serve human beings, not the reverse. We affirm that the search for the common interest should never justify anything that would damage the absolute value and dignity of the individual. These core values

take precedence over every other distinction, whether of skin colour, culture, nationality, ethnic or religious affiliation, class, age, sex, etc..

5. Justice, peace and the quality of interpersonal relationships

We seek justice. To seek justice we must first strive to be just ourselves, that is, to live in conformity with the will of God in our personal life and in society. Christians are called to respect the public authorities, (or ‘powers that be’?) but obedience to God and to His commandment to love our neighbour is primary. Therefore, we want to defend what is right and equitable, but we are reminded that Justice comes before the law and that the search for it sometimes can lead us to oppose certain human laws.

Peace, also, is at the heart of the will of God for mankind, and is inseparable from Justice. One cannot speak of peace where there is oppression or exploitation, and the pursuit of peace, paradoxically, can be a source of conflict. Because Christians are called by Christ to be peacemakers, they have the responsibility not to flee conflicts, but to work for their resolution whilst refusing to enter into the cycle of violence. (?could this be taken as a Pacifist position)

In a more general sense, because the love of Christ propels us, we want to work to improve the quality of interpersonal relationships within society, both at the local level and more widely, through our words and our deeds, for the good of the human community.

6. Concern for creation

We affirm that human beings are stewards of a world created by God. As such, humans are responsible for, and have as their mission, to take care of creation, notably in being attentive to the long-term consequences of the decisions they make today. This respect for creation is founded equally on the love of God and of His work and on concern for those who live today and who will live on this planet after us.

7. Attentive to everyone

We affirm that Christians have the duty to speak for those who do not have a voice and for those who are ignored or overlooked. Christian faithfulness cannot be reduced to support for highly publicized causes – however just those causes may be—and it is our responsibility to be attentive to, and to call to the attention of public opinion and political leaders, subjects that are not addressed at all or are only summarily addressed by the media and public opinion.

Conclusion

We are disciples of Jesus Christ, who lived among men as a servant. It is as servants that we want to take our place in the society of which we are a part, attentive to the needs and distress of our world. Christians and citizens, we are convinced that the Gospel retains all its relevance for our society today. We do not want either to lose interest in public life or to impose our convictions, but we would not know how to love and serve without dialoguing with the world, making our voice heard, and taking up our responsibilities.

So, we call upon Christians to

- not give in to resignation and fear, but to act for the transformation of the world,
- discern to which specific forms of involvement they are called,
- dare to take innovative initiatives,
- pray for those, Christians and non-Christians alike, who exercise political authority.

Let us be sowers of hope!

The Declaration “Christians and citizens, hope and responsibility” was solemnly/formally signed on 25 May by its organizers at the close of the Second European Evangelical Protestant Ethics Congress, which took place in Strasbourg, France from 23 to 25 May 2008 with more than 200 participants from Belgium, France and Switzerland.

European Evangelical Alliance

Evangelical Federation of France

French Evangelical Alliance

National Federation of Churches and Ministries of the Assemblies of God of France

French and Belgian Evangelical Alliance

CARE for Europe

Institute for the Development of Research and Reconciliation

Evangelical Protestant Committee for Human Dignity

Swiss Evangelical Network