

I. Reflections on the Conference & Declaration

A diverse group of some 120 evangelical economists, theologians, business people and development personnel from six continents gathered at the Oxford Center for Mission Studies in January 1990 to work on a comprehensive document on Christian Faith and Economics. This historic conference was an outgrowth of a smaller similar conference in January 1987 (see *Transformation*, Sept. 1987) spearheaded by Vinay Samuel (India), Ron Sider (US), and Chris Sugden (Oxford Study Center).

The conference document was the culmination of a three-year long study process involving regional conferences in 16 parts of the world with specific papers prepared in four areas: stewardship and creation; work and leisure; justice; freedom, government and economics. Ron McLoughry, a British economist, used the papers presented at these regional conferences to draft an initial 72-page statement for discussion by the Oxford 1990 conference.

The preliminary draft went through several revisions during the working conference. Indeed, each sentence of the document was carefully reviewed by conference participants diligently working in groups of 6-8 with a drafting committee taking input from the various groups and rewriting the document. The drafting committee included P.J. Hill (Wheaton College), Bryant Myers (World Vision), and Steve Mott, (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary) and was headed by Rene Padilla, a Latin American theologian.

A second parallel process was a thorough study of income generation projects in the private sector by Joe Remenyi, an Australian economist. His study was based on field research and visits to projects in seven countries in Asia and Africa. The study focused on successful credit-based income-generation projects which targeted the 'informal' sector. This study will be published by the Intermediate Technology Group in London later this year.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of this conference was the fact that it brought together people who have never talked with each other before. The ideological spectrum represented ranged from liberation theologians to conservatives and libertarians. The final 17-page declaration very clearly affirmed the strengths of the market system and the need for creation of wealth. Recognizing that too much attention on the creation of wealth can lead to inefficiencies and serious inequities, however, the document also clearly called on the Christian community to address issues of stewardship, materialism, justice and human dignity.

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North American papers, written by John Mason & Kurt Schaefer, Phil Wogaman, and John Alexander, heavily influenced the process, particularly the first draft of this statement.

Where will this go? One of the primary objectives of this document was to stimulate Christian economic study on matters of stewardship and justice. In the words of Sider, interest in the document has been 'astonishing.' It has already been translated into several languages and is being seriously studied in different parts of the world. The Oxford planning committee is meeting this summer to consider a third such conference in three years. There is interest in encouraging more

regional conferences. Sider states that "something too good happened in Oxford to just let this die." The committee is also planning to publish a book including the document, selected regional papers plus several essays reflecting on the document itself, and the process.

Other results were more informal in that many new relationships were established, and participants with vastly different perspectives developed a greater understanding of each other. One participant observed that in some 25 years of attending conferences he had never been to one where there was a healthier spirit and respect for others. It is hoped that this constructive dialogue will continue. ■

II. Reflections on the Conference & Declaration

Let me first review the process that resulted in the Oxford Declaration. An initial, smaller conference (held in Oxford in January of 1987) produced several papers (reprinted in *Transformation* 4:3-4, J/S and O/D 1987) and initiated two follow-up processes. First, a study of credit-based income-generating development projects in poorer nations was commissioned. Second, the entire world was divided into seventeen geographic regions, each of which was to produce four papers on the four topics highlighted in the Declaration. These sixty-eight papers were to be refined in regional conferences, then submitted to a single editor who would collate them into a "long" (72 pages) interpretive paper. A shorter "statement," which was to be discussed and revised by the conference and issued to the public as the conference "Declaration," was not available to conferees until after the conference began, and then only appeared one section at a time. These sections were discussed primarily in small (about 7-person) groups, with group comments passed back to a drafting committee that often worked late into the night to produce a revision for the next morning's session. After about a half dozen such revision cycles, the final draft of the Declaration emerged.

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