



## **Declaration and Invitation (1999)**

### **DECLARATION**

Through the church, the Wisdom of God is being made known to the world (Cf. Eph. 3:10). This may come as a surprise to many, both inside and outside the church. The economic, political, and social structures of the contemporary era are so powerful that they frequently seem to eclipse God's Wisdom, substituting for it the "wisdom" of the world. Instead of living as the body of Christ, Christians too often conform their lives to partisan ideologies and identities, or to the routines of a consumer culture. We are often asked to put other allegiances before what we owe to God and the community of faith; and all too often, our churches seem willing to subordinate the Gospel to the imperatives of economic and political power holders and institutions.

And yet, we are called not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed, by the renewing of our minds, so that we might discern the will of God — what is good, and acceptable, and perfect (Cf. Rom. 12:2). We speak of the Church as "the body of Christ" because we believe that Christians are called to make present the reality of Jesus Christ in the world. Hence, to "be the Church" is to declare that our allegiance to the God of Jesus Christ always takes priority over the other structures that compete for our attention during every hour of every day of our lives.

Christians from many walks of life feel the tensions among these competing allegiances, and recognize that accommodation and compromise are woefully inadequate responses. Some find themselves frustrated by the modern university and its various guilds, within which the Christian intellectual life is no longer recognized as a viable subject of conversation. Others are concerned that many people who describe themselves as Christians do not know the central stories of the Christian faith, let alone allow their lives to be shaped by these stories. Still others are anxious about the challenges of raising children in the Christian life, in the midst of a culture increasingly driven by consumerism and violence. What holds all these concerns together is the common conviction that the Christian faith should play the decisive formative role in our day-to-day lives. And it is also clear that many Christian universities, local churches and believers are unwilling or unable to play this role if it means resisting certain powerful aspects of the existing order.

To offer but one example: at one time, universities provided at least some "free and ordered space" within which the claims of the Christian life could be imagined, criticized, and supported even in the midst of the competing, often dominant, claims of state, empire and economy. But the increasing secularization of the modern university has made it, in most cases, a hostile environment for conversations about the Christian life. And yet, such conversations desperately need to take place if we hope to work toward a greater integration of Christian convictions and Christian practices, and if scholars are to explore what Christianity might mean to their fields of study and their various intellectual vocations. Without space for

Christian scholarship and reflection, and without conversations among Christians in the universities, in the workplaces, and in local congregations, the entire church is enfeebled.

From the time of the earliest gatherings of the disciples of Jesus, Christians have recognized that God fashions the Body of Christ to be a visible presence in the world. We are “called out” from the world, as suggested by the original Greek word for church: *ekklesia*. We understand this “calling out” to be the work of Holy Spirit, who redeems the lives of believers not as isolated individuals, but as members of an alternative community — a resource of resistance to the social and political structures of the age.

Carrying out this communal work requires a common vision and a good deal of mutual support. This is part of the mission of the local church, to which all Christians must remain committed. But congregations and other Christian organizations find it difficult to live a life of discipleship in the midst of competition from the thousands of objects, images, and ideals that vie for our allegiance and attention on a daily basis. Living the Christian life in the midst of such competition requires nourishment and strengthening from the Holy Spirit, carried out through *koinonia* (communion, fellowship) with other persons who find themselves similarly called.

Therefore, we have formed a network of mutual support for the life of Christian discipleship support that, sadly, is lacking in many local congregations. We believe that we can help one another to narrow the gaps between what we Christians profess and how we live. We call this The Ekklesia Project, in recognition of the fact that we are “called out” of the world into a different mode of life.

The Ekklesia Project is not a church, nor is it an alternative to existing local churches. It intends to celebrate and make known the work of those congregations and groups whose allegiances to God and the Body of Christ make discipleship a lived reality in the world. The Project also intends, in the spirit of “fraternal correction” (cf. Mt. 18: 15-16; 1Thess. 5:14), to challenge communities and practices that have minimized or diluted the church’s obligation to be a “light to the nations” (cf. Isa. 49:6) and a foretaste of the promised Kingdom of God. Those of us who have created The Ekklesia Project hope and expect to be held to the same level of accountability by our brothers and sisters in Christ.

## **PRINCIPLES**

Our principles are simple and straightforward:

1. We believe that the triune God is the origin and the ultimate goal of all things; and that, through Jesus Christ, we are called to give our allegiance to God and to make the Church our true dwelling place. We believe that the claims of Christ have priority over those of the state, the market, race, class, gender, and other functional idolatries. “You shall have no other Gods before me” (Ex. 20:3).
2. We believe that communal worship is the heart of the Christian life. We seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring our everyday practices into greater conformity with our worship, such that our entire lives may be lived to glorify God. Similarly, we pledge to give and receive counsel about how we might better embody the Gospel in its individual and communal expressions. “Praise the Lord; praise the name of the Lord; give praise, O servants of the Lord” (Psalm 135: 1).

3. We believe that the church undercuts its own vocation when it compromises with the institutions, allegiances and assumptions that undergird the “culture of death” in our world. We remind all Christians that, in rejecting the sword and other lethal means to advance His goals, Jesus set an example for all of us who seek to follow Him. While accepting rather than imposing death may still be foolish and scandalous in the eyes of non-Christians (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23), it remains central to what it means to follow a crucified and risen Messiah. We believe that the process of renewing the church in our day requires Christians to rethink all those values and practices that presume a smooth fit between killing and discipleship no matter how disturbing or divisive this reappraisal may be (cf. Matt. 10:34-8). Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).
  
4. We do not accept the ultimacy of divisions imposed on the Body of Christ — whether they be national borders, denominational divides, cultural and social stereotypes, or class divisions. We seek to restore the bonds of ecclesial unity and solidarity that are always under threat from the powers and principalities of the present age. “For I am sure that neither death, nor life, . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39). We seek to embody these principles through an ongoing critical conversation about the Christian life. We expect this to include regular gatherings and retreats at the local, regional, and national levels; a wide variety of publications, in both paper and electronic form, for a variety of audiences (academic, ecclesial, and popular); and through an ongoing network of communication (including a regular newsletter). Additionally, the members of The Ekklesia Project pledge that they will maintain vital prayer lives, participate in the worship life of their local churches, perform the traditional works of mercy (e.g., feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, welcoming the stranger, instructing the uneducated), and observe a daytime fast every Friday as a form of prayerful resistance to the idolatrous practices of our culture. We will hold one another responsible for these covenantal practices and those that the Spirit may lead us to accept at a later time.

## **AN INVITATION**

We invite Christians from all walks of life to join us by endorsing The Ekklesia Project. We ask for your prayers and participation; we ask each endorser to pledge a specific amount of time and money to the support of the Project each year; and we ask you to add your name to the endorser list of The Ekklesia Project.

### **Endorse**

Endorsing the Ekklesia Project is an expression of our commitment to God, the Church, and the friendship we share in Christ. Recognizing that friends ask things of one another, we therefore ask of ourselves and our fellow endorsers that we:

- maintain vital prayer lives
- participate in the worship and missional life of our local congregations
- practice the traditional works of mercy (e.g., feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, welcoming the stranger)
- observe a regular fast (from food, technology, or other good) as a form of resistance to the idolatries of our culture
- support the work of the Ekklesia Project with our prayers and, as we are able, with our monetary gifts

We know that we will need to rely on each other to be faithful in these things—to give and to receive strength and encouragement. We trust in the goodness of God to see us through.

You can endorse on our website.