



Urgent Issues Most Relevant to World Evangelization

By Kai Kjær-Hansen

“A new vision, a new heart and a renewed call’ was the theme of the Lausanne 2004 Forum for World Evangelization, held in Pattaya, Thailand from September 29 to October 5, 2004. More than 1500 participants from 130 countries attended the 31 simultaneous consultations of the Forum on urgent issues most relevant to world evangelization.”

Those words are taken from *The Lausanne 2004 Forum Summary Affirmations*, which was distributed to all the participants at Forum 2004’s concluding service in Pattaya. The topic for Issue Group #31 was *Reaching Jews with the Gospel*. The team working on the topic referred to itself as the *Jewish Evangelism Working Session (JEWS)*.

As new groups were added to the initial 22 groups to take part in the Forum, the JEWS group was the very last to be part of the program. It was also the smallest of the 31 issue groups, with only seven members.

First or last, big or small, Jewish evangelism was part of the program at Forum 2004 and was therefore one of the (in the words of the leadership of Forum 2004) “urgent issues most relevant to world evangelization.” Thus there is reason to rejoice. Where else is there today an international Christian network, which will include Jewish evangelism as one of the 31 “urgent issues most relevant to world evangelization”?

Although the work of the different Issue Groups occupied many hours at Forum 2004, the conference also provided an opportunity through its plenary sessions to hear from other groups and to learn of their agenda. Reports from the persecuted church made an impression, and need to be remembered when we in Jewish evangelism talk about the opposition Jewish believers in Jesus experience from their Jewish community. The conference program also included synergy groups providing members from different groups an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas and experiences. The following are two examples:

The JEWS group met with representatives from the group *Discipling Oral Learners*. Initially it seemed these two groups had very little in common. Jews all read and write whereas much of the world is made up of oral learners who understand best when information comes to them by means of stories. But as the conversation progressed we realized that to

share "Good News" in story form and parables is a means that certainly can be used also in Jewish work.

Similarly the meeting with representatives from the Issue Group *Understanding Muslims* was very fruitful. Jewish evangelism and Muslim evangelism face a lot of similar challenges. The Jewish-Christian dialogue questions the legitimacy and necessity of Jewish evangelism. This is also true of Christian-Muslim dialogue when commonalities between the two religions are emphasized and differences toned down. Just like some Jewish believers in Jesus are ostracized from the Jewish community, the same thing happens – perhaps to an even larger extent – to believers in Jesus from a Muslim background. Like Jewish believers struggle to express their faith in a Jewish way and in Jewish terms so believers from a Muslim background ask how they can do it in their context without compromising the gospel. Finally, just like there is a danger that Jewish believers (and those of us involved in Jewish evangelism) become anti-Arab, so believers in Jesus from a Muslim background stand in danger of becoming anti-Jewish in an attempt to gain sympathy within their own Muslim community. These examples suffice to show that those involved in Jewish evangelism stand to gain if this conversation could proceed in one way or another.

The JEWS group and the other 30 Issue Groups were challenged to write a report of their work. The reports will be published in the beginning of 2005. Next issue of *Mishkan* will take a closer look at the topics dealt with at Forum 2004.

The report from the JEWS group will have the title *Jewish Evangelism – A Call to the Church*. The introduction closes with the following words (taken from the not yet final edited document):

A Renewed Call

When we maintain that the gospel of Jesus is the gospel of salvation for Jews as well as for Gentiles, we realize that we also make ourselves vulnerable to accusations of spiritual arrogance, religious imperialism and supersessionism vis-à-vis the synagogue.

We therefore affirm that neither Jewish evangelism nor world evangelism needs manmade triumphalism. Genuine evangelization to Jews as well as non-Jews is carried out only by the victory of God raising Jesus from the dead, calling all men to himself through faith in the crucified and resurrected Jesus. Evangelism is credible when it is clear that the one who brings the Good News to others needs the gospel as much for himself or herself ...

For much is at stake for the church if it denounces Jewish evangelism. Many within the church today do so without realizing the theological and missiological implications ...

What is at stake can simply be expressed in these words: *If Jesus is not the Messiah for the Jewish people he is not Christ for the nations.*

