

YWAM's Covenantal Framework

(A draft document by David Joel Hamilton - 2014)

Our Foundational Covenant

It was June of 1956. Loren Cunningham was in the Bahamas with four other young men to evangelize and gather young people together using their musical gifts. On a Wednesday at 3 PM, a few days before his twenty-first birthday, he was kneeling by the bed in the simply-furnished guest room of his missionary host. He was asking the Lord about the message he was to speak that evening. Then, as he looked up at the white walls, something unexpected happened.

He says, “Suddenly I was looking at a map of the world, only the map was alive and moving! I could see all the continents, and waves were crashing onto their shores. Each wave went onto a continent, then receded, then came up further until it covered the continent completely. The waves become young people—kids my age and even younger—covering all the continents of the globe. They were talking to people on street corners and outside bars. They were going from house to house and preaching the Gospel. They came from everywhere and went everywhere, caring for people. Then just as suddenly as it had come the scene was gone.”¹

God had spoken to Loren through this vision of the waves. This remarkable initiative by God to share his dream with Loren would lead to the launch of Youth With A Mission four years later. Within a generation millions of young people would have their lives touched by God because of this vision of the waves.

We are some of those young people. Our lives have been changed because of how God met Loren that day in the Bahamas. As we reflect back on that event, we realize that that moment had significant parallels to other moments throughout history; moments when God stepped in to share his heart and his purposes for the world. Indeed we have come to realize that this vision, this unexpected encounter, was a God-initiated, destiny-defining, foundational covenant that God gave Loren in order to birth a new missions movement.

What should that movement look like? What were the major elements of this covenantal vision?

First of all, it was about youth. This was both a concrete reality and it can also serve as a metaphor for something more. Concretely, if we ever move away from championing young people we have moved away from the call of God upon us as the YWAM tribe. Metaphorically, this is the language of missional de-regulation and innovation. Young people were not considered candidates for missions in the mid-twentieth century. It was simply not something that was done when Loren saw this vision. And so it is today that this covenantal vision continues to call us to do what is not being done by others in the church. It calls us to lead out apostolically to birth fresh, entrepreneurial initiatives in the Spirit in order to accomplish Great Commission goals. It calls us to a lifestyle of viral pioneering, co-creating with God, doing and encouraging others to do new things in new ways.

¹ *Is That Really You, God?* by Loren Cunningham with Janice Rogers, YWAM Publishing.

Secondly, it was about all and every. The waves of young people covered every nation in all the continents. It is about being global, comprehensive, inclusive. If we ever lose sight of the alls and the everyys we have lost sight of God's vision for us as a movement. This is not limited only to the geographic alls. It also includes every thematic all, as we move redemptively into all the spheres, all the languages, and all the other various categories of human life and experience. As we do so, this covenant compels us to growth. It is about recurring and ever-expanding waves. This speaks of multi-generational re-iterations of the vision that expand in fractal-like multiplication. Each wave builds on that which has gone before. Each one makes fresh impact in new ways, reaching heights not previously achieved. It's never static. It's always dynamic, focused on going where we are not.

Our Covenant Renewal Documents

Several times over our first half century of life there have been key moments in which we as YWAM have felt it fitting and beneficial to recommit ourselves individually and corporately to God's covenantal call upon us. These moments have been captured in documents which seek to reflect upon God's call, clarifying its full implications and unpacking fresh applications. These covenantal documents have sought to strengthen us in God's call and realign us with his purposes. They have been successful to the degree that they helped equip us to embrace his foundational covenant that birthed us as a missions movement.

The Manila Covenant

In August, 1988 some 1500 YWAMers gathered in Manila for an international staff and leadership conference. As the event drew to a close they signed the twenty affirmations made in this covenantal document. It was a fitting finale to a landmark event. Called by Floyd McClung, it was the first such event led by a new generation of YWAM leaders. Highlights of the event included Kalafi Moala's message on the release of young people, women and third-worlders into missions leadership and our commitment to become two-thirds from the two-thirds world by the end of the twentieth century. Another significant milestone was the embrace of the new name of the University of the Nations (formerly Pacific and Asia University), allowing for the global inclusion of all in this missions-multiplying university.

This covenant reaffirmed our commitment to young people, stating, "*We affirm the calling of the Lord upon our mission to mobilize youth for world evangelism. We express in this covenant our commitment to see young people mobilized in great numbers for world evangelism, and youthful, exuberant world changers be given every opportunity to take roles of leadership and influence in our mission.*" It went on to affirm "*male and female in positions of leadership*" and that "*our staff and leadership should be ... representative of all nations of the earth*" thus furthering the de-regulation of missions in innovative ways.

This document also highlighted the alls and everyys in various ways: it spoke of our commitment to "*evangelism, training, and ministries of mercy ... so that by God's grace then the empowering of the Holy Spirit we will do all God asks of us to help complete the Great Commission.*" It goes on to challenge us to reach the unreached with the grid of the "*nine frontiers of world evangelism*"

and give ourselves to see Jesus as Lord over “*every sphere of life,*” It urges us to the two-handed approach of the gospel, that is “*to love people in both word and deed in order to proclaim and demonstrate the Good News of the gospel*” through “*personal evangelism and ... acts of mercy.*” It concludes with a holistic call to the ends of the Christian Magna Carta.

The Red Sea Covenant

In April of 1992, about a dozen YWAM leaders, forming the International Executive Committee gathered together in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. At that time YWAM had only a limited ministry among Muslims. A year earlier at the International Strategy Conference in Foz de Iguacu, Argentina, God had birthed in Lynn Green’s heart the vision for the Reconciliation Walk. Then just a few weeks before this meeting in the Middle East, Gary Tissingh had an accident which resulted in the loss of sight in one eye. Tom Hallas – who also has sight in only one eye – was also present at these meetings. These personal physical needs caught the attention of the group in the place of prayer. The Spirit led them to reflect on the fact that many have come into that part of the world with only one eye for the Jews or only one eye for the Arabs. But if we wanted to reflect his heart of unconditional love for all peoples we needed to pray that we would have a two-eyed approach, a healthy, wholesome, inclusive approach, that would not exclude anyone from God’s purposes. God underlined in prayer that any love that is limited by some human divide is not God’s love. His love is limitless.

Although the words of the document do not reflect a direct commitment to the first element of our foundational covenant, the fruit of what emerged from this time certainly was evidence of new missional innovations. One of the concrete initiatives that was pioneered as a result of this covenant was the launch of the *30 Days of Prayer* movement. Another was the Reconciliation Walk which touched both Jewish and Muslim communities in extraordinary ways over the next several years.

The documents call “*to keep our vision whole, seeing both Jews and Arabs as God’s beloved creation*” was exemplary of how we must embrace all peoples on every side of historic divides. What was true of this particular in the Middle East would serve to inform our attitude as we approached other binary conflicts: Japanese-Korean; Armenian-Turkish; Hutu-Tutsi. Instead of siding with any one side of an ethnic, national or linguistic divide, we were to embrace the attitude of all and every, seeking to be God’s agents of reconciliation and redemption across every line that would otherwise separate us and limit our vision.

The Nanning Covenant

Ten years later, In August of 2002, the Global Leadership Team would meet in Nanning, China. The events leading up to this gathering had been troubling. There had been a sense, shared by Loren Cunningham a year earlier at our GLT meetings in Nairobi, Kenya, that the mission was drifting from the vision and values that God had given us. Deviations from God’s covenantal call which seemed minor at first were having profound impact on our lives and ministries. We were starting to act more like a corporation in which we defined our own destiny rather than a missions

movement committed to walk in the inheritance the Lord had established for us. Relationships had been affected. Fruitfulness was compromised. A time of missional re-alignment was needed.

But all was not lost. In July, at a prayer meeting held in the Cunningham's home convened by the Innovations for Transformation Centre, Loren sensed, "We have hit the rock!" This phrase referred to the story of some young boys who decades earlier found themselves adrift on a barge on the Niagara River. It seemed like the rushing water of the rapids was taking them to certain death as they approached the massive falls on the border between the USA and Canada. They began to pray in desperation. People along the river banks did likewise. It seemed like a hopeless situation. And then, just before the barge went over the falls, they hit a rock! The boat stuck there on the rock, on the very brink of disaster until rescuers were able to save the young men.

Fresh from this experience, Loren spent 3 weeks in Australia in route to Nanning: weeks of prayer and fasting. There the Lord gave him the "*Tripod Message*" which affirmed that if we were to remain an apostolic missionary movement we needed to emphasize the interplay of the individual's **freedom** in the Spirit to hear and obey God in a co-creative way, together with the role of spiritual **eldership** committed to advancing God's missional purposes, all held together by healthy, loving **relationships** under the Lordship of **Jesus** and guided by the **Word** of the Lord. This message was the key, opening message of the gathering in Nanning, laying a foundation for all that would follow.

The meetings would also be marked by the departure of Mercy Ships from the YWAM family of ministries (re-aligning our values), the adoption of the 4k framework (re-aligning our vision), and the selection of John Dawson as the next president of YWAM (re-aligning our relationships). The resulting document strongly underscored the two initial themes of our foundational covenant of the waves:

First of all, it was "*a call ... for a renewed apostolic anointing*" in the mission because we "*deeply desire his blessings for a new surge of apostolic pioneering.*" This heart cry for Spirit-led, missional innovation affirmed our core commitment to champion young people, stating that we would "*encourage the newest to the oldest YWAMers to seek to know and obey his voice in the freedom of the Spirit, and to release them into the fullness of the promises of God.*"

Secondly, the call to the alls and everys was intentionally very strong, in this covenant. Not only was 4k embraced with its focus on going where we are not, but the document concluded, "*we declare to God this day to be available at all times and in all places to His call and purpose in this 21st century, to be all that we can be and do all that we can do to fulfil His Great Commission here and everywhere."*

The Jubilee Covenant

This covenant was signed by more than 30,000 YWAMers and associates. This document was introduced at the UoFN Workshop (held simultaneously in South Africa, Egypt, Switzerland, and the Ukraine) just prior to the fiftieth year. It was a marquis element of the 44 jubilee events held around the world in 2010. Though more individual and devotional in nature than our previous covenant renewal documents, this statement expressed a sense of hope and forward thrust which

came as a result of the intentional re-alignment efforts of the preceding years.

The theme of missional innovation was encouraged through a declared awareness that “*God’s Spirit is at work in amazing ways around the world*” and that we needed to be attentive to his call in “*such a time as this*” and be willing to “*follow Jesus wherever*” he would lead us.

The theme of alls and everys is evident in the opening declaration of purpose: “*that every individual might be redeemed and every society transformed by the Gospel.*” It is also underlined in the final commitment: “*to do everything I can possibly do to fulfill the Great Commission.*”

Concluding Reflection

To the degree that these four covenantal renewal documents have helped us unpack and re-engage with the two overarching themes of the original, God-initiated, destiny-defining, covenantal vision of the waves, to that degree they have served us well as a mission.

As we go forward at the outset of the second half century of our movement’s life, perhaps we will need yet again to create a covenant renewal document that will serve the emerging generation of leaders and propel us to the unfinished alls and everys of the Great Commission. As we do so now, we can act with greater awareness and intentionality as we have now more fully discovered and understood God’s purposes for us as the YWAM tribe. May we ever continue to **expand** in our pursuit for **intimacy** (to know God) **and impact** (to make him known) – not only in these days together, but in the years and decades ahead.