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A Report on the Laussane International Congress on World Evangelization

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IN 1910 AT EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND, hundreds of missionaries from all over the world and a few leaders from the young mission churches came together for the first world conference to discuss the strategy of evangelizing the world.

64 years later thousands of men and women, young and old, clergy and laity, missionaries and national church leaders from 150 nations and from nearly every evangelical denomination and church organization in the world gathered at Laussane, Switzerland, July 16-25, 1974, for an International Congress on World Evangelization. In his opening address the honorary Chairman, Dr. Billy Graham, hoped and prayed that the Congress would return to the theological, though not the political or sociological, visions and concepts of the historic Edinburgh Conference and earlier conferences.

Today's World Council of Churches that was formed in 1948 grew out of Edinburgh and the world conferences that it spawned. But it has now lost much of the evangelistic vision and zeal of Edinburgh. Dr. Graham saw three primary reasons for this: "1) the loss of the authority of the message of the Gospel; 2) the preoccupation with social and political problems; and 3) the equal preoccupation with organizational unity. He went on to say that one of the four basic reasons for convening the Congress was to re-emphasize these Biblical concepts which are essential to evangelism: 1) the authority of Scripture; 2) the lostness of man apart from Jesus Christ; 3) salvation is in Jesus Christ alone; 4) witness must be by both word and deed; 5) the necessity of evangelism."

Laussane was a congress of Evangelicals from within the traditionally Christian protestant denominations, although Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox and others were represented among the 1000 visitors. There were 2700 official participants. The majority of these were from outside the USA and included 1000 third world participants of whom 60 or more were on the program. Those who took part in the Congress came by individual invitation only. There were no official representatives of church bodies. 23 individuals from the Missouri Synod attended the Congress, 4 of whom are on the Board for Missions. Two-thirds of the \$3.3 million budget was contributed by interested churches.

In their Call to the ICOWE the Evangelicals have briefly summarized their beliefs as their "desire to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to historic evangelical theology revealed in the Scriptures, confessed by the Church through the centuries, reaffirmed at Berlin in 1966 and by evangelistic Congresses which followed at Singapore, Bogata, Amsterdam, and elsewhere."

In challenging the evangelistic position epitomized by the World

Council of Churches at its evangelism conference in Bangkok, 1973, the Congress proposed:

- “1. To proclaim the Biblical basis of evangelism in a day of theological confusion and examine our message and methods by this standard.
2. To relate Biblical truth to crucial issues facing Christians everywhere.
3. To share and strengthen our unity and love in Christ.
4. To identify those who are as yet unreached or alienated from the Gospel.
5. To learn from each other the patterns of evangelism the Holy Spirit is using today in our churches, fellowships, and missionary societies.
6. To awaken our Christian consciences to the implications of expressing Christ's love in attitude and action to men of every class and color.
7. To encourage cooperative strategies toward reaching all men for Christ.
8. To pray together for world evangelization in this century asking that the Congress may contribute significantly to this end.
9. To be God's people, available for all his purposes in the world.”

Working as a Congress the participants pretty well accomplished what it set out to do. Without becoming a legislative body or an official organization with elected church delegates, the Congress was part of a *process* rather than an event. What happened before, during and after was equally important.

Months before the Congress convened Biblical foundation and issue strategy papers were sent to the selected participants for study and response. They were requested to return general comments, raise questions, indicate points that they thought should have been included, list practical implications, and point out any unclear parts. At the Congress the writer of the paper was to respond to all these remarks. Also before the meeting those involved were given a chance to select small group forums for demonstration and discussion at the Congress, and were sent papers in advance. Preparation was extensive and intensive.

Missouri Synod participants met in Chicago the day before departure and discussed the main essays and their role in the Congress. They prayed God's blessing upon the Congress and asked for His guidance.

During the ten days of convention a rigorous work schedule was adhered to with pleasing punctuality. However free time was built into the program, which was used to relax, shop or tour. Mealtimes provided additional opportunity to get acquainted with others and talk about the topic for the day, or about evangelistic methods and strategy, or simply share faith with one another. Meeting people from

all over the world and sharing a common concern about the evangelization of the world was a tremendous experience.

Excellent vocalists, group singing, talented musicians, multimedia presentations, panel discussions, interviews, special speakers, all added variety and spiritual edification to an already challenging program. Early mornings were occupied with Bible study and the presentation of the issue papers. After morning coffee break, groups with a common cultural background met till noon to strategize and lay plans for the evangelization of their sector of mankind. Afternoons were set aside for small group demonstrations of evangelistic methods, the study of the theology of evangelization, and the consideration of approaches in specialized ministries such as theological education, evangelization among urbanites, children, Muslims, Animists, etc. In the evenings the entire Congress heard special speakers, interviews, panel discussions and a variety of inspiring presentations.

Particularly moving and informative were the evening presentations of the Reverend Stan Mooneyham, President of World Vision International, and Black Los Angeles Pastor E. V. Hill. Dr. Hill effectively used the baseball diamond to illustrate the Christian's total faith and ministry. "You have to go to first base first, which is regeneration by the Holy Spirit to faith in Christ, personal salvation. But you don't go from first to the bench and wait for the rapture," he said. "Second base is the visible brotherhood of all believers where our love for one another and our behavior shine forth. You can't get there across the pitcher's mound, and you don't hold hands on second and wait for Christ to return. On third, Christians filled with agape-love clothe the naked and feed the hungry. Many are saying that third alone is where we concentrate our efforts and ignore the other bases. We touch all bases. But don't leave me on third. Take me home. Heaven is my home; all the rest are temporary."

Reverend Mooneyham ended his 2-hour audio-visual presentation of slides, movies, narrations and personal interviews entitled "Acts of the Holy Spirit '74" with the plea, "Do it again, Lord! Do it again, Lord! Do it again!" He began by stating that while the historical recording of the work of the Spirit found in the book of Acts is now closed, the work of the Spirit has continued through the continuing witness of God's people. He proceeded to demonstrate the marvelous acts of the Holy Spirit of adding to the Church those who are today being saved from India to Indonesia. His presentation was so inspiring that the audience broke out in spontaneous singing of praise to God.

But the picture is not so encouraging in other places of the world. Time was taken to point out "The Hard Places of the World" such as China, the Muslim world, Russia, India, and Albania where all religion has been outlawed. We were sensitized to the many Christian brethren who are suffering persecution for the sake of their faith in Christ. We were asked to tell others about them and pray for them. Syncretism is hindering Christianity in Africa and Asia, we were told. So much remains to be done in the difficult non-Christian places!

Many fine testimonies of the work of the Holy Spirit in evan-

gelization, individually and through the Church were given all through the Congress. Rev. Juan Ortiz of Argentina painted a vivid picture in down-to-earth language of how the Holy Spirit used him to change the nominal faith of the congregation to a living, vital, and witnessing faith. Pastor Ortiz was one of the great many non-USA speakers at the Congress who made valuable contributions to it and the world.

Miss Corrie ten Boom of the Netherlands who has written *The Hiding Place* that is being made into a movie held the audience spell-bound as she related her experiences of witnessing to Christ in a Second World War concentration camp and in the years thereafter. All through the problems of her life she confidently stated that God has no problems, only plans, and that there will be no panic in heaven.

Aimed at establishing the Biblical basis of evangelism at the beginning of the Congress, Rev. John R. W. Stott, president of England's Evangelical Alliance, very perceptively addressed himself to a cluster of related words in the forefront of recent debate—mission, evangelism, dialogue, salvation and conversion. He introduced his astute definition of these terms with the hope that throughout the Congress there would be more evangelical penitence than evangelical triumphalism. He went on to say, "Both our profession and our performance are far from perfect. We have some important lessons to learn from our ecumenical critics. Some of their rejection of our position is not a repudiation of Biblical truth, but rather of our evangelical caricatures of it." Then he set out to define evangelism according to Scripture "and so bring both ecumenical and evangelical thinking to the same independent and objective test." The Bible sees "mission" as an activity of God arising out of His very nature. Mission is not a word for everything that the Church does, but describes everything the Church is sent into the world to do. Evangelism is an essential part of the Church's mission, and is fundamentally an announcement of the Good News of Jesus.

It was difficult for the authors of the Congress papers to speak to the responses that had been sent to them beforehand. There were literally thousands of comments and comparatively little time. But they did admirably well. All of them made solid contributions to the understanding of evangelism and the evangelization task. What they wrote and said pretty well represented the thinking of the majority, and was enshrined in the Lausanne Covenant, signed by nearly 2000 people.

The divine, human and methodological dimensions of world evangelization were presented by Dr. Donald McGavran, famous founder of Church Growth and Senior Professor of Missions at Fuller Theological Seminary. After pointing out God's will for the evangelization of the world and that He accepts world cultures, McGavran noted that God has created a new resource in the 200 LatfricAsian (*Latin America Africa Asia*) mission agencies and their 3400 missionaries. Large numbers of LatfricAsian and Eurican (*Europe North America*) missionaries will have to be sent out at great cost and sacrifice to reach what will be 3 billion unsaved by 1975.

The professor of Mission History at Fuller Seminary and Director of the William Carey Library, Dr. Ralph D. Winter, convinced the Congress that cross-cultural evangelism has the highest priority. Near-neighbor evangelism by the some 200 million *committed* Christians of the world will be able to reach only 13% (336 million) of the world's non-Christians. Only by crossing cultural boundaries will they be able to reach the remainder of some 2387 million (87%), one billion of whom are in radically different cultures and can be reached only by strenuous effort.

Winter's and McGavran's presentations emphasized the urgency of the Church's task, as did everyone on the program. This was captured in section 9 of the Covenant: "We are ashamed that so many have been neglected; it is a standing rebuke to us and to the whole church . . . The goal should be, by all available means and at the earliest possible time, that every person will have the opportunity to hear, understand, and receive the Good News." They stressed the global responsibility of every living Christian, which was expressed in several sections of the Covenant: "In the Church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary. World evangelization requires the whole Church to take the whole Gospel to the whole world." (Sect. 6) "We rejoice that a new missionary era has dawned. The dominant role of western missions is fast disappearing. God is raising up from the younger churches a great new resource for world evangelization, and is thus demonstrating that the responsibility to evangelize belongs to the whole Body of Christ. All churches should therefore be asking God and themselves what they should be doing both to reach their own area and to send missionaries to other parts of the world." (Sect. 8) "We urge the development of regional and functional cooperation for the furtherance of the Church's mission, for strategic planning, for mutual encouragement, and for the sharing of resources and experience." (Sect. 7)

Michael Green, the dynamic principal of St. John's College, Nottingham, England, in his paper and response concerning methods and strategy in evangelism in the early church said: "Perhaps this is the greatest lesson we can learn from the early church in the very changed situation of our own day. The most effective method of evangelism and the most widespread, in the long run, in its results, is *conversion evangelism* (underlining ours), where one who has found Jesus shares his discovery, his problems, his joys and his sorrows with one who is still groping in the dark." Green suggested total flexibility as the key factor for approach, and that the *home meeting* was and can be used as one of the most effective means for spreading the Gospel. The many types of contemporary evangelism practices were helpfully summarized by Dr. George W. Peters, Professor of World Missions at Dallas Theological Seminary.

The Evangelicals at Lausanne dedicated themselves anew in the power of the Holy Spirit to God's mission for the glory of His name, and staunchly affirmed "the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written Word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice," and "the power of

God's Word to accomplish His purpose of salvation." (Sect. 2 of the Covenant) Japanese Presbyterian seminary professor, Dr. Susumu Uda, did a good job of expounding this Biblical authority and linking it with evangelism.

As there is no other way of knowing the way of salvation in Christ than through the revealed will of God in the Bible, so also the Congress affirmed that the only God-Man Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and all men. Its statement rejected "as derogatory to Christ and the Gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally through all religious and ideologies." (Sect. 3)

All Congress participants wrestled with the nature of evangelism, and finally encapsulated this statement in the fourth section of the Covenant: "Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, Biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to Him personally and so be reconciled to God . . . The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into His Church and responsible service in the world."

It seemed that everyone went out of their way to stress the social responsibility in evangelism or mission. Dr. C. Rene Padilla, Associate General Secretary for Latin America of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, and Mr. Samuel Escobar, General Secretary of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of Canada, were the two program participants who led the Congress in this emphasis. The following Covenant statement indicates that everyone was anxious to affirm that "God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share His concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. . . . When people receive Christ they are born again into His kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead." (Sect. 5)

An outstanding exponent of this statement in section 12 of the Covenant: "We need both watchfulness and discernment to safeguard the Biblical Gospel," was Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer, leader of the L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland. Emphatically he wrote and reiterated verbally that "there is no use talking about meeting the threat of the coming time or fulfilling our calling in the midst of the last quarter of the twentieth century unless we consciously help each other to have a clear doctrinal position. We must have the courage to make no compromise with liberal theology and especially neo-orthodox existential theology. Christianity is a specific body of truth; it is a system and we must not be ashamed of the word *system*. There is truth and we must hold that truth. There will be borderline things in which we have differences among ourselves, but on the central

issues there must be no compromise." He contended for honest answers to honest questions, a true spirituality of being a true Christian indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and the beauty of human relationships as Christians who treat each other with love in the eyes of the world and our own children lest we destroy the truth we proclaim.

Evangelism and Culture; Education and Leadership; more on Spiritual Conflict; Freedom and Persecution; The Power of the Holy Spirit (which was universally proclaimed and affirmed); The Return of Christ ("We believe that the interim period between Christ's ascension and return is to be filled with the mission of the people of God, who have no liberty to stop before the End."); are the remaining sections of the Laussane Covenant. We Lutherans ought to thoroughly study the entire content of this statement. Aside from what it can contribute to our understanding and response to God's mission, we can see that we have some Biblical insights and additions to offer to the world of Evangelicals. Nothing has been said in the Covenant about Baptism and the Lord's Supper and their role in the evangelization of the world. The matter of who persuades people to come to Christ personally; the apparently immediate (not through the means of grace) "visitation of the sovereign Spirit of God;" and the proper use of the Law and Gospel are some of the areas in which we could still lend a Biblical hand.

Audio-visual presentations of various types were made each day during the lunch periods and other free time. One could bring himself up to date on God's mission in many lands and different situations. Cassettes and photographs of each day of the Congress' main sessions were available the following day. A daily newspaper with pictures announced coming events, changes in program, summarized important speeches, and kept the entire assembly informed about the discussion and action of the small groups who were convened to consider every aspect of world evangelization. It was printed in four languages: English, Spanish, German and French. News was made available in daily releases. All in all the Congress was well run. It had a well-balanced program. There was no time or reason for interest to lag.

Impressive was the evident love for and personal relationship with Jesus of the participants. They worked and planned and prayed on-the-job and in their hotel rooms with God's written Word as their authority and guide. They displayed an exhilarating and catching zeal for the spread of the Gospel. Christo-centric and Gospel-oriented they did not fail to take into consideration the entire Word of God, particularly the Law. Sensitivity for cultural differences, yet real fellowship and partnership were noted. New approaches and strategies along with a new type of missionary were fervently sought after. The both/and of proclamation and demonstration in their proper Biblical relationship received considerable attention. Time and again the desire for more and better missionaries was expressed. This was much greater than the call for a moratorium on missionaries by a few.

Now, what after the Congress? This was a big item in everyone's mind. On Wednesday, July 24, the Congress news bulletin

under the headline "The Congress Goes On . . ." announced that it was the clear wish of 86% of the 1140 participants who responded to the questionnaire that "some kind of continuing post-congress fellowship will help to implement the vision of a world in need of Christ and the need for Christians to get together to reach it." 79% indicated a firm approval of appointing of a representative group of 25 persons to act as a continuation committee that would seek to carry out the goals and wishes of the Congress, as brought to light by the reports of the strategy and theology groups and the final version of the Lausanne Covenant. The 25-member continuation committee will be appointed on the following geographical basis: East Asia 3, West Asia 3, North America 6, Africa 3, South America 3, Europe 5, Oceania 1, Middle East 1. The Congress then gave the Planning Committee approval to add five coopted members to the 25 for the purpose of achieving balance and filling obvious gaps. These 30 representatives would possibly develop plans for Evangelical cooperation in matters such as mass communications, theological education and social action.

Study guide materials in the form of a series of six booklets on the things that were said at the Congress have been developed and printed by World Wide Publications. These will serve as a reminder for continued prayer for the evangelization of the world. The research on the unreached peoples of the world that was begun will be continued until an accurate and complete record is obtained. The Congress may spark more mini-congresses on the regional or national level. If pressed hard enough by the kind of World Council evangelism that came through at Bangkok, the movement realized at Lausanne could develop in to a permanent organization.

The editorial comment in *Christianity Today* probably sums up best what has happened at Lausanne: "The International Congress on World Evangelization laid the groundwork for a great Christian offensive."