



The Cape Town Congress

The Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization

I was privileged to attend the third Lausanne congress on world evangelisation which was held in Cape Town in October 2010. The congress brought together 4000 evangelical church leaders from just under 200 countries to think and strategise together about the task of global mission. In this article I would like to convey something of the significance of the Congress and how it will help to advance the Gospel in the world today. To do so, a brief historical overview is necessary.

The first Lausanne Congress was called together in 1974 by such Christian leaders as Billy Graham, John Stott and Renee Padilla. They meet (not surprisingly) in Lausanne, Switzerland and produced the Lausanne Covenant, a highly influential statement of evangelical faith and co-operation. This first Congress also thought strategically for the first time about unengaged and unreached people-groups, those groups that had not yet heard the Christian message or had any known Christian workers among them.

The next congress took place in Manilla, Philippines, in 1989 and produced the document called the Manilla Manifesto. It built upon the success of the first congress and sought to bring a greater level of cohesion among evangelicals, particularly between the disparate areas of development and church planting. The idea was to have a common basis and understanding on the nature of Christian mission and how the evangelical church can adopt a holistic approach.

These congresses have become the flagships of a worldwide fellowship of Evangelical leaders and mission organisations now known as the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelisation. The major theme that characterises the movement has been articulated by John Stott: taking the whole Gospel, to the whole world, by the whole Church.

So it was with some expectation that I was privileged to be a part of a New Zealand delegation to a third congress, Lausanne III, held in Cape Town, South Africa. Much has happened in the world since 1989: although the Gospel mandate remains, the contexts and the

challenges have certainly changed. To name a few: the cold war has ended; there has been a digital revolution in global communication; the churches of the "Global South" have flourished in numbers and confidence; and the war on terror has deepened our awareness of ethnic and religious divides.

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In order to address these and other challenges the Congress was organised around six themes and a two part document called the Cape Town Commitment has been produced (see this website for the full text: <<http://www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment>>). This is sure to be a much studied document in years to come, as the first two Lausanne documents have been by a generation of scholars and students. However, as significant as the Cape Town Commitment may well become, it was but one part of the overall benefit of the Congress. Here I would like to consider five further ways in which the Cape Town Congress will leave its mark on how evangelical mission is conducted.

1. Encouragement from fellow Church Leaders

We gathered in "table" groups of five or six for Bible study and discussion from different countries. My group had delegates from Siberia, India, Korea, California and New Zealand. We also met in seminars and sat down with one another and talked over lunch: I shared breakfast in my hotel with Ephraim from Malawi working with sufferers from HIV/AIDS; Henok a church worker from Ethiopia; Willy from Brazil working with the homosexual community; Metti, a Salvation Army officer from Finland; Philip from Malaysia, a theological teacher who (as it turned out) is a colleague of my good friend and Australian

CMS mission partner, Paul Barker; Dewi from Wales, who works for TEAR Fund UK on conflict resolution and the process of reconciliation; and Sydney Park, an ethnic Korean teaching theology in Birmingham, Alabama. I give this list as a small sample of the enormously diverse range of connections that were being made every day. This in itself was a demonstration of the power of the Gospel to bring people together and I found the experience very encouraging.

2. Information Sharing about Global Issues

Each evening there were presentations from different regions of the world in which we learnt about the strength of the church in those areas and what were seen as the barriers and challenges to mission. For instance, the presenters from India were very candid about modern day slavery. It is estimated that there are 27 million slaves in the world today, with 20 million living in India! But those Indian church leaders went further and called on the global church to recognise the caste system as effectively another form of slavery, in which 250 million members of backward castes face discrimination and enforced poverty. They called on church leaders in India and around the world to speak out against the dehumanisation of such a cultural system, despite its ancient origin.

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3. Discussion of common concerns

As well as the main plenary sessions there was a multitude of smaller seminars and discussion groups. One discussion in which I participated addressed the question of how to evangelise groups that have no written language, or who are functionally illiterate. There were a number of innovative ideas presented in order to bring the Gospel to the estimated 70% of the world population who are oral learners.

Another session I attended concerned the role of the church in preventing ethnic conflict and bringing reconciliation when there had been inter-tribal violence. There was a very moving account of the work of reconciliation in Rwanda since the genocide. We must remember that the Rwandan genocide occurred in a country whose vast majority of people claimed to be Christian. How could such a thing as this occur? The sobering conclusion reached by the presenter was that, although the Church had proclaimed the Gospel and brought people to faith, they

had failed as a church to disciple those believers to maturity in the faith.

As I listen to discussions such as these, I realised that most of the issues facing the Global church were also features of the church in our own region of the South Pacific. In Gospel terms we cannot isolate ourselves behind national geographic boundaries. For instance, as New Zealanders we have supplied army and police personnel to the Solomon Islands, but how much support has been given to Christians in those Islands from their brothers and sisters in the churches of Australia and New Zealand. I say this while noting the good work done by the SOMA teams that have conducted short-term mission trips to the Islands. If we are to think globally as a New Zealand church we must start by thinking regionally.

4. The Formation of Strategic Partnerships

There were many partnerships that were able to be forged, even simply within the New Zealand delegation as we got to meet one another and talk together about the issues that affect New Zealand and the wider Pacific region.

The central strategic concern was naturally focussed on world evangelisation. Until recently there were 639 people groups with populations of over 100,000 (representing 535 million people) who had no known Christian church or Christian workers. They represent much of the unreached and unengaged people of the world. After a concerted effort in recent years, that number has fallen so that there are now 220 groups who remain untouched by the Gospel. We were asked to review a list of those people groups and to help update information as necessary. Then the challenge was put to us to pray for selected groups on this list. Since in my parish there are a number of Christian migrants from Bhutan and Nepal, I turned directly to those pages. I discovered that there were 400,000 such people living in Bhutan from 4 different groups and a further 1.5 million people from 12 groups living in Nepal.

5. Personal and Corporate Formation

Finally, there was significant energy given to addressing the corporate sins of the evangelical movement worldwide: we heard the teaching from Ephesians to live lives worthy of our calling; we heeded the Old Testament prophetic call to repentance and live lives of humility, integrity and simplicity; we were warned regarding the dangers of evangelical arrogance and triumphalism; and we were given detailed critiques of the so-called prosperity gospel. All these were important messages for the Congress to hear, to integrate into our ministries and to convey to our colleagues in the field.

The Revd Malcolm Falloon