

Moishe Rosen's Legacy and the Inspiration for LCJE

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On Shavuot, 2010, Moishe Rosen, founder of Jews for Jesus went home to be with the Lord. Those of us in the LCJE miss him greatly and so I was asked to speak to his legacy with regard to the inspiration behind the LCJE. I owe much of the information for this paper to the work of Ruth Rosen in her biography of her father soon to be published by Thomas Nelson.

Early Inspiration

Moishe's contribution to LCJE did not begin when he was invited to attend the LCWE from which the LCJE was birthed. He came with well-formed convictions and experience regarding the importance of working together, sharing ideas and encouraging one another. His earlier involvement in an American organization known as the Fellowship of Christian Testimonies to the Jews (FCTJ) helped clarify Moishe's attitudes toward the importance of cooperative efforts like LCJE.

One of Moishe's good friends, Avi Brickner who for some time served as president of the FCTJ reflected on that commitment Moishe had. "Moishe always had a desire to effect creative and positive change in both the organization with which he was working and also in the entire field of Jewish evangelism. Therefore, he always seemed to seek ways and channels through which he would be an influence for such change. He did this through personal networking with individuals, through seeking to influence the direction of the FCTJ and through a willingness to lend a helping hand to boost the ministries of other individuals and organizations that he thought worthy of assistance. I had the impression that he never sought to guard what he thought valuable and keep it for himself or his own organization, but to share it with others and other organizations so that they might benefit."

Moishe said, "I had this ideal that every ministry should help every other ministry. And to a degree, that was happening through the Fellowship of Christian Testimonies to the Jews. Ruth Wardell, who was in charge of the ABMJ's Long Island work was very much involved at her own expense and she was the first one to suggest that I get involved [with the FCTJ]. But in general, the attitude of most of the established missionaries seemed to be that . . . we were the largest, we had each other, and we didn't need the others. And nobody openly criticized anything. We had the best literature, we had the best this, we had the best that . . . Well, I wasn't always so sure that we had the best of everything. But not only that, I felt that if we did have the best of anything, then we had something to give to the others."

He also sensed that there was very naturally an unhealthy competitiveness that tended to spring up between ministries and that groups like the LCJE could be a positive force to counteract what he called "that deadly competition."

When Moishe arrived in Los Angeles in 1957 fresh out of Bible college, he didn't know what to expect from other ministries. At Northeastern Bible College he'd been taught that when a missionary comes to a new place, he or she should meet with others on the field and ask their help in fitting in with the work already being done.

When Moishe began making such visits, he discovered that various missions were in competition. They not only competed for funds, but for the attention and allegiance of Jewish people who might attend their meetings.

Moishe recalled,

“One mission invited me to speak but their representative told me, ‘I don’t want you to take any names and addresses of any people you meet here.’ If I’d started out with the attitude that everybody should share everything since we’re all here to do the same work, I would have been disappointed.

When I saw this competition, I realized that other ministries had interests to protect. My orientation changed and I looked for ways to cooperate that showed I understood their interests. Instead of being disappointed when some were unfriendly, I was delighted to discover that some were very friendly and received me well.

As I began relating to other missions, I found out that my predecessor seemed to have avoided such contact. This became apparent when the different mission heads were surprised that I would come and talk to them to see where I could fit in and be a blessing. Most of them told me the same thing, ‘Just go out and visit Jewish people, try to win them to the Lord the best way you can, and don’t try to get our people involved with what you’re doing.’”

So when the opportunity came to be involved in fostering better cooperation first in North America with the FCTJ and then later with the LCJE Moishe was eager to become a booster.

Early days of LCJE

To understand Moishe’s involvement in the early days of LCJE it’s necessary to backtrack. In June 1974, a group of evangelical Christians met in Lausanne, Switzerland. Their purpose was to revitalize an international fellowship of missionaries who could encourage one another, share insights, and keep the cause of bringing the gospel to all people moving forward.

Moishe had been invited to the Lausanne conference, but was reluctant to leave the country because Jews for Jesus was still less than a year old as an independent mission. He asked and received approval to send Tuvya Zaretsky in his place. He instructed Tuvya, “Go to this meeting; there’ll be 4,000 world leaders there. Wear your Jews for Jesus jacket and see who you can find as friends.” Tuvya went, met a great many people, and did not realize until years later that Moishe had relinquished to him a front row seat from which he witnessed a significant moment in the history of world missions.

The 1974 group named themselves the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization (LCWE) and purposed to meet again. The 1980 conference in Pattaya was the second meeting of that group. The conference included seventeen mini consultation groups to focus on specific areas of world evangelization. Jews for Jesus was part of the group for reaching Jews with the gospel. COWE involved a great deal of advance work, as various people came ready to present papers. Also during the ten-day

conference, the various groups were to produce additional papers pertaining to their particular people group.

David Harley, then the principal of All Nations Christian College in England, was the COWE coordinator of the mini-consultation group on reaching Jews. He had met Moishe in the late 70's; Moishe had come to talk with people from CMJ, one the Jewish missions in the UK. When asked about his first impressions of Moishe, Harley named four things:

“His size. He could barely fit into our car, which he described as a typical British missionary car—i.e. it was too small!

His warmth and friendliness.

His dislike of British food. He said he now understood that the British built an empire because they could not stand eating at home.

His passion to reach Jewish people around the world with the good news [of Jesus].”

The last item made enough of an impression that when David Harley was asked to organize study groups for COWE, he wrote to Moishe suggesting that some of the Jews for Jesus staff present papers on various aspects of Jewish evangelism.

Moishe required everyone on Jews for Jesus missionary staff to write a paper for the conference as part of the assigned studies. This was no small contribution to the preparations that David was making.

Susan Perlman recalled,

“Moishe, Jhan and I went to Thailand as representatives of all the papers that had been done during by the staff. It was really a wonderful time and Moishe cemented relationships with other Jewish missions leaders in a way that only time away from the usual responsibilities could provide.

Most of the mini consultation groups had a minimum of 50 people; the Jewish consultation group had seventeen. But I think we were one of only two groups that actually had finished what they called an LOP—a Lausanne Occasional Paper—because we had done so much prep work.

In fact, the group for Jewish evangelism finished their paper the first day, and with more than a week left of the conference, Moishe and the others spent plenty of time brainstorming, strategizing and getting to know one another (as well as playing tourist in Thailand). At the end of the conference, a group of participants decided to form a task force, so they could continue meeting for mutual encouragement and the added stimulus of cross pollinating ideas and experiences. They called themselves the Lausanne Task Force on Jewish Evangelism, which later became the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish evangelism (LCJE).”

When asked to comment on Moishe's level of support for the conference and subsequent development of LCJE, David Harley, the group's first international coordinator recalled,

“Incalculable! LCJE would never have come into existence but for the enthusiasm and support of Moishe. If I remember correctly, a small group (Moishe, Murdo MacLeod, Ole Kvarme, Susan and myself) met over a meal during the conference in Pattaya and discussed the possibility of forming an international task force on Jewish evangelism. Moishe was very enthusiastic about the idea from the start and his subsequent support in terms of advice, encouragement and financial commitment was invaluable. LCJE would never have come into existence or continued as one of the most significant products of the Lausanne Movement without Moishe’s wholehearted involvement.

[Yet] He tended to keep more in the background because he was aware of the divisions within the USA among those who were engaged in Jewish evangelism and he did not want to put some people off because [he knew] they thought the group was dominated by Jews for Jesus.”

Moishe played a key role in the LCJE not only because of the commitments David Harley mentioned, but also because he made many of the Jews for Jesus staff available, not only to attend meetings, but to do prep work for them. For example, Susan Perlman became part of the steering committee. Soon the LCJE was meeting internationally three times a year, and regionally once a year. Moishe encouraged many different people and groups other than Jews for Jesus to take part. He was often asked to present a paper to these meetings, but whether or not he was speaking, he was committed to coming to every meeting for as long as his health permitted.

Continuing Inspiration

The LCJE became a vehicle through which Moishe was able to influence the work of Jewish evangelism far beyond that of his own organization. He was an international force for the cause to which he devoted his life: making Jesus known to Jewish people.

David Harley observed,

“He [Moishe] believed that British missions had become too apologetic about the Holocaust and too reluctant to openly present the good news of Messiah. He galvanized Jewish missions in Europe that had lost confidence in the power and relevance of the gospel. He brought a new professionalism into Jewish ministry in terms of literature, presentations and public relations.”

Of course some aspects of Moishe’s personality and perspective did not cross well into other cultures. When asked about this, Harley recalled,

“I think he sometimes found it hard to be sensitive to the culture of others. [For example] He always thought Christians in Britain were too reluctant to talk about money and [he] insisted on having an appeal [offering] at every presentation. In the UK Christians do give generously but they are more likely to do so after they have had time to think and pray about it.”

However, Moishe did, at times, follow the advice of international leaders, as Harley also remembered:

“He wanted to bring a JFJ team to the UK to work with CMJ staff. He wanted to put the team in two or three star hotels but we replied that that would be misunderstood in a UK context. He always thought mission agencies in the UK did not look after their staff very well but he took our opinion on board. The team stayed in a student hostel in St John’s Wood, in London.”

Returning to the meeting in Pattaya, one of Moishe’s strong suits was his ability to recognize character qualities and high potential in others. As Jhan put it, “He sized up people pretty fast. He read Ole Christian Kvarme’s paper and he looked at me and said, ‘This is a substantial person.’” Moishe observed to Jhan that Kvarme’s paper was not only significant in its content, but was masterfully written in English, Kvarme’s third language. As he was able to do with so many others, Moishe quickly and easily saw that Ole was capable of great things, and he was certainly right.

From 1975 to 1981 Ole was a Lutheran pastor in Haifa and Executive Secretary for the United Bible Societies in Israel and the West Bank; in 1986 he became Director of the Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. He was a member of the Coordinating Committee of the LCJE from 1980 to 1999, first as a member, then as Coordinator and then president. He returned to Norway in 1986, first as General Secretary of the Norwegian Bible Society, then as Dean of the Oslo Cathedral. In 2005, he became the Bishop of Oslo in the Lutheran Church of Norway, a position he still holds today.

When asked to contribute his recollections of Moishe, including first encounters, Bishop Kvarme said,

“Some of us Europeans came to our first encounter with him with great skepticism, critical of [what we’d heard concerning] the Jews for Jesus approach in reaching out to Jewish people. But obviously we had not been properly informed. The JFJ material in the preparations for the Pattaya conference had made us curious and prepared us for better things. Simply meeting Moishe together with Susan and Jhan changed everything, almost immediately. Obviously, the first impression was the size of the man. But it did not take long before I discovered a different kind of greatness, his spirit of mind. Here was a person who was deeply anchored in the gospel and evangelical theology, combined with a deep love for his people and Jewish tradition.

We could not help but listen to Moishe when he spoke, we sensed in his voice a spirit of wisdom and gentleness, but also a strong and creative mind. I also discovered a friend who was generous, who wanted the best for his colleagues and friends, and who gave of himself. We enjoyed being with him, if it was in the swimming pool, around a dinner table or in the conference room. I got to know him as a man of good humor with a lot of self-irony.

Without Moishe LCJE would not have come into existence, or it would not have become the significant network it has been through these thirty years. I am thankful for his enthusiasm and creativity, thankful for his wisdom in leadership, sometimes exercised back stage, sometimes in front, always building

bridges across organizational barriers and relationship with many churches for the sake of the Gospel to Jewish people.

I remember how surprised I was when he said to me, (I was rather young at that time): ‘Ole, the important thing at big conferences such as this one, is not to be at every plenary session, but to connect with people and get the work done!’ Moishe taught me a lot about the significance of relationship and how to connect with people.

I came to treasure him as one of those great and entrepreneurial mission leaders who looked beyond organizational barriers. His generosity in visualizing and supporting common projects was not just the fruit of a generous heart, but of a creative and strategic mind. When I was director of the Caspari Institute for Biblical and Jewish Studies in Jerusalem in the early eighties, we cooperated with JFJ groups coming to Israel, and this brought a significant renewal in outreach to people in the land.

I regard getting to know Moishe in 1980 and having the privilege of working with him for almost two decades in the context of LCJE, as a tremendous blessing and a high point in my own life and ministry. I am convinced that for many years to come we will see the fruits of his visions and enthusiasm, his creativity and gentle spirit. “

Kai Kjær-Hansen, LCJE International Coordinator for twenty years, was also in on the “ground floor” of the birth of the LCJE. He said,

“Anyone with the merest insight into LCJE’s history will readily acknowledge Moishe’s importance for the establishment of LCJE in 1980 and his later commitment to this network. It lasted with undiminished strength all through these 30 years. . . Through proclamation, papers, and discussion he helped us all stick to LCJE’s purpose . . .

Moishe was an eager participant in the . . . LCJE meetings. People listened intently, but I sometimes had the feeling he was annoyed that he was not challenged for his often provoking statements. This was the kind of ‘respect’ he could easily forgo. Sometimes his contributions were too long. I remember a conversation with him over breakfast sometime in the ’90s. He began by telling me that he had talked too much and too long during the previous day’s debate, and that the moderator should have stopped him! What self-knowledge!

The North American LCJE conferences began in 1984; he only missed a few, and that because of illness. Perhaps this is what has made the deepest impression on me when I think of him and LCJE. Not only did members of his staff come to the LCJE conferences, he himself came – even after he stepped down as director of Jews for Jesus. . . He wanted LCJE to be the place where mission leaders at the highest level in their respective organizations met.”

Conclusion

Those committed to honoring Moishe’s memory will remain committed to the things that mattered to him, and that includes LCJE. From the start, Moishe was sharing opportunities with others, both on and off the Jews for Jesus staff. He did not abandon

the involvement to LCJE by handing off some of his opportunities, but he deepened and broadened his involvement by bringing in others whose gifts and perspectives matched his own in some regards, yet brought new and fresh energy and insights as well. Moishe was also committed to mentoring others, and this included an interest in seeing some of the younger people involved in LCJE. While Moishe shared the opportunities his commitment to LCJE was unflagging. He was present whether or not he was a speaker. I am quite sure that he would have enjoyed the opportunity to be here this week at High Leigh. But I am quite sure he prefers his present preoccupations. Hopefully when we join him there will be no further need for the LCJE. Such obsolescence for the LCJE, indeed for all of our ministry activities is a blessed anticipation. In the meantime I share Moishe's hope that we would all continue together to pursue the goals and objectives of this organization that was so near and dear to his heart.

Quotations taken from the biography *Called to Controversy* by Ruth Rosen to be published Thomas Nelson.

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