

Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization - 1974

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In July 1974, a committee of international evangelicals, including Billy Graham, called for an International Congress on World Evangelization, held in Lausanne, Switzerland. More than 2,300 evangelical leaders were invited from 150 countries. Moishe Rosen showed me the letter of invitation that he had received from Australian Bishop Jack Dain.

In July of 1974, the ministry of Jews for Jesus was barely in existence, having incorporated just nine months earlier. Though Moishe clearly understood the value of the opportunity, and appreciated the honor of the invitation, he could not justify a trip taking him away to Switzerland at the time. He handed his invitation to me with the request that I go in his place.

In July of 1974, I was just 27 years old. I had only been on full time missionary staff for a total of five and a half months. At the thought of sending me in his place, I wondered if Moishe was an amazing missionary mentor or perhaps a moron. How could I possibly stand in for him?

Anyway, I didn't quite understand the historical significance of the gathering. So, Moishe told me that I was going for *the opportunity to learn*. I didn't know a lot about being a missionary, so I figured there would be lots of people at the conference from whom I could learn.

Earlier this year I found my personal journal from those ten days in 1974 at Lausanne I. I was praying at that time that God would open my eyes so I see the point in all those people meeting for the Congress. I was curious to learn what God was doing for the sake of the Gospel among other people groups. And I was enthusiastic to share what I saw happening among our Jewish people in the early 1970s.

On a personal level, I was praying for two things: I needed wisdom about the field of Jewish evangelism. I wasn't yet settled into my new vocation. Second, I was seriously praying about finding a *wife*. Okay, so I wasn't focused 100% on the historic gathering in Lausanne.

The conference theme was "Let the Earth Hear His Voice." It was taken from the 1875 hymn written by Fanny Crosby. It was totally new to me on the first day of the Congress. However, after we sang it at every meeting for ten days straight ... well, I got it:

*To God be the glory, great things He has done;
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life gate that all may go in.*

The hymn was from outside of my cultural experience. I recall it being difficult for me to connect with the spirit of praise and by the time they got *Fanny Crosby* to the chorus, "Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Let the earth hear His voice!" it was way above my vocal range. I had no idea so many of them thought Fanny Crosby was cool! Nevertheless, it was amazing to be worshipping with believers from so many different parts of the world.

Unfortunately, according to my journal, I stayed up until two and three in the morning talking with people. Then, especially during the first two days I didn't adjust to jet lag and overslept the morning worship services and speeches.

Most of the activity at Lausanne I was focused in plenary sessions. It all took place in a large hall and from a stage with one large video screen above it. The program featured panel discussions and debates about theology, strategy and methods of evangelism. Almost all of the activities were taking place in one auditorium.

I hadn't been to Bible College so a lot of the discussions were over my head. But I have to confess that my attitude wasn't great to begin with. I wasn't used to being around that many Christians in one place, and the Western Christian culture just wasn't mine. I am an activist, and it was particularly difficult for me to sit through so many hours of meetings just talking about evangelism and mission theory.

To break up the boredom, I actually went out into the streets of Lausanne to hand out broadsides with a new friend from the U.S. We wore matching "Jews for Jesus" and "Goyim for Jesus" t-shirts on the streets of colorful Lausanne, Switzerland. My journal reminded me about Jewish people I met like Danny, from Australia with whom we had coffee and *animated* discussions with Soli the Israeli woman and *the two Moroccan Jewish guys*.

Jewish evangelism has come along way in the Lausanne movement. In 1974, they highlighted rapid spread of the gospel in Korea, India and Latin America: no mention of Israel or the Jews. Toward the end of the Congress, a plenary speaker spoke about "Standing for Christ in the Hard Place." My journal entry read, "I sent up a note mentioning that the Jewish people need to be remembered in prayer, too!" Someone actually read it and prayed for Jewish people from the platform.

The following morning, a handful of special interest groups were announced on the Congress video screen. One mentioned a gathering of people interested in Jewish missions. Later that day about 70 of us gathered in a seminar room. I remember seeing Baruch Maoz, Menachem Benhayim, Victor Smadja and Art Glasser in the room. There was an overwhelming and positive response to the testimonies of Jews coming to faith in different places. One man handed me half of a check made out in the amount of \$10,000. He told me that he would send the other half once he got back to the United States and "checked us out." And he did!

The First Lausanne Congress was also my first opportunity to meet Arab believers from outside of Israel. The Christian and Missionary Alliance hosted a gathering for their international workers. At that memorable fellowship dinner I met wonderful brothers and sisters in Christ like Sami Dagher from Lebanon, along with others from Egypt, Syria and Jordan. For some of them it was their first encounter with a Jewish brother in the Lord.

I came away with two very positive outcomes for my life. First, Art Glasser, the distinguished scholar and missiologist, gave his warmest endorsement to the whole enterprise of Jewish evangelism. Many of us were blessed during our careers by his enthusiasm and mentorship. He set a wonderful example for us by his life long commitment for the field.

Second, an amazing document came out of the 1974 Congress: *The Lausanne Covenant*. At the time, it was a declaration intended to define the “necessity, responsibility and goal of spreading the gospel.” Today, hundreds of organizations model their ministry statement of faith on it. In the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism, the *Covenant* is the basis for our fellowship. The only requirement for LCJE membership, apart from paying dues, is agreement “in principle” with *The Lausanne Covenant*.

I’m grateful for the way God answered my prayers back in July of 1974. The Lord helped settle my vocational quest, as I have now completed 37 years of missionary service. I can also praise God that He answered that *other* prayer, so that I can be here with Ellen, my wife and ministry partner for over 30 years. Now, whether this is your ninth or first LCJE meeting, I hope you are encouraged about what we can learn together this week.

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