

**Personal Reflections on The 3rd Global Lausanne Consultation on
World Evangelization
Challenges and Disappointments
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Introduction

The 3rd Global Lausanne Consultation on World Evangelization was a capstone experience in my almost 40 years of Jewish ministry! I was privileged to attend the event and have far more positive words to say about this great effort than critique to offer. However, I have been given the mandate to explore some of the challenges and disappointments that arose out of Cape Town 2010 and therefore will focus on a critique. However, I have also written an expanded, more complete report and more positive report that I am happy to make available to anyone who would like to read it! Simply send me an e mail at Me.coGlaser@chosenpeoplme and I will send it to you.

The following three areas will give you an idea of some of the very wonderful aspects of the event from my perspective. Let's look at these and then move forward to review a brief critique of the event – from the vantage point of Jewish Missions.

The centrality of Jesus and world evangelization

This, of course should go without saying, but I am glad that the Congress planners emphasized Him. One of the speakers made the statement that “if everything is mission, then nothing is mission.” Mission is proclaiming the Good News of what God has done through Jesus, not merely helping people or being kind. This helps, of course, but mission means going into *the entire world* and lifting up the name of Jesus so that nonbelievers might be drawn to the Father—through the Son.

This theme was well expressed through the music selected by the Congress. Also, the Bible studies, plenary sessions and the focus on prayer all emphasized the centrality of Jesus. I believe that there was an attempt on the part of the Congress organizers to do what they could to balance their agenda to motivate Christians to be involved in social justice issues with a call to clearly proclaim the Gospel, which of course necessitates an emphasis on the One who is the Gospel Himself.

One of the speakers – Ajith Fernando, from Sri Lanka – led us in a Bible study and mentioned the famous statement of St. Francis of Assisi, who allegedly wrote, “preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words.” I have personally quoted this myself, but the speaker very boldly “debunked” this concept and said rather, preach the Gospel at all times and use words whenever possible. I appreciated his emphasis on Jesus and I believe that the Congress organizers did a good job of trying to keep a balance between proclamation and benevolence ministries. I appreciate the emphasis on the person of Yeshua at the Congress and am grateful for the effort to lift Yeshua up!

The final communion service

I cannot remember a worship service that was more spiritually moving to me personally than the final communion service of the conference. I still remember my first Urbana missionary conference as a young believer in 1973. John Stott spoke on John 12 about the seed falling into the ground and dying so that it might produce life. What a sermon and what a service! I never thought anything could top that experience. But this final communion service was so beautiful because of the international character of the participants. Taking communion with brothers and sisters, fellow missionaries and servants of God – almost 5,000 of us in the room – was just amazing. The music and liturgy (low-church Anglican) was beautifully written, the songs were chosen well, and it was probably the fastest three hours of my life. God spoke to my heart and I was deeply touched and encouraged to continue serving God with my whole heart in reaching His chosen people. I hope you can all watch the video to experience at least a bit of what I am describing.

Congress statement on Jewish evangelism

One of the goals of the LCJE is to make sure that a positive encouragement towards Jewish evangelism becomes part of the permanent record of the Congress. This means that we needed the Congress to make a clear statement on this issue in the final conference statement. I worked with David Brickner of Jews for Jesus, Lawrence Hirsch of Celebrate Messiah/Chosen People Ministries Australia and a few others in carving out a brief statement, which was then submitted to the Congress leaders who were developing the statement. Our comments were heavily edited and the end result was excellent and all of us were pleased with the statement. The heart of the statement is presented below.

We affirm that whereas the Jewish people were not strangers to the covenants and promises of God, in the way that Paul describes the Gentiles, they still stand in need of reconciliation to God through the Messiah Jesus. There is no difference, said Paul, between Jew and Gentile in sin; neither is there any difference in salvation. Only in and through the cross can both have access to God the Father through the one Spirit. [61: Ephesians 2:11-22; Romans 3,23; Romans 10,12-13; Ephesians 2:18.]

We continue, therefore, strongly to affirm the need for the whole Church to share the good news of Jesus as Messiah, Lord and Saviour with Jewish people. And in the spirit of Romans 14-15, we urge Gentile believers to accept, encourage and pray for Messianic Jewish believers, in their witness among their own people.

Challenges and disappointments

Though the majority of the Congress was wonderful and encouraging, as you can see from the above, there were some aspects of the event that were disappointing and that present us with some challenges for prayer and direction in the days ahead.

The theology working group document preceding the conference

The following paragraph was included within a larger statement published on the LCWE conference web site by the Theology Working Group (TWG),

“The one Church that God has called into being in Christ is drawn from every nation,

tribe, people and language, with the result that no single ethnic identity can claim to be 'God's chosen people.' God's election of Old Testament Israel was for the sake of the eventual creation of this multi-national community of God's people, and the Old Testament itself envisages and anticipates it. We strongly affirm, therefore, that while there are multiple ethnicities within the one church by God's clear intention, no single ethnic group holds a privileged place in God's economy of salvation or God's eschatological purpose. Thus, we strongly believe that the separate and privileged place given to the modern Israeli state, in certain forms of dispensationalism or Christian Zionism, should be challenged, inasmuch as they deny the essential oneness of the people of God in Christ." <http://www.lausanne.org/participant-information/twg-paper.html>

The concern I had regarding this statement is not only for the small number of Messianic Jews attending the conference, but for the hundreds, if not thousands, of Lausanne participants who come from churches or denominations which are either pre-millennial or affirm some form of dispensational theology, as well as those who affirm some aspects of Christian Zionism, though this movement can hardly be viewed monolithically.

It was my hope that the TWG, especially because of the Congress' theme of unity and reconciliation and study of the book of Ephesians, would have emphasized theological truths that lead to unity among believers and not to divisions. It would be impossible for any pre-millennialist – in whatever form this theological perspective is packaged – to embrace the current statement. In fact, many non-pre-millennialists who also believe in the ongoing election of the Jewish people would have trouble affirming this paragraph as well.

There are a number of statements in the paragraph that concern me. For example, "no single ethnic group holds a privileged place in God's economy of salvation or God eschatological purpose."

I would imagine, knowing the theology of the various groups of Congress attendees, that more than 50% of those who came to Cape Town would disagree with this statement and believe that God chose the Jewish people, that this election stands (Romans 11:29) and is a key part of God's eschatological purposes. There will be no consummation of the ages without the remnant of Israel embracing Jesus as Savior. (Romans 11:25-29). This is believed by many and is the predominant position of most African and Asian church bodies.

The writers further state, "Thus, we strongly believe that the separate and privileged place given to the modern Israeli state, in certain forms of dispensationalism or Christian Zionism, should be challenged."

If they intended to state that the way Israel handles the challenge of a divided nation or the ways in which Palestinians are treated – then it would at least be understandable, in light of the Congress' concern for issues of social justice.

However, I believe it is unfair for Israel to be singled out – especially when there is no

statement about terrorism, calling upon those who perpetrate these acts to repent. There was no statement asking for a Christian outcry against terrorism on the part of certain Palestinian groups or Al Qaeda in general. I was disappointed because the statements included by the working group reflect a lack of balance.

Even more so, I believe that what we commonly call the “spirit of Lausanne,” a catchphrase referring to the unadulterated focus on the proclamation of the Good News, has been compromised. These are sectarian statements, and although we know that some Christians embrace this type of theological thinking, many attending the Congress did not. This is a change in the way the LCWE operates, as these finer points of theology in which there is substantial disagreement have usually been left alone for the sake of the higher goal of finding unity in Jesus and our need to tell the world about Him.

Once again, one would think that the writers of this statement would have looked for ways to unite the thousands of pre-millennialist and Supersessionist believers attending the Congress, who share a common passion and vision for the salvation of all peoples. In the days ahead, we will make overtures to the TWG to change this statement.

However, I am grateful to God that after some discussion with the LCWE leadership and with Chris Wright, the leader of the LCWE Theology Working Group, that this statement will be removed from the web site. This solves the issue for me personally and I appreciate the humility and grace with which this challenge was handled.

The Lack of Attention on Israel and Focus on Palestine

On day two of the conference, the situation in the Middle East received quite a bit of focus, primarily at the plenary sessions. One brief movie was shown to the almost 5,000 attendees in the morning which spoke about the country of Palestine. Most of the people interviewed were Palestinians, but the video also included a very brief interview with an Israeli Jewish believer who serves as the director of the Israeli Bible Society. Though I am not in agreement with calling Israel “Palestine,” I can see how this is understandable at a conference like this, as the leaders were trying to build bonds between brothers and not alienate one another over political issues. But the name Israel could have been used for the country at other times to achieve balance. Unfortunately, the opposite is true, revealing a clear agenda that takes up the language and concerns of our Palestinian brothers and leaves Jewish Israelis in the cold.

For example, during the evening session, a panel of five Middle Eastern Christians was interviewed about what God is doing in their land. Their presentations were heartwarming and inspirational. While I do appreciate the fact that only five nations were selected for the panel and understand that it would have been impossible to have every country from the Middle East represented, Palestine – represented by a Palestinian believer – was included within the group of five and Israel was neither mentioned nor included.

In fact, the only time Israel was mentioned from the platform of a plenary session was during the brief film clip and dialogue between an Israeli Messianic Jew and a Palestinian

Christian. This segment was good and I appreciate the efforts of the planners to include a focus on the Palestinian Christian/Messianic Jewish Israeli reconciliation effort now taking place in the land of Israel.

However, if one was to review the script of the brief film preceding this interview, statements can be identified that were not only anti-Israel, but in some ways anti-Jewish as they are a suggestion by the scriptwriter that one of the causes of the tension in the Middle East has been the post-Holocaust immigration of millions of Jewish people to what Jewish people around the world view as their rightful homeland. I understand that this view is held by many in the Middle East and outside the Middle East who are advocates for the Palestinians, but statements like this simply had no place at a Congress on world evangelization.

Some discussion with the LCWE leadership has already taken place regarding these matters. Essentially, we believe they chose to “lend their public support” to a stronger coalition of Arab believers, minimizing the role of Israel and the Jewish people in the Congress. This is unfortunate and yet consistent with the theological statements made by the TWG. We hope the LCWE leadership will reconsider their choices be more even handed in future Congresses and Consultations.

No public mention of Jewish evangelism

Evidently, Jewish evangelism is not a major focus of the LCWE. This is too bad, as the LCJE has been one of the most active groups within the LCWE. The major focus of this event was on those who have been marginalized by society: Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and those who follow tribal and traditionally more animistic religions. There certainly could have been at least a prayer offered for the salvation of followers of the Jewish religion, and we have to simply accept that the choice was made not to do so. This caused those of us who have been involved with the LCWE to be deeply saddened and disappointed.

The lack of information and misinformation regarding Jewish people

The only mention of Jewish people was not from the platform, but rather as part of a booklet distributed on unreached people groups. Yet the only mention of Jewish people in this booklet was of the French Jews – who do in fact have a number of missionaries attempting to reach them. The only other mention was of German Jews, and this number (which is over 300,000) was listed a just above 100,000 – and the language noted that they speak in Germany is Yiddish.

This misinformation is not only the fault of the Congress and those who did the research, but also ours, as we have not provided the correct information. The authors of the booklet were mostly from Campus Crusade, and we know they are generally very pro Jewish evangelism. So, the lack of correct information about Jewish people and Jewish evangelism was disappointing, and we need to do more to inform our brothers and sisters in the church of our needs.

The rift between Jewish believers and Middle Eastern Christians

There were a number of Palestinian believers in attendance at the Congress, and many from the Middle East. Since the topic of reconciliation was such a major theme of the conference, the issue of Jewish/Israeli /Palestinian reconciliation was often discussed at the “water cooler.” There was one plenary segment in which a Palestinian believer and Dan Sered, the leader of Jews for Jesus in Israel, were part of a video and then spoke about the issue of reconciliation. It was well done, but thought to be very superficial by those from the region. However, some of the attendees felt more hopeful after hearing the two speak.

The response afterwards from those who live in Israel was not especially favorable, as most of those directly involved – including our own staff – believe that relationships with Palestinian believers, especially “under the glass” at larger conferences, are heavily politicized.

On one of the evenings, prayer meetings were scheduled for both Israel and Palestine. The prayer meetings were scheduled for the same time and in adjoining rooms. I knew it was a “set up” in a good way, and sure enough, we all agreed to hold a joint prayer meeting. Eight to ten Palestinian believers and a similar number of Jewish and Israeli believers, as well as those from other countries who cared about the situation attended. It was a joy to pray together, but one of the non-Jewish non-Palestinian members prayed a very strong pro-Israel prayer; some of the Palestinian believers were upset and one Palestinian woman walked out.

The aftermath of the prayer meeting was mixed – some good and some bad. What became clear to me, without sounding hopeless, is that the situation even among believers is so complicated that it will take the supernatural work of God to bring healing to this situation. There is just too much hurt and anger on both sides. It is good to know that one day healing will come when Yeshua, the Prince of Peace sits on His rightful throne in Jerusalem and all those who live in Israel and every other place will benefit from His gracious and benevolent reign!

A minimization of opportunities among the middle class and affluent

The emphasis on meeting the material and spiritual needs of the poor and those who are marginalized was wonderful and needed. Yet the middle class and affluent were hardly mentioned. They do not need the social justice engagement of the church – all they need is the Gospel. This was one of the weakest areas of the conference. The only time this group was mentioned was when Tim Keller spoke about the importance of reaching the cities.

For the most part, the global Jewish community falls within this category. I believe it was an oversight and overreaction to the way in which the marginalized have been treated in the past. However, I believe it showed a Western bias, as many in the developing countries are doing a lot to bring the Gospel to an emerging middle class. India and China would both be good examples of these efforts to go beyond reaching the needy and marginalized to reaching the more affluent in their communities. Hopefully this can be

corrected in new Consultations and perhaps addressed more directly in the future by the LCWE.

Conclusion

The LCWE Cape Town event was a magnificent effort and wonderful conference. I was grateful for the opportunity to be part of this historic event. I know that all those who attended were edified and challenged. The quality of the speakers and programming was excellent, the global character of the event was inspiring and the spirit of participants was generally gracious. Those who attended represent some of the finest leaders of the global church and potentially some of our best allies in reaching Jewish people for the Messiah Yeshua.

This does not minimize my disappointments with where the church and the missions' community is going. This great event simply reflects certain trends within the global Christian community. The challenges related to the erosion of attributing theological distinctiveness to Israel promoted by modern Supersessionists has the potential to damage the cause of Jewish evangelism. When the Jewish people are no longer viewed as unique the missionary motivation to reach Jewish people for the Messiah is undermined. This growing movement is real and is deeply rooted in the souls of many Evangelicals – just as a love for Israel was embedded in previous generations. If it continues, then we will find that the prayers, support and engagement of the church in Jewish mission will diminish. As those who have given our lives to the cause of Jewish evangelism, we have a lot of work to do, and must be ready and ready to embrace the challenge.

I do hope however, that our Jewish mission community will seek the unity of the greater Body of Messiah, and will express our understanding of Scripture in ways that are humble, well studied and presented with intelligence and grace. We need to produce books, articles and media presentations created with excellence over the next few years that will produce a new body of material and argumentation that will provide a balance and challenge to the views of our more Supersessionist brothers and sisters. It is our intention to win Evangelicals back to the great biblical truth that the future of the Jewish people was sealed by covenant with our forefather Abraham and that the continued existence of the Jewish people, especially to day – living in the Land is evidence of the enduring testimony of a promise made by God Himself. I praise God that so many who hold to a more Supersessionist position still find the word of Rabbi Saul so difficult to explain away:

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins. Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. (Romans 11:25-29)

We will build our ministry upon these clear promises; we will go forward trusting in His

Word and by the power of His Holy Spirit, loving the Lord, our Jewish people and our brothers and sisters with whom we share this wonderful gift of eternal life. And hopefully God will use us to help our family in Messiah to understand the truth of God's plan for the Jewish people according to Scripture in ways that will encourage many to join us in bringing *the whole Gospel to all Jewish people*.

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