

Mission World – One More Wall To Go?

Last October, 4000 delegates from 198 countries met in Cape Town for the Third Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization. Mark Greene, who was one of them, thinks it might lead to a significant breakthrough...

IN 1989, the Berlin Wall came down and the world changed.

15 years earlier, in 1974, a different wall came down, and evangelical mission strategy and a huge number of local churches changed radically, and have never been the same since.

And it was a biblical conviction that brought the wall down. Ideas change the world.

The wall that came down was the wall between evangelism and social action. Until then, many evangelicals had regarded social action as a distraction from the primacy of proclaiming the good news. At Lausanne 1974, however, with Billy Graham and John Stott to the fore, the First Congress for World Evangelization agreed that the evangelistic proclamation of the love of God in Christ must be accompanied by the expression of the love of God in Christ by actively engaging with the physical and emotional needs of people – holistic mission. It may seem obvious now, but it wasn't then.

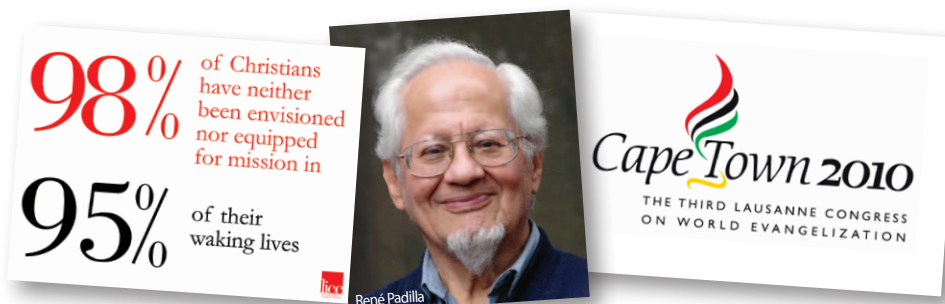
Indeed, if you're in a mainstream evangelical church and you've been involved in cleaning your town or sending teenagers to build orphanages overseas, or if your church took part in Hope 08, then it's likely you've been influenced by the theological conclusions of Lausanne. That meeting triggered a movement that continues to change the world.

Not many meetings do that.

So, with that dramatic history in mind, I prepared to attend the Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town. Would God say something transformational to the worldwide church about how we are doing mission?

Certainly, as far as the UK was concerned, we at LICC felt there was another wall to come down. At least, that's what all our research over the last ten years indicates. Here in the UK, the church's primary mission strategy has been:

'To recruit the people of God to use some of their leisure time to join the missionary initiatives of church-paid workers.'



It's a strategy that has yielded much fruit – in evangelism, in social action among the poor, the young, the old, the disadvantaged, as well as in reaching out to the rich, the adult and the privileged. Praise God for the ability of church leaders to mobilise their communities for such mission. Still, this is mission that most Christians can only participate in during their leisure time. What about the rest of their time?

The reality is that 98 percent of Christians – i.e. those not in paid church work – are not properly envisioned or equipped for their mission in the 95 percent of their waking time that they aren't involved in church activities, wherever that might be – workplace, schoolplace, clubplace. And that is a

tragic waste of the church's missional potential. Too few Christians have eyes to see what God might be doing in the places they already naturally spend their time, and where they already have relationships with those who don't know Jesus.

But that's the UK. When I spoke at Cape Town, I asked the international audience of around 500 people if they had this 'leisure time strategy' in their context. The vast majority indicated 'yes'. Fewer than ten people were pursuing a different strategy.

The confirmation that, overall, the global evangelical church has an incomplete mission strategy is an important discovery. Yes, the First Congress had triggered a movement that was underpinned by a dynamic biblical truth, and it had borne much fruit. However, it's a movement that has primarily found active expression in how Christians use their leisure time, or in para-church activity. The movement hasn't yet succeeded in envisioning people for holistic mission in all of life.

Importantly, however, this leisure time focus is not the inevitable outcome of the theology that has fuelled the Lausanne movement. On the contrary, Dr René Padilla, the great South American theologian and practitioner,

whose theology and praxis was so influential on John Stott and Billy Graham, clearly understood that mission can and should be pursued wherever God's people find themselves – factories and fields, schools and offices, labs and government buildings.

The challenge to the Lausanne movement then is not to change their theological foundations, but to extend their life-transforming biblical insights into the way churches disciple their people for everyday mission where they already are.

Just before the Congress I went to a meeting at which Dr Padilla was speaking and asked him why he thought the global evangelical church hadn't embraced this kind of whole-life mission. His response: 'because of the sacred-secular divide and our failure to make disciples'. Similarly, on the main stage in Cape Town, René Padilla's primary concern for the church going forward was:

to take the opportunity that the workplace in particular presents.

The workplace, however, is just one context for holistic mission, and it certainly should not be competing with any other context, still less with local church ministry. Rather, the challenge ahead for the 'marketplace movement' is not only how to be agents of gospel transformation at work, but also how to help local churches become the kind of communities that make whole-life missional disciples – wherever people's frontlines are. We desperately need whole-life disciple-making churches which is, of course, why we see the Imagine Project as so vital.

In sum, the global church needs to bring down the wall of the sacred-secular divide, and broaden its leisure time paradigm to embrace the opportunities for mission that God's people have in daily life, and develop a more comprehensive strategy. Perhaps something like this:

A New World Mission Strategy

To equip the people of God for fruitful holistic mission together in all of their life:

- in the local community near the church***
- in the communities that they are part of day by day away from the church building***
- in communities beyond their national borders***

It doesn't look all that dramatic on paper but it involves the demolition of a very large, very old, very stubborn wall, and it promises the full deployment of 2.1 billion Christians into whole-life mission.

It would be a great start. And we're praying for it.

Mark Greene



'The question of discipleship. Jesus did not send us to make converts, he sent us to make disciples that would learn to obey everything that the Lord Jesus Christ taught.'

René had sounded a warning.

Encouragingly though, there was such a positive response to the session in which I took part, to my section and to the other presenters, that it was repeated by popular demand. Furthermore, the recommendations for action that followed the Congress – the Cape Town Commitment – clearly identified the damage that the sacred-secular divide has done to mission, and made a vigorous call to the church to release the laity and

Further Watching

Mark Greene's Cape Town address can be viewed online:

<http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/11359>

Other Cape Town Highlights to View Online

Chris Wright – Integrity, Confronting Idols

<http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/11556>

North Korean Student Testimony

<http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/11671>

Mats Tunehag – Business as Mission

<http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/11371>



Further Reading

The Great Divide, Mark Greene – see page 9 for details of how to order from LICC

The Cape Town Commitment: <http://www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment>

Mission between the Times – Essays on the Kingdom, René Padilla, Langham Monographs, 2010.