

Being Part of Lausanne III at Cape Town – an Eye Opener

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‘God is on the move’ It is a preposterous idea that Adam’s descendents might ever be able to adequately describe anything about the Almighty or His deeds on earth. However, this was the motto of Lausanne III in Cape Town, just under a year ago.

Is God on the move? Those of us who are theologically minded might argue that ‘by His nature He must *always* be on the move’. A more down to earth thinker might say ‘I see evidence in the world today that cannot be explained other than by the intervention of the Creator.’ I suppose that is where I fit in.

Let me put Cape Town in perspective. Every year in Vancouver, over 30,000 Christians pass through the doors of the main conference centre to celebrate world mission in the city’s annual ‘Missions Fest’. In the vast exhibition hall one has a palpable sense that ‘something is afoot’! Every time I go, the message impressed upon me by Missions Fest is that yes – we – particularly we Canadians - *are* fulfilling the Great Commission!

Cape Town was something quite different. Much more than a glorified church missions conference it said that we – we from every nation – we are reaching every nation. We are fulfilling the Great Commission. Cape Town was a conference with delegates from virtually every single country on earth. These delegates were not only believers in Jesus, but also leaders in their communities. It was impossible not to see that there are churches in every country on the face of this globe.

I grew up reading Don Richardson’s book *Peace Child*. Irian Jaya seemed remote, exotic and magnificently pagan as I perused those pages. In Cape Town I saw delegates from the very Papua New Guinea which forms the setting for that story’s remarkable events.

I grew up hearing of missionaries who spent their whole lives in North Africa, toiling and praying and barely seeing one Muslim come to faith. In Cape Town I met Arab North Africans who not only love the Lord but also love the Jewish people!

No longer is the Gospel going forth from Jerusalem to all nations! Now it is going forth from many nations to all nations. In the last decade this transformation in world mission has taken place in front of our own eyes. I don’t know if I can *see* God on the move, but I certainly was able to see His church on the move, and I know His Spirit is the One empowering it.

As a Messianic Jew at this event, one of a small but significant minority, it was abundantly clear that nothing special was to be made of our ethnicity. In some ways, this was a relief! However, little if any tribute was given to the relevance of the people of Israel to the subject of world missions. It was as if the modern missions movement has divorced itself from its biblical, historical and theological roots. Nationally, Jews were of interest only in the context of reconciliation and the Middle East conflict. At least at that juncture we had some exposure as Dan Sered shared the platform with Israeli Arab Shadia Qubti to discuss issues faced by both groups of believers in Israel.

I believe the global church is missing something important. It would be for the church's own good to grasp it! If God's own ideal was for Israel to be a light to the nations¹ do Israel and the Jewish people have no significance today? Perhaps in this time of the Gentiles we have no significance, and perhaps you might say I am being too ethnocentric. But from a Jew's perspective this was a glaring omission. So it is that as I watched the proceedings I grappled with the issues surrounding Jewish identity. Overwhelmed by the mass of wonderful Gentile Christians, I had to ask myself 'how *can we Jews remain as Jews* in a Church that does not view us as distinct?'

History tells us that one hundred years ago Messianic Jews were asking the same question. Sadly they found no working answer. Where are *their* children? *Where* is the century, even two-century old community of Jews who believe that Jesus is the Messiah? Try as we may, it seems that Jewish believers cannot resist the forces of assimilation – either into the Gentile church or back into 'unbelieving' Israel. So what is the 'hope' that a Jewish attendee at Cape Town can bring back to his Jewish community? Does faith in Jesus mean the end of three millennia of God ordained Jewish continuity? God forbid.

I would contend that Lausanne III opened my eyes a little wider. Jewish believers in Jesus need the missions community, in particular the Missions to the Jews community, to take their national identity seriously. They need the church to seriously support the Messianic Jewish congregational movement as most mission societies would seek to help and support congregations formed in their mission fields. Around the world mission societies foster indigenous people and church movements. Opening my eyes, while I do believe Jewish missions are in some way exceptional, I believe that we need to cease treating our mission field in that way.

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¹ Isaiah 49:6 with its messianic overtones epitomises a long Biblical tradition regarding Israel's role in making G-d known among the nations. Redak combines this 'light to the nations' passage with Isaiah 60:3 'The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.'