

1980 - Three Major Mission Conferences

1. Melbourne, Australia, May 12-25.

Commission of World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Theme: "Your Kingdom Come."

The WCC conference met at the University of Melbourne. Some 600 delegates from 85 countries attended. The two leaders were Dr. Philip Potter, General Secretary of the WCC and Dr. Emilio Castro of Uruguay, the Chairman of WCC's World Mission and Evangelism Commission. Dr. Castro was also the elected chairman of the Bangkok conference in 1973. Typical lectures included The Kingdom of God and Human Struggles; The Church Witnesses to the Kingdom, and the Crucified Christ Challenges Human Power.

In the papers delivered at the plenary sessions, in group Bible studies and in the sectional meetings, salvation tended to be explained in socio-political terms. Dr. Philip Potter interpreted the program for the "Kingdom of God" as a political, economic, social world order.

Some strange statements could be heard by observers. One study was introduced by a prayer which included the words: "Our kingdom comes when there is land for all . . . education for the deprived and outcast ... when the land is cultivated ... when the sources of production are the property of the people

Dr. Castro spoke of the guilt of the Western churches. He asked: "How can we come with the proclamation of the message of redemption and freedom of God's kingdom, when so many people have seen slavery coming to them through colonialism, even in the name of the Christian faith?"

A delegation from Pakistan attempted to get the Soviet Union condemned for its military intervention in Afghanistan, but the Soviet delegates strongly opposed this move. One Baptist even threatened to break ties with the WCC. The Eastern European delegates received support from Latin Americans, some Africans and people from India. Pakistan's motion was defeated with 66 versus 58 votes.

The conference accepted the resolution expressing its sorrow that it was impossible to condemn countries which trampled on human rights. South Africa was the exception. It was the only nation condemned by the conference. Much more can be said about the Melbourne conference. I hope to write about its theology and missiology in more detail in the near future. (See Mission's focus Shift over Eight Decades)

2. Pattaya, Thailand, June 16-27.

Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, Consultation on World Evangelization. Theme: "How Shall they Hear?"

This consultation stands in the tradition of the evangelism conferences convened in Berlin in 1966, and in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974. Its theme was a follow-up to the Lausanne theme, "Let the earth hear His voice."

A select group of 650 delegates evaluated what's happened since 1974 and developed new strategies to reach the world's unreached or hidden people. The U.S. Center for World Mission's technical definition of hidden people is: "Those particular unreached peoples which cannot yet be reached by an evangelizing church within their own cultural tradition."

Some 16,750 people groups throughout the world have no churches whatever. Dr. Leighton Ford said in an interview before he went to Thailand, that the conference "will be a microcosm of the global church coming to grips with evangelization strategy for the years ahead."

3 Edinburgh, Scotland; October 27 to November 1, 1980.

Worldwide Missions Agencies, World Consultation on Frontier Missions. Theme: "A Church for Every People by the Year 2000."

This convention falls on the 70th anniversary date of the first world-wide missionary conference held in 1910. Pattaya, Thailand was a meeting of invited, individual evangelical leaders. Edinburgh will be a meeting of official agency representatives. It will deal exclusively with the hidden people.

At Edinburgh the anticipated 800 delegates will consider ways and means to promote greater involvement of the world's many evangelical Protestant mission agencies in reaching hidden people and consider concrete implementation of all what was discussed at Pattaya and other conferences.

Three major conferences in one year! Hundreds of mission personnel, theologians and churchmen on the move! Is this good stewardship of time and money? Many key people are involved in the preparations of conferences. They have to spend precious time on the preparation of papers, etc. In our days of economic recession, inflation and steep price of travel, the cost of each conference is high.

James W. Reapsome, the editor of *Evangelical Mission Quarterly* raised the possibility of a moratorium on mission congresses. He remarked, "Some skepticism about international congresses is warranted. Many a working missionary wonders about the time and money expended by a comparatively few leaders in world evangelical circles in what appears to be the full-time occupation of attending conferences. Rightfully they want to know if the results are worth the expenditures. It's hard for them to suppress the groans with which they greet the news of yet another congress."

A moratorium on mission conferences and congresses? I believe that the church should get on with the job of evangelization. Conferences tend to become self-perpetuating.

Churches shouldn't be financially burdened with the support of any more high level talks. The people in the pew like to see their money go where there is a need and an opportunity to present the gospel. Some hard questions must be asked before another congress is planned.

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