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# Will Lausanne III Listen? A Latin American Inquiry

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The wheels are turning and unless direct divine intervention changes plans, Lausanne III will take place in Cape Town, October 2010. Many preparations are in motion, committees work hard to keep schedules and datelines, places booked and speakers chosen. Anticipation is high and expectations are being defined. The Lausanne movement that started in 1974 has gone through many stages and it is good to see it coming back to its original intention expressed in the Lausanne Covenant.

Those who participated in the first congress in Switzerland remembered that two Latin Americans 'set the Congress alight'<sup>1</sup> and also had a prominent

role in the redaction of the covenant as well as the attached document on radical discipleship. What René Padilla and Samuel Escobar presented at Lausanne I remains relevant and the issues they raised should still be an important part of theological discussion of the church around the world. This paper reviews their presentations showing especial emphasis on the issues the church needs to attend to today.

The presentations of Padilla and Escobar at Lausanne I were regarded as causing a 'significant shift in Christian thinking,' a 'coming of age for evangelicals,' and a 'major breakthrough for evangelicals on questions of social ethics and openness in facing these issues.'<sup>2</sup> Another participant observed that the results of the Latin Americans' speeches 'were much more

deeply felt than many Western evangelical Christian leaders here could have expected.'<sup>3</sup> Rev. John A. Coleman, from Australia, a participant at Lausanne I, noted that the papers presented by Padilla and Escobar 'have probably been subject to more comment than all the other papers put together'.<sup>4</sup>

The few consultations that took place after 1974—on the Homogenous Unit Principle (1977), Gospel and Culture (1978), Simple Life-Style (1980), and Evangelism and Social Responsibility (1982)—reflected the main thrust of their papers. However, after 1982 it seems like Padilla and Escobar were shunned from the Lausanne movement. They were not on the podium at Lausanne II in Manila. Padilla noted that there was a conspicuous absence of Latin American speakers at Lausanne II.<sup>5</sup> Could it be a reaction to their boldness to challenge the 'success' preachers of their day? Or was it a result of an intentional policy by the people who led Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism (LCWE) from the 1980s? Maybe both. What was in their expositions that caused the evangelical leaders of the Lausanne movement to have goose bumps?

Padilla's paper<sup>6</sup> was considered by

an Australian journalist as 'the best theological presentation of the congress'.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning, Padilla disclosed his interest in the 'wider dimensions of the gospel' because they were intrinsically related to the mission of the church in the world. Nevertheless, there were at least two ideas in Padilla's presentation that ruffled some feathers, his identification of 'cultural Christianity' with the 'American way of life' with its reliance on technology, and his presentation of the social dimensions of the gospel.

Regarding the first issue, Padilla argued that 'cultural Christianity' was an adaptation of the gospel to the 'spirit of the times'. He presented as the dominant version of cultural Christianity the 'American Way of Life'. For Padilla, the influence of such a form of 'cultural Christianity' caused the gospel in the majority of the countries of the world to be equated with the 'American Way of Life'. He defined it as a version of Christianity that projected an image of a successful business and the gospel as a marketing of the formula for happiness but without repentance and commitment. Therefore, he said, 'accepting Christ is the means to reach the ideal of the "good life," at no cost. The cross has lost its offense, since it simply points to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us, but it is not a call to discipleship.'

To find customers for their religious product, Padilla continued, North American Christianity relied on technology, reducing evangelism to a mathematical calculation: 'to produce the greatest number of Christians at the

1 Athol Gill, 'Christian Social Responsibility,' in *The New Face of Evangelicalism: An International Symposium on the Lausanne Covenant*, ed. C. René Padilla (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 91.

2 John A. Coleman, 'Aftermath of Lausanne! Evangelism in a Changing World,' *New Life*, 28 August 1974; Gerald Davis, 'A Coming of Age for Evangelicals,' *Church Scene*, 1 August 1974; Bruce Kaye, 'Lausanne: An Assessment,' *CWN Series*, 16 August 1974.

3 Alan Nichols, 'Plain Speaking on Social Issues...' *New Life*, 8 August 1974.

4 Coleman, 'Aftermath of Lausanne! Evangelism in a Changing World.'

5 C. René Padilla, 'Presentación,' *Boletín Teológico* 21, no. 35 (1985), 211.

6 C. René Padilla, 'Evangelism and the World,' in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization Lausanne, Switzerland*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1974), 116-46.

7 Kaye, 'Lausanne.'

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least possible cost in the shortest possible time'. The most sophisticated technological resources are used by this version of 'cultural Christianity' to *efficiently* (italics his) propagate its message of success throughout the world. Padilla identified several problematic characteristics of such Christianity. However, the main problem he mentioned was the reduction of the Gospel to a formula for success and the equation of the triumph of Christ with obtaining the highest number of 'conversions.' He also said technology conditioned the message turning it into a man-centered Christianity: 'It is the religious product of a civilization in which *nothing*, not even man himself, escapes technology.' Furthermore, for Padilla such manipulation of the Gospel inevitably led to slavery to the world and its powers.

Those who remember Lausanne I would probably find in Padilla's description of 'cultural Christianity' a frontal critique of what another speaker at the Congress presented the day before: Donald McGavran's 'Church Growth' program. For Padilla, this version of 'cultural Christianity' put at risk the significance of the gospel. He was not against the growth of the church; instead he was critical of making growth an end of itself. He drove his point home by asking if 'the day is not close when missionary strategists employ B. F. Skinner's "behavior conditioning" and "Christianize" the world through the scientific control of environmental conditions and human genetics.' Hard words to swallow but considering that LCWE championed in the 1980s and 1990s the 'church growth' agenda, Padilla was not too far off the mark.

To talk about the social implications of the Gospel, Padilla started with the message's call to repentance. In order to avoid misunderstandings, Padilla defined repentance as,

... not merely a bad conscience, but a change of attitude, a restructuring of one's scale of values, a reorientation of the whole personality. Repentance is more than a private affair between the individual and God. It is the complete reorientation of life in the world-among men in response to the work of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

We can either take seriously this call to repentance or ignore it, according to Padilla. The right choice is the latter, meaning that we are taking God and the world seriously avoiding social quietism. For him, the goal of the gospel 'is not to take a man out of the world, but to put him into it, no longer as a slave but as a son of God and a member of the body of Christ.'

Another important term for Padilla was salvation. He defined salvation as man's return to God as well as to his neighbor. To explain this, Padilla described two extremes regarding salvation. First, salvation left in the hands of men when, 'eschatology is absorbed by the Utopia and the Christian hope becomes confused with the worldly hope proclaimed by Marxism.' Many might have nodded especially since the 'Cold War' mentality was pervasive. However, when Padilla described the second extreme he might have received many uneasy looks. Padilla described it as the concern solely on 'the future

8 Padilla, 'Evangelism and the World,' 129.

salvation of the soul' making religion 'an escape from present reality,' causing a 'total withdrawal from the problems of society.'

It was in Jesus' ministry that included *kerygma*, *diaconia*, and *Didache* where Padilla based his conclusion that the New Testament does not separate 'soteriology and ethics, communion with God and communion with one's neighbor, faith and works.' Christian commitment unavoidably means involvement with the neighbor.

There is no room for 'eschatological paralysis' nor for 'social strike.' There is no place for statistics of 'how many souls die without Christ every minute,' if they do not take into account how many of those who die, die victims of hunger. There is no place for evangelism that, as it goes by the man who was assaulted by thieves on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, sees in him only a soul that must be saved and ignores the man.<sup>9</sup>

At the end, Padilla made two appeals—one to the Christian person, another to the church. 'The first condition for genuine evangelism is the crucifixion of the evangelist. Without it the Gospel becomes empty talk and evangelism becomes proselytism.' He called the church to take seriously the mission given to her, 'the building of a new humanity... a mission that can be performed only through sacrifice.'

After his presentation, Padilla 'became, to the press, the *enfant terrible*

of the Congress.'<sup>10</sup> It was for sure a speech a lot of people wanted to forget but the issues were too important to let them fade away. Immediately after Padilla's presentation several people including Athol Gill from Australia, John H. Yoder, Samuel Escobar, René Padilla, and others decided to convoke an open meeting to discuss the topic of radical discipleship. Over 500 people gave up their Sunday rest to attend. It was an open forum with no hidden agenda. The discussion was candid and transparent with a noticeable absence of North Americans. A document called *A Response to Lausanne* was drafted and attached to the final *Covenant*. The following day Samuel Escobar was scheduled to speak at the plenary session.<sup>11</sup> His was expected to be the *coup de grace* on the social involvement issue, building on the foundation carefully laid by John Stott, Padilla and Michael Green.

From the opening paragraphs, Escobar was overtly outspoken about the relationship of evangelism with the realities of 'overpopulation, hunger, oppression, war, torture, violence, pollution, and the extreme forms of wealth and poverty'. Escobar expanded Padilla's idea of 'cultural Christianity' by describing two main attitudes of

10 Alfred C. Krass, 'The New Face of Evangelicalism: An International Symposium on the Lausanne Covenant (Book Review),' *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 1, no. 1 (1977), 23.

11 Samuel Escobar, 'Evangelism and Man's Search for Freedom, Justice, and Fulfillment,' in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1975), 303-18.

9 Padilla, 'Evangelism and the World,' 131.

evangelicals. First, the goal of making Christianity the official ideology of the West and therefore being committed to 'Western ideals' perhaps as a reaction to Marxism in the East. Second, indifference because for many people the 'Gospel is a spiritual message that has nothing to say about social problems' and consequently separating the message from its ethical demands.

To explain his ideas, Escobar added,

If we put together the growing imbalance of development and affluence in the world, with the past relationship between the 'Christian' Western powers and the missionary enterprise to the Third World, we can understand why the suspicion that the whole task of evangelization in its three dimensions is only an 'imperialistic plot,' a Western way of manipulating people. It would be like selling opiate to keep the masses of the Third World quiet in the midst of their misery and suffering.<sup>12</sup>

Escobar was talking from his personal experience. He heard such misconceptions of evangelistic efforts all throughout Latin American universities. The identification of evangelicals with imperialistic agendas of the northern rich nations was widely held not only by intellectuals. However, Escobar's exhortation seemed to fall on deaf ears if we consider the programs and emphases the LCWE sponsored after Lausanne I.

In agreement with Padilla, Escobar

found a close relationship between the message and the messenger. For him, to 'emphasize the communication of the message at the expense of the qualities that must characterize the messengers is not a biblical pattern'. It constituted a betrayal to the very identity of the message, since 'spirituality without discipleship in the daily social, economic, and political aspects of life is religiosity and not Christianity'. He challenged the Congress to 'get rid of the false notion that concern for the social implications of the Gospel and the social dimensions of witnessing comes from false doctrine or lack of evangelical conviction'.

At the end of his paper, Escobar became even more explicit,

If as evangelicals we rejected the liberal adaptation of the Gospel to the rationalism of the nineteenth century, we should also reject the adaptation of the Gospel to the social conformism or conservatism of the middle class citizen in the powerful West.<sup>13</sup>

Escobar did not have to wait long for responses and questions to his paper. More than a thousand came in! He agreed that many missionaries were already involved in meeting the basic needs of people around the world but he also mentioned that many of them had received pressure to 'abandon their efforts for the pursuit only of numerical growth of congregations'. Another implicit critique of the Church Growth School? If any had the impression Escobar was proposing a political

revolution, he was careful about leaving no doubts that 'simple liberation from human masters is not the freedom of which the Gospel speaks'. Rather,

Freedom is subjection to Jesus Christ as Lord, deliverance from bondage to sin and Satan and consequently the beginning of new life under the Law of Christ, life in the family of the faith where the old human master becomes also the new brother in Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, he added, 'the heart which has been made free with the freedom of Christ cannot be indifferent to the human longings for deliverance from economic, political or social oppression.'

Some people argued that directing efforts to the social implications of the Gospel would result in forgetting evangelism. Escobar disagreed with such a statement. The matter was more than theological. For him, the social gospel had a bad theology, but at the same time, those with the right theology did not apply it to social issues. Right on the money! He could not have been more prophetic.

The discussion of Padilla and Escobar's presentation was intense for quite a while after the Congress. Carl Henry called them 'self-proclaimed champions of radical discipleship'.<sup>15</sup> Regarding the North Americans' reaction to the identification of 'cultural Christianity' with the 'American Way of Life', he said,

Some Americans at Lausanne remarked that it will be time enough to listen to such complaints about evangelical cultural entrapment when Latin Americans put their own house in order. But that response is disappointingly evasive. American evangelicals must learn the importance of social and political criticism at home, even if the reminder emanates from outsiders who seem most ferocious when leveling criticism at situations other than their own.<sup>16</sup>

However, when talking about the Latin Americans, Henry considered 'confusing' all their talk about the church being at the forefront of social-economic change because it 'left unsure, however, whether the prospect of present political liberation is an integral facet of the gospel. Nor did they clarify how the life and example of Jesus actually rather than symbolically undergirds such a view'.<sup>17</sup> Were not Padilla and Escobar explicit enough? Was the *Response* unclear? Bishop Jack Dain, Executive Chairman of the Congress, gave a different answer,

I personally recognise that a minority of people in the congress wanted to go further in the direction of radical discipleship, but I think I would have to say that I do not believe the congress was ready to go further.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Escobar, 'Evangelism and Man's Search,' 304.

<sup>13</sup> Escobar, 'Evangelism and Man's Search,' 317.

<sup>14</sup> Escobar, 'Evangelism and Man's Search,' 322.

<sup>15</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, 'The Gospel and Society,' *Christianity Today*, 13 September 1974, 1365.

<sup>16</sup> Henry, 'The Gospel and Society,' 1364.

<sup>17</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian: An Autobiography* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1986), 349.

<sup>18</sup> Interviewed by Bruce Kaye, Billy Graham Center Archives, 'Collection 46,' Box 32, Folder 32.

Hence, it could be said that Padilla and Escobar were ahead of the times. It was not that their theology was wrong. The North American constituency was not yet ready. They were gripped by plain fear of the so-called 'social gospel' that swept through North America but they forgot, or did not know, their historical battles were not the same as everywhere else. In Latin America the 'social gospel' was never an issue. Although Padilla and Escobar were clearly evangelical by North American standards, their words brought back haunting memories of the past. History dulled the North Americans' hearing and blurred their vision.

John Stott mentioned another factor behind the efforts of North American evangelicals to keep social action at bay: the history of the ecumenical movement.<sup>19</sup> They saw in the ecumenical side of Christianity a denial of the gospel. In the words of Hoekstra, evangelicals felt betrayed by the World Council of Churches (WCC). It was as if 'a plane taking them to Jerusalem had been hijacked and was now bound to Moscow'.<sup>20</sup> He explains that 'rather than giving member churches support in their worldwide missionary and evangelistic task, WCC programs have too often tended to divert those churches from that task'.<sup>21</sup> The meeting in Bangkok less than a year before

Lausanne I was key to the deepening of the precaution.

For example, in spite of the many presentations at Lausanne I with a holistic definition for the mission of the church—Stott, Padilla, Escobar, Green, among others—for Harold Lindsell, Lausanne defined the mission of the church as 'the evangelization of the world'.<sup>22</sup> How did he read, for example, section 5 of the Lausanne Covenant? Lindsell claim that Escobar proposed that the Congress' participants get involved in 'the fight for social change, in the overturning of the status quo'. Even after several readings of what Escobar said it is hard to see how could Lindsell support his conclusion. However, he found a way to line up Padilla's presentation with his assessment. For Lindsell, Padilla appeared in the *Time* magazine as an example of Lausanne taking social action seriously 'but not in the way that the ecumenical movement does'.<sup>23</sup>

It seemed like the *Covenant* left the question hanging. If it was possible for opposing interpretations, how was the resolution supposed to come? The LCWE together with the World Evangelical Fellowship sponsored the International Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility in Grand Rapids, Michigan, United States, June 1982. Stott described the gathering as a 'demonstration of the value of international conferences'.

19 John Stott, ed., *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 169.

20 Harvey T. Hoekstra, *The World Council of Churches and the Demise of Evangelism* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1979), 109.

21 Hoekstra, *The World Council of Churches and the Demise of Evangelism*, 10.

22 Harold Lindsell, 'Lausanne 74: An Appraisal,' *Christianity Today*, 13 September 1974, 1328.

23 Lindsell, 'Lausanne 74: An Appraisal,' 1329.

When we remain apart from one another, and our only contact with one another is the lobbing of hand grenades across a demilitarized zone, our attitudes inevitably harden and our mental images of each other become stereotyped. But when we meet face to face and listen not only to each other's arguments but to the cherished convictions which lie behind the arguments, then we develop towards one another a new understanding, respect and love. This is not to say that we agreed about everything, but that our agreements are far greater than our residual differences.<sup>24</sup>

However, in spite of the Consultation's clear challenge to 'call Christians and churches around the world to a more costly commitment to the lost, the needy and the oppressed', the discussion continued unresolved and carried over to Lausanne II. In the years before Manila, the LCWE did not change the programs. It was like nothing had happened. Within the LCWE, Gottfried Osei-Mensah from Ghana and Saphir Athyal from India were supporters of including in the mission of the church evangelism and social responsibility together. At the same time Leighton Ford and David Hesselgrave from the United States pushed for limiting the mission of the church to evangelism alone.<sup>25</sup> The latter was the

predominant view in Manila 1989 and that perhaps helps to explain why Padilla and Escobar were not asked to speak to the audience.

But the issues could not be swept under the carpet. A request was granted at Lausanne II for Brazilian Valdir Steuernagel to address the plenary for ten minutes. The main part of his short discourse called the global church to take seriously the political and social commitment of the Lausanne Covenant. He said,

I am afraid that having work mainly with the biblical motive of compassion interpreted through the eyes of a liberal idealistic/individualistic ideology we have created a tradition of 'giving a drink to the thirsty' that does not answer completely neither adequately the needs of many... compassion must be accompanied by another motive, that is *justice*...the Kingdom's justice.<sup>26</sup>

Even though the Manila Manifesto included a clear reference to the prophetic witness of the church expressed in the 'denunciation of all injustice and oppression, both personal and structural', for Steuernagel the time had come to put it into practice. However, as he explained, 'it seems like we are suffering of a syndrome of cautiousness that paralyzes us'. He added,

How can we keep quiet about millions of abandoned children, degenerating poverty, immorality, and exploitation in our cities? How can

24 Stott, ed., *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989*, 170.

25 Gordon Aeschliman, '¿Fin de la Tierra o Fin de Un Movimiento? Temas Críticos Que Enfrentan a Lausana II,' in *Documentos Puente* (Quito: 1989).

26 Valdir Steuernagel, 'Preguntas a Lausana II,' *Boletín Teológico* 21, no. 35 (1989), 256.

# Jesus' Questions

Lee Wanak

*Key words: Enculturated consciousness, kingdom principles, transformation, hegemonic assumptions, cognitive dissonance, parables.*

## I Enculturated Consciousness

Jesus used questions as a way of countering the enculturated consciousness of his day. Enculturated consciousness is consciousness shaped by culture and traditions absorbed during our formative years and to a significant degree it programs our everyday behaviour. It can have elements closely aligned with Biblical teaching but also elements that are diametrically opposed to kingdom principles. It often defines who we are and how we view others and the world. It shapes our views of what is good, right and beautiful. It can also be an obstacle to growth, and can marginalize whole groups of people. Jesus sought to crack conventional thinking and move people toward kingdom ways of thinking; from thinking dominated by culture to a worldview centred in God.

Examples of enculturated consciousness abound both in ancient and

in modern times. The ancients typically believed that sickness, poverty, and misfortune were the result of wrong living. Health and wealth were the reward of the righteous. Holiness came to be associated with separation from all that was unclean or impure. Impurity could even come from one's parents. Holiness came to mean separation rather than seeking unity. The Jewish view of Gentiles is another example of enculturated consciousness that Jesus sought to change. In the modern world we enculturate stereotypes involving skin colour, class, ethnic group, place of origin, and gender and use them as markers of character and values. We unknowingly apply these same stereotypes to ourselves.

I did not discover some of my American attitudes until I began working with tribal minorities in Mindanao. Growing up in America, I often heard, 'Work hard and you'll get ahead,' but few thought critically about those who worked hard and didn't get ahead. So we thought if you're poor it's because you didn't work hard. Another example of enculturated consciousness in

we keep quiet about apartheid, drug trafficking, destruction of nature, and the horrible problem of external debt? We are using time and energy for our in-house discussions while the world goes straight to hell and becomes a hell.<sup>27</sup>

After two Lausanne Congresses and all the water that has run under the bridge, it is not difficult to see that the discussion has not brought a clear-cut solution. Questions are complex especially when trans-cultural factors are involved. Even after more than three decades, the issues Padilla and Escobar raised at Lausanne I remain current. At least in Latin America the situation is worse than in 1974. Poverty has expanded, violence is rampant, and corruption is endemic, while the evangelical church, in general, has not assumed the challenge of involvement in these issues.

The hope is that this Congress will move from the trend of previous gatherings. There are small breezes of change.<sup>28</sup> It is encouraging to see what the Lausanne Theological Working Group is doing under the leadership of Chris Wright.<sup>29</sup> We pray for the wind of the Spirit to take us to new dimensions of incarnation and commitment.

Lausanne III has a great opportunity to affect evangelicals around the world to incarnate the Kingdom's values with compassion and Christian love to people in need. The challenge for Cape Town 2010 is to move from meetings and publications to a solid plan of action so that the 'Whole Church' lives out the 'Whole Gospel' in the 'Whole World'.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Holistic Mission. Occasional Paper No. 33* (Pattaya, Thailand: 2004).

<sup>29</sup> See the October 2007 and January 2009 issues of *Evangelical Review of Theology* with the papers from the February 2007 consultation in Limuru, Kenya and the February 2008 consultation in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

<sup>27</sup> Steuernagel, 'Preguntas a Lausana II,' 257.

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