

From Lausanne I to Lausanne III

René Padilla

The First International Congress on World Evangelism (Lausanne I), which took place in Lausanne, Switzerland, from July 16 to 24, 1974, will pass into history as one of the most significant worldwide missionary events in the twentieth century. It was attended by nearly 2500 participants and 1000 observers from 250 countries and 135 Protestant denominations and turned out to be a big step forward for evangelicals with its affirmation that social and political responsibility is an essential aspect of the mission of the church. This basic affirmation appears in paragraph 5 of the Lausanne Covenant in the following terms:

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, color,

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culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.¹

This statement synthesized the thinking on a question of vital importance for the life and mission of the church all over the world that had been taking shape in evangelical circles since the beginning of the 1960s. In this article,² I will attempt to show the valuable contribution that Latin Americans, and especially the Latin American

¹ “The Lausanne Covenant,” *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974–1989*, ed. John Stott (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1996).

² This article is being published simultaneously in the *Journal of Latin American Theology* in commemoration of the Latin American Theological Fellowship’s fortieth anniversary and in the second edition of *Mission Between the Times* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Partnership International, 2010) in preparation for Lausanne III.