

# Looking Back—Looking Forward

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This Congress began with Luis Bush and Leighton Ford presenting a strong challenge to us. The Congress theme is that the whole church is to take the whole gospel to the whole world. The whole world includes Muslims, almost one billion of them. There are less missionaries in the Muslim world than the people who are sitting in this hall tonight. This world includes the Hindu community, almost seven hundred million Hindus in the world, most of whom have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We think of the urban world. More than half of the people alive today are living in great cities. It's estimated another seven hundred million people will immigrate to the cities in the next eleven years.

This world includes the youth of the world. What some call the "small half" of the world. Forty-five percent of all of the people in Africa, 27 percent of all of the people of Asia, 35 percent of all the people in Latin America are under the age of fifteen. One hundred million children are homeless in our world.

There are the tribal peoples of the world, most of whom still wait to be able to read God's words in the language of their hearts. There's the secularists of the world, in Europe, the United States, and many other nations as well, most of whom sense the gospel is something for the past, who scorn and don't believe and don't take it seriously. There are nominal Christians, 1.3 billion people who profess the name of Jesus Christ—but many of whom do not know what it means to have Jesus Christ as their friend and their Savior.

The Communist world is in turmoil and in ferment. There's a great spirit of change and transition. And yet we remember what has happened in China in the last few weeks.

Many are the poor and the needy of the world.

We're called to this Congress to take seriously the whole world. We're to take the gospel to every person, especially those who have never heard that Jesus loves them. Especially those who are poor and oppressed and have no hope. We were reminded this morning, by Robyn and by Bill, that if we are going to do that, it's going to require a whole new level of cooperation and unity. We can no longer accept the dichotomy, the divisions between male and female, between Western and non-Western, between the young and the old, between the charismatic and the non-charismatic, between those who believe in "incarnational" methods and those who are called to proclamation, between congregational structures and mission structures. It must be the whole church committed in respect and in love to go together to the world.

I believe God is calling us to a new kind of unity in the body of Christ, where we love one another and listen to one another so that in that spirit of unity, we will make a

witness of Jesus and his love for the world.

We were also reminded this morning, by Michael Cassidy and Eva Burrows, of the need for sacrifice and commitment.

I wonder how many of us make it a practice to attend conferences around the world. Some of us are required to do that by our responsibility. And yet, it might be time for us to make sure that we are *practicing* all that we hear in these conferences. It's time for many of us who are leaders to begin to lead anew from the front lines, to go where the people are, to sit where the people are. Jesus did not die for the cause of world evangelization. He died for people.

This Congress is first and foremost not about programs and causes and organizations. It's not about all of our various callings and agendas and concerns. It is about people who are lost without Jesus. People who are without hope, who desperately need us to make new levels of commitment and sacrifice, to live amongst them, to listen to them, and to bring grace and truth to them in Jesus' name. So there's a desperate need for us to have a new sense of Godly urgency, a renewed zeal in our hearts, a fire to burn within our spirits to reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must focus our energies and our efforts, not on maintaining first of all our institutions and our programs, but on people who need Jesus Christ.

Bill O'Brien is going to share with us some developments that have taken place in the last few months that help us to focus our attention on reaching people with the gospel.

## The Scope of the Task

Bill O'Brien

In thinking of A.D. 2000 and beyond, we can approach this problem either piece by piece until we come out with a whole, or we can talk about it from the whole back to the particular. I want to focus for just a few moments on the "global scope of the task." Tonight, let us consider that we're gathered here as one body, as Kingdom citizens, pilgrims and aliens in the world, but standing in the middle of hearts as a prayer wish of our Lord, when he said, "O, Father, don't take them out of the world."

About 20 percent of the world's population, or approximately 1.3 billion people, have never heard of Christ. They are doubly lost. Spiritually they are lost to any relationship with Jesus Christ, and physically they are lost to any opportunity to hear the gospel in any form. Fellow pilgrims, the time to change that is now.

When the Great Commission Manifesto was shaped in a global consultation in Singapore last January, two of the four major objectives were to provide every people a valid opportunity to hear the gospel, and to establish a Christian community of worship and evangelism in every human community. Could it be done? Now, let me tell you a scenario. Reach with me across the decades:

Date line—Singapore, January 1, 2001:

A global celebration of Great Commission Christians has just closed in one of the most dramatic moments in Christian history. The celebration was simulcast live via satellite, in fifty languages, directly to the entire world. In addition to home viewers, over seven hundred-thousand Great Commission Christians gathered in major convention centers in seventy-five world-class cities to experience the moment together by big screen. Even a small group of believers working on the L-5 Solar Energy Space Station at the edge of earth's gravity enjoys the celebration by ninety-second-delayed transmission.

The significance of this history-making moment was the spirit of unity reflected throughout. Wherever people viewed the celebration, they thrilled to the music of the thousand-voice choir from Seoul, Korea; the dramatic folk dance interpretation of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ presented by Indonesians; the messages by a Kenyan preacher from Nairobi, and the Brazilian preacher, both originating in Rio's massive Maracanas Stadium. We've heard reports from the representatives of the five intercontinental regional sending agencies that enable six hundred-thousand missionaries to work in cross-cultural, cross-pollinating missions. We've heard testimonies of lay volunteers, of bi-vocational tentmakers, of youth representing over one