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The World Goes Missional!

Well, I suppose that's an overstatement. But something big is obviously afoot when the Lausanne Movement gives an unconditionally positive endorsement not only to the missional terminology--by my count the specific word "missional" shows up 26 times--but also to many of the basic theological affirmations of the missional church.

The Lausanne Movement began with the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin in 1966. The First Lausanne Congress was held in July 1974 in Lausanne, Switzerland and was attended by 2700 representatives from over 150 countries. A major result of this conference was the [Lausanne Covenant](#) authored largely by the evangelical statesman John Stott. This was a ringing call "to pray, to plan and to work together for the evangelization of the whole world."

Lausanne II met in Manila, Philippines, in 1989. This gathering produced the [Manila Manifesto](#) which deepened and broadened the movement's understanding of evangelism and the nature of the gospel. That document concludes with the statement that "the whole church is called to take the whole gospel to the whole world, proclaiming Christ until he comes, with all necessary urgency, unity and sacrifice."

The Third Lausanne Congress met in Cape Town, South Africa, in October 2010. It was attended by 4000 leaders from 198 countries. Many more people connected to the conference through media links world-wide. Another major document was issued in connection with this Congress--[The Cape Town Commitment](#). The primary architect of this statement was Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright whose previous contributions to a biblical theology of mission [e.g., *The Mission of God* (2006) and *The Mission of God's People* (2010)] are echoed throughout the document.

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The Cape Town Commitment seems to be off the radar screen for most evangelicals, but it should not be. This is a carefully and winsomely written theological statement appropriately described by its subtitle: "A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action." It overflows with pithy, thought-provoking expressions that communicate deep truths in attractive form. For example: "The gospel is not a concept that needs fresh ideas, but a story that needs fresh telling;" "We confess that we easily claim to love the Bible without loving the life it teaches;" "The answer to leadership failure is not just more *leadership* training but better *discipleship* training;" and "A divided Church has no message for a divided world."

Love is the Focus

There is a fresh, warm, evangelical wind that blows through the pages of the Commitment. Part I, the confession of faith is entitled "For the Lord we love." Then follow professions of love for the living God--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit--and love for God's Word, God's world, the gospel of God, the people of God, and the mission of God.

The emphasis on love is the driving theme. It leads to what we could call "generous orthodoxy" or perhaps "generous Evangelicalism." In the forward to the document, Doug Birdsall, Executive Chairman for Cape Town, speaks of Lausanne's principle of "breadth within boundaries." This is perhaps the most significant "missional" emphasis coming from the Commitment: comprehensive love for God, one another, and the world must unite those who affirm Trinitarian orthodoxy and the centrality of God's redeeming action in Jesus. **Love for one another in the family of God is not merely a desirable option but an inescapable command.** Such love is the first evidence of obedience to the gospel, the necessary expression of submission to Christ's Lordship, and a potent engine of world mission."

Is it possible that the lack of attention given to this document by American Evangelicals stems from our preference for a harder, polemical edge in dealing with diversity among churches and believers?

As I mentioned above, the Commitment is pointedly missional. Here are a couple obvious examples:

1. Word and Deed Gospel

The missional church movement realizes that the world is cynical about Christian witness divorced from incarnational expression. Cape Town speaks to this issue in advocating for "integral mission" linking social involvement with evangelistic proclamation: "Our calling is to live and serve among people of other faiths in a way that is so saturated with the fragrance of God's grace that they smell Christ, that they come to see that God is good. **By such embodied love, we are to make the gospel attractive in every cultural and religious setting.**

When Christians love people of other faiths through lives of love and acts of service, they embody the transforming grace of God."

Elsewhere the document calls on Evangelicals to "renew our commitment to go to those who have not yet heard the gospel, to engage deeply with their language and culture, to live the gospel among them with **incarnational love and sacrificial service**, to communicate the light and truth of the Lord Jesus Christ **in word and deed . . .**"

I suspect that this may be another reason that Cape Town has not received wide discussion and support: Evangelicals are still nervous about any strong linkage between word and deed or faith and works. What do you think?

2. Cosmic Gospel

Scot McKnight and other NT scholars have been helping Evangelicals see that the gospel is the story of Jesus as the completion of the story of Israel and this means that it is a story about the coming of the kingdom of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. **For too long, Evangelicals have presented the gospel primarily as a private transaction between "me and Jesus."** We need a bigger story!

The Cape Town Commitment recognizes this larger context: "We urge church leaders, pastors and evangelists to preach and teach the fullness of the biblical gospel as Paul did, in all its cosmic scope and truth. We must present the gospel not merely as offering individual salvation, or a better solution to needs than other gods can provide, but as God's plan for the whole universe in Christ."

The document does not deny that individuals are saved through the gospel, but it does point out that a narrow focus on individual salvation is a distortion of the Bible's message--a distortion which ultimately short-changes the mission of God.

In light of the broader vision of God's in-breaking kingdom, Cape Town advocates a commitment to biblical peace-making in ethnic conflicts; a better stewardship of "the rich abundance of God's good creation;" care for the poor, the disabled, and the suffering; the pursuit of justice for the oppressed; and a deeper expression of love for people of other faiths.

This is all the stuff of a tough discipleship culture. Are evangelical churches ready to embrace this rather than the privatized version of faith that currently rules the day?

3. Whole-Church Mission

An older view of mission operated out of the idea that the many sent the few on a mission "over there and far away." The

missional movement replaces the idea of sending churches with the idea of sent people. All God's people are called and sent, not just a select few.

In similar fashion **Cape Town stresses the need to mobilize all believers for mission.** It urges "intensive efforts to train all God's people in whole-life discipleship, which means to live, think, work, and speak from a biblical worldview and with missional effectiveness in every place or circumstance of daily life and work."

Here we find a certain "leveling" or democratization of ministry. The mission of God is too big to be entrusted only to professionals or formally ordained representatives. So while Cape Town does not question the validity of formal ecclesiastical credentialing, it does undercut a qualitative distinction between clergy and laity: "we must reject the kind of clericalism that restricts the ministry of God's Word to a few paid professionals, or to formal preaching in church pulpits. Many men and women, who are clearly gifted in pastoring and teaching God's people, exercise their gifting informally or without official denominational structures, but with the manifest blessing of God's Spirit. They too need to be recognized, encouraged, and equipped rightly to handle the Word of God."

Post-Christendom models for ministry are moving away from organization-centered and building-centered imagination. Missional (or kingdom-focused) imagination will take seriously the training and mobilization of the whole people of God.

So what do you think? Has the whole world gone missional? Is it at least possible that in this movement we have the seeds for a major revitalization of the church, not only in America but even world-wide?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.