LAUSANNE: TIME FOR SOME BALANCE?

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Category: Observations

This time next week, I'll be in Cape Town attending the third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. Over the last few weeks the congress has been splashed all over the internet, on twitter, facebook and blogs. A good example of the sorts of things that are being said comes from Andrew Jones:

> *The **global mission event of the century** is only a week away! Its the Third Lausanne World Congress on World Evangelization also known as Lausanne 3.*
>
> *Its HUGE!.*
> *We're talking 5000 invited delegates from all over the world.*
> *Its bigger than Lausanne 1 and even bigger than Lausanne 2.*
> *Its bigger than Edinburgh 1910 and 2010*
> *Its the most wired, webbed, blogged, twittered, streamed missions event EVER!*

If you have followed Andrew's Tall Skinny Kiwi blog, you might find this enthusiasm for size really strange - I do. Andrew has long been an advocate for small, entrepreneurial, flexible mission work, which doesn't quite seem to fit with a huge conference.

For my own part, I must admit that I have a few reservations about Lausanne. Not least this question of size. I've just returned from a meeting of over two hundred Christian leaders from around the world. Being with two hundred people from many different languages and cultures could be quite overwhelming at times and Lausanne will be twenty times bigger. I'm not sure that it will be possible to develop any meaningful relationships with people during this time - especially as there is very little 'down time' allowed in the programme.

Equally, I don't see how it will be possible to have any sort of discussion process which allows over four thousand people to have input into any documents that are produced by the congress - especially when many of the people attending will have had very little, if any, exposure to this sort of cross-cultural discussion. It is not a simple matter to lead a table group discussion in such a way that people from Asia, Africa and the USA all have the opportunity to contribute openly and honestly. Even if you think you are getting it right, you probably aren't!

I think it is probably an admission of the difficulties posed by the congress that the theological statement from the meeting was developed some months ago - though I can't actually find it on line. It would be next to impossible to develop some meaningful statement in such a large group.

Another issue I have with the Congress is the whole question of 'hype'. As a delegate, I'm continually being bombarded with emails telling how important this meeting is going to be for world mission. Now this may be a cultural thing, but as a Brit, I find all of this bright, shiny publicity rather self-defeating. If it is going to be that good, you don't need to keep telling me. From conversations I've had with others, I know I'm not the only one who finds that the continual up-beat advertising of the

congress is actually discouraging me from wanting to attend.

So why am I going?

Well mainly because people I respect have encouraged me to go. When I received my invitation, I was, at best, ambiguous, but a number of leaders, whom I look up to, strongly encouraged me to sign up and go - and my Wycliffe Area office and some good friends offered to pay the bill! All of these people felt that I would have something to contribute. Perhaps my willingness to react against the hype is part of that contribution!

From my point of view, the main reason that I'm attending the congress is to meet people. It will be fun to see people from Ivory Coast and other places I have worked. We might even get some foutou to eat! More importantly, I hope to make some contacts with Brits and others that will be useful in moving the Bible Translation movement forward. Please could you pray with me that I would make three or four really good contacts that will be useful for the future? I may well skip a number of the actual sessions if it means that I can have some good conversations with people.

Meanwhile, I will be blogging and tweeting from the congress. Given the situation, and the fact that there will be people from countries where it is not safe to be open about being a Christian, I will need to be careful in what I say. However, I will do my best to be as honest and open as I can about the Congress. If it is fantastic, I will say so and if it is less so, I'll say that too.

There are plenty of other ways to follow what is happening at the congress, if you want to. Some of them are listed here.