

The Church and Other Faiths

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Day Three Of The Cape Town 2010 Congress Brings World Faiths To The Forefront; Participants are Challenged to Consider How to Effectively Share the Gospel for Followers of Other Religions.

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, 20 October 2010 —Wednesday's Cape Town 2010 Congress sessions thoughtfully explored how to contextualize the gospel for people of other faiths and encouraged participants to think about the cost of bringing the gospel to places where it has not yet penetrated.

In the morning, participants listened to several speakers share about how Christians are engaging or failing to engage with people of other faiths in their contexts; then they had an opportunity to respond in their table groups. Discussions continued in afternoon sessions

Antoine Rutayisire, Dean of the Anglican Cathedral of Kigali, Rwanda, said that one problem with the early transmission of the gospel in Rwanda was the presentation method. He said that in the past it relied on Scripture memorization without a sufficient understanding of the context or a sufficient application of scriptural principles to daily life.

'The Rwandan world is one,' said Rutayisire. 'The animal kingdom and the inanimate world are one. The consequence was that many people were baptized and integrated into churches but when they run into problems they fall back on traditional religion.'

Sophie Lee, a participant from Care Ministries International, said that in her work with Buddhists it is important to give them a comparison. '[When we talk to Buddhists in Taiwan], we tell them directly who Jesus is, and how our beliefs are different,' said Lee.

Vipool Patel, founder of Jesuscentral.com, grew up in a family that practiced Hinduism. He said that from his experience, he believes that many people who practice Hinduism are interested in Jesus, but not as interested in Christianity because of its connection to the people who colonized India.

'Rather than leading with religion, leading with Jesus overcomes the barriers of power and religious conflict and preconceptions from the past,' said Patel. 'And, hence, Jesus Central doesn't talk about Christianity or controversial religious issues. We stick to the topic of Jesus direct from the gospel--his life, his teachings. Then people have a life change because they are illuminated by the character of Jesus. His compassion, his grace, his forgiveness, his faithfulness. They see what it means to love like Jesus and to be loved like Jesus.'

Several speakers talked about Christianity and Islam. One speaker reiterated God's promise to the children of Ishmael. She said that Muslims, who consider themselves the spiritual children of Ishmael, are experiencing Christ in unheard of ways. She spoke about churches that use some worship forms similar to Islam, but adhere to Christian beliefs, scriptures and ordinances. She said that the contextualized format has been effective in reaching Muslims.

Another speaker told participants to consider the theological messages that have been communicated in the Muslim world. He said that a limited theology built on a clichéd gospel is too simplistic for the complex realities of this century. He said that we must come to a better understanding of the church in the Muslim world, and the global Church needs to be an example of love and reconciliation as it relates to Islam.

Ministry to followers of other world faiths does not come without cost. Another speaker reminded participants that those who carry the message of the gospel may experience intimidation, humiliation, persecution and suffering.

John Piper is the Pastor for Preaching and Vision at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. Preaching from Ephesians, Piper said that Paul's life was an example of how God brings followers to himself through the suffering of his servants.

'When Paul was willing to go to prison for the sake of Christ, he showed the nations that Christ is more precious than freedom. When Paul was willing to suffer for Christ, he showed the nations that Christ is more precious than comfort and security and prosperity.'

Piper called Lausanne to come together on the issue of suffering: 'There isn't anything that surpasses lostness and being bound for an everlasting suffering under the wrath of God.' Then he noted that the in the area of suffering, there are different perspectives among the participants:

'There are two truths that are an in tension in this room and in the Church. When the gospel takes root in our souls, it impels us outward to the all unjust human suffering. There's another truth, and the other truth is, when the gospel takes root in our souls, it awakens us to the horrible reality of eternal suffering in hell under the wrath of a just God. And it impels out to rescue the perishing—"flee the wrath to come!"'

Piper implored the participants, 'Could the global church say this, for Christ's sake: We Christians care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering. Christ doesn't want you to choose between pouring your life out for the alleviation of unjust human suffering now and the pouring out your life to rescue the perishing from everlasting suffering which is 10 million times worse than anything anybody will ever experience here. Christ is calling us to pull these together.'

Michael Ramsden, a passionate evangelist, apologist, and a Lecturer in Christian Apologetics at Wycliffe hall, Oxford, talked further about the cost of sharing the gospel.

'The gospel requires and demands everything,' said Ramsden. 'Let us live in complete surrender to him. One day we will all go home. Let us make sure that whatever God is calling us to, that we do with humility, we do it with love, and do it in obedience, knowing that our life is not worth preserving but the gospel we preach is certainly worth proclaiming.'

At the end of the morning plenary session—one of the highlights of the day, Libbie Little, whose husband, Tom, was martyred in Afghanistan, shared her testimony. 'I think if Tom were here today, he would say that in these difficult, hard to reach places, grace, God's grace, is not something that you discuss. It's not something you debate. The idea of God taking on a form of weakness of a human being coming in the body of Jesus, laying down his life, dying for us, has to be seen. It has to be experienced.'

She added, 'In communities where power rules, strength prevails, where you work hard to attain honor and avoid shame, where you get what you deserve, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, this talk about God's grace, the vulnerability of God, his loving kindness is too foreign. It's too distasteful. It's almost repulsive. It needs to come in small doses over a long stretch of time. ... May God restore his kingdom in Afghanistan and throughout the world. May each Nuristani who caught a whiff of what the apostle Paul called the very aroma of Christ taste and see that the Lord is good. And may the global church that you represent here so saturated with the fragrance of God's grace, God's infinite grace go, spread the aroma of Christ in these hard places to the glory of God.'