

# The Influence of the Lausanne Covenant in Latin American Churches

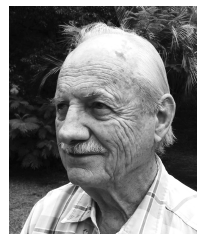
Sidney Rooy

The first International Congress on World Evangelization, held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, merits a significant evaluation for its broad representative character of the more conservative branch of the world church. The encounter of 3000 participants from 150 countries must have been an unforgettable experience for all. Such a moment leaves a permanent impression on the memory and affects one's attitudes, forever changing the way people think and act.

In the conference itself there were so many lectures, round tables, and devotionals that the details are soon forgotten. Yet without a doubt one presentation, one round table, or a certain devotional remains for each person as the most poignant. However, the opportunity for encounters with people from all over the world was surely the richest part of the congress.

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Reviewing the conference's schedule and printed materials and recalling the conversations shared with others may help jog our memories for what actually happened in 1974. Yet it is the summative document of the conference, the Lausanne Covenant,<sup>1</sup> that records the heart of the gathering. In it we have access to what was considered essential, the hope of the organizing committee. Much of the rough formulation was prepared prior to the event, with the heavy contributions of Dr. John Stott; it was reformulated and adapted by participants of the conference and then signed by the majority of those present. The covenant was then carried by conference participants to all regions of the world and shared with churches and parachurch organizations with the hope that it would stimulate them to carry out the mission of God among their respective peoples and cultures.

We can appreciate the difficulty of bringing the full value and inspiration of such a major communal event—one of such rich personal sharing, deep emotional character, and illuminating vision and hope for the church—to those who were not present. A summary of ideas, even when presented in carefully chosen and precise words, can never communicate with the same richness and beauty what one has experienced personally and in communion with others. Yet this is what we have, a document which reflects thoughts about the faith and life of the church and its calling in the world today. Perhaps it is better to say the faith and life of the *churches*, because the unity reflected in the document cannot overcome the plurality also reflected therein.

Here, of course, we have the characteristic problem of all church documents and creeds throughout history. Do they have value as a compass for the life of the churches? Do they truly guide the way

1. The Lausanne Covenant can be found on the Lausanne Movement's website, "The Lausanne Covenant," <http://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>. Also see *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989*, ed. John Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997).