

CCT E-newsletter

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Reflections from Executive Director, Richard L. Hamm

The Christian/Citizen Gap

When we as church leaders think about how we should witness against domestic poverty, our thoughts typically turn to influencing politicians. This is appropriate since government spending on programs that provide food, housing and opportunities for bettering one's economic circumstances are, though a very small percentage of the federal budget, *huge* in comparison to charitable resources and their impact. And, it is important for us to influence public policy in a balanced way that recognizes both the responsibility of systems and of individuals (see CCT's "Statement on Poverty" at <http://www.christianchurchestogether.org/poverty/>).



However, as important as our attempts to influence politicians are, it is at least as important that we help our own members understand the roots of poverty and the need to hold ourselves and our politicians accountable to our collective national responsibility. We are commanded to care for the poor; to provide justice and economic opportunities that give hope rather than fostering dependency and the cycle of poverty. The fact is there is a huge gap between what we as church leaders are telling our politicians and what they hear from most of our members! And politicians know that they are elected by our members rather than by us!

There was a time when politicians on the left and the right assumed that church leaders spoke for their membership. But the sophisticated polling techniques of today reveal the gap between what we as church leaders say and what most of our members think. "Compassion fatigue" has set in and so much of the media panders to our natural impatience with long term solutions to complicated problems. We get stories on Charlie Sheen and on the latest "ain't it awful" events, moving on to the next outrage or tragedy without pausing to examine root causes or long term solutions. Our entire culture has extreme anxiety and attention deficit disorder, so that we are constantly seeking someone to blame rather than seeking solutions. Thus the victims of poverty are often blamed for being poor. And in this regard, there doesn't seem to be much difference between our members and the general population. Even we as church leaders must confess that we often fall into this "blame game".

We must find ways to combat poverty that include addressing our *members* as well as our culture and our politicians. The church is, after all, the subject of its own mission! And, if the church is captured by the anxiety and impatience of the larger culture, we become salt that has lost its flavor.

What has this got to do with Christian unity?

For one, when we as church leaders and churches are divided, it is easy for politicians to use us. When anxiety is high, division is natural. But if, in the face of the world's anxiety, the church allows itself to be divided, we model back to the world division and hostility *and* we become useable by purely political forces. (The phrases "dividing walls of hostility" and "principalities and powers" come to mind.)

This requires nothing less than a conversion of us as church leaders: we must surrender our territories, our anxiety, and our intransigence to one another and to the Holy Spirit. Since Christ has called his body, the Church, to be whole, we on the left and we on the right are each half without the other.

We have legitimate differences between us that we must honor. We have criticized one another from the left and from the right, but because we have been divided we have been unable to hear each other's legitimate critique and it has been easy for us to be used by both the political left and right.

Church leaders, listen up! The economically poor need us to close the gap between ourselves and our members, and we who are spiritually poor need to close the gap between ourselves, thus fulfilling Jesus' prayer that we his followers "may all be one so that the world may believe" (John 17:20)

Grace and peace,

Dick Hamm

Coptic Church Remembers Present Day Martyrs

Bishop Serapion, of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles, led more than a thousand Copts, ecumenical guests, and local officials in a Commemoration Day at the Los Angeles Convention Center on February 27. The event was convened to honor the 23 Egyptian Christians killed by a bomb that was detonated just outside a Coptic Church on New Year's Eve in Alexandria. Between the time the event was announced and the event itself, the revolution in Egypt was well underway, so prayers for safety and for a democratic resolution were also offered up.



Bishop Serapion leads the Coptic Orthodox Church in Los Angeles, Southern California and Hawaii. As post-Mubarak Egypt stands at a crossroads, he is certain his hopes and vision for the new Egypt are shared not only by his homeland's Christians, but lovers of freedom and human rights

everywhere. He said, “While we have a deep concern about the direction of the country, we still have strong hope and great dreams.”

Dick Hamm attended the event on behalf of Christian Churches Together and was invited to speak. He reports that it was a moving event with prayers, multimedia presentations, and speakers expressing solidarity and support.

Dick’s statement: **“I come before you today on behalf of the 24 individuals who serve as members of the Steering Committee of Christian Churches Together in the USA. I bring you greetings and expressions of grief and concern in the wake of violence against the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt. We express to you our love, our support and our solidarity with the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt, in the USA, and throughout the Coptic diaspora. We pray for those who have died in the violence, especially those at Saints Church in Alexandria on New Year’s Eve, and for all the communities and families suffering as a result of the violence. We also grieve with the Church and the Egyptian nation the loss of life in the democracy protests and demonstrations of January. We share the hopes and prayers of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III for the elimination of poverty, corruption and unemployment, and for a peaceful transition to democratic rule based on a foundation of security, safety and the principles of social justice. We pray for the safety of all Christians in Egypt and throughout the Middle East in these days of uncertainty, turmoil and hope. May God guide the leaders of Egypt and may God bless Pope Shenouda III and all the bishops, pastors and people of the Coptic Orthodox Church.”**

“I close with these words of comfort and encouragement from Psalm 139: 7-10” (quoted)

Press Conference Initiates Fast For The Poor

On Monday, March 28, David Beckmann of Bread for the World, Jim Wallis of Sojourners, along with Tony Hall of the Alliance to End Hunger and Ritu Sharma of Women Thrive Worldwide held a news conference at the Press Club in Washington D.C. to announce their intention to fast while the budget debate is unfolding in Congress.



The current House bill HR1, would end or decimate many anti-hunger and poverty programs that have a proven track record, such as WIC, Food Stamps, Head Start and others. The hope of those fasting is to be a “circle of protection” around the programs that protect the poor and hungry. A video of the press conference and other information about the fast and its goals is available at www.hungerfast.com.

The following edited article first appeared in PRISM, the magazine of Evangelicals for Social Action, of which Dr. Sider is President. He is a member of the CCT Steering Committee and was a participant in the Lausanne Conference. Printed with permission.



**Evangelizing the World:
Reflections on Lausanne III
By Dr. Ron Sider, President of ESA**

From October 17-24, over 4,000 evangelicals from almost every nation on earth met in Cape Town, South Africa, to pray and plan better ways to share the whole Gospel with the whole world. (Both Al Tizon and I had the privilege of being participants.)

Thirty-six years earlier, Billy Graham had assembled the first Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, to focus the energy and resources of the global church on evangelism. The primary mission of the church, Graham said, is saving souls. But ringing papers by younger Latin American evangelicals Samuel Escobar and René Padilla moved the Congress to declare in its historic Lausanne Covenant that evangelism and social responsibility are both part of our Christian duty. Vigorous, intense debate followed, but the advocates of holistic mission prevailed (see Al Tizon's excellent history in *Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective*).

At Lausanne III in Cape Town, the biblical obligation to combine evangelism and social action was assumed by almost everyone. A deep powerful longing to share the Gospel with everyone who is not a believer pervaded the Congress. But so did the call to seek justice for the poor, care for the environment, combat HIV/AIDS and work for peace. There was a vast array of breakout sessions and dialogues both on the best strategies for effective evangelism and also the urgency and practice of social engagement. Lausanne III accurately reflected the huge change that has happened among evangelicals all around the world. Holistic ministry—combining evangelism and social action—is now part of our DNA. And the official document from the Congress, the Cape Town Commitment, provides a superb, biblical theological foundation for deepening our holistic engagement.

For the first time ever at a global evangelical congress, creation care received attention. In some workshops, and especially in the official statement from the Congress, our responsibility as biblical Christians to care for the environment and combat the reality of climate change was clearly affirmed—and grounded in a solid theological framework: “Creation care is a gospel issue . . . The Gospel is God's good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for individual persons, and for society and for creation. All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God's people” (Section 7).

Lausanne III was far less Western (and American) than previous congresses. Sixty percent of the participants were from the global South and East (Asia, Latin American, and Africa) where three-quarters of all Christians now live. The Program Chair was Ramez Atallah from Egypt. Americans still had too much influence, but it was substantially less than at Lausanne I and II.

I was surprised and delighted at the prominence of women at the conference. Twenty-seven percent of the participants were women (the goal was 35 percent). Women were prominent in the plenary sessions—Ruth Padilla DeBorst gave one of the morning plenary Bible expositions. Brenda Salter-McNeil was co-chair of the morning plenaries. Grace Mathews played a prominent role presiding, along with Archbishop Henry Orombi of Uganda, in the final communion service. A young American couple gave a clear plenary call for mutual submission and full recognition of the equal roles of women and men in the church based on gifting. Privately, when I asked one U.S. church leader what percent of the U.S. delegation would have been opposed to this prominent role for women, he astonished me with his

comment: only 5 percent! There is still a long way to go. Women were not close to being half of all speakers or planning committees. But Lausanne III did demonstrate substantial progress.

Many things, of course, could have been better. Repeated claims from the platform that Lausanne III represented the whole church were tragically overstated—only about ten Catholic and Orthodox Christians were there as observers sent by their churches. American managerial missiology was alive and visible at Cape Town. But the positive features of Lausanne III far outweighed these and other weaknesses.

Again and again, personally, I was caught up in intense worship. I felt a deeper love for Christ our Lord and Savior. Worshiping together—with the help of great musicians and liturgical dance—with Christians from almost every nation on earth was deeply moving.

Praise God for what, on balance, was an important global conference reflecting the growing maturity of global evangelicalism. And, far more importantly, thank God for a ringing call to get on with the task of sharing the whole Gospel with the whole world.

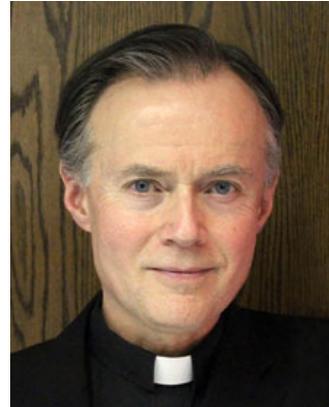
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The following article was written by Father Ron Roberson, a member of the CCT Steering Committee, as a brief update on CCT for the online newsletter produced by the Paulist Office for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations. Reprinted with permission.

Christian Churches Together in the USA: An Update

Ronald Roberson, CSP

Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT) began with an unofficial meeting of leaders of a wide range of churches that took place in Baltimore in early September 2001. At this meeting, there was a strong consensus that a new ecumenical structure of some kind was needed to facilitate dialogue and cooperation among the nation's churches. After all, the National Council of Churches represented only about one third of the Christians in the country since it did not include the large Evangelical/Pentecostal communities or the Catholic Church.



Over the next few years, more meetings were held and the idea slowly took root and grew. In November 2004, the Catholic Bishops of the United States voted to participate. Then in March 2006, meeting in Atlanta, the participants formally voted to officially create CCT as the broadest and most inclusive forum of Christian churches and organizations in the United States.

Representation of the participants on the Steering Committee was determined by five confessional families of churches: Historic Protestant, Evangelical/Pentecostal, Orthodox, African American, and Catholic. It was also decided that decision-making would take place on the basis of consensus, which means that any statement by CCT must have the support of all the participating bodies or at least their agreement not to block it.

Since that time, plenary meetings of CCT have taken place once each year. The first theme the group chose for consideration was poverty in the United States. Meeting in Pasadena, California, in 2007, the group issued a statement that called upon the civil and church leadership to work together to reduce the level of poverty in the U.S., and in particular the level of childhood poverty by 50% in ten years. It suggested a combination of individual initiative and government programs that would achieve this goal. CCT's consideration of this issue continued at the 2008 and 2009 plenaries, both of which took place in Baltimore and included meetings with members of Congress and their staffs in Washington, D.C.

At its 2010 plenary in Seattle, Washington, CCT turned its attention to evangelization. Papers were presented on how the evangelizing mission of the Church is carried out in our various communities. The members lamented the fact that Christian witness in the United States is compromised by our divisions, and encouraged Christians throughout the land to reflect on the relationship between ecumenism and evangelization in 2010, the centennial year of the Edinburgh Conference that marked the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement.

CCT's most recent plenary took place last January in Birmingham, Alabama. This city was chosen because the theme of the meeting was domestic poverty through the lens of racism. Meeting in Birmingham provided the members with an opportunity to visit the sites of major events in the history of the struggle against racism in America, especially the Civil Rights Institute and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church where 4 African American girls were killed in a bombing in 1963 in the midst of a civil rights struggle in Birmingham.

Most importantly, CCT issued a preliminary response to Dr Martin Luther King Jr's 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Dr King had responded to a letter from Christian leaders in Birmingham asking him to withdraw his support for civil rights demonstrations, but the clergy to whom it was addressed had never answered his letter.

In their one-page Initial Response to Dr. King's letter, the CCT church leaders recalled with gratitude the sacrifices of the leaders of the civil rights movement who demonstrated the power of Christian, nonviolent action. They also express repentance that "some of us have not progressed far enough beyond the initial message from the Birmingham clergy. Too often, our follow-through has been far less than our spoken commitments. Too often, we have chosen to be comfortable rather than prophetic. Too often, we have chosen not to see the evidence of a racism that is less overt but still permeates our national life in corrosive ways."

Christian Churches Together is still a new organization, still growing and seeking to find the best ways for Christians to speak with a common voice on the issues of our day. It has tackled the persistent scourge of poverty in our nation, reflected on the way our divisions compromise our evangelizing mission, and on the ways in which the legacy of racism still weighs heavily on our country. There can be no doubt that this is the work of the Spirit among us, and that more is yet to come.

Fr. Ronald Roberson, CSP, is Associate Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington. He is a member of the CCT Steering Committee, and has been involved in the CCT planning process since the first preparatory meeting in 2001.

Three Task Forces To Be Formed

Three task forces are currently being formed: 1) an “Outreach Task Force” to encourage more communions/denominations to join in CCT participation; 2) a “Funding Task Force” to develop more sources of income for CCT beyond church and organization dues; 3) a “Communications Task Force” to develop more effective communication between and beyond CCT participants, including the media.

If you have an interest in serving on one of these task forces, please contact Dick Hamm at dhamm@ddi.org.

For more information or to make a donation to CCT-USA, please contact:

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