On every continent, evangelicals are preparing for Cape Town 2010: The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. What is this Congress about? And how does it bear on our ministry?

Some 4,000 evangelical church leaders, opinion-formers and policy-makers from 200 nations will gather in Cape Town from 16-25 October 2010. But the invitation to participate stretches much further. We are working with God's enabling to engage the whole evangelical church globally. It is a huge effort, needing all the gifts and skills and experience people can bring. We would love your church to be part of it. Read on...

An unusual moment in history

This an unusual moment in history. We need Men of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32), who understand the times and who know what to do. Change is more rapid than ever before. We are seeing massive people-movements; the penetration of other faiths into new countries; and more political violence. Alongside this we have new values, driven by new technologies. Advance in the fields of bio, nano and digital technology, all converging, now brings almost anything into the realms of human possibility. The sin of Babel is beginning to look mild. The builders of that remarkable tower just wanted to make a name for themselves; now we are making ourselves.

In the early 1980s the West listened hard to the deconstructionists from Cambridge University's English Department. The reader's interpretation of a text, they said, was of greater importance than the author's intent. From then onwards, truth was deemed to have lost its meaning. For all who have passed through formal education since then, a new barrier has been erected in coming to Scripture. For they have been taught that a text means what you want it to mean. This, together with the increasing preference for visual images, and for the spoken word over the written word, has profound impact on Bible reading, and on Scripture engagement in preaching.

It is now a natural part of our day to wander in and out of a parallel virtual universe, to operate with aliases, to tweet or communicate on Facebook. The capacity to build and to follow a reasoned argument is diminishing. We preach a reasoned gospel, and we need our congregations to engage with the Apostle Paul's arguments in Romans. We need to look at the trajectory of what is happening. How can we influence the world of education?

Global issues need global conversations. Let's talk, let's strategize, let's work together. Above all, let's pray – with a sense of expectation and hope – for the Lord to give us those like the Men of Issachar and to bring his wisdom through the counsel of many (eg Proverbs 11:14).

The Congress programme will include expositions on Ephesians as well as multiplex sessions on key topics for world evangelization. Revd Vaughan Roberts is one of the six expositors drawn globally, and other British speakers include Lindsay Brown; Dr Michael Ramsden; Dr Chris Wright; Prof Nigel Cameron and Prof John Wyatt.

A never-imagined moment for the Church

This is an unusual moment in Church history. There are internal attacks on orthodoxy we could barely have imagined twenty years ago. We need a clear re-statement of what it means to be evangelical. And we need to stand together. Through the Lausanne Global Conversation, we are working to link up evangelicals in almost every country. But we realize it is not possible to draw in those living under the most extreme regimes, and we do not forget them.

Each month an article produced in partnership with the US *Christianity Today* magazine, and carried by journals around the world, sparks a new conversation. Join in by taking part online. From May this online conversation will be multilingual. Uniquely, the conversation also draws in our brothers and sisters without internet access, through conversations among church members, and through radio programmes in local African and Asian languages. Those listening to these radio programmes, specially produced for the Congress, can send responses to their radio stations by SMS, which are then collated, and fed into the online conversation.

Our goal

We trust Cape Town 2010 will give Christians new courage to proclaim Christ in local life, and to shake salt and shine light in our workplaces, and in public policy. Under God's direction, we trust the Congress will produce effective strategy and hundreds of new partnerships to shape the course of world evangelization for a generation. You can view John Piper interviewing Doug Birdsall (Executive Chairman), Lindsay Brown (International Director) and Chris Wright (Chairman, Lausanne Theology Working Group) on their hopes for the Congress.

A statement of evangelical belief will be published out of the Congress, together with a statement of evangelical intent. In the same way that The Lausanne Covenant permeated the evangelical church in 1974, we will work to get this statement out widely, so the whole evangelical church is invited to adopt it and to link arms in fulfilling its calling to faithful and fruitful service.

Why hold the Congress in 2010?

It is now nearly 21 years since the Second Lausanne Congress, held in Manila in 1989. That was the year Amstrad computers were beginning to appear in homes; the year of the Tiananmen demonstration, and the year the Berlin Wall fell. When Doug Birdsall was appointed Executive Chairman in 2004, he immediately began to consult widely about the need for a third Congress.

The year 2010 marks the anniversary of the Edinburgh 1910 Congress, an enormous feat pulled together by the American statesman John R Mott. There will be other events, in Edinburgh and around the world, to mark the centenary of that Congress, but there is a sense in which Cape Town 2010 is its spiritual legacy.

Read more of Lausanne's History and Heritage, with John Stott's perceptive critique of Edinburgh 1910. For a longer treatment of Edinburgh 1910's legacy, see David Hesselgrave's 2007 paper 'The Edinburgh Error'.

How you can be part of this unique event

1 Pray

We need your prayer for the planning process, finances, speakers, participants, and for spiritual fruitfulness. 'Unless the Lord builds the house, those that build it labour in vain.' (Psalm 127:1).

You will find prayer paragraphs on our website each month, which can be pasted into church newsletters or magazines. Will you pray and invite your church to pray with us for the Congress?

2 Give

Rich and poor nations alike are sharing financial responsibility for the Congress. It is a unique opportunity to invest in the advance of the gospel globally. Please consider making a donation and encouraging your church to give.

3 Volunteer

You can use your gifts and experience in a range of ways to help make this Congress happen. We need skilled servant-hearted helpers before, during and after the Congress. Will you think and pray about filling one of the many volunteer positions? You will see them on the Congress website.

4 Participate

John Stott, Honorary Chairman of The Lausanne Movement, once referred to the Movement rather beautifully as 'an exchange of gifts'. Christ gave gifts to his Church to share. At the moment much of the scholarship is in the North. But we know so little of perseverance, joy in adversity, and grace in suffering. Let us bring our gifts of insight to the table and learn deeply from the insights Christ has given our brothers and sisters in other countries, and our brothers and sisters from other evangelical traditions, so that the Church may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Please consider how you and your church members could take part in the Congress in three ways:

• ***Join the Lausanne Global Conversation*** Help shape discussions on major issues to be addressed at the Congress. You may access the conversation either on the Congress website or at www.lausanne.org, the permanent home of The Lausanne Movement.

• ***Study with us*** You will find an introductory course to the Congress on the website. Or use John Stott's study guide 'For the Lord we Love' to work through The Lausanne Covenant, personally or with your church. The Covenant is widely regarded as one of the most influential documents in recent church history – it is a covenant with one another and with God himself. Each section has questions for personal reflection or group discussion, making it excellent material for weekly home groups. Available as a single copy or with bulk discounts from www.10ofthose.com

• ***Join in the Congress*** There will be interlinked Cape Town GlobaLink sites in many countries. We are looking for churches and Bible colleges in the UK to host sites for Christians in their locality. You would decide when to operate through the Congress week, and material will be provided. Could you host a site?

For your church

We have bookmarks and brochures in packs of one hundred each which we can send to your church, to help get the message of Cape Town out. Email Rosemary Grier for stocks.

The Didasko Files is a series of booklets to serve the global church. Authors include John Stott, Ajith Fernando, James Philip and Sir Fred Catherwood. For UK distribution go to www.10ofthose.com/lausanne (bulk discounts for churches) or to 'look inside', go to www.didaskofiles.com

What else is there to know about Lausanne?

You will find Lausanne Occasional Papers, a wealth of archive material, and news of working groups and special interest committees at www.lausanne.org. Here you can register to receive *Lausanne World Pulse*, a monthly online missions and evangelism magazine. The Lausanne Movement was founded by the American evangelist Billy Graham and given infrastructure by the pastor-evangelist John Stott. We trust you will find help for your own evangelism locally, and a deeper grasp of mission globally.

Julia Cameron

Director of External Relations