

World churches' leader's speech reaches to evangelical Christians

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Cape Town, October 18 (ENI)--The head of the World Council of Churches has reached out to a global gathering of Evangelicals saying Christians of different traditions need to learn from each other to participate together in God's mission.

"We are called to be one, to be reconciled, so that the world may believe that God reconciles the world to himself in Christ," the WCC general secretary, the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, said in a 17 October address on the opening day of the 3rd Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization.

It is the first time a WCC general secretary has addressed a congress of the Lausanne Movement, which takes its name from the Swiss city where the first such gathering was held in 1974. "This historic invitation is a sign that God has called all of us to the ministry of reconciliation and to evangelism," said Tveit at the Cape Town meeting which has gathered more than 4000 participants and runs until 25 October.

The WCC and the Lausanne Movement have often been seen as representing different strands of Christianity - the WCC being seen as focussing more on social action, and the Lausanne movement known for its promotion of evangelism.

The 1974 International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne resulted from an initiative by the U.S. evangelist, the Rev. Billy Graham, and produced the "Lausanne Covenant" as a statement of beliefs of participants.

"Although not intended to be simply a reaction to the World Council of Churches (WCC), [the congress] did serve as an evangelical counterpart to the ecumenical WCC by establishing and fostering an international network of evangelical leaders," the Lausanne Movement notes on its Website www.lausanne.org.

The second Lausanne congress, held in Manila, Philippines, in 1989, issued a manifesto that urged the WCC to, "adopt a consistent biblical understanding of evangelism".

In his address, Tveit, a Lutheran theologian from Norway, said he had read the Lausanne Covenant for the first time when he was 15 years old. "I was struck by the clarity of its vision: We are called to share the gospel of reconciliation with all," he said.

Tveit noted how the congress is taking place in Cape Town, the city in which Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu was Anglican archbishop during the apartheid period of white minority rule. He recalled how Tutu had once said, "Apartheid is too strong for a divided church."

Tveit added, "The needs of the world for reconciliation with God, with one another, and with nature are too big for a divided church."

He noted how many of those at the Cape Town gathering had taken part with WCC representatives at a meeting in Edinburgh in May to mark the 100th anniversary of the World Missionary Congress held in the Scottish capital.

"I can see how much we share a common vision of the holistic mission of God," said Tveit. "I am very encouraged by how Evangelicals, churches and individuals share our calling as the WCC to address the needs of the whole human being and the whole of creation."

The WCC groups 349 churches, predominantly Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant. The Roman Catholic Church is not a member but works with the WCC on some programmes.

- Tveit address: www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/speeches/gre...
- Lausanne Movement: www.lausanne.org/
- The WCC is one of the four founder members of ENInews.