

## EVANGELISM IN THE HARD PLACES OF THE WORLD

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At this Congress, we have heard exciting reports of God at work around the world. In many countries of Africa and Asia, we have seen thousands and thousands of men and women turning from idols to serve the living God. Churches are growing; congregations have multiplied. Christians in the Third World have banded together to establish missionary agencies and fellowships and are now engaged in cross-cultural evangelism. Today we realize is a day of opportunity and we have seen the Gospel spreading and making tremendous advances. This note of triumph and expectation has been struck repeatedly at this Congress. What is our response? Surely our response is to rejoice and to praise the Lord.

The Apostle Paul bids us to rejoice with those who rejoice, but he doesn't stop there. He also bids us to weep with those who weep. Too often in our Christian circles, particularly in evangelical circles, we tend to glamorize the spectacular. We live, as it were, continually in Palm Sunday when we think of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. In our ministries, we forget that there was Gethsemane, there was Golgotha. Sometimes we forget that Jesus was also the suffering Messiah; he was also known as a man of sorrow, acquainted with grief.

Let me give you a personal testimony. When I was asked to preside at this gathering, I turned down the invitation twice. This is all in writing so it is in the Congress records. Later on I discovered that the planning committee, the program committee refused to accept "no" for an answer. When I was wrestling with this whole problem, God rebuked me. I said to him, "Lord, I'm involved in areas where there is tremendous response. Thousands of students have been disciplined and won for Jesus, and are having a tremendous ministry in their churches. I can speak of God at work in a mighty way, but not the hard places."

As I read my Bible, I began to see God speaking to me very clearly. Paul, in Phil. 3:10 prayed, "That I may know him, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering." And the Lord was saying to me, "You don't know me in the fellowship of my suffering because you don't care enough for people who are persecuted, for my people who work in hard places." And then again, he seemed to be saying to me, "Wee Hian, you have no concept of the church as the Body of Christ." The Word of God tells us that if one member suffers, all suffer together. When one member is honored, all rejoice together. All of us must identify ourselves with those who are suffering for the sake of the Gospel. We must also come together as a solid front of men and women who are willing to stand behind our brothers and sisters who are working in resistant cultures.

Tonight's meeting is a call to prayer. It's not a meeting for publicity.

I must warn you — we are going to show you different data. These might be very dramatic but I want us to take these things in the right context. It's a call to prayer and not to publicity. At the end of our meeting together we shall break up into small groups to pray for the things that we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears.

The hard places of the world. What are these areas? These are areas where the Gospel has not taken root; these are areas where messengers of the Gospel are continually buffeted; these are cultures that resist the unique claims of Jesus Christ and its adherents are members of different religions and are unwilling to turn to him, to believe in him. We think of the world, of over 600 million Muslims, of nearly 500 million Hindus, of over 600 million Buddhists and Confucianists. These appear to be impregnable strongholds.

Let me cite you some examples. A few months ago a missionary in a Muslim country heard a knock at his door. The police went in; they served a summons on him, "You are to leave this country within twenty-four hours." There was no appeal; there was no argument. Again, I know a Muslim student who was converted some years ago. He went back to his family and tried to tell them that he had become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. A few days later, the local Christians found him, dead. He was poisoned. I can tell you too of many cases of Hindu students and of other Muslim students who have been thrown out of their homes, of their communities, and they have become outcasts. These are *hard* places.

Hard areas also refer to countries where the political regimes are hostile to biblical Christianity. Immediately, our mind turns to China, the world's largest nation with over 800 million people where today there is very little freedom of religion. Some years ago, the Red Flag, which is the theoretical journal of the Chinese Communist party, said, "Christianity and Communism are like oil and water. They do not mix and we want to get rid of Christianity."

But tonight let's begin by turning our thoughts to cultures which are resistant to the Gospel. Let's begin first of all with the world of Islam. It's my pleasure to ask Dr. Frank Saphir Khair-Ullah of Pakistan to report on the world of Islam to all of us. He is an Islamic scholar; he has written and presented a paper here at this Congress entitled "Evangelism Among Muslims." He is also the director of the creative writing school in Lahore, Pakistan. Dr. Khair-Ullah comes from the background of a former Muslim family and his heart beats with those who are concerned to bring the Gospel to Muslim communities.

*Dr. Khair-Ullah:*

I think if I succeed in giving you an impression, a human impression of the difficulty that one faces in the world of Islam, I would feel quite satisfied. It is not only the minister who brings the Gospel to the Muslims who finds it difficult in the area in which he is working, but we have to look sympathetically in a human way at the world of Islam, at the individuals that Islam constitutes, in order to realize and feel something of their difficulty.

A Muslim, before he can come to our Lord Jesus Christ, has to

cross many barriers. In a Muslim country, it is so difficult to detach oneself from the nationality and culture. People who become Christians are sometimes accused of losing their nationality or being deculturated. The important thing is that we should pray that those people who come to the Lord Jesus Christ in the world of Islam may retain their place in society and in the family. The Muslim society is a very close-knit society. Everything that a member of the society does is known to the other person and in that society you have a close-knit family. The family is not like the Western family where each individual is free to go his own way. Every action of the person is noted and we find that if you make a decision for Jesus Christ, you have to leave that family and you have to give up so much. That cannot be done without certain difficulties.

Then, you have the difficulty of the barrier of will. A Muslim is brought up in a religious way in which he leads a very good devotional life. We should not condemn all Muslims as people who have no deep feeling of religion. A true Muslim, a serious Muslim, says his prayers regularly five times a day. He believes in his five pillars of the religion; he believes in keeping fast in the month of Ramadan; he desires that he will visit and pay homage to Mecca once in life or more, if possible; he believes in giving tithes. In these ways he leads a very religious life. His mind is so conditioned that he believes, like us evangelicals, that his holy book is truth and comes from God. To break away from there and to be liberated and to be able to hear what God is speaking to him through his book and through the Bible is not an easy matter. And we find that the Christians who approach Muslims must approach them in a sympathetic, human way, trying to understand their problems. There were in the past other methods — preaching in public, in the streets — but we have found now that the only methods left to us are personal evangelism and, what we have recently discovered as a most successful method, Bible correspondence schools. I noticed that in Africa, Asia and Pakistan the Bible correspondence schools have a very good response. In my country the response was so good that the people took notice of it and on the 23rd of December, 1973, one of our leading papers had a front-page article entitled, "Beware of the Poison in Closed Envelopes." He wrote a whole article on Bible correspondence schools, gave some of the lessons, and even reproduced the application form and warned people that the Christians are trying to poison the youth of the country by giving these free courses. And we can praise God. Seventeen of the people took that form that was shown as a sample, filled it in and sent it to the Bible correspondence school. As a result of that article which was telling not to do it, one of the students of the Bible correspondence school wrote an article and sent it to the principal of the school, saying, "I have sent a copy of it to the magazine that published the article and I am sure that they are not going to print that article, so will you please take it and print it in your own bulletin." It was a wonderful witness of one of the young people who was a Muslim who had read this article and was fully with us in seeing what work has been done.

Then we find that very often radio ministry is very effective. From Radio Sri Lanka, from Addis Ababa, programs come. People listen to them very intently. You see, I was talking of these barriers. A Muslim would not come to a Christian in Pakistan, but when he is by himself, he can take the correspondence course, he can hear the radio, and we should pray that this work will be especially blessed. Then we have some people working entirely among Muslims. In my country there is a St. Andrews' Brotherhood where Rev. Aslum Kahn, who is a convert himself, from Islam is working among the Muslims. And during this last six months, I have been at three of these baptisms, public baptisms. In each of them, we found that the young man who had been baptized suffered persecution from the home. He was threatened that he should not go back home, and it's not an easy thing. For us, I feel, it's a luxury to be a Christian in the Western world. You are free. You can do whatever you like. But when you accept the Lord Jesus Christ in a country like mine, you may be forced to be a secret disciple, and when you are a secret disciple, a group like St. Andrews' Brotherhood — or there are groups in other countries — take them and speak to them, encourage them, train them. After all, in the Bible we read of many people who were secret disciples. There was Nicodemus; there was Joseph of Arimathea. These were the secret disciples and so we have many secret disciples in Islam. Recently, about a few years ago, a Muslim doctor was put in charge of a Christian hospital. A great many of the Christians said, "Why is a Muslim doctor in charge of a Christian hospital?" When we saw the life of this Muslim doctor, we said, "How good his life is. He is just as good as any Christian." And you know, during the last six months, we discovered that this doctor, whom we took to be a Muslim, had been baptized in Bristol about seven or eight years ago. A secret disciple all that time. Only recently he has confessed that he is a disciple of Jesus. Now, do we condemn such people? We remember that Naaman was a secret disciple too and he appealed to the prophet and he said, "When I go with my master into the temple of Rimmon and if I bow, would I be forgiven?" In these hard places, we should praise God that there are so many people who are coming to our Lord Jesus Christ. We do not see the fruit openly, but we should not slow up, we should not slacken up. What has happened is that the church is finding that so few are converted from Islam (in fact, during the last three years, so many Christians have backslidden). You know that when our schools and colleges were under our own control, we saw so many Christians, but when our schools and colleges were nationalized, we found some of the people losing that zeal that they possessed before.

A year ago, I was asked to write a paper on the future of Muslims in Pakistan. And I read the papers daily and I had a number of cuttings where I read that, "So and so Christian has now embraced Islam," "So and so, with his family, has become a Muslim." So our difficulty in these hard places is not only that we have to reach them, but that we have to strengthen the church, make them consolidated in their place and pray for these Muslims that in various ways they may come to the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ. We should pray hard for these

people because the Lord has put that burden on us that we should not be self-satisfied but we should go out and win them over for our Lord and Savior.

*Dr. Wee Hian:*

Our next speaker is a personal friend of mine, the Reverend Subodh Sahu from India. He works in the state of Orissa and his main ministry is to train Christians to be effective disciple-makers. Together, Rev. Subodh Sahu and his colleagues would go out to evangelize Hindus and Muslims. He will tell us something about the hard and difficult world of Hinduism.

*Rev. Subodh Sahu:*

The hard places of the world — the world of Hinduism. 83 per cent of the people of India are Hindus or adherents of Hinduism. They number nearly 453 million. The hardness is as follows.

They claim, historically, Hinduism is an ancient religion, rather the ancient religion. They consider all other religions as upstarts in the field. Therefore, their attitude is one of pride which makes it hard.

Secondly, the intolerance of the philosophy of syncretism. It seems contradictory but actually this is the true condition — intolerance of the philosophy of syncretism. As a weapon, they want to wield it against the Gospel. Their desire is to block the Gospel. They want to assimilate the Christians and the Gospel into the Hindu fold and into their philosophy. They even say, "Believe whatever you want to, but remain within the Hindu fold."

Thirdly, Hinduism is, by nature, pseudo-political. The common concept of the Hindus is as I narrate here. Hinduism and India nationalism are inseparable. They mean that one who is not a Hindu cannot be a patriot. They commonly look at Christianity as the religion of the Western people — people, who, until the recent past, indulged in colonialism. Moreover, the Western culture has almost nothing to offer to the average Indian and, on the contrary, it has some things which are not admittable to the Indians. Therefore, as they associate religion with culture in their own thinking, they become prejudiced against the Gospel and it seems to be repulsive to them.

Fourthly, the reality of any faith and its true expression is attractive to anybody who seeks reality, but the nominality of the Indian Christians' faith and life is repulsive to the Hindus. The Lord said in his day, "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. . . ." Can it be also said, unless our righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Hindus, unless we excel in loving them, we cannot bring them into the Kingdom of God? Also the "Christ-plus" of the so-called Christian presentation — let me explain — Christ plus tradition, Christ plus ritualism of the so-called Christian presentation offends the Hindu. They want and need only Christ and Christ of the Bible.

Lastly, Hindu intellectuals who are not reached for Christ while they are doing post-graduate studies in Western universities see and often fall a victim to the scum of the Western way of materialistic life and return hardened against the Gospel and harden others also against

the Gospel.

But nothing is too hard for our Lord. In the face of this hardness, we who are disciples of Christ in India (I don't mean only Indians), we who are disciples *in* India need to give our testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus in the great power of the Holy Spirit and make disciples so that our fellow Indians will repent and will learn the secret to live by faith, not by works. They will surely have their eyes opened and they will be drawn away from darkness into light and from under the power of Satan to God. And may we exercise our throne rights in being united with the Lord himself to bind the powers of darkness who control the minds of those who are within the fold of Hinduism so that when we bind the strong man of the house, we can plunder the goods. Our living Lord who revealed himself to Sundar Singh, to Bakht Singh, to Naaram Nambudripad and to many others — our living Lord will continue to reveal himself and will add to his true Church daily those who are being saved. And surely, our Indians will hear the voice of the Lord.