

Why Gcowe 97

by George Verwer

The consultation for missionary executives aims to bring together leaders to discuss major issues, share experiences, and learn from each other, with the goal of mobilizing and supporting nationals, and promoting partnership and unity in world missions.

Duration: 31:36

Scripture: Proverbs 18:13, Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 4:3, James 1:19

Topics: "Missions"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of new emerging missionaries from sending countries in evangelizing the world. They emphasize the need for more research, listening to one another, and being open to change in order to effectively spread the gospel. The speaker also mentions the tension between short-term and long-term missions and how this will be addressed during a six-day congress. The invitation to hold this congress came from South African leaders who are passionate about advancing world missions. Additionally, the speaker mentions the challenge of balancing social concern with the goal of reaching people with the gospel.

Transcript

Hello, my name is George Verwer. I'm the International Coordinator of Operation Mobilization and also have the stretching challenge of being the chairman of the track for the mobilization of new missionaries, part of the AD2000 and beyond movement. I also recently accepted the responsibility of being the co-director of a consultation for missionary executives that is to take place in South Africa, June 30th, 1997.

This particular consultation of mission executives will run parallel with nine other consultations there in Pretorius, Johannesburg, South Africa. There'll be a consultation of business executives. There'll be a meeting of people especially in connection with helping the poor and needy around the world.

There'll be an African national AD2000 initiative. There'll be a training event for church planting movements. There'll be a South African local church pastors consultation.

There'll be a theological institution presidents and academic deans consultation. A university students and youth leaders consultation and then a consultation for performing arts and missions. This will all go on simultaneously over a six-day period and though there'll be some gatherings of all the people, I don't think

many, most of it will all take place in these separate entities.

I'd like to share with you a little background of this because it very much comes out of what God has been doing in South Africa in connection with the Love South African movement and other movements that have dovetailed together there in that great nation where I think most of us realize God is doing something very real and very special in these days. And this invitation to hold this congress has come from a considerable number of South African leaders to really try to take a giant step forward in regard to world missions and world evangelism. I think some of you, at least a few of you, have probably heard the tape I did about a year and a half ago on why I joined AD2000, a movement that, like most movements, has some degree of controversy surrounding it.

And I'd be happy to send that tape if you wanted more background as, of course, some of that now is a little bit out of date. We've had our great gathering in Korea where many of us were involved and we saw the Holy Spirit do a real work there at Jukoe in Korea in May of 1995. I was back in Korea just, again, recently for a student missions conference.

We had 6,000 students at that missions conference. This is a five-day event. And when I spoke two of the final evenings, and on the final evening about 1,500 came out of their seats and came forward, my Korean interpreter gave the invitation, to make a life-term, long-term commitment to world missions.

And, of course, Korea is one of many countries where the AD2000 movement and networks tied into that, organizations tied into that are really going strong. You might ask at this stage, why a consultation for mission leaders? Maybe I could say just a word about my own struggles with the great missionary events. I think of when I first came to Europe and OM was just being born, really exploding in 62 and 63.

And we were often misunderstood and criticized by other mission groups, so we were very rapidly becoming linked with many of them. And some of the criticism against us, I'm sure, was valid. But I remember wrestling with that first congress that was announced back then, in Berlin, 66.

And though I didn't go personally, I felt this was something that we needed to at least be involved in. And I remember sending a couple of our key leaders, I think one of them may have been Greg Livingstone, who was with us at that time, to go to Berlin. And though I had my questions and I had my doubts, especially the large amount of money for travel, I saw, as I looked at these things, these events, in some ways with critical eyes, I saw that they were strategic in building the kingdom of God and had the privilege then of getting involved in the Lausanne Congress way back in 1974.

I remember it well. Dr. Schaefer was there, and that's when the great Lausanne Covenant was born. And there again, though, I had my negatives.

I became convinced these events were very, very strategic in terms of world evangelism and building the kingdom of God. And I would urge you, if you have sort of this negative view of these big conferences, why spend the money, and what really comes from them, I'd really urge you to try to be objective, try to understand the variety of ways that God works. And though you personally maybe are not helped in a huge way through going to such events, other people are helped in many, many ways by at least having one opportunity to be in this kind of big international consultation or event.

In many ways, Jokowi 1997 in South Africa will be very, very distinct. I personally can never remember going to an international event that was attended mainly by missionary executives and leaders. And I

personally feel that such an event is long overdue.

We're brothers and sisters in Christ. We have the same basic goals and aims in terms of world evangelism and church planning, despite the great variety of ways that we may be going about that. And I personally feel that in the complex, rapidly changing world that we now live in, it would be a tremendous thing if a maximum number of us could be in South Africa for this consultation.

For some of us, it may be only once in a lifetime event. The consultation for missionary executives is not going to be a consultation where we're mainly just listening to messages and listening to great speakers. There's going to be a strong emphasis on interaction.

There's going to be a strong emphasis on fellowship, on getting to know one another, getting to know one another's ministries. We hope to be able to really have time to talk through the major issues, or at least some of the major issues, that are hitting us as biblical and evangelical mission societies and fellowships and organizations and churches in our day and age. And I believe we will all learn a lot from one another.

And I believe we will learn things and experience things that are going to enable us to be more focused and more proactive and more committed as we move toward the end of this millennium. And I would just urge you to consider being with us, even if you've decided somehow, maybe before getting that much information, that you can't be with us, that you would reconsider, because I believe this is going to be a strategic event that is going to be, as some consultants say, a win-win situation for all of us who get involved and for all missionary fellowships who decide to get involved by having strong representation there. I thank God that he does use these big events to change people's lives, to help people become more focused, to help people become more biblical, more evangelical, to help people take on the vision of the unreached people and other great challenges that are so important for all of us in these days.

I believe with all my heart that prayer, of course, is one of the major factors in seeing this become a successful and helpful event. And whether you can go or not, I would appreciate your prayers. And the co-director of our particular consultation, Avery Willis, who is one of the leaders in the Southern Baptist Missions Movement, speaking for both of us, we really do need your prayers.

Louise Bush, of course, will be with us as the leader of the 82,000 Movement. Willie Crew from South Africa is carrying, together with others, a tremendous coordination responsibility to make this happen next summer, which, of course, is the winter there in South Africa. This consultation is not just for people who are already involved in the 82,000 Movement.

We know that in some parts of the world, especially in Europe, the 82,000 Movement is not well known and not officially functioning everywhere. But this particular consultation, though it is tied into that movement, is for any missions executive who is part of an evangelical and biblical missionary fellowship or missionary organization. And we include in that churches that, in a sense, have created their own missions organization and are sending people directly from their church out into the mission field.

In fact, that's one of the areas we hope to discuss, the whole challenge that's facing us, with increasing number of churches wanting to have greater ownership in the World Missions Challenge. I saw this when I was in Singapore recently. And we want to listen to each other as we talk about different issues that are fairly controversial.

One of the reasons I believe this consultation is so important is that I feel strongly the time has come, as pragmatic, generally fairly fast-moving missions leaders with more than enough work to do, and certainly many challenges facing us, I believe the time has come for us to come together and to listen to each other and to listen to God. It's my prayer that all of us who come, and I speak about myself, will come with a real learning curve and come with a desire to sharpen the saw, so to speak, and see this as a growing and learning experience. I think of what people pay to go to college and to get higher education in our days.

I think of the emphasis in many places on the need for missionary leaders to have ongoing education. And I'm convinced that, though this may not be the priority for this consultation, it will be a growing experience. It will have an educational training factor to it as we meet so many different people, as we listen to different people of very different backgrounds, different nationalities.

Another one of my great burdens is in connection with a whole emerging world of new missionary agencies. Places like Brazil and Korea and Argentina, of course Southern Africa, other parts of Africa. New mission societies are being born.

New agencies are being born. And we need to somehow, those of us who have been in mission work for a long time, Operation Mobilization, we're soon celebrating our 40th birthday from our very beginning when three of us went to Mexico in 1957. And in OM, we're somewhat stuck in between the very new emerging mission societies and the great longer-term older mission societies like SIM and OMF and others.

And we long to be a bridge between the younger and the older, especially as in our own work we have a very large segment of our ministry which is long-term missionary work, but our major focus continues to be also short-term. That's another one of the subjects we hope to discuss together at this consultation. Let's be honest.

There are tremendous controversies in connection with the great world mission thrust today. There are tensions. And often, if we're honest, we find ourselves not always appreciating what some other mission agency is doing or saying, especially in their publicity.

What a fantastic breakthrough. If we could all experience a grace awakening together in prayer, a greater understanding of what different agencies are wanting to do and why they are doing something in a particular way. I just find that kind of thing builds love, builds understanding, builds unity, builds synergy.

And I believe coming together in this way will glorify God and help advance building His kingdom throughout the whole world. I've listed a few of the concerns that I'm hoping we will be able to speak about at this consultation. We are actually trying to get missions leaders right now to submit to us items that they feel should be on the agenda.

And I can assure you the agenda is not yet set. But these are a few things I'm hoping we might be able to discuss and seek biblical answers together. Firstly, the challenge between mobilizing and supporting nationals in their own country, especially places like India, in comparison to sending international missionaries into that country.

We'll have representatives from both those different strategies sharing at the consultation. And I believe it is going to be an important discussion. Secondly, there's this great tension or challenge between is it Western missionaries in the future or is it those coming from the new emerging sending countries, sometimes referred to as the two-thirds world.

I'm personally in the camp of believing that it has to be both, that we greatly still need Western missionaries. I've even done whole tapes about that and speak on it, write about it. But at the same time, most of us are convinced that one of the greatest hopes, if not the greatest hope, for evangelizing the whole world in the future is coming from the new emerging missionary sending countries.

Sometimes what they're doing or planning to do gets overstated and exaggerated. Sometimes the problems of the Western countries who have been in it so much longer, that also gets overstated and exaggerated. And just on this issue alone, we need more research, we need to be listening to one another, and we need to be open for change, which we believe is so important in the years to come.

Thirdly, there's this issue of tension between short-term and long-term. Again, many of us feel it must be both, and the situation has certainly changed in the past ten years. Many long-term missionaries now got their initial vision through being involved in short-term.

But now we have something new that's on the scene, and that's the sort of church missions trip, people going out on a missions trip. One church in Singapore, I heard, had a thousand people going on a missions trip. These are just two weeks.

Then we've all heard about the prayer teams that go out, praying for different parts of the world, prayer walking. We also now are very much hearing about research teams. That's nothing new, but it's being done in a much bigger way.

In fact, part of the heart of the Joshua Project is in connection with research teams going out, especially to the 2,000 largest unreached people's groups, and coming back with more information and statistics and facts so that a lot of new profiles of people's groups are being produced. We need to hear what God is doing through so many different groups, so many different strategies, so many different organizations around the world, rather than just picking up little bits of information and making some generalization about it, which is often not based on the fact or on facts, and that surely doesn't bring glory to God. We hope to discuss the Joshua Project, and I'm hoping Louise Bush will be able to share with us something of his vision of the Joshua Project.

There's a dream that somehow we could be more united in focusing on these 2,000 unreached people's groups without neglecting the many other smaller people's groups all over the world, even in almost all of the major cities of Europe. We don't want to get constantly into either-or situations, and we hope that Ralph Winter also will be able to share the burden of his heart, as God has given him so much vision and understanding in terms of reaching the unreached with the gospel. We hope to be able to deal with the whole area of recruits.

Why are we seeing a drop-off in long-term recruits in some countries? Is there any hope? I estimate, just a rough guess, that there's probably about 35,000 around the whole world who have made some kind of indication, usually at a very young age, that they want to be a missionary. But only a small percentage of these are ever getting through to the field for long-term missionary work. WEF, a movement that many of us also are very linked with, one of the older great networks across the world, Uniting Evangelicals, has had a special consultation on the whole thing of missionary attrition, missionaries dropping out.

I have a large document that I'm studying right now from them, and we hope to be able to incorporate some of the answers that have come out of that consultation and other consultations around the world into our agenda, so that we can all get a better picture and a better understanding of what God is doing in the

whole body of Christ. I hope that I'm able to have the privilege of sharing a vision and a burden that God has put on my heart that's now called Acts 13, Breakthrough 2000, which is tied into the New Missionary Mobilization Network and into AD2000 and beyond in a general way. Actually, anyone can adapt the Acts 13 Breakthrough concept.

They don't have to be linked necessarily with any other organization, though we hope they will, because it goes back to the simple strategy of Acts 13, where a group gathered in prayer, then the Holy Spirit sent two out of that group into missionary work and added a helper, Mark, to the group, even though that, of course, didn't work out very well. I believe we could see 200,000 new missionaries mobilized. That means tentmakers as well as more traditional missionaries.

It means those sent out from mission societies as well as those sent out from their own churches. It means those going as tentmakers or people going cross-culturally in their own country, Nigerians from one tribe reaching out to another, Indians from Kerala reaching out to Muslims in the north. It involves people also who are seriously committed in the actual backup staff of mission fellowships and agencies.

I have another tape just on this subject, why 200,000, and I'd be happy to send that to you, as well as a tape of the initial sharing of this vision shortly after it broke into my heart on an airplane flight in Argentina last January. There'll be question and answer sessions where you'll be able to ask, yes, even the hard questions about some of these visions and some of these strategies that are burning upon our hearts and that are beginning to catch and spread right across the world. We think of some of the controversy in connection with prayer, some of the new styles of prayer, prayer walking, the challenge about territorial spirits.

This particular consultation is going to be an open opportunity to share about some of these things and to get questions answered. And I'm sure in some cases we're just going to have to agree to disagree, and we'll go away from this consultation with the zeal and the focus and the commitment to get on with the job in our own missionary agency and our own missionary fellowship. I hope we'll be able to discuss the whole challenge of partnership.

InterDev and Phil Butler are tied into the AD2000 movement and have been an enormous blessing to so many groups and organizations. Certainly part of the future in world missions today is tied in with partnership, different agencies partnering together in a particular place to accomplish specific goals and aims. Please don't write that kind of thing off until you've studied more of what God has been doing through that, until you listen to some of the people who are on the cutting edge of that kind of missionary strategy around the world.

The very fact that we're going to have a number of new agencies represented as well as older agencies, the very fact that we're going to have people there who believe the best way for missionaries to go is just sent out from their own church together with people who feel quite strongly that that really isn't the most effective way to go in the future, means that we're headed into a very lively and catalytic conference and consultation together. I'd like to require everyone who comes to read Charles Swindoll's book, *Grace Awakening*, before I get there, because to me this kind of book and the whole message of 1 Corinthians 13 helps set the stage for a consultation like this in which we long to be guided by the Holy Spirit, filled with the Holy Spirit, and operating under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. That will, I believe, help us stay bonded together in the huge task that God has given us.

We connected with AD2000, do not believe the job is going to be finished by the year 2000. I don't think any of us ever believe that. I think there are some who have the vision and hope that the pioneer evangelistic aspect of world evangelism might be accomplished by then, but I don't think there's ever been total unity concerning some of these things, and it's difficult, if we're realistic, to get unity at times even in terms of definition.

Let's not allow little things that are bothering us. Let's not allow problems in terms of numbers of people's groups or definitions of particular words like unreached hinder us from coming together to wait upon God, to get to know one another and one another's ministries, and to be able to pray and engage in prayer together for the accomplishment of God's purposes across the world. Evangelism will go on and on until the Lord comes.

There's so much to do even in the countries where there are many churches. Building the kingdom, which for many of us is a better way of explaining all that we as God's people are attempting to do. Building the kingdom will go on and on.

In fact, that leads me to mention one of the other things that probably is going to come up in our discussions, and that's the challenge of social concern in comparison to just reaching people with the gospel. There's tremendous tension about this. There's various words that are thrown around like holistic ministry and incarnational evangelism.

Of course, people who don't have English as their first language are often confused by our ongoing changes in terminology and all the fine-tuning we engage in with endless missionary books that are flowing off the press in these days. Brothers and sisters, if we don't have basic love for one another, if we don't acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives to produce that fruit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, if that's not happening in our lives, then where will all this strategizing, where will all the fine-tuning, all the discussion, where will it actually lead us? So, of course, our prayer is that as we come together there may be a touch of revival in our own hearts and that we may go from South Africa with a renewed commitment to the great work that God has given us. Yes, it's a big challenge.

And I know many of you who are listening to this tape are incredibly busy people. And for you to fit this into your schedule and also to find the air ticket is no small challenge. In some ways, humanly speaking, with my present responsibilities, I should have run 100 miles away from this particular challenge.

But the Holy Spirit would not allow me to do that. I feel very weak and very inadequate for my own responsibilities in this particular event and in the whole work of God in general. But I know from Corinthians, his strength is made perfect in weakness.

I know from that same passage that his grace is sufficient. We need one another. Because we need one another, we need to be listening to one another and we need to seek ways that we can work together in greater unity, which we know will continue to be in the midst of great diversity.

I don't believe it honors God when we as missionary leaders, to be blunt, bad-mouth other mission leaders or other agencies, and especially when often we haven't done our homework and we don't really know the facts. There is increasing controversy in the work of God. There are quite a few tensions between parachurch agencies, as they're sometimes called, and local churches or denominations.

Let's be honest. Let's be open about some of these problems. Let's bring things into the light.

Talk about them and pray about them and see if we can find some God-given solutions that we then can share with the wider body of Christ around the world through our periodicals, through our messages, through the Internet, through cassette tape and every other means of communication. We're living in exciting days. There are large numbers of young people around the world who want to be involved with us.

They want to launch into world missions. But I personally feel that if somehow we as missions leaders don't get our act together a little more, that we're going to lose many of these new recruits and we're going to see days of increased confusion, disappointment, and tension. Let's unite together in Jokowi, 1997, for greater things to happen across the world.

Let's pray together. Living God, we thank you for what you're doing around the world. We thank you that in your sovereign purposes you've raised up so many great churches, so many great missionaries and visionaries and co-workers from so many different backgrounds and nationalities.

Lord, we ask that we may have greater wisdom and greater grace and strength for all that lies ahead of us. In a world with such exploding population, in a world of so much complexity, we pray for this great event that's coming up in June of 1997. We ask that you bring there, you lead to that consultation and all the different consultations going on simultaneously, the people that you want, and that somehow each one of us may have a spirit of faith and a spirit of expectation, not just for that particular event, but for all that must happen between now and then and for all that we believe must happen after that special time together.

Lord, help us. As you commanded in Luke 14, help us to really count the cost of what is involved in attempting to reach all the unreached people of the world. Deliver us, Lord, from doubt and unbelief on one side but foolishness and exaggeration on the other side and enable us to somehow find biblical cutting-edge balance in all that we do.

Father, you know the responsibilities we have in our own mission fellowships, churches, and agencies. Most of us probably have more to do and more challenges facing us than we know what to do with. But somehow we believe that meeting together and waiting upon you is going to help us be more effective in the work that lies ahead of us across the globe.

Strengthen us, God. Guide us as we're cast upon you. For we pray in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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