

Christian-based groups – their predicament and considerations for evangelical mission
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Let's begin by recalling Jesus giving famous Sermon on the Mount. I have in my mind's eye the situation. Those present had no idea of the significance of the moment, that what they were hearing would be translated, repeated, studied, and taught until the glorious return of this Teacher. Near the end of this great teaching, Jesus exposed a sad and challenging mission reality that exists in Christian-based cultures: the difficulty for many to find the true Gospel even though they frequently hear and maybe even speak the name of Christ.

The biblical scene

Who was present with Jesus for this monumental moment? Mathew (5:1) revealed that His disciples and a large crowd were present. The focus of His teaching was the kingdom of God and consequently Himself. As Jesus nears the end of this teaching to an interested crowd, he says,

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it (Mat. 7:13-14, NIV).

The biblical implication

Notice the following contrasts in Jesus' words: wide and small, broad and narrow, many and very few, destruction and life. All of these descriptions are eternal metaphors.

No doubt, Jesus is referring to Himself and His Gospel in the above passage. His command to "enter through narrow gate" correlates with John's record wherein Jesus calls Himself the "gate for the sheep" (John 10:7-10). Jesus' description of "narrow is the road that leads to life" echoes what He said about being The Way to the Father (John 14:6). Few of his hearers probably understood the full meaning of these personal references. We have the benefit of the canon to assist us in understanding what Jesus meant. However, His audience did understand that 1) the small gate leading to the narrow road was essential for life (salvation), 2) they were responsible for entering through this small gate, yet 3) most were never going to find it.

The obvious question is, "Why on earth would the majority of Jesus' hearers never find that small gate (i.e. the Gospel)?" Bringing this question into the present, "Why are most today unable to find that small gate (i.e. the Gospel)?" Credible answers include 1) the lack a genuine initial commitment to follow Jesus, 2) failure to continue in grace until the end, 3) a vain belief (i.e. 1Cor. 15:2), 4) a problematic heart for the Gospel seed to take root, and 5) no opportunity to hear the Way of Jesus (hard to enter the gate

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if you do not even know the gate exists!). While one may argue biblically for each of these reasons, none of them fit the context of Mat. 7:13-14.

Jesus said that only a few would ever *find* the small gate. Why? What is keeping most from finding the Gospel? The answer lies in the next verse: “Beware of false prophets” (Mat 7:15).

According to Jesus, false prophets are why most claiming an affinity with Christ will never discover Him. Sounds surprising? These spiritual teachers come not from non-Christian religions such as Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism, but they are among what many consider Christian (ranging from nominal Christian to Cristo-pagan).

Jesus’ teaching explains further his rationale and warning for false teachers and their associated groups. They do not deny the Lord; to the contrary, they acknowledge and show a passion for His work (Mat. 7:21-23). They would never consider criticizing Christ; they may even confess that Jesus is Lord. They lack neither the motivation nor the power to help people in their suffering; they may possess spiritual power to perform miracles, cast out demons, and give profound insights. Their fatal errors, nevertheless, are that 1) they themselves do not know Christ and 2) they distort the Gospel in such a manner that many people fail to find it (Mat. 7:14-15a, 23). It is a classic case of the blind leading the blind, albeit many of the last-mentioned find such distortions appealing. This situation requires ministry to the deceived masses of people and guidance to the church for its prevention and/or correction in such errors (e.g. Gal. 1:6-7; 2Tim. 4:3-4).

Brazil – case study of a Christian-based society

Current realities in contemporary contexts on multiple continents validate this teaching of Jesus concerning false prophets. Applying to the Brazilian context where I serve for example, sociologists and theologians consider Brazil a nominal Christian society, and some even declare it is a full-blown Christian nation. Such classifications depend, of course, upon how one defines Christian and, more importantly, Evangelical Christian; these parameters are tricky yet critical for responsible evangelical researchers and mission agencies. Therefore, let’s begin by surveying how Christian-based spirituality has a significant place in this nation.

Similar to other nations in the global South, Brazilians have a great affinity for spirituality. Yet unique among the nations of the Global South, Brazil’s spiritual receptivity has made it the “largest” in several Christian-based religious categories. According to João Dias Araújo, Brazil is renowned for being the (1) the largest Catholic population on earth, (2) the world’s largest number of Pentecostal groups (3) more sympathizers to mediumistic religions than any other nation (4) the greatest Protestant representation in Latin American, and (5) Umbanda, a uniquely Brazilian religion that has come about within the last century synthesizing folk Catholicism, Kardecism (a highly developed mediumistic religion), and Afro-Brazilian religions.² If Araújo updated his list for the twenty-first century, he would have to add one more facet to Brazil’s religious accomplishments. The country has been home to one of the world’s largest renditions of a new Pentecostalism, a “third wave” of the nation’s Pentecostal Movement,

² Araújo, João Dias de 1984. *Images of Jesus in the culture of the Brazilian people, in Faces of Jesus: Latin American christologies*, RR Bar (trans), JM Bonino (ed). Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 30-38.

commonly termed Neo-Pentecostalism. Herein, I will elaborate more on this latest religious development.

Because of Brazilians' history and open receptivity to Christian-based spirituality, expressions of Christ are part of the society and penetrate the vast majority of its citizens. Catholicism and its symbols can be seen everywhere - buildings, schools, and statues placed throughout urban and rural areas. Some date back to the sixteenth century. Thousands of spirit centers have performed good deeds, holding Jesus up as their model and in their liturgy. The general population holds reverence for Christ, and many pray daily and employ Judeo-Christian phrases in their daily speech (e.g. if God's wills; thank God; my God; my Jesus). Multiple Pentecostal movements have led to a growing social segment declaring loyalty to the "army of God".

These mentioned Christian-based groups and related cultural influences have produced numerous sociological benefits on the surface. However, day-to-day conversations with adherents leave me very concerned about their eternal status. Many love Jesus and acknowledge God in their lives; yet, their own words betray the fact that they have yet to find the Gospel of Jesus revealed in the Scriptures.

My family and I lead a cell group in our home, which is a highlight of our week. The members come from different social-economic backgrounds, each with different spiritual journeys. Most of the participants have embraced the Gospel within the past two years. When studying Jesus' words about the small gate and the difficulty in finding it because of false prophets, several in our group testified about how hard it was for them to find the Gospel, or at least an environment conducive to understanding what it truly is. As they shared their stories, most refrained from making harsh accusations but expressed sincere frustration about their former groups of affiliation. The common element in their testimonies was that each followed the teachings and practices of their respective Christian-based groups (i.e. Catholic, spiritist, and "evangelical") and other cultural influences, yet none were able to find the Gospel within them.

Brazilian Neo-Pentecostalism – A Global South mission predicament

In my list of Brazilian Christian-based groups, I mentioned the varied Pentecostal movements or "waves" that evangelical and secular periodicals mention, analyze, and commemorate. I do not question the Christian validity of all denominations related to Pentecostalism. On the other hand, when studying the histories, practices, and discourses of some Pentecostal groups, I come away wondering how what I call the evangelical-based Gospel of Jesus³ revealed in the Scriptures could be discovered by adherents

³ The term evangelical-based salvation or evangelical based Gospel, affirmed by the Lausanne Movement, refers to what evangelicals have historically held and propagated about the Gospel. This message is based on the teachings of the apostles and other writers that are recorded in the Scriptures about the person and message of Jesus Christ and His church. The implication of this salvation is that Christ's followers obey Him, fellowship together in local churches that hold these same truths, and serve Him in His mission, both in word and responsible deeds (*Lausanne Covenant* 1974, paragraph 4, 12). Salvation also includes the deliverance from the dominion of Satan; although, believers may still be tempted by him to sin and conform to the world. In addition, this salvation is not acquired or sustained by human effort nor does it expect a sinless perfection on the followers' part; it is by God's grace through faith in Jesus that one is saved. As stated in the *Manila Manifesto* (1989, sect. A,1), "we also reject half-gospels, which minimize sin and confuse God's grace with human self-effort."

within these groups. Harvey Cox sees much of Pentecostalism as an ecumenical movement, as it synthesizes “elements from a number of other sources, and not all of them Christian.”⁴ Once again, the small gate of the Gospel is difficult to find. Thus, it would be beneficial to understand more of the history and particulars of the religious phenomenon, as in the case for Brazil.

The Brazilian Pentecostal Movement can be divided into three periods, commonly known as waves. The classical period (first wave), which began around 1910, gave the nation its two largest Pentecostal denominations – the Assemblies of God and the highly sectarian *Congregação Cristã do Brasil*.⁵ These groups stress the importance of baptism of the Holy Spirit after conversion, speaking in tongues, and behavioral norms and customs. The second wave, which began around 1950 and significantly influenced the evangelical scene until the late 1970’s, was embodied primarily in three denominations – The Four-Square Gospel Church, *Brasil para Cristo*, and the sect *Igreja Pentecostal Deus É Amor*. Second-wave Pentecostals introduced “divine curing” and exorcism and began to utilize radio to spread their message. In addition, they diversified the Pentecostal camp by other experiments and, according to some, reduced their emphasis on doctrine which prepared for the succeeding Pentecostal period.⁶

The third wave, or Neo-Pentecostalism, began in late 1970’s and is the current period of the Brazilian Pentecostal Movement to sweep the nation.⁷ It is typically characterized by certain elements: the prominence of prosperity theology, an emphasis on extreme spiritual warfare, the liberalization of Pentecostal behavioral norms and customs, and the reduction of fraternal ties between the congregants. Of the 17.6 million self-declared evangelicals in the 2000 census, nearly 7 out of 10 are Pentecostals. Difficulty exists, however, in determining an exact number for Neo-Pentecostals, as it is a movement and not embodied in just one denomination. Some estimate that adherents represent over forty-two percent of the general Pentecostal population.⁸ This actual percentage though could be higher as third-wave teachings and practices creep into other Pentecostal churches as well as historic churches making them appear less like their affiliated denominations.

This situation of people not finding the Gospel in certain Brazilian Pentecostal groups has deeply troubled me and motivated me to study the largest third-wave denomination which originated in Brazil, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD). Since its start in 1977, the IURD has grown to over

⁴ Cox, Harvey 1995. *Fire from heaven: the rise of Pentecostal spirituality and the reshaping of religion in the twenty-first century*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press (2001 edition), 16.

⁵ The *Congregação Cristã do Brasil* and the second-wave denomination *Igreja Pentecostal Deus É Amor*, both mentioned herein, hold certain teachings and sectarian practices which exclude them from evangelicalism as they do not regard an evangelical-based Gospel (refer to footnote 3). For example, members are prohibited to interact with other evangelicals, except for the purpose of proselytizing, as each denomination considers itself the only true church. Furthermore, rigorous behavioral norms and customs are expected for church membership and, thus, necessary for one’s continuance in salvation.

⁶ Examples include (1) Mendonça, AG 1997. *Protestantes, pentecostais e ecumênicos: o campo religioso e seus personagens*. São Bernardo do Campo, SP: Universidade Metodista de São Paulo, 158-159; and also (2) Freston, Paul 1995. *Pentecostals in Brazil: a brief history*. *Religion* 25(2):119-132.

⁷ No doubt that Brazilian Neo-Pentecostalism has been influenced and is also influencing a global Neo-Pentecostalism, found in many Global South nations. For more on this dynamic, see for example (1) Anderson, Alan H 2001. “The globalisation of Pentecostalism and the reshaping of Christianity in the twenty-first century.” *Missionalia* 29(3):423-443; and also (2) Corten, A & Marshall-Fratani, R (eds). *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

⁸ Pereira, Camila & Linhares, Juliana 2006. Os novos pastores. *Veja* (12 de julho): 76-85.

two million members meeting in almost five thousand locations in Brazil alone; its size makes it the third largest Pentecostal denomination in the country. Furthermore, they have exported their system and presence into 172 countries, making it possibly the largest Christian-based export from a third-world country. Its leaders proudly boast of being present in more countries than McDonald's Restaurants.⁹

What has made the IURD grow extensively in such a short amount of time? There are multiple reasons, but a few will suffice. First, the denomination tailors itself to reach and accommodate people from fear-based societies where the spiritual is sought to meet real and/or perceived needs. Second, it heavily utilizes the media, especially television, as a precursor to its affiliated churches and communicating its specialty in touching the divine for the fulfillment of personal needs/desires. Third, the IURD is structured similar to a multi-national for-profit organization; for example, pastors and their assistants are remunerated and promoted according to their performance, particularly in the area of generating tithes and offerings.

My reading of works by sociologists, anthropologists, and theologians supported my concerns about the IURD and some of the other Pentecostal sects. Leandro Silveira Campos noted that the IURD caters to the selfish, hedonistic, and narcissistic facet of human nature.¹⁰ Luiz Sayão observed a considerable gulf between what the IURD and similar denominations teach and what most would consider evangelical.¹¹ The proliferation of such groups under the evangelical banner has precipitated a soteriological crisis in Brazil, inoculating millions to the Gospel. Yet many researchers and even some Brazilian evangelical leaders fail to exclude the IURD and similar groups from the evangelical fold. Some of them believe that while these groups may not be as pure in their beliefs and practice as others, the evangelical cause is better off because of their presence. Allow me to highlight a few statements from the IURD's founder and current highest leader, Bishop Edir Macedo, to support this assertion.

According to Macedo, one who is saved will normally be demon possessed until he/she has experienced regeneration; regeneration requires meeting three conditions - "accepting Jesus", the ritual of water baptism, and the total giving of oneself to Jesus for the born-again experience to occur.¹² The Bishop also mentions how to walk his prescribed 10-step "path of salvation", which also includes the elements of his version of regeneration but adds the giving of tithe and offerings, participating in IURD's deliverance meetings, and unceasing prayer.¹³ Continuing in salvific grace is nearly impossible, especially without the personal sacrifice and religious rituals, as salvation is more of a temporal state to be maintained. Macedo states, for example, that it was best that the repentant thief on the cross died soon after his accepting of Jesus; otherwise, he had little chance of continuing in the state of salvation he received as he did not experience water baptism, regeneration, nor "did nothing to deserve divine

⁹ Tavarolo, Douglas 2007. *O bispo: a história revelada de Edir Macedo*. São Paulo: Larousse, 243-245.

¹⁰ Campos, Leonildo Silveira 1997. *Teatro, templo e mercado: organização e marketing de um empreendimento neopentecostal*. Second edition. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes; São Paulo: Simpósio Editora & São Bernardo do Campo, São Paulo: Universidade Metodista de São Paulo, 473.

¹¹ Sayão, Luiz AT 1999. "Uma avaliação sociológica do pentecostalismo e do neopentecostalismo." *Vox Scripturae* 9(1):83-94.

¹² Macedo, Edir 2008. *Novo nascimento*. First edition. Rio de Janeiro: Unipro Editora, 18, 24, 35-37.

¹³ Macedo, Edir 2006. *Orixás, caboclos e guias: deuses ou demônios?* Fifteenth edition. Rio de Janeiro: Unipro Editora, 132-139.

forgiveness” that was granted to him.¹⁴ Last, tithes and offerings are *quase* sacramental, as they “are as consecrated and as holy as the Word of God” and referred to as the blood of the church.¹⁵

After studying extensively this denomination and comparing it primarily to the documents of the Lausanne Movement (LM), I found that the IURD actually inhibits evangelical mission in Brazil for several reasons.¹⁶ First, the leaders’ discourse presents a salvation which contradicts the evangelical-based message of Gospel. Second, the leadership promotes tenets and practices that allow its members to continue in their folk-religious and narcissistic worldviews. Third, members relate individually to the organization and hardly ever are they encouraged to relate to one another for the goal of biblical fellowship (i.e. *koinonia*). Last, the organization demonstrates sectarian practices; for example, members are encouraged not to associate with others who are outside of the IURD.

Brazilian evangelicalism - romantic view or realistic assessment?

The complexities of contemporary realities in Christian-based cultures, as described in the previous sections on Brazil, can lead to misinformation about who is truly evangelized, especially when trusting on census reports and superficial statistical talking points. As Mark Twain said, “Facts are stubborn things, but statistics are more pliable.” Such statistics need to be called into check in order to make wise mission-organizational decisions and determine what is best for kingdom advancement. I again refer to Brazil for an example.

The 2000 census reported that 15.4 percent of the population declare themselves evangelicals, but are 26 million of the Brazilian people really born-again believers? Hardly. My colleagues and I have found that the evangelical population recorded in the census can easily be reduced by 60 percent through eliminating heretical groups and considering peculiarities on how questions were asked the participants. However, getting to the real number of true believers presents an even greater challenge and a sobering actuality.

I recently reread a report by Alan Myatt and Nolan Pridemore that was sponsored by the former South American Region of the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the same mission board through which I serve in Brazil¹⁷. This document unfortunately did not make a wide circulation among our mission and evangelical circles. The report disclosed that Brazilian society is not that well along in evangelization, even in the mega-cities where evangelicalism is considered the strongest. The document was based on a survey conducted in four Brazilian mega-cities where around 450 people were interviewed in each city. Field missionary orientated the Brazilian interviewers who in turn followed strict procedures for sampling and asking questions. The number of inhabitants and self-declared evangelicals according to the 2000 census data for each city were the following.

¹⁴ Macedo, Edir 2008. *Novo nascimento*. First edition. Rio de Janeiro: Unipro Editora, 34.

¹⁵ No que cremos (undated). <http://www.igrejauniversal.org.br/doutrinas.jsp>. Paragraph 11. Accessed 21 Feb, 2011.

¹⁶ Bledsoe, David Allen 2010. “Brazilian Neo-Pentecostal Movement: development and distinctions with a missiological case analysis of the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus and its impact on Brazilian society.” Doctoral thesis. Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa.

¹⁷ Myatt, Alan & Nolan Pridemore 2007. The status of evangelicals in the mega-cities of Brazil: a preliminary survey. Unpublished report. 14 December.

City	Population (est.)	% declared evangelicals
Porto Alegre, RS	1.4 million	12.5
Guarulhos, SP	1.3 million	36.1
Salvador, BA	2.7 million	35.1
Manaus, AM	1.6 million	30.7

In three of the four cities, the number of declared evangelicals greatly exceeds the percentage of evangelicals in the 2000 census (i.e. 15.4%), which reveals that evangelicalism is concentrated in the larger urban centers and not small cities and rural areas. What is more, Guarulhos is considered a periphery area of the capital São Paulo and favors lower-income families coming from the northeast of the country, and Salvador and Manaus, which are capital cities, have a large population of low-income families and a historical affinity for Brazilian spiritualistic religions.

What is most shocking, however, is how many of these declared evangelicals have no biblical reason or hope for their salvation. The percentage of born-again believers drops considerably when setting evangelical-based parameters. According to the researchers of the report, the fairest profile (not the strictest) of answers by declared evangelicals discloses a more probable assessment of born-again believers. I list the number of probable born-again believers next to number of declared evangelicals for the reader to see the drastic disparity.

City	% of probable born-again believers	% declared declared evangelicals
Porto Alegre, RS	0.8	12.5
Guarulhos, SP	4.1	36.1
Salvador, BA	3.5	35.1
Manaus, AM	0.6	30.7

Pridemore and Myatt give two noteworthy conclusions for the stark gap of born-again believers to declared evangelicals. First, they interpret the Brazilian evangelical movement more as a sociological phenomenon rather than a conglomeration of people committed to an evangelical-based Gospel and associated beliefs. Second, the proliferation of Neo-Pentecostal churches in urban contexts facilitates the transition from fear-based Brazilian pagan religions, but adherents unfortunately never comprehend the Gospel and its implications. This report once again proves from the field that Christian-based cultures are a challenge for evangelical mission.

The leadership of the IMB, SBC recently announced the intention to reduce its personnel in Central and South America from around 436 missionary units to 270, which less than 100 would work among “legacy peoples” such as Portuguese-speaking Brazilians and Spanish-speaking Argentineans. Those remaining 100 missionaries will also retool their ministries to work in mobilization, primarily with Baptist institutions and USA-based partnerships for their respective countries. The logic behind this redesign is

that legacy peoples are considered somewhat evangelized, and the unreached people groups (UPG's) in these countries and in other nations must be targeted. My concern for such statements and tactical moves in light of Pridemore and Myatts' report is the following: are these populations that we are leaving really born-again? Should mission organizations with a history of helping their national brethren in the Global South abandon them with such situations as I have mentioned? Such moves seem to be based on romantic assessments rather than realistic observations from the field.

SUGGESTIONS IN LIGHT OF CHRISTIAN-BASED SOCIETIES

Given the biblical warning of Jesus concerning false prophets and the challenges they and their associated groups create, this section gives few suggestions. The following recommendations also reflect the case study which focused on Brazil, an example of a Christian-based society. Furthermore, reflections are given in light of the occasion of the reading of this paper, a conference on research taking place a few months after the historic Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization (Cape Town 2010).

1. Statistical reporting based on evangelical-based considerations

As responsible evangelical leaders and researchers, we need utilize parameters that get closer to reality as to who are born-again believers in a nation, area, or people group. Particularly in Christian-based societies, this judgment cannot be based on self-declarations of persons or counting the members of Christian-based religious groups. Alex Araujo concurs that many of the professing believers in countries should be removed from evangelical statistics and definitely from the mission force; they remain in need of evangelization given their understanding of the Gospel.¹⁸ He correctly points out that a simple declaration of "I believe in Jesus" is not sufficient to pronounce them as Christian brothers and sisters. Araujo's insight demonstrates how pastors, theologians, and even missionaries in particular areas should be included when interpreting statistics as they know well their target people's worldview and the teachings of local religious groups.

When knowing who declares themselves to be evangelical and who are really evangelical, tactical decisions can be made to assist the evangelical mission cause in a certain area. For this reason, the additional effort is worth it. The setting of parameters, of course, should be based on primary evangelical beliefs and not on secondary issues. The primary documents of the Lausanne Movement (i.e. *Lausanne Covenant*, *Manila Manifesto*, and *the most recent CTM*), for example, provide excellent standards which affirm the historic evangelical-based Gospel message as well as its correlation for mission. In the case of the IURD, its constituents were found to fit more appropriately in the mission-field category and as part of the mission force when the denomination's beliefs and practices were compared to the mentioned Lausanne documents.¹⁹

2. A call for LOP on Neo-Pentecostalism

I hope that my above comments on Neo-Pentecostalism demonstrate that this movement requires a response from the global church to the global church. The LM would obviously be a commendable platform to produce this document, interpreting this transnational phenomenon and orientating the national parishioners and missionaries on how to minister to those under the influence of such groups.

¹⁸ Araujo, Alex 1998. What is our message? *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (April): http://www.emqonline.com/emq_article_read.php?ArticleID=3031. Accessed 10 February, 2010.

¹⁹ Bledsoe, David Allen 2010. "Brazilian Neo-Pentecostal Movement: development and distinctions with a missiological case analysis of the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus and its impact on Brazilian society." Doctoral thesis. Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa, 235-240.

Since its inception, the LM has blessed the global church with such papers (e.g. LOP 8: Christian witness to secularized people; LOP 10: Christian witness to nominal Christians among Roman Catholics; LOP 11: Christian witness to religious movements; LOP 23: Christian witness to nominal Christians among Protestants).

No doubt, Neo-Pentecostalism is the major global carrier of Prosperity Theology. However, as illustrated with the IURD, this movement presents unique and complex challenges for evangelical-based mission in the Global South that are much deeper than Prosperity Theology. The recent *Cape Town Commitment* (CTC) articulated well the dangers of teachers and their groups which promote Prosperity Theology; however, the global church would be additionally served with a document that reports on findings and gives recommendations on the Global Neo-Pentecostalism Movement. Therefore, I call for this Research Network Conference to consider making an appeal to the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization to form a working group for the purpose of drafting a paper (i.e. LOP) which deals with this topic.

3. Theological partnerships to assist the church in the Gospel South

As a participant in Cape Town 2010, I noticed a reoccurring theme when selected delegates reported to the congress participants on how “God is on the Move” in their regions. Nearly every one of the reports could be summarized as follows: “We are doing pretty well in seeing responses for Christ in the nations we represent. Our greatest challenge, however, is theological training and the development Christian leaders.”

As a missionary serving in Brazil, I rejoice in what the Lord is doing in the Global South, but there is equal concern for what happening in many churches in the Global South. Therefore, I was pleased to see the declarations in the CTC emphasizing absolute truth and the evangelical-based Gospel and the encouragement of mission agencies and seminaries to engage in theological education as a mission endeavor. In fact, needs exist and invitations are numerous for the church in the West to help its sister church in the Global South to establish deeper a biblically centered Christian theology that is dually committed to mission in theory and in practice. In some instances, it will require denominations to return to where they once established churches, seminaries and daughter denominations.²⁰ On the other hand, this is commendable, as “theological education is mission beyond evangelism” and also interdependent with the evangelization of a nation.²¹

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In His discourse on the mount, Jesus identified a significant reason why those living in Christian-based cultures would never find the Gospel: false prophets. I have attempted to explain the reality and complexity of mission in such a context. Application has been made particularly for nations in the Global South where evangelicals are growing and even participating in global missions, yet many false prophets and groups stand as obstacles for mission within those nations. In addition, the article demonstrates how mission strategy must be based on the actuality of the field instead of non-filtered, general statistics. Last, a few suggestions have been made for participants in the Lausanne Research Conference to consider to help guide the global church to navigate the needs and challenges in Christian-based societies. It is my prayer that this paper will create discussions and ideas for actions among those who

²⁰ Bledsoe, David Allen 2009. “A plea to reconsider theological engagement in historic mission fields.” *Journal of Evangelism & Missions*. Vol. 8, Spring, 97-99.

²¹ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. 2011. *The Cape Town Commitment*, from part II, section IV, item “4. Theological education and mission”.

are both interested in research and committed to reaching this world with the Gospel of our Lord.