

Ethos in the Lausanne Covenant

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to analyze part of the Lausanne Covenant, a text produced at the end of the World Evangelization Conference (1974) in Lausanne, Switzerland. The question is: How has memory shaped different meaning effects (discourses) in the Lausanne Pact document produced during the International Congress of World Evangelization (1974)?*

Keywords: Christianity, Marxism, ethos.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyze part of the Lausanne Covenant, a text produced at the end of the World Evangelization Conference (1974) in Lausanne, Switzerland. The question is: How has memory shaped different meaning effects (discourses) in the Lausanne Pact document produced during the International Congress of World Evangelization (1974)?

In the description of the selected and cataloged data we found that during the International Congress of World Evangelization (1974), a group of South American evangelical leaders, represented by René Padilla and Samuel Escobar, gained notoriety and prominence, which culminated in the drafting a document that sought to clearly state issues related to social justice in the practice of Christian evangelism.

The International Congress of World Evangelization was held in Lausanne, Switzerland, from July 16 to 25, 1974, on the Palais de Beaulieu. The meeting was convened by a committee chaired by Rev. Billy Graham, a prominent North American Baptist pastor, and was attended by over 2300 evangelical leaders from around 150 countries representing numerous Protestant denominations.

With the theme, "Let the earth hear your voice," evangelical leaders participated in plenary sessions and Bible studies, as well as discussions and debates on theology, strategy, and methods that should be employed in practicing evangelism among Protestant churches. The meeting produced a document called the Lausanne Covenant, a statement that would define the needs, responsibilities, and goals of spreading the gospel.

In Lausanne (1974), important evangelical leaders were present, among which stood out among the South Americans, the Ecuadorian René Padilla and the Peruvian Samuel Escobar. Padilla was born in Ecuador and lives in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He holds a bachelor's degree in philosophy, a master's degree in theology from Wheaton College, USA,

and a doctorate in New Testament from the University of Manchester, England. Samuel Escobar was born in Peru and received his master's degree in Arts and Education at the University of San Marcos in Lima, and PhD in philosophy (Ph.D.) at the Complutense University of Madrid. Escobar is the author of several books on theology and missiology: Dialogue between Christ and Marx (1967), Quien es Cristo Hoy? (1970, with C. René Padilla), Decadence of Religion (1972), Christian Mission and Social Justice (1978, with John Driver), Youth Irruption (1978), The Gospel Faith and Liberation Theologies (1987), Gospel and Social Reality (1988), Liberation Themes in Reformational Perspective (1989), Paulo Freire: A Latin American Pedagogy (1993), among others. Escobar also participated in major international congresses on world evangelism in Berlin (1966), Bogota (1969), Toronto (1970), Madrid (1974), and Lausanne (1974). Both Padilla and Escobar were theoretically linked to Marxist thought and supported the assumptions of Liberation Theology.

Padilla criticized American forms of evangelism with its emphasis on numerical growth and urged the church to act politically in addressing social injustices; Escobar's speech followed the same line of argument. Padilla and Escobar were supported by some leaders during Lausanne (1974), so they organized a dissident group of about 500 delegates who supported this same speech and sought to persuade the committee to draft a "Lausanne statement", which should incorporate clearer propositions on social justice (cf. Swartz, 2012). On the text of the Lausanne Covenant itself, John Stott, a prominent evangelical minister present at the event and a member of the document's writing committee, states that the final version of the Lausanne Covenant was the third version of the text (STOTT, 1975). Thus, we are interested in identifying which discourses are materialized in that corpus. The hypothesis of the work is that the discourses materialized in the analyzed materials are linked to both the sphere of Marxist thought and the religious sphere, being linked to a certain discursive memory, which determines what groups can and should say, as well as that they cannot and should not say (FONSECA-SILVA, 2007).

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2. Material and Methods

As we have already said, the *corpus* of this work is made up of verbal materialities found in the document Lausanne Covenant, text produced at the end of the World Evangelization Conference (1974), referring to the principles that would guide the evangelistic practice of Protestant churches.

In the analysis, the procedures adopted were as follows: i) description of two extracts from the Lausanne Pact; ii) data analysis, based on the theoretical-analytical device of Discourse Analysis (AD), mainly on the concepts of *ethos*, developed by Maingueneau (2001, 2005, 2008a, 2008b), understanding the *ethos* as the construction of an image through discourse. In this sense, *ethos* is part of the enunciation of each and every text and contributes to the identification of the different discourses materialized in them. We are concerned in this paper with the concept of discursive memory coined by Courtine (1981). We take here the definition of Pêcheux (1983), for whom discursive memory is “a mobile space of divisions, disjunctions, displacements and retakes, conflicts of regularization [...]” (p. 56). Finally, we borrow the notion of places of discursive memory, coined by Fonseca-Silva (2007), for whom all symbolic materiality or significant materiality functions as a *place of discursive memory*, because the symbol invests the places of memory and, in this sense, “Commercials, as places of discursive memory, also function as a space of interpretation [...] therefore, of construction / re-construction of discursive memory” (FONSECA-SILVA, 2007, p. 25).

3. Results and Discussion

In this paper, as we have said, we analyze two excerpts from the Lausanne Covenant document, related to the evangelistic practice of the Protestant churches. We take these two significant materialities as a place for discursive memory, in the sense already explained.

(I) *We affirm our belief in the one eternal God, Creator and Lord of the World, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who rules all things according to the purpose of His will. He has called the world a people to himself, sending them back to the world as his servants and witnesses, to extend his kingdom, to build the body of Christ, and also to the glory of his name. We confess in shame that we often deny our calling and fail our mission because we have conformed to the world or isolated ourselves too much. However, we rejoice in the fact that even when carried in earthen vessels, the gospel remains a precious treasure. In the task of making this treasure known, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we wish to dedicate ourselves again.*

Excerpt (I), which deals with the first topic of the Lausanne Covenant, entitled “God’s Purpose,” presents important aspects of theontology, which is the branch of theology that is concerned with studying God’s being and his works. From this perspective, the enunciator initially states, “We affirm our belief in the one eternal God, Creator and Lord of the World, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who rules all things

according to the purpose of his will.” This statement embraces important notions of historical Christianity: monotheism, in affirming the belief in the “one” God; the doctrine of God’s eternity through the expression “eternal God”; the doctrine of the creative and sovereign character of divinity, embodied in “creator and Lord of the world” and “who rules all things according to the purpose of his will”; and also the doctrine of the trinity, through the expression “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” All of these, and the following, statements concerning deity are important to historical Christianity and more than expected in a text that summarizes what was discussed and affirmed at a Protestant world event. This is because these statements are in line with the doctrine accepted by the church, mainly by the historical denominations, namely, Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist and Baptist.

This God, then, as the enunciator of the Lausanne Covenant also states, calls his children to service and witness and indicates, through this call, a threefold purpose: (i) to extend the Kingdom; ii) build the body of Christ; and iii) glorify the name of your God. All of this is, to some extent, materialized in the statement, “He has called the world a people to himself, sending them back to the world as his servants and witnesses, to extend his kingdom, to build the body of Christ, and to to the glory of his name “. This call to service and witness is also present, even if indirectly, in the biblical text dealing with the Great Commission. This is because the Bible states that God set a people apart for Himself, according to the promise we mentioned earlier, made to Abraham. These people, in turn, were to testify of the salvation wrought in them by God in Christ, as the apostle Peter reports: proclaim the virtues of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light “(1 Peter 2:9). In summary, in relation to this first topic of the Lausanne Covenant, we verify the reaffirmation, through the action of a memory about the present, the symbols of the Protestant Christian faith, thus corroborating Protestant theontology. However, there are other issues that are presented as an extension of this supposed orthodoxy (argumentative strategy), but which are based on a certain perception of error related to a memory that no longer refers to orthodox Protestant discourse. This is what we can see, for example, in the following passage: “We confess, ashamed, that we often deny our calling and fail in our mission because we have conformed to the world or have isolated ourselves too much.” After “confessing” this “flaw”, Lausanne covenants say they want to “devote themselves again to the task of making this treasure known in the power of the Holy Spirit.” When they claim that they intend to devote themselves to evangelization again, they materialize a memory that this evangelistic work would have stopped, would no longer be happening, which points to the discourse about the failure to carry the gospel. Failure is explained or made explicit by two questions, namely, in terms “conformed to the world” or in terms “too isolated”. Let’s look at each of these causes separately. In “conforming to the world,” there is at least two effects of meaning materializing. The first, which would be linked to historical Protestantism, concerns secularism, which, from the theological perspective, would be to leave the presuppositions of God’s Word and conform to the presuppositions of “the world”, that is, society without God. The second effect marks a metaphorical relationship

between “conformed” and “conformism” and allows us to interpret “the world” as sliding metaphorically to “demands of the capitalist world.” In this case, the problem would not only be in a supposed secularization, but in the possibility of the Christian giving in or conforming to what the capitalist world gives him. This second effect is linked to the second question which, according to the enunciator of the text under analysis, would have caused failures in evangelization: the isolation of the Christian (“in terms too isolated”). To isolate oneself, according to this discourse, would be not to “look at one's brother”, not to consider the pains and problems of those who should be evangelized.

Thus we find that the enunciator of the text under analysis departs from a formulation linked to Orthodox Protestantism, which is in keeping with the creeds and confessions of historical Protestantism in its basic doctrinal statements, but at the same time introduces something different, because it uses in the text of the Covenant certain expressions, such as “we confess ashamed” and “moved in repentance”, which indicate the place of failure in the evangelistic process. This flaw, however, would not be linked to the principles of Protestant orthodoxy, but, as we shall see later, it is linked to the Marxist principles and / or foundations of what will later be called “Christian social responsibility,” and so to speak in shame or repentance Lausanne's covenants try to bring Christian discourse closer to Marxist discourse by creating a certain *ethé*.

Excerpt (II) refers to the fifth topic of the text of the Lausanne Covenant, under the heading of Christian Social Responsibility, and, as we have mentioned, approximates evangelistic practice to social action:

(II) *We affirm that God is the Creator and Judge of all men. Therefore, we must share his concern for justice and conciliation in all human society, and for the liberation of men from all kinds of oppression. Because mankind was made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, color, culture, social class, gender, or age, has an intrinsic dignity that should be respected and served, not exploited. Here we also repent of our neglect and of having sometimes considered evangelism and social activity mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, neither social action evangelization nor political liberation salvation, we affirm that evangelization and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines about God and man, our love for our neighbor, and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation also implies a message of judgment on all forms of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ, they are born again in his kingdom and should seek not only to evidence but also to spread the righteousness of the kingdom in the midst of an unjust world. The salvation we claim to possess must be transforming us into all of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.*

In excerpt II, “Christian Social Responsibility,” we find the initial statement that “God is the Creator and Judge of all

men,” where the issue here necessarily comes to the development of this topic, for in it the enunciator introduces, from more explicitly, issues related to social justice, which can be seen, for example, in the following passage: “We must share their interest in justice and conciliation in all human society, and in the liberation of men from all kinds of oppression. ” In Protestant theology it is believed that the Bible attaches some importance to social issues, seen early in the narrative of the book of Genesis, called theology of mandates. The first mandate given to man according to the biblical narrative is known as the cultural mandate. In this mandate, according to the account of the first three chapters of the book of Genesis, men and women should exercise their prerogatives of special creatures, created in the image of God, developing culture and simultaneously maintaining it, and from this emanate all social questions. However, despite this concern with culture and social aspects, This is not a concern in the transmission of the gospel itself. Notably other issues, initially unrelated to Protestant theology, but related to Marxism continue to be developed, also in an attempt to create a certain image of the evangelizer.

In this way, some of Lausanne's covenants in the sphere of the World Congress of Evangelization (1974) build their discourses, in which they can be seen to emphasize their values or the value of their ideological platform, to recognize and mobilize the Marxist ideal. In this performance, the document is built on the strategy of building its own image, trying to assemble an *ethos*, or several *ethé*, that bring Christianity closer to Marxism. The two significant materialities, taken as a place of discursive memory and analyzed in this paper, thus indicate the need for the construction of certain *ethé* that Lausanne's covenants tried to practice evangelism in the Protestant churches.

4. Conclusion

The analyzes showed that the ethos in the excerpts analyzed are related to the attempt to construct a particular religiosity. Thus, the enunciator uses all these statements to construct a valued image of social practice in order to link these issues to the evangelism of the Protestant churches, based on Marxist principles. Thus, during the International Congress of World Evangelization (1974), a group of South American evangelical leaders linked to Marxist thought and supporters of Liberation Theology, represented by René Padilla and Samuel Escobar, gained notoriety and prominence, which culminated in the elaboration of a document that sought to clearly state issues related to social justice in the practice of Christian evangelism, that is, the attempt to construct a certain image of religiosity where the enunciator values issues linked to social responsibility by attaching these questions to the practice of Protestant evangelism, based on the principles of Marxist ideology.

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