

EDINBURGH 2010 CONFERENCE

THURSDAY INTRODUCTION

'MAKE US A FAMILY'

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ!

The best remembered speech from the 1910 Conference, the one that historians and theologians often recall and quote, came from Bishop Azariah of India. Inspired by Paul's 'Hymn to love' in 1 Corinthians 13, he made this impassioned plea, as an Indian speaking largely to Western missionaries. "You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for *love*. Give us FRIENDS!"

"Give us friends!" I am sure that in the hundred years since Bishop Azariah's appeal was made the mission of the Church has produced many, many friends. You will know that better than I. I'm sure it's true.

But I have another thought, and a personal one, for us at the start of our Conference today. Friendships are good and precious and can be lasting. They are made sacred when they are made in the name of Jesus Christ. But they can wax and wane, they can grow and fade. They have to be worked at to endure.

There is one relationship that is beyond friendship, and that is family. Family speaks of something that can be even more intimate, and perhaps more enduring. Family makes us sisters and brothers together in an unbreakable bond. Now I know that families can be good or bad, there can be suspicion, rivalry, and even estrangement. But the family bond remains. We are sisters and brothers, children of the one heavenly Father, with Jesus Christ our Elder Brother.

In his first letter in the New Testament John writes (3.1), "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God." And John, as if the truth of this revelation has only just struck him, adds, "And that is what we are!"

"And that is what we are!" It's a blood relationship, we're all bound by ties of blood, of course the blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

That is my vision for this conference. Could that be our legacy? To know and love one another as sisters and brothers. And so, as the one family of the Lord our God, empowered by his Holy Spirit, to witness Jesus Christ his son in a divided and needy world.

"Give us friends!"

"Make us a family!"

Andrew Anderson, Chair, Edinburgh 2010 General Council, June 2010