

## Forward

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The theme of the 16th annual Centre for Mission Studies Consultation held at UBS, Pune; Jan. 13-15, 2010 proclaimed "Give us Friends!" Whether it is in missions or elsewhere, as an old saying reminds us, "If you want to make friends, be friendly." Let us all decide to "be friendly" hereafter for the cause of spreading the good news to all. The motto of UBS as most of you know is "speaking the Truth in love" (Eph 3:15) and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are also called upon to "practice the Truth in love." In this regard my theme for this forward is "Seeing Visions, Having Dreams."

"God says, I will pour out my spirit on every one. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message: Your young men will see visions and old men will have dreams." Acts 2:17

One hundred years have passed since the Edinburgh 1910 Missionary Conference. Pre Edinburgh 2010 consultations in preparation for the centenary celebrations are being held this year in various parts of the world. I attended one of them in United Theological College, Bangalore. I noticed that the Protestant church and mission delegates gathered there represented a wide spectrum of theological persuasions compared to Edinburgh 1910. The group spent considerable time on "what is 'mission' or good news today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a changing world." Theological perspectives, socio-economic and political realities have been changing significantly in comparison to the Edinburgh 1910 call of "carrying gospel to all the non-Christian world." For example, People are not comfortable now with the expression "non-Christian" and are pressing for the use of the term, "people of other faiths." Religious fundamentalism nurtured by political parties also has gained a head start in the last two decades. There are other socioeconomic and cultural changes introduced by the process of globalisation.

In the context of many such changes, our young people will have to see new visions and old people have to have new dreams. Great men of vision and dreams have used the gospel message some way or the other, whether it was Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr. or Nelson Mandela. The gospel or good news is a call for "change for good," a call for regeneration of the individual and the society. Gandhi challenged the Christian missionaries to practice the "Sermon on the Mount." The Gospel demands us to do the unusual and to be pioneers of change. That is what the call of Edinburgh 1910 had done in various areas of spirituality, social change, service to the suffering and in education. A revolutionary life has to be visualized and dreamt afresh today posed by the challenges--yet the fundamentals remain the same:

***Repentance and Renewal:*** This first fundamental is a prerequisite of seeing visions and dreaming dreams. Today the church and its mission are seen as a negation of the Sermon on the Mount or the "Upanishad" of Jesus. We need to be awakened. The Gospel could revolutionise the whole humanity. We are eager to speak the Truth but

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we need to visualize and dream about “practicing the Truth.” It requires the promise: “I will pour out my Spirit on every one.” We need to turn to God in a special way for this experience.

***Deeper commitment to Christ:*** In this respect also the Christian church has become a disappointment to others. The church and missions are now organizationally oriented and target oriented in material terms. Commitment to Christ implies selfless love and vicarious suffering, or selfgiving love on the cross. Let us see visions of commitment and be genuinely committed to Christ not only in words but also in action.

***Christian Openness:*** Jesus is not only unique but also universal. The openness of Christ invites all He served all those who were in need, irrespective of religious affiliation instructing them to have faith in Him. We have our faith intact but are inclined to exercise it in a “formatted” version. Are we ready to bring back the openness of Christ into our lives and into the life of our church? Do we dream “dreams and see visions” about Christ’s openness while upholding our exclusive theological positions? Have we forgotten the universal outreach of Christ?

***Conversion is God’s work:*** Humans need us to make known His relevant and revolutionary message. We need to help people to get the experience of “regeneration” and being “born again” for leading an enjoyable life with God’s help in all walks of life. The task is to enable people to be better humans spiritually, socially, and to help them to usher in a “new humanity in Christ.”

***Shed the arrogance of possession:*** We must develop stewardship in humility and cultivate the responsibility of trusteeship. God has appointed us as trustees of his message and other possessions and not as “owners.” Ownership is *God’s*. It is to be shared with other humans, animals and plants for their well being. Christians talk about stewardship but in reality it remains limited to “giving to the church and missions.” We need to visualize its wider implication in today’s world.

The challenge before us is to catch new visions and dream new dreams in repentance and renewal, deeper commitment to Christ, Christian openness, conversion as God’s work, and shedding the arrogance of possession. Let us train ourselves and our sons and daughters to proclaim God’s message in such a spirit!

May the following chapters which grew out of our our presentations, discussions and deliberations facilitate us and others to “see visions and dream dreams” for the sake of the Gospel in a changing world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century!