

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is not merely an elucidation of Christian communities in the contemporary context. Rather, Edinburgh 1910 is being set forth as a construing tool. Hence the paper will be elaborative on certain aspects and diminutive on others. Initially, essential facts and observations concerning Edinburgh 1910 are presented in order to help the reader have a brief panorama of the conference. This is followed by an analysis of the present mission and ministry understanding of the churches in India in order to see the Christian communities in the light of the spirit and the purpose of Edinburgh 1910. The last section concludes with remarks from the author's perspective.

A PANORAMA OF EDINBURGH

It was well said by John R. Mott, the chairman of World Missionary Conference, that Edinburgh was “... the most notable gathering in the interest of the worldwide expansion of Christianity ever held, not only in missionary annals, but in all Christian annals.”¹ It was, indeed, a notable gathering as it bore various eventual collaborative endeavors in the protestant churches in the world.

Objectives of the Conference

The constitution of the conference chose the following exclusive subjects for discussion: (i) only to deal with missionary work among non-Christian people, (ii) only to address the most urgent and immediate problems faced by the Church, and (iii) no room for any formation of opinions on ecclesiastical or doctrinal matters. Since the conference had its focus on international missions in the beginning of the last century, it is very relevant for us to revisit Edinburgh 1910 in order to assess outcomes of the conference in the light of the present Christian communities in the contemporary context.

It is better to evaluate this historical gathering as unbiased as possible, though it was later attributed by the ecumenical scholars as the symbolic starting point of the contemporary ecumenical movement.² The author of this paper does not want to consider the conference as an exclusive one for ecumenists, as it brought together people from a wide range of theological and ecclesiological affiliations, by setting aside their doctrinal variations and united them for a common missionary cause. It was a world-wide missionary conference. The Ecumenism that originated in 1895 and the evangelical revivals in the eighteenth century both had a significant role in the 1910 Edinburgh conference and were impacted by it.

Evaluation of the Conference

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¹ C. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott 1865-1955: A Biography* (Geneva and Grand Rapids: WCC and Eerdmans, 1979), 342.

² J. C. Pollock, *The Keswick Story. The Authorised History of the Keswick Convention*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1964), 131.

This paper does not intend to cover all the details of Edinburgh 1910 and is limited by the given topic. Following are some of the observations of the significant positive points.

- 1) The aim of the organizing committee was “a united effort to subject the plans and methods of the whole missionary enterprise to searching investigation and to coordinate missionary experience from all parts of the world.”³
- 2) There was a common focus on addressing “Evangelization of the world in this generation” by the cooperation of the institutionalized Protestant churches.
- 3) The preparatory committee for the conference had their first meeting at Oxford which consisted of eighteen international delegates and had set clear subjects on which the Conference would concentrate and present the same after a careful inquiry and study.
- 4) The committee had commissioned J.H. Oldham as the full-time Secretary for the preparation of the Conference.
- 5) The people of the conference saw a real confluence of the power of the Gospel and the power of modern science, which convinced them that the world could be evangelized in their generation.⁴
- 6) The conference attempted a systematic and careful study of the missionary problems of the world.⁵
- 7) Activities of the conference made the delegates and participants recognize the missionary movement as the heart of the Church.
- 8) It brought together people from a wide range of theological and ecclesiological persuasions, united in a commitment that the missionary cause was so important that they could set aside their doctrinal differences in order to focus on the challenges presented by the worldwide mission.
- 9) The famous challenging and thoughtful invitation of Azariah “Give us friends,” was later considered as a prophetic phrase for the later developments.⁶
- 10) Eight commissions were set to facilitate the focus of the conference.

Following are the points considered negative or unhelpful for the long term objectives of the conference, that the author has observed in the light of the conference:

- 1) Of the 1200 delegates to Edinburgh 1910, some 1,170 were from Europe and only about thirty delegates from India, China and Japan with no delegates from either Africa or Latin America.⁷ “There is no sign that these delegates were expected to have a *distinctive* or original contribution to the conference.”⁸ There is no indication that the issues raised by Azariah and other Asians were entertained any further at Edinburgh.

³ Keith Clements, *Faith on the Frontiers: A Life of J.H. Oldham* (Edinburgh and Geneva: T. & T. Clark and WCC, 1999), 77

⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 337.

⁵ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (New York and Edinburgh: Orbis and T. & T. Clark, 2002), 59.

⁶ Bassham, R C., *Mission theology : 1948-1975, years of worldwide creative tension, ecumenical, evangelical and Roman Catholic*. (Pasadena, California : William Carey Library, 1979), 18

⁷ Kenneth R. Ross, “Edinburgh 1910 — Its Place in History”, Manuscript, 5, http://www.towards2010.org.uk/downloads_int/1910-PlaceHistory.pdf (Nov. 2009)

⁸ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (New York and Edinburgh: Orbis and T. & T. Clark, 2002). 58.

- 2) Though it was intended for International scope and objectives, discussions were more on subjects related to intercontinental cross-cultural mission, as it was in the preceding conferences.
- 3) An immature conclusion of a division between “fully missionised lands” and “not yet fully missionised lands” was made. This distinction was considered obsolete in later days, as Walls points out, “Today some of what in 1910 appeared to be “fully missionized lands” are most obviously the prime mission fields of the world.”⁹

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES - A REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION

In this section, the author intends to revisit some of the emphases observed in the Edinburgh Conference in order to appraise their impacts on the Christian communities of the present context.

Reflection on the Evangelization of the World in this Generation

Mott even before the Edinburgh conference, in his writing made it clear that the above watchword does not mean conversion of the whole world.¹⁰

During the conference, there were few predictive and theological reflections made by the dignitaries which confirm that Edinburgh did not intend to promote an impractical slogan. In his speech, the Archbishop of Canterbury cautiously said, “It is dangerous, it is perhaps presumptuous, to dogmatize too decisively about the particular opportunities of one generation or epoch as contrasted with another.”¹¹ However, it sounded otherwise to some of the participating dignitaries. Mirbt, on behalf of German mission said that Germany would stay out of the project. He sounded that watchword was hasty and agencies were inadequate. He said, “But our German matter-of-fact way, and the conviction that only through solid work will find lasting success, prevented us from taking up the program “the evangelization of the world in this generation.”¹²

Has world evangelization been successful? An answer cannot be easily given. The evangelistic efforts of the last generation Christian missional communities have accomplished much and hence evangelization is moving forward. On the other side, the Church of God is not found to be growing globally. Over the past 100 years, Christianity has experienced a profound southern shift in its geographical centre of gravity.¹³ In 1900 the global Christian population was 35% of the world’s population, 1970 and 2005 it was 33%, and predicted in 2050 to be 35%.¹⁴ This fact does not mean that the efforts of the past were futile. This is an

⁹ Walls, *The Cross Cultural*, 237.

¹⁰ John R. Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in this Generation*, (New York: Student Volunteer Movement, 1901), 6. http://www.archive.org/stream/evangelizationof00mottuoft/evangelizationof00mottuoft_djvu.txt (Dec. 2009).

¹¹ Archbishop of Canterbury spoke on The Central Place of Missions in the Life of the Church on 14th June, *The History and Record of the Conference*, Digitalized for Microsoft Corporation by the Internet Archive in 2007, University of California Libraries, 148.

¹² Marburgh Mirbt, spoke on The Extent and Characteristics of German Missions, on 17 June, *The History and Record of the Conference*, Digitalized for Microsoft Corporation by the Internet Archive in 2007, University of California Libraries, 217.

¹³ Todd M. Johnson, “Christianity in Global Context: Trends and Statistics, Center for the Study of Global Christianity,” Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, <http://pewforum.org/events/051805/global-christianity.pdf> (Dec. 2009)

¹⁴ Johnson, “Christianity.”

indicator depicting that global evangelization is active and progressing through the human efforts, though numbers are discouraging.

Reflection on Unity of the Christians

Unquestionably, Edinburgh 1910 intended to unify the churches, though it had widely discussed on unity of missionaries. Lloyd later observed that Edinburgh had its influence on the union of the Churches, which it had discussed little, was greater than its influence on missions and was the purpose of its gathering.¹⁵

Azariah, as he was addressing on 20th June, expressed his anguish during the 1910 conference as follows.

The problem of race relationships is one of the most serious problems confronting the Church to-day. The bridging of the gulf between the East and West, and the attainment of a greater unity and common ground in Christ as the great Unifier of mankind, is one of the deepest needs of our time.¹⁶

In his speech he pleaded with missionaries and church leaders from the West to build a “relationship” and extend “co-operation” with the nationals for the purpose of unity in India in order that the collective mission force may have better accomplishments in His Mission. His appeal for unity was on the basis of what he had witnessed between two races.

Eventual evolving of WCC, in its article III declares its commitment to the unity as follows,

The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.¹⁷

The recent profile of WCC recommitments their value for unity by declaring, “In a world increasingly torn by economic and social inequality, political conflict, religious tension, violence and environmental destructions, the WCC commits itself in discipleship to Christ, heeding his call ‘that they may all be one’ by serving as a voice and catalyst for unity in the church and for life in all its fullness in the world.”¹⁸

The origin of World Evangelical Alliance had its beginning with Christians from ten countries which met in London in 1846 for the purpose of launching, in their own words, “a

¹⁵ R. Lloyd, *The Church of England in the Twentieth Century*, 1 vols., (London: Longmans, 1950), 204.

¹⁶ Addressed by V.S Azariah on The Problem of Co-operation Between Foreign and Native Workers at the Edinburgh Conference, *The History and Records of the Conference*, Digitized Copy from University of California Libraries, 306.

¹⁷ Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/porto-alegre-2006/1-statements-documents-adopted/institutional-issues/constitution-and-rules-as-adopted.html>.

¹⁸ Profile of the World Council of Churches, *World Council of Churches Annual Review 2006*, 4. http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2007pdfs/WCC_Review_for_web.pdf (Dec. 2009).

new thing in church history, a definite organization for the expression of unity amongst Christian individuals belonging to different churches...”¹⁹

How much of a unity factor is being found appreciable among Christian communities today in India? Well known Ecumenist theologian Newbigin warned of the danger of disunity within the churches in India, that was hibernating and was a hindrance for the mission.

It is His purpose that the Gospel should be preached to all nations, and that all men should be brought into one family in Jesus Christ. His purpose looks to a real End, and therefore requires our real decisions. If we misconstrue His patience, and think that there is infinity of time for debate while we perpetuate before the world the scandal of our dismemberment of the Body of Christ, we deceive ourselves.²⁰

Howell, shares his concern on Christian unity as he writes on persecution. “But I hear from responsible church leaders how disunited the Church is.”²¹ Newbigin insists that the Mission of the Church cannot be accomplished unless unity is found in the Church.²²

Even today this “unity” issue stands unanswered before the readers. Caste, language, economy, and education are the factors through which disunity are being found anchored within the local churches. Denominational fanaticism, doctrinal dogmatism, and ritualism are the other factors which make the Church in India fragmented.

“Discrimination within the Church is a painful experience,” Bishop George Punnakottil of Kothamangalam told the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI) in the plenary assembly as he shared about castism within the Catholic churches. Bishop Malayappan Chinnappa of Vellore, a dalit prelate, said he had to face upper-caste anger as he rose in life. He said he still notes resentment among Christians in Tamil Nadu against giving dalits equality in the liturgy.²³ Bishop Dr D.K. Sahu, NCCI General Secretary, commented:

The Indian church has to make a confession first. If you are alienated in the society and you become a Christian, you are alienated again. We tell them, “if you become a Christian then there is no discrimination,” but once they become a Christian they are looked down upon by Christians of higher castes. A higher caste Christian will never marry a Dalit Christian, yet we say we are all one.²⁴

How many Church of South and North India churches support missionaries serving in remote places sent by non CSI and CNI churches and missions? How many Assemblies of God churches support non-AG missionaries and missions in India? Obvious walls between

¹⁹ About WAE, <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/aboutwea/>.

²⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church: A Defence of the South India Scheme*, (London:SCM Press, 1960), 15.

²¹ Richard Howell. “An Overview and Plea: Christian Persecution in India,” <http://www.2000.org/re90719.htm> (Dec. 2009).

²² Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 170-174

²³ UCAN Report: IA9705.0968, Issued on: March 27, 1998, http://conversions.hindunet.org/castism/castism_in_church.htm

²⁴ Indian bishops speak out on caste discrimination, posted 1 Oct 2009 by Ekklesia <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/10315>.

Baptists are another issue. Criticism of this kind does not exclude other denominational churches from the reality of disunity, though they speak unity in words. Gairdner said in the conference that Christian unity must be centered on faith in Christ and His Lordship for reaching out to the unreached.²⁵ Unity is spoken by various Christian communities at various occasions, while being seldom applied for unity in mission as sounded by Azariah. The advocating of the Ecumenists, liberals, and evangelicals for unity should cross their iron, but invisible boundaries and make the Body of Christ in India active for the missional causes and the call of the Church at large.

Another detrimental factor for unity is prideful mega churches, which look low at the Meta independent churches. As and when persecution breaks in certain states a call for unity would become louder from every community of Christian faith. Associations and federations will amplify their call for unity. This unity in structures is an incomplete unity and not Christ centered. Azariah's call for unity was for "mission" not for security, identity or for protection.

Reflection on First and Third World Mission Forces Working Together

One of the two speeches of Azariah needs to be highlighted for the readers. His insistence in the speech was "spiritual friendship" between the First and Third world missionaries in missions. After an introductory insist on unity is made he goes further, to spiritual friendship. He said, "Through all the ages to come the Indian Church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and self-denying labours of the missionary body. 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!"²⁶

According to him, spiritual friendship brings two races together to work, worship, and learn mutually by two extreme races. When he asked for "friends," apparently it was a plea from his part for a mutual respect, recognition, learning, and support from the giving and sending nations of his time. During the 1910 conference colonialism was still in full swing. Europe was considered to be the "centre" of the Church, with "missions" at the world's periphery. However, Azariah's appeal should not be considered as an exclusive alarm against imperialism and colonialism. It was also an alarm against the Slavism that was imbedding in some of the Indian missionaries. Indian churches and missions and mission partners in the West need to appraise their kind of mission-relationship in the light of what Azariah had warned of in 1910.

The shift of centrality of Christianity from the First world to the Third though real, yet the missions cannot be fully carried out by the Third world countries alone. The author believes that this is God's orchestration for a unity in the Church to carry out the Mission of God world-wide. Change in the centrality of mission though certainly has brought the spirit of indignity among the third world; still imperialism, colonialism, and Slavism are hibernating in the global mission forces. Some of the following indicators confirm this danger among the mission forces in India.

²⁵ W. H. T. Gairdner, *Edinburgh, 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference (1910)*, (Montona: Kessinger Publishing, 2007), 12

²⁶ Addressed by V.S Azariah on The Problem of Co-operation Between Foreign and Native Workers at the Edinburgh Conference, *The History and Records of the Conference*, Digitized Copy from University of California Libraries, 306-15.

Earlier imperialism and colonialisms were practised by some of the missionaries from the West. This scenario though is not prevalent in present days, yet some of the nationals in India who have been either appointed or heavily funded by the West carry out “bossism” which the author considers as the imitated imperialism or colonialism.

The author and some of his Western friends together had ministered in several occasions in India, where they had noticed that some of the nationals demonstrated unreasonable interest toward leaders from the West. Followed by these programs, it was shared to him by his friends from the west about the mails that were sent by the nationals for dollar connections. Some Indian Christian leaders who consider that anything comes from the West must be superior, still exist. These leaders still live in the slavery sphere.

There are some ecclesiastical leaders from West who still prefer to instruct Indians as to what they should do in India, rather than working along with the Indians. Not often Western missionaries would like to work under the leadership of Indian leaders. Few visits to India and connections made by some Westerners make them think that they know “everything” about Indian missions, which makes them to exercise the “big brother” authority. Their God given ability and position in “giving” create a “boss” spirit in them. Even this mindset is an indicator of the existence of imperialism. The author gratefully acknowledges many exemptions that serve in partnership with a Christlike attitude with Indian missional leaders.

Reflecting on Local Church being the Agents of the Kingdom of God

The Church is called to bear witness to the Kingdom of God. This calling makes Christian communities in India to think beyond propagating the ‘salvation through Christ.’ Peterson made the attendees of 1910 conference to be mindful of the comprehensive task of the Church.

We hold that God’s promise is that we shall inherit the earth. We hold it to be His purpose that we should fill the earth, not only with holiness and righteousness, but with the machinery of civilisation, and that the tribes and people of the earth, with all the elements of worth and of human well-being that are realised or realisable among them, should be incorporated in the more comprehensive whole of the Kingdom of God.²⁷

Further, Coffin enhances the understanding of the Kingdom of God in his speech as follows.

This Kingdom is a redeemed social order under the reign of the Christ like God in which every relationship is Christ like, and each individual and social group the family, the trade organisation, the State comes not to be ministered unto, but to minister, is perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect, and the whole human society incarnates the love of God once embodied in Jesus of Nazareth.²⁸

Mission, is all about an exclusive Kingdom that revolves exclusively around Christ Jesus. This exclusive Kingdom is inclusive of both literal and spiritual reign of Christ. If

²⁷ W. P. Paterson, Christianity, The Final and Universal Religion, Address delivered on 15th June. The History and Records of the Conference, Digitilized Copy from University of California Libraries, 159.

²⁸ Henry Sloan Coffin, As an Ethical Ideal, an address given on 15th June, The History and Records of the Conference, Digitilized Copy from University of California Libraries, 164.

churches cannot demonstrate the spiritual-Kingdom as they serve on this earth, how could they be able to justify a literal Kingdom yet to come? Cross is a symbol of sacrifice not security. Christ is a symbol of condescension not equality.

Most of the Indian churches today are the victims of the number game. Professional churches²⁹ are the current attractions for many church leaders. Count heads for growth – is the mindset of most of the ecclesiastical leaders. A warning in this regard is well given by Arles,

... Christian Church should not appear as another self promoting, self seeking and self imposing community. Rather it should be the selfless, serving, enabling, advocating, vicarious community uplifting others. The theologian must sketch out such a self image for the church and enable to en flesh the theory into lifestyle. The missiologist must chalk out the action methodology to accomplish such goals of the missional activity.³⁰

A country where 28.6% of the total population are below poverty line,³¹ religious violence is being found hiking every day, unrest and bomb blasts have become common, crime rate remains a threat, and religious fanaticism enhances boundaries; has greater opportunities for Mission than the lands of prosperity and peace. Most of the churches and missions in India interpret these opportunities as obstacles. How could Christian communities in India remain a source of healing and reconciliation?

Extremists, militants, terrorists have now become a major threat to the peace in India. Violent deaths have become a commonplace.³² Increasing boundaries of violence in the world was central in discussions of the participants gathered together in the 7th Consultation of the Uniting and United Churches held in Driebergen in the Netherlands in September 2002. They challenged the churches to come forward to be united as a motivation for broken and violent world to seek for healing and reconciliation through Christ.

In the face of such apparent fragmentation, the Church must witness—by what it *does* and what it *is*—to the wholeness of God. In a time when talk of war is so pervasive, the Church must witness to the peace of God. At a moment when the powers of the world seem to lack the capacity for self-criticism, even our willingness to confess our brokenness is a witness to the sovereignty of God.... Our prayer at the consultation was that our Churches, timid and fractured as they often are, would be empowered by the Spirit, and thereby witness to God's

²⁹ These kind of churches have an unhealthy preoccupation with programs, techniques, methodologies, and procedures. It is so wise in its own conceits that it has shifted its reliance from God to programs, statistical analysis and strategy consultations – defined by Wong Chan Kok and Church Lowe, *Ministry in Modern Singapore*, (Singapore: Singapore Bible College 1997), 94-95.

³⁰ Siga Arles, "Mission Challenge – Bigger than ever in Asia," *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology*, (Vol 16, Nos. 1&2), June & Dec. 2008, 4.

³¹ Data refer to the most recent year available during 2000-2007. Human and income poverty: developing countries / Population living below national poverty line), Human Development Indices: A statistical update 2008, UNDP, accessed on Dec., 2009.

³² Homi Burjor Dhalla, "The Role of Religion in Overcoming Communal Disharmony and Violence in India," *Dialogue & Alliance*, (vol. 7, No. 1 1993 · Spring/Summer) 113.

power that tears down walls of hostility and brings together those who once were enemies.³³

Ministering to the persecutors is another avenue where Christian communities can exhibit the principles of the Kingdom of God. The content of most of the Christian bulletins and newsletters call the Christian community for seeking security by the way of joining hands together against the acts of the outlaw. The King of the Kingdom was willing to suffer and forgive the afflictors. Stephen, an adherent to the same Kingdom exercised the same principle of his King. Christian communities need to dedicate themselves as non-violent and non-resisting apostles to the cruel communities who are outside the Kingdom for whom, also Jesus had died on the cross.

Christian communities can speak of His Kingdom only as God commended it when His Son laid down His life for us. The supreme ideal of the King of the Kingdom cannot be proven by logic; it must be demonstrated by redeeming, forbearing, long suffering, and sacrificial love by the Kingdom community.

Reflecting on the Composition of Local Churches

The Archbishop said as he was delivering his speech in the conference of June 14th, “But be quite sure it is my single thought tonight that the place of missions in the life of the Church must be the central place, and none other. That is what matters.”³⁴ On the same day Speer said in his address, “The testimony of the growth of the Christian Church in the world has been an ever-fresh and expanding expression of the consciousness of the fact of Christ’s leadership in this enterprise.”³⁵

The conference insisted that every member of the Church must own the purpose, responsibility and mission of the Church and have a nonnegotiable, undivided and pre-eminent leadership of the Lord over Her. The Conference was conscious of the role of the Church in the Mission of God and the need for every member of the Church to be true to their being and doing.

The local church is God’s agency in the world, transacting God’s business. Any relationship or responsibility incumbent upon the universal church must eventually find its outworking through the localized counterpart.³⁶ This makes the readers to retrospect on the kind of churches that they have part in the prospect of present and future challenges.

Mike Hill, the Bishop of the Church of England in Bristol, was leading a seminar for church leaders on how to implement effective change within a spiritual environment. He told Christians, “The Kingdom is a very dynamic reality and if the church is supposed to be a foretaste of the Kingdom, something of that DNA of the Kingdom has to be reflected in the

³³ Message from the Consultation unpublished. (Aruna Gnanadason RELIGION AND VIOLENCE: A CHALLENGE TO THE UNITY OF THE CHURCHES, Political Theology, pp 64, Atlas collection, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=4&hid=11&sid=6e3708d5-af43-49fc-b090-2e95bd7a2b83%40sessionmgr12>)

³⁴ Address delivered on “The Central Place of Missions in the Life of the Church,” on June 14th. The History and Records of the Conference, Digitalized Copy from University of California Libraries, 150.

³⁵ Address delivered on “Christ the Leader of Missionary Work of the Church,” The History and Records of the Conference, Digitalized Copy from University of California Libraries, 152

³⁶ Earl D. Radmacher, *What The Church All About*, (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 317.

life of our churches.”³⁷ The Faith and Order of WCC states the following as essential nature of the Church.³⁸ Features from their document can be considered as DNA of churches.

- 1) The Church is centered and grounded in the Word of God.
- 2) Every member participates in the priesthood of the whole Church.
- 3) Christ is the abiding head of his body and at the same time the one who, by the presence of the Spirit, gives life to it. He who cleanses and sanctifies the body (cf. Eph 5:26) is also the one in whom “we, though many, are one body” (Rom 12:5; cf. 1 Cor 12:12).
- 4) The Holy Spirit so enlivens the community that it becomes a herald of, and an instrument for, that general transformation of the whole cosmos for which, all creation groans (cf. Rom. 8:22-23), the new heavens and new earth (cf. Rev. 21:1).
- 5) The biblical notion of *koinonia* has become central in the quest for a common understanding of the nature of the Church and its visible unity.

Metropolitan Geevarghese Coorilos, who responded to the document on “The Nature and Mission of the Church,” writes that the nature of the church in the context of social challenges in India should be part of the progressive civil society initiatives such as the subaltern movements of the Dalits and tribal communities.³⁹

The author suggests few essential components that are to be considered as readers think about DNA of churches in India.

The first one is “what constitutes a local church?” This question needs to be answered first of all. The Edinburgh conference frequently echoed the foundational message of salvation exclusively through Christ alone that was to be proclaimed by the Church to the non-Christian world. Eccles, a medical missionary, as he was sharing about the requirements for the medical missionaries serving in the non-Christian world, said that nurses apart from professional experiences, should have a personal knowledge of salvation.⁴⁰

The Archbishop further said,

If the work is to be done, we must make men know and feel it, and make them live as men who know and feel, not in abstract theory, but in living, burning with the fact that there is no other name under heaven, given to man, in whom and through whom, we or any other folk, can receive health and salvation, but only through the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁴¹

³⁷ Maria Mackey, “Church,” *Christian Today*,

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/churches.need.kingdom.dna.says.bishop.of.bristol/18847.htm> (Dec. 2009)

³⁸ Faith and Order Paper 198, World Council of Churches, Geneva,

http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p2/FO2005_198_en.pdf

³⁹ Geevarghese Coorilos, “Nature and Mission of the Church”: An Indian Perspective, Panel Discussion on “Nature and Mission of the Church” Faith and Order Plenary Commission, Crete, 7-13 October, 2009.

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/x-other-documents-from-conferences-and-meetings/plenary-wcc-commission-meeting-crete-2009/the-nature-and-mission-of-the-church-presentation-by-metropolitan-geevarghese-coorilos.html>

⁴⁰ W. M. Adam Eccles, spoke in a Sectional Conference connected to WCC in Edinburgh on 20th June 1910, *The History and Records of the Conference*, Digitilized Copy from University of California Libraries, 115.

⁴¹ Archbishop of Canterbury, *The Central Place of missions in the Life of the Church*, 14 June, *The History and Records of the Conference*, Digitilized Copy from University of California Libraries, 150.

How could the people of the “Church of the God of the Bible” propagate the uniqueness of Christ’s contributions to the world? Unless they believe, accept, practice, and commit for the Salvation that comes exclusively through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second one is contextualized local churches for better mission: How local churches can be contextualized in their kind, nature, function, and ministries in circumstances of changes of cultural-contexts in India?

The movement of contextualization during the seventies led us to look into the well of non-European cultures for new light.⁴² For the readers to “evangelize the world in this generation” as Edinburgh determined, there is a need for recognizing the challenges that the present generation interacts in their contemporary world. Bevans well describes the present distinct generation and insists the need for holding on the “constants” intelligently in the present context. “Our task is the same; the ‘great commission’ which is still valid; the *constants*, as Roger Schroeder and I have suggested, of the centrality of Christ, the necessity of the church, of an eschatological vision, an understanding of salvation, the human person, of human culture, all still obtain. But these *constants* are in *context*.”⁴³

Apparently churches in India, in the light of their spread, growth and nature, need to have both inter and intra-cultural missions. The Edinburgh conference was mindful of cross-culturalism as missionaries were sent from the West. For this reason acculturation was considered as one of the most primary qualifications for the cross-cultural missionaries.

The readers often heard alarms given by various missional leaders that churches in India must exit from “Westernized” gallery and set in within Indian culture. Is it a real issue today? Is it an issue based on the cultures of the West and the East? Contemporary contextual culture is the issue before the Church today. Contemporary contextual cultures are the fruit of the phenomena of the global village⁴⁴ and the impact of various advancements upon the present Indian context. These impacts have brought atypical changes in the sphere of cultures in India.

The enculturation of the present generation with new identities is a challenge today. Urban syncretized-culture⁴⁵ overarches all other cultural identities of the urbanites. Migrations of the tribal communities in to the cities for various reasons, their dwelling with other cultured communities, their eventual revisits to their respective regions, and their intermarriages have caused numerous changes in cultural compositions and identities. What should be the indigenous-culture of a local church in India? This question cannot be answered, unless each local church would come forward to trace for it, in their given context.

The third component is the nurturing care given in the local churches in order to develop the people of God with spiritual gifts, abilities, skills, and passion for the purpose of God’s mission. Nurturing releases the biotic potential,⁴⁶ which God has put into every local

⁴² Wong Wai Ching Angela, member of Presidium of CCA, Central Committee, WCC, spoke in Asia Plenary session from 26th Aug. to 3rd Sep. 2002 on Challenges of mission in a pluralistic world.

⁴³ Stephen Bevans, Issues in Mission Today: Challenges for Reflection at Edinburgh 2010. <http://www.brothersofholycross.com/MissionOfHope/Articles%20on%20Theology%20of%20Mission%20Today/Stephen%20Bevans%20Issues%20in%20Mission%20Today.rtf> (Dec. 2009).

⁴⁴ McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media*. (Gingko Press, 1964, 2003) 6.

⁴⁵ This is a blend or mixture of the cultural expression of the peoples of the earth.

⁴⁶ Inherent capacity of the Church to reproduce and survive.

church for its growth. Three noteworthy missiological aspects involved in nurturing people of God in the Indian context are “building up the body of Christ so that each part . . . supplies its gift or gifts to the whole;” “the process of bringing individual Christians and the Christian community as a whole to maturity;” “the preparation to withstand the fire of Satan’s persecution . . . relationally mentoring new believers to live out Christian principles in their lives . . .”⁴⁷ The nurturing ministries of the local churches must result in empowering Christians for Christ’s ministry with Christ’s attitude.

RESPONSE AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper is certainly limited to a few subjects that were focused during the conference in order that the contemporary Christian communities may be challenged by revisiting them. Following are the conclusive challenges presented for the readers:

Response to a Call for Evangelizing the World in this Generation

Evangelizing the world needs to be understood in the light of the “great commission of disciple making” of the Lord. There is a need which arises today to describe the word “discipling” in the present day context in order to activate “evangelization” precisely. World evangelization should result in discipling the nations. Faced with the fuzzy use of the term in the much popular literatures and preaching, a closer look at the New Testament meaning of the word, together with its implications for missions, is now overdue.⁴⁸ In Acts 11:26, Luke accounts that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. This makes it clear to the readers that disciples are not part of a church community rather the church community itself as whole, to be a band of disciples. The assumption that Christians were committed disciples in Acts, harmonizes with the absence of the word “disciple” in the Epistolary section of the New Testament. Evangelization and discipling were inseparable for apostles.

Evangelization is an essential and integrated part of the good news of the Kingdom. It begins as non-Christians who are out-churched reached and ends when the same community that is then made to be a Christ-like community. The word disciple in Greek is *mathetes* and it has the basic meaning of a pupil, apprentice, adherent.⁴⁹ These learning-adherents are further exhorted in the Epistles to imitate Christ (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; cf. Phil 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:7, 9.). Christ-likeness is the destination of the spiritual journey of a believer of Christ which begins from the time of hearing the good news of the Lord Jesus. For this reason the Church in India needs to remain as a consistent witness for the good news of the Kingdom in order to motivate the hearers to respond to the good news of the Lord Jesus and to willingly undertake their spiritual journey of discipleship for becoming Christ-like communities.

Following are some of the suggestions.

- 1) A biblical theology of evangelization in Indian context needs to be defined.
- 2) Churches should recognize their missional calling.

⁴⁷ Van Rheenen, 1996, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 154.

⁴⁸ C. Peter Wagner, "What Is "Making Disciples?"" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 9 (Fall 1973), 285.

⁴⁹ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, compiled by Walter Bauer, trans. and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. "*mathetes*," 486-87.

- 3) Effective discipling of every respondent of the good news of the Lord should be seriously considered by every church in India.
- 4) Churches in India should recognize the need for remaining as witnesses in the present crucial context.
- 5) Churches must realise the need for commissioning every Christian and Christian home to remain as witnessing-outlets in the society for the Lord Jesus Christ. Being a community of disciples, local churches should undertake the challenge of transforming their given pastorate holistically by remaining as consistent witnesses to the pluralistic society.

Response to a Call for Unity

Diversity is part of the human society of any kind. The Apostolic band had diverse personalities, leadership skills and even doctrinal understandings. But it was the “Mission” that was given by Jesus that made them to maintain unity in the midst of diversity. A clear vision for mission had the effect of a unified cause among the early churches. “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.... As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:17-18, 21-23).

The hibernating disharmony among the churches in India is a disgrace that impedes the mission given by Jesus to the Christian communities. In the light of early discussions made in this paper, the author would like to suggest the following.

- 1) Churches and mission agencies should come forward to build consensus on common mission objectives in order that unity among them may reflect the apostolic days.
- 2) Need for building missional partnerships is essential for better results in the mission. Mutual trust and respect are vital for partnership efforts.
- 3) Efforts are to be made by the key ecclesiastical leaders to build harmony between the denominations and mission agencies.
- 4) Retaining purity in mission-motives is essential for Indian churches, which the church leaders need to think about.
- 5) Nationals should attract the Internationals by their virtues of integrity, honesty, and productivity. Internationals need to willingly take a servant-subordinating role as they connect with the Nationals.

Response to a Call for Kingdom Conscious Mission

Bruce writes,

In the apostolic preaching both present and future aspects of the Kingdom had a place. According to the apostles’ teaching, Christians have already been transferred from the dominion of darkness into the Kingdom of Christ (Col. i. 13) and receive “a Kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. xii. 28); yet they are heirs of a future Kingdom (Jas. ii. 5 etc.), for which they work together (Col. iv.

11), and their present suffering for it makes them worthy of it when it comes (2 Thess. i. 5; cf. Rom. viii. 17; 2 Tim. ii 12).⁵⁰

As he pointed out, Christians are right now no more in the dominion of darkness but yet being placed among the people who are in the dominion of darkness. It is mandatory for Christians to exhibit the reign of their King by demonstrating the love of the same King. Doors for the Kingdom ministries are numerable, as the dominions of darkness have evoked numerous spiritual, moral, social, and communal evils. Christian communities need to act as the agents for peace making, community rehabilitations, non-violence, building the Nation, and promoters of moral values, and store-houses of the love and compassion of the Lord Jesus. Some suggestions are as follows:

- 1) Kingdom centred spirituality needs to be taught to every single Christian.
- 2) Christian missions and churches need to promote possible avenues and opportunities that Christian communities have before them to accomplish the Kingdom business.
- 3) Christian communities should come forward to act as the bridges and peace makers when religious violence interrupts the society.
- 4) The reign of the King in their lives should be exhibited by the Christian communities by virtues of Christ imitated life styles by the churches, mission agencies, and the individuals.

Response to a Call for Adequate Composition of Local Churches

As a fire exists by burning so does the Church exist by mission; if there is no burning there is no fire; if there is no mission there is no Church.⁵¹ The DNA of a local church, which is a collective potential, should have certain non-negotiable genes that can make a local church to be an effective part of the Kingdom affairs and thus be able to accomplish the Mission of God in their given contexts. Discipling the nations, demonstrating unity and harmony among the Christian communities, and being aware of Kingdom business on this earth are the key assignments that churches in India have before them. What kind of DNA do the churches need to possess in order to accomplish these assignments? Some of the suggestions are as follows:

- 1) Pre-eminence to the infallible and inspired Scriptures.
- 2) Culturally relevant worship by the saints.
- 3) Pastoral care and catering to the flock for a Christ centred unity.
- 4) Empowering every Christian to become a faithful steward of the Kingdom affairs in the midst of any kind of political and social contexts.
- 5) Passion for a holistic transformation of the communities.
- 6) Vision driven apostolic leadership.
- 7) Charisma that attracts the non-Christian communities.
- 8) A commitment for spiritual development for every Christian in order that they may remain as the salt and the light in their given contexts.

CONCLUSION

⁵⁰ F. F. Bruce, "The Kingdom of God: A Biblical Survey," *Evangelical Quarterly*, 15 (1943), 267. http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/kingdom_bruce.pdf (Dec. 2009).

⁵¹ Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931) 108.

The Edinburgh conference was unquestionably a historical mile stone in the journey of the world history of missions. It was later attributed as possibly the most significant missionary event of the twentieth century by Rouse.⁵² This Conference had triggered a sense of urgency, need for collaborative efforts of mission resources, emphasis on missionaries to make every Christian to undertake the responsibility of the Mission of God, a need for a paradigm to reach the non-Christian world, and the centrality of the Kingdom concepts in missions. Every church and mission organization needs to revisit the subject matters of the conference in order to appraise their accomplishment with respect to the dreams and desires, of their last generation ecclesiastical leaders.

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⁵² Ruth Rouse, *The World's Student Christian Federation*, (London: SCM Press, 1948), 128.

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