

# **DEVELOPING MISSION CURRICULUM IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION TO IMPACT THE LOCAL CHURCHES FOR MISSIONS IN INDIA TODAY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Centre for Mission Studies of the Union Biblical Seminary has taken a noble step to celebrate the 100 years of Protestant missions since Edinburgh 1910 by organizing a Mission Conference to look at the reshaping of missions in India due to the first world mission gathering. My task here is to look at the mission curricula adopted in Indian theological institutions to educate the churches and their leaders for missions. However, as I write from a remote corner of the North East India where there is no accessibility to good theological libraries, documents and even a modern communication through internet, I am concentrating on one premier degree giving body for theological education - the Senate of Serampore College/University. I have no easy access even to it, but I intend to draw from my personal experience under this Senate as a theological student (both B.D. and M.Th. degrees), as a social development worker, as a missionary, as a church administrator and as a theological teacher in two institutions affiliated to this Senate.

I truly believe that theology is the backbone of the church life. I also believe, with that conviction the theological institutions have been established – to give bones to our churches. We train our pastors and other full time ministers in those theological colleges and seminaries. Therefore, apart from the Spirit of God leading and molding its members, our churches are the reflections of how our leaders got and developed their theological insights from their theological ministerial training in those theological institutions. Whether our theology is in the right direction should be seen in the churches’ mission activities, because mission has been rightly called the “mother of theology”.<sup>1</sup>

I would like to approach this in three parts: introspection, retrospection and suggestion towards developing Mission Curriculum. In the first part, a quick survey of the background, nature and content of the Edinburgh 1910 Conference will be done. I feel it necessary to mention the background of the conference, even though it may sound like a bit of a ritual. In retrospection, I would like to do a general observation on the Indian church life, especially in the area of mission and evangelism, and then reflect on the present and the future curricula for missions in our theological institutions. I strongly believe that the churches’ stand for mission and evangelism will reveal whether our theological education is being relevant or adequate as the leaders of the churches are being trained by these theological institutions.

## **INTROSPECTION**

This section looks back at the history of the conference as a starting point for further reflection.

### **The Background of the Edinburgh 1910 Conference**

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<sup>1</sup> David J. Bosch referred to the affirmation of the contemporary New Testament scholars’ in agreement with the systematic theologian, Martin Kahler who made this statement, in *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 16.

A worldwide ecumenical conference of Protestant missionaries took place in Edinburgh, Scotland, 14 - 23 June, 1910.<sup>2</sup> John R. Mott was the Chairman of the Conference. It was preceded by five interdenominational conferences convened by societies for foreign missions in both Great Britain and the United States. The first conference held in 1888 in London, England was the first attempt to study and distribute information regarding missionary work throughout the world. This was followed in 1900 by a larger, "ecumenical," meeting of delegates sent from societies for foreign missions based in the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Europe, intending to represent the work of Protestant missionaries in the whole of the inhabited world. This gathering took place in New York City at Carnegie Hall, with over 50,000 attending.

Many of those involved in the successful 1900 conference resolved that there should be another conference held in ten years on the other side of the Atlantic. On 29 January, 1907, 37 delegates from twenty Scottish foreign missions committees or boards, unanimously agreed at a meeting held in Glasgow that a Missionary Conference should be held in Edinburgh in June of 1910.

With the constitution of the Conference decided, three points regarding the subject matter to be addressed during the Conference were agreed upon: The conference would only deal with missionary work among non-Christian peoples; it would only address the most urgent and immediate problems facing the Church; no opinion on ecclesiastical or doctrinal questions would be expressed by the Conference.

The Conference began to differ from previous gatherings in the truly international scope of its objectives. An international Committee of eighteen members was appointed from the United States, Great Britain and Canada, in order to frame the program and to oversee the arrangements for carrying it out. The first meeting at Oxford of this international committee decided: the choice of subjects on which the Conference would concentrate; the resolution to prepare and present these subjects through careful inquiry and study by appointed commissions; the selection of men and women to act on these commissions; the appointment of J.H. Oldham as the full-time Secretary for the preparation of the conference. The meeting at Oxford established the overall structure and method of gathering, interpreting and presenting the information to the conference. The subject themes were arranged according to eight commissions.

### **The Basis for the Conference**

This conference was not organized by any world body. Though it was spontaneous, it represented the enthusiasm in mission. The concern of the Edinburgh 1910 was the evangelistic mandate. The nature of the conference was broadly representative. Its 1200 delegates consisted of participants from nearly every non-Roman Catholic Christian agency including the interdenominational or "Faith Mission" societies such as the China Inland Mission. In all some 160 societies were represented. Participating also were church men from India, China, Japan and Africa as well as from the West. The large majority of those who attended were people who were engaged in active missionary work abroad, or administrative work at home.

It was an inclusive gathering. Questions of doctrine and polity were deliberately excluded in the planning. This procedure assured certain conservatives who were particularly conservative about conditions for church fellowship and unity that their consciences would not be overridden. The

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<sup>2</sup> From the World Missionary Conference Records, Edinburgh, 1910, Finding Aid Prepared by John L. Grillo and Ruth Tonkiss Cameron, January 2006, New York: The Burke Library Archives, Union Theological Seminary, New York.

emphasis was on consultative and cooperation. It was possible to work together despite differing convictions.

It was a business conference. Its business was to think and plan for the evangelization of two-thirds of the human race. There was unanimity regarding the urgency of the task. The conference in Edinburgh was acclaimed as one of the most significant missionary events in the modern missionary history.

### **The Commissions of the Conference**

There were eight commissions prepared at the conference. For want of space, I would like to mention briefly the **First** and the **fifth** commissions as these had links to the area of this paper:

**Commission I:** “*Carrying the Gospel to the Entire non-Christian World*”. It stressed the urgency and opportunity for world evangelism. A survey of the non-Christians were presented and pressed for further evangelization efforts. The commission stressed the importance of the church as an evangelistic agency.<sup>3</sup> Reports and statistics presented on the unreached people with the gospel all over the world, showed more urgency and more vigorous evangelization.

**Commission V:** “*The Preparation of Missionaries*”. This commission stressed on the need to equip the missionaries who will be trying to communicate the Gospel to the non-Christians. It expected a profound reform of missionary training.

### **Its Impact**

We can see that the conference was meticulously planned. The commissions covered most areas of mission concerns. But the immediate impact could be seen in the emergence of a number of mission conferences of national, regional and international levels.

Edinburgh 1910 set the trend towards national and international cooperation of many missionary endeavors. There were mission conferences and formation of many mission oriented bodies such as the YMCA, the YWCA, the Student Christian Federation, Christian Endeavor and Federal Council of Churches in the US.<sup>4</sup> Hedlund observes that the Foreign Missions Conference in North America, and World Sunday School Association, and the conference of Missionary Societies in Great Britain and Ireland are indicative of the growing trend toward cooperation in common tasks both for social reform and the spread of the Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

The Edinburgh 1910 was followed by a number of other mission conferences. In the Edinburgh Conference the delegates voted into existence of a continuation committee which was to follow through the work of Edinburgh begun by the Commission on Cooperation. But this Committee came to an end with the intensity of the First World War as Germany was a Christian country and many German missionaries were working in the mission fields all over the world. This situation led to the formation of the Emergency Committee in 1918, after the war. The work of the old Continuation Committee was carried on by this Emergency Committee to perpetuate Edinburgh Conference. This Committee worked out for the formation of International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1921 with six objectives: stimulating thinking and investigating on missionary questions, helping to coordinate the activities of the national missionary organizations in different countries, to

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<sup>3</sup> Roger E. Hedlund, *Roots of the Great Debate in Mission: Mission in Historical and Theological Perspective* (Bangalore: TBT, 1993), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Hedlund, *Roots of*, 53.

<sup>5</sup> Hedlund, *Roots of*, 53-54.

help unite Christian public opinion in support of freedom of conscience and religion and of missionary liberty through common consultation, to help to unite the Christian forces of the world in seeking justice in international and inter-social relations, especially where politically weaker people are involved, to publish the International Review of Missions and other mission literatures the committee finds them necessary, and to call the world missionary conference when desired.<sup>6</sup> Many other international mission conferences conducted by this IMC were followed such as: Jerusalem 1928, Madras 1938, Whitby 1947, Willingen 1952, and Ghana 1957-58.<sup>7</sup> From these mission conferences mission strategies were largely determined. The directed strategies then applied locally through further study and discussions in national and regional levels.<sup>8</sup> In Madras, “*the place of the church in evangelism*” and “*the witness of the church*” were discussed<sup>9</sup>; “*partnership in obedience*” was the issue taken up in Whitby<sup>10</sup>; in Willingen, “*the Missionary Obligation of the Church*” was discussed<sup>11</sup> and in Ghana, “*the Missionary Nature of the Church*” was the focus<sup>12</sup>. The Edinburgh conference, therefore, was urging the Christians to surge ahead for missions through consultations, cooperation and formation of Christian mission societies.

In the third world Assembly of the WCC in New Delhi in 1961, a symbolic merging of the missionary society (IMC) and the church (WCC) was done, giving a loud message to both the churches and the missionary societies that henceforth, mission will be done through the church alone. This came obvious in the report of the WCC’s new “Commission and Division of World Mission and Evangelism” during the Assembly.<sup>13</sup> These mission conferences were met with specific felt-needs and situations. The Jerusalem 1928 meeting, for example, was held amidst uncertainty, insecurity, instability, rising secularism and skepticism as aftermath effects of the war. There was no evangelization in their talk in the conference, but their focuses directed towards meeting issues theoretically and theologically on “*Christian message in relation to non-Christian systems of thought and life*”, “*the younger and older churches*”, “*religious education*”, “*missions and industrialization*” etc. Emphasis on Jesus as the Christian message towards social conflicts emerged strongly, giving a strong direction towards social gospel.<sup>14</sup>

Soon after the Jerusalem IMC meeting the cloud of the Second World War engulfed the world. Other world situations emerged. The IMC called for more conferences. It would not be possible to enumerate each conference with their important points. But let it suffice to note that these mission conferences acted as streams of water which together flowed to form a bigger river – the World Council of Churches in 1948.

### **The WCC Movement**

The Edinburgh Conference drew 1200 delegates from 160 mission societies. These delegates and the mission societies were represented by country-wise. The church leaders like Charles Brent, Nathan Soderblom and William Temple were so impressed with the ecumenical nature of the

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<sup>6</sup> Hedlund, *Roots of*, 56-58.

<sup>7</sup> R. Pierce Beaver, “The History of Mission Strategy” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Ralph Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, Eds., Third Edition, (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999), 251.

<sup>8</sup> Beaver, “The History of,” 251.

<sup>9</sup> Hedlund, *Roots of*, 103.

<sup>10</sup> Hedlund, *Roots of*, 118.

<sup>11</sup> Hedlund, *Roots of*, 122.

<sup>12</sup> Hedlund, *Roots of*, 124.

<sup>13</sup> World Council of Churches, *The New Delhi Report*, 249.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur P. Johnston, *World Evangelization and the Word of God* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 143-152.

conference that they dedicated their lives to the task of Christian unity.<sup>15</sup> Church historians like Cairns believed that this conference laid the foundation for the World Council of Churches<sup>16</sup> which was finally and officially formed in 1948 at Amsterdam with over 350 delegates representing 150 churches from 44 countries.<sup>17</sup> Some churches did not join this Council, such as the Southern Baptist of the United States and the Missouri Synod Lutherans.<sup>18</sup> It seems that there was some attempt by the liberals in the WCC circle to create an ecumenical church, for which the conservative evangelicals answered by creating parallel conservative international organizations.<sup>19</sup> Thus there were frictions even from the beginning of the movement between the liberalism in the WCC and the conservative evangelicals.

It must be noted that the Edinburgh 1910 was the ecumenical gathering of the evangelicals. It attracted both liberals and evangelicals in its on-going movements afterwards. In the meantime, the crisis of the two world wars and the birth of the new nations engulfed the nations around the world. Attentions were given on “priority” basis such as: the issues of poverty, justice, equality, struggle for liberations (economic, social, and political), pluralism, unity etc. came to the forefront attention of the WCC, and new approaches and methods of mission and evangelism through “*dialogue*”, “*witness by presence*” “*participating in peoples’ struggle for justice and liberation*” were advocated by them. In some places, mission fields struggled to survive as the attack on the traditional mission work came from within and without, as even “conversion of individual souls” was strongly criticized by the liberal theologians challenging the evangelicals to “re-read” the Bible in the context of the present world. Polarization in old mission understanding started to take place.

Nevertheless, the conservative evangelicals continued to be active in missionary works undaunted by the emerging new mission understandings. Evangelical Bible institutions or theological colleges like Nyack, Moody and Wheaton recruited<sup>20</sup> their students for missionary works abroad. Hrangkhuma quoted Herbert Kane as saying that from 1898 to 1976, 5400 Moody Alumni have served under 245 mission boards in 108 countries; of this, over 2022 were still active in 1976.<sup>21</sup> Faith missions which were exclusively associated with conservative evangelicalism, especially of the American fundamentalists recruited thousands of missionaries and sent out to foreign countries till last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>22</sup>

## RETROSPECTION

The Edinburgh Missionary Conference is a landmark in history of missionary movement. Looking at its background and the development it affected in formation of world bodies in both the liberal and the evangelical camps, we can say that it was the main source that shaped the present day Christian missions. It goes beyond that. It also planted the seed to the issue-based development of Christian theologies, many of which had brought a number of times, the world theologians into the discussion tables.

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<sup>15</sup> Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 489.

<sup>16</sup> Cairns, *Christianity*, 489.

<sup>17</sup> Cairns, *Christianity*, 491.

<sup>18</sup> Cairns, *Christianity*, 491.

<sup>19</sup> Cairns, *Christianity*, 492.

<sup>20</sup> F. Hrangkhuma, *An Introduction to Church History*, (Bangalore: TBT, 1996), 353.

<sup>21</sup> Hrangkhuma, *An Introduction*, 353.

<sup>22</sup> Hrangkhuma, *An Introduction*, 353.

## Paradigm Shift or Polarization?

The Edinburgh 1910 had given the impetus for the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948. The WCC movement had influenced the Christian world so much. This world ecumenical movement was held first to consult on world evangelization. But when the IMC of the missionary societies amalgamated symbolically with the church in New Delhi, 1961, a major paradigm shift for mission took place. A new set of ideas of mission were put forth and debates were held on those. A few examples of the new concepts that drew attentions in missions are the Theocentrism, *Anthropocentrism*, *Bias to the Poor* and *Mission in Unity*.

*The Theocentrism of Mission* - During the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the changing world scenes due to industrial revolution, post colonialism, and emerging of new nations, the First World War etc., the earlier mission theological emphasis on Christology, soteriology and Trinity were being gradually replaced by the strong emphasis on the Grace of God.<sup>23</sup> It was Karl Barth who, in 1932, first to articulate that the mission is an activity of God, had conceived mission as the mission of God, from which the famous *Missio Dei* concept developed.<sup>24</sup> In Tambaram 1938 (IMC), the German delegates gave the suggestion that God's act alone will establish the new earth and the new heaven and this eschatological thinking will prevent the church from the secular influence. In Willingen 1952 conference, the same thought prevailed once more, and the mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God, the God who sends the Son, and the Father and the Son together sending the Holy Spirit which yet led to another movement – the Triune God sending the church for the missionary task.<sup>25</sup> The *Missio Dei* concept went beyond the original intention, and finally the concept of mission became what God does and not what we or the church do. In the final analysis, there is no need to send missionaries as God is doing His own work without our interference.

*The Anthropocentrism of Mission* – The concept of social gospel or the social dimension of the gospel became the prominent concern of the new mission understanding. Humanization or the horizontal relationship between man and man, and between man and the cosmos begin to take the dominant theme in the modern mission theology. It understandably advocated “commitment to tolerance”, “open-mindedness”, “love and respect for the human dignity of the neighbor”, “no superiority attitude”, “no conversion” and “an authentic life witness”. The old methods of “preaching” and “teaching” is replaced by “dialogue” and “learning from the natives” of their cultures and religions. The goal of mission becomes not to convert but to make a Hindu a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim, a Buddhist a better Buddhist etc.<sup>26</sup> As Michael Amlados confesses saying:

Twenty years ago I studied Hindu religion and culture so that I can present Christ to the Hindus in a way more adaptable to their mentality. Later I tried to discover the “unknown Christ of Hinduism” so that I may make the Hindus recognize the Christ I preach to them as their own...I no longer dream of a time when the whole world will be Christian...I do not believe any longer that a Hindu, unless he professes faith in

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<sup>23</sup> Bosch, *Transforming*, 389.

<sup>24</sup> Bosch, *Transforming*, 389.

<sup>25</sup> Bosch, *Transforming*, 390.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions*, ( Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), 222.

Christ, will be damned to hell fire...I see other religions, not as enemies, but as allies.<sup>27</sup>

Here we see an example of a person's journey in the theological pilgrimage that typically shows the new mission concept among many of our country's theologians.

*c. Bias to the Poor* – The new mission concept of both the Protestant and the Roman Catholic Church is based on the conviction that the God of the Bible is much more concerned for the poor. The “poor” are marginalized, and the sinned against the oppressed (politically, economically, socially and religiously) people in the world who are the majority. Thus, in WCC conferences “salvation” is seen as economic and political “liberation” and “fellowship” as “solidarity” in Bangkok 1973, “the poor were put in the centre of missiological reflection” in Melbourne 1980.<sup>28</sup> In the meantime, the Roman Catholic Church “discovered the poor” and thus in 1979 at Puebla, (Mexico) CELAM III, the conference of the Latin American Bishops, and the “*preferential option for the poor*” was first coined.<sup>29</sup>

*Mission in Unity* – Another characteristic of new mission understanding is the unity of mission. This is also known as *Church-centrism of Mission*. Earlier, mission was done through conviction, call and training. That is to say that mission was done by the professionals. The new mission understanding believes that every believer is a missionary. It also sees that mission should be done with and through the church, and not through the mission agencies. Hence, the WCC moved for the symbolic merger of the IMC with the WCC (WCC representing church and IMC representing the mission organizations or agencies) giving the theological significance – “unity and mission belong together” in the new understanding of mission at least by the WCC and the churches affiliated to it.

The unity of mission is derived from the ecumenical root meaning of unity, cooperation and participation. The understanding of ecumenical as unity was first applied for Protestant mission agencies (as in Edinburgh 1910). Since then the meaning gradually enlarged to include all Christian churches, then all humanity, then all religions, and now among all God's creations. Now, when we talk about unity in mission among the WCC circle, it is to work towards peaceful co-existence, towards fighting for justice and against oppressions, and not about converting others to Christianity or planting churches.

There is, therefore, tension between the evangelicals and the liberals on mission. One wonders: has the mission theology been liberated from its old, conservative mission understanding, or has it become mere intellectual and philosophical discourses - speaking so much but achieving or doing nothing? Or, have they (the liberal missiologists) been making the Hindus the better Hindus, the Muslims the better Muslims through their mission witnesses by presence and dialogues?

### **Advancement of Mission**

Mission was under attack from within and without since Edinburgh 1910 IMC. From the many mission conferences since then, so much of mission literatures came up. The International Review of Missions (IRM) was officially published by the IMC which carried out official reports, messages, and important documents and commissions of the WCC meetings. It provided mission challenges, viewpoints, and debates on mission issues. Besides IRM magazines, there were many

<sup>27</sup> As quoted by Tord Fornberg in his article “A New Missiology and the Bible” in *Theological Forum*, Vol. xxii, No.4, December 1990, 37 – 38.

<sup>28</sup> Bosch, *Transforming*, 435.

<sup>29</sup> Bosch, *Transforming*, 435.

theological/missiological books published. There are such mission literatures from the conservative evangelicals as well. Such periodicals and mission books stimulated the Christians into thinking about missions.

Andrew F. Walls, writing about the mission magazine, called the *Missionary Register* in 1812, says, "...It was eagerly read all over the country...(Such) magazines helped to form opinion, they developed images and mental pictures, they built up attitudes...The average reader of the *Missionary Register* or the other missionary magazines knew exactly what he thought the British government should do about the temple tax in Bengal, or about the *sati* of Hindu widows, or the opium trade, or slave running."<sup>30</sup> With the more advance communication technologies since Edinburgh 1910, the multiplication of knowledge in mission has gone up now hundredfold.

There have been more theological institutions and colleges in the world after Edinburgh 1910 than there was before it, where missions have been taught, missionaries have been trained. Some of the world major institutions run by the evangelicals where mission courses have been offering, for example, are Moody Bible Institute, Utrecht University in Holland, The Fuller School of World Mission, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (Portland), University of Amsterdam, University of South Africa, Princeton Theological Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, Ill.), Asbury Theological Seminary, University of Aberdeen, School of Intercultural Studies, Biola University, to name some. The impact that their alumni must have made on missions can be of anybody's guest.

### **The Mission Situation in India**

According to the tradition, St Thomas came to India in 52 AD. Some other added the name of another disciple of Jesus, Bartholomeo, who had come to India in the first century of the beginning of Christianity.<sup>31</sup> Whether the Apostles Thomas and Bartholomew came to India bringing Christianity as early as 52 AD could not be proved strongly, but from the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards the major churches are unanimous in their witnessing to the tradition.<sup>32</sup>

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Venetian traveler Marco Polo visited India on his way to China. Later, the Franciscan missionaries came and a permanent mission was established in India which culminated in the erection of the Latin diocese of Quilon, Kerala.<sup>33</sup> The Colonial expansion of Portuguese came to Goa, India with Vasco da Gama, first with the intension for trade and commerce, but later established their colony in 1499. They sent the priests, and in 1534 Paul III erected the diocese of Goa.<sup>34</sup> Fr. Robert de Nobli, an Italian Jesuit priest came to South India in 1605. He settled in Madura and tried to win the high caste Hindus by adopting himself as a Brahmin. He studied Hindu Scriptures and began to instruct young Hindu Brahmins.<sup>35</sup> His mission had some success.

The Dutch Colonial rule also came to India in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and settled in Tranquebar and Serampore.<sup>36</sup> The Dutch belong to Protestant Christians. King Frederick IV of Denmark desired to

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<sup>30</sup> Andrew F. Walls, "Missionary Societies and the Fortunate Subversion of the Church" in in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Ralph Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, Eds., Third Edition, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999, 237.

<sup>31</sup> A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol.I, (Bangalore: 1989), 21.

<sup>32</sup> Mundadan, *History of*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Mundadan, *History of*, 121

<sup>34</sup> Mundadan, *History of*, 241.

<sup>35</sup> C. B. Firth, *Introduction to Indian Church History*, Madras: CLS, 1976, 110 -119

<sup>36</sup> Firth, *Introduction*, 130.

send Protestant missionaries to India. He requested to find suitable candidates for missionaries from Germany. Thus the two young theological students, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Pluetschau were sent in 1706 and began their work in Tranquebar.<sup>37</sup> Their mission had a great success. Meanwhile a very remarkable man, William Carey, had arrived in Bengal. He was a self taught Baptist Pastor in England, who co-founded a Baptist Missionary society with a few of his friends, offered himself as a missionary candidate and came to India. He had been able to influence the educated Hindus as well as the British Government on some evil practices like the *sati* and *infanticide*, translated parts or the entire Bible into more than 40 Indian languages<sup>38</sup>, run their missions through self supporting. Hundreds of Protestant missionaries from USA and European countries followed them to India in the later years. After India got independent, national mission societies like the Friends' Missionary Prayer Band, Indian Evangelical Mission etc. have come up and engaged in mission works. Many theological colleges were also established to educate and train church workers and leaders. Yet, conversion to Christianity is minimal – only about 3% of the total population. One wonders, why, what had gone wrong? Something, either with our church life as a witnessing community, or in our theological education, must have been the reason.

### **The Place of Mission in the Theological Education and Formation in India**

As I had mentioned earlier, I will focus on the nature and content of the theological education being offered by the Senate of Serampore College/University (from now on I shall use SSC/U) on mission.

Serampore College<sup>39</sup> was founded by William Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward in 1818, at Serampore, then a Danish Settlement. In 1827 the College was incorporated by a Royal Charter granted by King Fedrerick VI of Denmark with university rights and immunities and the power of conferring degrees. In 1845, on the transfer of the Settlement of Serampore from Denmark to Great Britain provision was made by the British Government in the Treaty of Purchase for the continuance of the chartered rights, immunities and powers of the College. The College started offering Bachelor of Divinity degree course and the first convocation for B.D. degree was held in 1915. The Bengal Act No. IV of 1918, which is called the Serampore College Act, was passed by the Bengal Legislative Council. In that year, the College was enlarged and it was constituted on a basis that represented various Christian communities in India.

SSC/U confers the degrees of B.Th., B.R.E., B.D., M.Th., and D.Th. through its internal program. It confers through the external program Dip.C.S., B.C.S. and Master of Ministry (M.Min.). It also confers the Doctor of Divinity (D.D.) degree *Honoris Causa*.

***Its Curricula*** - The Senate of Serampore College is the oldest theological college in India. All the Indian mainline churches are affiliated to it. Many other theological colleges (most prominent ones) are affiliated to it. It supplies the uniform curriculum for all the affiliated colleges and seminaries. The B.Th. and the B.D. degrees are the basic and minimum theological degrees required towards the ministerial and church leaderships like the pastors and association/convention secretaries. It offered one mission subject each - *Mission and Evangelism Through the Ages* for B.Th. degree course under the History of Christianity, and *Christian Witness, Mission and Evangelism* for B.D.

<sup>37</sup> Firth, *Introduction*, 131.

<sup>38</sup> From the Article, "Exploits for God," in *Blessing*, A Missionary Magazine, Vol.31 Issue 2 No.311, Published by Blessing Youth Mission, Chennai, 8.

<sup>39</sup> *Senate of Serampore College*, Faculty of Theology, Regulations Relating to the Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.) Degree Course, Serampore: 1991, 1.

degree course as one of the nine Interdisciplinary Courses. For the former subject, the Senate supplied the detailed syllabus, and for the latter the individual colleges were directed to make their own syllabus following the directions of the Boards of Study (till 1990s).<sup>40</sup> There is one more mission subject, namely, *Historical Study of the Development of Missiological Perspectives in the Twentieth Century*<sup>41</sup>, could be offered for B.D. degree which is **optional** and without a supplied syllabus. This being optional and referring just to the mission issues from the ecumenical consultations and conferences, most colleges do not bother to offer it. In *Mission and Evangelism through the Ages* (for B.Th), the course has 5 sections: *The Biblical Understanding; History of Mission* (beginning from the first century till the modern age); *Different Understanding of Mission; Mission as People's Participation; Mission and Evangelism in India Today*. In the section on *biblical foundation/understanding*, there are only two areas of studies: Jesus' understanding of mission (the four Gospels?) and the Holy Spirit and mission.

An evaluative look on these curricula, one could think that mission was almost pushed out of the theological studies in India, at least by the colleges belonging to the family of SSC/U. But this was the premier theological degree giving body, from where the most of the Indian church pastors and church leaders took their ministerial training! And if that is the case, how do we expect the Indian churches and Indian Christians to be active and effective in mission works? So, why wonder if the percentage of the Christian population never grows or sliding?

***A Revival in Mission in the Senate of Serampore?*** It is encouraging to note that the SSC/U is calling its affiliated family members to take new, bold steps towards a strategy for theological colleges "to educate entire people of God so that authentic Christ-centered communities are formed".<sup>42</sup> It sees the need to build a strong link between the theological colleges and the churches. It calls to recognize and strengthen such dimension of theological education. It declares that the mission of the church has to be praxis oriented and contextual, demanding total commitment with changed life-style of whole people of God. Tiwari suggested, "Theological colleges, therefore, need to involve the whole church, to have to become instruments of the church, in equipping the believer to be an active agent of the liberative mission of God through witness, service and teaching".<sup>43</sup>

I point out below a few references about the need of mission under Senate Curricula in *Initiating Revision of Curricula*, by Rev. Dr. Ravi Tiwari, Registrar, which has been circulated to all the Senate's affiliated colleges<sup>44</sup>:

1. Mission Perspective can be integrated in every subject. see p.14, No. 40
2. New branch of study to be introduced at BD level – Missiology etc p.17, 12c. and p.38
3. Suggested new course - Foundation course in mission such as Theology of Mission, History of Mission, New trends in Mission Strategy p.18,14(xvi)
4. Suggested mission oriented degree/diploma – certificate/diploma in mission studies. p.18, 15(iii), or special short/long term theological education programme for missionaries – certificate in mission studies p. 30.

<sup>40</sup> *Senate of Serampore*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> *Senate of Serampore*, 15.

<sup>42</sup> Ravi Tiwari, Registrar, Senate of Serampore College, an unpublished paper, "Theological Education in Context: Serampore Model," Presented at the Seminar in Shillong by the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College, during 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2009, 1 (from now on will refer as Tiwari, "Theological Education").

<sup>43</sup> Tiwari, "Theological Education," 1.

<sup>44</sup> Senate of Serampore College, *Initiating Revision of Curricula*, Feb. 2006.

5. "Serampore is often criticized for its insensitivity towards missiological and evangelical concern of the church" A new degree in missiology (B.Miss) can be considered p.24 (65)
6. "Senate needs to offer more subjects on Mission such as, Anthropology and Mission Trends in Mission Theology" p.36

Accordingly, the SSC/U had adopted a revised curriculum for a new B.D. course which will be in effect from the 2010-2011 Academic Year. The duration of the course will be four years. Four mission subjects will be offered, namely<sup>45</sup>:

1. Introduction to Mission Studies: Contextual and Methodological Issues (2 credit course)
2. Contemporary Issues in Christian Mission and Evangelism (4 credit course)
3. Development of Contemporary Global Missiological Perspectives (4 credit course)
4. Christian Faith and Witness in Pluralistic Societies (4 credit course).

The SSC/U had increased the mission courses from just one to four for BD degree studies. So there is a spirit of 400% revival in the SSC/U towards mission, and it is encouraging but it will be too little ground to do mission and a directional study of ecumenical understanding of missions which ended in talks and conferences. The basics are still not in the course, such as the biblical foundations of mission and the theology of mission.

### **SUGGESTION: MISSION CURRICULUM TO IMPACT INDIAN CHURCHES**

Thomas H. P, Sailer said, "Missionary Education is essential to-day to save the individual, the church and the world".<sup>46</sup> It is said that Seminary can be likened to a nursery where the seed is placed to mature and the church to a garden where it is planted to grow. If this picture is taken then the two – the church and the theological college has a unique link, interdependency and a partnering relationship. The theological college is there because the church existed. Therefore, a theological college to be useful for the church must strive to be relevant in its curriculum. But when the goal of the theological college education takes to different direction, it becomes just one secular institution (though it may be teaching Christian subjects) and will loss its credible existence to the church. Another point to make, I believe, is that the courses the college is offering must be balanced touching all areas of Christian and the church life – *worshipping and witnessing God*. Other Christian duties are included in these two, such as belief, obedience, devotion, humility, righteousness, compassion, service etc.

Our mistakes may be that our theological colleges are conceived as training grounds for "Christian leadership", "liberation of the oppressed", "high scholarship", "to be critical" etc. Thus we say that the primary task of theological education is producing the highest quality of ministerial leadership and theological scholarship (and we take pride on it) through theological institutions,<sup>47</sup> and training and equipping women and men for the variety Christian leadership roles and ministries.<sup>48</sup> These are

<sup>45</sup> New BD Program, Circulated by the Registrar, Senate of Serampore College, 2009, with the instruction to Senate affiliated colleges to start the program from 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in *Missiological Encyclopedia*, Missiological Classics Series No. 3, Siga Arles and Jan A. B. Jongeneel, eds., (Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2006), 249.

<sup>47</sup> See Samson Prabhakar's "India Today: Some Issues," in *Church's Ministry and Theological Education*, ed. Samson Prabhakar, Bangalore: BTESSC/SATRI, 2005, 6.

<sup>48</sup> See Limatula Longkumar's "Feminist Theology and Local Congregation: A Search for common and Relevance Ministry", A conference paper presented in *Tribal Theology: A Search for Institutional Collaboration for Ensuing Quality Theological Education and Relevant Ministry*, at ETC, Jorhat, 2008.

good and necessary for ministerial formation, but when, for example, “leadership” concept takes that of the worldly standard, it overshadows the biblical “servant-hood” or “shepherding” concepts for Christian ministry, it has deviated the real goal of the theological education. So also with the other goals mentioned above.

To me, in principle, the mission curriculum I would dream to have should have the following goals:

1. ***Confessing Jesus Christ as God, our Lord and Savior***- In these days where many teachings are based on the extra biblical matters such as dreams, visions, experiences of some people. We need solid biblical teachings. True Christianity is based on the person of Jesus Christ who is revealed in the Bible. Today many voices are making claims. Atheists say there is no God. Polytheism may allow that Jesus is one of many gods. Some modern day contextual theologians are seeing Jesus Christ in the teachings of their traditional religions, and they say Jesus was there among spirits they had worshipped. The Christian church is faced with a massive theological threat to its gospel that is different in kind from the older frictions between liberals and conservatives.<sup>49</sup> Beware of the threat of such syncretism.
2. ***Affirming our commitment to the Great Commission***- An excellent theological training must instill in us the need for our commitment to the Great Commission. The missionary task of all believers is still relevant and abiding. The eleven disciples were met by the resurrected Christ who commanded them to go with His Power, with His Program and with His Presence.<sup>50</sup> The Commission still stands for us today.
3. ***Affirming God’s love for people***- Our Bible tells that God loves every human being, who, apart from faith in Christ, is under God’s judgment and destined for hell. God’s love is far beyond human comprehension. Finite man can never fully understand its infinite nature. Yet the Bible says, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Hell is not the most popular of preaching topics. People do not like to hear about hell. Some theologians question about its existence. Yet the Bible clearly speaks about hell and the impending judgment of God.
4. ***Affirming Salvation through the Grace of God***- The heart of the biblical message is the good news of God’s salvation comes by grace alone through faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ and His atoning death on the cross for our sins. Many of our older generation in the churches do not believe that salvation is through the grace of God alone, as a gift for believing in Jesus Christ. They resist the need to accept Jesus Christ personally as their Lord and Savior. But as trained in theological excellence, we should face this issue in the churches.
5. ***Recognizing the need to be filled by the Holy Spirit***- This is one area where many go to extremes on both sides. There are biblical injunctions about the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believers’ life. There are groups claiming so many things about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which is extreme and unsound biblically. A balanced teaching understanding through careful studies is needed.
6. ***Our obligation to live in holiness and moral purity***- Christians should live in holiness and in purity, much more, we as leaders (or being trained to be leaders) should live without blemish, because we exemplify Christ to the church and to the world. The world is looking for men and women with integrity, for communicators who back up their ministry with their lives. Our preaching emerges out of what we are. We are called to be holy people – separated from the

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<sup>49</sup> Paul C. McGlasson, *Another Gospel*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994) 9.

<sup>50</sup> Billy Graham, *A Biblical Standard for Evangelists*, (Mumbai: GLS, 1984), 24-25.

moral evils of the world. The Bible commands, “As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Peter 1:15).

7. ***Sharing Christ’s concern for the society***- There are millions who are suffering from poverty and injustices. Jesus Christ has deep concern for the personal and social sufferings of humanity. We as Christian leaders must accept our responsibility to do our utmost to alleviate human need. We must exhibit a balanced Christian living in the spiritual and physical spheres.

## CONCLUSION

This then, I believe, will continue in the same spirit of the Edinburgh 1910 international conference in mission even in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Edinburgh 1910 was held to consult each other and to draw resources of knowledge and experiences in the mission fields, with a sole purpose of evangelizing the whole world. With this in mind, commissions were given with elaborate study plans. This would be realized through theological colleges with balanced and adequate mission studies, as the leaders of the churches who take their theological education in those colleges, would then be exposed themselves on the responsibilities of the churches for world evangelization.

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