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SPRINGBOARD FOR MISSION



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Kenneth R. Ross

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Edinburgh 2010: Springboard for Mission

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## *Preface*

The Centenary of the World Missionary Conference, held in Edinburgh 1910, is a suggestive moment for many people seeking direction for Christian mission in the 21st century. Several different constituencies within World Christianity are holding significant events around 2010. Since 2005 an international group has worked collaboratively to develop an intercontinental and multi-denominational project, now known as Edinburgh 2010, and based at New College, University of Edinburgh. This initiative brings together representatives of twenty different global Christian bodies, representing all major Christian denominations and confessions and many different strands of mission and church life, to prepare for the Centenary.

Essential to the work of the Edinburgh 1910 Conference, and of abiding value, were the findings of the eight think-tanks or 'commissions'. These inspired the idea of a new round of collaborative reflection on Christian mission—but now focussed on nine themes identified as being key to mission in the 21st century. The study process is polycentric, open-ended, and as inclusive as possible of the different genders, regions of the world, and theological and confessional perspectives in today's church.

This publication is recognised as reflecting the ethos of Edinburgh 2010 and making a significant contribution to its

study process. Kenneth Ross has diligently worked over many months to bring this primer to completion and is to be thanked for his efforts. It is commended to churches, mission groups and students of mission for study and reflection throughout the Christian world.

It should be clear that material published through the Edinburgh 2010 project will, of necessity, reflect the diversity of the views and positions which Christian writers are known to share and will not necessarily represent those of the staff at the Edinburgh 2010 office or its General Council. Our special thanks go to Dr Ralph Winter, Beth Snodderly and Chris Gandy, all connected to the William Carey International University Press, for making this publication possible.

Daryl Balia, International Director  
Kirsteen Kim, Research Coordinator

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*Edinburgh 1910: Remembering a Moment  
of Inspiration***WHY REMEMBER EDINBURGH 1910?**

In June 1910 the city of Edinburgh hosted one of the most defining and most long-remembered gatherings in the entire history of Christianity. The “World Missionary Conference”, more than it knew at the time, stood at the close of one great chapter of Christian history and at the opening of another. The chapter approaching its close was one in which the initiative in world Christianity lay with the Western missionary movement. Edinburgh 1910 was a climactic event of the 19th century missionary movement: a mountain top on which its leading representatives gathered to survey their achievements and to assess the work which remained to be done. Its significance in this respect is not to be underestimated.

Though “the missionaries” have often been caricatured for their supposed excessive religious zeal, cultural insensitivity and complicity in Western imperialism, their achievement speaks for itself. Whereas before the missionary movement Christianity was largely confined to Europe and North America, its impact has been such that Christianity has become a faith with more adherents in the Global South than in its historic

heartlands. For all its faults, the Western missionary movement was the instrument through which this dramatic change was accomplished. The world's religious demography has been transformed while Christianity itself has discovered new character and direction. While we are ever more aware of how much of this movement of Christian expansion is attributable to the initiatives of indigenous people, there can be no denying the seminal role of the Western missionaries. They were at the height of their influence in the period from 1850 to 1950 and one of the reasons that Edinburgh 1910 became emblematic of the movement is that it occurred at the high point of the movement, when it already had a wealth of missionary experience but when it was still bursting with energy and ambition.

While it functioned as the climax and summation of one remarkable religious movement, Edinburgh 1910 was perhaps even more significant in heralding the advent of a new era in Christian history. Amongst the 1200 delegates at the conference were a very small number of non-Westerners, leaders of the emerging churches in Asia. Though few in number, their presence spoke volumes about the changing character of Christianity and it was they who offered some of the most incisive contributions to the discussions at the conference. They had the imagination to advocate much greater unity amongst the various strands of Christian witness. For all its fecundity, the 19th century missionary movement was fragmented with a wide variety of agencies pursuing their own objectives, sometimes in outright competition with one another. One thing which united the Edinburgh delegates was the conviction that much more could be achieved if their agencies could work in cooperation with one another. It was the non-Western delegates who pushed the discussion further: could they think not only of cooperation but also of unity? They recalled the prayer of Jesus that "they may all be

one” (John 17:20). This question set an agenda for the century to come. As church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette concluded: “The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910, was the birthplace of the modern ecumenical movement.”<sup>1</sup>

The validity of this historical judgement is beyond question yet it is also important to remember that the Conference was inspired not so much by unity for its own sake as unity for the sake of mission. The delegates were united by the conviction that they stood at a moment in history when, like never before, there was a realistic possibility that they could fulfil Jesus’ command to “go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). Pragmatic in their outlook, they were focussed on finding the means to achieve this evangelistic objective. Edinburgh 1910 stands as a reminder to Christians that they have received good news and their task is to share it with the world around them. The Conference throbbled with this great purpose and lit a torch which has been carried forward as the evangelistic mandate has been taken up by succeeding generations.

It was the first clear glimpse of what William Temple would describe as “the great new fact of our time”—a truly worldwide Christian church.<sup>2</sup> This epoch-making vision of the church as a truly global missionary community has continued to inspire subsequent generations, making it an enduring point of reference for those who hear Christ’s call to a mission which extends to the ends of the earth. As Andrew Walls summarises: “The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910, has passed into Christian legend. It was a landmark in the history of mission; the starting point of the modern theology of mission; the high point of the modern Western missionary movement and the point from which it declined; the launch-pad of the modern ecumenical movement; the point at which Christians first began to glimpse something of what a world church would be like.”<sup>3</sup>

Before going any further in considering the inspiration generated by Edinburgh 1910, it is necessary to ask some basic questions about it.

### **WHOSE IDEA WAS IT?**

The missionary movement had got into the habit of having a big international meeting every decade or so in order to promote its message. So it was not a big surprise when Fairley Daly, the Secretary of the Livingstonia Mission Committee, wrote early in 1906 to Robert Speer, Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions in New York, to raise the question of whether plans should be laid to hold a major Missionary Conference following the one which had been held in New York in 1900? Speer and his American colleagues were positive about a Conference in Great Britain and Scottish foreign mission committees and missionary societies needed no further encouragement to offer to host the Conference in Edinburgh in 1910. The character and programme of the conference, however, were shaped by two men, an American and a Scot. The Conference chairman, the American John R. Mott, in Latourette's words: "combined a dignified, commanding presence, deep religious faith, evangelistic zeal, the capacity to discern ability and promise in youth and to inspire it, wide-ranging vision, courage, tact, administrative ability, power over public assemblies as a presiding officer, and compelling, convincing speech.... He dreamed and acted in terms both of individuals and of movements which would influence nations and mankind as a whole."<sup>4</sup> His skills were complemented by those of the Conference secretary, the Scot Joe Oldham, who worked behind the scenes, sensitive to theological nuances and a

masterful diplomat, to ensure all the mechanics were in place. As William Richey Hogg put it: “If Mott masterminded Edinburgh 1910 ... Oldham was its chief engineer.”<sup>5</sup>

### **WHO ORGANISED THE CONFERENCE?**

The initial planning was undertaken by a UK General Committee and a US Committee on Reference and Council. These were quickly superseded by a full International Committee, comprising ten British, five North American and three Continental representatives. It met for the first time in Oxford in June 1908, exactly two years ahead of the conference. From this point Joe Oldham emerged as the key organiser, accepting an appointment to work full-time for three years on the preparation of the conference. Gradually assembling a staff of 29, he hired a suite of offices at 100 Princes Street, Edinburgh—close to the Assembly Hall where the conference was to take place. From this organisational base Oldham worked both on the practical arrangements involved in hosting a large international conference and on the conceptual issues of priorities and policy.

### **WHO ATTENDED THE CONFERENCE?**

It was decided that the only qualification for participation was that a missionary society or board was in the business of supporting foreign missionaries. Only Societies having agents in the foreign field and expending on foreign missions not less than £2000 annually were invited to be represented and they were entitled to an additional delegate for every additional £4000 of foreign missionary expenditure. On this basis 176 missionary societies and boards sent delegations—59 from North America, 58 from

the Continent, 47 from the United Kingdom, and 12 from South Africa and Australia. The delegates were, overwhelmingly, British (500) and American (500). Representatives from continental Europe were a small minority (170). Very few (though very significant) were the delegates from the “younger churches” of India, China and Japan. There were no African participants nor were there any from Latin America nor from the Pacific islands.

It was an entirely Protestant event. No one was invited from the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Churches (though correspondence was sympathetically received). The Pentecostal movement which was beginning at this time was also unrepresented. The participants were overwhelmingly male despite the fact that women were already making a massive contribution to the missionary movement. While the participants were struck by their diversity, from a longer historical perspective it is striking how limited was their range. Such was the impact of the event, however, that it stimulated the imagination to think of a still more widely representative gathering. Wardlaw Thompson of the London Missionary Society confessed: “I long for the time when we shall see another Conference, and when men of the Greek Church and the Roman Church shall talk things over with us in the service of Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

While the delegates were full-time staff of church mission boards and missionary societies, fringe meetings were organised which allowed for participation by the general public. A sequence of public meetings took place in the Synod Hall, just across the road from the Assembly Hall where the delegates gathered. These broadly featured the subjects under discussion in the main Conference with the aim of sharing them with the home supporters of foreign missions. Open evening lectures by leading conference delegates were also held every day in the Tolbooth Church at the head of the Royal Mile, with a similar series being

held at the St Andrew's Hall in Glasgow. These fringe meetings attracted large numbers, demonstrating how much the event had gripped the popular imagination.

### **WHERE WAS THE CONFERENCE HELD?**

The conference was held in what is now the Church of Scotland Assembly Hall on the Mound in central Edinburgh, adjacent to New College, now the home of Edinburgh University's School of Divinity. This whole complex of buildings was constructed in the second half of the 19th century as a key centre of the Free Church of Scotland which had separated from the Church of Scotland in 1843 over an issue of the relation of Church and State. In 1900 the Free Church united with another strand of Scottish Presbyterianism, the United Presbyterian Church. So in 1910 the Assembly Hall was the property of the United Free Church which at that time was among the leading Churches in the world in terms of its overseas missionary commitment. Being in the Presbyterian tradition, the Assembly Hall is designed as a large debating chamber aiming to allow a large number of people to deliberate and reach decisions in a conciliar fashion. Hence it was chosen as the initial meeting place for the Scottish Parliament when it reconvened in 1999 after an interval of almost 300 years and had to wait five years for its permanent home to be constructed. It is a hall which has often struck observers as carrying a great sense of history and atmosphere.

### **WHY WAS THE CONFERENCE HELD IN EDINBURGH?**

The simple answer is that an invitation was issued and accepted. What is more of a question, however, is why the missionary leadership of a such a small nation had the confidence to offer to

host a World Conference and why their counterparts elsewhere had confidence to accept the offer? After all, Edinburgh was something of a backwater compared with the great cities of London and New York where earlier missionary conferences had been held. A sense of the appropriateness of the venue appears to have been inspired by an understanding of Scotland's standing in the Western missionary movement which was then at its zenith. As the official record stated: "Edinburgh was a fitting place of meeting. In the earlier missionary enterprise which evangelised Europe no country was more prominent than Scotland, and no country has in proportion to its size contributed to the evangelisation of the world during the last century so large a number of distinguished and devoted missionaries."<sup>7</sup> This latter point was emphasised by J.H. Oldham, the Conference Secretary, when he recalled at time of the Jubilee that Scotland had been chosen because it was "the native land of David Livingstone, Alexander Duff and other famous missionaries."<sup>8</sup> It was with a sense that they were coming to one of the world's great centres of missionary vision and commitment, that the delegates made their way to Edinburgh.

### **WHAT WAS THE AIM OF THE CONFERENCE?**

A distinctive feature of Edinburgh 1910 was that it did not aim to be a rallying of the faithful supporters of the missionary movement, as the great missionary conferences of the past had been. It did not make inspirational impact its primary objective. Whereas earlier gatherings had concentrated on a demonstration of enthusiasm, Edinburgh aimed to be a working conference, its subtitle being "To consider Missionary Problems in relation to the Non-Christian World". It was distinguished

by its attempt to achieve a more unified strategy and greater coordination within the worldwide engagement of Christian mission. The aim of the organising committee was that it should be “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.”<sup>9</sup> It was driven by the belief that the missionary movement had arrived at a unique moment of opportunity. There was a great sense of urgency to the conference, prompted by a conviction that the opportunity could be lost if the right strategy were not formed and implemented. “Never before,” stated its flagship text, “has there been such a conjunction of crises and of opening of doors in all parts of the world as that which characterises the present decade.”<sup>10</sup>

#### **WHAT WAS DISCUSSED AT THE CONFERENCE?**

The organising committee had agreed two years before the conference what were the key challenges facing the missionary movement. For each topic a 20-member Commission was established to undertake a thorough process of research and reflection in preparation for the 1910 conference. Most of the Commissions used a questionnaire method to consult widely with missionaries in the field. Through a communication effort unprecedented in its scale and ambition, they gathered the accumulated wisdom of the missionary movement in relation to their assigned topics. Each Commission then prepared a substantial report of its findings, varying in length from 200 to 500 pages. Delegates were expected to read these reports before they came to the conference. Each Commission was given a day on which to present its report and delegates has the opportunity to respond with what were then considered very short speeches

– maximum 7 minutes. In this way the conference brought into focus the key issues facing the Christian missionary enterprise and sought to discern a way forward in regard to each.

### **Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World**

This was the flagship theme for the conference and its inner motivation. The vastness and urgency of the evangelistic task united the conference delegates and provided the core around which every other discussion took shape.

### **The Church in the Mission Field**

A big question was the relationship of the Western missionary agencies to the indigenous churches now emerging in many countries. Great hopes were placed in the role which they would play in advancing Christian mission. Their representatives called for a much more equal relationship between older and younger churches.

### **Education in Relation to the Christianization of National Life**

A primary method adopted by the missionary movement was education. Debate centred on the type of education which was to be preferred and, in particular, whether it is best delivered in English or in vernacular languages?

### **The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions**

Extensive correspondence from missionaries in the field revealed the extent to which they had adopted a sympathetic and respectful attitude to other religions. Discussion focussed on the extent to which Christianity could be understood as the fulfilment of the inner hopes and yearnings found within other religions.

### **The Preparation of Missionaries**

The conference had a lively awareness that there was need for a much larger body of missionaries to become available for service. High quality training was widely recommended and collaboration with the universities was seen as a fruitful way forward.

### **The Home Base of Missions**

The strength of missions abroad rested on the spiritual vitality of the church at home. While the apparatus of informing and inspiring the home base was discussed in great detail, the central point was the need for spiritual awakening in the life of the churches.

### **Missions and Governments**

It was an innovative move to discuss the relationship of missions to the Governments responsible for the areas where they worked. Criteria were established for determining different types of Government, missions were encouraged to be reasonable in their approach to Government though prepared to raise a critical voice when required.

### **Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity**

It was argued that closer cooperation would result in more effective evangelism. The uniting of separated churches was not supposed to be part of the discussion but some delegates, especially from China, could not resist the opportunity to express the hope that in future the oneness of the church would be much more apparent. This struck a chord with the conference which unleashed a longing for the unity of the church which would prove inspirational for the century to follow.

“Never before,” wrote William Richey Hogg, “had the paramount problems of the world missionary enterprise been so thoroughly surveyed, studied and evaluated.”<sup>11</sup>

It is also important to notice what was not discussed at the conference. It was agreed beforehand that there would be no discussion of points of doctrine or church organisation on which there were differences among the delegates. The focus was entirely on the outward missionary task. This enabled a much wider participation than had ever been achieved at an international missionary conference. It was also agreed beforehand that the discussion would be limited to the “non-Christian world”. Missions to regions which some believed to be already “Christian” such as Latin America or eastern Europe were therefore excluded from consideration at the conference. This narrowing of the scope of the discussion had the effect of widening the range of participants since its subject was clearly one where there was substantial common ground between the most high-church Anglican and the most low-church Nonconformist.

#### **WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO BE AT THE CONFERENCE?**

The participants were awe-struck by the event. They were gripped by a sense that the conference represented a decisive step towards the realisation of the dream to which they had committed their lives – the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ to every part of the world. For many of those present, the very fact that such a conference could take place rested on technological possibilities unheard of when they were born. Edinburgh 1910 drew part of its power from the fact that it capitalized on new possibilities for travel and communication. The steamship had revolutionised international travel so that it became possible to contemplate bringing together hundreds of people from different parts of the world for purposes of conference. Mott himself was at one time calculated to be the most widely travelled person in all of history.<sup>12</sup> No one was more alert to the new possibilities. Technological

advance was hailed as the handmaid to the spread of the gospel worldwide. The vast correspondence which gathered information from hundreds of missionaries spread across the globe would not have been possible on anything approaching its scale at any earlier time. All of this gave participants a sense of being part of something dramatically new and full of promise.

The methodology of the Conference furthered this sense of purpose. The substantial reports prepared in advance, the issue of daily papers, the venue being a hall designed for discussion and debate, the seven-minute time limit on speeches from the floor – all this was geared to the generation of clear and action-oriented thinking. Oldham's genius for organisation was evident in an arrangement by which minutes of the previous day's proceedings were delivered by first post to delegates sitting at breakfast in homes throughout Edinburgh. They had a sense of being part of a modern, efficient, well-oiled machine which was geared to the attainment of its objective.

All of this was deeply impressive yet the feature of the conference which would be most remembered was its inner spiritual engine – the worship and prayer which lay at its heart. Standing Orders decreed that “the most important part of each day's proceedings” on which depends “more than all else...the realisation of the blessing possible for the Conference” was to be “united intercession.” Accordingly, at 12:00 noon, debate was suspended and one of the delegates would introduce “the midday intercession meeting,” leading the Conference in a brief reflection on a given theme and in general prayer. As Temple Gairdner recalled: “Every day, at the very time of the day when the audience was at its freshest and most vigorous, this great Conference, which was daily finding its available time insufficient, deliberately suspended its discussion; for a full half-hour the voice of debate was hushed, and the

Conference, as a Conference, fell to prayer.... And at the times of prayer, when the spirit of devotion was well aroused, the silence of God was heard within the hall”<sup>13</sup> During these times of intercessions, delegates were forbidden to enter or leave the Assembly Hall. For all their eager exploitation of new-found technological possibilities, neither organisers nor delegates had forgotten that the true engine driving the missionary movement was prayer.

Delegates were also struck by the hospitality with which they were received in Edinburgh. The Lord Provost gave a reception in the City Chambers and another was held at the National Museum; by special convocation the University conferred honorary degrees on fourteen of the most distinguished delegates; an opening service was held in St Giles, the High Kirk of Edinburgh, and a daily communion was celebrated for Anglican delegates at the Episcopal Church of St John the Evangelist on Princes Street. Families throughout the city opened their homes to provide accommodation for the delegates.

### **WHAT WERE THE OUTCOMES OF THE CONFERENCE?**

Our next chapter will listen to the echoes of Edinburgh which reverberated down through the 20th century. In terms of formal resolutions, the conference took only one decision. It was Commission Eight—on Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity—which brought the recommendation: “that a Continuation Committee of the World Missionary Conference be appointed, international and representative in character... to maintain in prominence the idea of the World Missionary Conference as a means of co-ordinating missionary work, of laying sound foundations for future development, and of evoking and claiming by corporate action fresh stores of spiritual force

for the evangelisation of the world.”<sup>14</sup> There was not a dissenting voice to be heard when this proposal was put to the conference. Spontaneously, the entire gathering stood to sing the doxology. The delegates were united in their determination that means must be created to take forward the inspiration which they had discovered through their gathering in Edinburgh.

Beyond the formalities of resolutions, committees and plans, Edinburgh 1910 had its impact through taking hold of the imagination. In places near and far it became an inspirational memory, invoked time and again. The delegates caught a vision of something which did not then exist: a “world church” with deep roots and vigorous expression widely apparent on every continent. As this vision steadily became reality in the century which followed, many looked back to Edinburgh as the occasion where this new demography of Christianity first came into view. The conference stood also for the missionary ambition which insisted that the churches apply themselves to their primary task of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to “the whole creation”. Finally, it stood for the conviction that it is “better together”—that the churches and agencies will be much better placed to fulfil their missionary mandate if they can be closely united. By elucidating these themes and by mustering energy to carry them forward, Edinburgh 1910 set the churches an agenda for the century to come and gave them impetus with which to address it.

### **A BEACON TO KEEP IN VIEW**

Edinburgh 1910 proved to be an event of momentous significance for the Christian faith. At the time John R. Mott, the Conference chairman, called it: “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.”<sup>15</sup> Fifty years later, in 1960, Hugh Martin gave his assessment: “By the general consent of all competent judges the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in June, 1910, was one of the most creative events in the long history of the Christian Church. Its significance is all the more clear in the perspective of fifty years after. In many respects unique in itself, it was also unique in the impetus it gave to Christian activity in many directions. It opened a new era in the missionary enterprise but it was also the beginning of what we now call ‘the ecumenical movement’. ‘Edinburgh 1910’ was in fact a fountain head of international and inter-Church co-operation on a depth and scale never before known.”<sup>16</sup> Today we have the “perspective of a hundred years after”—what will we make of Edinburgh 1910 from this vantage point?

Some things are clear. The conference marked a “coming of age” of the missionary movement. Even within the church, it had often been regarded as peripheral and eccentric. Now its assembled delegates heard no less an ecclesiastical leader than the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, stating that “the place of missions in the life of the Church must be the central place, and none other: that is what matters”. Davidson went on to conclude: “Secure for that thought its true place in our plans, our policy, our prayers; and then—why then, the issue is His, not ours. But it may well be that, if that come true, there be some standing here tonight who shall not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God come with power.”<sup>17</sup> Thus placing the missionary movement at the heart of the faith and action of the church gave a great sense of the momentousness of the event taking place. It also introduced the thought that “mission” is the mission of the church—something which would be a major theme in 20th century developments.

It is also clear that Edinburgh 1910 marked an historic turning point in the story of church and mission. Perhaps this has never been state more eloquently than by William Richey Hogg:

Edinburgh, 1910, appears to be the non-Roman Christian world's ecumenical keystone. The keystone, specially cut, stands as the central stone at the crown of an arch. It holds together and strengthens all beneath that converges in it. The arch it crowns provides a foundation upon which a superstructure can be built. The keystone is neither arch nor wall, but it belongs to both. Remove it, and both will collapse. It is unique. Thus it is with Edinburgh, 1910. It belongs to the nineteenth and to the twentieth centuries. It is the keystone through which developments in mission and unity in the one century relate to those in the other and apart from which the full meaning of neither can be assayed.<sup>18</sup>

No one seeking an understanding of the changing demographic shape of Christianity over the past 200 years could fail to take account of Edinburgh 1910. For the historians it is an event which they miss at their peril.

What about those of us concerned with church and mission today? For us too, Edinburgh 1910 offers a powerful point of reference. The ambitious scope and analytical approach of the Conference has ensured that many of the issues it discussed remain pertinent even in the vastly changed world of today. The Commission Reports which gave the conference its substance, together with the discussions which they each provoked at the conference, will amply repay study by those concerned with mission in today's world.<sup>19</sup> Even more than in its detailed points

of analysis, however, the conference challenges us today by the extensive scope of its ambition. As Andrew Walls explains: “Edinburgh sought to survey and assimilate the accumulated experience of the interaction of Christian and non-Christian worlds with a view to bringing the encounter to a new stage.”<sup>20</sup> We live at a time when the paradigm of mission represented by the Western missionary movement has run its course. New dynamics of mission are emerging, as yet unclear and liminal in their outline. Can the memory of Edinburgh 1910 provoke us once more to take stock comprehensively of the progress of Christianity in relation to its missionary mandate? Can it identify and stimulate the new vision and the fresh energy which will shape church and mission the 21st century?

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*An Enduring Memory: Echoes of Edinburgh*

Edinburgh 1910 was not a one-off event. It was the first step in a journey, the beginning of a process which would both shape and be shaped by the mission of the church in the 20th century. Certain key meetings mark the major steps on this journey.

**FORMATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL**

The only formal outcome of Edinburgh 1910 was the formation of the Continuation Committee under the leadership of John Mott as Chairman and J.H. Oldham as Secretary. Its responsibility was “to confer with the Societies and Boards as to the best method of working toward the formation of such a permanent International Missionary Committee as is suggested by the Commissions of the Conference and by various missionary bodies apart from the Conference.”<sup>21</sup> Within two years the Continuation Committee helped form the Conference of British Missionary Societies with its membership of forty missionary societies. The two bodies shared single premises in London, suitably named Edinburgh House. This initiative pointed the way which would be followed in many other countries also. The First World War (1914-1918) retarded the development of international missionary co-operation, but within three years of the war’s end, in 1921,

the International Missionary Council, with Mott as the first Chairman and Oldham and the American A.L. Warnshuis as its first Secretaries, was constituted at Lake Mohonk in New York State. With headquarters in London (Edinburgh House) and New York, its membership included 14 interdenominational missionary associations and 16 interdenominational field bodies. The second notable achievement of these years was the launching of *The International Review of Missions*. The journal, edited by Oldham, was dedicated to continuing Edinburgh 1910's emphasis on the disciplined study of mission. It has continued to appear regularly and is unsurpassed as a barometer of thinking about mission over the past century.

### **JERUSALEM, PALESTINE 1928**

The Jerusalem meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1928 saw “the younger churches” much more widely represented than they had been at Edinburgh, revealing the direction which be followed throughout the century. It followed the pattern of Edinburgh in commissioning comprehensive preparatory studies. These revealed a broadening scope of enquiry, including such topics as religious education, race conflict, industrialization and rural problems. The Jerusalem meeting started already to deconstruct the terms on which the Edinburgh conference had been held. Whereas at Edinburgh the “Christian” and the “non-Christian worlds were understood very much on geographical, territorial terms, at Jerusalem it was acknowledged that secularism was the real religion of the “non-Christian world”, thus setting the binary division of the world in an entirely different light.

### **TAMBARAM, INDIA 1938**

The meeting of the IMC at Tambaram, near Madras (now Chennai) in 1938 was markedly larger than the Jerusalem meeting, with more countries represented. Again, it was remarkable for the role played by delegates from the younger churches. Their representatives constituted slightly more than half of the official delegates—a dramatically different picture from that of Edinburgh 1910. Nor was it only their numbers which were impressive. The quality of their contribution to the discussion signalled that the future leadership of world Christianity would not be confined to the West. Much discussion focussed on the nature of the church and it was clear that it was the worldwide church which was emerging as the primary agent of mission. The question raised at Edinburgh as to how much of a role could be taken by the churches emerging on the mission fields now received an emphatic answer.

### **WHITBY, CANADA 1947**

Another war intervened before the IMC could hold what had become by tradition an approximately decennial meeting. “Expectant evangelism” was its theme as it sought to return to core business after the disruptions of the war years. Post-war austerity meant a smaller gathering than previously but this perhaps fostered the intimacy between representatives of the older and younger churches which led to a new emphasis on “partnership” as the keynote of their working together. Edinburgh 1910 had been a potent memory in the minds of “younger churches” prompting them to seek closer cooperation

and stimulating their response to the challenge of evangelism. By this time Latin American leaders had become familiar figures in IMC gatherings, their exclusion from Edinburgh 1910 becoming a distant memory.

### **FAITH AND ORDER**

Parallel to the developing life of the International Missionary Council was the emergence of another ecumenical instrument—the World Conference on Faith and Order. Its origins can also be traced to Edinburgh 1910. Among the delegates was Charles H. Brent, then a missionary bishop in the Philippines. Brent was frustrated by the self-denying ordinance which forbade discussion of points on which there were doctrinal or ecclesiastical differences among the delegates. He was convinced that, far from being avoided, these points should be thoroughly examined with a view to their removal and, ultimately, with a view to bringing about the union of churches which had become separated from one another. He spoke of his experience at the Edinburgh conference as one of a “conversion” which left him with the conviction that church unity could and must be achieved. This was the inspiration from which the Faith and Order movement sprang.

### **LIFE AND WORK**

Another parallel stream of ecumenical engagement was the Life and Work movement. Its connection with Edinburgh 1910 is less direct but when J.H. Oldham became its Secretary in 1934 he brought with him the experience, inspiration and wide range of contacts which resulted from Edinburgh 1910. Like the Edinburgh Conference, it worked on the premise that Christians

can best advance towards unity by setting aside doctrinal differences and concentrating on action and cooperation.

### **THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES 1948**

When the Edinburgh 1910 Continuation Committee met at Crans in 1920 to pick up the pieces after the First World War and to lay the basis for the formation of the IMC the following year, J.H. Oldham was already anticipating that the International Missionary Council “will probably have before long to give way to something that may represent the beginnings of a world league of Churches.”<sup>22</sup> In the event, it was the parallel streams represented by the Faith and Order and Life and Work Conferences which drew closer together a view to forming a World Council of Churches. From 1938, however, when the WCC was first conceived as a “body in formation”, it had a very close working relationship with the IMC. When the World Council of Churches was finally constituted in Amsterdam in 1948 it was noted that the presence of John R. Mott, Ruth Rouse and J.H. Oldham provided a living link with the Edinburgh 1910 conference to which its roots could be traced.

### **WILLINGEN, GERMANY 1952 AND ACHIMOTA, GHANA 1958**

While the WCC took its first steps, the IMC met in Willingen to consider the challenge of what “mission(s)” would mean in a greatly changed world. The premier mission field of China was now closed and the end of the colonial era in south Asia and Africa was dawning. It was time to attend to the theology of mission and delegates at Willingen pointed to what became known as the *missio Dei*—with the affirmation that “there is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission

to the world”.<sup>23</sup> This theological understanding of the nature of mission provided an anchor in changing times. A debate unresolved at Willingen concerned the relation of the church to mission, with some wishing to identify the two and others wishing to set mission on a broader basis. The mid-1950s saw a growing conviction in both the WCC and the IMC that the time was ripe for the two bodies to integrate into one. When the IMC held a major international assembly at Accra in Ghana in 1957, notwithstanding concerns that the “directness” of missions would be lost through integration, it was agreed to accept in principle a plan for the integration of the two bodies.

### **NEW DELHI AND INTEGRATION OF THE IMC AND WCC 1961**

Debates on “integration” raged during the late 1950s before the IMC finally integrated with the WCC in 1961 at a united Assembly in New Delhi. Those with a strong mission agenda and/or a conservative theological position feared that the “churchy” concerns of the World Council of Churches would lead to mission being sidelined, despite the formation of a Division of World Mission and Evangelism which was tasked to carry forward the life and action of the International Missionary Council within the life of the WCC. Under the latter’s auspices, further great international mission conferences were held at Mexico City in 1963, Bangkok in 1973, Melbourne in 1980, San Antonio in 1989, Salvador de Bahia in 1996 and Athens in 2005. An important result of integration was that the Eastern Orthodox, with their more centripetal understanding of mission, brought another perspective to the discussion at this series of conferences which led, in 2005, to an “Orthodox country” hosting for the first time a major international mission conference.

## TRENDS IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF MISSION

Through almost a century of concentrated discussion of the missionary task, a number of clear trends emerged.

- Whereas in 1910 “missions” were often considered in the plural as outposts of Christian witness in the “non-Christian world”, in the course of the century “mission” in the singular became the fundamental category as a comprehensive description of witness to Jesus Christ in all its forms.

- Whereas in 1910 there was much uncertainty about the relationship of church and mission, in the course of a century the conviction grew that the church is the proper agent of mission and must have the missionary function constantly at its heart.

- Whereas in 1910 mission was understood to be directed “from the West to the rest”, in the course of a century the conviction grew that all six continents form “the mission field” as well as all forming a “home base” for mission.

- Whereas in 1910 it was widely assumed that the Western understanding of Christian faith was the correct and progressive one, the ensuing century would see a growing appreciation that faith must be contextualized, that new contexts yield new insights into the faith, and that Western Christianity itself is but one contextualized expression of the faith.

- Whereas in 1910 there appeared to be a close affinity between the power of empire and the advance of Christian faith, the century which followed brought growing awareness of God’s “preferential option for the poor” and the development of a much more critical approach to the proper social location of authentic faith.

- Whereas in 1910 it was expected that other world religions would melt away as the superiority of Christianity

became ever more widely recognised, the resurgence of all world religions during the 20th century indicated that encounter with other religions would remain essential to Christian mission.

- Whereas in 1910, missionary work was understood as something undertaken by human beings in response to the command of Christ, in the course of a century the conviction grew that God is the primary agent of mission and that the role of human beings is to participate in the mission of God.

- Whereas in 1910, a world missionary conference could only be brought together by explicitly excluding discussion of questions of the organic unity of the church, in the course of a century the conviction grew among many that the issue of church unity must be at the heart of the agenda.

This final point provided the inner motivation of the ecumenical movement which found institutional expression in the formation of the World Council of Churches. The journey which began in Edinburgh was not aimed at departing from the evangelistic agenda with which it started. As Kenneth Scott Latourette has stated: “It cannot be said too often or too emphatically that the ecumenical movement arose from the missionary movement and continues to have at its heart world-wide evangelism.... Unity was sought not as an end in itself but as a means to evangelism.”<sup>24</sup>

#### **THE LAUSANNE COMMITTEE FOR WORLD EVANGELIZATION 1974**

Not all were convinced, however, that the focus on organic unity and the broadening of the understanding of mission would not lead to evangelism being downplayed. The formation of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization in 1974 proved to be a rallying point for those who feared that

the WCC was failing to deliver an explicit and convincing commitment to evangelism.<sup>25</sup> The WCC's holistic approach to mission as inherently part of the vocation of the church was feared in some quarters to mean the subordination of mission to the confessional and social agendas of liberal ecumenism. In 1974 the Lausanne Movement sought to redress this perceived imbalance by re-claiming Edinburgh 1910's priority of "world evangelisation" and concentrating missionary attention on the challenge presented by "the unreached". Billy Graham, in his opening speech at the Lausanne Congress in 1974, characterized Edinburgh 1910 as "the most historic conference on evangelism and missions of this century."<sup>26</sup> From then on there would be those who would claim that the Lausanne Committee, and not the WCC, carried the torch which had been lit at Edinburgh in 1910. This claim would be contested by the WCC which understood itself to be sustaining a commitment to evangelism while taking account of issues such as poverty, violence and the environment which indicated continuity with the work of the IMC and which later would be prominent on the Evangelical agenda also.

The Lausanne Committee held a significant series of international missionary conferences: Lausanne in 1974 (Lausanne I), Pattaya in 1980, Manila in 1989 (Lausanne II) and Pattaya again in 2004. Plans are well advanced for Lausanne III to be held in Cape Town in 2010. This movement understands itself to be maintaining the priority that the Edinburgh conference gave to evangelism when the WCC, in their view, has often been preoccupied with other concerns. While institutionally there is a direct line of continuity from the Edinburgh Conference to the World Council of Churches, there are mission movements outside the WCC that understand themselves to represent more faithfully the spirit and focus of Edinburgh 1910. While

the differences in emphasis have been sharp at times, there are also points at which there are strong parallels between the two movements. Lausanne has sought to be responsive to the changing demography of world Christianity and the leaders of “younger churches” have been prominent in its counsels. Moreover, it is those leaders who have been instrumental in ensuring that the emphasis on evangelism is held in balance with the role of Christian witness as an agent of transformation in society. While passion for world evangelization, echoing Edinburgh 1910, lies at the heart of the movement, there is a deep sensitivity to context and culture. It is a question whether the two world Christian movements which emerged from the ferment of the post-war years, identified with the neighbouring Swiss cities of Geneva and Lausanne, are truly so diametrically opposed as has sometimes appeared to be the case.

#### **A POINT OF REFERENCE**

It is striking how often Edinburgh 1910 is used as a point of reference by those concerned with world Christianity. To take but one mid-century example, the Report of the Foreign Mission Committee to the 1951 Church of Scotland General Assembly began with these words: “‘Edinburgh 1910’ has not yet ceased to produce fruit, and some of its fruit appeared in 1950.”<sup>27</sup> It was a very different world from the one which had excited the missionary imagination in 1910. Two world wars had occurred. Communist revolution had brought Western missionary work in China to an end. India was independent making the future of missionary work very uncertain. In Africa the stirrings of nationalism suggested that the missionary enterprise there might be in jeopardy before long. The extent of the change in the prospects for the missionary movement had been recognised

in the opening of the Foreign Mission Committee's Report the previous year: "God has given the missionary movement both encouragement and discouragement since the days of 'Edinburgh 1910'. Must we not confess that we needed this lesson on the paradoxical relation between Christian Faith and History?"<sup>28</sup> Similar statements could be culled from the records of many other churches and missionary societies. Edinburgh 1910 is a key reference point from which missionary strategy attempts to make sense of unfolding events. A glance at the index to books on mission and ecumenism reveals how often, and in how many different contexts, the conference remains a valued point of reference. This is not to say that it was a moment of perfection.

### **OWNING UP: MISTAKES AND LIMITATIONS OF EDINBURGH 1910**

It is clear that Edinburgh 1910 unleashed a dynamic which spiralled through the 20th century, creating a movement which expressed the transformation of world Christianity. Especially in light of difficulties and complexities encountered later on, it can be easy to idealize the Edinburgh conference and to forget that it had its own difficulties and complexities. As a child of its time, it had limitations and blind-spots which have been exposed with the passing of the years. The echoes of Edinburgh down through the years include not only an inspiring memory but also critical appraisal.

#### **A Territorial Idea of Christian Expansion**

The thinking of the conference was premised on a territorial idea of Christian mission. A key distinction was drawn between "fully missionised lands" and "not yet fully missionised lands". The task of mission was to "carry" the gospel from the "Christian world" to the "non-Christian world". This Christendom model of Christian

expansion would be obsolete within half a century. As Andrew 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.”<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile parts of the “non-Christian world” have become heartlands of Christian faith. The century which followed would expose the destructive potential of the dualism inherent in unbounded confidence in the “Christian” West and the belief that the “non-Christian world” must give way to its steady advance. The use of the territorial principle also meant that Latin America was excluded from the consideration of the conference on the grounds that it was a “missionised land” a recognition of the integrity of the Roman Catholic Christianity of the continent on which Anglo-Catholics insisted as a condition of their participation. Hence it belied its title as a “world” missionary conference and its understanding of mission was distorted by Christendom assumptions which would soon be manifestly outdated and of questionable validity.

### **Complicity with imperialism and colonialism**

As a century of critique has made plain, the conference did not acquire sufficient distance from the Western imperialism which was at its height at that time. The fact that the Western “Christian” powers dominated world affairs underlay a great deal of the optimism of the conference regarding the missionary enterprise. The enthusiasm and drive which marked the Conference drew much more than it realised on the optimistic self-confidence of imperial expansion and technological advance. Much too easily the conference bought into the colonial assumption of the inferiority of the colonised. Much too easily, for example they accepted a colonial caricature of Africa as a savage, barbaric and uncultured continent. While abuses of colonial rule such as the opium wars or the atrocities in the Congo might be subject

to criticism there was almost no awareness that colonialism, in itself, was damaging and that there would be a heavy price to pay if Christian mission were too closely allied to it.

### **Mission in military metaphor**

The territorial understanding of Christian expansion was allied with an activist mentality and a military metaphor. The Conference was marked by the mood of the Protestant missionary movement described by David Bosch as “pragmatic, purposeful, activist, impatient, self-confident, single-minded, triumphant”.<sup>30</sup> This mood unfortunately was often expressed in the vocabulary of aggression, attack, conquest and crusade. In the discourse of the Conference, missionaries were often described as “soldiers” or Christian “forces”. The reports and speeches abounded with metaphors such as “army”, “crusade”, “council of war”, “conquest”, “advance” and “marching orders”. Participants saw nothing incongruous in using the language of violent military campaigns to describe their missionary engagement and aspirations. The aggressive and confrontational understanding of Christian mission which characterised Edinburgh 1910 has provoked much resentment and does not serve to commend Christian faith today. This is not to say that Christians should lack confidence in the message they proclaim. The issue is one of respect for those who adhere to other faiths. For all that the Report of Commission Four showed the sympathetic appreciation of other faiths which many missionaries had developed, its militaristic and triumphalist language strikes a note of antagonism which could hardly be expected to make for cordial inter-faith relations or for a culture of peace. It concludes by celebrating: “the spectacle of the advance of the Christian Church along many lines of action to the conquest of the five great religions of the modern world...”<sup>31</sup> As we approach the

centenary of Edinburgh after a century of sickening violence, amidst neo-imperial wars and in face of the ever-present threat of nuclear holocaust, it has become all too clear how unsuited is the military metaphor to the purposes of Christian mission.

### **Patronising attitude to the emerging churches**

The conference was marked by an unmistakable ambivalence towards what it described as “the church on the mission field”. On the one hand, the objective of the missionary movement was the emergence of self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating churches. On the other, the missionaries were jealous of their “field” and showed an ill-disguised interest in retaining the initiative. The new churches emerging in the mission fields were regarded as “infant” churches and it was expected that they would require the care and direction of their “parents” for many years to come. This led to a somewhat distant and patronising relationship to the leaders of the churches which were already emerging as a result of the missionary movement. One of their number, V.S. Azariah, in what proved to be the most remembered speech of the conference, expressed both gratitude and exasperation in his concluding peroration: “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!”<sup>32</sup> Much of the journey ahead in the 20th century would be occupied with answering this request.

### **Restrictions to discussion stored up problems for the future**

Tactically, in order to achieve the widest possible participation, it was a stroke of genius to exclude doctrinal and ecclesial issues

from the consideration of the conference. Pragmatically, it made for a conference which could find focus and energy by concentrating on the key issues which were facing Western missions as they engaged with the non-Western world. However, there was a price to pay. It meant that the discussion of mission was abstracted from theological debate about the content and meaning of the gospel, and from ecclesiological debate about the nature and calling of the church. This meant that it was necessarily an incomplete discussion. When it was taken forward in the course of the century which followed the conference it was necessary to attempt a more integrated discussion of faith, church and mission. Insofar as Edinburgh 1910 was achieved through a papering over of the cracks, doctrinal and ecclesial divisions reasserted themselves. While the conscious thrust of Edinburgh 1910 was aimed at achieving greater unity, the structure of its discussion traded short-term gains for long-term struggles as the years ahead would see more fragmentation than integration.

### **History reveals that confidence was ill-founded**

It has to be recognised that, in many respects, the Edinburgh conference was over-heated and over-ambitious. It was carried away by the self-confidence of the Western powers at the height of the age of empire. Its slogans proved to be hollow. The world was not evangelised in that generation. The gospel was not carried to the entire non-Christian world. Within a few years of the Conference, the energies of the Western “missionised” nations would be consumed by a war more destructive than any experienced hitherto and a great deal of the worldwide evangelistic effort would be put on hold. Nor was this to prove to be a temporary interruption. Edinburgh 1910 which understood itself to be on the brink of a great new surge of missionary advance was, in fact, the high point of the movement. Never

again would the Western missionary movement occupy centre-stage in the way that it felt it did at Edinburgh. For most of the mission boards and societies represented, the 20th century would be one of remorseless decline in their operations. They had also made some ill-advised alliances, there were flaws in their understanding of mission, they did damage which it would take many years to repair. The scenario envisaged by the Edinburgh delegates never came to pass.

### **CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE: THE ACHIEVEMENT OF EDINBURGH 1910**

Nonetheless, despite all its blind-spots and weaknesses, the 20th century has witnessed a vindication of a fundamental conviction of Edinburgh 1910: that the good news of Jesus Christ can take root in every culture across the world and produce fruit in church and society everywhere. The great drama of the coming century, in terms of church history, would be the growth of Christian faith in Asia, Africa, Oceania and Latin America. In some respects it has surpassed even the most sanguine expectations of 1910. The extraordinary growth of Christianity in Africa, for example, was not foreseen by any of the Edinburgh delegates. Nor had they anticipated how Latin America would become the theatre of a powerful renewal of Christian faith. This worldwide flourishing of the faith stands as a demonstration of the validity of their missionary vision that the gospel could be received and find expression in completely new contexts. Without the missionary impetus represented by Edinburgh 1910, the prospects for Christianity as a world religion might well be doubtful today, particularly as its long-time European homeland is proving inhospitable. Largely as a result of the seeds planted by missionary endeavour, vigorous and numerous expressions of Christian

faith are to be found on all six continents today. Inasmuch as Edinburgh 1910 was the occasion on which the vision of the modern missionary movement found its most concentrated expression, it can be remembered as a vision fulfilled. However imperfect its conceptual equipment, the Edinburgh conference anticipated the transformation through which Christianity would become a truly worldwide faith.



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*Time for a New Conversation: Towards 2010*

As the centenary approaches, there appear to be four features of the 1910 Conference which carry particular resonance at this time.

**IMAGINATION**

Though it has sometimes been derided as a highly pragmatic ‘how-to’ Conference, it ought to be recognised that it was premised upon a bold attempt to transform the world’s religious demography. Never did the modern missionary movement articulate its ambition more comprehensively than at Edinburgh in 1910. It was a moment of imagination when people came together to think seriously about something which had never existed before: what a truly worldwide church would look like and how it would exercise its missionary obligations. It cast the vision, as Bishop Gore of Birmingham expressed it, that: “A universal religion, a catholic religion, needs a common message such as is contained in the Apostles’ Creed, and as is recorded in the Bible, but a common message comprehended by very different and various peoples and individuals, each with very different gifts, so that each in receiving the one message brings

out some different or special aspect of the universal truth or character which lies in the common religion.”<sup>33</sup>

## **GATHERING**

Within its limitations, the Conference succeeded in bringing together a wider range of Protestant Christians than had ever cooperated before. It also signalled the possibility of reviewing the division between Protestants and Roman Catholics. While there were no Roman Catholic delegates at Edinburgh 1910, the conference did receive a letter from Bishop Bonomelli of Cremona who wrote in positive and hopeful terms.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the hope was expressed that the Eastern Orthodox might participate in future conferences. Very importantly, the Conference also lifted the eyes of Western churches to the emerging significance of churches and Christian communities outside Europe and North America. Vastly influential was the work of Commission Eight on ‘Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity’. Though the Commission’s work was hedged around by limitations, particularly in regard to doctrinal and ecclesial questions, nonetheless a vision of the unity of the church broke surface at Edinburgh and remained a guiding light for many in the century which followed.

## **REFLECTION**

Much of the enduring value of the Edinburgh Conference stems from the depth and range of its reflection. This found expression not only in the debates of the Conference itself but, remarkably, in the eight study commissions which prepared reports for the Conference. The quality of the reports is such that they did much to stimulate the development of the science of mission, often

termed ‘missiology’, as a distinct academic discipline. Though their limitations of their conceptual landscape are apparent today, it is equally evident that their authors were grappling with profound questions of perennial importance to Christian mission.

## MOVEMENT

The ethos of the Conference was characterised, as Kathleen Bliss explained, by ‘... the common living convictions of practical men and women who are working together for the evangelization of the world.’<sup>35</sup> At its heart was a pressing sense of urgency about the fulfilment of the Christian imperative for mission which could find its proper expression only in action. As Latourette explained, it aimed to be a ‘consultation through which the missionary agencies could plan together the next steps in giving the Gospel to the world.’<sup>36</sup> Analysis was offered as a basis for action and the ambition of the Conference was to generate energy and fresh movement in worldwide mission.

## THE CENTENARY: RETRIEVING THE GENIUS OF EDINBURGH?

The centenary of the World Missionary Conference has proved to be a suggestive moment for many around the world who have the mission and unity of the church at heart. Those who have responded to the centenary include not only those who stand in a direct historical succession to the Protestant mission agencies which sent their delegates to Edinburgh in 1910. It has struck a chord with branches of the church which had no part in the 1910 Conference, even with those which scarcely existed at that time. Why has it had such a wide appeal? Could it be that the churches again find themselves in need of the imagination, gathering, reflection and movement which distinguished Edinburgh 1910? Could it be

that the energy and the hope being stimulated by the memory of Edinburgh 1910 is not so much about then as it is about now?

### **Time for Imagination**

We live today with the awareness, notably articulated by David Bosch in *Transforming Mission*, that the paradigm of mission which prevailed in the 19th and 20th centuries has run its course. New models of mission are needed but we do not yet know what form they will take. An act of imagination is needed and has begun to be expressed. The broad coalition which is preparing for an Edinburgh centenary event in 2010 has made the following commitments:

- 1) Rather than being centred in Edinburgh, a poly-centric approach will be taken. Facilitation will be offered by a variety of centres in different parts of the world. In 2010 it is anticipated that significant events will take place not only in Scotland but in many locations around the world.
- 2) Whereas 1910 was confined to mainline Protestantism, the participants in 2010 will be drawn from the whole range of Christian traditions and confessions. Particular effort will be made to involve new and indigenous streams of Christian witness from different parts of the world.
- 3) Instead of being largely limited to the North Atlantic, there will be an intentional bias to the South, recognising that Christianity's centre of gravity has moved markedly southwards during the past century. The vision is that 60% of the delegates at Ed-

inburgh 2010 will be from the Global South. The process will aim to be truly worldwide in its scope.

Imagination is needed to detect the contours of a missionary movement which is no longer 'from the West to the rest' but rather 'from everywhere to everyone'. What will it mean for initiative in mission to lie not with those who hold political and economic power but rather with the poor and marginalised? Perhaps a clue is found in the prophetic words of David Bosch: 'It is ... a bold humility—or a humble boldness. We know only in part, but we do know. And we believe that the faith we profess is both true and just, and should be proclaimed. We do this, however, not as judges or lawyers, but as witnesses; not as soldiers but as envoys of peace; not as high-pressure salespersons, but as ambassadors of the Servant Lord.'<sup>37</sup> Such hints are suggestive but there remains a clamant need for an act of imagination which generates a compelling vision of Christian mission for our time.

### **Time to Reconnect**

The history of mission in the 20th century led to major divisions opening up within the missionary movement. The controversial integration of the International Missionary Council (the institutional outcome of Edinburgh 1910) with the World Council of Churches in 1961 led in 1974 to the formation of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, committed to sustaining the agenda of world evangelization which it believed had been lost in the 'churchy' and 'liberal' agenda of the WCC. On the other hand, more Evangelical movements have at times been vulnerable to criticism for lacking political awareness and social responsibility. These tensions and divisions are widely apparent around the world. One constructive response to this situation is to

re-gather, to listen to each other, to share perspectives and to seek direction from the Holy Spirit in face of contemporary challenges. Could the centenary provide an opportunity for both streams to re-engage with the Edinburgh 1910 heritage and with each other? As Andrew Walls suggests: ‘both “ecumenical” and “evangelical” today have their roots in Edinburgh 1910. If each will go back to the pit whence both were dug, each may understand both themselves and the other better.’<sup>38</sup>

The historical perspective opened up by the centenary also creates the possibility, for both traditions, to recognise how much they represent a mid-20th century response to world affairs and theological trends. Major new movements lay down the challenge that it may be in new paradigms that Christian mission discovers the cutting edge it needs for the very different world of the 21st century. While there are traditions arising from the 1910 Conference which deserve all due respect, it may be that their renewal will come from reconnecting fragments which have broken apart and making new connections among contemporary movements of Christian mission. A process taking its inspiration from the 1910 Conference but thoroughly contemporary and forward-looking would give an opportunity for connections to be made which will be fruitful in shaping Christian mission for a new century. Indeed the world of the early 21st century provides greater opportunity for listening attentively to one another within the world church than anything the Edinburgh delegates could have dreamed of in 1910.

The Global Christian Forum, which met for the first time in Nairobi in late 2007, is evidence of a new approach to ecumenism that includes Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Reformation Protestant, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches as well as Christian networks and para-church organizations. A similar spectrum can be found on the General Council

now preparing to mark the centenary of Edinburgh 1910 which is possibly representative of a wider cross-section of the world's Christians than any previous organisation. It includes representatives of:

- African Independent Churches
- Anglican Communion
- Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
- Council for World Mission / CEVAA / United Evangelical Mission
- International Association for Mission Studies
- International Fellowship of Evangelical Students
- Latin American Theological Fraternity
- Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation
- Lutheran World Federation
- Orthodox Churches
- Pentecostal Churches
- Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity
- Seventh Day Adventist Church
- World Alliance of Reformed Churches
- World Baptist Alliance
- World Council of Churches
- World Evangelical Alliance
- World Methodist Council
- World Student Christian Federation

Amongst all these constituencies there is a strong commitment to connect around the memory of Edinburgh 1910 which provides something of a 'neutral' space for them to encounter one another. Representation of all the above bodies would ensure that Edinburgh 2010 would comprise a broader cross-

section of world Christianity than has ever before come together in a purposeful way. As the 2010 delegates share in the event of the centenary, will they find new ways to express the unity and common mission of the churches? Missionary engagement invariably raises the question of unity. A century after Edinburgh, this remains a primary challenge for the churches.

### **Time to Take Stock**

Some of the missionary movement's most perceptive participant-critics have observed that we have arrived at a time of fundamental change in the shape and direction of Christian mission. Andrew Walls suggests that: 'The missionary movement is now in its old age. What is changing is not the task [of world evangelization] but the means and the mode.'<sup>39</sup> Michael Amaladoss spoke for many when he said that: 'We are living in an age of transition—a liminal period.'<sup>40</sup> There is need for new models to interpret and give coherence to new patterns of mission for a new century. Wilbert Shenk declares that: 'Renewal will not come by way of incremental revisions of structures and liturgies inherited from the past.'<sup>41</sup> Common to different schools of thought is an acknowledgement that the 'old wineskins' are no longer holding the new wine of the gospel and that new wineskins are required. In this context, the centenary of Edinburgh 1910 is an occasion which challenges the global missionary movement to re-gather and take stock again of how it stands in relation to its task. This is not with a view to nostalgia but rather to be forward-looking. It is about attempting to do for the 21st century what Edinburgh 1910 did for the 20th, i.e. catching a vision and setting an agenda which gives direction and energy to the missionary movement.

The major instrument of preparation for Edinburgh 2010 is a round of commissions; an echo of the eight commissions

which reported to the 1910 Conference and aimed to engage with 'matters of large importance and of timely interest at this stage in the missionary enterprise.'<sup>42</sup> The subject matter of the commissions has been carefully chosen to engage with the great challenges facing church and mission in the 21st century:

*Foundations for Mission*

This commission addresses the "why?" question in regard to mission. What is it in the Christian faith which drives its outward mission? This will be considered empirically by ascertaining from local churches what it is that motivates them for mission. It will also be subject to theological analysis – how does understanding God as Trinity shape missionary theory and practice?

*Christian Mission Among Other Faiths*

The work of this commission is set against a background of religious resurgence in the contemporary world ("the revenge of God") and the sobering fact that differences of religious persuasion appear to underlie many of the world's most intractable conflicts. It will engage such questions as the theology of religions, the uniqueness of Christ, conversion, proselytization, syncretism, dialogue, encounter and evangelism.

*Mission and Post-Modernities*

The acids of modernity have dissolved faith in societies where Christian faith used to be strong. The post-modernities which define life and community for many people today pose new and searching questions for Christian mission. This commission will engage with the core philosophy of post-modernity as well as related contemporary developments such as post-colonialism, globalization and information technology.

*Mission and power*

This commission will recognise that mission is practised in a world shaped by various forms of power: spiritual, political, military, financial and international. It will raise issues of culture change, international partnership in mission, human rights, ecological sustainability and inequalities in the production, distribution and consumption of resources. It will examine the multifaceted interface between the practice of mission and the exercise of power.

*Forms of missionary engagement*

100 years ago what it meant to be a missionary was fairly well defined. Today it is far less clear where agency lies in the unfolding of Christian mission. This commission will assess the patterns, initiatives and developments which are shaping missionary engagement today. These will include the role of the local church, the nature of partnership, the place of networks and the significance of the poor and powerless becoming primary agents of mission.

*Theological education and formation*

The question of formation remains at the core of the missionary project—how to train, equip and educate those who will be tomorrow's missionary leaders. A core question for this commission will be how theological training can be so constructed as to offer formation in mission spirituality. The nature of the curriculum and the interface of theology with other relevant disciplines of study will be at the heart of this commission's work.

*Christian communities in contemporary contexts*

Christian faith finds communal expression in a variety of ways in today's world. This commission will take cognisance of such

issues as urbanisation, immigrant communities, migrant workers, affluence, poverty and virtual worlds. It will confront difficult issues such as whether churches are best to be homogenous or multi-ethnic in composition. It will explore what it means to be discipling, healing, reconciling and witnessing communities in contemporary contexts.

*Mission and unity—ecclesiology and mission*

Dreams of unity inspired Edinburgh 1910. The ensuing century has seen ecumenical energy rise and fall. What does it mean for the churches to seek unity today? This commission will turn afresh to the mission imperative of unity. It will take account of the endeavour of the past century—both its achievements and its shortcomings—and will negotiate new ecumenical frontiers such as the apparent gulf between Western and Southern Christianity.

*Mission spirituality for the Kingdom of God*

This commission will seek to articulate a motivation and dynamic for mission that is rooted in the Kingdom of God. It will examine the place of the natural order, prophetic witness and the ministry of reconciliation in an authentic spirituality of mission. It will consider how we can be faithful to our Christian confession while being open, adventurous and discerning in encounter with representatives of other religions

A broadly-based study process, spanning the globe and crossing the confessions, is organised around these key themes. Charged to offer wide-ranging and in-depth analysis, it is geared to bring substance to the Edinburgh 2010 conference and to be a key resource for all who are thinking mission at this time.

### **Time for Fresh Movement**

A clear focusing of the task which awaits Christian mission in the 21st century is widely felt to be needed and the Edinburgh 1910 centenary carries the historical meaning and emotional resonance to engage the required energy and imagination. An essential feature of the memory is that the analysis attempted by the Conference was geared to action. Hence any process of reflection worthy of the centenary must issue in clear direction and fresh impetus for the Christian missionary movement. It must identify, support and promote missionary praxis which is proving effective for our time. The discernment and elucidation of the key themes around which Christian mission will revolve in the 21st century must be undertaken in such a way as to stimulate a fresh concentration of missionary commitment and endeavour. Vital to the chemistry of the centenary celebration will be the interaction of the academic and the practitioner. The highest standards of academic rigour must be married to the action-oriented instincts of missionary practice. The Edinburgh 2010 organisers 'remind study group participants that their work is not simply a research exercise but should have the intentional outcome of contributing to more effective and more biblically faithful evangelisation all over the world, as well as to witness in a more general sense.'<sup>43</sup> The famous words with which Mott concluded the Conference must also shape any worthy celebration of the centenary: 'The end of the planning is the beginning of the doing.'<sup>44</sup>

### **Seeking Inspiration: the June 2010 Conference**

All these aspirations find focus in the international conference planned to be held in Edinburgh from 2 to 6 June 2010. This

will not be the only nor will it be the largest mission conference to be held in recognition of the Edinburgh centenary. The Edinburgh event does not seek to monopolise the centenary. On the contrary, it welcomes the opportunity to take its place amongst a constellation of events being organised around the world to draw inspiration from the memory of Edinburgh 1910. Conferences being envisaged include:

- Tokyo April 2010 – a conference for mission executives and mission leaders to confer on the missionary mandate in today’s context.
- Cape Town October 2010 – a large-scale conference on world evangelization (“Lausanne III”) organised by the Lausanne Committee and the World Evangelical Alliance.
- Boston November 2010 – a mission study conference organised by the Boston Theological Institute and particularly geared to students and scholars.

Other centenary conferences are being organised on a regional or continental basis. Distinctive to the Edinburgh event is the symbolic significance of holding a conference on exactly the spot where the 1910 event took place and the fact that this occasion promises to bring together a more widely representative gathering of Christians than has ever before met for the purpose of promoting mission. The Edinburgh conference will also be the focal point for the study processes which will bring substance to the event. While the study commissions will inform the event it is not intended to be a heavily academic conference. Much more, it will find its life in worship, in plenary sessions which bring today’s missionary challenge into focus and in the smaller groups and shared meals where participants can share at a more personal

level. It will strike a note of celebration, giving thanks to God for all that has been achieved through Christian mission since the 1910 gathering. Equally, it will be a thoroughly contemporary event, surveying current challenges, assessing strategies and creating energy. It will be marked by due humility, chastened by remembrance of hubris and triumphalism in times past, but also by the unquenchable hope which arises from the good news of Jesus Christ and inspires our generation to go out with renewed confidence to meet the particular challenges of our time.

Given the limited space available in the symbolically important Assembly Hall, formal participation in the conference will be limited to delegates sent by the various constituencies which make up World Christianity. A deliberate effort will be made to create a conference which is representative of the church worldwide. This will involve strong initiatives to ensure that many delegates come from the Global South where, increasingly, the numerical and spiritual strength of Christianity is to be found. Striking a proper balance in regard to age, gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability and denomination will also be extremely important. It is expected that there will also be a significant conference “fringe” which will offer opportunities for local people and visitors to connect with Edinburgh 2010. The challenge for the conference is to engender an idea of mission which will prove compelling for the 21st century and which will breathe fresh momentum into missionary movements. There is nothing guaranteed, nothing automatic about such an outcome. It is down to those who gather around the centenary, their openness to the Spirit of God and their capacity to communicate their thinking with the church and with the world.

**COURAGE: SEIZE THE DAY**

‘The World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in June, 1910, has been described,’ wrote William Richey Hogg, ‘as a turning point, a lens, a landmark, and a watershed.’<sup>45</sup> All of these features are badly needed by the missionary movement as it enters the world of the 21st century. Can the marking of the centenary do for the 21st century what Edinburgh 1910 did for the 20th, i.e. catch a vision and set an agenda which will give direction and energy to missionary movements? Great and historic opportunities present themselves. Now more than then we can realise the hope which James Barton expressed, in presenting the Report of Edinburgh 1910’s Commission Six on ‘The Home Base’, when he concluded with these words: ‘We can never understand our own Holy Scriptures until they are interpreted to us through the language of every nation under heaven. We can never know our Lord Jesus Christ in fullness and in the length and breadth of His love until He is revealed to the world in the redeemed life and character of men and women out of every race for which He died.’<sup>46</sup> As missionary-minded Christians engage with one another around such a suggestive and inspiring centenary, will they have the courage to discover the ‘larger Christ’ of whom John Mott spoke in 1910? Will they have the courage to set forth a contemporary and compelling vision of what it means to witness to that Christ in the world of the 21st century?



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*Edinburgh 2010: Charting a Course for  
Christian Mission*

The interest and energy gathering around the centenary of Edinburgh 1910 is nothing if not contemporary in its focus. It draws its inspiration not so much from an historical memory as from the need today for a compelling vision, a sense of common purpose and viable practical plans to fulfil the worldwide mandate which is foundational to Christian faith. As occurred in the run-up to the 1910 conference, studies have been commissioned on the most relevant and challenging topics facing mission practitioners. These will feed into a centenary conference in Edinburgh from 2 to 6 June 2010 where a remarkably wide cross-section of world Christianity will gather and deliberate. The thrust and emphases which will emerge from this engagement are not known at this point (December 2008). It is, however, possible to detect some straws in the wind and to suggest some of the themes which will be prominent at Edinburgh 2010 and around which the future shape of Christian mission will be formed.

**A GREAT REVERSAL: THE WEST AS MISSION FIELD**

The flagship Commission One of the Edinburgh 1910 conference was entitled “Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-

Christian World”. It was based on a simple binary concept: there was a “Christian world” which had been fully evangelised and there was a “Non-Christian” World which was bereft of the gospel. These two “worlds” were geographically understood: Europe and North America was the “Christian World” while Asia and Africa formed the “Non-Christian” World. (It was agreed not to discuss areas like Latin America which did not fit neatly into this binary division.) On this conception, the project of the missionary movement was essentially very simple: “carrying” the gospel from where it was well established to areas where it was unknown. Beyond the wildest imagination of the delegates was the possibility that within 100 years the geography of Christianity could turn by almost 180 degrees. As Scottish mission historian Andrew Walls writes, “By a huge reversal of the position in 1910, the majority of Christians now live in Africa, Asia, Latin America or the Pacific, and ... the proportion is rising. Simultaneously with the retreat from Christianity in the West in the twentieth century went—just as the visionaries of Edinburgh hoped—a massive accession to the Christian faith in the non-Western world. The map of the Christian Church, its demographic and cultural make-up, changed more dramatically during the twentieth century than (probably) in any other since the first.”<sup>47</sup>

The stark geographical framework which guided the 1910 Conference is clearly not serviceable today. However, it is abundantly clear that there has been a recession in Christianity in the West while the faith has spread prodigiously in the great continents of the South. While there are formidable challenges facing the young churches of the South, there is no mistaking the fact that they demonstrate a vitality and a confidence which is almost completely absent in the historic churches of Europe. No wonder that the missionary and ecumenical leader Lesslie

Newbigin liked to quote General Simatoupong of Indonesia: “Of course, the number one question is: can the West be converted?”<sup>48</sup> A further question is what part, if any, the Christian faith of the South will play as an agent of such conversion? There is growing talk today of “mission in reverse”, i.e., to use Edinburgh 1910 language, the gospel is being “carried” from the South to the West. Without any question, large scale migration from the South to the West is taking place and many of the migrants bring their faith with them.

### **MIGRATION—PEOPLE OF FAITH ON THE MOVE**

Migration and mission ran together in the 19th and 20th centuries but, though overlapping, they could be distinguished from one another. This is becoming ever less the case. The people who take the faith from one place to another are more often migrants or refugees than missionaries in the traditional Western sense. Dynamic witness to Jesus Christ is borne by a criss-crossing pattern of diasporic communities spread across the face of the earth. As Andrew Walls has observed: “The great new fact of our time—and it has momentous consequences for mission—is that the great migration has gone into reverse. There has been a massive movement, which all indications suggest will continue, from the non-Western to the Western world.”<sup>49</sup> Among those on the move are the refugees uprooted by the many conflicts which have afflicted the developing world in recent times. Despite the widespread resentment against immigrants from the South and the barriers put in their path, it seems safe to predict that South-to-North migration will continue to occur on a massive scale for the foreseeable future. So long as many of the migrants are people of profound and adventurous Christian faith, the potential of this vast movement to contribute to worldwide

missionary engagement is enormous.

For example, there can be little doubt that immigration has dramatically changed the character of Christianity in Europe today. It has been estimated that there are more than three million Christians of African origin living in Europe. This introduces quite a new composition to church life in Europe. As German theologian Walter Hollenweger observes: “Christians in Britain prayed for many years for revival, and when it came they did not recognise it because it was black.”<sup>50</sup> The largest congregation in London is a Nigerian-founded one. Such congregations build on a particular diaspora but need not be restricted to it. The Embassy for the Blessed Kingdom of God to All Nations in Kiev, founded by Sunday Adelaja of Nigeria and now the largest congregation in Europe, has reached many indigenous Ukrainians with the message of Christ. In Cologne the largest worshipping congregation is Korean. The widely-held expectation that Christianity in Europe is fading away and disappearing may face a strong challenge as immigrants bring a dynamic new missionary movement to the heart of the continent. However, they still have to answer the question as to whether they can carry out a cross-cultural mission which addresses the gospel to the particular context of Europe today.

### **THE POOR AS THE PRIMARY AGENTS OF MISSION**

One of the sharpest critiques of the Western missionary movement was published by Anglican missionary Roland Allen almost 100 years ago. In a book called *Missionary Methods St Paul's or Ours?* he contrasted the Pauline mission which was powerless in worldly terms and therefore dependent on the Holy Spirit with what he saw as the alliance of the modern missionary movement with the power of the Western world.<sup>51</sup> Were Allen alive today he might

be surprised to see that the identification of Christianity with the powerful is increasingly a thing of the past. More and more the agents of Christian mission come from among the weak, the broken and the vulnerable. It is a new kind of agency but is it not one which has greater affinity to Paul—and to Jesus—than the form of missionary presence which often appeared to be allied to imperial power and economic exploitation? Increasingly, we see a situation emerging which is quite opposite to the one which troubled Roland Allen. Swept by unmerciful currents of history, Christian believers bear witness to the suffering Lord in whom they find the strength to meet adversity. A new (or recovered) pattern of missionary activity is emerging in which the poor take the gospel to the rich. Africa is the world's poorest continent and unsurprisingly the one from which the greatest number of migrants originate. It is also the continent with the most vibrant expansion of Christian faith. Hence many migrants come from the new heartlands of Christianity and bring the flame of faith to the old centres in the north where the fire is burning low. As Tokumbo Adeyemo of Kenya, general secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa, has remarked, Africa has made the transition "from mission field to missionary force".<sup>52</sup> What will be the effect of this 21st century movement of mission? It is hard to say but it certainly looks already very different from the one which prevailed in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Jehu Hanciles of Sierra Leone has observed: "This non-Western missionary movement represents mission beyond Christendom: mission de-linked from structures of power and domination; mission undertaken from positions of vulnerability and need; mission freed from the bane of territoriality and one-directional expansion from a fixed centre; mission involving agents who reflect the New Testament reference to the 'weak things of the world' (I Corinthians 1:27)."<sup>53</sup> The organisational

pattern of mission also starts to look quite different from that which prevailed in the Western missionary movement. There is no mistaking the fact that the gospel is spreading through migratory movements but there is no sign of anything like a missionary society. There is no head office, no organising committee, no command structure, no centralised fund, no comprehensive strategic direction. It appears to be a disorganised movement of individuals making their own connections, developing their own perspectives and functioning within networks which they themselves have constructed. It has been characterised as a liquid movement, lacking in solid structures.

How could the older missionary movement productively relate to the new pattern? What forms of connection and association will provide unity and synergy for such a diverse movement of faith? Samuel Escobar of Peru has thrown down the challenge: “The Holy Spirit seems to be at work especially in the periphery of the world, giving Christian people a vision and mobilizing them for local and global mission in spite of poverty, lack of experience and absence of training. On almost every continent migration movements have brought to cities, and industrial or commercial centres, legions of mission minded lay people from Third World churches. The spiritual warmth and the sacrificial commitment of those whose parents or grandparents had been recent converts from other faiths, or from a dead nominal form of Christianity, is rejuvenating old established forms of Christendom. If this is the way the Spirit is moving, what needs to be done in order to walk in step with his reviving and transforming activity? What kinds of global partnerships have to be imagined and developed for this new stage of mission history?”<sup>54</sup>

**TIME TO HEAR THE GOSPEL “AS IF FOR THE FIRST TIME”**

A deep challenge for European churches is that they have been accustomed to being “in control” of the Christian message and its expression in church life. The opportunity to go into learning mode and discover from the experience of others new ways of understanding, experiencing and communicating the gospel is not easily grasped. American scholar Christine Pohl observes that: “... it is easy for people from more privileged settings to imagine that resources and assets flow one way; they easily overlook the gifts of guests and strangers. At times, people familiar with the role of host resist strangers’ and guests’ desire to give, and resist any acknowledgement that they themselves might have needs.”<sup>55</sup>

The extent of this challenge to learn again the meaning of the gospel by responding to a new global movement of Christian faith is explained by American China specialist Philip Wickeri: “... the most dynamic sections of Christianity today are in movements emerging outside its established centres: The African Initiated Churches (or AICs), Pentecostals all over the world; the rural churches of China; new indigenous Christian communities throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America. They represent a popular Christianity, a mission from below, a mission of transformation. Their emphasis is on oral tradition, lay leadership and maximised participation confront historic Protestant churches with our carefully scripted, over-clericalised approaches to church life.... Those of us from the historic Protestant churches need to be in dialogue with popular Christianity, both to share our understanding of the gospel with each other, and also to better understand and learn from the spirit which moves new Christian communities.”<sup>56</sup> By a process which

is hard to define precisely, the gospel of Christ has somehow become stale in Western communities where once it was utterly compelling and infinitely inspiring. Could the answer be to hear the gospel set in a new tone and declared by new voices?

### **POST-MODERNITY: TODAY'S NEW CULTURAL FRONTIER FOR THE GOSPEL?**

In today's world there is no mistaking the fact that there are powerful intellectual and cultural forces, often described as post-modern, which shape the way people think and organise their economic, social, political and personal life. By and large, where post-modernity prevails, the Christian faith has tended to recede, notably in Europe and sectors of society elsewhere which are influenced by European cultural values. No consideration of "the West as mission field" would be complete without taking account of the strength of post-modernity as the prevailing culture. With its suspicion of "meta-narratives", its hostility to the supernatural and its instinctive questioning of absolutes, it might appear entirely inimical to Christian faith. The experience of cross-cultural mission, however, suggests that a more nuanced approach may be required.

In the missionary's experience of learning a new language and seeking to communicate the gospel in a new language, there were invariably two stages. The first was one of frustration, where the missionary was painfully aware of his or her inability to communicate the gospel message in accustomed terms. The second stage was the wonderfully liberating one when the missionary realised that the new language was opening up all kinds of new insights into the meaning of the gospel, sometimes turning received understandings upside down. To reach that second stage it was necessary for the missionary to enter deeply

into the language and culture, to esteem it, to come to love it. Only through such experience will the faith be commended to the peoples of the West in the new cultural context into which they have entered. But to reach that stage requires the missionary sense of adventure that enters the vulnerability of a new place with the confidence that the gospel of Christ can be translated into the native idiom.

Right on the doorstep of the church in Europe today there is a cultural gulf to be crossed, a new language into which to translate the gospel, a new missionary frontier to cross, a new idolatry to combat. It may ultimately be necessary to criticise a post-modern, relativistic, hedonistic culture from a Christian point of view but criticism should not be the first or the only approach to be taken. Just as the nineteenth-century missionaries had to learn, often the hard way, that the societies in which they found themselves were not all bad and that indeed they often had much to teach the missionary, so it will be a surprise if the postmodern Western societies do not possess features that will make possible a new, revealing, and energizing appropriation of the gospel of Christ. Is not such a new cultural frontier one that excites the Christian imagination?

### **NO MORE BAD RELIGION – THE CRY FOR AUTHENTICITY**

One obstacle to be overcome is the fact the religion has had a bad press – often deservedly so. People have been dismayed to see religion being used ideologically to undergird political injustice or military aggression. They have noted that adherence to differing faiths is often, apparently, at the root of the most intractable and destructive conflicts in the modern world. They have also witnessed faith being reduced to a commodity, losing its transcendent reference and being treated as a marketable

product to serve the interests of those who “own” it. The abusive and exploitative use of religion has, understandably, caused extensive disillusionment – to the extent that it has become difficult in some quarters even to get a hearing for the gospel of Christ. What is required is not so much a new form of words as a translation of the gospel into a lived reality which vouches for its authenticity. As Indian mission leader Ken Gnanakan has written: “While there is need to renew our allegiance to proclaim the word faithfully, there is greater need to flesh the message out in acts that express this kingdom. Proclamation is urgent, but demonstration is the priority. The world must hear the message of the Kingdom, but it will also want to see some concrete demonstration of this message.”<sup>57</sup>

In a lecture given as part of the “Towards 2010” process in Edinburgh, Korean theologian Kyo-Seong Ahn proposed that, in contrast to the orthodoxy and orthopraxis which have characterized earlier periods of missionary engagement, today what is required is “orthopathy”. This involves proclaiming the genuine truth “not from the head, not from the hand, but from the heart”. Its keynotes are: relationship, emotional intelligence, symbiosis, community, interdependence, pathos and respect. This pathos-oriented missiology does not try to dictate or manipulate, but tries to respect others. What is indispensable in doing mission, is respect for the other human being, because with respect, a human being can keep his or her dignity in any situation. On this understanding of the task of mission, the love which makes for community is at the same time the action of evangelism.<sup>58</sup> Self-emptying, humility and sacrifice are sorely needed to liberate the gospel from captivity to projects of self-aggrandisement. It may be at the level of pathos that the gospel will be seen in its true colours and show its converting power. Perhaps it always has been.

## THE ADVENT OF A PENTECOSTAL AGE

Little did the delegates gathered for the Edinburgh 1910 conference think that they stood at the dawn of an age of renewal in Christian spirituality which would come to be known as the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. Yet just at the time they were meeting there was evidence of this renewed spirituality in such places as Azusa Street in Los Angeles where an influential early Pentecostal movement was led by the African American preacher William Seymour from 1906, Valparaiso in Chile where the preaching of Willis C. Hoover prompted a Pentecostal revival from 1909, or in West Africa where in 1910 William Wade Harris began the prophetic ministry which would soon result in a mass movement of conversion. Through such initiatives a new form of worship began to emerge, marked by drumming and dancing, exuberance and ecstasy, healing and exorcism. It was a recovery of the spiritual character of Christianity and hence recalled the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. “In the turn it took in its post-Western phase,” comments Yale-based Gambian scholar Lamin Sanneh, “charismatic religion was more than a spacey rhapsodic binge, just as its effects went far beyond wild spectacles and heady excitement. The West insisted that worship must be of a God who was intellectualizable, because intellectual veracity was the safeguard against mystification and superstition. Yet for Africans, the call for explanation was not equal in its drawing power to the appeal of the living God before whose eternal mystery explanation must exhaust itself in worship. Only the reality of a transformed spiritual life could commune with God, which, in part, was the need that the African charismatic movement existed to meet. The religious experience is about intimacy, connection, trust, discovery, and an ethical life in community and solidarity.”<sup>59</sup>

Not only in Africa but also in much of Asia and Latin America this intensely spiritual expression of Christian faith has proved compelling for large numbers of people. It taps into traditional religiosity much more effectively than the more cerebral approach of churches in the West and, for many, has offered a greater sense of authenticity in worship and discipleship. Considering the Ghanaian context, Cephas Omenyo points out that: “Charismatics are rooted in African culture in the sense that they respond to specific spiritual needs of Africans which emerge from the core of their culture (the primal worldview). The charismatic renewal thus allows participants to express their deepest religious longings. Therefore, charismatic theology is somehow a ‘liberation theology’, which is designed for Africans by Africans who are searching for an authentic Christian solution to questions emanating from realities in their context.”<sup>60</sup> Omenyo makes the point that this spirituality is no longer confined to Pentecostal churches. There is “Pentecost outside Pentecostalism” as many mainline churches in the global South embrace aspects of Pentecostal worship and spirituality.

According to the World Christian Database, more than 600 million people belong to Pentecostal-Charismatic churches.<sup>61</sup> Many more continue to belong to “mainline” churches but embrace Pentecostal-type spirituality. On any reckoning it is a large-scale religious development and the fastest growing movement in Christianity today. Its strength is on the ground where it demonstrates a remarkable capacity to spawn fresh movement. It does not emphasize central organisation or international governance structure so it is not always easy to identify representative institutions or leaders. Nonetheless it is apparent that a Pentecostal age has dawned, bringing new vitality to Christian witness in many parts of the world. It may be that it is with this movement that the future of Christian mission lies.

## CONFLICT AND RECONCILIATION

Perhaps there is no point at which the credibility of Christian faith is more on the line than in regard to its claim to offer a “ministry of reconciliation”. The claim of Christian mission, that it is in the business of reconciliation, is put to the test by the reality of a world where religion is often at the root of the most intractable conflicts. As American scholar Philip Jenkins comments: “However much this would have surprised political analysts a generation or two ago, the critical political frontiers around the world are decided not by attitudes toward class or dialectical materialism, but by rival concepts of God.”<sup>62</sup> The ideological role played by religion in situations of conflict can very quickly subvert the imperative for peace and reconciliation which lies at the heart of biblical faith. If Christian mission is not able to function credibly as a force for reconciliation, then its claims are soon going to look hollow. It also faces a rival strategy. The thesis of the “war on terrorism” is that the hegemony of the Western powers, enforced by overwhelming military superiority, will be able to eradicate all unsanctioned violence. This has led to a massive militarisation in the West and a tendency to see the military solution as the first, or even the only, option in any situation of conflict. “When all you have is hammers, everything looks like a nail.” This throws down the challenge to the churches to show what tools they have in their toolbox which can be used to find more promising answers to the problems posed by the conflicts of our time. An important measure of the authenticity of the church’s witness will be the degree to which it is able to function as an agent of reconciliation.

This is a critical issue for Christian witness since reconciliation is a central biblical paradigm in the declaration of the meaning of Christ’s coming. The reconciliation with God, which is the heart

of the gospel, is inseparably linked with reconciliation with one's fellow human beings, no matter what may have been the cause of alienation, division or conflict. Hence from its earliest beginnings, Christian faith has functioned as a force which brought together people who hitherto had been locked in irresolvable antagonism. It has proved, in context after context, that: "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). To be true to itself, Christian faith has to give expression to this feature of its core meaning. It needs to insistently point beyond the paradigm of protective security to the Christian vision of mutual dependency and vulnerability in which security and hope for all may be sustained. To do so in today's world means stubbornly, tirelessly working to bridge the divides which make for conflict. The inner personal experience of reconciliation with God through Christ has to find expression in spiritual practices that create space for truth, for justice, for healing and for new departures.

### **PLURALITY OF RELIGIONS**

Edinburgh 1910 is remembered for promoting an understanding of other religions which was highly progressive for its day. One hundred years later, the question of inter-religious relations is close to the top of the agenda for anyone concerned with world affairs. In 1910 there was great confidence among missionaries in the superiority of Christianity as a religion and an expectation that the other ancient religions would fade away in face of the Christian advance. Today, by contrast, it is apparent that all faiths have been renewing their life and mission. Contrary to the expectations of earlier secularization theory, the advent of modernity has not, in much of the world, been accompanied by the abandonment of religion. In fact, many people have

become more fervent and devoted in their faith. So much so that religious fervour often spills over into violent aggression against the adherents of another faith. As German theologian Hans Kung has argued, if there is to be peace in the world there must first be peace among the religions.

The challenge for proponents of Christian mission is how to hold in balance the peace imperative and the evangelistic imperative. Clearly both have deep roots in the biblical faith. Jesus both blessed the peacemakers and commanded his followers to proclaim the good news to all nations. Many Christians have opted to give priority to either one emphasis or the other to the extent that this has become one of the most divisive questions in the churches today. Edinburgh 2010 offers the opportunity to confront this polarity. In order to properly understanding core features of Christian belief such as the Trinity, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, salvation and conversion there is need for these to be considered in light of the plurality of religions. There are also a host of practical questions around evangelism, proselytization, dialogue and encounter. Here it is a significant challenge to ensure that other faiths are not discussed in the absence of their representatives. While Christian faith must be true to its own integrity, this includes ensuring that representatives of other faiths have the opportunity to explain matters in their own terms. As a minimum, any discussion of the relations between religions must take place in a context of respectful listening to one another.

### **STEWARDSHIP OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

Until recently concern for the natural order was often absent from the prevailing understanding of Christian mission. The focus was on the salvation offered to humankind through the coming, dying

and rising of Jesus Christ and the new inter-human relationships which this makes possible. Questions concerning the salvation and reconciliation of human beings were abstracted from the earth from which they draw their life. There was therefore little evidence of concern among proponents of Christian mission for the integrity of the natural order. Moreover, this was not only a sin of omission. The Western missionary movement was closely allied to a commercial enterprise which sought to make profit from new resources and new markets with little thought for the future of the environment. The ecological crisis now finding expression in rapid global warming has exposed the inadequacy of a vision of the future which failed to take account of the threats to the planet posed by the expansion of the modern industrial economy.

The extent of the calamity already taking effect through climate change, water scarcity, rising sea levels and desertification has awoken missionary thinkers and strategists to a challenge ignored for too long. It has provoked a re-reading of the Bible and a rediscovery of the fundamental reality that God loves the whole creation and embraces it in his saving purposes. There has been a move from a personal to a cosmic view of salvation which is far-reaching in its implications for mission. It has led to practical repentance as individuals have examined their lifestyles and adopted more responsible and sustainable ways of life. It has generated missionary initiatives which have stewardship of the environment at their heart. Each context is engaged in a way which takes full account of its ecological dimensions. Restoring a sound relationship with the earth forms a key strand in a viable missionary strategy for our time. As an opportunity to reflect on practice in this area Edinburgh 2010 is a timely opportunity. Caring for creation, as a theological imperative, may be a key way to witness to Christ and commend the gospel in today's world.

## THE SCANDAL OF POVERTY

Awareness of climate change has thrown into relief the obscene inequality which prevails in the global economy. It is not the wealthy but rather the poor who suffer the immediate negative effects of global warming because a part of poverty is often being forced to live on marginal land that is vulnerable to natural disasters. By and large, the world's poorest communities have made the least contribution to causing global warming. Yet it is they who are already struggling to feed their families as a result of climate change. It is in the interests of everyone to act to counter global warming but, for those with the cause of the poor at heart, there is an added imperative. Unless we act now we can say goodbye to the vision of a world free from poverty. There is a window of opportunity which within ten years may be closed. Action on climate change must be allied to efforts to resolve the debt crisis, create just trade rules and increase well-targeted aid if real hope of defeating poverty is to be within reach for the 2.8 billion people who are living on less than \$2 a day.

Taking up the biblical imperative to combat poverty which threatens human dignity, the churches have a mandate to speak out for justice. Yet this is not a matter of armchair observation. Rather, prophetic critique is forged through solidarity on the ground. Since the World Bank's "Voices of the Poor" project of the late 1990s, it has increasingly been recognised that "faith-based organisations" play a vital role in combating poverty in the Global South. Many, against all the odds, have continued to offer hope, to provide health and educational services, and to promote development in some of the least resourced communities in the world. Highly funded and highly acclaimed donor-driven development projects have come and gone, often with little to

show at the end of the day. Meanwhile the churches continue, from a meagre resource base, to provide essential social services and to inspire fresh initiatives in development within the poor communities which they serve.

The potential significance of the churches' role should not be underestimated. As Sojourners leader Jim Wallis has stated: "For the first time in history we have the information, knowledge, technology, and resources to bring the worst of global poverty to an end. What we don't have is the moral and political will to do so. And it is becoming clear that it will take a new moral energy to create the political will. I believe the religious communities of the world could provide the 'tipping point' in the struggle to eliminate the world's most extreme poverty. Faith communities could provide the crucial social leadership the world desperately needs, and I don't see where else that prophetic leadership might come from."<sup>63</sup> With their eschatological imagination, the churches are uniquely well-placed to sustain the conviction that "another world is possible". When others flag or become disillusioned by apparently immovable resistance to positive change, the churches are energised by faith in the promise that the purpose of God revealed in Jesus Christ will ultimately find expression in the new world which God will bring to birth.

## **LOCAL INITIATIVE AND WORLD MISSION**

Whereas in Edinburgh 1910 it was the Missionary Societies and Mission Boards of the Western Protestant Churches which were regarded as the primary agents of the evangelistic task, in 2010 it is the local congregation with which initiative lies. "The primary centre of evangelism..." stated Lesslie Newbigin, "is the local

congregation. The congregation should live by the true story and centre their life in the continual remembering and relating of the true story, in meditating on it, and expounding its meaning in relation to contemporary events so that contemporary events are truly understood, and in sharing in the sacrament by which we are incorporated into the dying and rising of Jesus so that we are at the very heart of the true story.”<sup>64</sup> The growing churches of the Global South have amply demonstrated the strength of the local congregation as agent of evangelism. Congregations grow to the point where they have to split or plant daughter congregations which in turn undergo the same process.

In the Global North, post-modern culture has featured growing distrust in large, centrist institutions and a new orientation to the individual and the local. This finds expression in church life as, even in an area like international mission, congregations are less inclined to leave the initiative with a national board or missionary society and more inclined to take direct action themselves, seeking to work on a local-to-local basis. This has been an energising development and has brought mission and evangelism close to the heart of local congregational life, rather than being regarded as something to be left to a few dedicated professionals. It presents a considerable challenge, however, in regard to forming a coherent strategy for the task of worldwide evangelisation. Is it time for military-type planning to be set aside in favour of a confidence that the gospel, commended by a vast diversity of communities and movements which believe it, will continue to cross new frontiers and reach “unto the ends of the earth”? In that case, what kind of national and international structures, if any, are needed to support and promote the world mission of the church?

**ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM – CHURCH UNITY AND  
CHRISTIAN DIVERSITY**

Edinburgh 1910 has been a symbol of the church's quest for unity. The deep yearning for greater unity which arose from the missionary experience gave rise to the Ecumenical Movement – something that inspired millions throughout the 20th century. The movement took institutional form – in united churches, national councils of churches and international ecumenical bodies. It peaked in the mid-20th century. This was the time when a number of significant united churches were formed, with the Church of South India as an inspiring example. Others came close but did not achieve the desired union. In fact, as the century advanced it apparently became more difficult to attain union. Churches rooted themselves more firmly in their own distinctive traditions. This, in turn, weakened their commitment to ecumenical bodies and the early 21st century has seen a steady down-scaling of both national and international ecumenical instruments. At the same time, it is not possible to be true to the New Testament and be unconcerned about the unity of the church. The ecumenical impulse has to find some new form of expression. As a wide range of churches and ecumenical bodies embraced Edinburgh 2010, it was soon apparent that they did not wish to create any formal organisation but preferred to function as a “network”. How far can a network go in expressing the oneness of the church for which Christ prayed?

It is also a dramatically new context for the exercise of ecumenism. There are large-scale expressions of Christian faith which barely existed in 1910. Pentecostal and independent churches are a diffuse movement, functioning without any headquarters, yet they number their members in hundreds of millions. How are they to be engaged in a new form of ecumenism

which is attuned to new dynamics of church life? In this context there is perhaps a new dividing line which will engage ecumenical energy: the difference in ethos between Western and Southern Christianity. As Philip Jenkins has pointed out: “Southern Christianity, the Third Church, is not just a transplanted version of the familiar religion of the older Christian states: the New Christendom is no mirror image of the Old. It is a truly new and developing entity. Just how different from its predecessor remains to be seen.”<sup>65</sup> Debates in the Anglican Communion over sexuality have revealed something of the extent of the differences that are possible. Moreover, while sexuality is the presenting issue, it is apparent that the debate rests on deeper issues of authority: who says what the standards are in doctrinal and ethical matters? The challenge of numerous and vibrant Southern Christianity to the assumptions and premises of “Old Christendom” brings a new frontier to the ecumenical arena. As Cuban theologian Justo Gonzales shrewdly observes: “The encounter of cultures in our midst is often also an encounter of various ways of being Christian. The cultural conflicts of our time are also conflicts within the church.”<sup>66</sup> Will there be a fragmentation into a variety of Christianities which scarcely recognise one another? Or will a new ecumenism find ways to celebrate diversity while affirming unity in inspiring and energising ways?

## **REDISCOVERING THE GOSPEL**

In June 2010 Edinburgh will see a remarkably representative cross-section of world Christianity gathered to address these questions. The answers they offer may be very significant in charting a course for Christian mission in the world of today and tomorrow. Above all, the journey to Edinburgh will be made in the hope of (re)discovering the power of the gospel of

Jesus Christ. A host of not-yet-answered questions challenge participants to bring new perspectives to the interpretation of the gospel. 1910 was, in John Mott's evocative phrase, an occasion when a "larger Christ" came into view. Might it be that Edinburgh 2010 will enable a new appreciation of the identity and significance of Jesus Christ? For this we may think, we may study, we may talk but most of all we must pray.

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