

The Legacy of Edinburgh 2010 to Cape Town 2010

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The Edinburgh 2010 Missionary Conference is now underway. I had the opportunity to drop into the conference for a little while yesterday morning. Its actually quite an impressive sight to see so many different nationalities taking part. In comparion with the Lausanne Conference which will meet in Cape Town later in the year, where there will be an estimated 4,000 delegates this is a much smaller grouping of people, but I believe it can have a great influence on future world mission strategy, however such influence must be earned and not simply depend on the legacy of the first conference which met in Edinburgh in 1910. The same comment will also apply to the work that is carried out in Cape Town.

The original concept for the 2010 Conference was to bring around 1500 people together to celebrate the historical significance of first Missionary Conference of 1910, but the conference planning has been beset by financial constraints and eventually a much smaller event has been organised. However size is not everything. Its more about quality and influence and passion and above all practice.

There are around 300 delegates from all over the globe meeting together to engage with the theme . " Witnessing To Christ Today". Many of those attending are pastors and church leaders and academics, all seeking to understand the changes and challenges that face the Christian Churches as we seek to take ? The Great Commission? of Jesus into the 21st century. The task is a challenging one and it was interesting to hear the perspective of different denominations during the response time to the first plenary session which was delivered by Dr Dana Robert. I?ll comment on these in another post. Professor Robert is co-director of the centre for global Christianity and mission at Boston University School of Theology. She had a theme question running through her paper asking the rhetorical question from the psalmist ?How Long, How long ? ? I found myself wanting to listen to the U2 song, called ? Bloody Sunday? in which the band echo the cry ?How Long" all over again.

Professor Robert was basing her thoughts on Revelation 7. 9 where John the Apostle describes the great gathering representing every tribe and nation. Reminding us that the early Christians were people of vision believing that the Gospel was for all peoples. The Revelation vision is all about celebrating God?s global mission. In her paper the Professor raised many interesting points highlighting the truth that the church can only enter into the "Full riches of Christ when the world church works together ?. We have to be a people who speak, who act, who live, so that God?s glory can be praised. Here she was quoting, Orchard, who wrote a great deal about the correlation between Mission and Doxology.

There was a plea in her paper to make sure that we didn?t let our theological difficulties stop us from working together to share the Gospel. Robert, as well as giving us a critic of where the church has been in the past and present, in relation to World Mission was also calling the world churches to engage in a global conversation, that allows us to concentrate on that which unites us rather than divides us. I think she is absolutely right.

There is I believe a common agenda developing among Christians featuring the core gospel values of peace, justice and reconciliation. These ideas are developing around social concerns including the needs of the poor. It is these biblical injunctives that are uniting the church across the world, regardless of so called theological divides. Many now believe that proclamation and justice go hand in hand, this also includes "the whole world concept" highlighting a concern for the preservation of God?s creation. There is also a concensus growing among Christians that the technological and economic globalisation of our world has created new challenges and responsibilities for all of us as believers in the way we talk about world mission. Professor Robert touched on all of the above

issues, ending by reminding us all that we need to take the long view and believe the eschatological vision that one day there will be no more hungering or thirsting, because God will indeed be with us. Until that day we still may cry how long but it is a cry that surely reflects our hope rather than our despair.

The great challenge of the 2010 Missionary Conference for all of us who claim to be Christians here in Scotland and indeed across the world, is to rediscover the power and passion of the Holy Spirit in our churches so that we may talk with conviction and commitment to the idea of "the whole gospel being proclaimed to the whole world". For too long our vision has been squashed by our own domestic challenges, especially those of us in the Church of Scotland. It is refreshing to once again have our eyes lifted beyond our domestic challenges to be inspired by the world church. Attending this Conference yesterday made me aware of the great opportunity Cape Town 2010 affords to all of us who will be able to attend.

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