Reflections on a Centenary: Edinburgh 1910, Edinburgh 2010, and Lausanne III

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INTRODUCTION

Centenaries are marked to celebrate what in retrospect are seen to be significant events. Of course, how you define 'a significant event' will always depend to some extent on your point of view. What may be significant for one person or group may be completely irrelevant in the minds of many others.

The centenary of the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh displays exactly this kind of ambiguity. Hence a history-of-mission-savvy American, the late Dr Ralph Winter, was the inspiration behind a conference in Tokyo focused entirely on unreached people groups, arguing that this was the chief concern of 1910. An African leader, John Pobee of Ghana, insisted that there must be an event in Edinburgh, bulging with symbolic resonance, revisiting a place where history was made in the era of modern Christian mission. A Malaysian bishop, Hwa Yung, insisted that there must be a celebration in the global south, bulging with a different symbolic resonance, that is, demonstrating visually and geographically the shift of the global church numerically to the global south; that is why Lausanne III ended up in Cape Town.

But, on the other hand, were you to ask most Scots, even most people in Edinburgh itself, and even within the church population, whether they noticed a centenary celebration, or knew what it was about, they would have been puzzled at the question and ignorant of the answer. With a few exceptions, they simply didn't notice it. As someone answered me vaguely, 'Was it someone inventing television?'

SO WHY BOTHER WITH 1910?

1910 was indeed worth celebrating, if only as an occasion to take stock of what went right and what went wrong, whether its hopes and expectations were realised, whether the World Council of Churches is right to claim to be its continuation, or whether some other body more accurately reflects

its ethos.[1] The Christian faith is an historic faith, and in order better to understand the present we need both to look back and to look forwards.

My guess would be that rather more Scots knew what was going on in 1910 than appeared to be the case in 2010, and that there was a fair measure of civic and national pride in it all, even beyond the active church population.

The impetus was world evangelization, and many Scots, by no means all what today we might call evangelicals, were actively engaged in that: praying, sending, giving, going. In fact, their engagement was disproportionately large for such a small country and population. The nineteenth century, famously named by Latourette as 'The Great Century',[2] had marked the expansion of the Protestant missionary endeavour to an unprecedented degree; travel and communications were easier and faster than ever; high imperialism had wired Europeans—in particular the British—for conquering the world; the Americans were bristling with entrepreneurial, pioneering, can-do spirit; the Scots were building ships as if their life depended on it—and it was only natural to sail on those ships, and emigration was booming; and an astonishing tsunami of missionary journals and letters and books and speakers at public meetings bolstered confidence, with a titillating mix of mystery and exotic information.

No, 1910 wasn't about someone inventing television, but paradoxically it is arguable that more Scots were more informed (sometimes erroneously, it has to be said) about the wider world, and more interested in it, than many are today; and the churches, of a variety of stripes, were more interested in world mission than many are today.[3]

The eight commissions[4] working ahead of the 1910 conference were extraordinarily efficient and resourceful in gathering information from all over the world (with the exception of Latin America, and the Ortho-

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1 For an excellent study of Edinburgh 1910, see Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

2 See Volumes 4, 5 and 6 bearing that title in K.S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, new edn (Exeter: Paternoster, 1971; original publication London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1941-45).

3 The repeated references to Scotland and Scottish churches arise not only from the 1910 conference being held in Edinburgh, but also from this paper being given at a conference in Glasgow, for academics and church leaders from Scotland.

4 Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World; The Church in the Mission Field; Education in Relation to the Christianisation of National Life; The Missionary Message in Relation to the Non-Christian Religions; The Preparation of Missionaries; the Home Base of Missions; Missions and Governments; Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity.

dox world; see below) and in circulating it in carefully crafted reports. This was of course an entirely Protestant undertaking, with very extensive input into the reports from field missionaries and mission agency leaders, but with some national Christian respondents as well. The whole enterprise created quite a head of steam before ever the actual conference began in June 1910, and there is for the most part considerable convergence within each report, although some differences of opinion are also discernible. Those directly involved in cross-cultural mission comprised the very large majority of those who attended the conference; ecclesial dignitaries were in a distinct minority.

SOME SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS

At the same time, there was already a wide divergence theologically within Protestantism, for instance between the sacramentalism of the High Anglicans, then in the ascendancy in leadership of the Church of England; the modernism of those committed to Higher Criticism; and the conversionism of the evangelicals. This divergence showed up in 1910, even though the discussion of theology was ruled out of court, deemed to be too divisive, and distracting from the focus on strategy. Even between the evangelicals, there were some significant differences in emphasis, ranging from the methodology of revivalism through to wholistic care. And, in addition, alongside these there were the seeds of both fundamentalism and of anti-intellectualism on the one hand, contrasted on the other with a willingness to work with a more theologically and ecclesiastically disparate team and commitment to some penetrating research and thinking. These differences are important to note, because they haven't gone away.

What was, I think, more or less unanimous was the confident expectation that the whole world would soon become Christian, and that this was an entirely right and proper goal to have. This was despite there being different underlying reasons for believing it was a right and proper goal. The juggernaut was running strongly, and nothing would stop it in its tracks now. All that they needed to agree on, and act upon, was the 'how' of reaching that goal.

Whatever may have happened that they did not foresee—the implosion of Europe in two terrible wars; the huge impact of Marxism in China, Russia and Eastern Europe; the rise of secularism in Europe; and the explosive resurgence of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, especially in the second half of the century—their belief that the gospel would take root all over the world was absolutely vindicated. The evangelical activist instinct has been a strong factor in that, though not the only one. Despite all the

setbacks of the twentieth century, Edinburgh 1910 genuinely contributed to the continuation in faith and confidence of so much begun in the previous century; and, in the grace of God, the church has been established in country after country, culture after culture, where in 1910 there was as yet no gospel penetration. It also established a pattern of serious data gathering, first seen in Carey's tooled leather map above his cobbler's bench, and of strategic thinking and action flowing from that data.

So now we can join the twenty-first century.

EDINBURGH 2010

Early on in the new century, Ken Ross, then Convenor of the Church of Scotland Board of Mission, and the University of Edinburgh's Faculty of Divinity along with the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the non-Western World, hatched a plan to hold a series of public lectures looking back at each of the eight 1910 commission reports in turn, and evaluating them in the light of developments since. Speakers would come from many different parts of the world, and, crucially, from many different church traditions, including the Orthodox and Roman Catholics (who had been excluded in 1910) and the Pentecostals (who had hardly started). Most of the speakers came from the academic world, reflecting the interest of the University.[5]

While this was envisaged as being primarily for interested people in Scotland, and attendance was never very high, a few hardy souls came from farther afield. As often happens, one thing led to another, and a small group of people involved in international mission networks or denominational bodies met to plan first a study process and then later on a conference. It evolved in a slightly ramshackle way, and partly because of Ross's role as a denominational mission leader, and partly because of the early involvement of staff from the World Council of Churches, the composition of the planning group changed. On the one hand, it became much more inclusive of a range of traditions, reflecting what had already happened in the public lectures. On the other hand, there was a strong bias towards denominational representatives, many of them based in Geneva and working in some way with the WCC, and most of them Europeans. Unlike 1910, mission agencies as such and particularly the interdenominational and faith missions which had played such a central role then, were

[5] These papers, in slightly abbreviated form, are collected in David A. Kerr and Kenneth R. Ross, eds, *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Then and Now* (Oxford: Regnum, 2009).

not included, although a number of predominantly evangelical networks (for instance, The World Evangelical Alliance, and the Lausanne Movement) were represented, as were bodies such as the Latin American Theological Fraternity and the International Association of Mission Studies, both led by evangelicals. And significantly, following the pattern of the Towards 2010 lectures, and again with the interests of the University in mind, the study process was designed as academic led rather practitioner led research. This of course shaped the outcomes.[6]

SHOULD EVANGELICALS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED?

For some evangelicals, especially certain streams in North America, and indeed some of our strongly Reformed friends here in the UK, the very thought of engaging in some shared activity with such a theologically disparate crew is anathema. Some of us who were involved, and the organisations we were representing, got a lot of vitriol.

I continue to believe that it is evangelical missions more than anyone else who are the true spiritual heirs of 1910, whether or not one wishes to make a case for WCC being the organisational heir (with a gap of almost 40 years after the event before WCC was formed). So, in my view it would have been absurd to hold a centenary here in Scotland from which the convictions of men like John Mott,[7] who did so much to inspire 1910, and his unashamed passion for world mission to be at the heart of the church's DNA, were absent.

Sadly, much of the twentieth century saw the withdrawal of evangelicals from the public square, from our universities and influential professional bodies, from politics, from academic theology, and from the wider discourse of the church. There are some great exceptions, and there is perhaps greater awareness in recent decades of what we have lost and the uphill task of recovering ground. Some of the chasms between ourselves and other traditions are of our own making. The question is, are we willing for the hard work of bridge building wherever that may be possible? Are we willing at least to engage in civilised conversation? We have things

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6 The list of participants in the initial planning group, and then the Council, may be found on pp. 385-7 of the record of the conference, Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson, eds, *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford: Regnum, 2011). This volume also outlines talks, findings, and much other information.

7 John Mott was one of the pioneers of the Student Volunteer Movement, formed in 1888 in America. The SVM's clear priority was to inspire students to give their lives in missionary service.

to maintain with firmness, but we also may have things to learn from other traditions.

In the end, evangelicals did get involved in the nine study themes, and have contributed to the many volumes coming out of them.[8] Yes, sometimes that is one voice among many, but at least the voice is not entirely silent, and in some cases it is very clear indeed. Many evangelicals from the global south are much more ready to engage in ecumenical discussion or action than we in Scotland are familiar with. They may not wish to be saddled with all the arguments that have divided northern churches over the centuries—our historical baggage. They may be passionate in their commitment to Scripture, but read it differently. They may be in situations of being a small minority surrounded by another majority world faith, or even under persecution, and they rightly reckon they need one another. High walled separatism is not an option. And some northern evangelicals might be surprised that many Roman Catholics or Orthodox, especially from the global south, can be clearer than many in our own congregations about the uniqueness of Christ, of the need for people to come to personal repentance and faith, of the need to study God's Word and seek to follow it.

THE COMMON CALL

At the close of the conference, delegates affirmed The Common Call. This document illustrates both strength and weakness. At one level, it is extraordinary that leaders representing Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant of every hue, Anglican, Evangelical, Pentecostal, WCC, could all sign a statement of this nature and agree there is so much we can indeed agree on. I am not aware of any previous gathering, across the traditions, which has achieved such a document. This was not a formal comprehensive doctrinal basis, rather, each paragraph represented by a somewhat circuitous route one of the nine study themes.[9] But as you read it, I don't

[8] The initial findings were summarised in Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim, eds, *Edinburgh 2010: Witnessing to Christ Today* (Oxford: Regnum, 2010). This volume was circulated beforehand to all conference delegates to enable prior reading. Subsequent to the conference, Regnum is publishing many volumes, many devoted to one theme in fuller detail, others focusing on confessional or regional responses.

[9] The nine themes were: Foundations for Mission; Christian Mission among Other Faiths; Mission and Postmodernities; Mission and Power; Forms of Missionary Engagement; Theological Education and Formation; Christian Communities in Contemporary Contexts; Mission and Unity—Ecclesiology and Mission; Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship. In addition,

think there is anything an evangelical could say 'I don't believe that, that's not biblical...'. On the other hand, some of the language is undoubtedly fuzzy, and open to far different interpretations, which has indeed been the case. Even the term 'witness' in the strapline for Edinburgh 2010 overall—'Witnessing to Christ Today'—certainly for some participants did not embrace evangelism or mission as evangelicals would understand those terms. There are also many things which we would consider very important that are not spelled out.[10]

I am not sure that it will be especially influential, despite appearing on numerous websites. Edinburgh 2010 has no continuation mechanism, though there will be close to thirty volumes published in the Regnum series. There is much worth studying in these but I am personally doubtful whether they will escape from the academic world.

The one shining exception in my view will be the superb *Atlas of Global Christianity*, edited by Todd Johnson and Ken Ross, and published by Edinburgh University Press. This, in the spirit of 1910, encompasses an astonishing goldmine of data—historical, current, global—most beautifully presented. Despite its eye-watering price, I think this will be a widely consulted reference resource for decades to come.

Will Edinburgh 2010 be memorable in the way that 1910 has been? I personally do not think so. It may prove more significant for some traditions than for others. Will it lead to closer evangelical consensus? No. Will it facilitate conversations with Christians of other traditions? Possibly. I pray so.

AND SO TO CAPE TOWN

On the face of it, Lausanne III was a mammoth evangelical jamboree. Certainly it was inspiring to be in the company of about 4,000 Christians from almost every people group in the world where the church is already established, or where there are known believers. The glaring absence was that of the China delegation, 200 strong, who at the last moment were prevented by their government from attending.

Unlike Edinburgh, it was an almost exclusively evangelical (including Pentecostals) event—a small number of observers from other tradi-

there were seven transversals, to be applied to each study theme: Women and Mission; Youth and Mission; Healing and Reconciliation; Bible and Mission—Mission in the Bible; Contextualisation, Inculturation and Dialogue of Worldviews; Subaltern Voices; Ecological Perspectives on Mission.

[10] The full text of The Common Call is widely available, including in *Mission Today and Tomorrow* as cited, also on websites including <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/>.

tions were invited—but how diverse that global evangelicalism now is! For those unaccustomed to venturing out of their tribal burrows, it was quite a culture shock, and disorientating, and some retreated back into clusters of their own kind. Others revelled in the opportunity to make new friends, and especially appreciated the table groups of six or eight people, carefully put together across nationalities, traditions and ministries. These groups, retained throughout the week, discussed each Bible study and plenary presentation, prayed together, shared about their own lives and ministries, and in the course of it all learned to respect those rather different from themselves.

There were many memorable moments, among them some of the plenary speakers, some deeply moving testimonies, the celebration of the final evening, and—more personally—particular conversations. The programme was a masterpiece of organisation (some would say, too tightly organised), with hundreds of smaller group meetings alongside the plenaries. The majority of participants were mission practitioners or agency or network or specific mission-focused ministry leaders, as in 1910, but there were also many pastors and local church leaders, with a smaller contingent of academics, business people, politicians and representatives of the professions. The use of every kind of advanced technology, both leading up to the event and during it, was highly skilled, and facilitated the participation before and during the conference of many not able to be actually present.

Far more than in Edinburgh 2010, but echoing 1910, there was a common belief that world mission, in its classical sense, is at the heart of the DNA of the authentic church, and that the whole world owes worship to the Triune God. That is not surprising, given that Lausanne's strapline is 'Movement for World Evangelisation'. There were many themes that came repeatedly from different parts of the world, seeming to express common concerns. We shall look at some of them briefly in a moment.

SOME LESS POSITIVE CONCERNS

It would be dishonest to suggest that all this added up to total harmony and consensus. The process leading up to Cape Town, and the event itself, were supposed to be a joint endeavour between the World Evangelical Alliance and Lausanne. Perhaps 'Lausanne and WEA' is a bit cumbersome and not very snappy, but WEA was consistently marginalised, largely because of American evangelical politics, including mission network politics, and the wishes of some major donors. In my view, this brilliant opportunity for two global evangelical players to present a truly united front was largely lost, and I regret that hugely.

Further, although there were large contingents from the global south, and although there were many non-western faces on the platform each day, there was a probably accurate widespread feeling that northerners had been the main decision-makers and shapers, and that northern money and power were still alive and well. We may talk about the shift to the global south, but from the southerners' perspective we haven't let go of the power strings or the purse-strings.

This was highlighted by the only two plenaries to cause real resentment and uproar, and in both cases the speaker happened to be an American. In the first case, a very high profile pastor, in his Bible reading, made some insulting comments about the previous day's expositor, who happened to be a Latin American woman. The pastor is well known for his vehement opposition to women teaching men, and here the implication was 'what can you expect if you allow what the Bible forbids—error, of course'. For good measure he included a disparaging aside about what he regards as Latin American suspect theology—and then went on a bender about eternal conscious torment of the unbeliever. This had nothing to do with his passage, as many people noted, but a great deal to do with arguments going on in his own country, no doubt greatly enflamed since Cape Town by the recent publication of Rob Bell's book, *Love Wins*.

This particular incident, and the reactions to it, illustrated several areas where evangelicals simply do not agree, both between different tribes and often between north and south: the role of women in public ministry; the place of social transformation and justice issues; what contextualisation is all about; and how rigid our doctrinal formulations can be, or should be. Behind them all, of course, are issues of hermeneutics, as well as of culture and context. Increasingly, evangelicals in the global south, and a growing number in the north, clamour for rather more grace and humility along with truth claims.

The second incident illustrated another tension between evangelicals, concerning the balance between evangelism defined purely as proclamation, and wholistic mission. For many, it was assumed that this particular battle had been fought and won way back at Lausanne I in 1974, that the influential Lausanne Covenant had made a marked contribution to resolving this, and that—because of that—wholistic mission was what Lausanne stood for. However, when the leader of the Lausanne Strategy Working Group gave his presentation, including some very dodgy statistics, it was clear that he was operating out of a very restricted paradigm for evangelism, that 'finishing the task' meant identifying and reaching unreached people groups as speedily as possible, with a minimalist conversionist message, and thus to hasten the Lord's return. Anything else

was a distraction. According to this paradigm, Europe is a Christian continent.

As with the first incident, the Latin Americans en bloc were incandescent, but equally so were many from every continent, while some others clearly agreed with the presenter. It seems that this is still a matter of deep division. There are deep fault-lines, not consensus, when it comes to eschatology and all that flows from it, the kingdom of God, evangelism and transformation, what is encompassed in the atonement, and so on.

THE CAPE TOWN COMMITMENT

These divergences were not of course new, and the group tasked with drawing up the Cape Town Commitment was very mindful of them. Part 1 of the CTC is entitled 'For the Lord we love: The Cape Town Confession of Faith', part 2 'For the world we serve: the Cape Town call to action'.[11] Part 1 was drawn together largely through the work of the Lausanne Theology Working Group, together with members of the Theological and Mission Commissions of WEA, and under the inspired chairmanship of Dr Chris Wright. With a very deep desire to be as constructive, inclusive, and irenic as possible, the group chose to avoid some more traditional doctrinal formulations and some of the red-rag-to-a-bull vocabulary, and instead to build the statement around first God's love for us, and then our love response.

Part 1 was prepared well ahead of time, and was supposed to be circulated in advance so as to be a theological framework within which the Congress operated. For reasons that were never given, it was not in fact released until the penultimate night of the Congress. Consequently it did not serve the immediate purpose for which it was written, and equally the feedback looked for by the group in order to amend it where necessary was not possible. It also makes it very hard to know how accurately it represents united evangelical foundations.

Part 2 is a distillation of key themes that came out of the Congress itself, and is shaped around the focus for the six days of plenary presentations and the vast number of complementary seminars. It was an almost impossible task to condense millions of words into a few thousand, but there was each day often a strong common thread, and themes that occurred again and again. For instance, echoing the Indian Azariah in

[11] The full text of the Cape Town Commitment may be found on <http://www.lausanne.org/>, and has already been translated into at least 20 languages. A study guide is expected in 2013, published by Hendrickson.

1910, there were repeated calls for north and south to establish far more equal and true partnerships, untainted by power or history.

Another echo from 1910 was the call for unity, not only among evangelicals, but also for freedom to build better relationships with those of other traditions for the sake of the credibility of the gospel. I think many northerners simply do not understand how deeply many in the global south resent the burden of inherited fractures between different parts of the church, and how on the ground, as it were, especially where Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement have influenced ancient churches, some historic divisions are being blurred. Evangelicals have usually sheltered behind defining unity as spiritual unity. I would question whether we have even that very often. But for many of our brothers and sisters, there is a strong desire for more visible partnership and unity—not organisational union, but observable working together.

From all over the world came the call for moving from superficial evangelism to deeper-level discipleship; in many parts of the world, because our evangelism has been shallow, so too now is the church—the one inch deep and one mile wide syndrome. It resembles the world more than it should, and there is distressingly little deep level conversion and worldview transformation. This is arguably a Scottish problem, not just somebody else's. There were repeated calls for responding more effectively to poverty, AIDs and human trafficking; for humility, integrity and simplicity; for breaking down the false dichotomy between sacred and secular; for mobilising the whole church, in all its daily life, to live out and speak out the gospel fearlessly and winsomely; for the urgent need for leaders with truly godly lives.

Almost all these themes which came across with united voice from across the evangelical spectrum, are related to ethics, character and action. It seems that evangelicals find it easier to agree in those areas than they do relation to some areas of doctrine or some of the strategy that flows out of theological presuppositions.

CONCLUSION

It is too soon to know what the impact of Lausanne III may be. Will it prove as influential long term as Edinburgh 1910, or even Lausanne I in 1974? I'm not sure about that either. The Lausanne machinery has bold plans for the next twenty years, but whether that will for instance pass the baton on to the global south, or lead to a truer partnership across the globe, is not so clear. Maybe the very idea of globalised plans appeals more in the north than in the south, not least because many parts of the south

suffer rather than gain from economic and cultural globalisation (and resent it), while the north has largely benefited from it.

At the local level, even here in Scotland, will Cape Town make any difference? That, too, is hard to evaluate at the moment. Sadly, I think many of the tribal divisions will remain. Evangelical consensus? Perhaps we all need to commit to praying for miracles.