

## **Edinburgh 1910, Africa 2010 and the Evangelicals**

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### *Abstract*

The most famous (and most interpreted) world mission conference was Edinburgh 1910, at which almost all Protestant missions participated. While some see Edinburgh 1910 as the height of achievement, others see it as the beginning of the decline. For the Evangelicals the issue of contention was the ecclesiology, which identified the church as all who are baptised, whereas the Evangelicals defined the church as those who have a personal “living” faith. Though the Evangelicals participated without making any fuss, it was not their conference. While Edinburgh 1910 had its roots in the Great Awakening of 1734, the Evangelicals had their roots in the Holiness Revival (1859) and in the Restorationist Revival (1828). At Edinburgh their paths met somehow, with the (then) mainstream of the missionary movement not recognising the Evangelical identity. A hundred years later Evangelicals make up the majority of the missionary movement, and those great developments fulfilling the Edinburgh vision frequently have an Evangelical tendency and challenge the Edinburgh 1910 concept of Christian unity.

### **A matter of perspective(s)**

No doubt, Edinburgh 1910 was a world mission conference unequalled by any other before or after. The Christian world was full of confidence, with World War I still four years ahead. It was better attended than any other such conference, and it was much better prepared and organised than any.<sup>1</sup> Over the last hundred years, Edinburgh 1910 has continued to move both mis-

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<sup>1</sup> The reports from the eight Commissions that prepared the conference over two years, were published before the conference: *World Missionary Conference, 1910*, Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier; New York, Chicago and Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1910. Volume 9 was published after the conference, containing its report: *World Missionary Conference, 1910. The History and Records of the Conference*, Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier; New York, Chicago and Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1910. All reports are available online at the Edinburgh 2010 website.

siologists and historians, and their verdicts vary greatly. Some Evangelical missiologists see Edinburgh 1910 as the high water mark of Latourette's "Great Century" and after that came decline, as missionary fervour was gradually being replaced by social concern, interreligious dialogue and political engagement. Others see Edinburgh 1910 as the beginning and initial impetus of the quest for Christian unity, culminating in the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948. Other commentators point out that since that big conference little has changed, with Christians still holding the adherence of a mere third of the world's population (Kobia 2009:245). What changed (probably for the better) was that the level of enthusiasm has gone down.

The appreciation of Edinburgh 1910 depends very much on the position of the historian. In this way I will add my voice, writing as an Evangelical. I make no claim to present an objective picture, but I hope to present a fair perspective, helpful to understand some dynamics of the conference, and from there I will trace lines of development of worldwide Christianity. I will look at the conference and the developments that followed from the perspective of Africa, Edinburgh's neglected continent. I write as a mission historian who takes his clue from Kenneth Scott Latourette, who based his monumental work on the premise that the Holy Spirit moves forward church (and mission) history by bringing in ever new revivals that produce ever new organisations (Latourette 1970; 1975). With Latourette I therefore see mission history as based on revival history. I see Edinburgh 1910 taking place just before the Great Century comes to an end, as a product of the Great Awakening – the revival that initiated the modern missionary movement which changed much of the world's religious geography.<sup>2</sup>

### **The culmination of an idea**

The first to call for a world mission conference was none other than William Carey, the pioneer of the modern missionary movement. He proposed that the missionaries of the whole world should meet in 1810 in Cape Town. As the concept of unity for such a conference he proposed comity, which meant that

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<sup>2</sup> The missions that originated in the Great Awakening are not the first missions, not even the first Protestant missions, but because of their pivotal role I call them the Classical Missions. After the Reformation the Catholic missions had been strong; while the Protestants largely refrained from missionary work. Some leading Lutheran theologians even saw foreign missions as sinful, since the Great Commission had been given to the apostles alone (ad personam) who had indeed fulfilled it, preaching even in those parts of the world which had not yet entered into the view of either Western or Arab geography. Since the office of Apostle was an extraordinary office of the church, to start missionary work after their death was seen as the sin of usurpation of divine office. The only exception of a kind was that Christian princes who happened to rule over non-Christian populations were allowed (even encouraged) to provide churches for them, too.

each denomination should work in its own area, and that they should respect each other, pray for each other and cooperate where opportunity would arise. They should not waste time on their differences, and after all, the unevangelised world would be big enough to provide enough room for each mission society (Carey 1792). I have not been able to find out why that conference never took place, maybe William Carey was in this, as in other things, ahead of his time.

The first world mission conference took place more accidentally in 1854 in Dr Alexander's church in New York; occasioned by the visit of the famous mission educationalist, Dr Alexander Duff, to America. 150 attended, 11 of them missionaries and 18 mission officers. In 1860 the next conference took place in Liverpool. The day meetings were for discussions, the evening meetings were public and well attended. The results were published, thus setting the pattern for Edinburgh 1910.<sup>3</sup> The next conference took place in 1878 at the famous Mildmay Conference Centre in London, with 158 delegates from 34 mission societies. In 1888 the centenary of modern Protestant missions was celebrated with another world mission conference, attended by 1341 British delegates and 132 from America, 18 from the Continent, plus three from the Colonies. A two volumes report "furnishing a new and illuminating conspectus of missionary work throughout the world, had a large sale" (World Missionary Conference 1910:4).

The next conference was planned for 1898, again in the USA, but was delayed to 1900. The participation was equally uneven as with the 1888 conference on the other side of the Atlantic: 1500 delegates from North America greatly outnumbered the 200 delegates from Europe. At the end of the conference the proposal of constituting a continuation committee was explicitly rejected. This fitted the character of the conference, which had a more individual appeal, being more in the revival tradition than in the tradition of representative deliberations.

After the conference in the USA it would be expected that the next conference should take place in Britain, and 10 years were by then an accepted interval. Edinburgh 1910 was to be the culmination of the string of world mission conferences so far. This conference summed up the developments, achievements and problems of the previous century and, in doing so, charted the way forward by giving new (and different) directions where to go and creating the structure to pilot the ship of world missions through seas that were threatening to become increasingly turbulent.

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<sup>3</sup> The first time an Indian, Rev Behari Lai Singh, attended.

*The character of the conference*

The fascinating feature of Edinburgh 1910 was its scope and its organisation. Its scope was all the Protestant missions (almost all attended)<sup>4</sup> and all their outreach to the non-Christian world. The organisation was excellent: eight study commissions (each with 10 members from each side of the Atlantic) worked two years to produce each a report of over 200 pages as the basis for the conference's discussions, and these reports reflected hundreds of contributions from virtually all the mission fields of the world. The discussions were highly disciplined, and the centre of all proceedings was the prayer time each day at 12:00 when all other proceedings of the conference were suspended to concentrate on what was most essential.

Edinburgh 1910 was a representative conference. The delegates would represent their mission societies, one delegate for the first 2000 £ and one more for each 4000 £ spent on missions to the non-Christian world. America, Britain and the Continent all sent full quotas. An important element of this (and future conferences) was the inclusion of about 100 "appointed members". There was also a measurable presence of church leaders who were not directly involved in (foreign) missions.

Further, Edinburgh 1910 was a consultative conference tasked with an "earnest study of the missionary enterprise". Here especially the 1888 conference (celebrating a century of Protestant missions) was a strong forerunner, though its two volumes were still dwarfed by the nine volumes of Edinburgh 1910. But the wider Christian public was also taken care of as there were evening meetings open to all. More importantly there was a Parallel Conference which served as "a school for missionary study and stimulus" where the participants were invited "proportionally through the missionary societies".

A decision that defined all future developments was in the field of ecclesiology. In the conference proceedings all discussions "involving any ecclesiastical or doctrinal question on which those taking part" differed were excluded. This was quite in line with the practice of the Evangelical Alliance (1856) and of the Evangelical missions. But what was very different was the definition of "Christian". The report expresses this in a circumspect way: That the conference was "to confine [its deliberations] to missionary work among non-Christian peoples". This implied that being a Christian was

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<sup>4</sup> Of the major missions in Africa the UMCA (Universities Mission to Central Africa) refused to attend, while the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), with which it is now united as USPG, did attend. The large Brethren Mission in what they called "the Beloved Strip" from Angola through Zambia to North East Zaire was not invited, because the Brethren did not form mission societies, seeing each missionary's work as an independent mission. For such missionary efforts Edinburgh 1910 had no category, and neither did the Christian Brethren have a theological concept to participate in representative cooperation.

defined sacramentally, and that baptism was enough evidence for that; while Evangelicals, though not denying the necessity of the sacraments, defined being a Christian, in the tradition of the great revivals, as having a personal faith.

For the organisers of the conference this meant the necessity to exclude from the discussions of the conference the (Evangelical) missionary work in Catholic countries, especially in Latin America, but equally so in France and other countries with large Catholic majorities. The same concept was also applied to missionary work that touched Orthodox churches, be they in the Near East or in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

#### *The Evangelical Faith Missions' protest*

In this article I differentiate two definitions of Evangelical: The broad definition includes all those who, coming from the revival tradition (Pietism/Puritanism, Great Awakening, Holiness Revival), emphasise personal faith, conversion, and love for the Bible, evangelism/missions and the translation of such faith in social engagement. Of these there were many in Edinburgh, after all, the missionary movement of the Great Century was a child of the Great Awakening. In the narrower definition that is largely applied in this article, Evangelicals are those that come from Evangelical denominations and base their piety on that of the 1858 revival, which I call the Holiness Revival, and others called the Second Evangelical Awakening. The foreign missions arm of this revival were predominantly the (inter-denominational) Faith Missions, which all go back in one way or the other to the China Inland Mission (CIM) founded in 1865 by Hudson and Maria Taylor (Fiedler 1994). These missions were innovative in many ways: Denominational differences were put aside, women (single and married) were given equal status, educational qualifications were given secondary value, and the aim to "reach the unreached" was given the utmost importance.

The Evangelical dissent becomes clear from two incidences recorded in the minute books of two of the Faith Missions. An entry in the minutes' book of the Regions Beyond Missionary Union (RBMU) of 13.10.1909 reads:

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<sup>5</sup> This excluded for example the work of the Alliance Bible School in Berlin (1905) which trained "missionaries" for the Catholic and Orthodox countries in Eastern Europe. The school would also have been excluded not being a *missionary society*. And if it had been one, it would still have been excluded since the Christian Brethren, who had founded it, did not agree to the formation of mission societies. For this reason the considerable missionary effort of the Brethren, reflected in the journal *Echoes of Service*, was not even noted as "absent" at the conference.

A communication was also read from the Secretary of the World Missionary Conference in answer to the protest of the Directors at the exclusion from the deliberations of the conference of work in Roman Catholic lands.

On 13.1.1910 another entry takes the issue further:

After some discussion it was unanimously resolved to arrange a meeting to consider the advisability of calling a conference with reference to work in Roman Catholic countries, and as to whether the Roman Catholic Church is to be looked upon as a sister church or not.

I have no evidence that this conference took place, and the RBMU participated in Edinburgh with five delegates in attendance. They made no fuss about the issue, but in their dissent they were not alone. All Faith Missions shared this attitude. They did not only see Latin America as a missionary land (Guinness & Millard 1894), but equally so France, Russia, Portuguese Guinea and the Seychelles. The Roman Catholic Church was not accepted as a Christian church, though the possibility of Roman Catholic individuals being true Christians was equally accepted.<sup>6</sup> The dissent was not so much over doctrine, but over ecclesiology: simply stated, the Evangelicals did not accept the sacramental definition of being a Christian, it was not baptism that made the difference, but the new birth, as it had always been the central point in the revival tradition.

So Edinburgh's position was clear: it is the denominational allegiance that counts first. This position dramatically changed the direction of missionary thinking: In and after 1792 it was the *mission societies* that took upon themselves the tasks of the evangelisation of the world.

Suppose a company of serious Christians, ministers and private persons, were to form themselves into a society, and make a number of rules respecting the regulation of the plan, and the persons who are to be employed as missionaries, the means of defraying the expense, etc, etc. This society must consist of persons whose hearts are in the work, men of serious religion, and possessing a spirit of perseverance; there must be a determination not to admit any person who is not of this

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<sup>6</sup> François Fénelon (1651-1715), Jeanne de la Motte Guyon (1648-1717), Miguel de Molinos (1640-1697) and Heinrich Seuse (Susso) (ca. 1300-1365) were among the widely read devotional authors of the Holiness Movement and thereby also of the Faith Missions. For more on the acceptance of the faith of individual Catholics see Evangelical Alliance 1867:263-270.

description, or to retain him longer than he answers to it (Carey 1792:82-83).

A hundred years later the organised churches tried to join what they had not created. Andrew Walls points out that it was the mission societies that evangelised the world, and that the Holy Spirit had made gentle fun by setting aside the churches and pursuing his own course with those who were willing and interested (Walls 1987). By increasing the role of the churches Edinburgh 1910 paved the way for the integration of Mission and Church, following the right theology<sup>7</sup> and cutting itself off from the source that had for a century sustained the forward missionary movement.<sup>8</sup>

The other critique voiced from the Evangelical (Faith Missions) side was the neglect of the interior of Africa, much of it being called “the Sudan” in those days. In the minutes of the Sudan United Mission of 30.12.1909 this is recorded:

Before we consider the voting of any such donation a strong statement should be laid before the authorities of the conference, the very unsatisfactory position of the whole Sudan question as presented to their constituency.

As an answer to the protest, Karl Kumm was given the opportunity to present the plea of the Sudan in a side meeting during the conference, and on 13 June 1910 finally £30 were voted as the Sudan United Mission’s (SUM) contribution, and two delegates attended the conference.

While the conflict over missions in Southern America was caused by divergent ecclesiologies, the complaint over the Sudan was due to the fact that the conference organisers, who saw it as their aim to reach the whole non-Christian world with the Gospel, recorded that one third of Africa was not only unreached, but that none of the mission agencies had any plans to reach that remaining third of Africa (“Inner Africa”).

The heart of Africa constitutes a vast unoccupied field ... more than a third of the entire continent without any existing agency having plans actually projected for their evangelisation.

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<sup>7</sup> Or what they understood that to be. Mission is of course the task of the church, but are the mission societies not as much the church as the denominational structures?

<sup>8</sup> Karl Kumm of the Sudan United Mission expressed the view that “the Layman’s Foreign Mission Movement, the Student Volunteer Movement, the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference are all unitedly working to denominationalise men and means” (SUM minutes, 4.10.1910).

In making this statement, they overlooked the CMS, which was then making serious attempts to reach the Sudan through Nigeria's Middle Belt, and they overlooked the several Evangelical missions that not only had plans to enter the remaining third of Africa, but who had been doing that since a number of years. They had overlooked that the Sudan Interior Mission had started the work of reaching the Sudan Belt in 1902, also through Central Nigeria, and that the Sudan United Mission had joined them in 1906, after the attempts to reach the Sudan from the East in 1900 had not been successful.<sup>9</sup> Before these attempts the Africa Inland Mission had started the work in the interior of Kenya in 1895 as the first stepping stone to reach Lake Chad. The reporters had equally overlooked the fact that the Christian Missionary Alliance had started in 1890 to reach the Sudan Belt from Sierra Leone and that missionaries from the East London Training Institute, the first Evangelical Missionary Training Institute ("Bible School"), had been since 1878 on their way into the interior of the Congo Basin by first establishing a chain of mission stations from the mouth of the Congo to what is now Kinshasa, where the big river becomes navigable.<sup>10</sup>

The conference did not discriminate against the Evangelicals, neither is there any evidence that Commission I (Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World, led by John Mott) did so. Still, it failed to see the missionary advance that was planned and undertaken to reach the unreached third of Africa. The only explanation is that the Commission simply was not in touch with what the Evangelical missions were doing and planning. Or did they perhaps not take the Faith Missions seriously, coming as they did from another (and later) revival? The Commission worked during 1907/08, and it may be said – as an excuse – that some of the Evangelical efforts to reach the interior of Africa were still young and had had little success so far. However to conclude that there were not even any plans, went too far. The only explanation is that the missionary advance into the unreached areas of Africa had largely slipped into Evangelical hands and that the Commission simply had

<sup>9</sup> On these they could have read Karl Kumm, *The Sudan*, London: 1907. The famous book by Hudson Taylor, *China: its spiritual need and claims; with brief notices of missionary effort, past and present*, London, 1865, <sup>8</sup>1890, that set out the plans of the China Inland Mission, could have alerted them to look for such a publication.

<sup>10</sup> The next station was Equatoria, where the river crossed the Equator. In 1884 Fanny and Grattan Guinness handed over the Livingstone Inland Mission to the American Baptists Foreign Missionary Union in the (unfulfilled) hope of speeding up the progress into the interior, especially by the (equally unfulfilled) hope that such progress would be furthered by the employment of Black American missionaries. In 1889 Harry Guinness took up the advance again by starting the Congo Balolo Mission. Various missions related to the East London Training Institute were later combined into the Regions Beyond Missionary Union. It was in Bolenge of the Congo Balolo Mission that Mrs Banks discovered the ignominious Congo Atrocities, and decided to publish them to the world. Grattan Guinness took up the cause, even achieving an audience with King Leopold, the Sovereign of the then Congo Free State, who promised to improve (Fiedler 1994: 227-228).



no antenna for missions that were not of the usual (Great Awakening or Classical) type.

*The Evangelical Faith Missions' participation*

Many Evangelicals seem to have been aware that Edinburgh 1910 was not their conference, but the Evangelical concept of their “distinct but undemarcated identity” allowed them to participate (Fiedler 1994). Of the more than 500 delegates from Britain 30 came from the Faith Missions. North America also had over 500 delegates, 13 of which were members of the faith missions. From the European Continent there were eight Evangelicals among the 98 German delegates and four among the Swedish delegates. Of the 55 Faith Mission delegates 17 were members of the China Inland Mission. Thus the Faith Mission delegates at Edinburgh 1910 constituted less than 5% of the assembly, and among the 100 appointed I could not make out any representative of the Faith Missions.

Their number reflected broadly their (limited) importance in the Protestant missionary movement at that time. The Evangelical missions were still young, with the first, the China Inland Mission, having been founded in 1865, not as just one more mission, but as a mission of a new type. The next Faith Mission (and the first in Africa) was the Livingstone Inland Mission (1878) led by Fanny Guinness. The major Faith Missions only came into being in the two decades before the conference, and almost all had to struggle to survive in their early years (Fiedler 1994). The conference leadership took note of the Faith Missions and gave them as much room as other minor participants would receive. But the conference leadership did not recognise that the Faith Missions represented a new missionary movement, having its own history and spirituality. This became clear when the ecclesiology of the conference had to be decided. When the (High) Anglican establishment demanded that the (Evangelical) missionary work in Catholic countries be excluded from the deliberations of the conference, it was no question for the organisers to agree to their view even if that meant alienating the few Faith Missions. And I am also convinced that the decision reflected well the majority view of the Classical Missions that constituted the large majority of the participating missions, which were in the process of moving away from the society base of their support to a church base.

The Evangelical Faith Missions, though some had expressed serious reservations centred on the ecclesiology, did not voice their concerns during the conference, and they played their (limited) role well. Among the main speakers none came from the Faith Missions (which reflected their importance in 1910). Three members of Faith Missions gave briefer presentations. Rev B Fuller (Christian Missionary Alliance, India) was one of eight speakers on the subject “The work in the Mission field”, Mr DE Hoste (China

Inland Mission) spoke twice, on “Education of the Christian community, adult and juvenile” and “Should the missionary devote chief attention to raising up and helping to develop a native Evangelistic agency, or to doing direct Evangelistic work himself?”. The latter topic was dear to the heart of the CIM missionaries, as was Mr WB Sloan’s presentation on “The rights of native Christians”. In addition I found two Faith Mission contributions to the discussions: Dr Karl Kumm (Sudan United Mission) spoke during the discussion on Africa, and Dr Lepsius contributed to the discussion on the “Missionary message in relation to Islam”.<sup>11</sup>

The Evangelicals, unimportant as they were, were given a small role to play, and they played it well, setting aside any differences in theology and missionary approach that they had<sup>12</sup> — one special recognition they received during the conference. When, on 30.6.1910, the news was received that Grattan Guinness, the Faith Mission pioneer in Britain after Hudson Taylor, had died, the conference rose to honour him and sang a hymn.

The Protestant missions, which had organised Edinburgh 1910, all had their origin in the Great Awakening. Latourette argues that the Holy Spirit moves church history forward by sending ever new revivals that produce ever new organisations. The Classical Missions were organisations that had resulted from that revival, and they had made a tremendous contribution to the evangelisation of the world. They freed Protestant Christianity from its European/American captivity and changed the religious map of Africa and other parts of the world for good (Walls 1987). The Evangelicals came from another revival, the Holiness Revival of 1858.<sup>13</sup> In Edinburgh 1910 the two children of revivals met. They recognised the same father, but at least the elder brother seems not to have realised that they had different mothers.

In 1910 neither the Edinburgh Conference nor the Evangelicals realised that another child of revival had been born, the Pentecostal Movement. Understandable, when the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles occurred in 1906, it was a strange phenomenon at the fringe of the Christian spectrum, happening in an obscure (and Black) Holiness church. When the commissions were doing their work, the first Pentecostal missionaries went out. They were few, and all (at that time) refused the idea of the mission society, which was a constituent element in Edinburgh 1910. It was not

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<sup>11</sup> Dr Lepsius from Germany worked for the Deutsche Orient Mission, trying to reach Muslims for Christ. Gustav Warneck, the leading figure of classical German missiology, resented any attempts to reach Muslims, the time being not ripe for that.

<sup>12</sup> The concept of “undelimited separate identity” made room for such an attitude, as it emphasises, besides the origins in different revivals, all that is common. Therefore cooperation is possible and welcome.

<sup>13</sup> Some of the missionaries (and more of the concepts) came from the Christian Brethren, who have their origin in the Restorationist Revival.

understood on either side that a new little sister had been born, and both revivals would take decades to come to terms with the fact.

### **Africa in Edinburgh 1910**

No (black) African was present at the conference, and the eight (white) Africans who attended most likely felt to be on the “missionary” as opposed to the “native” side of the conference. The representation at that conference of churches on the mission field was limited, there were only seven delegates, and they all came from East Asia and India.<sup>14</sup> A later observer points out that the closest to an African presentation at the conference was the presence of a Black American who represented his mission – my perception, though, is that being African should not be defined by race. More of a representation of Africa was the presence of European and American missionaries working and living in Africa. Of course, that did not make them Africans, but they were members of the church in Africa and thereby had some ability to speak for her. In some other way Africa was represented through the mission leaders who directed the work of their missions in Africa. Here Africa played a big role, as in 1906 Rev J Fairly Daly, the Honorary Secretary of the Livingstonia Mission of the United Free Church of Scotland, asked Robert Speer of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, while writing on another issue, if there would be a world mission conference in 1910. Was it not due after New York 1900? Speer submitted the idea to the secretaries of the American Mission Boards, all agreed, and that set the ball rolling (World Missionary Conference 1910, vol. 9:6).

In preparing for the conference, the Scottish missions with their strong interest in Africa played a major role by freeing JH Oldham, at that time the Secretary of the Mission Study Council of the United Free Church of Scotland, to become the full time organising secretary. Despite the Scottish concentration on mission work in Africa, the whole conference focussed far more on Asia, especially its eastern parts, and India. There it saw such great possibilities of advance that it overlooked Africa where such advance was not hoped for; but where it was happening on an unprecedented scale. Africa was of course included in all the topics and all the reports, but the fact that a whole continent was in the process of changing its religion was not realised.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The University of Edinburgh recognised their contribution by awarding honorary doctoral degrees to KC Chatterji from India and T Harada from Japan (Report, p 22).

<sup>15</sup> Neither was it observed that the spread of Islam in Africa had almost come to a halt and that religious change for the continent almost everywhere meant conversion to the Christian faith.

**After Edinburgh 1910***A great success*

Nobody should doubt that Edinburgh 1910 was a great success. Never had there been such a conference, and (at least up to now) there was never one to equal it. But success, once stated, tends to have many fathers, or maybe more precisely, to have many claims to paternity. Here it must be understood that the Evangelicals have no claim to the success of Edinburgh 1910, except maybe a tiny bit. I do not think that contemporary Evangelicals made such a claim, but these days in Evangelical missiological literature such a claim has been repeatedly made. So there came Edinburgh, and then decline ever after. No, Evangelicals must take no credit for Edinburgh 1910, and they must not apportion blame for things that developed after the conference that were not to their liking. The reason is simple: the Evangelicals were not there; and though they were there in little number, it was not their conference. Therefore Evangelicals who want to criticise Edinburgh 1910 and its subsequent developments must do so as outsiders.

*A reflection of changes*

For the movement of the Classical Missions coming from the Great Awakening, Edinburgh 1910 was on the one hand the culmination of their achievement, and on the other hand an indicator of the most important change in their history, namely the process of denominationalisation – the replacement of the mission society by the church. It is claimed that after Edinburgh 1910 nothing would be the same any more.<sup>16</sup> I don't believe that conferences, even well organised ones, can have that effect. Their consultations do not change the direction of church history, but they reflect it.<sup>17</sup> And Edinburgh 1910 reflected that change from mission to church in what we now loosely term the main-line denominations. Therefore it is quite appropriate to see the conference as the birth place of the Ecumenical Movement, World Council of Churches (WCC) style, which is characterised by the cooperation of churches. And it was the logical consequence of the developments which were reflected in Edinburgh 1910 that in 1961 in New Delhi the International Council of Missions terminated its existence and became a Department of the World Council of Churches. Around that time many classical mission societies disbanded themselves by integrating into the

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<sup>16</sup> “Certainly so far as Protestantism is concerned, no event was more definitive for the emerging shape of Christianity in the twentieth century than Edinburgh 1910” (“Introduction” in Kerr & Ross, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> This is different with Catholic conferences like Vatican II which have the power to make decisions.

churches which previously they had represented, but unofficially so. If New Delhi 1961 can be seen as the (theo)logical consequence of Edinburgh 1910, then Edinburgh 1910 can be seen as the denial of the original impetus of the movement of the Classical Missions. Andrew Walls proposed that the Holy Spirit created the mission societies (William Carey, 1792) because the churches had not seen the (foreign) missionary task. The churches had seen more of it by 1910, I agree, but I do not think that the absorption of the classical mission societies into the churches did the missionary endeavour any good.

The process of denominationalisation (or integration, if seen less critically) opened the missions to the theologies and policies of the churches. Missionaries would receive full training as pastors, and young men like Robert Moffat (of Kuruman fame), a gardener with six months' private training in theology, would no longer be welcome,<sup>18</sup> and the simple revival theology of the German and Swiss mission seminaries would gradually be replaced by the theologies of the universities, with their historical-critical approach to the study of the Bible and their often phenomenological approach to the encounter with other religions. The missions then would be equally open to a tendency to shift the emphasis from the conversion of the individual to the improvement of the structures of society, sometimes called the Social Gospel, a trend which even Samuel Kobia, speaking from the perspective of the WCC, admits as having gone too far in the concerns of the WCC in the 1960s (Kobia 2009).<sup>19</sup>

In all these trends, which I see as being included in or related to the process of denominationalisation of the Classical Missions, there is a clear divergence from its revival roots. The revival, though denying neither the relevance of the sacraments nor of the organised church, emphasised conversion, the experience of being born again. William Carey had then seen England as much as a mission country as India (Carey 1792:79), but in Edinburgh England was part of the Christian and India of the Non-Christian world. Church was no longer defined as the company of believers from all denominations, but as the baptised organised in various denominations.

The Great Awakening had given laymen (and even laywomen) an increased and independent role.<sup>20</sup> The leader of a mission society could be a layman, but rarely so if ever, once the mission became a department of the church. As to the engagement in fighting the ills of society, the revived people of the Great Awakening had always been in the forefront, but as with

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<sup>18</sup> His wife Mary, a teacher with no theological training, would still be acceptable, provided she would not be married to a gardener or carpenter, but to a properly qualified theologian.

<sup>19</sup> "One must admit that in the 60s and early 70s, the mission of the church was somewhat neglected in the missiological discourse of the WCC" (Kobia 2009:243).

<sup>20</sup> Pierce Beaver shows in a fascinating way the power of the women's missionary organisations, and how it was traded away for equality, integration and unity (Beaver 1980).

Wilberforce their commitment sprang from their experience of conversion, not from the simple realisation that society needs to be improved to come closer to God's design for mankind.

*Not two streams from Edinburgh 1910 but one*

In more recent reflections on the developments after Edinburgh 1910, the concept emerged that two streams emanated from Edinburgh, one leading more into the direction of social and political engagement with the world, the other emphasising evangelism in the traditional ("evangelical") way. I see only one stream: The logical consequence of the big conference, a consequence that had been denied 10 years before in New York, was the Continuation Committee, which Commission VIII proposed "to perpetuate the idea and spirit of the conference and embody it in such further practical action as should be found advisable" (World Missionary Conference vol 9:26). It is worth noting that the Continuation Committee was proposed by Commission VIII (Cooperation and the promotion of unity) and not by Commission I (Carrying the Gospel to all the non-Christian world). Thus Edinburgh 1910 was a major marker in the transition process from the Great Awakening to the World Council of Churches, pointing rather forward than backwards.

What about the Evangelicals? I see no Evangelical stream emanating from Edinburgh 1910. Yes, some Evangelicals had been there, their ecclesiology had been explicitly rejected and they played their limited role well, but it had not been their conference. The dominant Evangelical mission had been the China Inland Mission, and it was duly offered a place in the Continuation Committee. They, however, did not accept the offer. Scholars give the reason that (especially the American Branch of) the China Inland Mission was afraid of the influx of liberal theology in the main line missions. I don't have access to sources that could prove this, but clearly the CIM felt out of place in the new establishment, that would lead to the International Missionary Council in 1921.

Evangelicals have no ruling authorities; their Ecumenism (Alliance style) is personal, not cooperative. Therefore the decision of the CIM was not binding on any other Evangelical mission. None was offered a place in the Continuation Committee, but Evangelical missions were members of National Mission Councils, like in Germany.<sup>21</sup> As such they had a share in the International Missionary Council. But their participation was limited.

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<sup>21</sup> But even in Germany, they were very junior members. When Julius Richter, in Edinburgh honoured with an honorary doctorate (Report vol 9, p 22), published a compendium on the German [Protestant] Missions, he gave every Classical Mission a chapter of its own, but the Faith Missions were bundled into one, with the misleading heading "Gemeinschaftsmissionen" (Missions of the Fellowship Movement).

Though the German Faith Missions were members of the National Mission Council, they were not part of the substantial delegations that attended the Jerusalem 1928 and Tambaram 1938 conferences. In the participants' list of Jerusalem 1928 I could not identify a single Evangelical, and in Tambaram the only Evangelicals I found may have been the three delegates of a Swedish mission working in Inner Asia. Seen from the German evidence, non-participation was not a decision to protest, it is simply that the Evangelical missions were not there. This seems to me to have been true for other countries in Europe.

Taking the long view from 1865 to after the Second World War, the Evangelical (Faith) missions were a new missionary movement, with its own (and separate) revival roots, its own spirituality missionary concepts. Being over a hundred years younger than the classical missions, they took their time to get established and to organise their cooperation. Their central tenet was (individual) conversion, and their ecclesiology was based on that. Their concept of unity was based on the same individual faith; ecclesiology was explicitly excluded from it. They had, right from the beginning, their own separate identity, but this separate identity was, different from that of the Fundamentalists, a *non-demarcated* one. This made it possible to use later terminology for the same person to be Evangelical and Ecumenical at the same time, and also to participate in Edinburgh. The little sister from the later revival was there and played her role, fairly well in my opinion, but she had not come to stay, neither did she want to move into the same house with her big brother. She went her way, without rancour and without enmity. But her own way she continued to go. And in America the cooperation of the Evangelical missions in 1945 led to the formation of the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies (EFMA).<sup>22</sup> The same process took longer in Europe, the Evangelical Missionary Alliance in Britain was founded in 1958 and the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Evangelikaler Missionen in Germany in 1968. The Evangelicals there had been going their own way(s) anyhow, but it is a reflection on Edinburgh 1910 that what finally triggered the withdrawal from the German Mission Council was again the ecclesiology, as they could not go along with the New Delhi 1961 decision to abandon the concept of the mission society, leaving the mission responsibility to churches that had other priorities than missions.

#### *Dropping the s*

The continuation committee paved the way for the International Mission Council (1921), whose organ became the *International Review of Missions*.

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<sup>22</sup> EFMA was preceded by the formation of the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association of North America, IFMA, in 1917, representing the Faith Missions.

In the tradition of the Great Awakening and the Classical Missions, missions were of course seen wholistically in Edinburgh, though the term is a later construct.<sup>23</sup> Such missions, however, were a definite movement from the Christian to the non-Christian world. Since Edinburgh 1910 the borders between the two worlds have been increasingly less defined by geography, as Europe marched valiantly into its post-Christian era. Thus the world mission conference in Mexico City in 1963 rightly defined mission as “Mission in Six Continents”. William Carey had done that in 1792, using different words, Edinburgh 1910 rejected the concept due to its ecclesiology, and the Evangelicals wholeheartedly approved it. Still, they could not go along with “Mission in Six Continents” because the s had been dropped.<sup>24</sup> Missions had become Mission, and Mission was no longer a specific enterprise to take the Gospel to the non-believers, but the general “mission of the church”. Therefore, “when everything is mission, nothing is mission” (Stephen Neill).

#### **Africa 2010**

In the hundred years after Edinburgh 1910, that which was hoped for at the conference, and perhaps not expected, happened in Africa. The Christian message reached an unprecedented number of non-Christians who accepted it. Africa had finally turned Christian; the overlooked continent had become the centrepiece in the development of worldwide missions.

When the conference was in session, the advances of the classical missions were duly recorded as was the limitation that none of them had any plans to evangelise the remaining third of (Inner) Africa. Indeed, by 1910 the advance of the classical missions had, in simple terms, largely stagnated. The elder brother indeed had his hands full in the areas that had been so successfully penetrated; and though he carried on the work faithfully, it was little Evangelical sister which took up the advance, using new ideas, new personnel, new resources and making new blunders. Nonetheless, the Faith Missions (and other Evangelical Missions) advanced, countries like Congo Brazzaville, Guinea Bissau and Chad are, as far as Protestant Christianity is concerned, dominated by them, and their share in Congo and Nigeria cannot be overestimated. Missions from the (1828) Restorationist Revival helped with the Brethren taking much initiative in Eastern Congo, Angola and Zambia, and the Seventh-day Adventist in many African countries.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The conference recommended that medical missionaries should work with all missions, except where there already existed sufficient medical services.

<sup>24</sup> This is reflected in the change from International Review of Missions to International Review of Mission.

<sup>25</sup> This made, for example, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Malawi the third largest denomination, and worldwide it made the “typical Seventh-day Adventist” a black woman.



Soon their efforts were supplemented by the Pentecostal missions, in Edinburgh 1910 the birth of that new sister had not been noted nor had her growth been foreseen. The Pentecostal missionaries did their share in the forward movement, they also challenged the classical ecclesiology by not always accepting the comity idea, but probably most important Pentecostal mission expressed itself in new denominational families like the Zionists in South Africa and the Aladura in Nigeria (often unfortunately called “African Independent Churches”). In the 1970s and 1980s the forward movement was taken up by a new revival, the Charismatic Movement, which managed to attract many of the educated and the wealthy. Of course, all this was outside the vision of Edinburgh 1910 as they had not seen or foreseen the Evangelical developments. Still, it was an answer to and the fulfilment of the Edinburgh vision: to reach all who are not Christians with the unique Gospel.<sup>26</sup>

### Conclusion

Edinburgh 1910 has indeed been the most important and the most discussed world mission conference. Edinburgh 1910 marked the end of the era when the mission societies *as voluntary associations* had been leading the Protestant missionary advancement and it inaugurated the era when this task was given to the churches *as organised structures* — a transition that shifted the emphasis of the mainline churches from the declared quest of a hundred years of missionary enterprise (*and* of Edinburgh 1910) to reach the non-Christian world to a predominant quest for Christian unity.<sup>27</sup> This ecclesiological decision necessitated the rejection of the Evangelical definition of being a Christian and it led to the fact that the Edinburgh idea of continuing outreach to the non-Christian world fell more and more into Evangelical hands.

Edinburgh did not foresee the rampant decline of Christianity in the West, especially in Europe. This equalled the tremendous advances that the Christian faith made in the non-Christian world, especially in Africa. In fulfilling the Edinburgh vision, Africa took an Evangelical turn. Not only that many Evangelical missions achieved something, but also the churches that came out of the classical missions kept more of the revival (evangelical) piety than their mother churches<sup>28</sup> in Europe and America did.<sup>29</sup> Although the

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<sup>26</sup> Edinburgh 1910 expected a breakthrough for the Gospel in Eastern Asia, which did not happen as expected. And when the great breakthrough came in China, it largely took an Evangelical form. This happened at a time when a number of classical missiologists saw the Cultural Revolution as God’s answer to liberate China.

<sup>27</sup> This, like all generalizations, is a statement of tendencies, not a full description of facts.

<sup>28</sup> “Mother churches” is a generous designation, since Africa was not evangelized by the churches from the Global North but by the mission societies from there.

Edinburgh 1910 vision is very much active in Africa, people have usually never heard of such a conference. The vision is active, though the ownership has, to some extent, changed (Fiedler 2005).

At Edinburgh 1910, elder brother and little sister met, recognised the same Father, but did not start living in the same house which, in my opinion, was the right thing to do. Big brother has grown older since, little sister has matured, and while growing they have met and should meet more often. Since then, two more sisters have been born, unexpected by their elder siblings. Let them all recognise each other, and together fulfil that great vision to reach the non-Christian world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The geography has changed since 1910;<sup>30</sup> the task has not, and much of it still needs to be done.

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<sup>29</sup> This becomes evident in the conflicts within the worldwide Anglican Communion, where Nigeria is not only the largest of the Anglican Provinces, but may perhaps become the alternative centre of Anglicanism.

<sup>30</sup> For an excellent study of these changes see Todd M. Johnson & Kenneth R. Ross. 2009. (eds), *Atlas of global Christianity 1910-2010*. Edinburgh University Press.

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