



THE MESSAGE BOARD
A Newsletter from
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Personal Reflections

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Edinburgh 2010

Part 2

On this first full day of **Edinburgh 2010: Witnessing to Christ**, one can clearly see the global expansion of the faith since 1910 in the makeup of those attending. People from every continent, male and female, are here in witness to the fact that the church is truly pan-national and pan-cultural.

The latest statistics show that 60% of all Christians now live in the Southern hemisphere. The foremost mother tongue in the Church today is Spanish. Religious pluralism due to migration and other factors has increased throughout the world except in predominantly Muslim countries. Asia is the most religiously diverse region in the world.

Our morning plenary began with the statement by Dr. Andrew Anderson, chair of **Edinburgh 2010**, that his vision for the event is that we grow in love toward one another as brothers and sisters of one family in order to witness to a divided world—a timely word in the face of 41,000 denominations in the world.

Dr. Dana Roberts of Boston University School of Theology brought the plenary address in which she stated that the task of the church is unfinished. It is to invite others to follow Christ and to work for peace, justice and the integrity of creation. She quoted Orchard that we are to speak, act and live so that God's name be praised.

She pointed to two major turning points in the history of modern missions: the 1910 conference which awakened the consciousness that unity and mission are inseparable. Additionally, she spoke of the 1963 WCC meeting, "Witness in Six Continents," as the first post-colonial declaration that mission is the work of the global church, not just the Western churches.

She concluded with naming five challenges for mission in our context: (1) the contextualization of the faith in every culture; (2) the ecological crisis and the work to repair the earth; (3) the need to conceptualize Christianity beyond the limits of national boundaries; (4) refusal to allow disagreements to prevent us from sharing God's love and salvation; and (5) restoring confidence in God's mission.

It is interesting that on more than one occasion, delegates from the Southern Hemisphere have referred to the perception that the West has lost confidence in the gospel.

One aspect of the conference that has brought me joy has been the inclusion of representatives from churches related to the World Council of Churches and the World Alliance of Evangelicals. One clear and vibrant work of the Spirit in the past five years has been the lowering of the walls of hostility that have often marked relationships between these two sectors in Protestant life.

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This work of reconciliation is evident as well in the increased relationship between leaders in the National Association of Evangelicals and leaders of the National Council of Churches. What a joy for us as American Baptists who have always sought to identify with each as a prophetic witness to the unity of the church.

An equal joy has been the celebration of our ties with the world church. Today, for instance, I met Dr. Song Mee Chung from Sabah Theological Seminary, Indonesia, who worked with ABCUSA missionaries, Gam and Alice Shae. Dr Chung was the first woman from her church to receive an IM scholarship for theological education. She was able to attend Central Baptist Theological Seminary where she studied church history with Dr. Fulop. Thanks to our investment in her, she has trained hundreds of Christian workers who are active in ministry in Asia.

This afternoon was spent in three study tracks around the nine study themes. Study theme two, *Mission Among People of Other Faiths*, was the topic of my workshop. In light of the increased religious diversity in the world, this is a primary theme. There were several areas of consensus: (1) witness must never be manipulative and should always be respectful of the other; (2) we witness humbly to Christ's redemptive work of reconciliation and trust the Spirit and the power of the gospel to bear fruit; (3) as neighbors we can work with other faiths in efforts for peace and justice; (4) testimony is a powerful form of witness; and (5) God is using miracles in many parts of the world to testify to Jesus as Lord.

Among the churches, there are also clearly questions as to the nature of the relationship of the Christian faith to other faiths and to culture, that will continue to be discussed in missiological circles in the years to come as a continuation of this conversation.

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