



THE MESSAGE BOARD
A Newsletter from
A. Roy Medley, General Secretary



Personal Reflections

Volume 46 – June 5, 2010

Edinburgh 2010

Part 3

Our second full day of *Edinburgh 2010* opened as each day has with worship that drew from the rich hymnody of the several traditions represented here. Metropolitan Nifon of the Romanian Orthodox Church, speaking from 2 Timothy 1:1-14, called us to guard the truth of the gospel, to be willing to suffer for it, and to thirst for unity as essential to the mission of the Church.

One wonderful aspect of the conference is the breadth of participation from a wide range of the Church, each sharing its traditional strengths with the others and each acknowledging the areas in which it might grow. Dr. Young-Hoon Lee, from the Pentecostal tradition, is the senior pastor of the Yoido Full Gospel Church (YFGC) in Korea, a congregation of almost half a million members. He began the morning focus on "Mission Worldwide," speaking briefly of the rapid growth of the church in Korea and more specifically of the Yoido Church. In doing so he emphasized how the theology of David Yonggi Cho had changed. "It is important to note that Cho's notion of salvation until the early 1980s was focused on the personal level.... As Korean society became politically stabilized and economically developed in the 1980s, the YFGC's ministries started to change. The faith of *Threefold Blessing* was clarified not as self-centered teaching, but a missional commitment to bring transformation to personal and corporate life by practicing Christ's ethical teachings."

Lee then outlined how this commitment has spurred ministry with the poor, a concern for social engagement, a commitment to ecumenicity, and most recently a concern for ecology. For Lee and Cho, these developments are a fulfillment of the work of the Spirit. "Without the work and power of the Holy Spirit, no true change can be possible, ranging from spiritual regeneration to behavioral change and social transformation."

Lee was followed by Tony Kireopoulos an Orthodox from the United States, who highlighted the damage done when mission becomes one Christian church taking members from another church, rather than reaching folk who have no faith in Christ. He urged care and respect between churches in mission.

Dr. Mombeke, a Lutheran from Tanzania living in Europe, spoke of the relationship of the churches in the Northern and Southern hemispheres in mission. He specifically addressed churches from the south in mission to the churches in the north. First, he noted that several European mission societies had transformed themselves into communities that include the former receiving churches as equal partners in mission. As an African missionary working in Europe, he sees the gift of renewal that churches from the south have to offer to the north. He noted that (1) there is a hunger for the gospel and not dry theological exposition; and (2) the immigrant church communities are beginning to evangelize and attract Europeans. However, there are still barriers that are encountered in mission to Europe including: Europe's self-perception as Christian, secularization that marginalizes faith's relation to life, pluralism that relativizes all faiths, the privatization of life behind locked doors, and fear of the foreigner.

Within the American Baptist context, each of these presenters highlights an edge of challenge. Let's begin with the last. One aspect of the immigration debate that has been seldom focused on has been the issue of the renewal of the church and the sharing of the gospel in the United States by those from the Southern hemisphere. While many come with immediate material needs, they bring rich spiritual resources to the life of the church. Opening our hearts, processes, congregations and structures to them is to experience not merely a ministry of diakonia to them, but a ministry of the Spirit to us through them. Just as the migration of Abraham and Sarah was the expression of God's plan to bless the nations, are we to understand that the migration of those from the south is part of God's plan to bless and renew the church in the north?

(continued)

Edinburgh 2010 – Part 3

(continued)

Secondly, the presence of a "missionary" theology rather than a "mission" theology restricts our understanding of the nature of mission as being from all six continents to all six continents. We must avoid distorting the Missionary Partnership Teams (MPT) by making our American Baptist missionaries the primary focus rather than the peoples to whom and by whom we are called. To make our missionaries an exclusive focus would be to distort the mission dynamic and to focus on ourselves rather than our neighbors to whom we are called by Christ through the Spirit. There was a touch of both anger and disappointment in the voices of the leaders of the church from the south when they spoke of being seen only as recipients of mission rather than as fully constituted churches empowered by the Spirit to be missional churches themselves. So, we must be prepared to leave behind the notions that we are always the stronger, the senders and the givers, and to recognize that God has raised powerful witnessing and serving churches in the global south.

Dr. Lee restated the need for mission that is holistic—touching soul, body, society and creation. His emphasis upon the empowerment by the Spirit was a strong caution to the churches in America that look for that right technique or the right program to cause them to grow. The great Korean revival he noted did not come until there was a great outpouring of repentance by Christians. Renewal in the United States is about discipleship and the formation or re-formation of covenanted communities of devoted disciples of Jesus who live their lives in mission and ministry for the healing of the world through the love of God.

There is a hunger and openness among young adults to the category of transcendence, of mystery, and of the mystical. Of course, this can become a form of superstition or lead it to a free-floating spirituality not rooted in God. But it also stands as a powerful corrective to the exclusive emphasis upon rationalism by modernity. How do our worship, our preaching, and our life as the body of Christ respond to this shift, in ways that respond to this hunger for a faith that is not irrational, but one that is open to the dimension of mystery?

Unity as a necessary basis for effective mission has been a theme raised not only by Kireopoulos, but by many others. Certainly this was a major theme in 1910 as well. As ecumenical Baptists, American Baptists have a rich legacy of working across confessional boundaries in cooperative mission efforts within the United States and other countries. However, the mix present here challenges us as American Baptists to move beyond the divide of evangelical and mainline. The narrative of the change in the theology of Pentecostal icon Dr. Cho related above, to include justice and ecology, is mirrored by the statement of an American Baptist leader who recently said, "While I am probably best known for my concern for social transformation, I am also concerned about personal transformation." Here, leaders of the World Evangelical Alliance spoke of their attempt to distance themselves from a gospel that had no social dimension. It is also true that those from the World Council of Churches must distance themselves from a gospel that has no personal dimension.

www.edinburgh2010.org



American Baptists Serving as the Hands and Feet of Christ

Office of the General Secretary
American Baptist Churches USA • PO Box 851 • Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851
800-ABC-3USA, extension 2274 • Roy.Medley@abc-usa.org
www.abc-usa.org