



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



Personal Reflections

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Edinburgh 2010

Part 4

On this our last day of Edinburgh 2010, Sister Elizabeth Moran reminded us that "As the sun shines, God loves; just as the sun cannot but shine—that is its nature—so God cannot but love."

I then entered into the most challenging discussion of our track: the discussion of the church and post-modernity. The contours of post-modernity are so diverse that even that term was discarded in favor of "post-modernities."

Post-modernism was a revolt in the arts against spare modernism, especially in architecture. In the arts it emphasizes symbol, signage and ornamentation. In the general culture it is experienced as subjectivity, distrust of meta-narratives, pluralism, consumerism, and skepticism about truth, progress and the universality of the rational.

Our task was two-fold: to name the primary challenges post-modernities present to the Church, and name the possible responses in mission. The list of challenges included fragmentation, relativism, fluidity, experience as the primary source of truth, search for significance and consumerism.

We were then divided up according to continents to discuss the response the church offers as it intersects culture, shaped by these factors. I was surprised that almost every group named the same constellation of responses. They are (1) community; (2) testimony as witness; (3) worship that rediscovers the richness of symbol and aesthetics; and 4) a prophetic witness of concern for the poor, the earth and the marginalized.

In the face of fragmentation and search for meaning, the church as a community of faith is receiving more attention. At times our Baptist emphases on the individual and freedom have almost obscured the Baptist understanding of church as a covenanted community. It is critical to note that in emphasizing community we also said we need to constantly confess that we are broken communities—forgiven sinners seeking to more fully live in the way of Jesus.

Testimony is something that has long been a part of Baptist life. In a culture that sees experience and relationships as key vehicles for knowing truth, testimony is a primary vehicle for sharing the faith. The ministry of the laity as witnesses rises in importance.

It was said several times by attendees under 30 years of age that emphasizing the church's mission in care of the earth is an important way to connect to their generation.

The group responded positively to an American Baptist statement that our primary challenge is the creation of covenanted communities of devoted disciples who live their lives in ministry and mission for the healing of the world through the love of God.

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On Sunday, we worshipped in local churches and then gathered for a Spirit-filled closing service. The hall where the original conference met in 1910 was filled with prayer, music and dance, filled with a sweetness as fragrant as incense. There was a powerful presence of the Spirit that descended upon us. Led by the Scottish All-Africa Mass Choir, we chanted and sang. The pipe organ resounded within the walls with "Now Thank We All Our God."

The Anglican Archbishop of York, Dr. John Sentamu, spoke on "Where in Heaven's Name is the Church Going?" His text was Ezekiel 37:1-4, focusing on the question, "Can these bones live?"

He reminded us that mission is not our enterprise, but the Spirit's. In the face of a church that is faltering in Western cultures he said,

- "God loves graveyards and they are his greatest opportunity."
- "Renewal isn't activity but response."
- "Evangelism is to insert love where there is no love."
- And quoting the novelist Antoine St. Exupery, "If you want to build a ship, inspire in them a yearning for the wide boundless ocean."

We left the hall to the cheers and applause of local church members who lined the walk. May God use these days and the continuing conversation about and joint action for mission that follows to God's glory.

I close this chronicle with the Common Call issued by the Conference (see next page).

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