

**CONSULTATION REPORT:
“Edinburgh 1910 Revisited: Give Us Friends!”
UBS, Pune, Jan. 13-15**

The Centre for Mission Studies consultation at Union Biblical Seminary, Pune was like a train journey with 9 stations along the way. Those “stops” were ambitious attempts to touch upon each of the 9 centenary study themes from an Indian



perspective. The integrating theme was entitled: “*Edinburgh 1910 Revisited: Give Us Friends!*” The phrase “Give Us Friends!” comes of course from V. S. Azariah—one of the few Indians present at the original conference in 1910. In a similar vein we sought to give an “Indian spin” to the themes as they have played out in the last hundred years of Church and mission. Fifteen

presentations sought to create a conversation which looked back at the documents of Edinburgh 1910 and reflected on the 100 years of mission which followed, especially in India. After the editing process is completed, the papers will be published in book form and may even be available at the June meeting in Edinburgh.

Each morning featured a brief time of biblical reflection. On the first morning, we began with a welcome and challenge from **Dr. P.S. Jacob**, officiating principal at U.B.S., in which he called the consultation to order by pointing us toward Acts 2:17 and the call to “dream new dreams” all in the context of the former vision of Edinburgh 1910 to bring Christ to the whole non-Christian world.

Rev. Barmen Sinaga of Indonesia in his devotion on the second day called for a Great Commission vision to see India become a Christian nation. **Rev. Grace Ida Rajan**, of ECI, in her devotion on the final day used Jesus’ interaction with the scribes to remind us of the importance of humbly moving beyond theory to implementation.



On our first stop we considered *the foundations of mission* with a paper by **Dr. Cor Benema**, N.T. professor at SAIACS, on the role of the Spirit in mission. He reminded us of the need for a biblical theology of mission which balances to role of Christ and the Holy Spirit. In this we may avoid some of the negative effects upon mission which followed from Edinburgh 1910. The next paper in this area was by **Fr. Joseph Mattam**, of Sneh Jyoti SEVASI, who gave his own personal theological perspective on the meaning of foundational terms: salvation, conversion, baptism, and membership. He called the group away from a classical concepts of mission to consider mission foundations in the light of what we as humans can do to change the face of injustice and human suffering around us in the social moment. His was not an official Roman position by any means but his own honest, thoughtful reflection on

what these essential concepts can mean in a liberational light. As you might gather these two papers were two very divergent vistas on this first stop.



Second, we stopped to consider *mission among other faiths* with two papers, the first by **Rev. S. D. Ponraj**, mission author and activist. This paper emphasized the uniqueness of the Christian faith much in line with the one hundred year old call to “evangelize the world in this generation.” He stressed a respectful but biblical approach to other faiths and actively opposed any rethinking of the evangelistic responsibility toward those who are separated from Christ by religion. **Dr. K. P. Aleaz**, professor of religions at Bishops College, took quite a different approach preferring the terminology “witnessing Christ in the company of people of other faiths.” By this he inferred a dialogical learning about the gospel in mutuality with different faiths as Christians lay aside out-dated absolutism. These two approaches to mission were quite distinct and led to some animated discussion.

Third, we journeyed by way of a topic that was not really a part of the non-Christian world at Edinburgh 1910, that of *mission and postmodernity*. **Dr. Santhosh Sahayados**, theology professor at NTC, laid out a treatment of the prospects and challenges of mission in the postmodern context. This gave the broad landscape of presuppositions, features, and difficulties. He also critiqued postmodernism and suggested avenues of mission within this ethos of ambiguity and pluralism. **Dr. Arun Kumar**, professor of religions at SAIACS, continued this tour of postmodernism with a description of the relationship of postmodernism with neocolonialism and globalization. He used the contextualization model of Hiebert to suggest an appropriate mission approach based upon a biblical hermeneutic of Jesus. These two papers drew our attention to the updated “missionary problems” of the context we serve in today.

Fourth, our journey should have taken us to directly consider issues of *mission and power*. However, both of the presenters in this area had to cancel for various reasons. Of course issues of subaltern peoples, women’s representation, imperialism, casteism, religious intolerance, and various systems of international hegemony came up again and again; but there were sadly no specific presentations and discussions under this rubric. The name of V. S. Azariah and the consultation subtheme “Give Us Friends!” were oft-repeated and did bring the conversation back to how systems of power were and are evident in the last century of church and mission. Even in the next two papers discourse related to power differentials is very evident.



Fifth, we stopped to consider *forms of missionary engagement* through the eyes of **Mr. Christhu Doss**, a Ph.D. history candidate at JNU. Mr. Christhu Doss explores

the tension between missionary attempts to Westernize Christianity and local efforts to Indianize. He uses a somewhat critical approach toward Western missionary attempts to Christianize as he traced the struggles toward Indianization with special attention given to V. S. Azariah in South India. He notes that these indigenous efforts met with limited success. On this stop, **Dr. B. Y. Cho**, a Korean professor of mission at UBS, looks back to the unity in mission that existed in 1910 to call for a restored partnership between the WCC and Lausanne movements which are officially each celebrating Edinburgh 1910 in separate events in 2010. He calls the bifurcated evangelical vs. ecumenical movements to again come together for the evangelization of the world. He presents his own biblical subject position on the *missio Dei* and calls those who have left the classical meaning of mission to return to a more biblical mission theology. Here reconciliation around the one hundred year old call for evangelization of the whole world is carried on by a non-Western voice.

Sixth, our journey brought us to the context in which most of those present have our daily interaction, the theological seminary with the topic of *theological education and formation*. **Rev. Krickwin Marak**, mission lecturer Harding Theological College, considered the place of mission studies in the Senate of Serampore curriculum, which many of us are involved with. He summarized the commissions of Edinburgh 1910 which were relevant to mission curriculum, then reflected on the polarization in mission thinking which has taken place, and finally suggested how we can continue the spirit of Edinburgh 1910 in modern curricula. **Dr. F. Hrangkhuma**, history professor SAIACS, drew from the 1910 commission dealing with problems in the “Home Base of Mission” to point out the general neglect toward the need for integrating mission into theological education. He then explains the different models for bringing mission into theological studies and prophetically diagnosed “reasons why” mission may have been marginalized in the theological seminary. As members of seminary communities we were called to introspect about our own theological programs and how we may be obscuring what God wants to highlight.

The seventh stop on our journey through one hundred years of mission brought us to consider the expression of *Christian communities in contemporary contexts*. **Dr. Eliya Mohol**, O.T. professor at UBS, gave a fascinating narrative of how a British railway engineer had a connection with Edinburgh 1910 and bringing the gospel to his own subaltern community in Maharashtra. The world seemed much smaller after listening to the social networks which connected this remote and depressed community of North India to J. Oldham, the secretary of Edinburgh 1910, and also to the people movement which occurred in that remote community from which Dr. Mohol originates. **Dr. R. Jayakumar**, president of BBCM and ACPL, interacted deeply with some of the chief concerns of the Edinburgh 1910 records to reflect on ways in which the church in India today is and can express itself. He raised, reflected on and responded to relevant issues such as: world evangelization, genuine discipleship, Christian unity, international partnership, social responsibility, and healthy congregations. It became obvious that issues that were alive one hundred years ago are still relevant in modern contexts.

The eighth stop on our journey brought us to the theme, *mission and unity*. **Dr. Jürgen Schuster**, professor of mission at Liebenzeller Seminary, used Azariah’s call for friends as a starting point for his discussion of the ecumenical legacy of Edinburgh 1910 with special attention to Leslie Newbigin’s vision for a unified church in India



as an expression of this spirit. He points out that the only decision made was to initiate a continuation committee, which would later give birth to the International Missionary Council and the journal *International Review of Missions*, and which is hailed in retrospect as a turning point in the history of ecumenical relations. **Dr. Richard Pierard**, Professor Emeritus of History, Indiana State University, adds an important piece to this by

showing that the nature of a growing missionary movement necessitates lowering walls of doctrinal and ecclesiastical differences. Another important contribution of his paper was the suggestion that ecumenism does not require loss of identity or surrender of important doctrinal markers. He traces how the history of missions to non-Christian peoples has always had the much-needed effect of drawing diverse Christians together across various boundaries.

The final stop on this journey from Edinburgh 1910 to 2010, was to consider the theme of *mission spirituality and authentic discipleship*. **Professor Franklin Samraj**, a historian from Spicer College, shared his ecumenical vision to see a Christian University developed and called us to join him in seeing that vision realized as an expression of spirituality and discipleship. The final paper by **Dr. Dipankar Haldar** of Serampore College, who was not able to be present in the consultation, explored the polarity that developed in the last 100 years between Ecumenicals and Evangelicals. As he traces the attempts at coming closer through some of the important conferences of this past century, he expresses optimism that the two factions are indeed coming nearer to each other and ends his chapter suggesting an Ecumenical-Evangelical Approach of Witness which is both Christocentric and inclusivistic.

In all of these nine stops with whatever subtle movements there may have been by those of various camps, there remain two very distinct conceptions of mission that have developed and persist. Celebrations will be held by both groups, i.e. those generally characterized as Ecumenical and Evangelical, meeting at two different venues (Edinburgh in June and Cape Town in October) to commemorate Edinburgh 1910. Many of these papers and discussions highlighted the polarization between the two camps and some were hopeful at finding ways to come closer together. Others seemed to have their “faces set like a flint” to continue to go in their own direction away from the other. Some of the suggestions for coming together



seem to call either side to allow itself to be swallowed up by the other. At the end of the journey the question, which was also the topic of a panel discussion on one night of the consultation involving the entire seminary community, remains--whether the legacy of Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference was more of a bane or a blessing to the Church and Mission in this past one hundred years. Christians still appear to be very divided in their perspective on key doctrines and relationships to

non-Christian faiths. After one hundred years, it seems that the two unreconciled branches of Christianity are left calling to each other across a vast chasm: “Give Us Friends!”

--Frampton F. Fox, Ph.D.
Centre for Mission Studies Co-ordinator