The Legacy of Edinburgh, 1910

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Our topic will be the famous meeting at Edinburgh in 1910, the resulting International Missionary Council, and World Council of Churches. In addition we will be looking at the more recent Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization and some other structures that have developed having to do with the international missions scene.

I wish the out of print book called *Ecumenical Foundations*, by William Ritchey Hogg, were more readily available. The book presents a very interesting survey of what the author calls "movements of unity," regarding the mission field in the nineteenth century.

One thing that you should take note of is that there are four different streams of coagulation— my word, not his—whereby different groups and strands of Christianity began to come together on the field or have an impact on the field in, say, India.

One was a series of field conferences, convened by missionaries; the second stream was conferences, held in the homelands; the third one was fellowships of mission executives (such as the IFMA and EFMA), held in the homelands. Finally, there was the student movement, the SVM, and eventually the World's Student Christian Federation. I would add that even before the first of the four mentioned by Hogg, there were field fellowships of missionaries, without which the more formal "field consultations" would never have taken place.

The Origin of Unity: The Mission Field

On most mission fields there is a variety of mission agencies. In Guatemala there were 40 different ones when I was there. By now that number has at least doubled. I was the editor of the inter-mission newsletter at one point. I got to be editor by the simple fact that I suggested that there be such a newsletter.

The missionaries from the various agencies would get together once a year for a time of fellowship. Usually some American pastor would come down and treat the missionaries like his pastoral charge for a few days of retreat and spiritual renewal. That type of inter-mission fellowship brings together people of different kinds. If I had not been in that kind of a fellowship, I do not think I would have gotten to know the California Friends, the Central American Mission, the Nazarenes, or the Southern Baptists as well as I did. If I had stayed in California, it certainly would never have happened. The point is that in the nineteenth century, due to Americans from the same city, say Cincinnati, going to India, they felt a closeness to one another in India. I lived in a part of Guatemala where there were practically no other Americans. Now and then, when I would be in a nearby city, I would see an American tourist walking down the street with a wife and a couple of little kids. I would have to bite my tongue to resist the temptation to stop and talk with them in English. It would have been so nice. But I had to mind my own business and walk on past; for why, in the middle of a city, should I stop somebody and start talking to them? (I was a person starved for any kind of contact with my own people).

It really is not any great spiritual achievement or virtue that people from these different backgrounds of the Christian tradition got together, once they had gotten on the field; or at least, that was not the only explanation. We cannot easily say that because missionaries are holier than anybody else, they are able to see their unity in Christ more clearly. That might be part of it, but, basically, the missionaries were just stunned by the utter contrast be-

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tween their Christianity, of whatever type, and the Hindu reality. So all of a sudden, Mennonites and Presbyterians felt very close together, because, comparatively speaking, they were. That kind of unity is almost inevitable—no great credit to the missionaries themselves.

It is a fact that movements toward unity in Western Christendom are preeminently, in terms of the originating energy and momentum, the result of mission-field events. Students from the same country found one another on their campuses; and, as missionaries from different countries, they found one another on the field. Various missions got acquainted; and then their field churches were brought together in councils of churches, which tended to weld Lutherans, Baptists, and Methodists together far sooner than it ever would have happened in the United States.

That is what the first hundred pages, or so, of Ritchey Hogg's book are about. Hogg was a doctoral student under Latourette, and his book is a history of the International Missionary Council (IMC).

Edinburgh, 1910

In 1910 a very significant meeting took place in Edinburgh, Scotland. It was called the World Missionary Conference. There had been a meeting in the United States in 1900, the Ecumenical Missionary Conference. (It is rather amazing that they had used the word "ecumenical" in that year.) It had been a very large meeting—mainly of church people—a conference on mission mobilization, not a consultation on mission strategy. The assumption had been that every ten years they should hold a similar meeting. By 1910, John R. Mott, most readily characterized as the leader of the Student Volunteer Movement, was about 44 years old. The SVM got started in 1886, when he was about 20. After 24 years of faithful and energetic labor, he and his friends now had an immense, international influence through both the World Student Christian Movement and the Student Volunteer Movement. For example, he was the one (with an eye back on a strategy meeting of mission leaders that he had attended in Madras), who decided, almost independently, that the 1910 Edinburgh meeting would not be a church leaders' meeting, as back in 1900, but rather a mission leaders' meeting, to focus on strategy rather than on mobilization.

This set the Edinburgh 1910 meeting apart from all previous, or subsequent, meetings. Never before had there been a world-level conference to which people were invited specifically because they were mission agency leaders! Never before had anything like that been convened (nor since).[1]

It was an absolutely unique meeting in the sense that it drew together, not church leaders, but mission leaders.

At the conclusion of that 1910 meeting, a continuation committee was formed. The continuation committee had its work blasted by the First World War; and it was not until 1921, at Lake Mohonk, New York, that the International Missionary Council (IMC) was formed.

The IMC, not the World Council of Churches, was the immediate result of the Edinburgh 1910 meeting of missionary executives. Thus the International Missionary Council drew together all the various associations of mission agencies. In North America, for example, having begun back in 1892, there was the Foreign Mission Conference of North America (FMCNA). That was a conference of mission executives in the United States. There was a similar conference in Norway, and one in England.

In England they called this one the British Foreign Missions Secretaries' Bag Lunch, or something like that. Mission executives got together in the various countries of the sending part of the world. There was a sending portion of the globe and there was a receiving portion. This is not a proper distinction today, but it was practical then. So in the sending part of the world, there was the FMCNA, the Norwegian Missionary Council (which still exists, full blast), the British Foreign Secretaries' whatever, etc.; and each of these sending associations was a member of the International Missionary Council.

On the receiving end, a subtle event took place. Immediately after the 1910 conference, a new phenomenon took place in various countries of the world. The different agencies working in a country such as India had been getting together for an annual inter-mission fellowship of some sort. Now they formed the National Christian Council of India. That Council and others like it in other mission fields also became members of the IMC, which was then composed of both sending councils in the home countries and field councils of missionaries in the target mission lands. The conjunction of these two kinds of councils would eventually be its undoing. Thus the International Missionary Council was exclusively mission-agency oriented at its

inception, but from the start a subtle transformation began to take place.

The immediate goal of missions is to plant the church. The mentality of the missionaries (later on, when there were not only mission agencies in the field, but also those national churches to which these missions were tied) focused on the question, "What will we do with the emerging national church leaders? Shall we incorporate them into the National Christian Council?" Of course, the answer was "Yes! Certainly. That is the purpose of our being in India, to produce national churches."

Soon, then, you had two different kinds of leaders coming together in the field councils: you had expatriate missionaries, who represented spheres of financial and intellectual power and schools and hospitals, running their own little colonial empire in India. They met together, but they eagerly said, "The national church leaders should come to our meeting!" And the National Christian Councils throughout the mission lands more and more were formed with the idea that the churches would also be represented, and not just expatriate missionaries.

Now you had what I call in my writings an "oicumenical" gathering. (The phrase has never stuck, but what it identifies for me is a meeting where both church leaders and mission leaders are present.) "Ecumenical" today means church leaders; and there is no word for mission leaders only.

Church and Mission Agency

We are talking now about 1850–1950. Pretty soon, in the mission lands, the churches became very important and the mission agencies not so important. (There may have been a few Johnny-come-lately mission agencies that did not produce much of a church.) You also had a few churches on the field that had no related mission agencies. But gradually, as the National Christian Council (NCC) of India included more and more church leaders, there came a day when somebody said, "Why do we have missionaries in this meeting? Who are the missionaries? What are they doing here? It's the church in India that counts!"

It is an interesting thing that no one noticed that two mission agencies, born in India of Indian national initiative, already existed. They were both founded by Bishop Azariah of the Anglican Church. One was the National Missionary Society, a sort of home mission society in South India, founded in 1905. But that was not quite good enough. About 1907 there came the National Indian Missionary Society. The point is that these two agencies were nation-wide and interdenominational. Two mission organizations existed, but nobody took them seriously.

I want to go back to something I said earlier:

> The greatest strategic hiatus in modern mission strategy has been the near total absence of anybody saying that we have to start mission societies run by nationals.

We have started churches run by nationals, but no one (or practically no one) has thought of starting cross-cultural missions. Yet Bishop Azariah did! Actually, it was Sherwood Eddy, a Student Volunteer man in the YMCA movement, who encouraged him to do it. It was not purely a nationalized idea.

Then there was a parenthesis until around 1945, when some missionary leaders—not necessarily national leaders—suggested a change. It was not as if the national leaders had said, "Let's get rid of these missionaries." The foreign missionaries were the idealists, the armchair strategists, who had said, "We shouldn't be the ones to be here, you know; we're going to be retiring. Push the national leaders forward." So here they were saying, "Let's change the constitution of the NCC of India."

Incidentally, what I am telling you now is happening simultaneously in many other mission lands: in the National Christian Council of Kenya, and in the National Christian Council of South Africa—it is all happening as we speak. The national churches are growing up. Their very presence and existence is lionized—the precious fruit of missionary work!

In 1945 they said that the mission organizations and their people are not even going to be members of these national councils. The National Christian Council of India should now be called the National Council of Churches of India. The National Christian Council became the National Council of Churches. In fact, in India you still have the National Christian Council; but it has a different function. In Melanesia they changed it to the National Council of Churches of Melanesia. And in most other places they changed the name from NCC to NCC, so to speak.

We are interested not in names, but in structures and forms and functions, and in what is really happening. The fact is that over a period of time in the receiv-

ing areas of the world, a mission situation changed to a church situation. The receiving countries ended up with a bunch of National Councils of Churches, even though the sending countries still had a bunch of missionary-sending councils. One example is the Norwegian Missionary Council that still sits, abandoned, lonely in the West, an anachronism to the rising and transcendent missionary church reality!

And so these great missionary and church statesmen orbited the earth, talking about the New Era of the National Church. Archbishop Temple said, "The younger churches are the great new fact of our time." Oh, what a thrilling and a fabulous development it is! The Church has come of age! In every nation of the world the Church is there; and the mission agencies can just take a back seat or wither away—which they themselves wish to do, in most cases anyway.

Henry Venn's famous "goal statement" in the nineteenth century was "the euthanasia of the mission (structure)." Most mission agencies naturally wanted the national churches to be prominent. However, this produced what was a fundamental structural anachronism in the International Missionary Council. At one end of the scale were the National Councils of Churches (NCCs). These people are not the kind of people who, when they gather together, are going to pull out their Bibles and read the Great Commission for their devotional period. Back in the earlier IMC, when they pulled out their Bibles they refreshed their minds on the Great Commission. In the later NCCs, when they pulled out their Bibles they read about social justice and all other kinds of problems that are the normal, natural, inevitable, and perfectly reasonable concerns of national churches.

I do not want to excuse liberalism, nor excuse theological decay, nor erosion or anything like that. But in addition to all that we know about creeping liberalism, there is here a *structural transition*, which is not a theological change but a sociological change. This structural transition should not be charged as characterizing creeping liberalism. Just because the National Christian Council of India no longer talks about missions does not in itself prove that they have lost their faith. They just simply lost their missionaries. They lost the mission agencies as members. They ruled them out in the finest hour of their idealism.

Here is the fly in the ointment, and this is why I always use India as the example of this transition: they even ruled out, structurally, two indigenous mission societies that were perfectly legitimate and totally national! In other words, they made a structural shift, not merely a national shift. *They shifted from mission agencies to churches*, not merely from foreigners to native Indians.

Church Theology vs. Mission Theology

Church theology is different from mission theology. If you do not believe it, walk from the School of World Mission to the School of Theology in Fuller Seminary. The School of Theology is dominated by the concerns of the church. I believe that "church concerns" add up to nurture: nurture theology, nurture pastoral care, and nurture E-1 (at best) evangelism.

Mission theology is something else. I used to be told that missiology is not an academic field. I had to take the initiative, along with Gerald Anderson, to start the American Society of Missiology, because the President of Fuller Seminary told me that they can't offer a Ph.D. degree in Missiology because there isn't such a field. So we started a scholarly society and we started a scholarly journal. Now you can get a Ph.D. in Missiology at Fuller.

The fact is that there was a *structural shift* from missions to the needs of the churches, which meant a whole new agenda. It is inevitable, it is reasonable, and it is normal. After all, what do you talk about in the family circle? You talk about the family bank account and whether or not you should buy brown rice; but when you go to the office, you talk about office things. The office where you go to work is a task-structure. The home is a caretaker structure.

The churches, whatever else they are, have to be caretaker structures. When church leaders get together, they talk about caretaker problems.

Where is the link between mission theology and church theology? The Fuller Theological Seminary Statement of Faith was being revised a few years ago. They asked the School of World Mission to make some remarks about it. So for the second time I looked at it closely, the first time having been when I became a professor. I had realized the first time that the whole statement of faith structure was built, like any other Protestant statement of faith, to explain how it is that we are Christians and nobody else is. The element of the Great Commission, of redemption, is present in a secondary sense. So when we said that we did not

have any problems with the Statement of Faith, except for its fundamental structure, there was a tense little back-and-forth discussion for a time! It is basically a church creed. What about the Apostles Creed? Does it say anything about taking the gospel to the ends of the earth? No. It is a church creed.

Now, when the church leaders became ascendant in the field councils, an adjustment became necessary in the IMC itself. The IMC now faced a dilemma. The transition for the IMC took place between the meeting in Jerusalem in 1928 and that in Ghana in 1958. Already at the Jerusalem meeting you could see the predominance of church leaders crowding into the meetings. No longer, as in 1910, did they just invite mission leaders, and nobody else.

Bishop Azariah, who had helped to found the two mission societies of India in 1905 and 1907, was at the 1910 meeting at Edinburgh. He was there, but he was not there *as a mission leader*. He was there because the CMS (the Church Missionary Society of the Anglican Church) invited him. The expatriate missionaries in India saw him as an outstanding church leader, and the mission was proud of the church. So he was there at Edinburgh 1910. But the Western missionaries ignored—unintentionally, I am sure—the enormous significance of the founding of a national mission society in India, run by Indians. And though Azariah was the founder, and was currently involved in both of those mission societies, it apparently did not occur to them to invite either of them to the 1910 IMC meeting. As a matter of fact, Latourette himself mentioned Azariah several times in his *History of Christianity*, but it did not occur to him to mention that he was a *mission leader* as well as a church leader!

That hiatus, however, was not due to a defect in the structure of 1910, it was a defect in the implementation of 1910.

Thus, the IMC met in Jerusalem and then in Madras; and then finally they went to Ghana to have a meeting in 1958 to consider the developing anomaly. At the Ghana meeting they said, "What are we going to do? We now have mainly representatives of national churches coming to our meetings." (I happen to have a copy of the verbatim transcript of everything that was said at Ghana.) The next meeting was in New Delhi, then in 1963 in Mexico (by this time the IMC had merged into the World Council of Churches), then came Bangkok, and then Melbourne in 1980.

Thus, the IMC was eliminated, or, that is, it was incorporated into the World Council of Churches. It became an associated council of councils. It also became a WCC "Commission on World Mission and Evangelism"; and under the latter name it bravely met in Bangkok, and tried to pretend that it was still interested in missions. Yet what they really did at that meeting was to say that missions is over, it is a thing of the past! It is no longer legitimate to send missionaries from anywhere to anywhere! That is what you l *church* theology. Churches are now everywhere, so what's the use of missionaries?

The new phrase is "Mission in Six Continents." What a heresy! Notice that word *in*. In other words, mission takes place *within* each nation; it does not take place *between* nations. Well, yes, they have talked about "from six continents to six continents," but what they are referring to is church-to-church workers, not mission outreach to unreached peoples.

The WCC (World Council of Churches), in preparation for its Melbourne meeting, devoted a whole issue of the *International Review of Mission* to an analysis of the IMC's 1910 meeting, their 1928 meeting, their 1936 meeting, and all their meetings down to Bangkok, and then with a look forward to Melbourne.

I was asked—I do not know how this happened—to write the article on the Ghana meeting for that issue of *IRM*. Well, I was flabbergasted and pleased! I said, "Wow, what a privilege!" This was the crucial meeting in the whole history of the International Missionary Council! I wrote back and asked, "May I write not only about Ghana, but also about the structural changes that flowed up to it, and so forth?" The editor said, "Sure, that's okay!" So I wrote an article analyzing this whole trend.[2] In that article, I said that what we need is not only Mission in Six Continents, but missions *from* and *to* six continents, if necessary. That was what had been dropped out of the picture.

Conclusion

I have been unfolding to you a "plot" that was not the design of any human being, but was a very understandable transition. It nevertheless wrecked a Council founded to focus on missions. It changed because its pillars were now set upon a different entity. When all those church leaders came from around the world to the meeting at Ghana, the Western (minority) delegates from the Norwegian Missionary Council, the

German Missionary Council, etc., had said, "We can't vote against all these nice national leaders, all these church leaders!" It was obvious by then (Ghana, 1958) that it was too late to do anything else. They said, "We don't have any reason for existence because the World Council of Churches is a council of churches, and now we also have become a council of church councils! So what is the use for us to continue?" And so they invented a new category under the WCC called the Associate Councils of the World Council of Churches, to handle things like councils of churches. Up until this time the WCC reached around the whole world to churches (and denominations) by themselves, not to councils of churches. Individual churches are direct members of the World Council. Once the IMC was merged with the WCC, the latter gained a new department that takes the National Councils of Churches into membership. So now the IMC's Council of Councils is a department of the World Council of Churches; and for many people that effectively takes the place of the whole missions sphere of reality.

For many people the churches are the reality, so it has been a shift that has gone full circle. The structure of missions itself has thus been eliminated. At this point in history, then, the gatherings of the new WCC entity only invite those mission structures that are connected to member churches. This means that quite a few very significant structures simply do not fit into the normal pattern of participants in the formal meetings of the WCC's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism—such as a "World Mission" organization like Wycliffe Bible Translators, or an "Evangelism" organization like the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. This is in decided contrast to the tradition of the IMC and the Edinburgh 1910 tradition.

Endnotes

1 This statement was made in a classroom of missionaries in 1979. At the end of that class, a missionary (Leiton Chinn) agreed to serve as the secretary for a founding committee for a proposed 1980 meeting similar to 1910!

2 My article was given a name within the series of articles in that issue. The Ghana meeting is where the "marriage" between the IMC and the WCC was decided upon. Thus, I entitled my article (no doubt unwisely) "Ghana: Preparation for Marriage." By itself that title is clearly misleading.