



THE CHANGING CONTOURS OF
WORLD MISSION & CHRISTIANITY

The Changing Contours of World Mission and Christianity: Celebrating the Centenary of Edinburgh 1910

Narrative Report

By Rodney L. Petersen, PhD
Executive Director, Boston Theological Institute

In 2010 the theological and ecclesial communities gathered to discern the missional challenges of our times with at least a dozen conferences worldwide celebrating the centenary anniversary of Edinburgh 1910. Acknowledgements and celebration were in order as the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 had led to multiple mission movements, the development of ecumenical agencies, the growth of world Christianity, and engagement with peoples of other living faiths. The amazing diversity and vitality that has emerged over the past one hundred years is documented in *The Atlas of Global Christianity*, edited by Todd Johnson of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Kenneth Ross of the University of Edinburgh (University of Edinburgh, 2009), published with BTI support and replete with articles by faculty members from BTI schools.

Prior to his passing, Missiologist Ralph Winter had singled out four of these many conferences as particularly important: **Tokyo** (May), **Edinburgh** (June), **Cape Town** (October), and **Boston** (November). Of these four conferences Tokyo and Cape Town were the most clearly Evangelical while Edinburgh and Boston most clearly Ecumenical. Yet if mission is the mother of ecumenism, then even the Evangelical conferences were Ecumenical and the Ecumenical ones were Evangelical to some degree.

Nevertheless, this division of conferences is understandable. In this context, each had its own clear emphasis. The closing **Tokyo** Declaration signaled that conference's clear affirmation of evangelism and sponsorship by the U.S. Center for World Mission, the Global Network of Mission Structures, and churches in Korea and Japan. Its planning group consisted of persons representing the global church. Tokyo was unapologetic about "Finishing the Task" of worldwide evangelism, yet with an accent on discipleship which added depth to its breadth. **Cape Town** was a champion of holistic mission, bringing evangelism and social justice together. By far the largest conference, it was organized by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization in partnership with the World Evangelical Alliance.

Edinburgh 2010 was run by a Council representative of all strands of the world Church, and was hosted by the University of Edinburgh, with endorsement by the World Council of Churches. Its Common Call reflects the conference's amazing diversity and supplemented its emphasis on the *missio dei*. The conference in **Boston** drew together students, faculty, clergy and lay persons from over twenty different countries, and from more than a dozen states under the auspices of the Boston Theological Institute, the ecumenical (and now inter-faith as of 2011) consortium of theological schools in the Greater Boston Area. As at Edinburgh, the conference at Boston was clear in its concern for unity amongst Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox, and other segments of the global churches and sensitive to issues of interfaith relationship. The Boston conference was of an academic nature, calling professors and research students to study the phenomenon that is missionary history, the expansion of the Church, and the rise of World Christianity. Students helped to shape the mission movement in 1910. They are central to it in 2010. This was clear in the Boston conference.

Each of these four conferences tried to address the latest issues facing mission in the 21st century, and what has changed in the last 100 years since 1910.

The conference in Boston supported by the Boston Theological Institute drew over an estimated 500 persons in 6 different venues with a consistent presence of over 200 persons attending most or all programming in the different venues: 1) Park Street Church (c. 300 persons); 2) Boston University (c. 250 persons); 3) Holy Cross (c. 150 persons), 4) Andover Newton Presidential Breakfast (c. 30 persons), 5) Boston College (450 persons), 6) Memorial Church, Harvard (c. 350 [morning], 150 [afternoon] persons).

2010Boston was distinctive in a number of ways (www.2010boston.org). In addition to funding assistance from the DeFreitas Foundation, the Day Foundation and the New England and Maritime American Academy of Religion, 2010Boston was supported by an array of diverse academic and ecclesial bodies, including the Massachusetts Council of Churches, the Overseas Ministries Study Center (New Haven, CT), the American Society of Missiology – Eastern Fellowship and the New England and Maritimes American Academy of Religion. Each of these groups supported the conference in a variety of ways appropriate to the nature of the organization.

In keeping with the academic character of the conference, it opened with an address by Boston University historian of mission, Professor Dana Robert (also the opening speaker in Edinburgh) at Boston's historic Park Street Church on, "*Boston, Students, and Missions from 1810 to 2010.*" She documented the rich legacy of piety and learning that led to what can only be called in retrospect a global NGO movement, the founding of churches, schools, hospitals and social service agencies – laying the foundation for a legacy of social capital in many different regions of the world. Her remarks were matched by those of Angelyn Dries, OSF of St. Louis University respecting a parallel history in American Roman Catholicism. Both speakers drew this down to the present with renewed mission interest evident in the newly-founded Institute for Orthodox Mission at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology.

The conference closed with three lectures for students by Anglican Archbishop of York, John Sentamu (also closing speaker at Edinburgh). The Archbishop, originally of Uganda, spoke on “*Who is Jesus and What Does He Mean to Those Who Put Their Trust in Him?*” In between were analyses of the history of Edinburgh by Brian Stanley (University of Edinburgh), remarks on the relation between Edinburgh and Vatican II by Peter Phan (Georgetown University), social and cultural analyses by Ruth Padilla DeBorst (Latin American Theological Fraternity) and Daniel Jeyaraj (of Liverpool Hope University and Andover Newton), and challenging talks about contemporary mission by Brian McLaren, Athanasios N. Papathanasiou and others – in addition to a wide array of student papers on eight “Edinburgh” themes modeled on those of the original Edinburgh Conference and its Study Commissions.

A Closing General Assembly was held in Harvard University’s Memorial Church at which Professor Susan Abraham of Harvard Divinity School posed a question of mission drawing upon post-colonial and post-modern interests. In response, and drawing upon the eight thematic workshops that ran through the duration of the conference, faculty-led small groups developed the following eight areas of further study as the Boston Conference’s contribution to the centenary history of Edinburgh 1910. These areas are reported on more fully in the book, *The Changing Contours of World Mission and Christianity*, edited by Todd Johnson, Rodney Petersen, Gina Bellofatto and Travis Myers (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011). This publication also contains the keynote addresses and a select number of student papers.

Eight Areas for Further Research

(with brief comment as more extensively developed in the book cited above)

1. **Changing Contours of Christian Unity**

Professor Raymond Helmick, SJ (Boston College, Department of Theology), Chair

An assumption that God has made God’s self and saving work available only to us is a corruption of the Gospel in the direction of a theology of domination and exclusion, and has historically made the practice of Christian mission vulnerable to exploitation by Western colonialism.

2. **Mission in Context**

Professor Margaret Guider, OSF (Boston College, School of Theology and Ministry), Chair

All mission is contextual. Attention needs to be given to the social, cultural and a historical context in which mission happens.

3. **Disciples in Mission**

Fr. Luke Veronis (Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology), Chair

Missionaries are disciples. They are never “above” the other to whom they seek to proclaim the good news. We need strategies of listening and learning that affirm a common journey and respected spiritual ends.

4. Education for Mission

Dr. Elizabeth Parsons (Boston University School of Theology), Chair

We affirm an emphasis on Biblical and theological literacy and on addressing the concrete, daily life issues of communities. Yet there seems to be a lack of connection between what happens in theological education about "mission," and what is actually going on in the churches. There is a need for intellectual and practical training of the laity and of pastors that should concern both new images for mission and be open to new structures (e.g. NGO/FBO work), both "non-Christian" and "secular" NGOs.

5. Mission Post-Colonialism

Professor MT Davila (Andover Newton Theological School), Chair

How do we acknowledge the positive elements of the diverse relationships that stem out of the missionary movements of the 19th and 20th century while at the same time taking seriously the picture of relationships marked by domination and violence brought to light by the descriptive tools of post-colonial thought? For many, suffering was a common element shared by a variety of populations and to which mission must attend.

6. Mission Pluralist World

Professor Catherine Cornille (Boston College, Department of Theology), Chair

Among the several challenges posed by non-Christian religions is this: to maintain a proper balance between the saving work of Christ and of the Spirit. In this, interreligious dialogue may remind missionaries that proclamation is not a one-way exercise, and that Christian mission may have much to learn from other religions. It also points to the importance in mission of placing one's trust ultimately in the Holy Spirit, rather than in human effort and ingenuity.

7. Mission Post-Modernity

Dr. Todd Johnson (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary), Chair

The dominance theme often fostered by Christians in the Global North makes Christians in the Global South suspicious of motives in mission from the North. The Northern Church needs to become a listener rather than an instructor. In order for this reality to change, a broad and comprehensive rediscovery of the Christological roots of the mission is needed. At the same time, the Northern Church needs to be reintroduced to Christ.

8. “Salvation Today”

Professor Peter Kuzmic (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary), Chair

Christians differ in the way they conceptualize salvation. Differences of understanding shape views and practices of mission. For those to whom salvation is primarily understood to be the restoration of an individual's relationship with God, verbal proclamation of the gospel as evangelism is primary. Others understand salvation as

mediated through the church by the means of sacraments. Still, most find salvation to be a comprehensive term expressing God's loving concern for the well-being of all humanity and that the aim of mission should therefore be the recovery of the imago Dei in every person.

Among the outcomes of this conference are the following four points that deserve brief consideration:

1. The book that has grown out of this conference, *The Changing Contours of World Mission and Christianity*, edited by Todd Johnson, Rodney Petersen, Gina Bellofatto and Travis Myers (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011) not only outlines with greater specificity areas for further research, it contains the conference addresses which were of value in terms of the different areas of addressed related to mission studies. The table of contents is as follows:

Preface
Contributors
Introduction

Part I: World Christian Movement

- 1) "An Introduction to the *Atlas of Global Christianity*"
Todd M. Johnson
- 2) "Boston, Students, and Missions from 1810 to 2010"
Dana L. Robert
- 3) "From Boston to the Whole World: Twentieth-Century North American Roman Catholic Missions and the 'Antioch Agenda'"
Angelyn Dries, OSF
- 4) "Discerning the Future of World Christianity: Vision and Blindness at the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910"
Brian Stanley

Part II: Mission in the Twenty-first Century

- 5) "Journey to the Center of Gravity: Christian Mission One Century after Edinburgh 1910"
Athanasios Papathanasiou
- 6) "Mission and Interreligious Dialogue: Edinburgh, Vatican II, and Beyond"
Peter Phan
- 7) "Wooden Boxes and Latticed Windows: Christian Confession and Post-colonizing Mission"

Ruth Padilla DeBorst

8) “Finding the Seventh Story”

Brian D. McLaren

9) “Theological Education and Mission in Euro-American Institutions of Higher Learning: A Non-Western Reflection”

Daniel Jeyaraj

Part III: Student Perspectives

10) “The Student Paper Workshops of 2010Boston”

Travis L. Myers

11) “‘From Among Her Own Children’—African-Americans and the Evangelization of Africa in the Nineteenth Century”

Mary Cloutier

12) “Disciples in Mission: Evangelization, Liberation, and a ‘Theology of Neighbor’”

Marcus C. Mescher

13) “Do-It-Yourself Missions: The Rise of Independent Faith-Based Organizations and the Changing Contours of Missions”

Eva Pascal

14) “Methodist Border Friendship Commission: A Case Study”

Lisa Beth White

15) “A Preliminary Study of Symbiotic Mission Through Floral Beauty”

Megumi Yoshida

Part IV: Reports and Conclusion

16) “2010Boston From the Student Perspective”

Gina Bellofatto

17) “Tokyo 2010: Global Mission Consultation”

Allen Yeh

18) “Lausanne III: A Success?”

LouAnn Stropoli

19) “Witnessing for Christ Today: Christian Mission Beyond Edinburgh 2010”

Kapya John Koama

20) “The Eight Themes of 2010Boston”

Rodney L. Petersen

Appendix I 2010 Boston Schedule

Appendix II 2010 Boston Worship

2. The conference fostered a deeper sense of the consciousness of the consortium, its value for raising theological and ethical questions for mutual deliberation and was suggestive of further paths for intellectual and institutional collaboration. As a body of academic institutions with varying degrees of dependence or relationship to different ecclesial bodies, the BTI is an unparalleled ecumenical organization for ecclesiastical and civic purposes.
3. The consortium is not only ecumenical in the inherited Christian sense of the term “ecumenical” as used and evolved in the twentieth century, but the consortium is now interfaith and, with the addition of Hebrew College in 2011, illustrative of the “wider” ecumenism being pioneered in many different settings today. This institutional evolution is quite valuable for further theological reflection, the development of comparative theology and for wider ethical engagement. In terms of the Boston mission conference this is valuable when it comes to the study of or reflection on a document such as the recently released, “*Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*,” agreed to by the World Council of churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and World Evangelical Alliance,” (document finalized in January, 2011).
4. A fourth outcome from the Boston mission conference is composed of the different areas for further study and research. These include not only the eight thematic areas noted above, but also such other considerations as the following:
 - a) Helpful research might be done in the field of comparative missiology. Christianity, as well as Buddhism and Islam – and other faiths – are missionary religions; more work needs to be done in this area. An entity like the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University and Divinity School is uniquely positioned for such a study as are other BTI schools.¹
 - b) The importance of mission in relation to the ways it fosters social capital needs to be explored. Research into the history of Roman Catholic mission work and that of many of the different Protestant churches is replete with many examples, such as the very founding of the field of Social Work in our own setting in Boston in relation to the history of Methodism and early development of Boston University. Orthodox social work, both in the early Patristic

¹ Models for this kind of reflection are seen in the volume edited by Francis X. Clooney, SJ, *The New Comparative Theology. Thinking Interreligiously in the 21st Century* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010).

churches as well as its recovery today is a rich area for additional research.²

- c) Work needs to be done, particularly in a self-critical way, within the Christian community on the relationship between mission and ecumenism. As we enter a day of heightened interfaith consciousness this area of study is of increasing importance, particularly as religion is often a potent component of identity consciousness and politics. In this light, the Boston mission conference should be seen in light of the two interfaith conferences held by the BTI together with Andover Newton Theological School and Hebrew College (June, 2009 and April 2010).³

- d) A fourth area of research might relate to ways that the Boston mission conference could be viewed through the lens of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, sponsored by the World Council of Churches in Jamaica (May 2011).⁴ This would highlight themes of mission as the ministry of reconciliation, raised up at the conference of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in Athens in May 2005. This was also a theme at first assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam (1948).⁵

² Vision for this kind of work is laid down with respect to the Millennium Development Goals by Sabina Alkire and Edmund Newell, *What Can One Person Do? Faith to Heal a Broken World* (New York: Church Publishing, 2005). See also Elizabeth Parsons, *What Price for Privatization? Cultural Encounter with Development Policy on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010.

³ See “Training Religious Leaders,” articles by Diana Eck, Jennifer Peace, Art Green and Abdel-Rahman Ibrahim Mohamed in the *BTI Magazine*, no. 9.2 (Spring, 2010): 5-15; Greg Mobley, Jennifer Peace and Or Rose, *Border Crossings* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011).

⁴ Fernando Enns, “The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation: Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Just Peace?” *The Ecumenical Review* (March 2011): 44-53; and Rodney Petersen, “The Spirit, the Church and the Decade to Overcome Violence: Trajectories in Reformed and Orthodox Theology,” in *John Calvin's Ecclesiology: Ecumenical Perspectives*, ed. by Eddy van der Borgh and Gerard Mannion, Ecclesiastical Investigations Series (T & T Clark International/Continuum, 2011): 203-219.

⁵ See Preparatory Papers by Jacques Matthey and Robert Schreiter at: <http://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/mission-and-evangelism/cwme-world-conference-athens-2005/preparatory-paper-n-10-mission-as-ministry-of-reconciliation.html> (accessed, August 2011).