

SEEKING CLOSURE:



The Story of a Movement from William Carey to Tokyo 2010

RALPH WINTER & DAVID TAYLOR

Editorial Note: This insightful article was first written by Dr. Ralph Winter for the Global Consultation on World Evangelization held in Seoul, Korea in 1995. For this issue of Mission Frontiers, it has been shortened and updated to include developments over the last fifteen years.

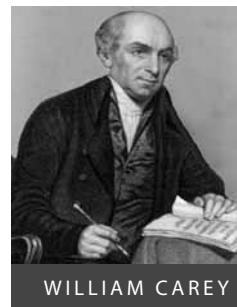
How close are we to “finishing the task?” The question of “what remains to be done” in fulfilling our Lord’s Great Commission has been a driving force of the missions movement from William Carey to the present day. Fulfilling the Great Commission is so large and complex, no one church, agency, or national missions movement can take it on alone. For this reason, missions has often been a catalyst for bringing the Church together. Here in this brief survey, we will take a look at how the concept of closure and mission cooperation has gradually developed over the last two centuries.

As we approach the year 2010, many large global consultations will be held to commemorate the centenary of Edinburgh 1910. One of these in particular, the first of the 2010 meetings (which will be held in Tokyo), has “closure” within its sights. But as the reader will likely discern, the way in which that “task” is being looked at has changed considerably over the last two centuries.

The theme and vision of the Tokyo gathering, which will be predominately attended and led by non-Western leaders has a significant historical context. Their vision statement takes into account both the breadth and depth of the unfinished task: “Making disciples of every people in our generation.”

Ralph Winter was the founder and General Director of the Frontier Mission Fellowship. David Taylor is a member of the Tokyo 2010 planning committee.

As mission leaders from around the world prepare for this global gathering it is appropriate that we take a step back and ask ourselves some probing questions. How did we get here, and why this vision? Is it part of a discernible movement to the final frontiers? What other meetings have had that burden? How does this movement compare?



WILLIAM CAREY

William Carey, 1810
In India for more than a decade, William Carey, in 1806, thought that it would be a good idea if all of the missionaries in the world were to meet together four years later at the Cape of Good Hope, in 1810. The purpose of such a meeting would have been very simply to plan together to finish the task of world evangelization. His proposal may have been the first time any human being thought in such concrete and planetary terms.

Carey was obviously not just a field missionary in India, but (like Hudson Taylor after him, and John

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R. Mott still later) he had his eyes on the whole world. His letters inspired people to go to specific, strategic places other than India. His own son went to Burma. Missionaries often recruit for more than their own fields!

Despite his considerable influence by 1806, his idea of a world-level gathering of missionary strategists in 1810 was dismissed by one of his followers as merely “one of William’s pleasing dreams.”



John R. Mott, 1910

But Carey’s dream for 1810 didn’t die. It was actually a delayed-action fuse. It went off a century later at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910.

William Carey was called into the ministry in August of 1786 and made his proposal 20 years later, after

being in India over a decade. John R. Mott stood up as one of the “Northfield 100” in August of 1886 and made his proposal 20 years later after tramping the world for over a decade on behalf of the Student Volunteer Movement.

By 1906, John R. Mott wielded an enormous influence. He had attended a regional meeting of mission

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leaders in Madras, India, in 1900. By 1906 (exactly 100 years from the date Carey made his suggestion for a world-level meeting of mission leaders) Mott announced his resolve to attempt to head off another “decennial” popular meeting already scheduled for 1910 and to transform it into a radically different type of meeting. He had

been stirred by the significance of mission leaders getting together by themselves to discuss the task before them, and was impressed by the immediate significance of a world-level meeting constituted specifically by missionaries and mission executives. Thus, in 1906 he wrote:

To my mind the missionary enterprise at the present time would be much more helped by a thorough unhurried conference of the leaders of the boards of North America and Europe than by a great, popular convention. I feel strongly upon this point.

Unlike church leaders (parallel to mayors and governors) who provide the all-important nurture and spirit of the mission enterprise, mission leaders are parallel to military generals. They have literally in their hands the troops to carry out expeditionary goals.

Although a world-level conference of a more typical kind was already contemplated for 1910, Mott resolutely switched to the mission-leader paradigm he had seen in action in India. It took two more years for him to convince enough others. The result was that beginning in 1908, with only two years to go (and with the help of his friends, notably J. H. Oldham), Mott drummed up one of the most influential conferences in world history.

Why is 1910 so well remembered? No doubt because it was the William Carey paradigm. That is, it was not based on church leaders who have only indirect connection to the mechanisms of mission. Well-meaning church leaders often speak warmly of causes in great gatherings but do not necessarily have the administrative structure with which to follow through.

No, the meeting at Edinburgh in 1910, following the example of the India regional gathering (plus the gust of wind coming from a similar meeting in Shanghai in 1907), consisted of the electrifying concept which William Carey had proposed.

Granted the 1910 meeting was not immediately succeeded by similar meetings. The next meeting in this stream (Jerusalem, 1928) included a wide variety of church leaders and, as a result, switched back to that all-important sphere of church leaders who guide and nurture the troops but do not command them. At the same time, while there have never been many “liberals” among the missionaries themselves, once you invite a wide spectrum of church leaders you will find that theological debates and issues of liberalism tend to crowd out the kind of strategic mission discussions that are the hallmark of dedicated mission leaders who have most of such discussions behind them.

Thus, unfortunately, the 1910 meeting has become known more for the kind of meetings that followed it (eventually leading into the World Council of Churches) rather than for the meeting it really was.

Edinburgh, 1980

The proposal for a second 1910 type of meeting to be held in 1980 finally materialized after six years when it was first suggested at a gathering of mission leaders. It almost didn’t. It was not easy to defend

the significant features of the 1910 meeting which it followed, namely:

- 1) that its only participants were delegated executives from existing mission agencies, and
- 2) the focus of the conference was exclusively upon "unoccupied fields."

However, in August of 1979, more than a year before the meeting, the sponsoring committee of mission agency representatives voted that those formally participating consist of delegates from agencies with current involvement in or with formal organizational commitment to reaching hidden people groups.

All of the largest non-Western agencies were represented at Edinburgh 1980. Three of the four invited plenary speakers, including Thomas Wang, came from the so-called mission lands. The delegates to this conference, on going back to their countries around the world have been involved in many notable advances of the specific emphasis on finishing the task and upon reaching the unreached peoples (as the necessary precursor to reaching every person).

The cost of the meeting was very low since agencies appointing delegates provided travel costs

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Note that Hidden Peoples were defined as "those cultural and linguistic subgroups, urban or rural, for which there is as yet no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize their own people." This definition, with slight changes of wording, was later adopted by the Lausanne-sponsored meeting in March of 1982 as the meaning of the phrase, Unreached Peoples.

The theme and watchword of the conference was a "Church for every people by the year 2000." Here the seeds of what would become known as the AD2000 and Beyond Movement were deeply sown in the hearts and minds of many mission leaders



from around the world. Indeed the most unusual and powerful feature of the 1980 meeting was the fact

that fully one-third of all of the delegates came from Two-Thirds World agencies. By comparison, in 1910, although a handful of non-Western agencies existed, they were accidentally overlooked! Bishop Azariah, for example, who had already founded two different mission agencies in India, was not invited to send delegates from his agencies. He was, instead, sent to the conference as a delegate of the Church Missionary Society working in South India! That was appropriate, but it revealed the woeful fact that the Mott leadership team failed even to conceive of the possibility of what we now call Two-thirds World mission agencies!

as well as food and lodging expense. At the last minute a grant came from Anthony Rossi which assisted some of the Two-thirds world delegates to be able to come.

The Catalytic Genius of Singapore '89

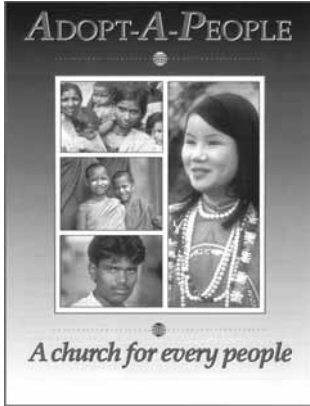
A similar financial plan was followed by the January 1989 Singapore Global Conference on World Evangelization by the Year 2000 and Beyond, sparked by the vision of Thomas Wang. Dr. Wang had been deeply impressed in 1980 by the question of what God might be expecting of His people by the year 2000. He wrote a widely influential article, "By the year 2000, Is God Trying to Tell us Something?" The resulting meeting in Singapore was simple, unadorned, very low budget. A substantial gift from the Maclellan Foundation gave last-minute assistance.

GCOWE '89 gave birth to two more global consultations which were held focusing on the theme of closure and the AD2000 watchword. The first meeting in Seoul, Korea brought together 4,000 delegates from 186 countries.



Out of these meetings came the significant Joshua Project (JP) initiative which focused on the world's 1,739 largest, least reached peoples (over 10,000 in population and less than 2% Evangelical). This initiative brought about a flurry of regional and national cooperative efforts to identify, research, and engage all the major least-reached peoples in the world. At GCOWE '97 mission leaders were challenged to take responsibility for

the 572 remaining unengaged groups on the JP list and churches around the world were challenged to “adopt” one of these



peoples for prayer, giving and sending. (The Adopt-A-People concept and campaign was first launched at Edinburgh '80. Since that time hundreds of agencies around the world have become participants and tens of thousands of churches have adopted their own unreached

group.) The result was that by the year 2000, over 90% of those on the list were engaged at some level of evangelism and church planting.

Following AD2000, much progress has been made in national and regional efforts to identify remaining unreached peoples and see them engaged over the last decade. Much of this can be traced back to the closure focus that came out of Edinburgh 1980. However, much more needs to be done. As stated by Dr. Yong Cho, former general secretary of the World Korean Missionary Fellowship, and now director of the Global Network of Mission Structures:

As of yet, there is still no global network of mission organizations networking together to fully engage all the peoples of the world in a systematic way. We remain largely ignorant of what each other is doing. We need more cooperation in research and joint planning to address this. . . . We can't repeat the mistakes of the past. They will only be amplified by the fact that so many more people will be making them! Are we going to plant a hundred different denominations in Turkey, for example, each with their respective ties to groups around the world, or is it possible that after two hundred years of Protestant missions we can do better than that?

As alluded to earlier, if you want to fight a war you need the backing of the mayors and state governors. But for the planning and execution of the war it is also necessary for the military leaders to get together and weld themselves into a single fighting force. In the early 1990s we certainly saw that kind of wholesome and hearty cooperation between otherwise totally independent agencies in Russia where both the CoMission and the Strategic Alliance for Church

Planting became the intentional integration of more than 50 separate agencies working in great harmony. Why not tackle the whole world in the same way?

The time has come for those who are the active leaders of mission agencies to gather for the purpose of joint planning and action, for the kind of goal setting for each agency which is not developed by the agency itself but by the consensus of the group. It is as if an agency in a “Strategic Partnership” voluntarily gives up its right to determine its own goals and instead takes its orders from the combination of minds and hearts of a number of different agencies which then work in complete harmony. This has already happened many times down through mission history. In recent years Interdev has marvelously spearheaded developments of this kind on a regional level. Why not work together in a similar way at the global level?

Tokyo 2010

As we prepare to look to the future, the question before us is the same as it was in the days of William Carey: How



far have we come and how far do we need to go?

One initiative, led in part by Paul Eshleman of Campus Crusade, is Finishing the Task, which is seeking to see all peoples engaged with church planting and evangelism in the next ten years.

When the initiative began there were 639 peoples in the unengaged category with populations greater than 100,000. The total population of these groups is over half a billion. (Half of these groups are in India, and only recently identified as part of a major research effort underway

Finishing the Task

in that vast sub-continent. None of these Indian groups, for example, were on the original Joshua Project list.)

Today, of these 639 groups, less than 95 remain completely unengaged. This is truly remarkable progress for just under seven years! Engaging these remaining groups is certainly a doable objective. Indeed, this aspect of the unfinished task is very likely completeable in the next decade if we all work together even at a minimal level. No doubt this will be a remarkable achievement and milestone in the history of the Great Commission! But as we ap-

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proach the “finish line” in this particular dimension of the unfinished task, it is appropriate that we begin to take a closer look at the fruit of all this effort. Are we succeeding in fulfilling the mandate Jesus gave us to “disciple all peoples”? Why is the Christianity of certain areas of the world being described as a “mile-wide and an inch deep”? These areas are “reached” by one standard—percentage of Christian adherents, national leaders, etc. But how do they measure up to the Great Commission standard—*teaching them to obey* everything Christ commanded?

With this in mind, the Tokyo 2010 global mission consultation has made the decision to step back and look at this important issue, while at the same time keeping the frontier mission focus of its predecessors. Thus the new watchword, *Making Disciples of Every People in Our Generation* focuses not only on the breadth of the unfinished task—represented by *every people*—but also on the depth of that task—*making disciples*.

Can this be done in *our generation*? The results are up to God. But this is our hope and prayer—that everyone alive at any given time might have the opportunity to say yes to Jesus and be discipled in a culturally relevant fellowship of believers.

In the final analysis, frontier missions is not just about identifying and engaging the unreached peoples of the world—as important as that initial first step is. But perhaps even more important and crucial is “what do we do once we get there?” Thus the real objective of frontier missiology is about building the right foundations from the very beginning. That is why it is imperative that we learn from the past successes and failures of the last two hundred years.

This is the hope and challenge of Tokyo 2010. As a global consultation gathered from the ends of the earth, delegates will be sent by their respective mission agencies to engage this issue in depth. They will be looking inward and outward

at the same time, listening and learning from one another, and by God’s grace returning to the global church with one voice the collective message He gives us. With two-thirds of the delegates coming from the non-Western world (the opposite of what happened at Edinburgh ’80), Tokyo 2010 has the potential to be a truly history-making event. Without a doubt it will represent a significant marker in the transfer of the bulk of mission responsibility to the non-Western world, which comprise 80% of evangelicals today.

Concluding Thoughts

What we see in this brief history is a journey of movements which have taken us ever closer to the heart of the unfinished task—from “evangelizing the whole world,” to “a church for every people,” to “making disciples of every people.” All three are necessary! All three are biblical. And the result of it all should be the fulfillment of our Lord’s Great Commission, which is that *all peoples would be discipled*. Here in this final objective of discipling peoples, the gospel of the kingdom is being applied to every sphere and pursuit of life—from government to economics, and from education to health and science.

Thus the theme and vision of Tokyo 2010 may take us one step closer to that reality—back to the ultimate objective of the Great Commission—which is not just getting people to come forward at an evangelistic meeting, and not just about forming local assemblies of believers, but about discipling entire nations with the gospel of the Kingdom—teaching them to obey everything Christ has commanded from Genesis to Revelation. †

For more information on Tokyo 2010 visit www.tokyo2010.org

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