



setting *the* pace

Tokyo 2010 leads the way in celebrating Edinburgh 1910

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“Come over and help us!” pleaded Stefan Gustavsson, leader of the Swedish Evangelical Alliance, to the delegates at the Tokyo 2010 mission consultation. Echoing the call of the man in Paul’s Macedonian vision almost 2000 years ago, in his plenary address Gustavsson portrayed the stark reality of Europe today, where the vast majority of the population is turning to secularism, atheism and agnosticism. What followed was perhaps the most moving response during the entire consultation, when Dr. Yong Cho, director of the Global Network of Mission Structures (GNMS), came to the podium with tears in his eyes and as the entire assembly began to cry out to God for the peoples of Europe.

The significance of this moment, from an historical perspective, was immediately obvious. We were at Tokyo 2010 to celebrate what has taken place in the last century since the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference. Yet in those same 100 years, while the Church exploded in Africa, Asia and Latin America, one of the greatest tragedies in the history

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of Christianity also took place in Europe. As we began to pray, we could all perceive the deep sense of gratitude, obligation and loss felt by the non-Western mission leaders who were at this very meeting because of the efforts of European church and mission leaders a century ago. How is it that a Church that weathered so many storms for centuries could be at risk of virtually disappearing in the next 50 years?

“Not on our watch!” was the response at Tokyo 2010.

A Changing of the Guard?

By its very nature, Tokyo 2010 represented many significant contrasts. As an historical marker, this Global Mission Consultation may very well be regarded as the symbolic end of one era and the beginning of another. While the largest mission agency in the Western world, the International Mission Board (Southern Baptist Convention), announced they would be cutting back their personnel by 500 this year, the largest foreign mission sending agency in the non-Western world (the Global Mission Society of the Korean Presbyterian Church), announced at Tokyo 2010 that they intend to more than double their mission force in the next decade.



global meeting following the Edinburgh 1910 pattern which was organized, conducted and attended by a majority of non-Western mission leadership. Not only that, the majority of the funding came from the non-Western world as well!

Going Further and Deeper

In the same way that Edinburgh 1910 became a decisive meeting in the history of

In many ways, large and small, Tokyo 2010 was a wake-up call that times are changing — and faster than many may have expected. For example, an interesting feature at Tokyo 2010 that surprised many Western delegates was the number of African missionaries serving in Japan who volunteered to help with on-site logistics. Ironically, as many older missions have been pulling their personnel out of Japan due to the high cost of living, God has been replacing them with missionaries from some of the poorest nations on earth!

These African missionaries are a tiny glimpse of a seismic shift that has been taking place in non-Western missionary sending over the last decade — a shift that is changing the global Church and global mission movement. Dr. Yong Cho commented on this in his Tokyo 2010 report for the GNMS (see pages 16-17), highlighting an important trend that few had previously noticed:

For the most part, the non-Western mission movement in the 20th century was primarily restricted to domestic missionary deployment. Even throughout the 1980s and 1990s non-Western cross-cultural missionaries serving outside of their country represented just a fraction of the foreign mission total. But that is changing — rapidly! The day will come when even the majority of personnel serving with international missions of Western origin will be made up predominately of non-Western cross-cultural missionaries.

With this incredible change taking place in our generation, it is altogether fitting that Tokyo 2010 should have the unique privilege of being the first

Western missions, when the history of non-Western missions is told, Tokyo 2010 will likely hold a similar place. Edinburgh 1910 had four characteristics that made it unique in Western mission history:

- 1) Its organizers brought together mission leaders as representatives of all the major evangelical sending agencies and nations of the world;
- 2) They focused on the frontiers of the Great Commission;
- 3) They sought to fill in the gaps of inter-mission field coordination;
- 4) They continued to cooperate following the meeting on the national, regional and global levels to reach the remaining unengaged peoples.

The ability of non-Western mission leaders to see the value in these four components and to seek to duplicate them shows remarkable sophistication in the movement. (The number of non-Western mission leaders with PhD degrees at Tokyo 2010 was not the least bit intimidating!) Overall, there was a strong awareness and appreciation for the Edinburgh tradition. But the non-Western organizers of Tokyo 2010 didn't stop with Edinburgh — in many ways they picked up where Edinburgh left off. Though thoroughly evangelical and frontier-focused, the Tokyo 2010 gathering took Edinburgh to the next level to address an important issue that has plagued the non-Western Church for the last century, and which its leaders felt must be corrected before it is replicated among the world's remaining unreached peoples.

The watchword of the Edinburgh 1910 generation was "World evangelization in our generation." It

was a good watchword, but it reflected a somewhat shallow expression of the mandate of the Great Commission. Believing there is more to the Great Commission than had been transmitted from Edinburgh 1910, mission leaders from the non-Western world rethought the watchword at Tokyo 2010 and extended it in both breadth and depth. In so doing, they arrived at a solidly biblical theme. Their watchword, “Making disciples of every people in our generation,” captured both the urgency and the fullness of the unfinished task.

Furthermore, by utilizing such biblical terminology, mission leaders at Tokyo 2010 recognized that the Great Commission is not just limited to evangelization or church multiplication, but it is fundamentally about transformation at every level — from the individual, to the family, to the society as a whole. Without transformation there is no fulfillment of the Great Commission. The Tokyo Declaration issued at the consultation made this abundantly clear:

The new believer’s worldview must be adjusted to a biblical worldview; his lifestyle changed to increasingly conform to the image of Christ; and his ethical conduct progressively marked by biblical morals. Ideally, this results in individuals applying the gospel of the kingdom to every sphere and pursuit of life — from government to economics, from education to health, and from science to creation care. As a consequence, whole communities, cultures and countries benefit from the transforming power of the gospel.

In this regard, Tokyo 2010 represented a call to extend the reach and influence of the Kingdom among all the peoples of the world. It was a call to re-evaluate from where we have come and where we are going, with a healthy reminder that what has happened to the West could happen to the entire world. Indeed, after listening to Stefan Gustavsson’s address, many non-Western delegates remarked that the same trends that overtook Europe are beginning to appear in their countries as well. It was an important reminder that the mission movement must not be so preoccupied with building the Church where it is *not* that we neglect the health of



the Church where it *is*. The Apostle Paul’s missionary epistles provide ample evidence that from the earliest days the mission movement has held both concerns in balance. Tokyo 2010 carried forth that tradition with perhaps greater urgency than ever before. With the rapid spread of globalization, no country or Christian tradition can afford to function as an island unto itself.

For this reason, foremost among others, we will increasingly need each other — to listen and learn from both the mistakes and successes of every church and mission movement around the world. Tokyo 2010 was a refreshing confirmation that the non-Western church is prepared to do just that, and they want to do it together with believers in the West. 🌐