



2010 Statements and the Whereabouts of Satan

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MF readers are well aware that 2010 was the year of four global mission conferences, all commemorating the Edinburgh 1910 meeting (www.tokyo2010.org; www.edinburgh2010.org; www.lausanne.org/cape-town-2010; www.2010boston.org). With the recent release of the full version of the “Cape Town Commitment”, the official statement of the Lausanne a Movement’s Cape Town Congress (last October), we are now able to take stock of the three statements that came out of 2010’s unprecedented conferences. Tokyo 2010 was the first conference (last May) and produced the “Tokyo 2010 Declaration”. Edinburgh 2010 was the second conference (last June) and released the “Edinburgh 2010 Common Call”. The fourth conference, 2010 Boston (last November), did not write an official statement.

I am for the writing of statements! Yes, they are idealistic and our thinking is light years ahead of our practice. Yes, it is laborious and those involved probably have no desire to ever do it again. BUT, these statements are of great value historically. They give future generations an idea of what evangelicals (and other believers) were thinking about in 2010. They also give each of us an opportunity to match our personal beliefs with these statements, which is a good practice for our own good. Here are some of my thoughts related to the statements.

First, I believe the statements successfully achieved their respective purposes. No doubt the meeting with the broadest diversity was at Edinburgh. Their statement is an encouraging document when you realize that it has been ratified by representatives of the Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal/Charismatic streams. I was especially

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impressed by the emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the document. Similarly, the Tokyo 2010 Declaration is representative of the focus of that meeting on unreached peoples. It gives a clarion call for continued emphasis on frontier mission, addressing the breadth of the unfinished task (all peoples) as well as its depth (discipleship). The Cape Town Commitment, again representative of its constituency and purpose, is by far the longest statement and has a broader scope than the others, which are only a few pages. While some think the Lausanne Covenant cannot be improved upon, I am very impressed with the Cape Town Commitment. The statement has a great perspective on dealing with “insider movements” that will serve the mission community well if lived out. As a whole, it represents my own beliefs and convictions, and I’m grateful for the great effort that obviously went into its formation (including that of our own Greg Parsons, who was the US representative on the statement committee). I fully and wholeheartedly endorse it and trust that it will help evangelicals navigate the troubled waters of mission we are presently treading.

Second, whatever happened to Satan? He doesn’t appear in the Common Call statement in any way, shape or form. The Tokyo Declaration elicits only one reference to “spiritual warfare”, which at least implies Satan’s existence. The Cape Town Commitment has eighteen references to “evil” or “evil powers”, only three references to “Satan”, two references to “spiritual warfare”, and one reference each to “powers of darkness” and “satanic rebellion”. Keep in mind that this is a

much longer document and one would expect more and better coverage on a wider variety of topics. While the Cape Town statement does mention Satan by name, which is encouraging, I wonder if we evangelicals are more comfortable describing Satan and his works (thus the prevalence of “evil” in the statement) than we are naming him.

While belief in God is still credible in America today, belief in Satan represents lunacy to some. Is it some great leap of faith to believe in an evil spiritual being? If so, what is the point in believing in a good spiritual being? I wonder if the cumulative effect of the enlightenment, materialism and rampant secularization has so influenced us that Satan seems no longer plausible, even to believers. If indeed Satan is real and represents God’s arch-enemy, if he is the root cause of the “evils” we see in our world, if he is intimately connected to the fall and sin and the need for forgiveness, if he is constantly tempting believers to fall and preventing others from coming to faith, if he is destroying individuals, marriages, families, whole societies and nations – then one would think he would figure a bit more prominently in our statements representing organizations devoted to advancing the Kingdom among all the inhabitants of this earth.

Of course, we all believe in Satan and his works, but we need to do more to address and resist him. Without a theology that includes him in a prominent way, we easily end up blaming God for evil and shifting the identity of our enemy onto human beings.^f