

Tokyo 2020:

A Global Call for Reformation 2.0

BY DAVID TAYLOR

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If Martin Luther were alive today what might he nail to the door of the Church? This is the topic which global mission leaders will ask when they gather in May of this year in Tokyo, Japan. Ten years after Ralph Winter gave a call for the Tokyo 2010 Global Mission Consultation, the original organizers of this gathering are reconvening to ask a crucial question: In what areas do we need reformation today in order to see world evangelization in our generation?

Five hundred years after the Protestant Reformation and almost 2,000 years after Jesus gave the Great Commission, we still have a long way to go in fulfilling our global mandate. Two billion people remain without access to the gospel. Hundreds of thousands of communities are

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without access to a church in thousands of unreached and frontier people groups. Over 3,000 languages still do not have the Scriptures in their language. In spite of these great needs, missionary sending from the United States and other Western nations is plateauing and even declining.

Why is that? What are the impediments that have kept this generation of believers from reaching every unevangelized person, place and people with the gospel? Although we live in the most gospel-rich era in human history, there are still vast areas of the world that remain without a witness. With an estimated 800

million evangelicals in the world, why are there still unreached people groups who have yet to receive their first missionary? Is there something inherently flawed in our discipleship, our ecclesiology and our leadership development that allows this status quo to persist unquestioned?

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Tokyo 2020 is an open call to re-examine everything we are doing both at home and abroad, both within the church and on the mission field. Leaders from every country are being asked to pray and seek the Lord. In what areas do we need to repent? In what areas are we doing well? Do those of us in the West have blind spots which the African church can see, but we cannot? Tokyo 2020 will be a summit to hear from God, but it will not end with the gathering itself. It is just the beginning of what will be a five-year global inquiry to hear what God is saying to his Church all over the world.

The genesis of this reformation survey began with the chairman of Tokyo 2010, Obed Alvarez, a mission leader from Peru. Following Tokyo 2010, Obed organized several international gatherings to mobilize and equip the Church to face the Muslim challenge. Obed was alarmed at the inroads Islam was making in his country and in Latin America. It seemed the Church was not prepared. He learned that Islam has bold and aggressive plans to evangelize his continent, as well as Africa and Europe.

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The more he examined this, the more he realized the Church was asleep. At a time when the Church should be the most awake, with such incredible opportunity to reach the Muslim world, the opposite seemed to be happening.

Like Martin Luther, this issue revealed something deeper that was troubling. Luther's original 95 Theses dealt with one major issue: papal indulgences. At the time it was more of an annoyance to Luther than anything else. He was still a faithful Catholic and an obedient priest. Yet this one issue struck a match to a reformation that has now impacted the entire world. Ultimately what Luther was contending for was the purity of the gospel, even though he may not have known the full weight of his inquiry at the time. In hindsight we can see that getting to this core issue changed everything. The gospel is the foundation for everything we do and everything we are. Recovering the gospel unleashed the power of the Church and the believer for global impact that has irrevocably altered the course of human history.

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Are we in need of a new reformation today? It would seem God has been speaking to many leaders around the world about this very thing. When Obed gave the call in this last year to issue a new "95 Theses" for the global church, submissions began pouring in from every continent. It is evident God is speaking in many areas. Compelling themes are emerging. One area in particular should be of special concern to those of us in the West. There is growing unease, especially in the non-Western

church, with what is happening to American Christianity. While we have been busy exporting our denominations, theological controversies and mega-church franchises to the nations, we have been losing an entire generation of young people to secularism, agnosticism and atheism. Could it be that after two hundred years of sending over 200,000 missionaries, it is now we in the West who are in need of some mentoring in disciple-making? Maybe we could learn a thing or two from the persecuted church, from our brothers and sisters in places like China and Iran.

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No doubt, we all need to come to this table with humility. Like it or not, as Americans we represent the richest generation of Christians in history. We carry the most weight and have the strongest impact. Our "prosperity gospel" can now be found in every country of the world. We should not be surprised if the global church has something to say about it. We may not like it, we may even find it offensive, but we need to listen. If we have made the gospel subservient to our culture, it may take the global church to help us see it. That's the beauty of global mission coming full circle. God still has his prophets, and we need to hear what he is saying through them.

Of course, this inquiry will not just be a critique of Western Christianity and its global impact. It's about the whole church listening to one another. Like "iron sharpening iron", Tokyo 2020 will be an opportunity for the global church to refine its message, purify its motives, and recover lost methods for world evangelization. It's about Asians listening to Africans, Latinos listening to Indians, and Europeans listening to Pacific Islanders. From East to West, everyone's voice will be heard.

Each participant and delegate to Tokyo 2020 is being asked to consider the following questions:

- 1.) What needs restoration?
- 2.) Why does it matter?
- 3.) How do we recover it?
- 4.) Who is responsible to pursue it?
- 5.) Where do we begin today?

In many respects, this global inquiry follows the trajectory set ten years ago at Tokyo 2010. This global gathering gave a clarion call to go deeper as we go farther. It's not enough to simply go everywhere. Our job is not done even if every person in the world becomes a Christian. Our task is to make disciples, and we can't do that if we ourselves are not being discipled. This was the weighty subject matter of Tokyo 2010. It had to do with the breadth and depth of the gospel. The Tokyo 2010 Declaration made this abundantly clear:

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“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.”

This statement itself is quite reformational. In fact, it was something the Protestant reformers understood very well. They recognized what we seemed to forget along the way – that the gospel is not just about transforming individuals. It's about God's purposes in the whole world. We are called to proclaim the “gospel of the Kingdom” to all nations and to every area of society. Only then will the end come. In other words, it's not just about our going everywhere that fulfills the Great Commission. It's about the quality of what we are proclaiming and what we leave behind. It's about teaching the nations to obey all that Christ commanded. It's about God's kingdom—not our denominational empires. It's the gospel of Jesus Christ—not the gospel of the latest fad or ecclesiastical franchise.

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We look forward to what will emerge as God's people take a pause and listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches today. May we truly be a generation that seeks His will and His kingdom above all else. May those who gather in Tokyo be filled with His presence and blessed with His counsel. We eagerly await what God will do and how He will speak as His people seek his heart and mind. 

