

Tokyo 2010 and the Shift Toward Movements

BY KEVIN HIGGINS

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Welcome to this edition of *Mission Frontiers*, which looks back at the Tokyo 2010 Conference and asks, “what has developed since then?”

Before I say more on Tokyo 2010, I am aware that many of our readers were aware that plans were underway for a Tokyo 2020 conference. Given the realities of the COVID-19 crisis, that has been cancelled. While our focus here is looking back to 2010, I wanted to be sure we didn't fail to mention this.

Back to my question, “what has developed since 2010?” In a world of conferences and publications and great speeches this is a fair question, and each article in this edition seeks to give an update. Each is written by the same person who spoke and wrote on the same topics back in 2010.

2010 in Perspective

The common understanding is that in 2010 there were four conferences commemorating the great 1910 Edinburgh gathering. Ralph Winter did note that four of the 2010 celebrations were especially significant (Tokyo, Edinburgh, Cape Town, and Boston). However, there were conferences overtly aimed at revisiting the 1910 gathering in Aarhus, Denmark; Pune, India; Strasbourg, France; St. Paul, Minnesota; Yangon, Myanmar; and Auckland, New Zealand (see Allen Yeh's excellent overview of Tokyo in *IJFM*, 27:3 Fall 2010, page 117).

Why did Dr. Winter emphasize the four that he did? Tokyo was about mission agencies, Edinburgh was about ecumenical and denominational diversity, Cape Town was about evangelical cooperation in ecclesial structures and Boston was academic.

The four “main” gatherings were held on every major continent, with one glaring exception: Latin America! Given the tremendous explosion of mission sending from Latin America, this seems to be a glaring paradox.

1910 to 2000 to 2010: a prophetic shift?

The theme of Tokyo was selected to echo John Mott's 1910 slogan related to evangelization of all peoples, and perhaps also the famous slogan, “A church for every people by the year 2000.”

The vocabulary shift in both cases is not insignificant: disciple-making instead of merely evangelism and disciple-making as the essence of church-planting. The shift from evangelism to disciple-making took place between 1910 and 2010, of course. But in many ways the selection of the term *disciple*, and not *church* for the main theme of 2010 was almost prophetic, as the more recent emphasis in missiology on Disciple Making Movements was not in any way obvious in Tokyo.

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Tokyo's Fourfold Purpose

The promotional efforts leading up to Tokyo 2010 emphasized four purposes: to **celebrate** what God has done over the last 100 years since Edinburgh 1910, to **cast vision** for the future (assessing what remains to be done),



to **introduce new models** in frontier missions (for reaching the least reached peoples), and to **facilitate coordination** among mission organizations to fully engage and disciple every people with the gospel of the kingdom.

Those purposes were then the framework around which the tracks for the conference were developed. And the articles in this edition of *MF* will reflect, we hope, what progress or challenges may have emerged since then.

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Intended Outcomes

The Tokyo 2010 conference gave special attention, as we have noted, to the disciple-making dimension of the Great Commission and aimed at the integration of this into every aspect of the consultation. However, beyond the gathering itself, there were several stated aims:


- 1) Initiating a global research project, both before, during and following the consultation to assess the progress of **discipleship** in every people of the world.
- 2) Facilitation of an inter-mission coordination and follow-up with plans made to fully engage all the peoples of the world **with disciple-making teams**.

I have mentioned in prior *MF* editions that we are in an era of “the movement movement,” meaning, that movements of all sorts are a major focus in missiology: Church Planting Movements, Disciple Multiplication Movements, Insider Movements, etc. Did this spring from Tokyo?

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What we *do* know, looking around now as we look back to Tokyo 2010, is we know more about the extent of discipleship progress than perhaps at any time in history since the book of Acts (see aim number 1 above), and we know that there is a rapidly growing number of movements that, in various ways, emphasizes discipleship (aim number 2).

There were certainly other outcomes from Tokyo: deepened relationships, an incarnational expression of the multi-cultural and multi-national shift in mission sending and thinking, and a deeper probing of the boundaries between what we could know about the least reached and what we didn't know as researchers gathered and compared notes.

I am sometimes asked, about this or that conference, whether such gatherings are worth the cost of money in rooms and food and travel, and the real costs in terms of peoples' time and focus while in actual attendance and in preparation. I know there are conferences I have attended for which I would need to politely say, “no, not worth it” (and I am sure my readers can add examples). However, looking back at Tokyo 2010, I believe God is still making withdrawals on His investment. 

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