

Is It Possible?

Global Cross-Cultural Mission Collaboration: 1910 to 2010

By Ralph D. Winter



Curiously, while many professions require special training and insight and have large meetings of their practitioners from time to time to compare notes and share knowledge, the role of a *cross-cultural mission agency*, has not often merited that kind of meeting on the global level. On the national level, in the United States, it was not until 1891 that the Foreign Mission Conference of North America (FMCNA) came together.

Today we have in the USA at least two associations of mission agencies with large annual meetings of member agency executives, the CrossGlobal Link (formerly IFMA) and The Mission Exchange (formerly EFMA), both with around 100 member agencies. (Nothing like the India Mission Association with nearly 300 member mission agencies!)

Lineages?

IFMA was founded in 1917 when the just-mentioned FMCNA decided only denominational boards could vote—not the delegates of interdenominational mission agencies (like the China Inland Mission [now Overseas Missionary Fellowship], Wycliffe Bible Translators, etc.). It was also a split between the social level of the missionaries in the denominational agencies who were college products and those of the Faith Missions who were not necessarily so. The FMCNA eventually helped to create its own umbrella in the form of the National Council of Churches of Christ USA (NCCCUSA), now calling itself the Division of Overseas Ministries (DOM) of the NCCCUSA.

The EFMA as an intentional replacement for the DOM was born in 1945 partly also because the IFMA had from its founding admitted only interdenominational agencies, later excluding Pentecostal and Charismatic mission agencies as they emerged.

However, in about 1976 both the EFMA and the IFMA decided to meet jointly every three years. (Plans in 2008, under their new names, are to meet jointly every year beginning in 2010.) The meetings of such entities are helpful. But mission agencies as such have very rarely met *on the world level*—1910, 1980, and 2010. That's it.

At Edinburgh 1910 the meeting was run by the denominational agencies but was open to all agencies. At the 1980 meeting, as we shall see below, the sponsorship was no longer mainly denominational. Tokyo 2010 will be primarily run by non-Western agencies but will include Western.

Meanwhile, the educational and social “lift” of the non-college and the Bible-Institute Evangelicals has brought them gradually into increasing harmony with the Evangelical missionaries of the older denominational traditions.

But a whole new layer began to emerge in the “charismatic” sphere. In what is now called Accelerating International Mission Strategies (AIMS), there are many mission-concerned entities ranging from a handful of formal agencies, like Youth With a Mission to thousands of local churches which send their members to visit and link with overseas churches in their same sphere.

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Interestingly, leadership at its best in this somewhat amorphous Charismatic sphere often comes from the older and wiser Pentecostal tradition.

The Charismatic sphere is still strong on (blemished by?) strange miracles, visits to heaven, and of course, charismatic experiences, differing from and going beyond the older Pentecostal tradition, while the older Pentecostal sphere is already downplaying that sort of thing,

The Charismatics have many big, even global meetings of various kinds, but there is nothing that fully unites them on that level and there is nothing at this date in this sphere on the national or international level comparable to *an association of mission sending agencies*.

For good or ill, many local churches are big enough nowadays to send their own (mainly short term) missionaries, rarely with any success other than linking (meddling?) with existing like-minded churches overseas. Moving in every direction it is likely that this vigorous, sizable sphere will gradually come closer to the “straight” Evangelicals.

However, this tendency of “missional” congregations, many of which see no reason for professional

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mission agencies (and have consequently shied away from pioneer fields), is becoming prominent even in the much more orderly, older Evangelical sphere. All three of these spheres, older denominational, older Evangelical, Pentecos-

tal/Charismatic will appear in some way, probably, in all four 1910-commemorating conferences in 2010. Note that these spheres each have their flagship magazine, *Christian Century*, *Christianity Today*, and *Charisma*, respectively.

Two of the 2010 conferences, the one in Edinburgh itself and the student conference in Boston will both be anchored in the older denominational traditions. They were the backbone of the enormous, popular Ecumenical Mission Conference of 1900 in New York, which attracted up to 200,000, with three presidents and former presidents as speakers. (This event was only weeks removed from, and mainly oblivious to, the backlash of the terrible Boxer Rebellion in China killing hundreds of missionaries.)

This sphere was also, note, the leader of the later, smaller, more professional and historically more influential (and much more famous) Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference. It is clear that

in the year 2000 nothing like the four scheduled conferences in 2010 took place to commemorate the enormous Ecumenical Mission Conference of 1900. A major factor in that absence in 2000 was that a hundred years had made the shallow triumphalism of 1900 embarrassing.

It is interesting that the more sober, professionally based 1910 conference less than 1% as large would now be commemorated by no less than four global level conferences in 2010.

Legacy?

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With a rising gust of wind in their sails from the newly-born Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, the denominational leaders dominating the Foreign Mission Conference of North America sponsored the huge popular meeting at Carnegie Hall in New York City in 1900. A second such extravaganza was then intended for 1910. However, in 1905, a significant change of course was suddenly envisioned. The influential leader of the Student Volunteer Movement, John R. Mott, attended a large meeting in China, which consisted of just missionaries from all over China. In 1907, he attended the same kind of meeting in South India. He was impressed. He now resolved that the 1910 meeting would become that same type of radically different meeting—not a *demonstration* but a *strategic working conference* of workers.

He had firmly concluded that there was good reason for mission executives and missionaries to meet by themselves, whereas the 1900 meeting in New York, however helpful in other ways, included all kinds of people besides those actually involved in cross-cultural mission work.

With only a short time to shift gears, Mott and his associates (mainly of Student Volunteer Movement background) managed to redefine the 1910 meeting almost totally. For the meeting in 1910 study commissions were set up producing stout books on eight major themes. There was no list of individuals being invited—as in the meetings in China and India. Those attending were the *delegates* of mission agencies approved as organizations by a credentials committee. Those accredited sent delegates of their choosing. Due to fervent diplomacy, and building on the already broad sweep of Student Volunteers, almost the entire Protestant world of missions was included.

It was a triumph of sorts in pushing forward global cross-cultural mission agency collaboration, typical of the elite high-blown student idealism of the day.

It was also a triumph of potential ecclesiastical unity. The fact that the 1910 meeting of missionaries drew from more parts of the global Christian community than any previous meeting easily gave rise to the idea that, if the missionaries from highly diverse backgrounds could meet together, why not the church leaders?

Such optimistic thoughts failed to take into account the fact that missionaries don't usually argue about minute differences in the handling of the Eucharist (and such topics were, accordingly, not on the agenda in 1910). Thus, it took many years and many meetings before the Faith and Order, and the Life and Work movements could attract

anything like the breadth of unity that already existed on many mission fields and at Edinburgh in 1910. Finally, in 1937, merging the Faith and Order, and the Life and Work movements, the first faltering step was taken to found the World Council of Churches. Due to the Second World War the official ceremony did not take place until 1948. No one questions that the early inspiration of such a thing as the WCC was the 1910 meeting.

However, it is truly ironical that the resulting WCC may have found it difficult to achieve theological unity to the extent manifested in 1910, but was and is structurally unable to achieve or handle the structural background of the mission agencies

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A Case for Global Network of Centres for World Mission (GNCWM) Meeting Again

By Chong Kim

During GNCWM's heyday in the late 1980s, it had identified close to 40 such centers worldwide. At one such meeting in Singapore (hosted by the Singapore Centre for Evangelism and Missions), 33 representatives of 12 centers and 5 other organizations discussed how to bring synergy and to plan for the network's future. The 1986 "Singapore Statement on the Global Network of Centres for World Mission" defines a center for world missions as an "interdenominational, inter-mission organization working in a supporting role for the cause of World Evangelization and especially for the reaching of the unreached peoples." It also reads that a Centre for World Mission is intended to fill a gap not being filled by other mission organizations. The Statement also includes the aspiration in collaborating with the existing global entities such as the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the Missions Commission of the then World Evangelical Fellowship (now World Evangelical Alliance).

However, due to unintended administrative oversight and various other factors, GNCWM fizzled out and ceased to function in the mid 1990s. This does not mean, however, that the centers for world mission ceased to function. In fact, a case can be made that there are new centers that have sprung up in the last decade or so. Naturally, a question emerges, "Is there a need for such a global network again?" Going by the Singapore Statement and the current world's needs and challenges around us, perhaps GNCWM

is more desperately needed now than ever before. Leaders of the centers for world mission will not know the answer with full conviction and clarity until the leaders come face to face and discuss whether GNCWM is worth rebuilding and thus begins to contribute to the cause of frontier missions again.

Once again, the Singapore Centre for Evangelism and Missions (SCEM) will play a crucial part in hosting the GNCWM Consultation April 20-23 of 2009. The planning committee includes Stanley Ow with SCEM, Chulho Han with Mission Korea, Robert Lopez with the Philippine Missions Association, Timothy Olonade with Nigeria Evangelical Missions Association, and Chong Kim with the U.S. Center for World Mission. Other than Dr. Ralph Winter's keynote talk, most of the schedule will revolve around group interactions highlighting fruitful case studies and sharing of specific resources reflective of the theme which is "A New Beginning: Challenge and Opportunity of the Centres for World Mission in the 21st Century." The Consultation will also seek to deal with challenges and opportunities in frontier missions in the 21st century and how centers can "fill a gap."

Thus, if you are a leader of a center for world mission, you are cordially invited to be part of the Consultation this April. Please write to Stanley Ow (Executive Director, SCEM) at stanley.scem@gmail.com for the invitation letter and other necessary documents. The registration fee is \$25 and the venue is set at the historic St. Andrews Cathedral. 🌐

manifested in 1910. Theologically, missionaries will almost always find it easier to meet and even work together if only because, immersed, as they are, in a radically non-Western culture, their differences now seem far less significant. In many spheres of doctrine and liturgy dear to church leaders back home, missionaries simply don't feel inclined to split hairs.

But Structure?

The usual *structure* of mission agencies is a type of organization quite different from that of a church. There has been relative acceptance of such mission structures in the case of the orders in the Roman Catholic tradition. The Reformers accepted congregations but abolished the orders. When the same structure (somewhat like a private enterprise) centuries later re-emerged within Protestantism (with the help of William Carey) it has been, as a structure, extensively ignored, despised or denigrated by such phrases as "parachurch structures." As for the term *parachurch*, in truth, modern American congregations are so far removed from the *ecclesias* of the New Testament that it would be just as reasonable to refer to our contemporary congregations as "paramission" structures.

In 1972, a Southern Baptist professor proposed for 1980 another conference like the 1910 conference. It was only the second time in a century that a conference of that kind was convened. The third is the one scheduled for Tokyo in 2010.

In any case, nothing being said here should be taken to mean that there have not been any other global gatherings with mission significance. The World Council of Churches' Commission of World Mission and Evangelism, which carries on part of the function of the former IMC, has its periodic meetings. But, as mentioned above, quite a few mission agencies cannot be involved.

The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization on the other hand has a very much broader constituency and will include quite a few *individuals they invite* who may be related to mission agencies. The Lausanne Committee was born at the original 1974 International Congress for World Evangelization in Lausanne, with later similar meetings at Manila and Pattaya, Thailand. Earlier there had been a sort of proto-LCWE meeting in Berlin, the 1966 World Congress on Evangelism, which was jointly sponsored by 1) the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (note that Graham's wife grew up in China as a child of missionaries) and 2) the periodical *Christianity Today*. Carl F. H. Henry was the editor and his wife also grew up in Cameroon as a child of missionaries.

Most of these other, excellent conferences, however, could be characterized as meetings similar in structure and purpose to the 1900 Carnegie Hall type of meeting, namely strategic attempts to encourage church leaders in the direction of evangelistic and mission outreach.

Take for example the mammoth Amsterdam conferences (e.g. "International Conference for Evangelists") sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in 1983, 1986 and 2000. Each one drew about 10,000 local "evangelists" (many, if not most, just local pastors) from primarily the so-called mission lands. Thus, they focused on people evangelizing their own people in their own country. That is wonderful and essential, but it does not necessarily reach into new, unengaged peoples.

So What Is Mission?

As a matter of fact, at the 1986 conference, in a press interview, Billy Graham was asked by a reporter what he thought about missions. He immediately told a story about a man up in the mountains north of Chennai in India who had heard something about Christ and then went deliberately down to Chennai to find out more about it. On return to his mountain village he won many to Christ.

Note that Graham in his response, I think intentionally, made no reference to foreign missionaries, or even to cross-cultural outreach within the same country. Similarly, when I submitted my paper for the Lausanne conference in 1974, I noticed that every time I used the word *mission* it was crossed out and replaced by the word *evangelism*. When I asked why this was so I was told that many people consider missionaries coming in from the outside of a country to be an imperialistic activity, but that evangelism within a country was less offensive. I guess that's true.

Now, I am not predicting that the Lausanne-sponsored meeting at Cape Town, South Africa in 2010 will continue to replace the word *mission*. The International Director, Douglas Birdsall, has had years of experience as a mission executive. However, I certainly cannot fairly expect him to transform the Lausanne meeting in Cape Town into a conference for just mission executives! That is not the purpose of the Lausanne conference. But, it may well be that mission agencies and missionaries will be more visible. The day of missionaries going to countries other than their own is certainly not past.

The willingness to recognize each other, as seen already in the four global conferences of 2010, is a good sign. 🌐