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The World Comes to Edinburgh: Images of the Christian and Non-Christian Worlds from Edinburgh, 1910

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The World Missionary Conference which we remember as 'Edinburgh 1910' was a word-heavy occasion. Every delegate was supplied with a weighty proof set of the eight Commission reports. That produced by Commission VI on 'The Home Base' was by far the longest, amounting in its published form to 565 pages. For nine days the delegates endured sessions that began at 9.45 in the morning and did not conclude till 9.30 at night. They listened to some 300 consecutive speeches of seven minutes each during the daytime, and twenty-four evening addresses of up to forty minutes each. One might expect that first-hand reports of the conference would complain of the surfeit of words, but in fact most devote more attention to the visual impact of an event which participants found to be without parallel in their experience. In this paper I will discuss some of the images and visions created by Edinburgh 1910 and draw from them some reflections on the assumptions that they both reinforced and subverted.

1. The City of Edinburgh welcomes the conference

We begin with three clusters of images relating to the opening of the conference. They are decidedly images of the western Christian world, yet in each case their fascination derives from the presence within the picture of the exotic, an element introduced from outside. The first dates from the evening before the opening of the conference, on Monday 13 June 1910, when a grand civic reception was held in the Great Hall of the Royal Scottish Museum in Chambers Street.¹ Up to 5,000 attended, made up of conference delegates, their hosts and hostesses, and the large number of mission workers who had come to Edinburgh to attend the parallel sessions in the Synod Hall. The reception was hosted by the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, magistrates, and city councillors, resplendent in their scarlet robes. The Lord Provost, Sir William Slater Brown, was attended by uniformed halberdiers, and the kilted band of the Edinburgh Police Pipers played. It was an impressive occasion. The Great Hall, its galleries and staircases, were packed to capacity. All the movable exhibits in the Great Hall were pushed to one side to create a wide thoroughfare running the whole length of the Museum. Flowers and palms from the City Gardens decorated the Hall and the corridors. The Chief City Officer solemnly announced the names and nationalities of each of the guests, until it was realized at about nine o'clock that this procedure would protract the ceremony unduly if continued. One awed American commentator observed 'one could see why it is that the cities of Great Britain are so much better governed than ours and why it is regarded as high honor to render unpaid service as member of council.'² But what was unique about this ceremony was the presence within this distinctively Scottish environment of a cosmopolitan sample of the human race. The correspondent of *The Baptist Times* lyrically described the

¹ See the report in *The Scotsman*, 14 June 1910.

² Howard B. Grose, 'The Edinburgh conference: a pen picture of the world meeting', *Missions*, I, 9 (Sept. 1910), p. 567.

exotic global miscellany of humanity arrayed before his eyes against the background of the no less exotic exhibits of natural history on display in the museum:

The delegates came by in their thousands from the ends of the earth and the ultimate islands of the sea. The first delegate presented came from Constantinople. Others followed from Peking and Toronto, Boston and Benares, Dublin and Delhi, Moscow, Tokyo, Shanghai and Samoa, Christiania, New York and Papua, Jerusalem, Berlin, Cairo, and Capetown.

The cosmopolitan animals and relics in the Museum had also a quaint appropriateness. One would see a Baptist missionary from Congo side by side with an African negro, gazing up at a mighty elephant, while zebras, hyenas, kangaroos, bisons, and wolves formed a background to men and women from the very lands whence the animals came.³

In fact, as I shall explain later, what the Baptist journalist saw was not a black African, but must have been one of the African American delegates. Addresses were given by the Lord Provost; the chairman of the American executive committee, Dr Arthur Judson Brown from the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions in New York; the president of the conference, Lord Balfour of Burleigh; and Bishop La Trobe of the Moravian Church. Lord Provost Brown expressed his satisfaction that Edinburgh - 'the most beautiful city in the world', not excepting Washington - had been chosen for the great gathering. Arthur Judson Brown aptly quoted Robert Burns's 'Address to Edinburgh' to describe the welcome which the overseas delegates had received:

'Thy sons, Edina, social, kind,
With open arms the stranger hail.'

Lord Balfour and Bishop La Trobe returned thanks to the Provost and Corporation of Edinburgh for the city's hospitality to the conference, and Bishop La Trobe brought a fulsome message of greeting from the German Colonial Office.⁴

2. The University of Edinburgh honours the conference

The second cluster of images also displays the formal pomp and ceremony characteristic of western Christian culture. At 5 p.m. on 14 June the University of Edinburgh held an honorary degree ceremony in the splendid setting of the McEwan Hall, presided over by the Vice-Chancellor, Principal Sir William Turner. No less than fourteen conference delegates received honorary doctorates in an unprecedented outpouring of academic recognition towards the missionary movement. Honorary doctorates of divinity were bestowed on eight delegates, and a further six received honorary doctorates of laws: among them were Archbishop Randall Davidson of Canterbury, himself born and bred in Edinburgh, and the chairman of the conference, the American Methodist evangelist, John R. Mott. The surprising element in the picture is that two of these fourteen honorary graduands were Asians. The Revd K. C.

³ *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 17 June 1910, p. 393.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 393; World Missionary Conference, 1910, *The History and Records of the Conference* (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, n.d. [1910]), p. 20; W. H. T. Gairdner, 'Edinburgh 1910': *An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference* (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, 1910), p. 45.

Chatterji, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in India, received a doctorate of divinity. Revd Dr Harada Tasuku, president of what is now Doshisha University in Japan, and one of his country's foremost Christian leaders, was awarded a doctorate of laws. He was to speak on three occasions to the Edinburgh conference – the only Asian delegate to do so. Principal Turner broke with precedent by inviting several of the recipients of the degrees to make a short speech each. Harada Tasuku made a particular impression by speaking of the debt which Japan owed to the great men of Scottish intellectual history and of the work they had done to cement the sympathies of Asia and Europe.⁵ Here was the University of Edinburgh paying its early respects to infant Japanese Protestantism (then a constituency of only about 80,000 Christians), and, in return, Japanese Protestantism paid its due homage to the Scottish Enlightenment which had such a formative impact on the intellectual contours of Asian Christianity before the First World War.

3. An imperial monarch greets the conference

The third cluster of images comes from the opening session of the conference itself and they are distinctly imperial and monarchical in nature. The conference gathered at 8 p.m. that evening in the Assembly Hall of the United Free Church of Scotland. In the chair was the Conservative Party grandee, Lord Balfour of Burleigh, 'towering gigantic above the desk' (he was 6 foot 5 inches tall), and resplendent in his decorations and the silver star and green sash of a knight of the Thistle, worn 'to salute the missionaries of Christ, as he would have worn them at some high ceremonial in Windsor Castle or Buckingham Palace'.⁶ After an opening hymn and prayer offered by Dr Alexander Whyte, principal of New College, Lord Balfour began his address by reading a message of greeting from the still-uncrowned new King, George V. King Edward VII had agreed in 1909 to send such a message of greeting to the conference. Within a week of his sudden death on 6 May 1910, Lord Balfour had contacted the Buckingham Palace staff and at their request produced a draft which he sent to the Palace and to Archbishop Davidson for comment. The message as read to the conference represented Balfour's own draft with only minor alterations.⁷ As the conference stood at Lord Balfour's bidding to receive this royal greeting in what W. H. Temple Gairdner called 'the royal capital of a Christian king', he was reminded of the historic role of the Roman emperor in opening the ecumenical councils of the early church.⁸ In response, someone began singing the National Anthem, and the conference joined in. We should remember that Britons and Celts were in a minority in this gathering, albeit a very large minority. The Anthem was sung by 'monarchists and republicans alike', Americans apparently included.⁹ *The Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland* was pleased to observe that 'the great-great-grandsons of the men who threw George III's chests of tea into

⁵ W. Nelson Bitton, 'Report of the proceedings of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh', *Chinese Recorder* (Aug. 1910), p. 532.

⁶ *Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland* 116 (Aug. 1910), p. 343; Alexander Smellie, *At the World Missionary Conference: a little narrative for friends who were not there* (Dundee: James P. Mathew, 1910), p. 13.

⁷ Lambeth Palace, Davidson Papers, vol. 269, fols. 71-5, Lord Balfour of Burleigh to Archbishop Davidson, 26 May 1910, and draft message of greeting from King George V to the World Missionary Conference.

⁸ *History and Records of the Conference*, p. 141; Gairdner, 'Edinburgh 1910', p. 38.

⁹ Gairdner, 'Edinburgh 1910', p. 39.

Boston Harbour' sung as heartily as his own subjects.¹⁰ The accuracy of such reports may have been stretched by imperial sentiment, but an American source paints a similar picture of general willingness to pray for divine blessing on the British monarch:

Everybody joined and made the rafters ring. The effect was electrical, and nothing could have drawn that mixed throng so close together. There they stood, British and American, Continentals and Indians, Chinese and Japanese, white, black, and brown, singing with one voice and soul, "God save the King!"¹¹

The infectious power of British imperial motifs ironically played its part in making unity from the outset a dominant theme of the Edinburgh conference. Lord Balfour went on in his address to strike repeatedly the note of the underlying and deepening unity which the delegates shared in the fulfilment of their common missionary task.' He concluded by expressing the hope that 'a unity begun in the mission field may extend its influence and react upon us at home ... that it may bring to us increased hope of international peace among the nations of the world, and of at least fraternal co-operation and perhaps a greater measure of unity in ecclesiastical matters at home.'¹²

Balfour was followed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, in a prophetic address which foretold the transfiguration of the body of Christ within the lifetime of those present, if only the Church were to give missions the priority they deserved. The evening concluded with an impassioned oration by Robert E. Speer on 'Christ the leader of the missionary work of the church'. If only the church were to become alert to the full meaning of Christ's leadership, argued Speer, that living faith would then 'make it possible for Him to make use of us for the immediate conquest of the world'.¹³ Both Davidson's and Speer's addresses appeared to make the missionary conquest of the world dependent on the measure of faith and obedience displayed by the Christian armies gathered that night on the Mound.

4. The representatives of the 'younger' churches

There were 1,216 official delegates at the conference. 510 were British. 490 were North American, many of whom had crossed the Atlantic in a specially chartered liner of the Red Star Line, the *Kroonland*. 171 originated from continental Europe, and 28 came from the white colonies of South Africa and Australasia. No more than 18 came from what would now be called the majority world. The list of official delegates contains the names of eighteen Christian converts of the missionary enterprise listed, who were in practice, though not in strict theory, representatives of the so-called 'younger' churches:

Of these eighteen, eight were Indians, four Japanese, three Chinese, one Korean, one Burmese, and one of Turkish origin. Johannes Awetarianian was a former Muslim mullah and member of the Bektashi dervish sect from Erzerum in Anatolia. He was

¹⁰ *Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland* 116 (Aug. 1910), p. 343.

¹¹ Grose, 'The Edinburgh conference', p. 564.

¹² *History and Records of the Conference*, pp. 142, 145.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

born as Muhammed Schükri Efendi, but, remarkably for a Turk, adopted the Armenian name of Awetaranian – ‘son of the gospel’ – following his conversion and adherence to an Armenian evangelical church. He had worked as an evangelist in present-day Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, then at Kashgar in Chinese Turkestan, and finally among Muslims in Bulgaria as a missionary of Johannes Lepsius’ Deutsche Orient-Mission, whose delegate he was at Edinburgh.¹⁴ His status at the conference was thus not as a representative convert from Islam but as a missionary to that part of Europe included in the scope of the conference (the Ottoman empire and south-eastern Europe).

In addition to the three Chinese listed as official delegates, two other Chinese Christians are recorded as participating in the conference in some capacity. Dr C. C. Wang, from the London Missionary Society church in Shanghai, a former student of the Imperial Medical College in Tientsin, who was pursuing further medical studies in Edinburgh, attended at least one session and made a speech criticising China missions’ resort to the judicial and military aid of the western powers, but he was not an official delegate. As part of the parallel conference programme held in the Synod Hall, Dr Ida Kahn, a Chinese woman doctor working in Jiangxi province, addressed an afternoon women’s meeting, held in St George’s United Free Church on Monday 20 June, on the topic the ‘present-day needs of Chinese Women’, but she too was not an official delegate.

The seventeen Asian official delegates formed an extremely well educated and distinguished international group. At least twelve were ordained in their various communions. Three had in recent years been elected as the heads of their respective national denominations. K. C. Chatterji from the Punjab was Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in India. In 1907 Honda Yoitsu had been elected the first Bishop of the United Japan Methodist Church. Revd Dr Ibuka Kajinosuke was moderator of the United Church of Christ in Japan, formed in 1877 by eight different Presbyterian or Reformed churches, and was also the first Japanese chancellor of Meiji Gakuin Christian College (later University). Ibuka was the sole non-western member of the conference business committee, and as such had the privilege of a seat at the clerks’ table, just below the chairman. The Honourable Yun Ch’iho had occupied senior government positions as Vice-Minister of Education, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Acting Foreign Minister in the Korean government. Seven of the Asians were professors or heads of institutions of higher or theological education.¹⁵ Harada had an earned doctorate from Yale in addition to his Edinburgh honorary degree. He was possibly the most highly educated Asian Christian of his day. At least eight of the others had studied to a lower level in either the United States or Britain. One of these, the Revd Thang Khan, a Baptist evangelist from the Garo Hills in north-east India, who had studied at the Newton Theological Institution (now Andover Newton Seminary) in Massachusetts, must have been one of the very first Assamese to have followed a course of higher education outside India.

¹⁴ Awetaranian’s autobiography, *Geschichte eines Muhammedaners der Christ wurde* (1905), was republished in an expanded edition by Richard Schäfer in Potsdam in 1930, and has now been published in English: *A Muslim who Became a Christian: the story of John Avetaranian (born Muhammed Schükri Efendi)*, transl. John Bechard (Hertford: AuthorsOnLine, 2002).

¹⁵ L. T. Ah Sou, T. Y. Chang, Chiba Yugoro, Harada Tasuku, Ibuka Kajinosuke, R. K. Sorabji, and Tong Ching-en.

These seventeen Asian Christians were accorded a place in the conference programme and in its discussions which Robert E. Speer described as being ‘out of proportion to their numbers but it was desired to exalt in them the Churches from which they came’.¹⁶ Mott’s most recent biographer confirms that the prominence of the Asians was no accident: ‘As Chairman, Mott recognized the few Orientals for whose presence he had labored, perhaps disproportionately.’¹⁷ Mott undoubtedly exercised positive discrimination as chairman in calling on the Asian delegates, and the East Asians in particular, to speak: each East Asian was given at least one opportunity to participate in the debates, whereas only four of the nine South Asians did so. Twelve of the seventeen Asians spoke to the conference, either by giving invited main addresses, or by being chosen to contribute to the debates, or in both capacities: six addressed the conference on more than one occasion.¹⁸ K. C. Chatterji, in addition to being called on to speak in the debate on Commission IV, was given the particular honour of leading the conference in its morning devotions on 21 June. Two of the Asian contributions – by Cheng Jingyi and V. S. Azariah – are well known, and will be discussed later in this paper. But they were not exceptional in being prepared to speak their minds. Thang Khan, for example, made a bold speech in the debate on the ‘Missions and Governments’ report, protesting against the report’s characterization of the stance of the British Government in India as being one of ‘religious neutrality’.

5. Were the Asian voices really heard?

It is tempting to conclude, therefore, as a number of contemporary accounts did, that the voice of the ‘younger’ churches was heard at Edinburgh. The Japanese in particular brought home to at least some of those present the salience of growing national sentiment in the life of the Asian churches. The correspondent from *Life and Work* recorded his very clear impression that

The spirit of nationalism, so deeply stirring in all lands, found utterance again and again at the Conference. It is not English speech and English thought on which the new churches in the Mission-field are to be formed: else they would be foreign churches. China, Japan, India must bring their own traditions and their own passion of patriotism into a Church of Christ, truly become also the Church of China, Japan, India. Missions exist to make missions unnecessary.¹⁹

However, whether what the Asians said was truly heard is open to question. Some sources assure us ‘how very interested the Conference was in what they had to say, and there was none more heartily welcomed to the platform’.²⁰ Other contemporary accounts, however, pay more attention to the ‘picturesque’ sartorial appearance of some of the Asians than to what they said.²¹ One who receives regular mention is the professor from Shanghai Baptist Theological Seminary, Tong Ching-en, the only

¹⁶ *The East and the West*, 8:32 (Oct. 1910), p. 376.

¹⁷ C. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott 1865-1955: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 357.

¹⁸ Those who addressed the conference in some capacity were: V. S. Azariah (twice), T. Y. Chang, K. C. Chatterji (twice), Cheng Jingyi (twice), Chiba Yugoro, J. R. Chitambar, Harada Tasuku (three times), Honda Yoitsu, Ibuka Kajinosuke (twice), Thang Khan, Tong Ching-en, Yun Ch’iho (twice).

¹⁹ *Life and Work*, 32:8 (Aug. 1910), p. 244.

²⁰ R. K. Hanna, in *The Missionary Herald of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland*, 1 Aug. 1910, p. 195; see also *Chinese Recorder*, Sept. 1910, p. 606.

²¹ *Life and Work: the Church of Scotland Magazine and Mission Record*, 32:8 (Aug. 1910), p. 251.

Chinese to appear in national dress, resplendent in his skull-cap and pigtail, flowing grey skirt, and ‘stuffed, quilted jacket of richest peacock-blue silk’. Tong Ching-en was one of three founding members of faculty of the Shanghai seminary from its inception in 1906 to 1919 (and was its Vice-President from 1915); the seminary eventually evolved into the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology. Tong was the ‘Chinese pastor in his quaint native costume’ who is described as having presided ‘with much dignity and most acceptably’ at one of the half-hour mid-day prayer meetings held in the Synod Hall.²² Also frequently singled out for his ‘patriarchal’ features is K. C. Chatterji, ‘with a beard like John Knox’s’, a ‘venerable, one might say high-priestly figure, a pure Brahman by descent’, of ‘aristocratic, gentle features, and mild Indian voice.’ Whether delegates’ orientalist fascination with the exotic hindered or assisted their attentiveness to what the Asians had to say is a moot point, but there is some evidence in favour of the latter interpretation. The colourful descriptions of Tong Ching-en by Temple Gairdner and in the *Chinese Recorder* are coupled with commendatory references to his speech in the Commission IV debate appealing for Christian education in China to engage in deeper study of the Confucian classics.²³ Similarly, Chatterji is singled out not simply for his venerable appearance but also for the deep impression made by his contribution to the same debate, in which Chatterji, describing himself as the only Hindu convert among the delegates, explained how hard it was for a Hindu to accept a vicarious understanding of the atonement.²⁴ *The Missionary Review of the World* in its summary of the conference gave particular prominence to choice quotations from the Asian Christian speakers.²⁵ Contemporary accounts of the conference were just as intrigued by the ‘strange medieval apparition’ of F. J. Western of the Cambridge Delhi Brotherhood in his brown habit, sandals, and huge silver crucifix, as by the appearance in Edinburgh of anything indigenous to Asia.²⁶ The conference was endeavouring to span a cultural gulf between evangelical and Catholic forms of Christianity that was almost as wide as that between European and Asian expressions of the faith.

6. The unnoticed absence of Africa

Numerous contemporary accounts of the conference were fascinated with the kaleidoscope of humanity that was on display. The Boston *Missionary Herald* observed that ‘Europeans, Americans, Asiatics, and Africans rubbed elbows, and with their various and often picturesque garbs made a scene never to be forgotten.’²⁷ Temple Gairdner’s official record of the conference declared that ‘possibly the most interesting, certainly by far the most significant figures of all, were those of the Oriental and African delegates, yellow, brown, or black in race.’²⁸ But many of you

²² *Women’s Missionary Magazine of the United Presbyterian Church*, 24:2 (Sept. 1910), p. 43.

²³ Gairdner, ‘Edinburgh 1910’, p. 57; *Chinese Recorder*, Aug. 1910, p. 538; see World Missionary Conference, 1910, *Report of Commission IV: The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religion* (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, n.d. [1910]), pp. 301-2.

²⁴ *Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland*, 116 (Aug. 1910), p. 350; *Chinese Recorder*, Aug. 1910, p. 539; see *Report of Commission IV*, pp. 314-16. The other delegates from a Hindu background - Azariah, J. R. Chitambar, S. A. C. Ghose, and John Rungiah - were all second-generation Christians.

²⁵ *Missionary Review of the World*, Aug. 1910, pp. 652-63.

²⁶ *Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland*, 116 (Aug. 1910), p. 350; *Life and Work*, 32:8 (Aug. 1910), pp. 246, 251; Smellie, *At the World Missionary Conference*, p. 17.

²⁷ *Missionary Herald* (Boston) 106 (1910), p. 351.

²⁸ Gairdner, ‘Edinburgh 1910’, p. 56.

will know that in fact there were no black Africans present at Edinburgh 1910, and may be asking how such well-informed commentators managed to invent African delegates when in reality they were none. The answer lies in the fact that African Americans were in 1910 still widely regarded as Africans living in America rather than as true Americans. There were at least six African American delegates: two from the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention; two from the Foreign Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion (one of them a woman); and two from the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Revd Dr W. H. Brooks of New York and the Revd Dr Alexander Camphor from Louisiana who had served as a missionary in Liberia. Camphor was described by Temple Gairdner as being 'a negro of immense size and glorying in his African race'.²⁹ Brooks, together with one of the National Baptist Convention delegates, the Revd Dr L. G. Jordan of Louisville, organized an unofficial meeting for all coloured delegates on 18 June in the Mission Hall of the Tolbooth Church, which was advertised in the *Conference Daily Paper* for that morning; how many turned up, and whether any of the Indian delegates attended, are not known.³⁰ At least six sons or daughters of Africa were, therefore, present at Edinburgh; the fact that none of them had been born on African soil simply did not register in white consciousness.

It should also be noted that Camphor was not the only non-white missionary to Africa among the delegates. The Revd John Rungiah from south India was one of five Asian delegates of the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society. Rungiah was not simply the first missionary sent (in 1903) by the Telegu Baptist Home Missionary Society to the Telegu workers on the sugar plantations in Natal, but also the first overseas missionary sent out by any of the mission churches of the American Baptists. He is an early example of what would now be called 'south-to-south' mission. By 1910 he had been instrumental in planting ten Baptist churches in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg areas, which remain the basis of the Indian Baptist community in Natal to this day.³¹ Rungiah did not make any public contribution to the conference.

Although it is true that Christian education in Africa in 1910 was much less advanced than in parts of Asia, there were a few African Christian indigenous leaders in 1910 who had sufficient education to have participated meaningfully in the conference: the names of Archdeacon Dandeson Crowther, Bishop James Johnson, John Tengo Jabavu, and James E. K. Aggrey spring to mind: they were all conspicuous by their absence from Edinburgh 1910. African Christian leadership had fallen into grave disrepute in missionary circles in the aftermath of the Niger controversy and in the face of the growth of Ethiopianism in South Africa, and the shadow of disapproval extended even to Edinburgh.

²⁹ Gairdner, 'Edinburgh 1910', p. 58. William Richey Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations: A History of the International Missionary Council and its Nineteenth-Century Background* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1952), p. 396.

³⁰ *Conference Daily Paper*, No. 5 – June 18th, 1910, p. 86.

³¹ On Rungiah (d. 1915) see J. B. Brain, *Christian Indians in Natal 1860-1911: an historical and statistical study* (Cape Town: Oxford UP, 1983), pp. 222-4; A. W. Wardin (ed.), *Baptists around the World: A Comprehensive Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), p. 57; S. Hudson-Reed (ed), *Together for a Century: The History of the Baptist Union of South Africa 1877-1977* (Pietermaritzburg: South African Baptist Historical Society, n.d. [1977]), p. 86.

The voice of indigenous African Christianity was thus simply not heard at Edinburgh. The two contributions from the non-western world which aroused the strongest reaction among the majority of delegates were made by the two youngest and least well-known representatives of Asian Christianity. In both cases the impression which they made depended on their graphic use of language to delineate a vision of Christianity within the so-called 'non-Christian world' that most delegates greeted with astonishment.

7. Cheng Jingyi and the vision of a United Church for China

The first was Cheng Jingyi, a delegate of the London Missionary Society. Cheng was the twenty-eight year-old assistant pastor of the Mi-shih Hutung LMS church in Beijing. This was a new church that had attracted a number of Chinese professionals and academics to its membership. Cheng had been converted at the age of seventeen during a revival meeting in Tianjin. He was invited to Britain in 1903 to assist in revising the Union version of the Mandarin New Testament for the British and Foreign Bible Society. From 1906 to 1908 Cheng studied at the Bible Training Institute in Glasgow, which sent many of its students to China, and is one of the parents of today's International Christian College.³² Having spent several years in Britain, Cheng possessed unusually fluent English for a Chinese at that time. In the light of his identity as a Manchu, who might have been deemed to represent the ruling Qing dynasty, it is significant that the LMS churches selected him as one of their two delegates. Cheng may have been the youngest delegate at Edinburgh; his official status was still only that of assistant pastor of the Mi-shih Hutung church; he was not ordained to the pastorate until his return to Beijing after the conference.

This young Chinese made a profound and even disturbing impact at Edinburgh through two speeches. He spoke first on Thursday 16 June in the debate of the report of Commission II on 'The Church in the Mission Field', urging the conference not to be afraid to allow the Chinese church to assume the challenge of sustaining and managing its own life. Self-support should be viewed as a joy, not a burden. The controlling power over the Chinese churches had properly been in missionary hands in the past, but the time had now come for every Chinese Christian to assume responsibility for their own church and the propagation of the faith.³³ But it was Cheng's second contribution, to the debate on the report of Commission VIII on 'Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity' on Tuesday 21 June, that made the more lasting impression. The Boston *Missionary Herald* judged it 'without question the best speech' made at Edinburgh.³⁴ In his allotted seven minutes Cheng referred to the modest progress the Protestant churches in China had made towards a federal structure, and went on to say that

Speaking plainly we hope to see, in the near future, a united Christian Church without any denominational distinctions. This may seem somewhat peculiar

³² Of the 775 students who had studied at the Institute by 1909, 83 had gone to work in China, 3 of whom (including Cheng) were native Chinese (*Bible Training Institute Annual Report* for 1908-09, p. 7, International Christian College, Glasgow).

³³ World Missionary Conference, 1910, *Report of Commission II: The Church in the Mission Field* (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, n.d. [1910]), pp. 352-3.

³⁴ *Missionary Herald* (Boston) 106 (1910), p. 354.

to you, but, friends, do not forget to view us from *our* standpoint, and if you fail to do that, the Chinese will remain always as a mysterious people to you!³⁵

This striking vision of a united Christian church in China was, Cheng emphasized, an urgent priority for Chinese Christian leaders. He observed that ‘denominationalism has never interested the Chinese mind. He finds no delight in it, but sometimes he suffers for it!’ The only conceivable obstacles to the formation of a united church in China were ‘due to our Western friends and not ourselves.’ Cheng reminded the conference of the theological truth that ‘The Church of Christ is universal, not only irrespective of denominations, but also irrespective of nationalities’, and cited the famous motto of the Keswick conventions – ‘All one in Christ Jesus’.³⁶ Temple Gairdner, who described the speech as ‘another vivid insight into the Oriental point of view’, felt it sufficiently important to reproduce it in its entirety in his published account of the conference, the only address to which he gave that privilege. Yet Gairdner also cited Cheng’s contribution as evidence of ‘how completely unaware of the real difficulties and essentialities’ of the question of church unity Chinese Christians were.³⁷ What Gairdner euphemistically termed Cheng’s ‘artlessness’ – by implication, his theological naivety – to his mind amply proved the validity of a warning delivered to the conference by Bishop Charles Gore that questions of ecclesiology must not be swept aside in the haste for functional unity.

Despite such Anglo-Catholic anxieties, it is clear that Cheng’s forthrightness had immediately established his credentials with Mott and the conference secretary, J. H. Oldham. Nelson Bitton wrote years later that ‘In those seven minutes he had found his place in the leadership of the Christian missionary enterprise in China.’³⁸ On the following afternoon, Cheng was chosen as the one representative from China among the thirty-five members of the continuation committee appointed to carry forward the spirit of missionary co-operation. The continuation committee evolved in 1921 into the International Missionary Council. In China itself, steps were taken in 1912-13 to establish a national branch of the continuation committee; and similar bodies were formed in Korea and Japan. With a missionary colleague, Cheng was appointed the first joint secretary of the China continuation committee. His selection for such a post was noteworthy, in view of the fact that Cheng was a Manchu, and the Republican Revolution of 1911-12 had overthrown the centuries-old Manchu domination of the Chinese empire. Cheng held this office until 1922, when he presided over the inaugural conference in Shanghai of the successor to the China continuation committee – the National Christian Council of China. From 1924 to 1933 he was the Council’s general secretary. In 1934, the vision outlined in his Edinburgh speech was partly realized through the formation of the Church of Christ in China, which united sixteen different Presbyterian, Congregational, and Baptist church bodies; Cheng was appointed as its first moderator and later general secretary, a position he held until his death in 1939. He attended both the Jerusalem and Tambaram conferences of the International Missionary Council, and was the only Chinese present at Edinburgh

³⁵ World Missionary Conference, 1910, *Report of Commission VIII: Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity* (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, n.d. [1910]), p. 196.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 196-7. It is also worth remembering that Cheng had studied in an interdenominational Bible college: the Bible Training Institute had received students from 19 different denominations up to 1909 (*Bible Training Institute Annual Report for 1908-09*, p. 7).

³⁷ Gairdner, ‘*Edinburgh 1910*’, pp. 184-6.

³⁸ Nelson Bitton, ‘Ch’eng Ching-yi: a Christian statesman’, *IRM* 30 (1941), p. 516.

1910, Jerusalem 1928 and Tambaram 1938. He never lost his original evangelical faith nor his passion for evangelism: he taught Chinese Christians to pray a prayer which became well known internationally: ‘O Lord, revive Thy Church, beginning with me’.

And now for the second of these strikingly visual contributions. In the Mott papers at Yale Divinity School, there is preserved a small yellowing postcard written by John Mott to his wife, Leila, on 7 May 1910 from the small village of Goathland in north Yorkshire. Mott, Oldham, and some of the key figures involved in the organization of the conference, had gathered in this remote spot for a spiritual retreat in preparation for the conference. The postcard reveals that one of the eight persons who gathered for that retreat was Oldham’s former colleague in the Indian YMCA, Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah, an Anglican clergyman from Tirunelveli in south India. This young, newly ordained, and still largely unknown Indian priest thus formed one of the select few who were invited to set the spiritual tone of the conference by prayer and silent reflection amidst the beauty of the Yorkshire Moors.³⁹

8. V. S. Azariah and the vision of a global Christology

To those assembled at Edinburgh 1910, Azariah was still an unknown name. He spoke twice at the conference. His first speech, on 15 June, was a plea that, relative to its vast population, India (rather than Latin America) was the real neglected continent of the missionary enterprise. He argued that there were 100 million Indians beyond the reach of any mission and claimed that there were 50 million untouchables ‘who are ready to hear the Gospel and join the Church’.⁴⁰ His address was well received but nobody remembers that speech today. Azariah’s second contribution, by contrast, is the one speech delivered at Edinburgh that is still regularly cited. In the evening session on Monday 20 June Azariah followed Ibuka Kajinosuke in tackling one of the most sensitive topics on the conference agenda, ‘The Problem of Co-operation between Foreign and Native Workers.’

Azariah’s address began with the statement that ‘The problem of race relationships is one of the most serious problems confronting the Church today’. It went on to complain of ‘a certain aloofness, a lack of mutual understanding and openness, a great lack of frank intercourse and friendliness’ between European missionaries and national Christians. He cited examples of experienced Indian national missionaries who had never been invited to share a meal with any of their European brethren, and of European missionaries who had never dreamt of visiting the homes of their Indian colleagues. He pointed out that ‘Friendship is more than condescending love’ and remarked that ‘Too often you promise us thrones in heaven, but will not offer us chairs in your drawing rooms.’⁴¹

³⁹ Yale Divinity School, Mott Papers, Box 107, Folder 1835, Postcard from John R. Mott to Leila Mott, 7 May 1910. The others present at Goathland included Kenneth MacLennan (assistant conference secretary), George Robson (chairman of the business committee), the Methodist, W. H. Findlay (a member of the international committee), and Mrs Alexander Whyte of Edinburgh.

⁴⁰ World Missionary Conference, 1910, *Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World: Report of Commission I* (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, n.d. [1910]), pp. 411-12; *Church Missionary Review* LXI, 735 (July 1910), p. 407.

⁴¹ University of Birmingham Library, CMS archives, Acc215 Z1, H. F. Houlder, ‘“Edinburgh 1910” Reminiscences of the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in June 1910’, p. 3.

The problem Azariah had identified was related to the financial structures of the mission movement. Most Indian Christian leaders were employed and supported by foreign missionary agencies. ‘The missionary’, Azariah pointed out, ‘is the paymaster, the worker his servant. As long as this relationship exists, we must admit that no sense of self-respect and individuality can grow in the Indian Church’. That was an admission which most missionaries were quite prepared to make. His pleas for the devolution of responsibility and financial control from missionaries to national church leaders were in conformity with what progressive missionary strategists were already saying, even if few missions had yet put these principles into practice. But what made Azariah’s audience so uncomfortable was his assertion that the real problem lay with a failure of Christian spirituality. Such failures of friendship, he argued, were impoverishing the church’s theology and spiritual life. At the climax of his address Azariah used two portions of Pauline language, drawn from Ephesians 3 and 1 Corinthians 13, to create a bold vision of a truly universal Christian theology that would be enriched by the insights of all cultures:

The exceeding riches of the glory of Christ can be fully realised not by the Englishman, the American, and the Continental alone, nor by the Japanese, the Chinese, and the Indians by themselves – but by all working together, worshipping together, and learning together the Perfect Image of our Lord and Christ. It is only “with all the Saints” that we can “comprehend the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God.” This will be possible only from spiritual friendships between the two races. We ought to be willing to learn from one another and to help one another.

Through all the ages to come the Indian Church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and self-denying labours of the missionary body. You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for *love*. Give us FRIENDS!⁴²

This prophetic word was received in what Temple Gairdner described as ‘an electric silence, broken now by a sort of subterranean rumbling of dissent’ and some applause when Azariah conceded that the failing he was alluding to was not typical. He immediately qualified the concession by an impromptu ‘At the same time it would be a mistake to think it was exceptional!’, and there was some nervous laughter and further applause. Gairdner comments that ‘Possibly some of the men – Indian missionaries they were – whose dissent, and even more than dissent, boiled every now and then to the surface, did not quite understand what the speaker was intending.’⁴³ One missionary journal notes that ‘there were a few cries of dissent’ in response to Azariah’s accusations of failures of missionary hospitality, but that ‘the Indian was heard through, and was applauded.’⁴⁴

The chairman of the meeting was Lord Reay, a former British Governor of Bombay and Under-Secretary of State for India. Conscious that he had to say something to reduce the tension, Reay responded to Azariah’s address by assuring the conference that ‘some of his best friends’ were Indians. Perhaps they were, but the scholars and

⁴² The fullest record of the address is in *History and Records of the Conference*, pp. 306-15.

⁴³ Gairdner, ‘*Edinburgh 1910*’, pp. 109-110.

⁴⁴ *Missionary Herald of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland*, 1 Aug. 1910, p. 195.

Indian princes whom he had welcomed to the Governor's palatial residence at Bombay were not the same sort of Indians of whose treatment at the hands of missionaries Azariah was complaining. Indeed, according to one source, what Reay said was that during his governorship of Bombay 'he had no more trusted friend than one of the Brahmins of the city'.⁴⁵ Reay asked Azariah to take back to his church the assurance that this conference of Christians was prepared 'at all times to shake the hand of fellowship with them' ('Hear, hear!').⁴⁶

Whether anyone present actually shook Azariah's hand at the end of the meeting is not known. What we do know is that his domineering missionary chaperone, Isabel Whitehead, wife of the Bishop of Madras, wrote to Azariah's wife, Anbu, back in India, reporting that the speech had struck the company 'like a bomb', with half of the audience being delighted 'and the other half very angry'. Mrs Whitehead counted herself in the former camp, 'little realizing that she was part of the problem'.⁴⁷ Azariah's indictment of missionaries as being deficient in the essential Christian motivation of fraternal love caused such a sensation that an informal meeting was called to discuss what should be done. Some pressed for 'something in the nature of a public protest' or, at least an explanation that would reassure the faithful that reality on the field was not as this unknown Indian had suggested. In the end, it was agreed simply that George Sherwood Eddy, the YMCA evangelist who was Azariah's closest confidant, would administer a 'fatherly admonition'.⁴⁸ There is evidence that Azariah had been diffident about speaking so frankly, but had been urged by John Mott to 'tell out freely what lay on his heart'. In later years he confessed that he had spoken 'under a severe nervous strain, and, while he did not regret having entered his remonstrance, he mentioned that were he called to take similar action again he would do it more circumspectly'.⁴⁹

If Azariah's speech was an accurate identification of the heart of 'The Problem of Co-operation between Foreign and Native Workers', hardly anyone in the western churches in 1910 seemed ready to listen. Even those missionary reactions to the speech which were sympathetic strike the modern ear as either patronising or wilfully blind. In the former category belongs Azariah's later friend and colleague, J. Z. Hodge, then a missionary in Bihar with the Regions Beyond Missionary Union. At the time, Hodge found Azariah's statements incredible, but in retrospect, in 1946, on the eve of Indian independence, the speech stood out in Hodge's mind as 'the outstanding memory' of Edinburgh 1910 and as perhaps 'the first shot in the campaign against "missionary imperialism"'. Yet its value, according to Hodge, was in its Dickensian use of over-statement, painting 'in too sombre colours' in order to drive home the point.⁵⁰ In the second category belongs Temple Gairdner, whose official account of the conference devotes two pages to the subject, commending Azariah for courage, delicacy, humour, and sincerity. Yet his closing comment cannot resist repudiating the accuracy of Azariah's charge even as he urges

⁴⁵ Smellie, *At the World Missionary Conference*, p. 17.

⁴⁶ *The Scotsman*, 21 June 1910, p. 10.

⁴⁷ Susan Billington Harper, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: Bishop V. S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge, and Richmond: Eerdmans and Curzon Press, 2000), p. 148.

⁴⁸ J. Z. Hodge, *Bishop Azariah of Dornakal* (Madras: Christian Literature Society for India, 1946), p. 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-6.

missionaries to take note of it. In his comment Gairdner mis-quotes Robert Burns' poem, 'To a Louse' in which the poet describes an incident in which he saw a woman in church proudly sporting a new hat. Unknown to her, a louse was crawling all over the feathers on the hat, subjecting her to the ridicule of her neighbours:

It could after all do one no harm to be reminded of the difficult ideal of inter-racial friendship. And as for the criticism, what does it matter even if criticism passed on us is false? The point is, that in *that* we see the impression we have made on those who pass the criticism; that thus and not otherwise they feel about us. The old couplet – 'Oh wad some fay the giftie gie us to see ourselves as ithers see us', loses no particle of its point if the vision of those others is most unaccountably mistaken'.⁵¹

Azariah's address was a plea for a visible demonstration to a society fragmented by caste and structural injustice that the Christian vision of the kingdom of God really is different. India needed to see that the church was held together across the dividing lines of caste, ethnicity and empire by a unique quality of friendship that derived from the knowledge of what Azariah, following Ephesians, called 'the exceeding riches of the glory of Christ'. What is more, Azariah had argued that such genuine Christian fellowship across racial fault-lines also *contributed to* knowledge of the riches of the glory of Christ. In other words, Christ would be more fully and more profoundly known as Christians allowed themselves to be changed by real intimate fellowship with believers from other cultures. The richer their experience of the *body* of Christ, the richer would be their knowledge of Christ *Himself*. By identifying failures in human relationships as the most fundamental of all missionary failures, he had touched a raw nerve in the western Christian conscience. Edinburgh 1910 represented western missions of the day at their most progressive – open to indigenous voices from Asia, and prepared to conceive of the relationship between Christianity and the great religious traditions of Asia in non-confrontational terms. Yet even this cultural and theological progressivism was shot through with a racial and imperial pride that continually threatened to nullify the apostolic witness to Christ. Cheng Jinyi and Azariah held before the conference a vision of an alternative, more authentic way of being Christian. In so doing they exposed most starkly the assumptions that lay beneath the surface of missions at that time, assumptions that even now may not have wholly been expunged from the western Christian mind.

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⁵¹ Gairdner, 'Edinburgh 1910', p. 111. Burns's couplet in fact reads 'O wad some Power the giftie gie us, To see oursels as ithers see us!'