

***World Missionary Conference
“Edinburgh 1910”***

***Summary of Commission One
“Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World”***

The Commission was chaired by John R Mott, General Secretary of the World’s Student Christian Federation, New York. The Introduction to the Commission’s Report states its purpose as follows:

The first duty of a World Missionary Conference meeting at such an auspicious time is to consider the present world situation from the point of view of making the Gospel known to all men, and to determine what should be done to accomplish this Christ-given purpose...It is earnestly hoped that the way may be pointed to a more scientific study of the fields and problems, and, above all, that enough may have been done to impress the Church with the unprecedented urgency of the situation, and to create a sense of deep solicitude as to the grave consequences that must ensue if the present unique world opportunity be not improved.

The Report is divided into four parts.

1. *The opportunity and urgency of carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian world.*
The world situation, marked by the emergence of new nations and the shaking of ancient traditions, is characterised as “crisis” that presents the Church of Christ with an urgent challenge and an opportunity that it never previously had had: “to make the universality of the Gospel ideal a practical reality in the history of the Church.” The world has become open and accessible as never before. Non-Christian religions are loosing their hold on rapidly changing societies, although some are adapting themselves to modern conditions and manifesting increased activity, enterprise and aggressiveness. Many non-Christian nations are in a “plastic” condition of flux, in which secularism and nationalism have powerful influence. There is at the same time a “rising spiritual tide” on which the Church can build. To do so, it must commit itself to renewed evangelistic effort, with renewed support from the home churches.
2. *Survey of the non-Christian world.*
3. *Factors in carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian world;*
4. *Findings.*

An additional part of the Report, separately published, was the *Statistical Atlas of Christian Missions*.

The vastness of the task

The Report focuses on the challenge of evangelising two-thirds of the human race in the southern and eastern hemispheres. Asia is treated in four sections; Africa and the Americas (North and South) in eight apiece; one section on Oceania, one on the Jews, and a final piece on “unoccupied sections of the world.” Each region was debated in the conference plenary, with concentrated attention on India, East Asia, and Islam that were recognised as so-called “storm-centres of interest and urgency in and anxiety in the oecumenical crusade.”

Importance of concentrating on countries where the Church is already at work

It was recognised that the future challenges of evangelism are most acute in those regions where the Church's missionary resources were already concentrated. These needed to be re-enforced and extended. Confronting Islam emerged as a strategic priority: in Africa, where an east-west line of centres of Christian evangelism was needed to stop the expansion of Islam into sub-Saharan regions; and in Asia, since Islam forms a bridge between the two continents, creating a hostile wedge between Eastern and Western Christendoms. The most urgent need in India was a four-fold increase of missionaries to meet the target set at the Madras Decennial Conference (1902) – one missionary to every 25,000 native Indians; and it was emphasised that missionaries needed to be intellectually trained – on par with the Indian Civil Service – to evangelise the educated Indian youth. The collapse of Confucian traditions in China was seen as an immediate opportunity for evangelism, one that should not be lost as it had been when Japan went through its moment of historic transformation. The Japanese Empire also presented challenges for evangelism, especially in Korea and Manchuria.

Need to enter the so-called unoccupied fields of the world

“Unoccupied” fields – meaning regions where evangelism had yet to be undertaken – were estimated to include one hundred million people who had never heard the Gospel. Millions of these lived in sub-regions of areas that might otherwise claim to be centres of missionary activity: North India, for example, where millions of people lacked a single missionary. There were large areas of Africa, and many tribal groups in South America, where the Gospel had yet to be preached. In the whole of Central Asia only three mission stations could be counted. A special plea was made for Mongolia where two and a half million pastoral people had only one missionary.

United planning and concerted effort

Yet it was acknowledged that growth of evangelism does not depend only on numbers. “It is our deep conviction”, the Report states, “that a well-considered plan of co-operation in the missionary work of the Societies represented in this hall, entered into and carried out with a sense of our oneness in Christ, would be more than equivalent to doubling the present missionary staff.” The case for ecumenical co-operation was frequently made, to the conference's approval, though details were deferred to the Commission on Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity.

Emerging priority of Asian and African leadership in mission

“The evangelisation of the world...is not chiefly a European and American enterprise, but an Asiatic or African enterprise.” Increasingly it is the task, the Report continued, of “the Church in the Mission-field...[by] well-qualified native evangelists and leaders.” Pointing to hopeful signs of indigenous initiatives, the debate instanced Korea, China and Japan, Uganda, the South Sea islands, and the initiatives of Jewish converts. A difference of opinion emerged over the funding of indigenous evangelists: some advocated the principle of self-support by indigenous churches themselves, while others argued that foreign funding is an empirical necessity.

State of the Church in the Christian countries

The final section of the Report addresses the reciprocal relationship between the Church in Christian countries and the Church in Mission-fields. “[T]he most crucial problem in relation to evangelising the world is the state of the Church in Christian countries. We are frank to concede that it is futile to talk about making Christ known in the world in this generation or any generation unless there be a great expansion of vitality in the member of the Churches of Christendom.”

Luxury and materialism in the West are identified as “imminent perils” from which the Church itself must be saved. History shows that times of material prosperity are times of greatest danger for Christianity. The evangelism of non-Christians offers the Church “a supreme world-purpose” that promises to discipline the faith and strengthen the character of its members. “To preserve the pure faith of Christianity”, therefore, “a world-wide plan and conquest are necessary... The concern of Christians today should not be lest non-Christian peoples refuse to receive Christ, but lest they, in failing to communicate Him, will themselves lose Him!”

The very life of the Church therefore depends on its missionary vitality. Faithfulness to its missionary character enables the Church to deal with the problems at its own doors. Above all, mission will “reveal to the Christians of today the sinfulness of their divisions, and so convince them of the necessity of concerted effort as actually to draw them together in answer to the intercession of their common and divine Lord” [“that they may all be one... that the world may believe that Thou has sent me.” (Jn 17:21)]