

## **THE GREAT COMMISSION 1910-2010**

ANDREW F.WALLS

### **The Great Migration**

Around 1500, a development occurred with more significance for the future of Christianity than the Reformation itself. The Great Maritime Migration began, that was to shape the modern world and have complex effects upon the world's religions. Over the years it was in being, millions of people left Europe to make their homes or seek their fortune in lands of which before 1500 Europeans had not known, or had not considered accessible. Whole nations, some with vast populations, came into being as a result of the movement, and the migrants and their descendants established hegemony over much of the world and control over much of its trade. The movement lasted for four and a half centuries, until the system which it produced imploded during the twentieth century.(1)

When the process began, Europe was more Christian than it had ever previously been. It took many centuries for Europe to become Christian; and by the time the Great Migration began, Christianity had become eclipsed in many other parts of the world where once it had been strong. Western Europeans, holding a form of Christianity heavily acculturated by centuries of inter-action with the languages and cultures of Europe, became by default the representative Christians of their time. At first they essayed the crusading mode of propagating their faith, a method developed by long competition with their Muslim neighbors, the only non-Christian people (other than Jews), of whom they had much knowledge. The Spanish Conquest of the Americas was the last of the Crusades. But in much of the rest of the world the crusading method was manifestly out of the question; especially when such a small power as Portugal was the agent. For the most part the powers of Christendom soon tired of official attempts to promote the spread of Christianity in the non-Western world.

An alternative to the crusading model of evangelization emerged. The initiatives for it came generally not from official sources, but from radical Christians; those for whom the faith of Christ was more important than the economic, military and political advantages of overseas activity. The missionary movement was born, based on dedicated people whose function was to offer and persuade without the power to coerce, and frequently needing, unlike the crusader, to live on terms set by another society. Born in Catholic Europe, and fuelled by the new devotion of the Catholic Reformation, the missionary movement had by the seventeenth century entered into genuine interaction with the cultures of China, India, Japan and South East Asia. The Protestant version of the movement took longer to blossom. Beginning in a small way in Puritan North America, it took new forms in the eighteenth century under the influence of German and Central European Pietism. In the wake of the Evangelical Revival it had by the early nineteenth century set its impression deep on European and American Protestantism as a whole.

### **The World Missionary Conference**

The high point of the Protestant missionary movement came with the World Missionary Conference, held in Edinburgh in 1910 (2). It was no triumphalist celebration, but a

serious attempt at a systematic and business-like analysis of what Protestant missions had already achieved, and of what remained to be done. Immense labor went into preparatory documents, and notably into the *Statistical Atlas of Christian Missions* (3), designed so that those attending the Conference could have all the available data about missions at their fingertips. Representation was carefully balanced to reflect the proportional involvement in missions of the main areas from which missionaries came, i.e. Britain, North America and Continental Europe, with a small place reserved for the “colonies,” the white populations of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Great pains were bestowed also to cover the entire theological spectrum represented in missions.

No conference was better prepared beforehand. Eight commissions toiled for months to produce book-length reports as a basis of discussion; and discussion itself was kept crisp and pointed by limiting contributors schooled in an age of pulpit eloquence to seven minutes each. The report that has attracted most attention since is that of Commission IV, (4) entitled *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions*, with its analysis of replies to a detailed questionnaire sent all over the world. But of all the volumes that contain the record of the conference, none stands closer to the focus of the meeting than the report of Commission I, published under the title *Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World*.

The Commission was chaired by John R Mott (5), who was the dominating figure at the conference, and its twenty members – eight British, eight North Americans and four Continental Europeans – included some of the biggest names in the missionary movement at that time. Its report conveys its drift in the very title of its first section: “The opportunity and the urgency of carrying the Gospel to all the non-Christian world,” and in the opening statement:

It is possible today to a degree far greater than at any time in the past to

Give the Gospel to all the non-Christian world. (6)

For one thing, the world was now known and explored. For another, it was largely open; open not only in the political sense of unimpeded access, but in the more important sense of the attitudes of its peoples. The decision-making classes in countries such as Japan and Korea, long closed to outside ideas, were now ready to listen. In India the outcaste and lower caste groups were recognizing the advantages of Western civilization, and were taking the Christian message seriously as a result. Africa and the Pacific were at last open to mission enterprise, even if colonial governments still placed obstacles in the way of missions where there was a Muslim presence.

If the Commission is impressed by the opportunities which the contemporary situation offers, it is also insistent that those opportunities may be merely transitory. Certainly, the non-Christian religions were losing their hold on key groups in some countries; but it did not necessarily follow that those classes would become Christian. They might turn elsewhere; or the old religions might re-form to meet the challenges of modern thought, or the modern secular education now spreading in Asia might create a climate unfavorable to Christianity. Islam, with the aid and protection of European governments, might become the religion of Africa. Western influences were spreading on a global scale; but the net result might be that the worst, and not the best, features of Western

civilization took root in Asia and Africa. The worst face of the West was already clearly visible among European and American residents in the non-Western world. Behind the present fair winds, the Commission saw unsettled weather coming.

The second, and much the largest division of the report is a survey, continent by continent, of the non-Christian world, to which the *Statistical Atlas* is a companion. To the missionary situation in Asia 142 pages are devoted, with 42 to Africa and ten to Australasia and the Pacific. There is a short section on “Non-Christians of the Western hemisphere”, devoted entirely to the native peoples of the Americas, North and South, and to Asian immigrants there.

This points to a major lacuna in the World Missionary Conference. The organizers had aimed at theological inclusiveness; the more “catholic” expressions of Anglicanism, though to a significant degree involved in missions, had not been officially represented at earlier mission conferences, and the general theological climate of the time did not make such meeting easy. In the event – though this had required great diplomacy – the whole range of Anglican outlook was represented at Edinburgh, and the organizers sought to avoid flashpoints where traditions might come into conflict. The greatest potential danger lay in discussions of Latin America. The focus of the conference was the unevangelized parts of the world. For many delegates, Latin America as a whole could be considered an unevangelized area; for others, only such mountain and forest peoples as had never been reached by Catholic missions could be so described. The effect was to make all reference to Latin America muted; hence the marginal place it has in this survey. After this section on the Western Hemisphere comes another on the Jews throughout the world, and there is a final statement about “Unoccupied sections of the world” with no missionary presence.

This section first deals with areas of special difficulty of access, or sparse population, such as Central Asia, but then resumes the theme of the position of Africa.

To a far greater degree than even in the case of Asia, the heart of Africa constitutes a vast unoccupied field....There are therefore to be found in Africa ...more than a third of the population of the entire continent without any existing agency having plans actually projected for their evangelisation. These figures are overwhelming, and they become more so when it is pointed out that the extent of the effective influence of existing missionary agencies has probably been greatly overestimated. The question can seriously be raised, Has the Church more than made a beginning in the evangelisation of the Dark Continent?

(7)

The last division of the report concerns factors to be taken into account in planning for evangelization on the non-Christian world. It includes a substantial chapter on “The Church in the mission field as an evangelistic agency”, which includes in its summing up the statement

The small native Church, left to itself, is in danger within a generation or two of losing its tone under the influence of monotony, isolation, or ill-success. As a rule it needs the guidance

and stimulus of the spiritual ideas, as well as the spiritual aids, which are supplied through contact by means of missionaries with the life of older Churches. While many noble leaders have arisen among the early converts in the field, it will take time to develop a sufficient number of men of knowledge, gifts, and character to enable the Church to stand with advantage, or even with safety, apart from foreign missionaries.(8)

The impression given by this whole division of the report is that the task of evangelization depends largely on Western missionaries. The factors to be taken account in carrying the Gospel to the non-Christian world, how missionaries should be deployed, how historical factors have skewed deployment, what methods missionaries should use, and the essential nature of the spiritual disciplines. There are words addressed to the “Home Church” (that is, the church in the West) on the danger that increasing luxury and growing materialism may enervate it and quench the missionary spirit. Missionaries in the present situation are represented as overstretched physically, mentally and spiritually, unable to get time for either the intellectual or the spiritual preparation for their demanding task. The thrust of the report is about the responsibility of the Home Church, that is, the Church of the fully evangelized world in Europe and North America. It must produce the missionaries and resources needed to tackle the unprecedented opportunities now being offered to evangelize the non-Christian world – before it is too late.

Almost a century later, it is at this point that the greatest difference appears between the conditions under which the older missionary movement sought to fulfil the Great Commission and the conditions of our own day. The best analysts and thinkers of 1910 could take for granted that there was a reasonably homogeneous fully evangelized world, and a world beyond it that was unevangelized or only partly evangelized. From the fully evangelized world of Europe and North America the Home Church must send forth its choicest to carry the Gospel to the non-Christian world, where the Native Church, a tender young plant, stands as earnest of the future.

How to multiply the number of Christians who, with truthful lives, and with clear, unshakable faith in the character and ability of God, will, individually and collectively or corporately as a Church, wield this force [intercessory prayer] for the conversion and transformation of men, for the inauguration and energising of spiritual movements, and for the breaking down of all that exalts itself against Christ and His purposes – that is the supreme question of foreign missions.(9)

The analysts and the visionaries of 1910 realized that the hopeful signs they saw in Asia could quickly change to something much less hopeful. They could visualize the church of the West losing missionary zeal under the influence of its rapidly rising standards of living. What they could not glimpse was how soon the West, and Europe in particular, would become part of the non-Christian world. Perhaps the military language of “occupation” helped to disable them from remembering that Christian history, from the

first century onwards, suggests that there are no permanently Christian lands. Christianity is serial in its growth, often decaying in its areas of apparent strength to start anew at or beyond its margins.

The analysts of 1910, living in an age of seaborne communications, held a maritime view of the Church and of the world. The carriers of the Gospel crossed the seas in order to fulfil their task.(10) Though they lived when the Great European Migration had reached its climax, and generally believed that the spread of Western culture was favorable to the Gospel, there is little sign in their report of triumphal rejoicing in the Western empires. The principal direct references to the empires are mostly about the obstructiveness of Western governments towards missions; and there is no shortage of reference to the negative impact of certain aspects of Western culture. And while recognizing the difficulties which anti-foreign movements in Asia create for missionaries, they have no condemnation for nationalism:

This national and racial spirit cannot and should not be crushed or checked. It is a matter of profound concern to the Christian Church. It will have much power to hinder or to facilitate the spread of Christ's Kingdom. Christ never by teaching or example resisted or withstood the spirit of true nationalism. Wherever His principles, including those pertaining to the supreme claims of His Kingdom on earth, have had the largest right of way, they have served to strengthen national spirit and not to weaken it.(11)

Even in India, where the national movement gave rise to strong anti-missionary feeling, it was important to not that the movement also denounced and discarded caste, hitherto the main obstacle to Christian preaching.(12) Nationalism should cause missionaries to deepen their work, and to have the humility to realize that they must decrease while the native church must increase. (13)

On theology, Edinburgh 1910 has little to say. The conference ground rules, of course, precluded the introduction of topics known to be controversial among the participants; even so, it seems remarkable today that so many people, representing such a wide range of theological views, could accept that they were agreed as to what the Gospel was. It seems equally remarkable that they could all accept that evangelism, translation, education, medicine, literature, industrial training and "women's work" were simply different methods of carrying it. (14).The most notable questioning voice was that of the German missiologist Gustav Warneck. Warneck was not present at Edinburgh, but sent a long letter to Mott, reproduced as an appendix to the report of Commission I. (15) Edinburgh 1910 reflects a certain confidence that, whatever issues may divide Christendom, there is a consensual theological deposit that is the common heritage of Christians.

The conference was a time of dreams and visions; the excitement of delegates is palpable, even in the staid pages of the official record. (16)The accounts of such participants as W H Temple Gairdner (17) show it still more. Not for nothing are the origins of the modern ecumenical movement conventionally dated from this meeting. A mere handful of Asian

delegates attended amid hundreds from Europe and North America, and Africa and Latin America were essentially without indigenous representation; yet many who were present caught a first glimpse of what a truly World church might be like. Yet the meeting was not solely visionary; most of it was severely practical, directed to systematic planning and co-operative effort.

### **Then and Now**

The apparatus planned at Edinburgh for international missionary co-operation did come into being, but with much more difficulty than had been anticipated at the conference, and against the background of international events unforeseen then. Within a few years of the meeting came the shock of the Great War that pitted the missionary-sending countries against one another and ushered in the most violent period in modern history, that was to last for the rest of the century and beyond it. The whole basis of the secure worldview that underlies the analysis of the world made by Commission I was swept away. Most surprisingly of all, the fundamental assumption on which Edinburgh thinking, and indeed the missionary thinking of the whole previous century, was founded, was called into question. The Edinburgh delegates had thought of the "Home Church" in Europe and North America, the old Christendom, as the base for the evangelization of the rest of the world, and had assumed that it would remain so. But in the course of the twentieth century, perhaps the largest and fastest recession in Christian history (far faster, for instance, than that which followed the first rise of Islam in the Middle East) set in. Its most obvious effect was in Europe, but it affected most of the lands newly settled in the Great European Migration. The effect has been slowest in the United States, but not the less clear for that. The old Christendom had lasted many centuries; around 1500, as the West newly engaged with the non-Western world and the Great Migration began, Christianity could be identified with Europe. Five centuries later, Europe could best be described as post-Christian; and Western people were no longer the representative Christians.

All this might seem to invalidate the whole vision and project of the World Missionary Conference, were it not for another extraordinary aspect of twentieth century church history. This is the extent to which the dreams and visions of the conference about the evangelization of the non-Christian world were fulfilled, though not in the way, nor always by the means, nor even in the places that the delegates expected and planned. The fact remains that, by a huge reversal of the position in 1910, the majority of Christians now live in Africa, Asia, Latin America or the Pacific, and that the proportion is rising. Simultaneously with the retreat from Christianity in the West in the twentieth century went – just as the visionaries of Edinburgh hoped – a massive accession to the Christian faith in the non-Western world. The map of the Christian Church, its demographic and cultural make-up, changed more dramatically during the twentieth century than (probably) in any other since the first.

But it happened in ways that the analysts of 1910 could not have predicted. The most favorable signs about the future that were observable to them lay in Asia. They saw multitudes in Japan, in China, in India turning to new ways of thought, and thus, as it seemed, becoming open to Christian ideas as never before. The great Asian cultures had

long received the heaviest deployment of missionary personnel and effort. Medical missions (the most financially intensive branch of missions), and other specialisms had been developed largely with Asia in mind. Missions were considerably involved in higher education to university level in Asia, in addition to equipping entire medical faculties there. But the Christian growth that has taken place in Asia has not always followed the patterns of missionary investment. China has indeed seen substantial, if as yet unquantifiable, Christian growth; but it has come in the second half of the twentieth century, in the teeth of official disfavor and often of outright hostility. And the growth has been most pronounced in the period after missionaries were excluded from the country. Korea was somewhat cursorily treated in the Edinburgh Commission's report, since Protestant work there was then so new, and the country's long period of isolation from foreign contact was so recent. (North Korea's present isolation is in some ways a reversion to tradition). But the twentieth century – a time of frequent and varied trauma for Korea – saw Korean Christianity becoming a major force in the land, taking shape in the national movement against Japanese colonialism, burgeoning in the times of worst trouble. In recent decades Korean Christianity besides becoming a significant force in North America, has produced hundreds of missionaries to serve in other parts of the world, including some of the most inhospitable, where Western missionaries never penetrated. If any country can be said to preserve the spirit of 1910, it is South Korea.

A whole chain of churches now stretches across the lands bordering the great mountain ranges from the Himalayas to the South East Asian peninsula. Most of these churches were tiny or non-existent in 1910. Then, and for long after, Nepal was considered a country wholly closed to the Christian message; now it has a thriving church. Vigorous churches have also arisen among the complex of peoples who live in North East India and South West China who are neither Indic nor Han Chinese, and these for the most part in the twentieth century. There are states in North East India where Christianity is the majority religious profession. Across the frontier with Myanmar, among peoples of similar ethnic origin, Christian growth has accelerated since the expulsion of missionaries in the 1960s. In each of the countries mentioned – Nepal, India, China, Myanmar – Christians are a minority, and often a small one; but taken together (and with the related Christian communities in Thailand) they form a substantial Himalayan-Arakan Christian community of which there was little trace when the conference met in Edinburgh.

Latin America, which diplomacy led the World Missionary Conference to leave aside has now become a theatre of Christian operations which no one can possibly ignore. The peculiar history of Latin America has given it an unusual Christian trajectory. The conquest was intended to bring it within the existing Christendom; thus Mexico became New Spain, with the expectation that its laws and customs would be those of old Spain. In the sixteenth century Latin America received the church settlement adopted in Southern Europe, a settlement arising out of the conditions and controversies of sixteenth century Europe. It received the Catholicism of the Council of Trent without going through the processes and experiences that produced the Council of Trent. For several centuries there seemed no reason to doubt the successful incorporation of Latin America within the Christendom framework derived from medieval Europe. But Latin America, though in one sense a European artefact, was no mere extension of Europe; it was a union

of diverse peoples with powerful indigenous religious influences. And in the twentieth century, with rapid urbanization and huge social ferment, the lid blew off the religious pressure cooker. A theological upheaval occurred as drastic as those that befell Europe in the sixteenth century; Latin America's delayed Reformation era. As in Europe, there was a pastoral revolution within the established church; as in Europe, reforming zeal took both conservative and radical ecclesiastical forms; as in Europe, popular religious movements burst the bounds of the old Church altogether. Protestantism, outside immigrant communities, had traditionally played no significant part in Latin America; at the time of the World Missionary Conference it was hardly visible there. By the end of the twentieth century, however, Protestants formed a significant proportion of the population; in the some Central American countries perhaps forming a majority, not of the population, but of the actively practicing Christians in the population. But the movement took an indigenous form; the overwhelming majority of Latin American Protestants are Pentecostal; what in the West has been a marginal has in Latin America become the mainstream. Latin America may be an artifact of the West, manifestly carrying the impress of influences from Europe and North America; but its potent mixture of the cultures of three continents has ensured that it has a religious dynamic of its own. Liberation theology and Pentecostal preaching and congregational life are both examples of its effect; and the spread of a huge diaspora from Latin America, a further effect of the twentieth century, will ensure that its influences spread far beyond its boundaries..

The analysts of 1910 saw inland Africa as "a great unoccupied field", and questioned whether more than a beginning had been made of the evangelization of the continent. It is perhaps the change in Africa that marks the strongest contrast between the Church today and the Church as seen by the writers of the report of Commission I. The figure for professing Christians has risen over the period from something like ten million to something over 300 million. Sub-Saharan Africa has become one of the Christian heartlands, and is quietly slipping into the place in the Christian world that was once occupied by Europe.

### **A Transformed Church**

The twentieth century brought the transformation of the Christian Church, and opened a new chapter in Christian history. After a Western phase that lasted several centuries, the Church has a new shape, a new ethnic composition and a new cultural orientation. Christianity is again becoming a non-Western religion.

There are considerable implications in this for the fulfillment of the Great Commission, making it a different matter from what appeared so plain to the delegates at Edinburgh in 1910.

For one thing, North America and Europe will now not be presiding at the table. The representative Christians, those by whom the quality of twenty-first (and doubtless twenty-second) century Christianity will be judged, are now Africans, Asians and Latin Americans; Western Christians are a minority (and if present trends hold, a shrinking

minority), in the Church. The great theatres of mission, raising key issues for Christian faith and service and determining the Christian agenda for the whole world that Christ redeemed, are Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America. Western Christians, so long used to leadership since the time of the Great Migration, will need to learn new skills as assistants and facilitators. The way that globalization works in the world leaves the West in charge. True globalization in the Church could put the process into reverse.

The meeting in 1910 envisaged the “Native Church”, as the churches of Africa and Asia were then designated, as a tender young plant in need of supervision. It is salutary to remember what many of those churches have encountered since those days. Is there a parallel in Christian history to the story of the church in China over the past fifty years, in terms of what it has endured and how it has emerged? Over the same period, Christian faith in many parts of Africa has been honed on endemic disaster; the normal climate of the life of faith has been war, disruption, dispersion, disease and disappointment. The churches of South Africa were called to give moral leadership to the nation in ways the Western church has not known for many centuries. Elsewhere churches, often the only functioning forms of civil society when even the state has broken down, have become salt and light to nations in distress. If suffering, persecution, and faithful wrestling with impossible situations are marks of Christian authenticity, then we may assume that God has been training certain churches for leadership in the fulfillment of the Great Commission, imparting to them accumulated knowledge of God’s salvation.

Theology is one area in which that leadership may be necessary. Theology is about making Christian decisions. It is the effort to think about faith in a Christian way. The great doctrinal issues of the Trinity and Incarnation were forced on Christians by the need to explore their deepest convictions about Christ by thinking in Greek, using indigenous Greek vocabulary, categories of thought, and methods of debate. It was strenuous and painful – there is no “safe” theology. But it led to discoveries (true discoveries, though not necessarily the final ones) about who Christ is, that could never have been achieved using traditional categories, such as Messiah, alone. The great creeds that resulted can still draw us out in worship and adoration as we recite them. The discoveries came from the process of translation; moving into new intellectual territory by exploring the meaning of Christ in terms of the Greek heritage and identity. And it did not mean abandoning the past; Messiah and the other traditional titles continue to mean what they always did. It did not mean abandoning Scripture; the process made clear things that were in Scripture all the time, but clearly seen only when they were brought out by translation.

Analogous processes have occurred on other occasions as Christian faith has crossed cultural frontiers and required Christians to think in new categories and face issues never faced by Christians before. In our time we could well be entering a time of theological creativity such as the Church knew in the third and fourth centuries. That period of creativity arose from the interaction of the Gospel with a Hellenistic culture and a firmly established tradition of Greek thought. In our time it could arise from continued Christian interaction with the ancient cultures of Africa and Asia. Issues will arise where events, conditions and traditions in Africa and Asia force a need for Christian decisions.

The Western theological academy is at present not well placed for leadership in the new situation. It has been too long immersed in its local concerns, and often unaware of the transformation that has taken place in the Church. It is often hugely ignorant of the world in which the majority of Christians live, their social and religious contexts, and the history and life of their churches. Its intellectual maps are pre-Columbian; there are vast areas of the Christian world of which they take no account. Nor are its products always readily transferable outside the West. Western theology is in general too small for Africa; it has been cut down to fit the small-scale universe demanded by the Enlightenment, which set and jealously guarded a frontier between the empirical world and the world of spirit. Most Africans live in a larger, more populated universe, in which the frontier is continually being crossed. It is a universe that comprehends what Paul calls the principalities and powers. It requires a theology that brings Christ to bear on every part of that universe, making evident the victory over the principalities that Paul ascribes to Christ's triumphal chariot of the Cross. The new age of the Church could bring a theological renaissance, with new perspectives, new materials, new light on old problems, and a host of issues never faced before.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians we have a vivid account of the place in the early Church of two sharply contrasting Christian lifestyles. There was the way of life of the first believers, who had never changed their religion, and still rejoiced in Torah and circumcision, understanding Jesus wholly in terms of Jewish history and experience. There was also the new Hellenistic way of being Christian that we see in Paul's letters being constructed among former pagans. For them Torah and circumcision had no place; instead, existing Hellenistic social and family life and ways of thinking had to be turned towards Christ. Both ways of life were converted lifestyles; but neither was complete in itself. Each needed the other, for both were building blocks in the New Temple, both were functioning organs in the Body of which Christ was head. Only as they came together could the Temple be built, the Body function, the full stature of Christ be realized.

When Ephesians was written, there were only two significant cultures, and thus two converted lifestyles, to take note of. Not so long after the letter was written, one of those, the original Jewish, dropped out of sight. But now the Ephesian moment has returned. But there are no longer two, but many cultures into which Christ has come by faith. The different converted lifestyles belong together; they are necessary building blocks in the New Temple designed for God's worship. They are all functioning organs in the Body of which Christ is the head. Some of the great tests of Christianity in the new age of the Church will be ecumenical. This is no longer a matter of how different confessions and denominational traditions relate to one another. It is rather how our Lord's prayer that all his disciples may be one can be realized in a Body composed of African and Indian and Chinese and Korean and Hispanic and Caribbean and European and North American Christians.

Which brings us back to our starting point. The last phase of the fulfillment of the Great Commission, so well reflected in the World Missionary Conference, took place in the

context of the Great Migration. Over a period of four and a half centuries, millions of people of European origin migrated to the non-Western world, in the process setting up Western hegemony over much of it. The new phase has a different background. From the middle of the twentieth century the Great Migration went into reverse. Multitudes from the non-Western world have migrated to the West, with the United States as the principal target. The process looks set to continue, as falling population in the developed nations calls for immigration to sustain economic viability, and population pressures elsewhere force people to seek new homes. Those coming to the West include multitudes of Christians, who often transplant their churches and congregational life. It is a development which opens the possibility of realizing the Body of Christ in a truly multi-cultural Church; or the terrible indictment of failing to do so. The same development, and the new resources that it brings, sheds new light on one of the supreme evangelistic tasks of the new phase of the Great Commission, the re-evangelization of the West.

There are, in fact, several Great Commissions in the New Testament. The most familiar is that in Matthew 28: 19-20. Its starting point is the universal authority of Christ; the thrust is the discipling of nations, with baptism and the whole teaching of Jesus shared with the nations. The commission is not to make some disciples in each nation, but to make the nations into disciples. In other words, the commission is about culture; about turning a nation's history and traditions and ways of thought, the things that make it distinctive, the roots of its identity, toward Christ. The outcome – and the process may take many generations – is that glorious diversity of converted lifestyles taken into the building of the New Temple, and pointing in its variety to the full stature of Christ.

There is also the Great Commission of John 20:21: “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” The disciples are commissioned as Jesus was commissioned, with the loving authority of the head of the family. And they are sent for the purposes Jesus was sent for. They are sent to preach and to teach, certainly, but they are also sent to be and to do. They are to feed, and heal, and restore people, to confront evil, to suffer, perhaps unjustly, on behalf of others. We cannot set either version of the Great Commission aside. A measure of fulfillment by earlier generations has provided our generation with resources to take up the challenge of both versions in the new age of the Church.

#### NOTES

- (1) The idea is pursued further in Andrew F Walls, ‘Mission and Migration; the diaspora in Christian history’ *Journal of African Christian Thought* 5 (2) 2002,3-11
- (2) On the conference see W Richey Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations: a history of the International Missionary Council and its nineteenth century background* (New York: Harper 1952),chapter 3; Andrew F Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 2002), chapter 3.
- (3) Edited by Harlan P Beach and James S Dennis, New York 1910
- (4) See, eg J. Stanley Friesen, *Missionary Responses to Tribal Religions at Edinburgh 1910*, (New York: Peter Lang 1996)

- (5) On Mott, see Charles Howard Hopkins, *John R Mott, 1865-1955: a biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1979)
- (6) World Missionary Conference 1910. Report of Commission I: *Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World*, (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier 1910), hereafter Report, 5
- (7) Report 281-2
- (8) Report 342
- (9) Report 360-1
- (10) The effects of this are note in the Report, where the point is made that since missions arrived by sea they tended to concentrate on coastal areas and move inland by ports and waterways. Islam had traveled by the great overland trading routes.  
Report 284-5
- (11) Report 33
- (12) Report 364
- (13) Report 96
- (14) Cf. Report 298-316
- (15) Report 434-6. Warneck does make strategic, as well as theological, observations.
- (16) A volume similar to the Report of Commission I was published for each of the other commissions; a ninth volume, entitled *History and Records* contains an account of the Conference.
- (17) W H Temple Gairdner, "*Edinburgh 1910*": *an account and interpretation of the World Missionary Conference* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier 1910)