

*To hang a ladder in the air:
talking about African education in Edinburgh in 1910
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1. The African Road to Edinburgh: Introduction

The Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria say that a man who does not know where the rain met him could not possibly know where he is going. The conference in Edinburgh in 1910 could best be understood from Africans' encounter with the rain of the gospel and how they responded by the end of the first millennium. Admittedly, the impact of the conference remained strong in the future that appeared scorched by the violence of the First World War and its untoward aftermath. As there was no African present at the conference, white missionaries spoke for them. My people are very concerned about the prospects of a discussion where those concerned were absent or whose 'mouths' were literally not there. The verdict runs the risk of being so prejudicial that the conversation could be presumed to be a hostile gossip. Happily, the voices that spoke for Africa were so scattered by the ancestors, so discordant that the conferees soon realized the vastness of the neglected continent, how complex and incomprehensible the problems, and how challenging the context could be for the integrity and future of the missionary enterprise. In spite of the high ideals about education, the Commissioners felt like people trying to hang a ladder in the air and concluded that,

“so varied are the conditions with which missionary workers are confronted in different parts of Africa that only a few conclusions apply to the whole region which is dealt with in this chapter. But these conclusions are concerned with matters of outstanding importance.”¹

The task assigned to Commission III at Edinburgh was global though limited to China, India, Japan and Africa. Latin America was imaged as a preserve of the Roman Catholics. Its focus was on education. The reflection here revisits the deliberations about Africa, the voiceless continent. It examines how the West talked about African education during the Edinburgh Conference of 1910. The reason is that the indigenous folks from the other nations participated. Some, like Reverend V.S Azariah from India, made stirring speeches. His plea for friendship that was more than condescending love struck at the heart of the racism, cultural hubris and disparity of wealth that distorted missionary relationship with host communities. Besides, much has been written about these places that constituted the focus of missionary enterprise. Europeans were intrigued by China, Japan and India. Indeed, the Commissioners observed that, “more than one of our correspondents in China emphasizes the marvelous power possessed by Chinese civilization of influencing those who came in contact with it.”² They acknowledged the power of Confucian thought and the need to approach “the Chinese mind along the lines of deeply laid convictions of truth which we need not disturb otherwise than to set them

¹ *World Missionary Conference, 1910, Report of Commission III: Education in Relation To The Christianisation of National Life* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910):213. Hereafter referred to by volume only.

² III:248

in their places as related to the higher truths of Christianity.”³ As J.R. Mott confessed in *Decisive Hour of Mission*,

“The great and highly organized religions present a stronger resistance than the simpler nature-worship of barbarous tribes, and they would therefore require a larger and better-equipped staff of workers.”⁴

Later, when the Continuing Committee, the International Missionary Council, could not meet in China, it met in India.

On Japan, the Commissioners acknowledged that their education system was advanced, the literacy level was high, and “the percentage of children without schooling is far less than in Great Britain;”⁵ that many Japanese Christians are superior in culture, native ability and education to the missionaries. “Thirty years ago, the missionary was first, today he is influential only when he is ready to co-operate with the Japanese and to give them initiative.”⁶ It would, therefore, require missionaries of the highest ability and training to function in such an environment.

The Indian context should have resembled the African in its complexity and in the depth of loathing that the conquering British had for the indigenous religions. But the Commissioners pointed to the allure of India beyond the opportunity for manifesting the arrogance of power as depicted in E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*. Two dimensions mattered: first was

“the deep and subtle powers of the Indian mind bent continuously towards the fundamental problems of religion, the unequalled capacity of the Indians for meditation and inwardness, their wonderful devotion to the ascetic discipline—the qualities which have made men call the Indian thinkers ‘God-intoxicated’.”⁷

The second was ironically the success of “Christian colleges (that) have in a wonderful way been assimilated by the people themselves and become in a sense indigenous.”⁸ The Asian countries possessed enough to invite attention and dialogue.

Africa was truly at the periphery and its conditions conjured an image that was exotic, at the lowest rung of the evolutionary process of both religion and civilization, and as if from the penumbra of the missionary zone. After listening to twenty-eight correspondents that included some prestigious veteran missionaries, the Commissioners were dumbfounded and concluded that it appeared that the core elements of a meaningful education did not exist, especially in the development of industrial skills, training of girls, higher education and evangelization of the culture (or national life).

It should, therefore, be germane to reconstruct the profile of African Christianity through the 19th century to the end of the first millennium in 1900. This may aid our understanding and re-evaluation of what they were talking about in Edinburgh in 1910. Second, a short comment on the significance of the conference in missionary discourse provides another introductory background. Here, we are confronted with the problem of images and lenses. The image of African education could be explained by the lens

³ *ibid.*,250

⁴ John R. Mott, *The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement For Foreign Missions,1912):120

⁵ III:254

⁶ *ibid.*,253

⁷ *ibid.*,259

⁸ *ibid.*

through which the conferees *read* the African cultural landscape, the responses to the presence of the gospel and their needs. There is little doubt that the core of the conference was the problem of *legibility*, the way people read other people. As the Commissioners observed,

“it is only of recent years that we have been learning to look with sympathy on forms of religion which are strange to us. We are an insular race.”⁹

Quite important in this regard is Mott’s account of the conference in 1912 based on the documents generated by the conference. He reviewed the profiles of the mission fields, articulated the strategies, and recommended the directions for the future in bold terms. Reading non-Western contexts with Western lenses has remained an enduring aspect of the ecumenical relationship with non-Western world and a source of the ambiguity, paradoxes and complexities in their relationship especially as the center of gravity of Christianity has shifted to the southern hemisphere.

Third, on the specific matter of education, three dimensions would be privileged: the ideology- broad aims and specific goals -of missionary education; the interior of the educational process and its enemies; and ecumenism as an antidote. Since some of these are complex, they may not receive the adequate treatment that they deserve.

2. *The African Road to Edinburgh: Christianity in Africa in 1900*

i. **In the beginning:**

The story of Christian presence in Africa at the beginning of the 19th Century was a gloomy tale. It was as if a desolate wind scorched the efforts of yesteryears. In the Horn of Africa, the decline had been steady with the incursion of Islam from the 7th Century. However, the varied policies of different Islamic regimes preserved signs of life among the rural Egyptian Copts; permitted Nubia to remain Christian till the 15th Century and left Ethiopian Christianity in a splendid isolation. The tripartite force of the court, the monastic houses and the Egyptian *abuna* sustained the ideology of a Christian state into the modern times. Early contacts in the 16th Century painted the image of a muscular church with the character of pristine first century Christianity, monastic spirituality, creative music, fine architecture and fascinating art. However, by the end of the 18th Century, Ethiopian Christianity was in a traumatized state. Henry Salt’s *Voyages and Travels* (1809) was a sorry picture:

*The nation, with its religion, is fast verging on ruin; the Galla and Mussulman tribes around are daily becoming more powerful; there is reason to fear that, in a short time, the very name of Christianity may be lost among them.*¹⁰

The state structure had grown soft, its boundaries dwindled and internecine theological debates on the Sabbath and nature of Christ created virulent divisions between the court, the leading monastic houses and the *abuna*. Its ancient liturgy in Ge’ez became less intelligible to Amharic speakers and less inspiring; learning declined as the infrastructure rotted. Indeed, hundreds of churches were destroyed or abandoned amidst violent strife.

South of the Sahara, Iberian Catholicism had carried the Christian flag into its commercial enterprise in a crusading spirit encrusted in the *padroado* agreements with the Popes, who issued self-serving bulls as the contact with Africa progressed. Iberian missionary enterprise concentrated on the islands of the Atlantic Ocean but the slave trade that overawed

⁹ *ibid.*,257

¹⁰ cit. Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994):

all other forms of cross-cultural contact soon restricted European presence into trading forts. Twenty-one of these dotted the West African coast by the 18th Century as competing European nations joined the affray. Chaplainries became the major form of Christian presence. Many chaplains were supposed to serve the half-hearted interest of the traders. Creative efforts to minister to the indigenous people through their own kinds failed. The careers of Quaque, Protten, Amoah and Capitein showed that even indigenous chaplains could not sustain Christian evangelism in the midst of the inhuman trade. Ironically, the cult of *Nana Antoni* that survived among the Fanti of the Cape Coast region represents the syncretistic vestige of what was once a celebration of the life of Saint Anthony. Further down the Guinea Coast, broken sculptures preserved a glorious period when Jesuits and Capuchins inhabited the court of Oba of Benin and Olu Sebastian sat on the stool in Warri after his education in Portugal.

The Kongo/Soyo kingdoms (Angola) were regarded as the best effort of the Iberians. Court alliance proved successful. By 1761, Christian presence diminished as Marquis de Pombal expelled the Jesuits; this was soon followed by their dissolution by Pope Clement XIV in 1773. The anticlerical French Revolution followed apace and engendered an ideology that infected French colonial policy. France, Italy, the Low countries and Portugal closed convents and other Religious houses by mid-19th century. The supply of foreign manpower ceased while the indigenous priests were left to manage as best they could.

In Southern Africa, the major religious force was Islam. This was equally true for the Western and Eastern Africa (once known as *Estado da India*). The Arab factor in African history was crucial at this point as Islam expanded into the interior through trade (especially slave trade), fundamentalism of the *Wahhabis*, resurgence of old *sufi* orders, formation of new ones such as the *Tyyaniyya* and jihads. In West Africa, nine jihads till 1853 led to state formations in the Futa Jallon, Futa Toro and Sokoto regions as the nomadic Fulani took over the territories of sedentary communities in the assertion of their variety of orthodoxy. New centers of Islamic presence emerged such as Harar (Ethiopia), Zanzibar (East) and Sokoto (West). In Uganda, an astonished missionary, A.M. Mackay wondered, “*Is Arab or European power henceforth in Central Africa to prevail?*”¹¹ In the Cape region of South Africa, the slave population actually outnumbered the settlers. The Dutch *predikants* on both sides of the Great Fish River (Albany District, Ciskei and Transkei) did not perceive their mission as shaped for the indigenous population who were exploited for labor. Much to the contrary, they mounted a psychological war against the early Moravian Brethren who essayed to uphold the dignity of the indigenous population. A demographic feature was the displacement of indigenous people, the Khoikhoi and the Xhosa, caught between marauding Zulu and land hungry settlers and unsettled by internal wars generated by Arab slave raiders. Confusion reigned supreme as communities broke up into survival bands. Adrian Hastings could rightly conclude that,

Overwhelmingly the impression that a careful observer would have gained of Africa of 1820 was that Islam was substantially a missionary religion, and an effective one, while Christianity was not. The white Protestant presence in Cape Town for a century and half had led to no significant advance beyond the ranks of the settlers.¹²

This dismal background provides the backdrop to the incredible story about the forces that reshaped the face of Christianity in the 19th Century. The same commentator, Adrian Hastings enthused that “*it was good to be a missionary in 1910. The movement*

¹¹ cit. Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag* (Leicester: Varsity-Apollo Press, 1990): 128

¹² Hastings, *The Church in Africa*: 193

had grown not only in numbers but in education, and organization, in quality, stature and confidence.”¹³ He was too enthusiastic about a picture that was still unfolding. How did the nascent forces of regeneration emerge in the midst of a bleak scene?

ii. Regenerating Forces

Five broad themes could be identified with many subplots that emerged to reshape the religious landscape and regenerate the fortunes of Christianity in 19th Century Africa: philanthropy, abolitionism and African American missionary impulse; re-energized Protestant and Roman Catholic missionary resurgence; geopolitics such as European nationalism and partition of Africa that heralded colonialism. Perhaps the crucial and neglected dimension is how Africans appropriated the gospel through a variety of prophetic and charismatic movements and nationalist responses such as “Ethiopianism”. It could even be argued that Islamic insurgence served as a challenge and missionary allure to “Sudan” regions of Africa. A combination of these forces reshaped the face of Christianity in this era. Some were more important than others in the various eco-theaters of Africa. Here periodization is intriguing because the temper of cross-cultural contact between Africa and Europe shifted dramatically after the 1880’s or the high-noon of the colonial enterprise. Earlier concessions to traditional rulers and indigenous forces were scorched in a more controlling, racial, oppressive ideology of over-rule. Even the theological underpinning of missionary enterprise changed. As an illustration, Brian Stanley used a theological conceptual scheme to interpret British Protestant missions of the 19th and 20th centuries. Among the theological premises was a strong eschatological emphasis. He argued that in the latter half of 19th century, consensus was undermined:

“ Those evangelicals who began to move in a liberal direction in their doctrine of the atone ment, the authority of the Scriptures and eternal punishment retained the postmillennial hope but in an increasingly diluted form. The expectation of social transformation was no longer tied so explicitly to the process of personal conversion and began to be understood more loosely in terms of the spread of Christian civilization and idealism.”¹⁴

As Christianity was locked into the civilization project, white image of black people darkened, creating the turbulent responses that characterized the century and embedded the contemporary issues of gospel, cultural authenticity and race in African Christianity. In the period between 1800-1850, the most compelling force was the relationship between philanthropy, abolitionism and mission. Between this period and 1900, missions engaged in rapid, competitive, vertical expansion into hinterlands, and staking boundaries of operation; sometimes following the boots of colonial forces. A period of consolidation would start much later.

As was observed earlier, the slave trade sapped the moral authority of the gospel bearers and the commercial dimension absorbed the energy and commitment of agents. Abolitionism, therefore, became the engine that moved the new enterprise of the 19th Century. The connection is not always obvious precisely because the slave trade did not grind to an abrupt stop; Christians were not agreed that the system was evil; missionary bodies discouraged their agents from antagonizing slave owners in the West Indies and abolitionism was not hinged on unprofitable plantation system. Moreover, some philanthropists participated in the cause from non-religious moral positions. It might be

¹³ *ibid.*,419

¹⁴ Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*:75

argued that when Justice Mansfield gave his judgment on slavery in England, he acted out of legal and constitutional grounds, national pride in British heritage and in response to humanitarian concerns for the hapless poor in a society that was increasingly conscious of the dark sides of the Industrial Revolution. Such sensitivity saved England from the trauma of a revolution as France suffered.

A network of philanthropists and religious groups prosecuted the abolitionist agitation across the Atlantic Ocean. Historical accounts have documented this aspect of the story. Less emphasized are the roles of various groups of African Americans including liberated slaves, Africans in diaspora such as Cuguano and Equiano (who wrote vividly about their experiences) and entrepreneurs such as Paul Cuffee who spent his resources in an effort to create a commercial enterprise between Africa, Britain and America. Motives varied: religion, politics, commerce, rational humanism and local exigencies. There was an increasing social and financial problem about the number of poor liberated slaves in England, Nova Scotia and West Indies. The Committee of the Black Poor in London declared its inability to cater for the huge freed population. Lamin Sanneh's *Abolitionists Abroad* has recaptured the unsung role of African Americans in the cause. He argued that an educated African American elite became concerned over the welfare of the race and drew up plans for equipping the young with education and skills for survival. A second impetus came from those slaves who took the dangerous option to desert their masters and fight on behalf of the British forces in the War of Revolution. They perceived the revolutionary war as an opportunity for their liberation; they also absorbed the liberal constitutional ideology and struggled against odds in Nova Scotia and West Indies to create a space for the practice of the ideals. Indeed, the next century would witness many rebellions in the West Indies over liberation from slavery. They also created a link between abolitionism and mission by weaving the intriguing link between the liberal philosophy of de Tocqueville and New Life evangelicalism, between Enlightenment ideas and Christianity. They shared the same ideals as the Republicans against whom they fought. As Sanneh puts it, they adopted the ironic liberal stance, namely,

“separation of church and state (that) was to create a vibrant civil society of lay agency, individual enterprise, personal responsibility, and equality before the law. This arrangement challenged people to believe in progress and in the improvability of society, rather than to cling to the past and established structures, and provide an encouraging and useful model of what was required in Africa. It also appealed to former slaves who found in the American experiment support for their own campaign for freedom, for a new society conceived in antislavery and anti-structure.”¹⁵

They went out on mission to Sierra Leone in 1792 before any British missionary society was founded and with a clear vision to build a new society under the mandate of the gospel and beyond the court alliance that adulterated the mandate by seeking the protection of indigenous chiefs who had been compromised through the slave trade. Indeed, they advocated a separation of church and state so as to de-link the missionary enterprise of redeeming Africa through religion from the patronage of the Governors of trading companies. They set the cultural tone of industry and religion that nurtured thousands of recaptives in Sierra Leone between 1807-1864. These freed slaves became agents of missionary enterprise throughout the West coast. Jean Kopytoff rightly dubs their story as the “preface to modern

¹⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999): 13

Nigeria.”¹⁶ The liberated slaves who returned to Yoruba land served variously as educators, interpreters, counselors to indigenous communities, negotiators with the new change agents, preachers, traders and leaders of public opinion in many West African communities. The Colonization Society recruited enough African Americans to found Liberia in 1822.

Caveats however include the fact that these intrepid blacks garnered spiritual sustenance for their vision and perseverance from evangelical spirituality and a certain mode of appropriating the power of the gospel. It could also be that the overall numbers of African Americans missionaries in the evangelization of Africa remained small in the 19th Century but their significance is beyond the fact of numbers. In the early segment of the era, they bore the brunt of white missionary enterprise; they were sought after by missionary societies because of the dire health risks for whites on the West coast. Graduates from Oberlin College and Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes were pressed into service in the southern, central and northern regions of Africa. Many of them went on mission out of a sense of responsibility, to improve on the image of the black, acquire acceptability and the freedom to prove their innate capabilities. It was the race factor that leashed their rein. Except for those who were sponsored by black churches, the white churches often insisted on white supervisors. For instance, William Henry Sheppard, graduated from Stillman College and applied to the Presbyterians to be sent to a mission field in 1887. It took three years before they could recruit Samuel Norvell Lapsley from a prominent Alabama slave holding family to lead the mission to Congo. Unfortunately, Lapsley died leaving Sheppard as the sole shepherd of the mission to the Luebo of the Kasai Valley. The impact of the African Americans was greatest in Southern Africa through the African Methodist Episcopal Church.¹⁷ But this lay in the future.

In Britain, an inexplicable moral resurgence garnered support for the abolitionist cause led by Quakers, Evangelicals and Nonconformists; a few Unitarians and less of High Church men participated. Christine Bolt has emphasized the neglected role of the Quakers in Britain: there is little evidence that their pacifism hindered a proactive combat against the slave trade. Bolt argues that 32 of the 67 members of the Executive Committee of the British and Foreign Anti Slavery Society (BFASS) in the years between 1839-1868 were Quakers. This is important because among the five emancipation societies that appeared in the 1830's, the BFASS was the most prominent and absorbed some others. They not only had an informed magazine, *Anti slavery Reporter* but held huge popular conventions. The flow of the abolitionist movement was shaped by individuals and sense of commitment; emphasis on religious scruples; the sinfulness of the system; and a rejection of compromise with the politics of the Whigs who advocated a gradualist approach.¹⁸

The temper of evangelicals grew more uncompromising as they canvassed a number of projects as antidotes. Perhaps the best known is by Fowell Buxton's whose *African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* compelled an official program. It argued that a solution lay in the pressing the indigenous participants into the task of dismantling the trade at source. Treaties with such rulers will create the atmosphere for installing legitimate trade in raw materials needed for British industries. Christianity would serve as a civilizing agent among the

¹⁶ Jean H. Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria: The Sierra Leonians in Yorubaland, 1830-1890* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965)

¹⁷ Walter L. Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); Pagan Kennedy, *Black Livingstone* (New York: Viking, 2002)

¹⁸ Christine Bolt, *The Anti-Slavery Movement* (London: Oxford University press, 1969):6

indigenous population. Charles Dickens may apply his acerbic wit to guffaw about the failure of the 1841 expedition to the Niger based on Buxton's plan, as many of the protagonists died. But in the end, the use of commerce and Christianity; the Bible and the plough as instruments of abolition won the day. Less known is that Buxton hinged his plan on a process of reparation to wronged Africans. British naval squadron superintended the Atlantic and Indian Ocean coasts rescuing slaves and supplying votaries to various missionary enclaves until the 1860's when the Freedman's Aid campaign broke the back of abolitionist movement and a new and virulent wave of racial prejudice swamped every endeavor. After the Civil War in America, the case for a stronger Anglo-British co-operation on cultural and economic grounds supplanted the battle that had achieved much and survived the vicissitudes of the years.

iii. The Resurgent Gospel

The role of blacks in the resurgence is the point of this narrative- a story that was missing in Edinburgh in 1910. The connection between abolitionism and mission remained enduring because traders engaged in legitimate trade and provided the logistical support for missionaries. Abolitionist projects drew the power of the government into closer contact with indigenous peoples and increased access for missionaries. But another strong feature of the century was the evangelical revival of the era and the attendant resurgence of the missionary enterprise among the Protestants as well as Roman Catholics. A commentator said that evangelicalism is like the aroma of coffee; one knows it is there but cannot define it. Multi-dimensional in manifestation, its key character is a certain spiritual orientation and affirmations based on biblicism; total absorption with the message of the cross; attack on lukewarm Christianity; conversion experience; a strong eschatology and its implication for engagement in the public space (social activism).

Three things happened in this period: the first was a spiritual revival that engaged the awakening of yesteryears that had swept from Europe into the British isles and overflowed like a river into America, creating different eddies in each place. The impact of the Welsh revival of 1904 on the pace of the missionary enterprise in Korea, India and China is only gaining attention. However, the impact of Charles Parham's ministry in Topeka Kansas (1904-6) and William Seymour's in Azusa Street, California (1906-22) and Swedish and Norwegian pietists on renewed missionary enterprise to Africa, Asia, China and Japan have received much attention. Second, there was a shift from concern for the social maladies of the local context as painted by Dickens, *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* to sensitivity about cross-cultural contexts. The limits of Protestant mission in yesteryears makes the new trend staggering. Echoes of it reverberated in the novels of the period. Thirdly, it was a spirituality that was ecumenical in breadth as it enveloped Roman Catholicism and a variety of races.

The theological register of this spirituality included a weakening of rationalism and hyper-Calvinism; emphasis on divine sovereignty; human responsibility; the imperative of the Great Commission; and affirmation of the efficacy of preaching. It affirmed that the outpouring of the Spirit was in proportion to fervency of prayer and therefore that prayer was a veritable tool for achieving the purposes of God. It took a very prophetic and eschatological tone by reading the arrival of the fullness of time; that the French Revolution betrayed a shaking of foundations and the fall of Antichrist and may induce the restoration of the Jews. It was not a mushy wallowing in ecstatic experience; rather reason was imaged as a divine

gift that enlightened the Scriptures and revealed the divine providence that imposed order on the universe. As it engaged the Enlightenment worldview, it was a short step to a crusade against idolatry, a divine obligation to save the perishing heathen by also sharing the benefits of Western civilization.

This form of spirituality whether it manifested in the Keswick and Mildmay conferences or in the incipient Pentecostalism of the period was, like abolitionism, linked to Europe and America. Moreover, Keswick carried within it two different streams: the broader one linked social improvement or perceived civilization as a mandate of mission. A narrower version that prevailed later inclined towards personal salvation.¹⁹ Indeed, evangelical engagement in mission was first achieved in Germany and this may explain why Germans and other Europeans served as midwives and supplied the manpower for many British societies in the early 19th Century.²⁰ Continental nodal points were Basel, Berlin, St Chrischona and Liepzig. The linkage between foreign missions and evangelicalism or “increase of national righteousness” to the “conversion of the heathen” was best shown by the group nicknamed, “The Clapham Sect”. As a plaque to their memory indicates, they were centered around the ministry of John Venn in South London and included prominent abolitionists as William Wilberforce, Granville Sharp, Zachary Macaulay, John Shore, Thomas Clarkson, John and Henry Thornton, Charles Grant and others. It is said that Wilberforce’s conversion account inspired many of them; they brought evangelical social activism to bear on contemporary issues including slavery.²¹

According to Andrew Walls, Carey’s notion that popery was diminishing was forlorn hope. Institutional revival and enormous reorganization occurred in the Roman Catholic Church in the 19th century. Structurally, the old missionary system came alive again; the Propaganda Fidei section of the Vatican was revamped as the clearing-house for the missionary enterprise; the Jesuits were restored; new orders and apostolates emerged such as the White Fathers, Mill Hill, Verona and many education and medical apostolates by nuns. The fund raising strategy borrowed a leaf from the voluntarist principle of the Protestants. Voluntarism, argued Walls, was the subversive factor that reshaped the capacity of the enterprise as it mobilized people from different social classes to patronize missions and forced the hands of the established churches. The Association for the Propagation of the Faith founded by a girl in Lyon in 1819 burgeoned. Catholics were not spared the contest between varied ideologies of mission: the Munster School under Joseph Schmidlin emphasized the conversion of peoples and establishment of local or national self-supporting folk churches. He aligned himself with the Protestant Gustav Warneck. Pierre Charles of Louvain insisted on planting the visible church, an ideology that privileged the administration of the sacraments or institutionalization. It shared the Protestant notion of the Christendom.²²

With a change in metaphor, Angelyn Dries has shown that in America, the two ideologies of mission competed: the business and organizational structure of Francis Kelly of the Catholic Church Extension Society that laid emphasis on the construction of church

¹⁹ Ian M. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences: a study in the Spirituality of English Evangelicals, 1918-1931* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999):35

²⁰ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000):194-214

²¹ E. Marshall Howse, *Saints in politics: the Clapham sect and the growth of freedom* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953)

²² O.U. Kalu, *Embattled Gods: Christianization of Igboland, 1841-1991* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003):68

buildings and the “martyr in the wilderness” imagery of Mary Josephine Rogers of the Maryknoll Fathers. She shared the Protestant Roland Allen’s emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in mission.²³ The period between 1792-1870 witnessed the rise of missionary societies and apostolates all over Europe. Waterways constituted the mode of accessibility; so, many missions operated around secure zones with facility to keep in touch with home bases. As alluded earlier, many British organizations could not recruit sufficiently from among the clergy because of the nature of *advowson*. European centers and certain regions such as the pietistic Bavarian villages provided the bulk of missionaries. Spiritual balance rather than education meant that Godly mechanics constituted the bulk of the early batch of missionaries.

iv. Geopolitical catalyst

The story of Christianity in Africa took a specific, enduring turn in the 1880’s as a reflection of currents in European geopolitics. After the British trade fair in the 1850’s that exhibited the inventions and glory of industrialization; after the German invasion of France in the 1870’s and the Paris commune that fought it to a standstill, competing nationalism consumed Europe and this was played out in the acquisition of colonies. Arguments abound whether colonies were acquired in a fit of absent-mindedness; whims and caprices of officials in the Colonial Office; spurred by men-on-the-field; the urging of missionaries; an effort to protect the natives or paltry returns in commerce. The literature has attempted to debunk the economic arguments for colonization. But all agree that the Berlin conferences of 1884/5 to partition Africa among competing nations dramatically changed the geopolitical terrain and the relationship between Europeans and the rest of the world.

The effects were in the mindset and attitudes; at once hegemonic, filled with hubris and salted with a conquering spirit. Jingoism filled the air to drown the protests of the enemies to the imperial idea. It also had much to do with space, expansionism and enlargement of European space and migration to non-Western world. Without this, one may not appreciate either the popularity of Rudyard Kipling or the children stories of G.A.Henty and the attraction of Romantic poets as Coleridge. Armchair theorists such as Frazier wove the myth of *The Golden Bough*. One of the provisions of the Berlin treaty included the need to demonstrate actual presence instead of mere claims of areas of influence. European interest in Africa and the non-Western world increased and its presence opened the innards of communities to foreign gaze. Chiefs were now treated in a cavalier, imperial manner; middlemen were brushed aside; maxim guns became important in the pacification projects. Even the romantic notion of savages turned into pejorative insistence of African lack of capacity and the need to control and tutor the half-man, half child. Trusteeship replaced the vision of using indigenous agents to evangelize. There was an enlargement of scale in missions: number of missionaries, number of participating nations; areas evangelized; level of participation by females and amount of funds raised for the enterprise.

Competing interests bred virulent rivalry that spurred the pace, direction, strategies and types of charitable instruments in missionary expansion. The propaganda was that “*all should go and go to all*”; the hope was “the evangelization of the world in this generation,” according to A.T Pierson, the editor of *Missionary Review of the World*. H.R Niebuhr could well tease that the dominant theme of the century was extension, expansion and

²³ Angelyn Dries, *The Missionary movement in American Catholic History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998): 78-80

encompassment; the goal of mission was for “*the kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons...to bring light to the Gentiles by means of lamps manufactured America.*”²⁴ Gustav Warneck initiated a critical tradition in Europe that worried over the human-centered activism; the emphasis on proclamation to the neglect of discipling the nations; the danger of confounding the spread of European culture for the spread of the gospel; the replacement of the role of the church by voluntarist organizations and the dangerous rhetoric, watchword and slogans that could be quite misleading. Hastening the parousia may miss the tried and tested strategies; above all, none should specify when the evangelization of the world could be accomplished. Right up to Edinburgh Conference in 1910, the European missiologists remained hostile to the new spirit in the 19th Century missionary enterprise. Race and control dominated missionary encounter in Africa resonating from the mood in the secular imperial age.

v. Patterns of African responses

Missionary message, presence and attitudes determined some aspects of the patterns of African responses. The power of the Word and the translation into indigenous languages determined the charismatic elements. Some scholars have emphasized control and hegemony in the relationship; that racism generated counter racism; European nationalism bred imitation. Others have argued that in culture contact, all parties are agents who give, take, negotiate and appropriate according to basic needs; that even when the playing ground appears unequal, translation goes on; the vulnerable party always has command of the infra-political zone to articulate feelings and that Africans were not passive proselytes; indigenous religions remained resilient, birthing the new. In spite of the control system that essayed to make the victims legible, Africans wrote their own hidden scripts. Still others argue that it was a contest between rival narratives; each party engaged in universe maintenance. In the moral economy designed by the intimate enemies (missionaries and colonial order), Africans responded variously by loyalty/collaboration, voice and exit.

Yet the story of missionary enterprise is characterized by its varieties and fluidity; and missionary presence was always vulnerable though the control system bred dependency and disunity in many communities. Yet the exigencies of the mission field continuously compelled modifications of missionary hardware. Therefore, its story is a fragmentary one precisely because the size of the continent, number of players and vested interests proved so daunting that they took opposing positions on socio-economic, political and cultural themes. Some have argued that the contributions in education, medicine and translation of the Bible into indigenous languages catalyzed the changes in African Christianity. The point has often been made that when people read the word in their languages, the power catalyzed tremendous changes. Each regional context presented its own challenges as culture became the contested ground. The argument here is that both education and the effects of translation became more apparent after the First World War when the character and provenance of education changed, and when the flares of revivalism grew more intense. In 1900, the Commissioners would have been confronted with a rudimentary education system that was operated haphazardly.

Periodization is important in the reconstruction of Christian presence in Africa. The missionary enterprise was unsuccessful in many parts of Africa till the second half of the century. This may explain why African Christianity was not central in missionary discourse

²⁴ R.Nieburh, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York,1959):179; John F Piper, *Robert E. Speer: Prophet of the American Church*(Louisville, Ky: Geneva Press,2000)

when they met in the Edinburgh Conference of 1910. J.R.Mott enthused about changes in education and socio-economic development in the continent that he described as “the most plastic part of the world.”²⁵ But in 1900, African Christianity was like the tender offshoot of an emergent non-Western plant. The maturity and galloping changes would occur later in the 20th Century. The argument here is that those changes benefited from these forces of regeneration that started during the 19th century. In the Horn of Africa, indigenous agency struggled to maintain the independence and orthodoxy in Ethiopia, confronted by Jewish, Protestant and Catholic efforts to “clean” up Ethiopian Christianity. The return of court Christianity by 1856 and the victory at Adwa in 1896 sealed the nationalist rebuttal. In southern and Central Africa, missionary villages as enclaves served as the means of evangelization and encrusted a certain ideology of education that concentrated on primary level education. Its ideological contradictions became apparent with the years. Venn’s indigenous ideal in West Africa, that produced the novelty of Adjai Crowther’s bishopric in 1864, collapsed by 1891 betraying the rising tide of “scientific” racism that thwarted the evangelical spirituality of yesteryears. White settler Christianity dominated in Eastern Africa, escalating a diatribe against indigenous culture to a breaking point. Metropolitan Christianity in Belgian Congo rivaled Portuguese underdevelopment of Angola and Mozambique through religious instruments. French secularism and British protection of Islamic emirates would arouse missionary outcry.

The Africans responded to missionary structures through *loyalty* and collaboration in certain places, serving as native agents. Critical *voices* were heard in other places while some would *exit* either out of cultural nationalism or through charismatic and prophetic initiatives that appropriated the pneumatic elements of the gospel. Sometimes, these manifested in curious ways as Nxele and Ntsikana did among the Xhosa; or when Shembe saw transforming visions in ‘Boss’ Conrad’s barn. Others joined the early Pentecostal movements that came from the West, especially between 1906-1910. When racism snuffed off the Spirit, the Africans built their own ‘Zions’ on the smoky ashes. At other times, anti-structural rebuttal appeared in cultural, religious and political protests and even exit as in the foundation of “African Churches” that seceded from mainline churches from the 1880’s. In all cases, the forces that catalyzed the first phase of growth of Christianity in the period, 1914-45, had appeared in nascent forms by 1900. Unfortunately, their salience was unrecognized when whites talked about Africans in Edinburgh in 1910.

Wade Harris typifies the African Road to Edinburgh. In the year that whites met to talk about Africa, a bearded man, decked in a long white *soutan*, walked from his native Grebo Island across Liberian coast, through Ivory Coast to the Gold Coast. He carried a long staff, a Bible and a bowl of holy water. He preached; he created choruses and taught these to large crowds. He baptized, healed and performed other miracles. He was very ecumenical; he founded no churches but convinced many to burn their idols and go to the nearest churches. The Methodist Church in the Gold Coast exploded numerically because they took the old man seriously. The Roman Catholics in Francophone colonies also benefited. Others engineered problems for him using the colonial governments. On his return through Ivory Coast, he found that shipmasters had not stopped the practice of using Kru men to offload their ships on Sundays. He had warned them; and now, decided to punish their recalcitrance. He threw his holy water at some ships and these caught fire. The French authorities put him

²⁵ Mott, *The Decisive Hour*, 25

under house arrest. Undoubtedly, his missionary journey achieved more within months than the labors of many expatriate missionaries through many years.²⁶

3. Images and Lenses: The significance and structure of Edinburgh Conference, 1910

Edinburgh Conference in 1910 has become the referent point in missionary discourse because of a variety of reasons. It was not the first attempt by those engaged in the massive missionary resurgence of the period to meet and compare notes. The conference in New York in 1900 touched on a number of similar issues. It was simply the largest and best organized of such conferences. Twelve hundred delegates from over one hundred and fifty missionary organizations participated. The combined genius of two people whose personalities complemented each other produced an efficient administrative structure: John Mott enjoyed the glare while J.H. Oldham, who had some hearing difficulty, preferred to stay in the background. In constituting the eight commissions, they deployed people from academia, church leadership, administrators of missionary organizations and people with missionary experience. They paid attention to geographical and denominational spread, gender and participation by indigenous people from the key areas of the mission field.

For instance, on Commission III on Education in Relation to the Christianisation of National Life, the Right Rev Dr C. Gore, the Bishop of Birmingham, a High Church Anglican, chaired while Rev Professor Edward Caldwell Moore of Harvard University served as his Vice-Chairman. Out of twenty members in the Commission, twelve came from Britain, six from the United States, one from Canada, Professor R.A. Falconer, President of the University of Toronto, and one from India, a Scot, Rev Dr John Morrison who was formerly the Principal of the Church of Scotland College, Calcutta. In fact, twelve of them were leaders of Western academic institutions including Universities of Oxford, London, Manchester, Harvard, Chicago, Columbia, Toronto and Rutgers, and four others were connected with colleges. Two were Administrative Secretaries of key missionary societies. The membership deliberately excluded missionaries.

The strategy for gathering data privileged active participants in the mission field. They sent out questionnaires to about 223 correspondents whose names were submitted by missionary societies from Europe and North America: 69 in China, 62 in India and Ceylon, 33 in Japan and Korea, 28 in Africa, 14 in Mohammedan lands in the Near East, and 17 special interest groups that included 8 from Dutch East Indies, Sumatra and Java. This last category included Dr T.J. Jones of Hampton Institute, Virginia, who was an expert in Industrial Training, and would later become very important in designing the plan for African education in the mid 1920's. The size and distribution of correspondents may indicate the priority and perception of the size of the mission field. However, in China, the correspondents included only one indigenous person, Cheung wan Man, a medical doctor with the Southern Baptist Convention at Shiuhing. India had five, Japan and Korea, five and Africa, none.

In Africa, the regional distribution of correspondents created a lens that could distort the image: twelve came from South Africa, seven from Nyasaland, five from the whole of West Africa, two from East Africa and one each from Madagascar and Mozambique. Within West Africa, three came from Nigeria and one each from Sierra Leone and Liberia. Within Nigeria, one came from the northern region, the intrepid medical doctor, Dr Miller, who confronted the exclusion of missionaries from the Moslem emirates, and two came from

²⁶ Gordon M. Haliburton, *The Prophet Harris* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973)

Calabar: one Presbyterian and one Primitive Methodist, ignoring the vast south-western region where the educated, religious nationalists were very strong.²⁷ From hindsight, the strategy of using participant observers served better than arm-chair theorists but the distribution flawed the results. It is argued that the distortion in sampling factored the distortion of the image of Africa and African Christianity in the conference.

The Commission received replies from over 200 and distributed these by regions to separate sub-committees. “The English members of the Commission met in London for a week (November 1-6,1909), discussed these reports, and determined the lines to be taken by the report as a whole.”²⁸ They submitted their work for the input from the American members, who suggested changes. At a meeting between the British members and a representative of the American members in London on April 22nd,1910, the report, conclusions and recommendations were harmonized to be presented with the assent of the entire commission. One approach to the document is to examine the roles of individuals behind the scene and trace how disagreements were ironed out. Another approach, as adopted here, analyzes the document in the spirit and words of the protagonists, that “the conclusions or recommendations represent the deliberate opinion of the whole Commission.” There is every indication of a high level of responsibility, attention to the data and a certain level of frankness in dealing with the role of education in the missionary enterprise. It was the lens that distorted the image!

The fourteen questions administered were exhaustive and shall be considered along with other aspects of the interior of missionary education. Suffice it to say that the Commission was sensitive to the pioneering hardship of missionary work, and endeavored to balance the achievements with new theories of education. As the Report put it,

“It has seemed to us that we should probably best assist those who are actually engaged in the educational work of missions by formulating such a series of conclusions or recommendations...not to make final pronouncements or to arrogate authority to ourselves in any sense, but rather to stimulate thought and to provide a basis for discussion.”²⁹

The significance of Edinburgh 1910 in missionary discourse is the astonishing level of self-criticism that made the movement resilient. The Conference espoused high ideals. Having acknowledged the achievements by missionaries, it moved quickly to observe that

“education, as pursued under missionary auspices, has exhibited certain *weaknesses in its methods*, and is exposed to certain *perils*, which make it necessary to review its *principles and its processes*.”³⁰

This startling acknowledgment opens up the discussion on the gap between the ideal that the Commission perceived and the practice that the missionaries pursued. The very title of the Unit was theologically loaded as it proposed to examine how education could be used as an instrument to engage in mission to culture, baptizing the nations or Christianizing the national life. In re-imagining the conference, it is argued that the Commissioners started a conversation on African education that combined with geopolitical realities to nudge missionary practices in new directions.

²⁷ III: vii-xx

²⁸ *ibid.*,3

²⁹ *ibid.*,4

³⁰ *ibid.*,6

4. *The Ideology of Education in Edinburgh 1910*

The Commission espoused an ideal of education that resonated with Roman Catholic ideals and practices. In spite of the collapse of their early mission to China, their indigenising principles remained classic. In many parts of Africa, Roman Catholic education enterprise outpaced the Protestant. In southern Nigeria, Bishop Shanahan boasted that if he captured the hearts of the children, the heart of the country would be safe in Roman Catholic hands. He prosecuted the education apostolate with such vigor that inspectors from Lyon in 1929 wondered whether the Holy Ghost Fathers had not deserted evangelism. The absence of their input in the conversation in Edinburgh was regretted. But apparently, Protestants at Edinburgh arrived at the same conclusions. As Mott put it, a German proverb says that, “What you would put into the life of a nation, put into its schools.”³¹ Education was the instrument that mediated the missionary message.

Imagining the educational process

First, the Commission delineated the contexts or types of education that are required: primary, higher education, teacher training, ministerial formation, industrial, education of girls, and education for Muslim evangelism because Islam is reaching out and Christians must penetrate its hearts. Second, it derived the rationale for missionary education by exploring the lessons from the early church. The early church recognized the *pilgrim/universal* and *indigenous/local* principles in Christianity. It sought to be universal and catholic without becoming exotic or foreign. In the early church,

“Christianity became indigenous in each race and place from the first, because it was entrusted to native teachers and rulers almost at once. There was somewhat later accommodation to such national religious customs as were thought to admit of a Christian interpretation and use. The result was the diffusion of a Catholic religion exhibiting local variations of customs and presentation.”³²

Education was crucial to Christianity for several reasons: a commonly shared elementary education saved the catholicity of the Christianity from becoming exotic or representing a foreign influence. Christianity was a religion of ideas and institutions that could only be maintained through teaching. It inherited from Judaism a profound respect for teachers and special instructions in catechism that were designed as a process of training and initiation into the religion. When the center of gravity shifted from Palestinian roots into the Graeco-Roman world, it came into an empire well furnished with schools that it utilized. People were versed in both secular and Christian literature. Some leaders were wary about the idolatrous dimensions to secular education but recognized the utility for Christian evangelism. Those who engaged in “spoiling the Egyptians” in their apologetics, demonstrated the usefulness of secular education. The implication is that the goal of education is evangelization and the method or process utilized cultural pathways.

The Commission recognized the changed environment. In some places, there is no commonly shared public education that could serve as a framework; so, each mission designs its process. The Commissioners may have been blind to indigenous models of education and socialization that could serve as inculturating pathways; they ignored the voices of educated

³¹ Mott, *The Decisive Hour*, 114

³² III:240

Africans crying for indigenisation of the gospel; but conceded that the ideal method of propagating Christianity in the contemporary period is that,

“the Gospel should be received by each race through the ministry of evangelists from nations already Christian but that the church should pass as rapidly as possible under the control of native pastors and teachers, so that while all churches hold the same faith, use the same Scriptures, celebrate the same sacraments, and inhere in the same universal religion, each local church should from the first have the opportunity of developing a local character and colour.”³³

Converts, they argued should, with their children, continue to share the education and social life of their own races and nations; and bring the distinctive genius and its products within the circle of the Holy Spirit, to the glory and honor of all nations. They not only promoted the Venn policy shared with Rufus Anderson but moved towards a compromise with the German *volkskirche* principle that Gustav Warneck and other German missiologists urged. It was an espousal of a brand of ecumenism in which all nations and cultures stood equidistant to the kingdom of God. But one suspects that they proffered this idea for Japan and China and hardly for Africa.

The ecology of learning

Third, they explored the counteracting forces in the ecology of learning, for instance, the tendency of Western people to reproduce “strongly defined and intensely western forms of Christianity.” This creates a gulf between the mental equipment of missionaries and that of the indigenous people. Missionaries pay little attention to presenting the gospel in the form best suited to the context and spirit of the people. This tendency to plant “the religion of conquerors or foreign devils and unwelcome intruders” betrays a lack of the wisdom of the apostles, especially when conquest, perception of the other, insularity, lack of sympathy for and study of other religions may have caused alienation.³⁴ This has created the peril that the replacement of the indigenous vernacular and culture may create an exotic religion and promote false ethics that replace communal ethics with western individualism.

They pointed to the teaching-learning environment that privileges imparting ideas and exercising the memory and intelligence of the student. The Commissioners observed that the missionaries

“did not estimate how little the imparting of information, with the appeal to only the too facile memory to receive and repeat it, would really do in the way of reforming the fundamental habits of thought or instinct in their pupils.”³⁵

It is exciting to find that the Commissioners said in 1910 what made Paulo Freire famous in 1970. Here is the banking model described by Paulo Freire. The banking model is built on a jaundiced image of the host community, perceiving it as a “pathology of the healthy society” represented by the home of the missionary. The teacher “mythicizes” the indigenous social structure and creates a platform for causing division, manipulation, cultural invasion, alienation, conquest and all manners of induced actions. The teacher’s high profile is that he knows all things, thinks, teaches, talks, disciplines, enforces, chooses the program, confuses authority of knowledge with professional authority and deposits knowledge that the students bank by memorizing mechanically. The teacher withdraws from the bank when he chooses.

³³ *ibid.*,244

³⁴ *ibid.*,245,257

³⁵ *ibid.*

The teacher is the subject and the learners are mere objects. The goal of the teacher is to change the consciousness of the students to ensure that the students internalize the teacher and his world.³⁶ Using India as an example, the Commissioners argued that the product contents of missionary education are imitative, dependent, weak native Christianity, lacking initiative.³⁷ Paulo Freire dubs this model as “cultural invasion” in which

“the actors draw thematic content of their action from their own values and ideology; their starting point is their own world, from which they enter the world of those they invade.”³⁸

The opposite is “cultural synthesis” in which

“the actors who come from another world to the world of the people, do so not as invaders. They do not come to teach or to transmit or to give anything, but to learn, with the people, about the people’s world.”

The actors integrate with the people and become co-authors of the action that both perform upon the world. For him, this model of transformation, dialogue and liberation does not deny the encounter of two different worldviews, but argues that each can affirm the other in a process of “mutual humanization”; that knowledge of the indigenous culture frees it from alienation and enables it to be transformed in a creative manner.³⁹

The Commissioners did not go this far but called for a reversal of the contemporary trend. Education should be a social process that trains students for social functions. It should train the whole being-body, soul and spirit- through music, poetry and dance. It should engage and develop the psychological roots of the child such as the instincts of one’s nature or the subconscious nature. Education should train the individual into conscious and intelligent participation in the great social movements and challenges of one’s environment. As the South African educationist, Bongani Mazibuko said, “It is stressing the affective and experiential, rather than the narrowing rational and academic, that students are affirmed and empowered.”⁴⁰ As a practical measure, the Commission urged missions to train native Christian leaders as teachers and church officers as people who will bear the responsibility of building the church, produce the indigenous literature and use the vernacular in instruction in the elementary schools because “ a man’s mother tongue is that which reaches his heart, and always offers the best approach to the deepest subjects.”⁴¹ Simply put, foreign language makes Christianity a foreign production.

Fearing that the divisions and rivalry among western Christianities may confuse the non-western world, they suggested that the best approach is to teach the original and fundamental elements of Christianity, using the vernacular. The challenges in Japan brought this matter home because the Japanese feelings for the ancestors, patriotism and their assertion for leadership in the church not only compelled the need for highly educated missionaries but people who were open for dialogue in the vernacular. Even in India where the religious base was heavily pantheistic, there was still the possibility of a dialogue that sifts the best values such as the peaceful or passive ethics of the Hindu as a pathway to the

³⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum,1970):58-60

³⁷ III:258

³⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,181

³⁹ *ibid.*,182-3

⁴⁰ III:247;see,Roswith Gerloff ed., *Mission Is Crossing Frontiers: essays in honour of Bongani Mazibuko* (Pietermaritzburgh: Cluster Publications,2003):14

⁴¹ *ibid.*,252

character of Jesus, a critique of western aggressive culture and ethics and the representation of “a full-orbed type of Christian life, embracing the eastern and western emphases.”⁴²

The undergirding ideology of education was based on the reading of the peoples, the times and conditions in the various mission fields. The geopolitical environment was suffused with intense nationalism all over Asia: Japan emerged as a major power player in 1905; China showed an astonishing awakening of national consciousness, enormous changes in the social infrastructure, and rapid proliferation of education; Indian Christians brought the political nationalism into the church. R. Suntharalingham has traced the politics of national awakening in South India in the prelude to the conference.⁴³ For instance, in 1888 the Madras Native Christian Association was founded and two years later, their newspaper, *Christian Patriot* appeared. Edwin James Palmer, the Bishop of Bombay, confirmed in 1909, a report that

“the modern young man wants a national church, first and foremost, to attain independence from all foreign sway and its concomitants... There is a sort of idea floating around that India could start with a clean state and evolve something wholly new and Indian, based as some of its advocates openly say, on the ‘religious treasure’ of non-Christian India.”⁴⁴

The Christians were pressurized by the temper of Hindu nationalism that stereotyped Christians as unpatriotic, denationalized people who pandered to foreign churches that bore such names as the *Church of England* or *Lutheran Church*. In Africa, Ethiopianism continued to garner strength in western and southern Africa. In 1891, the firebrand, Wilmot Blyden, gave a lecture in Lagos entitled, *The Return of the Exiles* in which he intoned that “Africans must evangelize Africa” or, as Mojola Agbebi would say, the sphinx must solve its own riddle! The Niger Delta pastorate had split from the Church Missionary Society in that year. A young Ghanaian Methodist lawyer, J. Casely-Hayford wrote his play, *Ethiopia Unbound* in the year that white people met to talk about Africans in Edinburgh. There was ferment in the young mission fields but the din did not interrupt the discussions.⁴⁵

As J.R Mott read the signs: beyond the strategic position of Japan, there was an openness to receive the gospel in Africa and a significant conversion rate occurred in Korea and Manchuria. China remained attractive to missionaries because of its population density. The challenge from Islam in both Moslem countries and Equatorial Africa contested the enterprise. Moreover, Christianity needed to deal with certain neglected regions as Sudan and the Pacific Islands, and buffer the marginalized caste groups in India.⁴⁶ In this task, education was a core instrument and the distribution of Christian literature was imperative. This included devotional materials, apologetics, literature for moral formation and general, scientific materials that would provide information and aid reading abilities.

But there appears to be three different perceptions of the goal of education among the conferees in Edinburgh 1910. The first was the *assimilationist* that argued that the African indigenous civilization was low; education could be deployed to uplift the culture to the

⁴² *ibid.*,261

⁴³ R. Suntharalingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India, 1852-1910* (Jaipur-New Delhi: 1890)

⁴⁴ cit Klaus Korschorke, ed. *Transcontinental Links In the History of Non-Western Christianity* (Weisbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2002): 205

⁴⁵ E.A Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914* (London: Longmans, 1966)

⁴⁶ Mott, *The Decisive Hour*, 109-110

European level. By the mid-1880's this benign view suffered a defeat. Mott may represent a second posture held by the 'cultural invaders' when he enthused that,

“As already seen, the influence of western learning has been in the direction of undermining the faith of the student class in the non-Christian religions and of breaking up the social and ethical restraints of the old civilizations.”⁴⁷

As Jacob Ade Ajayi would argue in 1965, the goal of missionary education was “the making of an elite” class of detribalized, educated people who will interpret Christianity to their people.⁴⁸ The Commissioners may not have been averse to the civilizing project of the missionary enterprise but nuanced their *indigenizing* position differently. The task was to explore how to Christianize the national life through education or how to respond to the challenging social and economic structures that would determine the fate of Christianity. The handwriting on the wall was boldly nationalistic and suggested the need for a native agency trained to shoulder the burdens of self-governing, self-funding, self-propagating churches. Education should be

“ an instrument for raising native Christian Churches, which shall be in the fullest sense national, and capable of a growing independence of foreign influence and support.”⁴⁹

To achieve this, they recommended changes in the content and method of education, with emphasis on agricultural and industrial training. This should culturally and economically equip people who will lead the churches and the nations, and respond to challenges of their ecosystems.

The problem of industrial education emanated from three sources: there was a concern about the effect of “book-learning’ that did not enhance the full productive capacity of the person; the second was a racial commentary on the pretensions of educated Africans who served as clerks and imitated white people. The third was related to western enthusiasm with industrialized economy. In 1900, a conference in New York had insisted that the industrial spirit, when properly directed, would champion liberty, serve as handmaid of education, an auxiliary to the gospel and aid missions.⁵⁰ The problem was how to ensure that the indigenous people participated in its benefits and avoided its vicious effects. The Commissioners suggested a gender sensitive model of education to mobilize the women and girls. However, they merely envisaged “raising up a pure girlhood and womanhood such as is only possible in truly Christian home.” This wove the traditional community’s goals to new white needs for domestic servants, nurses and teachers. The curriculum consisted of domestic science, hygiene, cooking, laundry, sewing, cleaning, spinning, lace-making, basket weaving, dispensary assistance.⁵¹ The only missing subject was hewing wood.

The education ideology in response to Islam was more creative than the confrontational habits of evangelical Sudan parties. They urged for special education facilities in Moslem countries manned by evangelists trained on how to witness without injury to the sensibilities of the Muslims. The strategy would privilege edification, leavening

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 114

⁴⁸ J. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria; The Making of an Elite* (London: Longmans, 1965); see John P. Ragsdale, *Protestant Mission Education in Zambia, 1880-1954* (Toronto: Associated University Press, 1986)

⁴⁹ III:8

⁵⁰ see a discussion in Efiog S. Utuk, *From New York to Ibadan: the impact of African Questions on the making of ecumenical mission mandates* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991)

⁵¹ III:208-211

and living the faith without preaching it.⁵² Behind the contrasting ideologies of the ‘cultural invaders’ and the ‘indigenizers’ was a certain reading of the contentious matters of race, indigenous cultures, mission and the future of Christianity. Racism so vitiated the force of the missionary enterprise that J.H. Oldham wrote a book, *Christianity and the Race Problem* in 1926 and many imaged him as a friend of Africa.⁵³

The Commissioners, however, privileged a technical or professional view of education as an instrument and avoided the larger issues. In their view, contemporary missionary education suffered from a wrong method, wrong subject matter, wrong articulation of goals, and a challenging environment. That environment consisted of imploding materialism introduced from the West, destruction of old values that had not been adequately replaced by a new moral system; vagaries of official policies and practices, symbolized by Education Codes, that could harm education; insurgent nationalism; and inadequately trained teachers.

Returning to the old premise that teachers constituted the point men in the enterprise, they asserted that,

“ Nowhere has experience more conclusively shown that the essential thing in education is the personality of the teacher. The clearness of his moral convictions, his unselfishness in the sphere of his duty, his personal example, are the character-forming influences which make education a living thing.”⁵⁴

They paid close attention to the training, requiring that it should become more professional than based on spiritual fitness. Thus, the training of the missionary became a major consideration in reforming and revitalizing missionary education. This broad ideology determined the contours of the questions sent to respondents in Africa.

5. The Interior of Missionary Education in Africa in 1910

The Questions of education

Using the social science model of the shape and flow of Christian education, the fourteen categories of questions could be schematized under four headings: the purpose (broad aims and specific goals) of education; the teaching-learning process focused on the facilitator/teacher, the learner/student, and the environment. On the teacher, they queried about the technical training and moral quality. On the learner, they identified the various contexts of education and rehearsed the same questions for various contexts of the process (elementary, higher, teacher training, education of girls, industrial and Muslim contexts of education). They sought to assess the product-content or result of the process: whether it had caused Christian conviction, permeated indigenous thought, feelings and outlook and whether it had percolated a certain influence directly, indirectly or by general diffusion on the learner’s community; whether “the course of education is being gradually brought into more vital relation to the real needs of the different categories of native pupils”?⁵⁵ Specifically on the learner, the Commissioners wanted to know whether the process has catalyzed a higher ideal in life, equipped the learner for leadership roles and enhanced physical development. Most of the questions focused on the environment of learning: on

⁵² *ibid.*,233ff

⁵³ See ,Brian Stanley’s article on “Church, State and Hierarchy of Civilization” and Andrew C.Ross, “Christian Missions and the Mid-Nineteenth Century Change in Attitude to Race” in Andrew Porter, ed., *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880-1914*(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003):58-105

⁵⁴ *ibid.*,166

⁵⁵ *ibid.*,168

curricula, especially use of indigenous and other Christian literature; on the mode of communication, either English or vernacular; and the social ecology of learning characterized by competing power nodes, Government policies and actions, the white settler communities and their racism, indigenous nationalism, and dysfunctional missionary rivalry.

The Answers From the Fields

The discussion of the responses of protagonists in the mission fields, could start with J.R Mott's typical hyperbole that galled the Germans. He intoned that,

“it is not necessary to call attention to the economic, social and educational development of the natives races of South Africa, which development, along with the political evolution, has advanced steadily through the past two or three generations. Suffice it to say that in no period has the progress been more marked, judged by every test, than during the last two decades. This progress is observable in almost every part of what is known as the Sub-Continent, the parts of Africa lying south of the Zambesi.”⁵⁶

In reality, 1910 was a dark year for the black population of South Africa as the Afrikaans declared a political status that denied the indigenous people of their political and socio-economic status. They were compelled to appeal for Britain's intervention in 1912, the year that Mott's book came out. So, what was the advancement catalyzed by missionary education?

The correspondents showed that missionary education in 1910 was prominently at the elementary level, with little effort at the higher or secondary school level and a few Teachers' Colleges. Industrial education was either non-existent or rudimentary and girls' education remained at the lowest priority. The correspondents usually skipped the opportunity to dialogue on broad ideology of missionary education. They were more interested on the specific goals of education. These focused on enabling the pupils to read the Bible and devotional literature; moral re-orientation that would subvert the traditional worldview and culture, imaged as the bondage of superstition, and victory for the civilizing mission. This would, in turn, foster a closer dependency on the gospel bearers, broaden the vistas of Western civilization and produce interpreters or native agents and teachers. The intellectual and moral equipping of the native agents was the missionaries' contribution to the leadership of native churches. It was also hoped that technical education would attach a breed of intelligent natives to the periphery of the new capitalist society, engage them in “useful living” and improve their earning power. The brass ceiling of missionary education was moral formation, skill acquisition, and production of native teachers.

The reasons were not hard to find. As Rev D.D. Stormont, Principal of Blythwood Institution, Butterworth, insisted: education in the Cape Colony certainly has taught the people to improve their hygiene, physical surroundings, acquire higher ideals in life and capacity to dissent from tribal ties and family control. But the unintended consequence has intensified individualistic ethos, assertion of independence often amounting to license, and opposition to Europeans. Admittedly, this last fact is linked to wider socio-economic factors such as erosion of “tribal life” or social control system, effects of alienation of land, and urban morality. Stormont basically admitted that missionary education did not provide an adequate coping mechanism in the face of dire socio-economic changes in the lives of the indigenous people. The product-content left much to be desired because the key component in the teaching –learning process was faulty. The native teacher, he wrote, is unchastely,

⁵⁶ Mott Decisive Hour,22

conceited, and lover of ease and money, unless he apprentices for a very long time under the European who could provide him with money and morals.⁵⁷ Stormont did not comment on the European teacher as the Commissioners would have liked; but he was impressed by the effect of missionary education that has liberated the impulse of individualism in the 'native' by crushing by tribal norms. There is little of industrial training in the Cape Colony but it must be seen in perspective. Industrial education is no prophylactic against moral weakness because those who show less capacity for academics turn to industrial education; these function as second rate people with lower moral quality of life.

Interestingly, the other leaders of institutions in the southern African region echoed Stormont. Henderson of Lovedale repeated the goals of moral regeneration and character formation, confessed the little engagement in higher education, unfocused goal of generating Christian influence in the communities, and low priority of industrial education because the youth find it unattractive. Even less attention was paid to girls' education because they would rather stay at home. Blame polygamy, early marriage and love of ease.

Rev J.D.Taylor of Adams Mission Station, Natal, devoted immense effort in answering the questionnaire. He perceived the moral dimension of missionary education, the access to the Bible, arousal of interest in higher education, and spread of Christian influence. But he rated the enterprise as a failure because of poorly trained native teachers, who despoil primary schools and lack earnestness in giving religious education. Blames go to parents who use child labor and encourage indolence and absenteeism as well as the Government that under-funds education. He explained missionary reluctance to engage in higher education precisely because the products so far are

“leavening the native population with new ideas and ambitions—a process which is at the present stage unsatisfactory in many of its results, and is causing a ferment of half-comprehended ideas.”⁵⁸

The teaching-learning environment, observed Taylor, is vitiated by an over-emphasis on academics, undue attention to examination results by government inspectors, lack of textbooks suitable for local conditions, and multiplication of low quality schools by competing societies. Industrial education has low priority because the Government plays to the gallery of white labor organizations who resent the skill acquisition by blacks. The dark picture in South Africa is completed by Rev L. Fuller of Johannesburg who saw less of the academic emphasis and more of a religious emphasis in primary education, and would not encourage higher education for natives because it will afflict them “with a horror of hard work, either mental or physical”, and make them “rather immoral and very far from religious.”⁵⁹

In Nyasaland, the chorus continued as if orchestrated or reflected the editorial agenda behind the records. Dr Robert Laws of Livingstonia appeared to be the most optimistic about missionary education that has widened the horizon of those who have learnt to read, enculturated higher ideals and standard of life, and created a fruitful evangelistic agency. Miss M.W. Bulley of the Universities Missions to Central Africa, Likoma, explained the catch phrase, 'higher ideals'. It means “bringing the natives in touch with European ideas”, building a disciplined character and breaking ties with traditional norms. Or, as Dr Hetherwick of Blantyre Mission put it, “gradual purifying of the atmosphere of native

⁵⁷ III:175

⁵⁸ *ibid.*,180

⁵⁹ *ibid.*,183

thought and morality, and imparting a higher ideal of life to the native and his race.”⁶⁰ All agreed that higher education was practically non-existent and industrial education was confined to producing artisans who work for the mission stations. According to Rev. H.H. Weatherhead of King’s School, Buddu, Uganda, the training of indigenous teachers remains unorganized and on small scale because the salaries are low and young people would prefer other occupations. The Native Church apparently paid low wages to the clergy in Uganda as in the Sierra Leone. In 1950, the World Council of Christian Education, in New York, conducted a very elaborate global survey of the practice of Christian Education, and produced a source book for the convention in Toronto. Virtually all respondents linked evangelism to Christian education and stressed moral formation and destruction of indigenous religions as their aims.

Internal Diagnosis: Problems and Prospects

The missionaries pointed to some of the problems and possible solutions. On the social environment, they pointed to the political resurgence, Ethiopianism, that spread throughout the Zambesi, Cape Province, Natal and Nyasaland; the effect of increased demand for labor in the mines and its attendant moral consequences; growth of Islam; the spread of materialism and urbanization; and the competition by governments, some of whom were hostile as the French in Madagascar, or suspicious of missionaries as the Portuguese in Mozambique. Besides, Africa suffered from conflicting policies by the British, French, Portuguese and Belgians.

The missionaries did not always agree on how to improve the results of missionary education. J.K.McGregor, United Free Church, Calabar, blamed the lazy ‘natives’, their distaste for manual labor, and preference for high salaries as interpreters and civil servants. Others wanted a review of the teaching-learning environment. Dr. Weatherhead raised the question “whether (missionaries) may not have laid too much stress on Bible teaching in the past to the exclusion of the practical side of education.”⁶¹ Rev W.T.Balmer of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Freetown, Sierra Leone concurred, adding that Sierra Leone was now educating the fourth generation of Africans; that the Native Pastorate handled much of the Christian work while missionaries served as supervisors. However,

“the weakness of the system of education which followed the British models too closely is now apparent...Education has been too much confined to instruction in the art of reading and writing, with the tacit assumption that manual labour is of less dignity and worth than the exercise of those accomplishment...Mere book knowledge is compatible with the retention of the corrupting notions of the natural world, and is even capable of aggravation of the corrupt ideas which prevail. Hence in the educational policy of Missionary Societies, emphasis should now be laid upon the giving of instruction in manual arts and upon the systematic study of nature.”⁶²

Beyond content, the use of vernacular as a means of instruction and the use of indigenous literature became contentious. The Commissioners had been scandalized by the fact that

“ so little has as yet been done in this direction that there is not even a school history of South Africa dealing with the subject in any way suitable for natives or from the native point of view. The musical gift of many of the African native tribes is

⁶⁰ *ibid.*,187

⁶¹ *ibid.*,197

⁶² *ibid.*,197-198

remarkable. As at Hampton and Tuskegee in the United States, vocal music may be made a great factor in this connection. Much good is done by the introduction of hymns in the vernacular as an alternative to such of the native songs as are low and indecent.”⁶³

The debate on the use of English squared off Dr Stormont against M. Junod of Lourenco Marquez who had delivered a very thoughtful paper entitled, *Native education and native literature* at Bloemfontein Missionary Conference in 1909. Stormont had delivered his counter view on *Literature for native Christians* at a conference in Johannesburg in 1906. Three issues were raised: use of English as a branch of study; use of English as a means of instruction; and at what level of education. The protagonists said little about the translation of the Bible or catechisms into indigenous languages. Yet, this was the primary literature for learning to read; except in Francophone colonies where people were designated as illiterates if they could not read in French, and even if they could read in Bambara or any other indigenous language. The debate turned into the contest between a monocultural and a multicultural approach to education.

Arguing for the former, Stormont insisted on the use of English as a branch of study and means of instruction at all levels, because it will help the blacks in their relationship with whites; it is necessary for commerce and civilized life; good government and public morality; and it will be economical as students could acquire cheap literature from Europe. He represented those who fought against vernacularization because

“there is no native literature in Africa. Tradition is largely based on myths and vague ideas. Thus, there is practically no stock on which to graft Christian ideas.”⁶⁴

The Nigerian representatives disputed this because enormous translation work had been a part of the missionary task in West Africa. As W.H. Mobley has shown, the indigenous educated elite in the Gold Coast had graduated by 1900 from producing literature of tutelage to critical literature. P.E. H. Hair has studied the enormous translation work in West Africa and commended the high quality of the Efik Bible translated by the Presbyterians, thirty odd years before Edinburgh conference. Translation work was a priority for Adjai Crowther who co-operated with Schon to publish a number of such translations; he also encouraged missionaries on the Niger to do so. J.D.Y Peel has argued that the Yoruba Bible created the identity of the Yoruba. The ingenious capacity of T. J. Dennis who gathered a group of indigenes to produce the Ibo Bible (1907-1911) has been celebrated as the achievement of the Church Missionary Society in Nigeria. John S. Mbiti, therefore, explored the translations and impact of the Bible on Africa in 1987. Three years later, Lamin Sanneh reinterpreted the African church historiography on the touchstone of translation.⁶⁵ Educationists recognize that first grounding in the vernacular is essential for transmitting and preserving indigenous knowledge and for developing mental and communication skills. The irony was that many communities wanted to learn English. When the CMS insisted on using vernacular as a

⁶³ *ibid.*, 203

⁶⁴ *ibid.* 203; see, Stormont, 204

⁶⁵ W.H Mobley, *The Ghanaians' Image of the Missionary* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1970); J.S.Mbiti, *Theology and Bible in Africa* (Nairobi: Oxford University press, 1987); Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989); John Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002); P.E.H. Hair, *The Early Study of Nigerian Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967). See the chapter on translation work in N.Omenka, *Schools as means of evangelization* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1991)

means of instruction, village chiefs chose to patronize the Roman Catholics who easily obliged to teach in English. Pundits wager that this fact explains the pre-eminence of the Roman Catholics in education and numbers of votaries in civil service and professions. But all these appear as historical hindsight.

Among the protagonists of this era, William Beck of the American Lutheran Church, Monrovia, Liberia, concurred with Stormont that he “finds native tongues barren of words to express Christian thought.”⁶⁶ Dr Laws added his weighty voice to urge that the vernacular suffered from an imprecise interior and encouraged tribalism. Those who deploy the political theory of mobilization in nation building, always look for a *lingua franca* that would wipe away competing power nodes and the differences of “tribes and tongues.” Missionary ideology in the settler communities was a mobilizing concept. Vernacularization was not one of its ideals. The total rejection of the resources of indigenous knowledge destroyed the potential of a liberating education.

H. A. Junod (Mission Romande, Switzerland/Rikatla, Mozambique) countered that the mother tongue must be retained because it is the medium of thought and emotion; for producing native teachers who will teach their compatriots because English is as foreign to them as Latin was to Europeans; their vernacular is composite and contains all that is necessary for communication. J.E. Hamshere (CMS, Freretown) opined that Swahili was sufficient for those in British East Africa. At this point, P.S. Kirkwood of Livingstonia beat his chest in guilt and picked up enough courage to disagree with the venerable Dr Laws:

“Let us remember how much our own national growth in Christianity was hastened by translation of the Scriptures into our mother tongue. We must get at the hearts as well as the heads of the natives. For that we need the vernacular... our students when they pass to the village schools as teachers are apt to attach an altogether exaggerated importance to English, both as a medium of instruction and as a branch of study.”⁶⁷

Vernacular, some argued, could be the needed antidote to the nagging problem of “narrow ignorance and overweening self-conceit” among educated Africans. Europeans found their insolence to be insufferable and caricatured them as “Black Englishmen.” In Joyce Cary’s novel, *Mister Johnson*, the Europeans deserted the African who dared to dress in white and inch his way into the charmed circle.

However, many missionaries conceded that translating the Bible into indigenous languages was one kettle of fish, using the vernacular as a medium of instruction was another. The myriads of languages and dialects may necessitate the use of English at the higher levels of education while vernacular could be used to teach at the lowest grades. Rev. W.T. Balmer of Sierra Leone had the brilliant idea that the best means of cleansing the impurities of the vernacular was “having it used properly and vigorously in schools and colleges, where its use can be brought under direct Christian oversight.”⁶⁸ Few were prepared to engage in such sanitary work. Some looked into the seeds of time and predicted that the future belonged to western civilization; the blacks cannot do without European supervision; and the appropriate language of the future should be English. The debate among the correspondents said more about the minds of missionaries and the temper of the era than the subject matter.

6. Conclusion: ecumenism as an antidote

⁶⁶ III:207

⁶⁷ *ibid.*,206

⁶⁸ *ibid.*,207

The Commissioners were overwhelmed by the discordant voices emanating from the mission fields, impressed by the breadth of the continent and complexities of its problems, and filled with “anxieties as to the present results of some of the educational work upon which men and women are unselfishly spending themselves in many regions of the African mission field.”⁶⁹ Scholars, therefore, speak about African Christianities that grew out of these realities as well as the patterns of appropriation of the gospel from many cultural contexts. Edinburgh Conference proffered few solutions: it sought to bring modern educational theories into missionary practice. In considering the immense challenges, it suggested an ecumenical endeavor as antidote, urging missionaries to co-operate in building inspectorate divisions in the system, operating joint training of teachers so as to harmonize the instructional methods, intensifying the care of alumni, improving the education of the girl child, and especially emphasizing handwork, manual labor, sports, industrial skill acquisition and agricultural education. The North American ideals of Hampton and Tuskegee Institute would continue to beckon throughout the colonial period. But the Commissioners were aware of the need to review the education ideology at the home base of mission and the training of those who will go out as teachers. Many missionary societies did not differentiate between gospel bearers and teachers, or provided them with the requisite skills. A study of ministerial formation institutions that prepared missionaries in various parts of Europe and America will be quite instructive. Government inspectors complained about the rapid opening of schools in the heat of rivalry without adequately trained teachers. Missionary co-operation would, by delimiting areas of operation, diminish competition; by bonding save resources and avoid duplication; and by dialogue engage the colonial governments’ policies, and harmonize cultural policy in response to the tensile strength of indigenous religions and cultures. Examples abound that from 1911, the conference inspired many co-operative efforts.⁷⁰

But Christian missionary enterprise remained unsuccessful till after the First World War because its cultural hardware and dark image of the African hosts restrained its capacity to exploit the inculturating pathways. Ironically, education and translation would fuel both charismatic spirituality and nationalism and change the character of Christianity in the aftermath of the conference. The gospel would expand under the indigenous bearers just as it did in the early church. All these lay in the future. The challenge of re-imagining the Edinburgh Conference is to reconstruct it with a keen eye to context. It was 1910 and hindsight does no justice to the protagonists. Christianity had not encountered many African communities in the hinterland of the coastal regions. The European mind gloried in the Enlightenment worldview and Social Darwinism. The missionary was a child of his age and struggled to balance an evangelical spirituality with the racism of the age and the challenge of a civilizing mission. The exigencies of the mission field, the compelling desire to work with the colonial governments, and the resilience of indigenous structures complicated the scene. Indeed, some of their strategies were sourced from the model employed in dealing with delinquent children in 19th century Europe. A missionary would often adapt the familiar principles of education. William H. Taylor’s study of the Scottish Presbyterian Mission to

⁶⁹ *ibid.*,166

⁷⁰ O.U.Kalu, *Divided People of God: Church Union Movement in Nigeria, 1875-1966* (New York: NOK Publishers, 1978). Deeply impressed by the Edinburgh Conference, Wilkie of the UFC initiated the regular meetings between the CMS, Qua Iboe Mission and the CSM in Eastern Nigeria from 1911. These inspired the church union movement.

eastern Nigeria, argued that, “the first Calabar mission schools were to borrow many of their practices from the Ragged Schools that had been started in Edinburgh by philanthropist and theologian Thomas Guthrie and from the Scottish Sunday School movement.”⁷¹ Africans were read as “docile bodies”, to borrow from Michel Foucault. A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved; or plastic according to Mott. Chosen young, three factors, time, space and the constitution of a new individuality, contributed directly to the culmination of this African docile body.⁷²

This makes the conference significant in revealing the strength of the missionary enterprise as its capacity for self-criticism. The Commissioners and the men-on –the –spot differed over the ideals, content and method of education. The Commissioners set out to revamp the entire educational apparatus of evangelism by indigenising it. That was a tall order. Yet on closer look, the Commissioners did not go far enough in distinguishing *training* from *education*. They diagnosed that the primary pedagogy for learning did little to impress upon the learner the importance of knowing self. It was directed more toward a formation that promotes social maintenance instead of promoting a liberating agenda that reveals the divinity of the human spirit. It fitted individuals into the colonial caste system maintained by the pedagogical approach termed as “action-reaction”. Most often this is manifest in “presentation of information-information regurgitation” or banking model. It did not encourage reflection and analysis as much as it promoted singularity of thought, uniformity of ideas, and monolithic universality of response. It privileged training over against education. Training is skill based, whereas education is identity based. Training focuses on learning mechanics; education focuses on learning one’s place in the world through an emphasis on one’s history or high culture. Education nurtures the human being and expands the person’s understanding of the self through the identification of a cultural-social location.

The historian must, however, put their ideals in the context of the period. What is the significance of reconstructing this era? The result provides an interesting cameo of an era, an insight into the adventurous western imagination at the turn of the century, and the backdrop to what happened later. Indeed, the revolution in education in the aftermath of the Conference becomes more significant. As education exploded, it became clear that it was the African who initiated the modern face of Christianity. Mary Slessor wrote soon after the Edinburgh Conference that the chiefs at Itu “want their boys educated and they want someone to guide them safely through the new world in which they are being enclosed by the white man of whom they know so little and whom they fear.”⁷³

This is more astonishing because Edinburgh Conference did not represent the actual face of Christianity in Africa because of the lenses used in reading the people and their responses to the presence of the kingdom of God in their midst. By focusing on the settler communities of southern and central Africa, it missed the ferment in the western theatre and the signals of transcendence all over the continent. It ignored the key players in the indigenising movement, misrepresented Ethiopianism and paid scant attention to the rising tide of charismatic revivals. Finally, education became the strongest weapon in western underdevelopment of Africa because of its power of eradication. It is intriguing to note how some of the missionary ideas of the early period survived till the decolonisation period and

⁷¹ William H. Taylor, *Mission to Educate* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1996): 11

⁷² M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979): 136; V. Y. Mudimbe, *Tales of Faith: Religion as Political performance in Central Africa* (London: The Athlone Press, 1997): 50-51

⁷³ *Record, 1911: 168* cit. *ibid.*: 125

served as the backdrop of the hostility to missionary control of education. The study of the past always has meaning for the present and future. It is always useful to know where the rain met us.