

A Tale of Two Conferences

The Father of modern Missions, William Carey, was a man ahead of his time. In 1810, he proposed a World Missions Conference, and he suggested Cape Town as the ideal venue! It was 100 years later, in 1910, that the first World Missions Conference was held, in Edinburgh. Two hundred years after William Carey had proposed it, Cape Town hosted the Third Lausanne Conference on World Evangelism, October 2010.

Cape Town 2010

It was a tremendous privilege to participate in this Congress on World Evangelisation. With over 4,200 invited participants from 198 countries, and extending through global link sites to another 700 venues across 95 countries, Cape Town 2010 was the largest and most representative Missions Conference in history.

Edinburgh 1910

Although I did not hear anyone in any of the plenary sessions refer to Edinburgh 1910, I had to conclude that surely it had been the intention to mark the centenary of the first World Missions Conference.

William Carey's Vision

Similarly, although none of the speakers that I heard, nor any of the publications which the official organisers produced, referred to William Carey's vision of a World Missions Conference in 1810, it had to have been more than an extraordinary coincidence, that here we were in Cape Town, at what William Carey had described as the uttermost part of the earth, at the junction between East and West, at the port that sat astride two oceans, the Atlantic and the Indian oceans, in the shadow of Table Mountain, to discuss the fulfilment of the Great Commission.

The Father of Modern Missions

Dr. William Carey is rightly called the Father of Modern Missions. His book, *An Enquiry Into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means For the Conversion of the Heathen*, is credited as being the book that launched the Modern Missionary movement. In 1793, en-route to India, William Carey's ship docked in Cape Town and he was struck by the ideal setting of Cape Town, at the uttermost parts of the earth, a half way house between Europe and Asia, for a World Missions Conference, which he proposed be held in 1810! William Carey became the most prolific Bible translator in history, translating the complete Bible into 6 Asian languages, and the New Testament and Gospels into another 29 languages. Since William Carey launched the greatest century of Missions, more than 80% of all Protestant Missionaries have been English speakers.

Operation World

Another extraordinary coincidence was that the seventh edition of Operation World was launched at the Cape Town 2010 Congress. In its Foreword, Operation World acknowledges that the very first Missionary Prayer Guide to the world was written by William Carey in 1792: *An Enquiry Into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means For the Conversion of the Heathen*. This was the first global survey ever printed and the inspiration for the present phenomenon of Operation World.

Andrew Murray

Although it was not mentioned at the congress, Dr. Andrew Murray, the Scottish South African minister, in 1900, wrote, *The Key to the Missionary Problem* and challenged the church to hold weeks of prayer for world Missions.

The Whole Church Taking the World Gospel to the Whole World

As with previous Lausanne Congress, the focus was on The Whole Church Taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World. However, I could not help wonder, why none of the speakers referred to the deliberations, presentations, conclusions and projections of the first World Missions Conference at Edinburgh, 1910?

“Without a vision, a people perish...” Proverbs 29:18

The Greatest Century of Missions

The 19th century was the greatest century of Missionary advance. It was a century of astounding inventions and of spectacular advances in technology. Many countries in Europe and overseas experienced dramatic spiritual Revivals. Christian Missionaries, most of whom came from the British Isles, won whole tribes and nations to Christ, in the remotest regions of the globe. Christianity came to the beginning of the 20th century on a rising and apparently unstoppable tide. Christianity was gaining spectacular momentum, as Missionaries from Europe were Evangelising and discipling virtually every tribe and nation.

Flourishing Faith and Freedom

The Protestant Faith had far outstripped the Catholic and Orthodox branches in missionary activity, vitality and initiative. From being confined almost entirely to North Western Europe, the British Isles and a narrow strip on the Eastern seaboard of North America, and with a very small outpost at the Cape of Good Hope, the Protestant Faith in the 19th century had become a truly international Faith. It was the dominant Faith of the most productive, powerful and prosperous nations in both the Northern and Southern hemispheres. Amidst irrepressible optimism, many were openly speaking of the beginning of the Biblical millennium on earth.

Christians Dominated the World

In 1910, Christian nations ruled virtually the whole world. With the exception of China, Japan, and the Ottoman Empire, the globe was dominated by Christian powers, especially Protestant, Great Britain, Germany and the United States.

A Century of Peace and Progress

Following the Battle of Waterloo and the defeat of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna had ushered in a century of comparative peace, astounding increases in population, and unprecedented increases in productivity and standards of living. The 19th century had been a century of astounding achievements, growth and expansion. By 1910, the world was being led by people who had traditionally been known as Christian.

Anticipating the Fulfilment of the Great Commission

At the first World Missions Congress in Edinburgh in 1910, delegates were anticipating the extinction of all false religions by 1960. The consensus of the speakers at Edinburgh 1910, was that every tribe and nation will have been thoroughly Evangelised and disciplined by 1960. They were anticipating the fulfilment of the Great Commission and the beginning of the Biblical Millennium on earth - before the end of the 20th century!

Retreat from Victory

No one in 1910 could have anticipated the wholesale abandonment of entire nations to communism, to false religions and heathenism. Nor would any have predicted that the Church would retreat from victory to such an extent that they would even be questioning the existence of the devil, or hell, or reinterpreting marriage to include that which God in the Bible describes as perversion and an abomination.

When the Church Fails to Be Salt and Light

The devastating and far reaching results of Western Europe's retreat from victory, and of Christians withdrawal from impacting society, is clearly seen in the shocking statistics of heathen nations which by now should have been thoroughly Evangelised and disciplined. That is, if Christians in Europe and America had not been so busy bombing cities and killing millions of

fellow Christians in the First and Second World Wars.

Return to Paganism

The Missionary leaders who gathered in Edinburgh, 1910, would never have believed that by 2010, Europe would have become mostly secular and that the countries at that time that were being evangelised, civilised and disciplined, would have, in so many cases, returned to such pagan savagery.

The Great Civil War of the West

What no one at the 1910 Conference could have envisaged was the devastating impact of two World Wars. The heartland of the Church and of Mission sending agencies, wiped out millions of one another, and at the end of it, Europe was no longer the greatest economic, political and spiritual power on earth. Instead of disciplining the world, Christians allowed themselves to be manipulated into devastating one another's countries.

One Hundred Years Later

This year, 2014, marks the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the greatest catastrophe in the history of civilisation, World War One. Prior to 1914, Christian nations ruled the world. The 19th

century was the greatest century of Missions. Great Britain in particular, was succeeding in bringing the Gospel of Christ, literacy, civilisation and the rule of law to even the most remote and primitive parts of the globe. However, after two world wars, Europe went from being a majority church-going population to a spiritual wasteland, where only small percentages of each nation still attended church.

Filling the Vacuum

The vacuum left by Europe abandoning Africa in de-colonisation was quickly filled during the Cold War by the Soviet Union and Red China with virulent communism and anti-Christian atheism.

The Guns of August

The Christian era of bold Missionary expansion came to an abrupt end as the guns of August 1914, erupted. The great European countries which had been the heartland of Christendom, and the source of most of the missionaries, devastated each others economies and annihilated millions of one another's young men, in what has to be recognised as the most tragic, senseless and counter-productive conflict in history.

Continental Suicide

Before the First World War, no continent had ever been as powerful as Europe. There was no hint of any possible challenge to British dominance of the world. 1914 marks a far more drastic turning point than 1815, or 1648, or any other of the watershed events of history. Nothing could have stopped the positive, onward march of Christianity worldwide, except that Christians were persuaded to kill one another so enthusiastically and so efficiently. Far more devastating than the actual numbers of people killed, crippled, or severely injured, was the damage to the spiritual life of Europe, and the world. The 19th century was the greatest century of Missions, but the 20th century became the worst century of persecution.

Refocusing on What Ultimately Matters

It is absolutely essential that we, the children of Abraham, learn the lessons of history and rediscover our purpose as God's people, to refocus on the fulfilment of the Great Commission, to make disciples of all nations, teaching obedience to all things that the Lord has commanded. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. Our purpose on earth is to fulfil the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and finisher of our Faith..." Hebrews 12:1-2

Dr. Peter Hammond

Frontline Fellowship
P.O. Box 74 Newlands 7725
Cape Town South Africa
Tel: 021-689-4480
Fax: 021-685-5884
Email: mission@frontline.org.za
Website: www.frontline.org.za