



## *Did Cape Town 2010 Correct the “Edinburgh Error”? A Preliminary Analysis*

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### Introduction

Prior to several 2010 centennials of the famous World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910 my article, “Will We Correct the Edinburgh Error?” was published in the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* and then republished in two parts in the various language versions of the Vatican’s missionary magazine, *Omnis Terra*.<sup>1</sup> For many years it had seemed to me that the fateful “error” at Edinburgh was its failure to deal with vital matters of the Christian faith—with theological and doctrinal issues crucial to the future of Christian mission. In view of challenges external and internal to the church at the time, that failure was as inexcusable as it was ominous.<sup>2</sup>

Anglican John R. W. Stott is even more straightforward. What I have termed a “fateful error,” he categorizes as a “fatal flaw” and then goes on to say,

Theologically, the fatal flaw at Edinburgh was not so much doctrinal disagreement as apparent doctrinal indifference, since doctrine was not on the agenda. Vital themes like the content of the gospel, the theology of evangelism and the nature of the church were not discussed. The reason is that Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury, as a condition of participation at Edinburgh, secured a promise from John R. Mott that doctrinal debate could be excluded. *In consequence, the theological challenges of the day were not faced. And, during the decades that followed, the poison of theological liberalism seeped into the bloodstream of western universities and seminaries, and largely immobilized the churches’ mission.*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See David J. Hesselgrave, “Will We Correct the Edinburgh Error? Future Mission in Historical Perspective,” in *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 49, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 121-49.

<sup>2</sup>Introductory Note: In this article, I am dealing with only one slice (theology) of a missionary movement that, when Pentecostals are included, has become one of the most significant developments of the post-war era. My concern here has to do with the relationship between evangelical missions and the revealed truth of God. Divine truth is the lifeblood of missions past, present and future. All else is dependent on its acceptance and vitality.

<sup>3</sup>John R. W. Stott, “An Historical Introduction,” in *Making Christ Known: Historic*

Stott is right, of course. In addition to the neglected themes he mentions, Edinburgh failed to deal with the need for a clear confession of faith, the historicity and authority of the Bible, special problems in geographical areas dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, and, yes, the very nature of the Christian mission itself. Conference planners seem to have prized spiritual fellowship and unity more than theological integrity. Following their lead, organizers of subsequent ecumenical councils and the World Council of Churches (WCC) itself gave highest priority to organizational unity. Leaders often quoted our Lord's prayer, "That they may be one . . . so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21). Rarely if ever mentioned, however, were his prior words, "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth" (Jn 17:17).

By the close of the twentieth century, the deleterious consequences of all of this were readily apparent. In the mainline denominations that comprised the bulk of WCC membership, orthodox doctrine yielded to liberalism, and biblical mission practically died. Those denominations had provided eighty percent of the North American Protestant missionary force at the beginning of the twentieth century; they provided but six percent at its close.

### Three Centennial Celebrations in 2010

In this context I will deal briefly with three of the four commemorations of Edinburgh that were held in 2010—an ecumenical celebration attended by about 300 participants from around the world and held in Edinburgh itself; a more conservative Global Mission Consultation held in Tokyo, Japan and attended by approximately 900 delegates from about 60 nations; and, primarily, the most important of these celebrations—the Third Congress on World Evangelization held in Cape Town, South Africa, and attended by over 4,000 participants from 198 countries.

#### Edinburgh 2010

The program, study documents, and "Common Call" of the ecumenical commemoration held in Edinburgh in 2010 laid to rest any lingering doubts as to whether John Stott's and my assessments of the intentional dismissal of doctrinal discussions at Edinburgh 1910 are accurate and fair. The study documents emphasized that mission is no longer founded just on the Bible but on three bases: 1) experience or context, 2) diverse understandings of the biblical text, and 3) new theological frameworks. Reportedly, the initial draft of its "Common Call" emphasized the notion that "God's mission" is especially concerned with liberation and justice. *Only later was the word "evangelism" inserted.*

### Tokyo 2010

The Global Mission Consultation in Tokyo can be located near the other end of the theological/missiological continuum. The preamble of its “Tokyo 2010 Declaration” begins with an affirmation of Scripture’s authority and with the Christian mission as being primarily occupied with the completion of the Great Commission:

We affirm that mission is the central theme of Scripture, through which God reveals Himself to be a God who communicates and works through us by action and word in a world estranged from Him. Furthermore, we recognize that fulfilling and bringing completion to Jesus’ Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:44-49; Jn 20:21; Acts 1:8) has been the on-going responsibility of the Church for 2000 years.<sup>4</sup>

The Declaration then proceeds with affirmations and biblical confirmations having to do with “Mankind’s Need” (the lostness of all people); “God’s Remedy” (the gospel of Christ); “Our Responsibility” (the priority of disciple-making); and “Finishing the Task.” The statement concludes with a pledge: “With this in mind, we leave Tokyo pledging cooperation with one another, and all others of like faith, with the singular goal of making disciples of every people in our generation.”<sup>5</sup>

Finally, a “Saint Paul Award” was given to leaders from various nations who had made outstanding contributions to Christian missions over the years. This was not only a generous act; it was an act that, along with the Declaration, commended biblical mission to evangelicals the world over. On the other side of the coin, however, the idea that “mission is the central theme of Scripture” is highly questionable though frequently asserted. Mission is *our* work. The central theme of Scripture is Christ and *his* work. Also, the Declaration writers failed to make even one explicit reference to the church of Christ (though they did make reference to the “Body”). It is unlikely that the apostle Paul would have been guilty of such an omission!

### Cape Town 2010

By almost any measure, the Third Congress on World Evangelization held in October in Cape Town, South Africa, was the most significant of 2010 centennials, especially from an evangelical point of view. Planned and led primarily by leaders of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) and the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF), though with the aid of representatives from other evangelical groupings, it was most representative of evangelicalism as a whole. By virtue of its “Cape

<sup>4</sup>See “Appendix 10: Tokyo 2010 Declaration: Making Disciples of Every People in Our Generation,” in *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2011), 446-50.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 449.

Town Commitment” and programs projected for the future, it promises to be of signal importance to the future of evangelical missions thinking and involvement. For these reasons, Cape Town is the primary focus of this reflection.

### **The Third Congress on World Evangelization in Cape Town And the Future of Evangelical Missions**

I can appreciate that the overwhelming sense of spiritual exhilaration widely reported by those privileged to attend the Congress in Cape Town is both true and real. Having read the voluminous “Cape Town Commitment,” it is obvious that the document represents the earnest desires and noble aspirations of many evangelicals and, in that sense, is both uplifting and encouraging. That much is not in question. The question is, “Did the Consultation correct the Edinburgh error and therefore harbinger success for the future of evangelical missions?” Let us explore this question in the light of some recent history and biblical theology.

#### **Some Relevant History**

Human nature being what it is, internecine struggles began to plague evangelicals almost immediately after the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies (EFMA) in the late 1940s.<sup>6</sup> Early on, some of the most divisive of those struggles had to do with whether or not liberal prelates should be included in mass evangelism efforts; whether Scripture is authoritative in its entirety (inerrancy) or only in what it affirms (infallibility); and whether Christian mission is primarily evangelism/church development or also inclusive of socio-political action.

As time went on, additional problems were posed by “new” proposals forwarded in movements such as Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT), the Emergent Church (EC) and New Perspectives on Paul (NPP). All three of these movements are amorphous and with almost as many views as members. However, ECT proponents have tended to be ambiguous when it comes to Catholic and Evangelical differences on such matters as imputed versus imparted righteousness, the authority of Tradition and the Magisterium, the mediating role of Mary, and the sacrifice of the Mass. Charles Colson, for example, has treated the Eucharist in such a way as to obscure profound differences between Protestant and Catholic understandings of it. EC leaders have often encouraged younger evangelicals to divest themselves of the teachings of their forebears and embrace new understandings. One of the EC founders, Brian McLaren, has endorsed “missional” as connoting that believers first determine what their mission is and then construct a theology that supports it. And W. D. Davies’ new understanding of Paul which made justification by faith secondary to the centrality of Christ in Paul’s epistles

<sup>6</sup>The EFMA is now The Mission Exchange.

became a precursor of the NPP Movement.<sup>7</sup> Thirty years later, in the late 1970s, NPP theologian E. P. Sanders concluded that “works righteousness” was not a problem for the Rabbis of New Testament times because they understood obedience to the Law as being a response to God’s love for Israel. He called this “covenantal nomism” and saw it as the kind of religion known by Jesus and, most likely, by Paul as well.

This is not the place to examine the degree to which ideas such as the foregoing rest on historical-critical methods of Bible interpretation, or their validity in the light of biblical theology, or their impact upon evangelical understandings of mission theology and strategy. But it is both the time and a place to note the importance of all of this and to consider how evangelicals ought to respond.

### **Prioritism and Holism in the Lausanne Movement**

As a broad-based evangelical movement, Lausanne has not been immune to any of these challenges, but it has been especially vulnerable to one of them—namely, holism and even radical holism. Precursor to the Lausanne Movement was the World Congress on Evangelism held in Berlin in 1966. Sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Foundation and *Christianity Today* magazine, the Congress was an outgrowth of questions that had been raised regarding the validity of cooperative evangelism and the importance of evangelism and world evangelization. As a gathering of internationals engaged in evangelism it was widely heralded as a success though some were critical of the fact that it did not deal with the relationship between evangelism and social concern.

Due largely to the influence of Latin evangelicals, that relationship became a major concern at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization held in Switzerland in 1974 (Lausanne I). Its Lausanne Covenant, of which Anglican John Stott was the chief architect, established an enduring partnership between evangelism and socio-political action in mission. Evangelism, however, was still a basic concern in 1974-75. Ralph Winter gave an impassioned and well received appeal to reach “unreached peoples” at the Congress. There was also an interest in Church Growth as mirrored in the discussions about Donald McGavran’s “Homogeneous Unit Principle.” Then, in a follow-up book, Stott himself maintained that, in the partnership between evangelism and socio-political action, a “*certain priority*” for evangelism prevails.<sup>8</sup>

Subsequently the precise nature of this “priority” proved to be a very sticky wicket for the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization (LCWE) and for evangelicals in general. It was made “more sticky” when, in

<sup>7</sup>Cf. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980); and E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977).

<sup>8</sup>“Certain priority” is Stott’s phrase. One could wish that he had said *clear* priority! Cf. John Stott, *Christian Mission in the World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 41-47.

the work just mentioned, Stott also advocated his preference for John 20:21 as over against Matthew 28:16-20 as a statement of the Great Commission, and for the ministry of Jesus rather than the ministry of Paul as a model for missionaries. To top it off, the issue of priority became really, really sticky when, some thirty years later, Ralph Winter himself announced his “radically different interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer and the Great Commission.”<sup>9</sup> To the consternation of numerous of his colleagues, though to the delight of others, he proposed a kingdom-oriented missionary approach that made God glorifiable and the gospel credible by engaging in good deeds designed to “destroy the works of the Devil.”

In short, 2010, the year of Edinburgh centennials, dawned to find evangelical missions in full array and missionaries actively engaged in all sorts of worthy endeavors. But when it came down to their understanding of the Christian mission itself and how best to go about it, very often they were in disarray. A variety of movements and Lausanne itself had given birth to problems that cried out for attention and, to the degree possible, resolution. How would Cape Town respond? Would it correct the Edinburgh Error?

### **Focus on Cape Town**

There were many similarities between the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh and the Cape Town Congress. Both were faced with critical issues from both outside and inside the church and its missions. Many, if not most, of those issues were theological in nature. Both gatherings possessed a unique opportunity to influence the future of a large segment of the Christian church for good or for ill.

Of course, there were differences as well. Edinburgh 1910 was the beginning of the twenty-first century Ecumenical Movement while the Cape Town 2010 gathering occurred more than a half century after the beginning of the Modern Evangelical movement. Edinburgh 1910 produced a document calculated to help missions better understand the world and its peoples; Cape Town 2010 produced the much more significant “Cape Town Commitment” which included a whole host of proposals intended to help missions better understand and carry out their mission to a postmodern, globalized, and needy world.<sup>10</sup>

### **But Did Cape Town Correct the Edinburgh Error?— That is the Question!**

We can agree with the majority of participants that Cape Town was a worthy commemoration of Edinburgh 1910. With many more participants, a

<sup>9</sup>See David J. Hesselgrave, “A Prolegomena to Understanding and Evaluating Dr. Ralph Winter’s ‘Fourth Era Kingdom Mission,’” in *Occasional Bulletin of the Evangelical Missiological Society* 21, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 1-4.

<sup>10</sup>The full text of the “Cape Town Commitment” is available online at [www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment](http://www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment). For summary of this document, see “Summary of the Cape Town Commitment” in *Edinburgh 2010*, 443-45.

huge increase in the number of representatives from the nonwestern world, a veritable avalanche of publications, and the prospect of continuing dialogues and discussions, Cape Town 2010 has the potential of being every bit as determinative of the future of twenty-first century evangelical missions as Edinburgh 1910 was of twentieth century ecumenical missions.

Only the passage of years will reveal whether Cape Town's influence will turn out to be positive or, to use Stott's word, "poisonous." However, with the passing of those years, fewer and fewer of us who actually witnessed both the heyday and the near demise of ecumenical missions as well as the rise of the post-war evangelical missionary movement will still be around to monitor Cape Town outcomes. As one of those who will not have that opportunity, I view Cape Town productions (especially, its "Commitment") and projections and see potential in both directions. Accordingly, at this point, my answer to the question posed above is, "Maybe yes; maybe no."

### **Why "Maybe Yes"?**

As intimated above, it is relatively easy to see that, unlike Edinburgh 1910, Cape Town 2010 did not completely avoid theological issues. In fact, one can make a case for Cape Town as being a reflection of the "twin pillars" of mission and theology:

1. The organizing framework of the Congress was the familiar Lausanne formula, "The Whole Church taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World." This formula lent some assurance that, in addition to dealing with matters having to do with partnerships, logistics and strategy and, contra Stott's indictment of Edinburgh, Cape Town would also deal with matters having to do with the truths of the gospel, the importance of theological education, and the distinctive role of the church. And it did. Following suit, future consultations and conferences can be expected to deal with theological issues such as these as well as still others. This is encouraging.
2. Cape Town planners appointed a prominent evangelical theologian, Christopher J. H. Wright, to help set the agenda. Overall, theologians as well as Doug Birdsall and his fellow missiologists played a significant role in the planning and proceedings of the Congress. In addition, the appointment of a "think tank" helped to assure that evangelism and theology would not be overlooked at Cape Town and that, in turn, lends assurance that they are not likely to be overlooked in follow-up proceedings.
3. By virtue of the ready availability of a huge volume of Cape Town resources and the scheduling of upcoming gatherings that will consider and re-consider Cape Town proceedings and papers (including its Commitment), there will yet be numerous opportunities to rethink the Congress, reinforce



what is biblical, and correct/compensate for that which may have been mistaken or misleading. Perhaps this is the greatest encouragement of all because, if there is any one commonality that I have heard in reports of colleagues who were in attendance, it is to the effect that, though they experienced much of which they were appreciative, they also experienced certain (often rather inchoate) misgivings.

### Why “Maybe No”?

Clearly, then, Cape Town planners did not *commit* the Edinburgh Error. They did not disallow or dismiss theological discussions but rather invited them. But did they *correct* the Edinburgh Error? Perhaps not. In my view, Cape Town was not necessarily a step backward for evangelicals in mission, but neither was it necessarily a step forward. Why?

1. First, though Cape Town dealt with certain very important theological and doctrinal issues, it avoided others. Whether by design or default, some of the most sensitive and critical of those issues noted above were completely beneath Cape Town’s radar. That is not a hopeful sign. Long ago Archbishop William Temple uttered the now famous line, “All of our problems are theological.” He was right. In spite of a multiplicity of obstacles of all kinds that face biblical missions these days, the most serious among them are *interior* to the Modern Evangelical movement and theological in nature. The fact that some of the most crucial of them are seldom if ever recognized by evangelical practitioners on the front lines only underscores the responsibility of evangelical leaders to bring them to the level of awareness and deal with them openly and candidly. Cape Town will be of little help in that process unless evaluators take notice of the problem and place even the most sensitive of these issues on future agendas.
2. Second, though comprehensive and even expansionistic to a fault (some 29 pages!), the Cape Town Commitment leaves much to be desired theologically. Lausanne I propounded the “Lausanne *Covenant*,” Lausanne II, the “Manila *Manifesto*,” and Lausanne III, the “Cape Town *Commitment*.” The difference in terminology here may represent more than a rhetorical bow to alliteration. “Commitment” is the weakest of these three words. Also, substitution of the “we love” formula for either the traditional “we believe” or “we affirm” formulas at the beginning of Commitment paragraphs seems to represent a turn away from confessional objectivity and in the direction of existential subjectivity. It may also be indicative of a shift from traditional Pauline theology and

missiology to the “newer” interpretation of Rabbinic Judaism and the ministry of Paul mentioned above.

3. Third and perhaps most important in this regard, however, is the overwhelming number of “loves” in the Commitment—love of God’s Word, love of mission, love of the gospel, love for social justice, love for caring for creation, love for orality, love for storying, and on and on. This sort of expansionism overshadows the avowed “centrality” of evangelism and world evangelization. One cannot read this almost interminable list of “loves” without recalling Stephen Neill’s familiar warning to ecumenists of the last century: “When everything is mission, nothing is mission.”<sup>11</sup> Let us grant for the moment that all of the things enumerated in the Commitment may be good things to love; that all of the strategies mentioned may be good strategies to employ; and that all of the deeds advocated may be good deeds to do. Nevertheless, the first concern of Great Commission mission is not for good things, good strategies, and good deeds but for gospel proclamation. The primary consideration in gospel proclamation is not *felt love* but *true truth*.

### Hope for the Future—Three Imperatives

Recently, a much younger and highly respected evangelical professor of missions was motivated to write to a small circle of professor friends. Despite the many organizations, tremendous energy, and sometimes almost frenetic activity that characterizes the evangelical missionary movement these days, he warned that the future of evangelical missions is very much in jeopardy. With a deep sense of urgency, he urged his colleagues to be especially watchful and faithful to biblical faith and mission.

He is by no means alone. We do not like to face it and therefore we ordinarily do not, but some of our foremost evangelical theologians and historians also forecast a bleak future for evangelicals if they continue on their present path. Taking the long look, I understand. Review again the early struggles of post-war evangelicals mentioned above and you will notice a pattern. In those early controversies having to do with cooperative evangelism, the inerrancy of biblical autographs, and the priority of evangelism in mission, the issues were clearly delineated and opposing points of view were vigorously debated over a number of years. Nevertheless, agreement was not forthcoming. However, with the passage of time differences were more or less settled, *not* by reasoned discourse, but simply by a *growing indifference*. In all three cases, these controversies were “resolved” in a direction that can only be described as more liberal and less conservative.

John Stott is right. It could not have been *theological disagreement*

<sup>11</sup>Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 81.

that afflicted Edinburgh 1910, because its leaders disallowed theological discussion. It was *theological indifference* that was fatal both to Edinburgh and, later, to ecumenical missions. The same could be true of evangelical missions in the aftermath of Cape Town, not because critical theological discussions are *disallowed* but, rather, because they are *disdained*. Additionally, mission-minded evangelicals have an abiding interest in cultural change and simply *love* to generate and discuss new strategies for dealing with it. However, they tend to demonstrate an uneven interest in that which is *changeless* and are prone to taking unchanging truth for granted rather than celebrating it and elaborating it. *These preferences must change*. They must give way to three imperatives if evangelical missions as we know them are to have a future.

### **Imperative #1:**

To be and remain “evangelical,” mission entities must understand and describe Christian mission as witnessing to the truth of the “evangel” or good news of the gospel of Christ and discipling the peoples of the world in his Name with special attention being given to those who have yet to hear the gospel.

This imperative can be stated in a variety of ways, of course. It can also be carried out in a variety of ways. The endeavors that attend it will also differ. However, neither semantics nor theology should be allowed to obscure the fact that, at its very core, the missionary mandate is world evangelization. The word “mission” is a much debated term in mission circles. In secular parlance, however, it is almost invariably understood in accordance with its dictionary definition—i.e., as having to do with sending someone on a stipulated assignment or, sometimes, the stipulated assignment itself. Few, if any, seem to have a problem with this meaning of the word except those involved in the mission of the church! Historically, ecumenists have had a major problem with the word and now it occasions serious problems for evangelicals. That should be sufficient to alert us to the fact that the problem is as much *theological* as it is *semantic*—in fact, much more so.

That should not be and need not be. Missiologists who advocate the adoption of some alternative word that does not carry the same negative connotations have a point. Theoretically that could be done, but as a practical matter it is all but out of the question. Some missiologists advocate use of the biblical terms *apostolos* and *apostellō* and, following Catholic practice, urge us to think and speak in terms of the “apostolate.” That proposal has more to be said for it, but even if adopted it would not resolve the problem because it does not answer to the basic issue. Viewed from a biblical perspective the question is: “When New Testament missionary/apostles specifically, and successor missionaries generally, were sent forth, what was their stipulated assignment?” The answer to that question was so obvious to Stephen Neill some fifty years ago that he said, “If everything that the Church does is to be classed as ‘mission,’ we shall have to find another term for the *Church’s particular responsibility for ‘the heathen,’ those who have never yet heard the*

*Name of Christ.*<sup>12</sup>

Making allowance for Neill's now archaic word choice, Bible-believing Christians should be able to agree that, whatever else the Christian mission may entail, beyond question it entails evangelism and evangelization. That takes *priority* (Stott's word) in the text and that biblical *priority* should be made crystal clear in context of missions today.

**Imperative #2:**

As a first order of business in any organization, conference, or undertaking designed to further biblical mission, attention should be given to a confessional statement/statement of faith upon which its deliberations and determinations will be based. Unanimity on nonessentials is not a requirement for Christian unity and cooperation. Unanimity on essentials may not be necessary when the objective is something less than fulfilling the Great Commission. But when the goal is to glorify God by preaching the gospel and discipling the nations, unanimity on the essentials of the Christian faith is necessary. When that is the objective, enthusiastic well-wishers cannot be allowed to replace robust gatekeepers.

After spending over sixty years in missions, Donald McGavran admonished colleagues to give careful consideration to the distinction I am making here. Not necessarily opposed to alliances formed for other purposes, McGavran nevertheless arrived at a point where he insisted that, if the purpose is to "disciple the *ethnē*," we must be assured that participants embrace the cardinal truths of the Christian faith. We must also know the *kind* of authority they ascribe to Scripture. If some participants disagree as to whether or not people are lost, for example, they cannot be expected to agree as to what needs to be done on their behalf. If some do not agree that the Bible is completely trustworthy and the final arbiter in all matters of faith and practice, they cannot be expected to agree as to how missiological proposals will be measured and evaluated.

Admittedly, affirmation of an orthodox statement of faith will not guarantee error-free outcomes, but the absence of such an affirmation will make errors more likely and outcomes more tentative and even questionable. As a matter of fact, evangelical entities and gatherings should do more than agree upon and actually state their basic beliefs; they should give regular attention to the review and refreshment of them. Even though duly *affirmed*, beliefs cannot be automatically *assumed*. Mainline church congregations repeated the Apostles' Creed as a part of their worship rituals long after various items in the Creed had been dismissed as irrelevant or discarded altogether. The importance of all doctrines articulated in orthodox faith statements is assumed, but at any given time and place the special relevancy of some of those doctrines will be most obvious and necessary. If biblical mission is to prevail, essential doctrines should be periodically recalled, their

<sup>12</sup>Neill, *Creative Tension*, 81. Emphasis added.

meaning refreshed, and their relevance renewed.

### **Imperative #3:**

Evangelicals must reclaim the apostle Paul as the model missionary, his message as entirely normative, and his methods as most instructive. As recently as the mid-1960s when I was privileged to join the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Paul's gospel was unquestioned, his missionary methods were salutary, and Paul himself was considered to be the "Missionary Par Excellence." That was a heritage bequeathed to us by some of the most prominent mission theorists of over one hundred years. But the winds of change were already blowing and were destined to become a gale. Despite continued references to the work and writings of Paul and the publication of some outstanding works on this great apostle to the Gentiles, Paul's influence in missionary theology and practice gradually but steadily yielded center stage in both theological and missiological studies and publications. This was due to a confluence of factors: NPP thinking on New Testament Judaism; a rethinking of Reformation theology; widespread acceptance of the transformational mission paradigm; the meteoric rise of missiological holism; the preference accorded to Jesus the Model Missionary; a preoccupation with the kingdom; the popularity of missionary strategies such as orality and "storying the gospel"; and still more.

I do not mean to indict these proposals and movements wholesale. Some are manifestly good and most helpful. Each must be evaluated independently. However, in one way or another, all seem to have contributed to the downgrading of the importance of Paul's writings and ministry. Whatever else might be said, the following cannot be gainsaid: Paul did not receive his gospel indirectly from the apostles in Jerusalem but by direct revelation. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote a considerably larger part of the New Testament than any other writer. It was Paul who was sovereignly chosen as missionary to the Gentiles, and it was Paul and his team who evangelized and planted churches throughout the first century Mediterranean world.

Answering the call of God and following Paul's example, earlier missionaries of the modern missionary movement, while lacking some of the skills now thought necessary and committing some of the offenses of which they are now accused, nonetheless gave themselves first and foremost to the proclamation of the gospel and the planting of those majority world churches now so highly and rightly esteemed. Only when evangelical missionaries of the present and future find it in Scripture and in themselves to recover Paul, proclaim a Pauline gospel, and enlarge the church of Christ will they make an optimum contribution to our world and, yes, to the kingdom of God.

### The Bottom Line

What did the centennials celebrate? Well, they celebrated the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference, of course. Yes, but what else? Well, they celebrated unity in mission. Fine, but what *kind* of unity? It is at this point that the three centennials differed and differed sharply:

- Edinburgh 2010 celebrated the unity of *diversity*—diversity in experience and context, differences in biblical interpretation, and the multiplicity of new forms of theologizing.
- Tokyo 2010 celebrated the unity of *priority*—the priority of evangelism in the Great Commission, the importance of essential doctrines of the Christian faith, and the place of the apostle Paul in modeling mission.
- Cape Town 2010 celebrated the unity of *action*—the centrality of the kind of evangelism that can be demonstrated by working for socio-political justice, saving the environment, and establishing peace.

The future of evangelical missions will be determined in large measure, not by these centennials themselves, but by the choices evangelicals make between and within the kinds of unity celebrated in these three centennials. Then,

May the LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers.  
 May he not leave us or forsake us that he may incline our hearts  
 to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments,  
 his statutes, and his rules, which he commanded our fathers . .  
 . That all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is  
 God; there is none other (1 Kgs 8:57-58, 60, ESV).