

The "Third Call" for Global Networking Precarious Milestones to 1980

by *Ralph D. Winter*

Written only a few months before the 1980 meeting, this article is of value because it shows how slight differences of wording and of interpretation almost prevented the 1980 meeting from following in the "novel" pattern of 1910.

What it does not reveal is how the intended offspring of a global network of mission agencies was born dead. For that see the appended note at the end of the article.

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The year 1980, gateway to the year 2000, is a year of many important meetings. One of the least well known is the World Consultation on Frontier Missions (October 27–November 1, Edinburgh, Scotland), a meeting representing mission agency structures.

It is mildly amazing that so many people should be surprised by the present mounting flurry of preparation for this meeting that was suggested in 1972, seconded in 1973, and formally defined and proposed in 1974. It is the nature of this surprise that will focus this brief preview of a meeting that almost wasn't.

A Southern Baptist missionary, Luther Copeland (temporarily detained in the United States as a missions professor), as the outgoing President of the (U.S.) Association of Professors of Mission (APM) in June of 1972 made the original proposal as a part of his presidential address. This was out of the blue. But winds were stirring.

R. Pierce Beaver, surely one of the world's greatest historical missiologists, provided the organizing wisdom for a Consultation on Frontier Peoples in December of the same year. This could have underscored the value and feasibility of the Copeland proposal, pulling together as it did representatives of ninety United States missions of all stripes, and creating a solid book, *The Gospel and Frontier Peoples*. But it may have influenced the writer of this review more than anyone else.

In June of 1973, at the following meeting of the APM, the writer made a small presentation in effect "seconding" the Copeland proposal. There was still little noticeable response.

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In June 1974, however, when the Association of Professors of Mission met at Wheaton, virtually everyone present participated in the Copeland-led discussion, which developed a statement of Call for the meeting:

It is suggested that a World Missionary Conference be convened in 1980 to confront contemporary issues in Christian world missions. The conference should be constituted by persons committed to cross-cultural missions, broadly representative of the missionary agencies of the various Christian traditions on a world basis.

A few days later at the International Congress on World Evangelization meeting at Lausanne, a group of about forty gathered in a side meeting to discuss the now public Call.

It is interesting that not only did Copeland make the original suggestion but he was the one presiding when the 1974 Call was formulated. Whatever he had thought the conference would finally be when he first suggested the idea would therefore seem to be superseded by the consensus of the 1974 group that formulated and, along with Copeland, signed the Call. Yet it is still a matter of historical record that Copeland himself, writing in the *International Review of Mission* in late 1973 had commented further on his 1972 proposal. In this article he interpreted the writer's "seconding" of his proposal in the summer of that same year as assuming that the 1980 meeting would be "composed of representatives of para-ecclesial missionary agencies," while by contrast he felt that "some combination of ecclesial, para-ecclesial, and conciliar structures may be necessary to achieve adequate inclusiveness."

This slight divergence may be partly in terminology. In the writer's thinking, and in the 1974 Call, the phrase "representatives of mission agencies of the various Christian traditions" includes nondenominational as well as denominational mission structures. His concern for both is probably contained in his words cited above, and is preserved in the 1974 Call.

What the Call omits, however, is Copeland's written 1973 questioning suggestion that for the 1980 meeting, *unlike* Edinburgh 1910, it "may be necessary" to include "churches as such. . . ."

Copeland's 1973 article does not center on his concern for a 1980 meeting so much as on the evaluation of "an ecumenical network of national and regional centres of mission held together by a loosely structural international coordinating agency." By contrast, he noted, "a programme of the [WCC] Commission on World Mission and Evangelism is inevitably limited by virtue of the fact that vast reaches of the missionary enterprise—in terms of agencies and churches—are not affiliated with CWME." The various centers he suggests would, one hopes, be able to transcend the present situation in which "traditional (mission) structures . . . seem ill equipped either to penetrate the world beyond the Church or to develop mature Christian selfhood in the young churches." While Copeland's 1973 article ends with the hope that the WCC-CWME would take the initiative in calling the 1980 conference, it is clear that the 1974 Call does not envision that kind of initiative but retains the 1910 reliance on the initiative of the mission agencies themselves. Nevertheless, there is still much valuable food for thought and clear analysis of ultimate need in Copeland's article. In any case, the 1974 Call became the basis of further thinking and planning.

In late 1975 a detailed summary of events going back to 1910, and an analysis of the 1974 Call, was the work of this writer, appearing in the April 1976 issue of *Missiology, an International Review*. The gist of this article is that the Call deliberately chooses the same name as the 1910 conference, and defines the same all-important uniqueness of its constituency: mission agency representatives, whether denominational or interdenominational. This expository article further observes that the framers of the 1910 conference were very determined to focus on frontiers,

as was indicated by their dogged but exceedingly unpopular adherence to a scheme that automatically excluded from participation those agencies that labored only in Christianized territories.

In the fall of 1976 the writer (on an unrelated trip to Korea) was invited to the Hong Kong meeting of the Executive of the Asia Mission Association, at which time those six key leaders present from all over Asia favorably discussed the 1974 Call and added some wisdom of their own, which became part of later plans, as we shall see below.

In 1977 both the World Council's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) decided to launch world-level conferences in 1980. It was pointed out by the latter that the 1974 Call (employing the original name used in 1910-World Missionary Conference) could too easily become confused with the LCWE meeting unless it was changed. This was a helpful impetus, because the passage of time since 1910 had so extensively modified the meaning of the words "mission" and "missionary" that the use of the same title would no doubt have failed to carry forward the sharpened focus of the earlier conference. Thus "World Consultation on Frontier Missions" was finally adopted. But I am getting ahead of myself.

In 1978 the backing for the conference was still informal. The original date for the LCWE conference had been January 1980. When this was shifted to the latter half of June, the August date long discussed for what we now call Edinburgh 1980 was virtually forced to move later in the year in order to be able to take full advantage of the study documents prepared for the LCWE meeting, now planned for Pattaya, Thailand.

Suddenly, with the full momentum of the Lausanne Congress tradition behind the Pattaya meeting, and a full-time coordinator, David Howard, appointed, it became necessary on occasion to defend the very existence of the Edinburgh 1980 meeting. This has not been difficult. Edinburgh

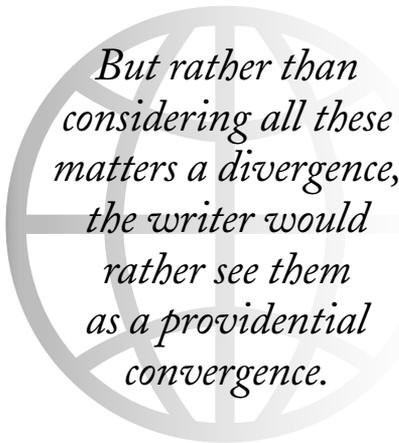
'80 (E-80) and Pattaya '80 (P-80) have different sponsorship, goals, and constituencies.

E-80 is not sponsored by any previously existing organization. It enjoys the favor of a number of existing agencies, associations, commissions, and so forth, but is sponsored precisely by an ad hoc group of mission agencies, as was the 1910 meeting, and as defined in the 1974 Call. P-80 is the successor to the Berlin 1966, Lausanne 1974, and LCWE-sponsored series of meetings. Furthermore, the mission agencies convening E-80 have established a credentials committee, which may under certain circumstances (see below) turn down missions expressing an interest in participating. By contrast, no one applies to P-80, and individuals, not organizations, are invited.

P-80 will involve a spectrum of scholars and leaders from both church and mission (as equals) and will concentrate on the identification of Unreached Peoples and Hidden Peoples (see below) and the best strategies for reaching them. E-80 will be a conference of representatives, sent as delegates strictly from mission agencies, and the implementation of what is studied and strategized at P-80 will be in order. The mission agencies, after all, must take the implementing lead in the actual development of plans (as contrasted to strategies) and the commitment of funds and personnel. Of twenty-two missions in Norway at this writing, only two have had any of their people invited to P-80. All twenty-two will be welcome at E-80, and some of them can send more than one delegate, in proportion to their size.

Just as the LCWE regional committees themselves are primarily church, not mission, leaders, so the choice of P-80 invitees is primarily in the hands of church, not mission, leaders. This does not mean that no mission leaders will be invited. Furthermore, not all can be invited. For example, invitees related to only 12 mission agencies of the 100 in the United Kingdom will be going to Pattaya. All could apply for attendance at E-80.

But rather than considering all these matters a divergence, the writer would prefer to see them as a providential convergence. For P-80 to stir up the



church world about missionary frontiers is entirely complementary and foundational to the work of E-80. In turn, E-80 will allow the cross-cultural outreach structures to further plan and deploy forces to new Hidden People groups, but can gratefully build on the new mood of outreach among the churches created by P-80. If also the WCC-CWME-sponsored meeting in May 1980 at Melbourne (M-80) functions in somewhat the same way as P-80, then we can see a great deal of good deriving from Copeland's 1972 proposal, his 1973 article, the 1974 Call, and the three nonconflicting meetings resulting: E-80, P-80, M-80.

At this writing (late 1979) so many details have been settled with regard to Edinburgh 1980 that space does not allow for all the particulars. Precise organizational and theological "participation criteria" have been laid down and specific goals and objectives have been developed. An elaborate set of committees has been defined, and different national and regional committees are forming and stepping forward to shoulder the various roles. As might have been expected, the first initiative outside the United States was British, but the largest and most auspicious committee outside the United States is, at this date, in Korea. These same committees' representatives compose an International Council of Reference, which will

function without actually meeting. A central office in Pasadena, California, established by the first regional committee to form, has a full-time office manager, Leiton Chinn, who has performed efficiently and sensitively from the moment his mission offered his services.

E-80 has chosen Edinburgh partially for historic reasons, but has turned away from any non-Western site primarily for reasons of economics. The overall cost of convening a world meeting, especially when there is still a slight majority of mission agency headquarters in the West, is smaller for a gathering somewhere near the Frankfurt-Geneva-London triangle, and in this meeting, as befits mission societies, expenses are definitely to be minimized. A travel pool will "level" all travel costs, so that those coming from a great distance will be aided by a sizable fund created by a substantial registration fee that will not only cover consultation expenses but provide financial assistance to those coming from a distance. Detailed calculations are as yet impossible, without knowing the precise geographical contours of attendance, but the travel pool plan in use by the American Society of Missiology has worked out very equitably and is being adopted for E-80.

One of the early decisions of the first committee in Pasadena, made in consultation with the host leaders in Scotland, was to define the conference as Protestant-Evangelical and, in addition, to adopt verbatim a statement drawn for the discussion of the Executive Meeting of the Asia Mission Association in Hong Kong, in a section called "Theological Criteria for Participation." Added also was the phrase "agencies that are in agreement with the tenets of the Statements of Belief of the IFMA or the EFMA or the Lausanne Covenant."

In regard to the matter of E-80's focus on frontiers, a most significant regional antecedent (beyond the already mentioned Chicago consultation in 1972) was the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association Executives Retreat, held in September

1979. The theme of the conference was “Unreached Peoples,” but the emphasis at this more recent meeting was even more specifically on that large subgroup of unreached peoples nowadays called by a technical phrase “the hidden peoples.” This happens to be the precise focus of E-80. For example, the first of six objectives of E-80 speaks of, and centers the conference upon, “the world’s ‘Hidden Peoples’: those cultural and linguistic subgroups, urban or rural, for whom there is as yet no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize their own people.”

In view of all this background, why are so many people surprised to see this conference finally come together?

For one thing, an ad hoc meeting is never a sure thing until it actually jells. No one organization can decide the issue, but one organization must take the initiative and gain the collaboration of others before things can begin to move. The one organization that made the most decisive move was International Students, Incorporated. Even so, their decision to contribute a full-time office coordinator depended upon a great deal of personal initiative (and personal expense) on the part of Leiton Chinn. For one thing, no one could have predicted that he would step forward. If he hadn’t, I believe the moment of final opportunity for this meeting to have come together would have passed. He gave up personal educational goals to tackle a cause. Yet for him this has already been probably the most stimulating “education” he could possibly have gained.

But there are more profound reasons for surprise. For many people this kind of meeting is “out of due time.” It seems anachronistic precisely because of the extensive trend in the past thirty years to the belief that, now that there are churches overseas, the mission agency structure itself is no longer needed. To be sure, for a few rare people the situation is only a case where Western missions need to be sensitive to the rise of Third World missions, and for this rare group it is reassuring that E-80 welcomes mission societies from all parts of the world. (Curiously, the 1910 meet-

ing somehow failed to take seriously either the Indian Missionary Society of South India, or the National Missionary Society of India. Bishop Azariah, who could have been sent by either of these had they not been ignored, attended in 1910 only because the Church Missionary Society sent him as one of their delegates!)

But for a considerably larger group of people, and for a still different reason, it is also startling to see such a meeting promoted this late in history. The conscientious opinion of people in this group is that pioneer mission societies are no longer needed, and that church departments or councils that lend interchurch workers are all that are needed. Such observers have not yet recognized the fact that fully 80 percent of all non-Christians live in subsocieties in which there is not yet an indigenous church tradition to which workers can be sent, and that to reach into these 16,750 remaining pockets will require mission agencies from somewhere employing essentially pioneer missionary techniques, not normal, culturally near-neighbor outreach evangelism.

Fortunately for the WCFM, enough agencies have in fact discovered the “new” world of Hidden Peoples, long invisible to those outsiders who tend not to take subtle cultural differences seriously. These alert agencies have taken the necessary initiatives. They sense that we are now in the Third Era. William Carey’s Era One took missionaries to the coasts of Africa and Asia. Hudson Taylor’s Era Two went into the “interior”—went “inland.” Our own Era Three does not confront geographical boundaries but does face 16,750 culturally definable frontiers. Pattaya 1980 will throw a great deal of light on the subject; perhaps Melbourne 1980 will as well. Edinburgh 1980 can be the ideal complement: to clarify the key administrative decisions that will move from facts, strategies, and dreams to plans, bold moves, and realities.

Addendum

The World Consultation on Frontier Missions, Edinburgh 1980, is now

history. It succeeded wildly. Delegates represented 173 mission agencies (compared to 160 in 1910) including 46 Third World mission agencies (none in 1910).

Plenary speakers included Patrick Johnstone and Thomas Wang who became even more prominent on the world level as time went on—Patrick, in great part because of his incomparable *Operation World*; Thomas, became Executive Director of the Lausanne Committee. The latter then carried the Edinburgh 1980 slogan, “A church for every people by the year 2000,” into his initiative in the founding of the AD2000 Movement, which spoke of “A church for every people and the Gospel for every person by the year 2000.”

But it is painful to report that the carefully planned committee for a follow-through network, after being duly elected, never got off the ground. Why? Because the appointed director on arrival home found that his mission would not allow him to carry that responsibility.

The “First Call” (for a meeting at Edinburgh in 1910 and a follow-through office and periodical) was more successful, even if its success finally and unexpectedly did it in. By comparison, the “Second Call” (for a meeting at Edinburgh in 1980 and a follow-through office and periodical) succeeded even more in its founding meeting, with unprecedented Third World involvement, and even a parallel student level conference. (See the book *Seeds of Promise* by Alan Starling (Wm. Carey Library 1981). Yet the Second Call failed in establishing an on-going office for networking. It was, however, an indirect impetus for the marvelous AD2000 Movement. This journal was created as a direct follow-through of the student meeting (see our IJFM masthead). It was in great part the impetus for the founding of the International Society for Frontier Missiology, which now sponsors this journal. **IJFM**