

Editorial Reflections

The Meeting at Ephesus

In the history of the world has there ever been a conference of over 200 Christian leaders all (but 3) from the Third World, paying their own way to a global level conference that then was run almost entirely in English?

That was the 9th Triennial meeting of the Asia Missions Association that met in Turkey at Ephesus, during the first week of November 2006. I was privileged to be one of the many speakers.

In view of the fact that there are 240 missionaries in Turkey sent from Korea, local staffing was easy and effective. But the people who came were all leaders of mission agencies or of associations of mission agencies.

One of the latter, a woman representing the Philippine Mission Association, described how her local congregation was founded 72 years ago by foreign missionaries but only two years ago discovered that Philippine congregations are supposed to be sending missionaries, too. The foreign missionaries apparently never thought of that. That is generally true of all modern mission effort—it seeks to establish a church movement but does not plan for that church movement then to send out its own missionaries.

She pointed out that there are more than seven MILLION Filipinos out around the world in a vast diaspora, and that Filipinos determinedly believe that these foreign workers can become a major mission force in addition to the full time workers also sent from the Philippines.

The theme of the meeting was “Missions—The Apostolic Way.” An earnest effort was made in paper after paper to seek out the way of the apostles not just perpetuate uncritically the way of modern Western missions.

One thing on which my paper touched was the practical difficulty of finding the exact equivalent of the Pauline campaign. His main ministry was to Gentiles who had sat in the back rows of synagogues for perhaps years, had imbibed the Bible (Greek Old Testament) and were called “God-Fearers.” In Paul’s ministry these people readily “converted,” not from sin but from bondage to a misunderstanding to the effect that

if they really wanted to please God they would adopt Jewish customs of food, holidays, and behavior.

A fascinating sideline was the discussion with AMA leaders about collaborating in a global level meeting in 2010 celebrating the 100th anniversary of the famous Edinburgh 1910 meeting. Something of that sort may happen. Now we have as a sponsoring body the GNMS, the Global Network of Mission Structures (www.gnms.net), which is the first such global level meeting ground of mission agencies.

1910 and 2010

The meeting in 1910 was, in turn, a delayed response to William Carey’s serious proposal that all of the world’s mission leaders meet to compare notes in 1810.

The distinctive feature of the 1910 meeting was that no individual was invited. All of the thousand participants were delegates chosen not by the leaders of the conference but by the mission agencies who sent them. It was not as the meeting in 1900 was, an inspirational meeting of church leaders being recruited for missions.

There was not another meeting of its kind until 1980, when an intentional celebration of 1910 took place, proposed in 1972 by a Southern Baptist mission professor, what turned out to be called World Conference on Frontier Missions. It met again in Edinburgh. In 1910, virtually no non-Western mission agencies existed. In 1980, 56 Third World Agencies sent delegates, fully one third of the total.

In 2010 more than 2/3 of the delegates will likely be from non-Western mission societies. Two other gatherings will take place in 2010. One is being organized by local Edinburgh academics and will be a small conference in which missionaries and mission executives will not comprise the bulk of the participants. Another is being projected by the Lausanne Committee and, like former Lausanne meetings will consist mainly of church leaders comparing notes on evangelistic and mission initiatives within their domain. Mission executives will probably be in the minority since the design of such conferences is to enhance outreach vision within the sphere of the church. **IJFM**