



**What Would Luther Do?
From the Authority of Edinburgh 1910
to the Authenticity of the Individual 2010**

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The Modern Mission Movement – A Well-Oiled Machine

Kenneth Ross, in his book *Edinburgh 2010: Springboard for Mission*, describes the proponents of the modern mission movement that peaked at the 1910 Edinburgh World Mission Conference as having a “sense of a modern, efficient, well-oiled machine which was geared to the attainment of its objective” (Ross 2009:13). By this description

Ross seeks to give the reader an impression of the mentality or mind-set that penetrated the whole enterprise of “world mission” at the beginning of the 20th century: a well-oiled machinery, put into movement by industrious and pietistic believers in the western, Christian world.

The motto of the conference, indicating the successful evangelization of the world within the very same century that had just taken its beginning, carries with it the same sense of machinery and precision in the global mission enterprise and confirms the sense of accuracy and meticulousness intrinsic to the modern mission movement in Ross’ description. Modern means of communication – it was believed -- would make it possible for missionaries from the Christian West to literally roll out the gospel message to the rest of the world in virtually no time and in a manner never before anticipated.

Such imagery clearly points to the fact that the modern mission movement was indeed ‘modern’ in the sense that it had become part of the technological progress witnessed by the ‘modernized’ western world at the turn of the century. Technology made mission work possible in new and innovative ways. In fact, the very idea of a world mission conference could not have come into being was it not for the technological progress, spearheaded by the western world. In this way, Ross’s illustration is spot-on as an image of the modern mind-set of the modern mission movement.

However, modernity carries with it more than technology. It can be argued that modernity is also a ‘mind-set,’ a certain way of looking at and perceiving the world as it lies before us. The modern mind-set can be characterized by concepts of expansion,

control and universality, three terms that to a large degree belong to the mentality forming the very core values of the modern mission movement.

A Child of Modernity

Ross more than indicates that the phenomenon that we know as ‘the modern mission movement’ is indeed born and bred as a child of modernity – it is, as the terminology alludes to, ‘modern’. Ross touches upon factors behind the movement with headlines like “A territorial idea of Christian expansion” and “Complicity with imperialism and colonialism” (Ross 2009:29 and 30). However, below we will attempt to dig deeper and move even closer to some indicative parameters of a modern mind-set. Sociologist Gregor McLennan in an article on the nature and characteristics of the Enlightenment and that which scholars have subsequently termed ‘modernity’ questions if it is appropriate to talk about the ‘Enlightenment Project’ or the ‘Project of Modernity’ as scholars at times tend to do. The plethora of voices that belong to the modern period and which identify themselves with the Enlightenment and later on with modernity are far from unified in their understanding of what their presuppositions are.

However, McLennan does make the observation that what we in general term ‘modernity’ has certain coherent features which are typical for a certain standpoint or foundation from where modernity finds its starting point and builds up as a concrete expression. So even if there is ‘something slightly misleading’ about the ‘project’ terminology so often employed both within and outside modernity’s own ranks, McLennan, when he looks to his own professional field of social science, believes that

there is a “cluster of underlying assumptions and expectations about the nature of modern social theory which are shared by a significant number of social scientists and which stem from classical eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific aspirations” (MacLennan 1992:328).

The Modern Mentality

MacLennan employs social science for his illustration. However, this is an observation that is not restricted to his area of concern, but indeed found in all spheres of specialist research and in lived (modern) life in general, including Christian mission. Missiologist Werner Ustorf in his and church historian Hugh McLeod’s *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000* remarks that “[w]e can only work in the culture we have got” and does so with a reference to the fact that “Christian Faith is in a constant conversation with the realities of the past” and later on to the fact that “[t]he European past is that of the Enlightenment” (Ustorf, 2003:224). Thus, the argument is that the modern mission movement as a matter of course springs from European Enlightenment thought and thus reflects the derived modern mind-set. Ustorf in the quote below illustrates this with a vocabulary that indirectly refers to and to a large extent supplements Ross’ machinery imagery, however pointing to a larger degree of ‘mentality’ than Ross’ more ‘technological’ illustration contains. Ustorf writes:

Protestant missions [...] had repackaged the knowledge of God, putting it within the safe confines of a modern interpretation of Christianity as an absolute religion, and came to see themselves as the executors of divine history. This divine mandate included the conversion of anybody who might think differently [...]. At

the centre stood a desire to tame any independent or local designs for life and religion, and with this to take control of their social forms. The intention was to master the ambiguity and fuzziness of the world by applying a universal religious rationality (Ustorf 2004:297-8).

Terminology such as ‘safe confines,’ ‘absolute religion,’ ‘tame,’ ‘to take control,’ ‘to master,’ and ‘universal rationality,’ are used as constitutive labels for an ethos of modernity as it is, in Ustorf’s example, mirrored within the modern mission movement, which he sees is a contextual theological expression born in modern western society. Ustorf touches upon lines similar to this significant and historical point of his at the very beginning of his article in McGrath’s and Marks’ *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism* where he argues:

that missionary (in the Victorian sense of the term) Protestantism is a very particular phenomenon; that it was not born out of the reformation, but rather in the colonial encounter; that it was ambiguously inculturated in the European drive to unify the world through a twofold process involving modernization and Christianization; and that, with the collapse of this project, it was forced to radically reinvent itself (Ustorf 2004:392).

What is reaffirmed here is the relationship between the modern mission movement and the marks of modernity in western cultural and epistemological history. Applying the word ‘inculturated’ Ustorf conveys the lucid message that modernity was reflected in a no less than profound manner in the way mission and mission theories were conceived and acted out by western missionaries and mission agencies.

Enlightenment Orthodoxy

One of the most significant missiological publications dealing substantially with the issues relating to mission and modernity is Brian Stanley's *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*. This publication is significant due to the fact that it comprehensively deals with the 'alliance' between on the one hand modern mission and on the other modernity as an epistemological paradigm or mind-set. It has since long been commonplace to identify the modern mission movement with an anti-modern and anti-enlightenment ethos. However, Stanley points to the fact, and does so implicitly in support of Ustorf above, that evangelical circles and among these the missionary zealots of the traditional churches of the West represented a movement "whose origins and contours owe an immense debt to the philosophical and cultural patterns of the Enlightenment" (Stanley 2001:2).

This thesis is supported by Daniel W. Hardy. Hardy maintains that the modern mission movement was limited by and governed by what he terms 'Enlightenment orthodoxy' which according to Hardy can mainly be associated with the universalizing ideas of the European Enlightenment. In this way, modern mission was made possible not only through the newly developed means of transport and communication, although such indisputably also made their marks on it, but furthermore and importantly so by the "the enhanced sense of unity and potential of humanity that Enlightenment thought and practice embodied." However, the potential for unity builds on yet another fundamental presupposition according to Hardy, viz. the 'space' between oneself and the other. This

sense of ‘space,’ Hardy argues, was enhanced and further developed, or ‘construed’ in his own terminology, by the way of Enlightenment thought. Hardy writes:

“They” – the others – were to be identified, understood, civilized, and utilized according to the criteria of Enlightenment orthodoxy, with at least some benefit for Europe. Accordingly, the ‘space’ between those who went and those to whom they went was construed as *difference* and the *asymmetrical* provision by one part of the “benefits” (Hardy 2001:215).

Hardy thus additionally illustrates Stanley’s argument by pointing towards the enhancing and to some extent metamorphosing impact of modernity on existing characteristics of human life, e.g. the transfiguration of ‘space’ into ‘difference’ and ‘asymmetry,’ both notions essential in an understanding of what modern thought has brought to the modern mission movement and largely identical with the legitimizing notions, in different shapes and forms, of the movement.

Christianity and Other Religions

This latter observation has been made also with a particular review of the relationship between Christianity and other religions, one of the key issues pertaining to the proceedings of the 1910 Edinburgh conference. Kenneth Ross touches upon the issue as it was seen then by the majority of the Edinburgh delegates and does so by pointing to the *Report of the Commission Four*. The report shows a “sympathetic appreciation of other faiths” – allegedly, according to Ross, reflecting the good relationship many missionaries ‘in the field’ so to speak had developed to followers of other religions – however “its militaristic and triumphant language [struck] a note of antagonism which

could hardly be expected to make for cordial inter-faith relations or for a culture of peace” (Ross 2009:31).

The American Methodist and missiologist Kenneth Cracknell makes it a significant point in his monograph on missionary perceptions of the world religions that even if a negative view of non-Christian religions indeed had a history before Enlightenment with its dominant modern world view, the new rationality embodied within modern thought supplied a new impetus behind the conceptions of superstition and idolatry as constitutive for religious traditions outside Christianity. Thus, Cracknell writes that:

it is [...] important to see that [a] radical denial of salvific significance in other religious traditions was attributable not only to their medieval and reformation inheritances but to the new rationalism which was becoming prevalent in both Europe and America. Its dominant conviction was that the way to knowledge in every sphere in life lay in reason (Cracknell 1995:14).

In this view “the other” was seen not only as fallacious and characterized by a void in terms of salvific capabilities or powers, but simply an irrational construction compared to Christianity’s rational systematic nature and qualities. Important to notice, too, is the fact that even if newly converted (i.e. to Christianity) individuals were considered part of ‘the Christian family,’ so to speak, they were treated in a not so dissimilar way. It would take another 50 – 60 years before theologies ‘from the south’ gained ground as fully legitimate expressions of Christianity. Some would even argue that “the old Christian world” has not yet reached the point of full recognition of the quality of Asian or African or South American theology.

If essential, the examples above are but a few illustrations of an apparent interconnection and deep penetration by modernity of the modern mission movement as the world had come to know it since the Enlightenment. They are illustrations as to how modernity's decisive marks was added onto the way the west perceived and acted upon the rest of the world and upon the 'otherness' inherent within global realities such as these were laid bare for the western political powers and ecclesial principalities.

From Modernity to Postmodernity

The question is now, however, as indicated in the heading of this article: Are we moving on a road between mind-sets or paradigms, approaching a change in perceptions? Ustorf, in the second substantial quote above, alludes to a change in mission behaviour and self-understanding. He terms it a 'radical reinvention' as a result of the fall of modernity's universalizing project. This observation is crucial in order to understand the profound changes that do have taken place since the time of the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 and sine the 'well-oiled machine' was running at its apex.

This move can effortlessly and constructively be related to Ross' reminder of the fact that the "confidence [of the Edinburgh participants] was ill-founded," that "Edinburgh 1910 which understood itself to be on the brink of a great new surge of missionary advance was, in fact, the high point of the movement" and that "[t]he scenario envisaged by the Edinburgh delegates never came to pass" (Ross 2009:33f). Just as the modern mind-set peaked at the beginning of that last century, but got profoundly and devastatingly questioned four years later by the Great War, the mission movement that

was – as we have demonstrated it - the product of that mind-set also peaked. From Edinburgh onwards, it was downwards from that very peak.

A common denominator for the signs of the times with regard to a shift in the western mind-set is the shift from what we may aptly term a modern frame of understanding to a postmodern interpretative ethos. What kind of change, then, will such a shift indicate in the history of Christian mission? Kenneth Ross speaks of postmodernity as a powerful intellectual and cultural force, suspicious of meta-narratives, questioning the absolute, and thus as a reaction and an intellectual redirection against the universalizing project of the modern mind-set. Postmodernity is, briefly and somehow popularly put, all that which modernity was not.

Even though Ross will not – unlike a number of more conservative missiologists – ascertain that postmodernity is impenetrable by the gospel, he does speak of the phenomenon as a “new cultural *frontier* for the Gospel” (Ross 2009:60 – my emphasis). In other words, postmodernity must be encountered in an evangelistic way. However, there is still more to be said about that which the French thinker Jean-François Lyotard appropriately has termed “La condition postmoderne” – the postmodern condition of our western societies (Lyotard 1979).

A Cry for Authenticity

Ross points to a decisive change of mind which characterises the transformation from modernity to postmodernity insofar as he exemplifies the new condition as a “cry for authenticity” (Ross 2009:61). Whereas the modern mission movement took its

starting point in the “obvious” almost “God-given” fact of religious and cultural superiority and unrivalled authority of the western Christian hemisphere applied to the encounter with the non-Christian and newly-Christianized world, Christian mission under postmodern conditions demands authenticity rather than authority.

Symptomatically for these new postcolonial and polycentric times in mission, Ross quotes not a western expert on the issue, but an Indian missiologist, Ken Gnanakan, who stands as a representative of the global and thus much more complex condition in which mission today takes its starting point. Ken Gnanakan says:

While there is need to renew our allegiance to proclaim the word faithfully, there is greater need to flesh the message out in acts that express this kingdom.

Proclamation is urgent, but demonstration is the priority. The world must hear the message of the Kingdom, but it will also want to see some concrete demonstration of this message (Gnanakan 2008:9).

Thus, it is not enough to proclaim, even with all the powers and principalities of the modern western world behind oneself, any longer. Authority is not enough – authenticity is needed: in the words of Ken Gnanakan the Christian message must be demonstrated, fleshed out in acts.

Yet another Asian theologian, the Korean Kyo-Seong Ahn finds his way into Ross’ article in an attempt to put into words what is needed in contemporary mission as part of the appeal for authenticity. Kyo-Seong Ahn suggests that an ample term is “orthopathy” (Ahn 2009:82), an expression Ross interprets as “relationship, emotional intelligence, symbiosis, community, interdependence, pathos and respect”, concluding on that note that “[s]elf-emptying, humility and sacrifice are sorely needed to liberate the gospel from captivity to projects of self-aggrandisement” (Ross 2009:62). He thus

establishes a loop back to Ustorf's characteristics of the modern mission movement founded on concepts of 'safe confines,' 'absolute religion' and 'universal rationality' as well as with terms like 'to tame,' 'to take control' and 'to master' – indeed words of “self-aggrandisement.”

Here postmodernity indeed stands out as that which modernity is not. James K. A. Smith in his introduction to Carl Raschke's monograph *Globochrist. The Great Commission Takes a Postmodern Turn* suggests that this 'postmodern turn' means leaving one of the core ideas of the modern mission movement behind, when he states that mission is:

[...] not the communication of “messages” or the proliferation of programmes – not even the planting of Churches. It might not even be primarily about communicating some “truth” to those who are without it. Rather it is about being Christ to and for the world (Raschke 2008:11).

Relational Christianity

Raschke himself goes biblical in an attempt to legitimize a postmodern understanding of being a Christian as first and foremost a relational exercise, thus quoting St. Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 8:18-19: “For the creation waits in eager expectation for the revealing of the children of God.” He hereafter asks the reader if that is “not what is implied in the teaching that the word became flesh?”, if that is “not just the historical but also the eschatological meaning of ‘incarnation’?” and he finishes concluding that “[r]elational Christianity *is* postmodern Christianity” (Raschke 2008:20).

Overall, the concept of “relationality” seems to be a concept that time and again pops up among postmodern minded theologians. An additional voice working along these lines is that of Australian John D. May, for many years based at Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College, Dublin. May is straightforward in his critique of a modern universalizing religious project:

The ‘meliority principle,’ the conviction of uniqueness and superiority based on divine revelation or the exclusive possession of higher truth, [...] in the end makes [the universalist religions] impossible, because their purported universality is in fact *someone’s* particularity projected onto all (May 2003:149).¹

In his monograph *Transcendence and Violence* May points to the fact that what was once possible, viz. to live out one’s religious tradition in isolation from other traditions, is no longer tenable. The quotation above alludes to this condition hinting to the fact that in today’s polycentric, however interconnected and globalized world, a system of complete and unambiguous truth always represents “*someone’s* particularity projected unto all.”

Critical of various attempts to create a ‘global ethic.’ arguing that such attempts are extremely ‘thin’ and eligible for the critique associated with an alleged but questionable universalism, May implies that neither a withdrawal in a separatist fashion of segregated local traditions, nor aggressive and competitive scenarios based on religious assumptions of uniqueness and superiority are viable options in a globalized world (May 2003:150 and 149).

May confirms the global religious traditions as distinct contextual expressions. However, at the same time he acknowledges the role of globalization as a force which

¹ *Meliority*: The quality or condition of being better; superiority (*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Fourth Edition, 1993).

affects the variety of religious traditions which “in the new context of globalization [...] need to be mutually translatable without the threat of alienation or identity loss.” May’s conclusion from this insight is that whereas the traditions until recently could (and did) live relatively isolated lives as traditions in their separate cultural contexts, clarifying their identities for their own sake, so to speak “in the new context of globalization they can only do [that], if at all, together” (May 2003:151).

Again, we see how the importance of “relation” is stressed. The delegates of the Edinburgh 1910 Mission Conference cannot exactly be blamed that they wanted Christianity to live isolated: the whole impetus of the modern mission movement was indeed to disseminate the gospel to virtually all corners of the world. However, it was a centrifugal movement, a centrifugal and a Eurocentric movement. Edinburgh 1910 was the authoritative mission centre of the world. Edinburgh 2010 is not.

Problem, Challenge or Simply a New Way?

What is – more specifically - questioned here is the way of modernity’s mission thinking and practice, again, rather accurately described with the helpful terminology applied by Werner Ustorf: ‘safe confines,’ ‘absolute religion,’ ‘universal rationality,’ ‘to tame,’ ‘to take control’ and ‘to master.’ Such vocabulary barely suits a world that has moved from being Eurocentric to becoming polycentric. In the following we will take a slight turn away from the main concern of Edinburgh 1910 – the relationship between Christianity and other religions – and move towards the relationship between old and new churches.

A polycentric world: not just in the sense that today's large and still growing churches are situated in what has in recent years been termed 'the south' as compared to the 'old churches' in 'the north.' This is yesterday's news. What is at stake is, today, more than a matter of where churches are situated. What needs the full church's attention is the fact that theologians, lay and ordained, in the 'new churches' are increasingly vocal in putting into words and distributing their theological points of view. What is witnessed in global theology today is more than 'theology' in the singular; it is rather a plethora of 'theologies,' evolving from the variety of cultural, socioeconomic and political contexts that make up global society. This is indeed not good news if one's aim is 'to tame' and 'to control.'

The American missiologists Paul G. Hiebert – himself a proponent of modernity's mission paradigm, demonstrated in my book *Missiological Mutilations* (Sørensen 2007:144ff), has described this new situation as “a morass of theological pluralism” (Hiebert 201:30) which he, for his part, is rather critical towards – hence the use of the term 'morass.' which reveals his theological wish for a 'universal rationality.” Hiebert is not alone with his rather critical view on 'theological pluralism.' Theological pluralism is in many ways gravel in the well-oiled machinery which Ross saw the modern Edinburgh missiology to be.

Current globalization shows no signs that time will be turned back into modern times, a sort of Edinburgh 1910 state of affairs where Europe or any other region for that sake is in charge of mission endeavours throughout the world. If this analysis is true, I believe this new situation leaves at least some Christians of the 'old Christian world' with

a lack of theological legitimization of the fact that the church is today a globalized, highly contextualized and fragmented entity. Not with one unifying theology but built up with a plethora of theologies. Interestingly, this state of affairs has in the old churches moved theologians to look into their various traditions in order to ground themselves in the new situation.

Even if this can be seen as a defensive move, it may also – on a more positive note – be taken as an acceptance of the fact that traditional European (or Western) theology, too, is coined in a particular context. It is contextual and part of a wider jigsaw puzzle of global contextual theologies. This does not make it invalid – by no means – but it does make western theology particular. The false teaching of western theology as a universal theology must go, itself a move towards theological acceptance of ‘theologies’ rather than ‘theology.’

What Would Luther Do?

However, digging into one’s own tradition and theological history, we may also find elements by which we are given tools to grasp and work with our new plural situation today. As a Lutheran, speaking from a Lutheran point of view on mission, where can I pinpoint bits and pieces of the Lutheran tradition in order to add to a contemporary theologically legitimized understanding of theological plurality. Let us start by referring to the American Lutheran Richard Bliese who - in his article “Lutheran Missiology: Struggling to Move from Reactive Reform to Innovative Initiative” - questions a distinctive Lutheran missiology as such, demonstrating the fact of “a divorce

between Lutheran theology and Lutheran missiology” leading to Lutherans “borrowing mission theology from other traditions” (Bliese 2005:221). Bliese is here indicating that we should maybe not expect to gain too much in missiological thinking by turning towards our Lutheran heritage.

Still, may I suggest – possibly moving from stagnant ‘reactive’ to emerging ‘innovative’ as part of the Lutheran struggle suggested by Bliese above - that Martin Luther’s idea of ‘the priesthood of all believers’ may turn out as a theological tool, potentially capable of adding to our understanding of the new plurality of theologies that is the very condition of any missiological endeavour today. The theological concept of ‘The priesthood of all believers’ has become central to Lutheran theology. Let me be clear, however, that I cannot entirely subscribe to the popular interpretation of ‘the priesthood of all believers.’ That Luther should have wanted and theologically argued that all believers have the same authority as interpreters of the biblical texts and administrators of the sacraments is a plain misunderstanding.

What Luther taught on the issue was part of a larger political context - as was so much of reformation theology. This has been rather clearly demonstrated by Timothy J. Wengert in his monograph *Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops*, where he reveals how the concept of priesthood of all believers is rather to be seen as a pious myth than a dictum by the reformer himself. ‘The priesthood of all believers’ is not a final showdown with pastoral or priestly leadership in the church. Neither is it authority given to all believers in the sense that all are believers are spiritually powerful individuals.

On the contrary, Wengert lays bare through his meticulous working through Luther's writings, that a more authentic reading of Luther would suggest that the idea of the reformer was not that "anyone can act as a pastor", but that he rather means that "all of us are members of the one body of Christ and individually servants to each other in our respective offices" (Wengert 2008:8). I venture experimentally in this elaboration to suggest that by this interpretation of Luther's intention behind that which has popularly come to be termed as 'the priesthood of all believers' we see some initial steps in a move from authority to authenticity in our understanding of the church.

The body of Christ has expanded and become a global entity with authentic and autonomous churches and strong church leaders on every continent. This is the new situation and one that constitutes the major difference between Edinburgh 1910 and Edinburgh 2010. To many people who adhere to the 'old Christendom' paradigm, i.e. a Christianity dominated by European and modernity's paradigms of perceiving and understanding the world and all that comes with it, this constitutes both a joy and a challenge. New churches emerge: Joy...! Christianity is changing its face as it grows into the world, the west hereby losing control: Concern...! Now, what would Luther have done in a situation like this?

Being a committed reformer who managed to convince larger parts of Europe to follow him and not the Pope, Luther would have been concerned, too, by losing control. His agenda was for the prevailing church hierarchy, the papal church, to lose control and for him and his followers to gain it. But we can still apply his 'priesthood of all believers' idea to the current situation, especially if we work under the interpretation suggested by

Wengert. By applying the idea of ‘the priesthood of all believers’ we do not necessarily say that everything is equally good or equally qualified. This was not Luther’s intention either. We do, however, open up for a splintering process, leaving the certainty that lies within having one uniform, or relatively uniform, church tradition, behind.

Speaking of ‘the priesthood of all believers’ is rather a reaction against all authorities of the global church. Luther reacted against the unequal powers and principalities of his own church, which ultimately led to the questioning of concepts like control and universality. In that sense one can talk about Luther as a reformer with early traces of postcolonialism within his thoughts. Or at least – even though the reformer hardly anticipated such – one can say that the consequences of the Reformation prepared the ground for the multiplicity of theologies which are a reality of the global church today. Seen in this perspective, that very same multiplicity is to some extent that of which post-colonial theologians in various “reformation like ways” are struggling for recognition.

The “eliarity principle” under Pressure

Ken Gnanakan and Kyo-Seong Ahn, both quoted above, are living illustrations of the fact that Europe is no longer the world centre of mission. In its own peculiar way Lutheran reformation through Edinburgh 1910 is a cornerstone in the development towards Christianity becoming a multicultural and truly global religion. At the same time, both of these church historical event have to a large extent situated the churches in Europe under pressure to give up what John D. May terms the “meliority principle.” The

conviction of uniqueness and superiority based on divine revelation or the exclusive possession of higher truth is no longer viable in a globalised world.

To us today, it is obvious that western Christianity's "purported universality is in fact *someone's* particularity projected onto all." Indeed globalisation of the world is one of the major if not the major precondition of 'la condition postmoderne' -- the postmodern condition, the mindset we live with, the emerging framework of our intellectual reasoning deriving from the fact of global plurality. Europe's Christian authority, based on the 'meliority principle' of modern reasoning and applied in mission history and possibly nowhere more unmistakably and forthright demonstrated than in the planning and proceedings of Edinburgh 1910, is questioned from all corners of the world. Possibly even from a German reformer situated in the 16th century.

From Authority to Authenticity

Whereas May's showdown with the Christian meliority principles might seem theoretical, both Smith and Raschke quoted above points to more concrete conclusions with their understanding of incarnational theology as the impetus of mission: Mission is not about transmitting a 'message,' building churches or conveying a 'truth' that is unavoidably somebody's truth rather than everybody's truth. Mission is relation – it is about "being Christ to and for the world."

That which is here argued is really – expressed in theological terms - a turn from being Eurocentric to becoming Christocentric through the incarnation of Christ in all missional doings and ecclesial beings in whatever context one finds oneself. This may in

fact not be far from Luther's original theological *sola fide* intention: a move from ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism. In short, moving from Edinburgh 1910 to Edinburgh 2010, moving from a modern framework into a postmodern context, is not about giving up one's own tradition and identity. On the contrary, it is a journey where, indeed so, an authoritarian church and mission attitude is left behind, but at the same time a glimpse towards being authentic in faith, tradition and current context through the interpretive ethos of postmodernity and in a witnessing encounter with a culturally and religiously polycentric world.

“Might it be,” Kenneth Ross asks in the conclusions to his deliberations, “that Edinburgh 2010 will enable a new appreciation of the identity and significance of Jesus Christ?” (Ross 2009:74). This may indeed be a precise recollection of our times. However, Christians will have to show courage, leave the certainty of authoritarian modernity behind and believe in the authenticity of Christ.

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