

## Analysis of Tokyo 2010 – Important Issues, Strengths and Weaknesses By Marvin J. Newell

The 2010 Global Mission Consultation & Celebration - From Edinburgh to Tokyo, is now a year and a half past. The main question that arises is, “What lasting benefit did that global conference bring to the world of missions?” Did it cast a vision for the future that attendees now share? Did it help coordinate greater interdependence between mission associations and networks from around the globe as was hoped? Did it come up with new models and strategies that are now being implemented? These and other related questions need to be addressed, as they are based on the stated goals of the conference.

My good friend Lon Allison, Executive Director of the Billy Graham Center, has observed that conferences of this nature (and he has been involved in quite a few!) “tend to over-dream and under-produce.” Did Tokyo 2010 over-dream and subsequently under-produced? This is a legitimate question. To be responsible, we need to reflect honestly on the consultation, candidly evaluating both its strengths and weaknesses - for surely there were both.

### What it did accomplish

For those who were present, it is undeniable that the gathering met its goal of consecration and celebration of the past. The plenary sessions were filled with worship and thanksgiving as the participants reviewed what God has done through missions since 1910. The variety of nationalistic and cultural worship styles from the continents of the world were uplifting and inspiring. They gave visual proof to the fact that over the past 100 years the church has become global, indigenous, and culturally pluralistic.

Another goal met was the reinforcement that God’s global church is no longer western-centric. This was by design. Although Ralph Winter initiated the vision for this global mission consultation, there was only a sprinkling of westerners on the planning team. Of the eleven plenary speakers, only three were from the West. Only twenty percent of the nearly 1000 participants were western mission leaders. The venue (Japan) was non-western. On the platform, there were no western worship or drama teams during the week. The vast technical team that functioned behind the scenes was completely non-western. This was indeed a global conference organized, comprised of, and administered by Majority World leaders. As such, it reflected accurately the make-up of the Church today.

The Japanese context of the conference cannot be overlooked. It was by foresight and design that Winter lobbied that this conference be held on Japanese soil. One of the explicit purposes of the conference was to “bless the Japanese church and people.” Time has shown how this has become significant. The evening plenary sessions were open to Japanese believers, and they flocked to the meetings. They were blessed by the content of the program but also by seeing and feeling how many they really are when joined together. In their typical small congregations they miss the grandeur of their corporate number.

What no one could have imagined at the time was the direct affect this would have on the Japanese church ten months later. That was, *to the very day*, when the catastrophic earthquake and tidal wave hit northern Japan, devastating communities and killing thousands.

In-part due to connections that were made and inspiration to serve that was generated at Tokyo 2010, area churches and believers in Tokyo have joined together in providing relief, comfort and compassionate ministries to their affected countrymen.

#### Some noted strengths

The Tokyo 2010 Global Consultation produced three significant products that have enhanced the world of missions.

1. The Tokyo Declaration. This document has become the directional statement for the 30+ networks that signed it as they move forward in mission through this decade. This document focuses on “making disciples of every people in our generation.” It is a clear clarion call to not only reach (evangelize) but to also teach and transform (make disciples) every remaining people group that has yet to have a viable church established among them. Signatories pledged to engage in cooperative efforts in seeking “to know where people are unreached, overlooked, ignored or forgotten,” in order to “love and make disciples of them in the way of the Cross.”

2. The Last Mile Calling. Another strength that came out of the conference has been the ability of attendees to be continuously stay in contact with each other. In partnership with Tokyo 2010, this fully secure, on-line networking platform ([www.lastmilecalling.org](http://www.lastmilecalling.org)) enables members of the global mission community to be inter-connected, irrespective of where they are located. Through this electronic platform they can share ideas, exchange information, update one another, adopt unreached people groups and pray for specific needs. The strength of electronic networking, especially for those in remote and restrictive locations, is obvious.

3. The establishment of the Tokyo 2010 Mission Network. Still in its infant stage, this network was established as a coordinating body to carry the momentum of the conference forward in practical ways. All 30+ mission structure Declaration signatories have, as autonomous units, become affiliates of this network. Regional meetings and strategy working groups are envisioned. Yet to be seen, is how this network will complement and not compete with the well-established Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance and the Lausanne movement network. I believe its value will be in giving the opportunity to the many economically disadvantaged mission workers and evangelists who normally do not have the privilege to attend forums and consultations held by the better financed WEA-MC and Lausanne networks.

#### Some noted weaknesses

There has been some criticism, justly warranted, that Tokyo 2010 focused so narrowly on “making disciples of all peoples,” that it omitted the social aspect of the Church’s mission. The consultation provided little discussion on areas of social justice, creation care, advocating for the disenfranchised, compassion ministries or poverty abatement. Not one plenary session addressed these issues and no workshop dealt directly with any of them. The evangelistic mandate not only took priority over the cultural mandate, it was the sole mandate of focus. There are those who consider this not only the consultation’s weakness but an inexcusable omission.

However, the weakness in this regard, is not that these issues were not directly addressed. Rather, the strength of the conference was that they were not. The organizers of the conference knew that three other global conferences were to follow: Edinburgh 2010, Cape Town 2010, and Boston 2010. Each of them would deal extensively with cultural mandate related issues – and they did. Tokyo 2010 was intended to set itself apart from the other three as the forum where full attention would be placed on the evangelistic mandate of the Church, the “making disciples of all nations.”

It should be noted, however, that the Tokyo Declaration did not entirely exclude reference to social justice and related issues. They are referenced under the teaching section, stating:

The new believer’s worldview must be adjusted to a biblical worldview; his lifestyle changed to increasingly conform to the image of Christ; and his ethical conduct progressively marked by biblical morals. Ideally, this results in individuals applying the gospel of the kingdom to every sphere and pursuit of life—from government to economics, from education to health, and from science to creation care. As a consequence whole communities, cultures and countries benefit from the transforming power of the gospel. Thus, the importance of the ministry of teaching.

Therefore, a perceived weakness was actually the consultation’s designed uniqueness.

Looking back, there was an expectation that the consultation glaringly failed to fulfill. One of the stated goals was to “look at new opportunities, models & strategies.” Disappointingly, I did not discern any new models or strategies issued forth from the conference. It may well be that if renowned thinker Ralph Winter had still been living and in attendance, that something uniquely new in terms of methodology, model or strategy would have emanated in this area. But in his absence, nobody else stepped forward to propose anything new of directional value. This was unfortunate.

#### Conclusion

Tokyo 2010 was a worthy and successful global mission consultation. It informed, encouraged and energized a specific segment of the Church – those who lead mission structures, gathered from around the globe. It gave impetus to all who attended to focus on the singular task of “making disciples of all peoples,” and to strive to do so in this generation. Did it over-dream? Yes, it did. Did it under-produce? Probably so. But which of the four 2010 global conferences did not? For myself, I am glad that the first global conference of 2010 placed a strong emphasis on one of the last things Jesus commissioned his followers: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”

#### Bio:

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