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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WORLD CHRISTIAN REVITALIZATION MOVEMENTS

REVITALIZATION

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The Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements contributes to the vitality of Christian mission and local congregations by synthesizing learnings from past and present revitalization movements worldwide. Its approach is interdisciplinary, combining biblical studies, theology, history, anthropology, and sociology.

Revitalization is the twice-yearly bulletin of the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements. Center Director: J. Steven O'Malley. Editor: Michael Pasquarello; Associate Editor, Chris Kiesling; Book Review Editor, Mark Lewis. The cost is \$6.00/year by mail, or \$5.00 on our website. Sample copies sent free. Send correspondence or change of address to Revitalization, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY 40390 or email revitalization@asburyseminary.edu. Feedback, letters to the editor, and brief articles are welcome.

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear friends of the Center for the Study of Christian World Revitalization Movements,

We are pleased to share this spring/summer edition of our newsletter with you. As you will see in the article that follows, the Center is continuing its work of studying and interpreting revitalization movements around the world. As you read you will get a sense of how much this work comprises the asking of many, many questions in preparation for our third and final consultation in Toronto, Canada later this year. We have proceeded in this manner because the subject of our study is the work of the Triune God, and especially the person of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life, at work in Christian communities around the world. We acknowledge that what we are hoping to understand better is the mystery of grace which has been revealed by God in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ for the sanctification of the church and the redemption of creation. For this reason, we believe it is our responsibility to pursue this task with humility and hope. Humility, in that we will never fully comprehend the ways of God; hope, in that God has promised to bring about a new heavens and a new earth through the work of Christ and the Spirit. I am grateful to my faculty colleague at Asbury Theological Seminary, Dr. Chris Kiesling, for contributing to the following report on major themes and questions that were raised during the table conversations that constituted our second consultation in Edinburgh, Scotland. This issue concludes with a report from the Center's Director, Dr. Steve O'Malley. ■

Peace, Michael Pasquarello III

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Editor, Revitalization

CONSULTATION TWO REPORT

The Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements conducted the second of three international consultations during late May and early June, 2010, in Edinburgh, Scotland: "Exploring the Dialectic between Revitalization and Church." The significance of this setting for World Christianity was obvious to all who attended, as the consultation coincided with the Centennial celebration of the 1910 Edinburgh conference. In a manner similar to the first consultation, participants were asked to do their work in table discussion groups, focusing attention on three primary tasks: (a) providing a definition of revitalization, (b) constructing a model of the church for revitalization, and (c) explaining what revitalization means for the internal and external life of the church. As we (the editors) worked our way through the fifteen, single-spaced pages of notes and reflections that were collected from these table conversations, two impressions quickly began to form. First, we were struck by the complexity of the assigned tasks. Second, the work of our participants has made an important contribution toward increasing our understanding of revitalization and the church. The following reflections are a modest attempt to identify some key themes and questions that emerged during our reading of this material.

In their discussions, table participants acknowledged that attempts to define revitalization will inevitably presuppose other fundamental questions - what do we hope will be revitalized, and to what end? Their reflections seem to indicate that ways of answering these questions will differ from community to community depending upon a variety of aims: i.e., revitalization of the church, the culture, the liturgy, or the human community. In addition, there was considerable discussion regarding the nature of revitalization: is it an end in itself, or a means to another end? In other words, for whose sake does revitalization occur? Is its purpose to strengthen the church, to transform aspects of culture, to advance the gospel, or more fundamentally, to glorify God? As we reflected on the questions raised by our table groups concerning the nature of revitalization, we were reminded of earlier periods of extensive evangelization, spiritual awakening, and cultural transformation in North America which demonstrated a similar dialectic between revitalization and church. Such historical examples led us to ask if we should attempt to understand revitalization in historical or theological terms. What we have discovered, however, is that in attempting to arrive at a definition of revitalization table participants generally began by orienting their conversations theologically. For example, acknowledging the

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action of each member of the Trinity; emphasizing the "already, but not yet" dimensions of God's kingdom and the church's eschatological hope; focusing on the paschal mystery and the cruciform nature of Christian faith and life; and confessing that revitalization is, from beginning to end, "God's presence and action in the world via the body of Christ." On the other hand, one of our table groups chose not to begin theologically, questioning the appropriateness of defining revitalization by the use of formal theological terms rather than the language which is indigenous to the historical, social, and cultural location of each ecclesial community.

Given the variety of working definitions around the concept of revitalization we were not surprised that a number of correlative questions and concerns began to emerge as our table participants shifted their focus to constructing a model of the church for revitalization. One group suggested that "there is no model" (since revitalization movements are context-specific) and that renewal should not be conceived as an abstract concept but rather as a narrative account of "doing things together." However, this hesitation may also reflect a certain amount of ecumenical sensitivity and restraint, since another working group had already expressed concern that the process of constructing a model of revitalization should not require the prescription of any particular ecclesiology. Moreover, another table discussion focused on the question of whether a theological basis for constructing a

model of revitalization was necessary prior to the movement or should be discerned as one of the effects or fruits of the movement itself. We suspect that such questions and concerns will inevitably be part of any attempts to situate and understand contemporary revitalization movements within the larger vision of God's dealings with his people provided by the narrative of Scripture. Another set of questions thus emerged for our consideration: Where should we begin? What should we emphasize? What length of time is required to constitute a revitalization movement? And in an ecumenical gathering such as this one, whose story (stories) of the church will be told?

The second question assigned for table discussions emphasized the central place of ecclesiology. In other words, how is revitalization related to and expressive of ecclesial forms of life? And should our understandings of revitalization be derived from tradition or stand over and against tradition? The complexity of this particular ques-

tion was accentuated by the historical reality of revitalization movements that have been raised up to serve as a prophetic voice in relation to the "mother" church which gave them birth. The discussions around this particular question were framed by participants in a variety of interesting ways. One table group contended that ecclesiology cannot control the work of the Holy Spirit, and that attempts to program or structure renewal may actually become an obstacle to the church's freedom in the Spirit. Another group concluded that the metaphor of a journey, or the church on pilgrimage, might be more appropriate than language which suggests human mastery and control. A third table group grappled with the question of how the authority of leadership is authenticated as the work of the Spirit within a movement, given the prevalence of charismatic preachers and other popular figures who occupy prominent positions in leading renewal movements. In relation to this line of discussion, another table group raised the question as to whether revitalization movements are more likely to emerge in the West than in the East. Moreover, the members of this group acknowledged their question may point toward a need for careful analysis of the particular personal, social, political, and ecclesial conditions preceding and surrounding renewal movements such as: long term cultural crises leading to a loss of hope concerning the future, identity alienation, a sense of spiritual emptiness and longing, consumer - oriented and market - driven church competitiveness, denominational decline, and governmental oppression.

Finally, our table groups were asked to explain what revitalization means for the external and internal life of the church. This question prompted extended discussion around the challenges related to identifying the particular



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CONSULTATION TWO REPORT cont'd.

characteristics, effects, and fruits, etc., that may be seen as signs of an authentic revitalization movement. Attempts to define particular signs of spiritual vitality as criteria for identifying an authentic revitalization movement yielded a rather long and diverse list. This prompted one table group to suggest a possible taxonomy of revitalization movements which might include the following classifications:

- Repentance leading to a way of life characterized by self-denial
- Healing - restoration that may be associated with reconciliation within family life
- Prophetic discernment - exposing and confronting culturally accommodated forms of idolatry
- Pentecostal signs and wonders
- Persecution
- Embodiment of the Word
- Care for creation
- Ministry with the poor
- Liturgical renewal



During the course of this discussion a number of other important questions were raised concerning the types of vital signs that may accompany authentic revitalization. In addition to asking what kind of conditions might invite or facilitate revitalization, our participants also thought it important to ask what kind of practices might sustain and extend such movements. This last question turned the conversation to a discussion of how the study of revitalization and the church might require a fresh theological exploration of divine and human action. For example, do human needs prompt divine action, or is the divine initiative completely responsible for generating renewal? And in light of the clarification pursuing such questions might yield, are there faithful and appropriate ways that established churches and institutions might seek, encourage, hope for, and position themselves to be made participants in the Spirit's work of revitalization?

"Exploring the Dialectic between Revitalization and Church" completed the second stage of a three year project which aims to serve the global church by identifying, studying, and interpreting revitalization movements from around the world. This article has attempted to briefly summarize a series of conversations that took place among the diverse group of participants who gathered on the occasion of remembering and celebrating the 1910 Edinburgh Conference. Our hope is that the results of the good work which was completed during the first and second consultations will serve as a guide for participants of our third and final consultation which will be hosted by Tyndale Seminary of Toronto, Canada, in October, 2011. ●

—Chris Kiesling & Michael Pasquarello

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

2011 marks the completion of a three year project funded by the Henry Luce Foundation which has aimed to measure the collective contributions from members of the world Christian community who have participated with us in strategic consultations since 2009. We have looked to these partners to report on the heartbeat of revitalization movements that are significantly influencing the life and mission of global Christianity. It has been our great joy to welcome persons from different expressions of the global church who have joined with us to study, interpret, and understand better the Holy Spirit's work of revitalization around the world.

In the summer of 2011 we plan to publish a volume of essays that will provide a variety of perspectives on the research data gathered at the Edinburgh consultation in June, 2010. In October, 2011, we will convene a third and final consultation of our current project at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto. This gathering will bring forward the insights from

the previous consultations in order to guide six case studies of communities representing diasporic revitalization movements located in the Toronto area. We believe each of these communities, which represent particular revitalization movements based in the global South, are now making a significant impact for Christ in reaching across borders in the highly multiethnic context of Toronto. The consultation will be followed by a public forum which will be hosted by a large Chinese congregation, the Richmond Hill Christian Community Church, near the Tyndale campus. An important aim of this consultation will be to share insights gained during the course of our three year project with the larger Toronto community. This presentation will feature the close connection between revitalization, diaspora Christian communities, and lay development in order to demonstrate the importance of every member - participation in the ministry of Christian revitalization.

The work of the Center this year has also included hosting research

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scholars, including our first in-residence research fellow, Dr. YalinXin of China, who completed his PhD at Asbury Theological Seminary, studying the house church movement in China and its ongoing ministry. His current research features women leaders in that movement. In February, we the coordinating committee of the Center hosted Dr. Sadira Joy Tira of Toronto, International Coordinator for the Filipino International Network (FIN): "A catalytic movement of Christians committed to motivate and mobilize Filipinos globally to partner for worldwide mission", who is also Global Ministries Diaspora Specialist for the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Canada. We appreciate the assistance of Dr. Tira, as well as our friends and colleagues on the Tyndale Seminary faculty in Toronto with whom we are privileged to serve in planning the final consultation. We are especially pleased that Tyndale Seminary has agreed to be our host, since it is an exemplar of intercultural faculty and student composition, with a special focus on ministry with Asians.

We are grateful for the network which is being formed among friends and partners in this research, a connection which includes a diverse number of denominational, racial, and ethnic groups from around the world. We be-

lieve these partnerships and the ecclesial communities they represent are a source of hope for the future of Christianity in the twenty first century.

I am also very pleased to report that preparation is currently underway for a renewal grant to continue the research of the Center over the next four years. This next phase of research will extend our study of revitalization to four megacities of the Global South. This work will seek to understand more fully the transnational and urban character of major centers of revival in global Christianity and how they may inform our understanding and practice of Christian faith in North American. We look forward to sharing more about the future of the Center and its research in the coming months. ●

With thanks to each of you for the gift of your prayerful support of the work to which the Center has been called,

Steve O'Malley, Director
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