

**“Next Wave: The Changing Contours of World Mission and Christianity”**  
**By Rodney L. Petersen**

2010 finds four international conferences exploring the legacy of the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference – Tokyo, Edinburgh, Cape Town and Boston. Edinburgh 1910 is known for its influence on mission strategy, inception of ecumenical relationships, and opening dialogue with other living religions. November 4-7 affords BTI faculties, students and those from further afield opportunity to participate in a student-oriented, academic conference to consider what the “next wave” of Christian mission will look like.

Mission strategists often identify the first wave with Edinburgh. Its focus was on the *geographical* spread of Christianity. Dominated by mission strategists like Anglican J. H. Oldham, Methodist J. R. Mott and Presbyterian Robert Speer, 200 of the 1200 delegates were women with few representatives of the global church present. Edinburgh 1910 was white, largely male and Protestant but led to multiple mission movements.

A second wave of mission strategy emerged in the 1930s with a focus on *ethnographic* or “people” groups. Originating with persons like Cameron Townsend, Frank Laubach and Donald McGavran, it might best be seen as represented by Townsend, founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators. Its focus on translating the Bible into indigenous languages was felt to facilitate ethnic literacy and to foster local leadership freed from dependency on western ways and means. A further facet of this movement, represented by McGavran (*Understanding Church Growth*, 1970), discerns the sociological factors that motivate or impede receptivity to Christianity.

A third wave of mission strategy, the “*two thirds movement*,” is shaped by church activists like Pentecostal David Cho of Korea, Ravi Zacharias of India and G. D. James of Singapore. Its emphasis is on nationals reaching nationals, drawing upon elements of local culture, and a house or cell-group church strategy. This last wave has influenced mega-churches, emerging and missional church movements in North America.

We stand on the edge of a spiritual *tsunami*. With Christianity’s projected growth in Asia alone expected to outstrip that found in Europe and North America, “*the changing contours of world mission and Christianity*” are upon us. Each of the traditions represented in the BTI stands at a crossroads in terms of identity and mission.

Edinburgh was not able to forestall the ravages of the twentieth century or the violence that has carried us into 21<sup>st</sup>. An agenda for the next wave of mission will surely include reconciliation, to be set forth at the World Council of Churches’ International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Jamaica in May 2011. The mission we seek is liberative and graceful. It sees the *imago dei* in each or sees it not at all. Its end will be forgiveness and reconciliation. And, finally, it will do what religion has always done, offer a sense of identity, give direction to life and provide consolation in the face of loss. With its unique academic mosaic, Boston 2010 challenges the future shape of identity and mission.