

Women's Perspectives on Mission and Theological Education in the 21st Century

Mission for All: *Full participation in the mending¹ of creation*

Women gathered at Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland from November 24-28, 2008 for a consultation '*Towards Edinburgh 2010: Women's Perspectives on Mission and Theological Education in the 21st Century.*' We came from 27 countries, 8 regions, 22 denominations, including Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant, and included indigenous women, young women, sexual minorities, and women with disability. The consultation was organized by the Women's Programme of the World Council of Churches together with Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) and Lay Formation Programmes (WCC), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Student Christian Federation, Mission 21, and the Lutheran World Federation.

The aim was to bring together different women's perspectives on engagement in mission and theological education with the hope of finding a way to have women's voices and perspectives be an integral part of the Edinburgh 2010 process.

Our methodology was largely dialogical, engaging the context, experience and theological opinions of all the participants. We did contextual Bible study, heard case studies and panel discussion, worshipped together, and worked in communal processes to think about our theme of mission and theological education as well as decide together how to engage Edinburgh 2010.

In pondering mission, we agreed that our missiologies and our mission praxis are contextual, shaped by our understanding of how God invites people to share in the *Missio Dei* and by the concrete situations in which we live out that calling. At different times different biblical insights inspire our actions. Over the past decades our world has changed rapidly and the negative effects of globalization are visible everywhere; for example, people are forced to migrate to find food and a home in a strange land, our societies are increasingly violent, and the earth is groaning. It has become clear to us that Christian mission must engage with economic, ecological and gender realities. Our work as stewards of God's mission must, therefore, integrate concrete action to work for justice, inclusion, and transformation of our suffering world. We must also identify the Church's complicity in the domination over women and nature in the name of mission. We must repent of this and work for the transformation of unjust structures within the Church itself as well as in the wider society. In mission, we must work in partnership and with deep respect for all of God's creation.

In our brief time together, we reviewed the past, examined the present, and envisioned the future.

With regard to the past century,

- We mourn:

¹ Understood to connote reparation and regaining wholeness.

- That women have often been invisible, their contribution has been undervalued, and they have been marginalized within the structures of knowledge and power.
- That women were not full participants of Edinburgh 1910 and that the contributions of women to mission were not well-represented at Edinburgh 1910.
- We celebrate:
 - That the status and role of women in society and in church has advanced in many contexts and in many ways. We have women theologians and women in ordained and lay ministry. More doors of seminaries and theological faculties have opened to women as well as increased opportunities for lay formation. There has been a proliferation of feminist theological literature around the world. Women have been active in advocacy and their ministries increasingly recognized.

With regard to the present,

- We regret:
 - That resistance still exists in church and society to the full participation of women in societal structures.
 - We regret that parity does not exist between women and men on the organizing team for the Edinburgh 2010 process, reflecting an ongoing marginalization of women. We note from the Edinburgh 2010 website that the Scottish Coordinating Team (SCoT) has only 28% women and the Representatives of Organisations has a mere 25% women. There are many number of women's organizations that could ably participate in the planning process, including the YWCA, World Day of Prayer, WEAVERS, Manahine Pasefika (Association of Oceanian Women Theologians), International Union of Superiors General, Women's Division General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, Commission of Women in Mission of EMW (Evangelisches Missionwerk in Deutschland), Women and Gender Desk of Mission 21 (Evangelisches Missionswerk Basel), European Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women, EATWOT Womens' Commission (Ecumenical Association Third World Theologians), Con-Spirando, Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, and the Asian Womens' Resource Centre for Theology and Culture.
- We affirm:
 - The priceless contribution of women theological educators who have brought women into the scene of mission and theological education, the many women's networks that support women in their call to be agents of transformation in the world, and the existing partnerships between women and men.
 - The commitment of the organizers of Edinburgh 2010 to have balanced representation of women and men and people from the global south and global north.

With regard to the future,

- We sound the alarm:
 - That progress made is not being sustained in many places. Funding and support for feminist theology and gender studies is being seriously reduced. The proportion of women on some theological faculties is decreasing. Many

men have not been adequately empowered to partner with women in our mutual mission.

- We commit ourselves, in hope:
 - To challenge churches and theological schools to proclaim and practice the full participation of women and men in the mending of creation.
 - To work towards the eradication of violence against women by involving both women and men to challenge domination and violence.
 - To mentor young people and work together with youth as partners in mission.
 - To continue the work of our consultation by engaging our communities in dialogue about mission and contributing all we can to the process and implementation of Edinburgh 2010.

Since both women and men are made in the image of God, they should both be present, working side by side in mission.

In view of the above, this consultation resolved to contribute to the Edinburgh 2010 process by:

- Enthusing our communities and networks about the Edinburgh 2010 study process and event.
- Nominating one representative woman theologian from this consultation to join the Edinburgh 2010 General Council in order to contribute specific women's perspectives to the planning processes.
- Identifying at least one woman for each of the nine study groups, according to their expertise and research interest, so as to enrich each group with women's perspectives.
- Producing a paper that focuses on women's perspectives and methodologies in mission to be included in the Edinburgh 2010 study book along with the chapters from each of the 9 study groups.
- Contributing towards a global resource on women in mission and theological education to be made available at Edinburgh 2010 or beyond.

Meanwhile, our recommendations to the Edinburgh 2010 General Council are:

- To have parity between women and men and between the global south and global north in each aspect of the Edinburgh 2010 process and event, planning and programme, including plenary speakers, persons giving testimonies and workshop leaders.
- To pay special attention that women are included in the worship and Bible study teams as planners and facilitators of inclusive worship and Bible study.
- To ensure that youth (from the global south and global north, women and men) be an integral part of the leadership of the Edinburgh 2010 study processes and event planning and implementation.
- To organise plenary sessions that are interspersed with testimonies by grassroots persons from the margins and who do mission with women at risk and children at risk.
- To ensure that women and men lead at all levels as co-chairs so as to engage different perspectives in conversation and debate
- To introduce into the Edinburgh 2010 event a methodology that begins with the reality of people's experience from different contexts, moves to analysis, using all of the theological tools, and leaves us with concrete ideas and commitments for action and transformation.

Failure to fully integrate women will hinder the capacity of Edinburgh 2010 to assess critically the status of the world, to renew our understanding of God's purpose for creation in Christ, and to further a renewed vision of spirituality and mission for the 21st century.

Let us all, women together with men, hold up the highest possible vision for this important historical moment and walk together as we open ourselves to the movement of the Triune God.