



On 1910 the World Missionary Conference gathered in Edinburgh. It was a remarkable meeting. It was the starting point of modern mission and the launch pad for the ecumenical movement. It was also the peak of Western mission. The delegates were so confident of their mission and of the progress of science and improved means of travel and communication that they believed this was a sign of God's providence and the whole world would be Christian by the year 2000. But within decades their hopes were dashed by the trenches of World War I, the Depression, World War II, the end of colonialism, the end of Christendom and the rise of the Third World and its Churches. It was a similar story with Catholic Mission. In a century we went from supreme confidence to a malaise in mission so that Pope John Paul II felt compelled in 1990 to write *Redemptoris Missio*, an encyclical to assure missionaries of the "permanent validity" of mission.

It's an irony of life that when we are successful we believe that God must be on our side and when our works fail then we despair and feel deserted by God. Yet the church has always needed apparent failure and suffering to become fully alive to its real nature and mission. It is all too human to confuse our plans and our successes with God's plans for the world. Through failure we come to recognise that mission is God's mission not ours and we must allow God the freedom to save in the way God wishes. Our task is to be faithful and hopeful.

It is easy to be hopeful when bolstered by the optimism of everyone around us but it requires faith and courage to trust that all will be well when everything seems to be going against us and God seems absent. Recently I read a statement by Timothy Radcliffe which inspired me. "Christianity does not offer a road map, but it does have a story." It is Jesus' story. It is a story of failure, misunderstanding, betrayal but also of faithfulness and self-sacrificing love. It was the same for the disciples frequently, but especially with Jesus' death, their hopes for the future were dashed. Yet somehow they managed to hang on, to be as faithful as they could because of their confidence in Jesus.

Most of us would love life to be simple and trouble free but we slowly learn to be grateful for the crises we face. A crisis-free existence for the Christians and the Church is unhealthy and strangely soul-destroying. It's in crises that we come close to God and are converted and rejuvenated.

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