THE FUTURE OF MISSION?

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Some thoughts from Michael Stroope on the future of mission.
Category: Observations

This week I spent 24 hours at a Global Connections' conference on the future of mission. The keynote speaker was Michael Stroope author of Transcending MissionÂ one of the most important books on missionÂ to emerge in the past decade (read my review here). It was a stimulating couple of days and it's always good to catch up with old friends and to talk about important things. That being said, I'm not sure that I heard anything new or surprising, apart from a couple of very challenging personal stories. There is an ongoing problem with these sorts of meetings in that the people who are essential to push for change; church leaders and agency board members rarely attend them. Meanwhile, the "mission nerds", as someone described those attending the meeting, talk about the importance of change and new models of mission, but little actually changes in the Western mission movement.

The highpoint of the meeting for me was Michael Stroope's closing summary. What follows are my notes and they may not exactly reflect what he said, but here goes anyway.

In a commercialised world, religion and mission have become products to be bought and sold on the market.

Ecclesiology is key: the effective separation of church and mission is wrong. There were good historical reasons for Carey suggesting new structures for mission over 200 years ago, but we should not assume that these hold good today.

We need a better biblical understanding of the nature of power.

We need to rethink how we define and measure success. What is transformation? What is fruitfulness?

We need a ministry of introduction and hospitality. We have to set up tables and invite others to share with us and we need to turn up at tables set by others.

We need to pray. We must pray as if we are desperate to know God. We have to pray as if we are convinced that God hears us and intervenes in time and history. We have to acknowledge that this is difficult for activist cultures.

We have to address the mission narrative. Are we telling the whole story? Are we spinning it? Are we focussing on others or on ourselves?

The future will involve new paradigm**s** and new model**s** of mission. There is no one answer to the questions that are being posed today and no one solution. We need to be okay with ambiguity. We need to beÂ *for* each other, spurring one another on, not pushing our solutions on others.

We need to focus on ends, realising that means change. Missions is not an end, it is simply a vehicle. The end is the glory of God and my own transformation.

We need to stop thinking about scale. Church growth is not the goal, smaller but deeper may be the

answer. The parables of the kingdom are key to how we envision mission.

If sacrificial love is the means to the end, we may need to rethink our theology of suffering and loss. We need a much better critique of the prosperity gospel (I would add, we need a better critique of Western, secularised materialism, which is an equal danger to the church).

What is the role of the missionary? Our role is changing, we are no longer driving the bus. It is no longer our bus!

Social change will decimate the modern missionary enterprise. We have to change our language and our attitudes if we are to play a role in the future.