MILLENNIALS AND MISSION

Posted on February 19, 2020 by Eddie

If there is a future for mission from the West, it will be shaped by those who are in their twenties and thirties today. We cannot assume that they will neatly follow in the organisational footsteps of earlier generations. Maybe they will, but I wouldn't take it for granted.
Category: Observations

I've just finished reading Millennials and Mission: A Generation Faces a Global Challenge and while I'm not going to review it, it does spark a few thoughts.

I read the book because I'm working on something about the future of mission agencies and understanding the way in which the next generation will engage in mission will be key to that future. For those who are unfamiliar with (or sceptical about) generation terminology, millennials are those who were born between 1982 and 2000.

The problem with the book from my point of view is that it was written by old people like me, for old people like me. It's a bit like reading Europeans explaining what African life and theology are like, rather than reading what Africans have to say. The story comes second hand and filtered through the world view of the storyteller. In this case, the constant references to how good the authors' (there are two of them, this isn't a typo for once) own mission agency is and the gung-ho do this and all your problems will be over approach came across as very baby-boomer to me. There were a number of theological and philosophical inconsistencies which irritated me, but I could live with those.

The big problem was that the book lacked imagination. It was written by older people talking about how millennials can fit into organisations run by those same older people. What tweaks might need to be made here and there so traditional agencies can become more friendly - while retaining their broad, driven culture. It makes the unspoken assumption that involvement in world mission means involvement in a mission agency and proceeds from there. However, agencies and mission are not the same thing and should not be confused.

Rather than a book that talks about how millennials can come and join us, we need one that sets out how millennials understand God's mission and what they think of the current industrial-mission complex. When we hear millennials stories and their viewpoints we can seriously start to think about structures, but if we start with structures we'll inevitably come to the wrong answer. It may be uncomfortable, but we cannot avoid discussing issues such as climate change and sexuality with regard to mission. They may not be big issues to people my age, but as I understand it, the underlying issue of justice links these and a host of other issues to mission. We need to talk about them.

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What we don't need is more old blokes like me telling us what millennials think, so I'll stop here - almost.

I have a number of friends who fit into the millennial generation and I'd love to hear your thoughts on world mission and mission agencies. Is there anyone out there willing to write a guest blog post or two (500-1,000 words a time)? There is no payment, just the opportunity to get your opinions heard by a wider group who desperately need to hear your voice even if they don't realise it. It would also help to inform me in the presentations that I give to agencies and you'd have my eternal gratitude. If you'd be interested in writing something, please get in touch and if you know someone whose opinion we should here, please pass this on to them.