MISSIONARY PRIORITIES

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Category: Observations

There are two contrasting facts that should (must) influence any discussion of missionary priorities and involvement today. The first is the dramatic shift in the demography of the church. Christianity is growing incredibly rapidly in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The church is growing faster than it ever has done before and we should rejoice at this. That being said, this poses a challenge for our existing mission structures because there is a whole new cohort of "missionaries" arising who don't naturally fit within our traditional ways of thinking and doing things. There is also a need for new believers to be trained and discipled within their own cultural contexts.

The second fact is that despite this incredible growth in the church, we are hardly holding our own. Yes, huge numbers of people are becoming believers, but even more people are having babies, so the number of Christians as a percentage of the world population is static or even falling. Around a third of the people in the world would describe themselves as Christians and that is more or less constant. But the world population is growing. This means that there are an increasing number of people who are not believers. More critically, still, the number of people who have no obvious way of becoming Christians (often termed the unreached or unengaged) because they are unlikely to ever meet a Christian is increasing.

Can I suggest that this second fact should (metaphorically at least) keep evangelical Christians awake at night? Every day there are more and more people going to a Christless eternity and that looks likely to continue. Can I suggest further, that if you and your church are not involved in some way in addressing this issue, something is wrong?

I fully realise that not every church in the UK can send a missionary or a missionary team to an unreached group. However, we can all covenant to pray on a regular basis for situations where the vast majority of people are unlikely ever to hear about Jesus. We can get behind missionaries or agencies who are working in these sorts of situations.

Let me be honest, I am allergic to some of the rhetoric and approaches that surround reaching the unreached, but that doesn't make the need any less urgent.

By all means, be involved in training church leaders around the world, have an interest in health care or education. However, if you call yourself evangelical and your church's mission interest portfolio does not include reaching the unreached, you need to do something about it.