MOBILISATION: NOT THE BEST WORD

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Category: Observations

Mission agencies and their representatives like to talk about mobilisation. It is a broad-reaching term which includes recruiting actual missionaries, but also encouraging people to pray for mission, to give financially or to get involved in supporting mission work in a variety of other ways.

And I wish they would stop it!

The problem with mobilisation is that it is essentially a military metaphor. Now, in and of itself, that isn't a problem. The Bible uses lots of military pictures when encouraging us to be faithful followers of Jesus. Military discipline and service are good illustrations of the Christian life. I'm not against military examples, *per se*.

So why don't I like them in the mission world?

Let me explain. For the most part, this term is used in the context of *mobilising* people from Europe and North America to go to the majority world. However, we have a long history of these same countries actually *mobilising* armies to send to these same parts of the world. We in the West may not think a great deal about our colonial past or the military interventions of the post-colonial era, but they are still live in the memory of those who were colonised or who suffered our interventions.

Mobilisation gives the impression that the countries who are sending missionaries are active participants while those on the receiving end simply have to put up with what the more powerful countries decide. In truth, that is the way that politics and economics have worked and missionary work has fallen into the same trap.

So, I don't like the term *mobilisation* because the military connotations are insensitive in our post-colonial age and I also don't like it because it does not paint a picture of the sort of active partnership and cooperation that need to be at the heart of mission today.

I realise that posting something along these lines opens me up to accusations of being too PC or of trying to be *woke*. However, I think we need to work a lot harder at grasping the extent to which the church has changed around the world and the ways in which mission has changed. Language which maintains old stereotypes does not serve us well and we need to find better terms which capture the current realities.

To be honest, I don't have an easy alternative. Recruitment is better, but still has some problems. I

think that in the end, I'd want to go for a longer phrase such as "encouraging involvement", but that hardly trips off the tongue.