MISSION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: TRANSFORMING UNJUST STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY

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Category: Mission

This is the next in a delayed series of posts examining the five marks of mission, inspired by Mission in the 21st Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Mission by Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross.

Today we reach the fourth mark: to transform the unjust structures of society. It is good to start this short reflection with the verse which is on my wall in my eyeline:

> *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?*
> *To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)*

God wants us to act justly and to love mercy: justice and mercy are two of his attributes and he wants us to demonstrate them to. These are just as much imperatives in the life of a Christian as issues of sexual sin or any of the more current and popular moral issues of the day.

- God is a God of justice and loves it.
- Justice is not a mere concept but a relational reality that can be best seen in the life of the poor and the oppressed, witnessing their liberation. It is transforming justice.
- God's people will experience God's justice and are called to be an agent of that justice in this world.
- While the Old Testament speaks of justice quite often and very clearly, the New Testament does not repeat it with the same intensity, but endorses it in such a way that the new community of God has to be seen as a community of justice. (P.72)

This notion of a community of justice is an important one. Too often in evangelical circles issues of justice are dealt with by saying that when individuals become Christians they will work to transform their bit of society and little by little this will build up into a change for the whole nation. Now there is a truth in this, individual Christians should have an impact on the world, but it also betrays a very Western, view of the faith. The Biblical picture is about a redeemed community working and acting together, we are a part of a body and that body must act to transform society.

There is a problem in much of christendom that the Church and the political system have become intertwined (interestingly, this is at its strongest in the USA, where there is *de jure* but not *de facto* separation of church and state). This means that in the West the church has often not challenged the state when it should have done. The church needs to be a radical transforming community which stands up for the rights of the poor and oppressed.

Some would (and do) argue that getting involved with issues of social justice means that the church is not concentrating on the central job of evangelism.Â This takes us back to the first post in this series, where I argued that the church's mission is more than simply proclaiming the Gospel. Working for social justice must never stand on its own as a 'lone ranger' (p. 62) but must always be seen in the context of the broader message of announcing the kingdom of God. But equally, we cannot remove working for justice from the mission of the church without ignoring a large slice of

Jesus' teaching.

> *â€œThe Spirit of the LORD is upon me,*
> *for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.*
> *He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,*
> *that the blind will see,*
> *that the oppressed will be set free,*
> *and that the time of the Lordâ€™s favor has come. (Luke 4:18,19 NLT)*