A HEALTH CHECK FOR MISSION AGENCIES

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Some thoughts on the current situation for mission agencies from Steve Bell's new book.
Category: Observations

A few months back, I interviewed Steve Bell about his upcoming book, Mountains Move. My copy has finally arrived and I'm finding it to be a stimulating read; a review will appear soon. In the meantime, I thought that this section about mission agencies was worth quoting at length.

> *In Covid-19 language, Christian mission organisations have some 'underlying health conditions' which make them vulnerable to negative PC scrutiny because they are preoccupied with viability rather than relevance and are in denial of that fact. The following points show up where the blind spots seem to have set in*
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> *- The role of Mount Imperial (upon which the older mission organisations were founded was dismantled from the 1960s onwards and churches in the former colonies (known as the 'mission field') became autonomous, prompting mission agencies to have to discover what they are now for.*
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> *- Access to many countries has diminished greatly or closed, so what the mission groups used to be for has been made more difficult to maintain.*
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> *- The day of the career mission worker is over and the generation that supported them is passing away; a new funding model is therefore required but this is impossible within their current 'wineskin'.*
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> *- Western 'sending nations' are now sites of cross-cultural witness as local churches find themselves on a new cross cultural frontline.*
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> *- A misunderstanding exists between the mission agency, which looks to the local church for funding to send people 'over there' and the local church which looks for partnership to engage with the same ethnic groups who are now living 'over here'.*
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> *- Mission agencies restrict their focus and theological reflection to issues traditionally within their frame of reference, rather than dealing with the trending theological issues of the day, which will have a 'make-or-break' impact on what they do.*
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> *p. 91*

With regard to the latter point, I researched this issue in some detail for my PhD and you can read up about it in my edited thesis *Mission Agencies in Crisis?* There is also a shorter booklet *The Way Forward* which is available for Kindle or on the downloads page here.