TWO WAY TRAFFIC

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Category: Observations

In broad terms, modern mission agencies (or missionary societies as they were originally termed) came into being in order to send missionaries from the Christian world into places where there were no believers. Over time some agencies began to specialise in sending financial support, rather than people, but the movement was essentially the same; resources from the West were sent to the rest of the world. The flow was essentially one way.

Of course, in the years since mission agencies first arose, the world has changed dramatically. The church is in decline in much of the West, while it is growing rapidly in many places that were once considered as mission fields.

Now, there is still a need for the church in the West to contribute to the rest of the world, but there is an equal, if not more pressing, need for the rest of the world to contribute to the church over here. Paul's illustration of the church as a body, all of whose parts need each other applies on the macro scale as well as to individuals. We need each other.

Mission was envisaged as being a one way flow, but today it needs to be two way (actually, it needs to be multidirectional, but that is more complex than I want to be for the moment).

However, for this two way flow to occur as it should, our attitudes and structures need to change. Firstly, churches in the UK need to grow accustomed to receiving mission partners from other parts of the world (and not just from the so-called developed world). Alongside this, mission agencies need to adapt so that they promote and facilitate mission from the rest of the world to the UK. Some agencies already do this, but for the most part, it is only a small part of their operation and not the major focus which it needs to become. If our current agencies won't or can't make the changes that are needed, then new structures - probably based in the majority world church will arise to fill the gap. Actually, this may well be the best solution anyway.

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