IT'S TOUGH HERE

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We live in a missionary situation and we need to get used to it; there aren't any shortcuts.
Category: Observations

My friend John Stevens has just highlighted a report which indicates that the UK is one of the most challenging countries for Christians in Europe (you can read a shorter news report about it here).

The report says:

> *The UK is clearly undergoing a cultural process, in which Christian values are being replaced by secular values in society as well as in the legal landscape. This strongly threatens Freedom of Expression and breaches Parental Rights. Social intolerance in society is also affecting the rights of Christian institutions and churches, causing discrimination, and leading to vandalism. The media seems to contribute to this issue, by misrepresenting Christians in society. The public discourse about sex and gender is leading to the social exclusion of people who have dissenting opinions, even if they donâ€™t belong to a religious group. If opinions and beliefs can cause this degree of social exclusion, discrimination, and negative consequences in daily life, then these developments are cause for real concern.*
>
> *p. 46*

If you are Christian leader or teacher in the UK you really should plan to read the section of the report which refers to this country.

In this post I'd just like to touch on an issue which I raised when Ian Williamson interviewed me and also in my post about Christmas services: evangelism.

I'd like to try to distinguish between two types of evangelism, I'll call one Christendom evangelism, and the other missionary evangelism. There may be better terms out there, but these will do.

Christendom evangelism is what happens in a society where most people are confessional Christians. Most people have a lot of background knowledge of the Christian faith and they would probably identify themselves as Christians. This is the environment in which British evangelicalism developed and lived for most of its history. Christendom evangelism essentially consists of explaining to cultural Christians what the biblical message of the gospel is. You can assume that they have a lot of background knowledge, that they are sympathetic to the Christian message and that a significant number of people already feel the desire for a deeper commitment to Jesus.

Missionary evangelism is exactly the opposite. It takes place in a situation where people know next to nothing about the nature of the Christian faith and are at best apathetic and quite possibly hostile to it. There are huge barriers of both knowledge and culture to overcome before people are likely to respond to the message. This is why techniques such as Chronological Bible Storying were developed. Missionary evangelism involves a long-term commitment to sharing the gospel in word, deed and sharing life and it sometimes seems very little fruit.

Over the span of my lifetime, the UK has moved from a Christendom situation to a missionary one. However, all too often our evangelism has not kept pace with the changes in society outside. All too often, we see evangelism in terms of one-off events to which we invite people, rather than long term involvement in their lives, where a slow drip feed of gospel truth is backed up by Christlike living.

I have often been asked why people would spend a decade or more translating the Bible for a small people group. The truth is that missionary work is slow and sometimes painful. We live in a missionary situation and we need to get used to it; there aren't any shortcuts.

To be honest, I don't know what missionary evangelism will look like in different situations in the UK. The nature of missionary work is that it adapts to the context that it finds itself in. This series of posts on lessons that the church can learn from overseas mission might help, though.