THE BEST THING FOR THE BRITISH MISSION MOVEMENT

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Category: Mission Agency Futures

I mentioned in my previous post that as I near retirement, I may start to post a few things that I might have hesitated to write previously. Well, here goes!

Before I get too deep, let me explain what I'm talking about. When I say the British mission movement, I am referring to the plethora of different mission agencies and the string of organisations and structures that are in place to help them function. This should not be confused with mission from the UK or even more so with God's mission (the *missio Dei*). I am talking about a series of structures and organisations which may have a contribution to mission from the UK or to God's mission from these islands.

There are some significant differences between the mission movement and mission *per se*. For a start, mission or God's mission is transcends any particular set of structures, it is much bigger than anything that we put in place. Secondly, mission is eternal (whatever John Piper says), whereas human structures are purely temporary. Mission agencies come and go, but God's mission remains.

Which brings us to my thesis.

The best thing that could happen for the British mission movement is for one or two high profile agencies to go bankrupt.

Before anyone gets the wrong end of the stick. I am not thinking of any particular agency, I'm speaking in general terms. Obviously, I have my favourite agencies and I would prefer that they were ok, but the principle stands. Some agencies need to die.

Let me explain. I've written about this numerous times, but the number of agencies in the UK continues to grow, while the number of church goers is not growing at the same rate, if at all. My recent analysis shows that overall agency income declined from 2018-2020, and it looks as though 2021 will be even worse. This is further compounded by the fact that some larger agencies are growing financially, further squeezing some of the smaller ones. There isn't enough money to go round.

A second issue, is that it is my observation that the British mission movement has yet to get to grips with the face that we are operating from the margins of the church and not the centre. Things have moved on and the Western world, of which we are a small part, is no longer the heartland of the Christian faith. For mission agencies who operate across international and cultural boundaries, these

changes are existential in nature. However, it is my observation that most agencies are operating, broadly as they did 20 or more years ago. Some have made some small changes to the way in which they operate, but the British mission movement has not changed in the same way that the church around the globe has.

Now, these problems can be resolved. It won't be easy, but they are fixable. Financial problems can be addressed by sharing some back office functions, or perhaps having an outside organisation consolidate the work of a lot of smaller agencies. The issue of changing alongside the world church is more complex and will require concerted action at both board and executive level. I've outlined some of the steps that could be taken in my small booklet "The Way Forward".

The thing is, we've been talking about these things for a long, long time and while the world has changed around us, the British mission movement has not changed greatly. As a result, churches and individuals are finding new ways to be involved in what God is doing, without troubling existing agency structures. While I have no fundamental objection to this, it does mean that mistakes that agencies made decades or even centuries ago are being repeated by new movements.

I believe that the reason that we are not changing as fast or as drastically as we need to, is that we simply don't feel the pressure to change. That is why, I believe that a few high profile agencies need to go to the wall. Only then, will agency boards grasp the reality of the situation that we are in. The sad thing is that we have enough momentum in our movement to carry on for years without changing; we are viable, but are we relevant?

Sad to say, I think only a big shock will wake us up to the reality of the world that we now live in.