THE PRODUCT AND GUIDE OF MISSION: WRITING

Posted on May 17, 2010 by Eddie

Category: Bible & Mission

There has been a fair bit written on the issue of reading a Bible through the lens of mission. My blogging colleagues Brian and Tim are particularly active in this field (Brian has just published an excellent essay on the subject.) However, less has been written on the subject of how the Bible was written in a missional context: though this is an important part of the equation.

I'd like to briefly explore the way in which one book of the Bible came to be written in a highly missional context. For this exercise, I'd like to look at the book of Romans, which would probably not be most people's first choice of a book inspired by mission.

The first thing to remember is that Paul was a first century Jewish convert to Christianity who was writing to his contemporaries about the issues they faced. It isn't unusual to come across people who write as though Paul was writing to address issues in sixteenth century Europe. He wasn't. This doesn't mean that we can't apply his writings to those issues, but we have to remember to read him in context, not to force his books to fit an entirely different situation.

Paul was a highly trained rabbi. He had studied under the best teachers of his day and was an extremely zealous young Jew. An encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus changed the direction of his life completely and the former persecutor of the church became its greatest advocate. But Paul retained his keenly trained, forensic mind and his vast knowledge of the Old Testament and Jewish tradition.

Around the time that Paul was converted, the number of people following Jesus was starting to grow really rapidly. From the day of Pentecost onwards, the sign that people were true believers in Jesus was the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. It is important to note that the first believers (at Pentecost and for a while afterwards) were all Jewish. The Jesus movementÂ shared a common heritage and background. During these early days, the disciples grew to recognise the Spirit at the work in the lives of believers. That means that when God started to draw gentiles into the movement and to bless them with the Spirit, too, the leading Christians could not deny that God was at work. They may have been prejudiced against the Gentiles, but the evidence that God was at work amongst them could not be gainsayed. Over time, the Jesus movement grew and became more Gentile, eventually developing into the Christian church.

Paul was an enthusiastic advocated of Gentiles joining the church; but they did pose him a problem. Paul's understanding of God and his relationship to men and women was conditioned by his Jewish roots. Now, all over the place, he sees incontrovertible evidence of God at work in the lives of Gentiles.Â Paul turned his massive intellect and his years of experience to the problem and guided by the Spirit he wrote a number of letters which explore the issue of what it means to be a Christian and how come God accepts Jews and Gentiles on an equal footing. Romans is the longest of these, but most of Paul's letters touch on this theme in one way or another.

This wasn't idle theological speculation. Paul was deeply involved in mission and he could see God at work. His creative thinking and writing sprung out of that mission. The Bible is a product of God's

people at work in God's mission.

Posts in this series

- Introduction
- Writing
- Engagement
- BibleFresh
- What?