CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE: A FEW THOUGHTS

Posted on April 19, 2011 by Eddie

Category: Church: World

Two events defined the founding of the Christian Church in the book of Acts. The first was the miracle at Pentecost in Acts 2 which demonstrated that the Gospel could be understood and appropriated in any language. The second was the way in which the early believers broke out of their Jewish background at Antioch and started to witness directly to Greeks. It is no surprise that it was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

The implication of these events is very clear; Christianity was not to be constrained by its Jewish background, but could be lived out in any language and culture. This was further emphasised when the Gospel writers chose to record Jesus life and deeds in Greek, rather than the Aramaic that he would have spoken. In Sanneh's words, Christianity is the only religion that is transmitted without the language or culture of its founder.

Christianity doesn't belong to any culture: attempts to force believers to fit into one cultural mould, be it first century Judaism, mediaeval Latin or the King James Only movement, have missed one of the central points about the nature of the Church.

What this means in every day terms is that it is perfectly legitimate for us to use the English language for worship, prayer and Bible reading. We don't have to become first century Palestinians in order to become Christians. Equally, Christians around the world don't have to adopt a Western lifestyle in order to become Christians.