NO PLACE FOR HIT AND RUN: THE GREAT COMMISSION 10

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> *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

Jesus command to the disciples is a pretty inclusive one; they are to make disciples, to baptize believers and to teach them to obey everything that Jesus taught. There are two implications that immediately jump to mind on reading this list.

1. They take a long time! Mission involves the church in a long term commitment to a group of people. Our missional responsibility to a group does not end when the Gospel has been preached, the Scriptures translated or a few people converted.
2. The need to make disciples, baptize and teach is renewed in every generation. Christian discipleship is not genetic and it is not simply cultural; it has to be renewed in each generation as people face up to the claims of Christ on their lives and come to follow him for themselves. It is not unusual for groups which were once strongly Christian to turn their backs on the Gospel over a period of a few generations - we may well be living through such a scenario in Western Europe today.

In mission circles it is common to talk about unreached or unengaged people groups (UPGs); that is groups who don't have an active Christian witness in their midst. There is some value in this sort of categorisation as it can help us to focus resources where they are most needed (for example, translating the Scriptures for a group with no Bible at all, rather than working on the umpteenth translation into English). However, many writers ascribe a significance to the concept of unreached people which is not always helpful. (In passing, the way in which some mission scholars talk about people groups does not seem to take into account the increasing urbanisation of the world in which traditional boundaries and identities become very blurred.)

One of the problems with the whole UPG concept is that some people suggest that all we need to do is to "reach" the people with the Gospel and then move on. Clearly, this doesn't match up with Jesus' command in Matthew 28 which envisages a much longer term engagement from the Church, renewed in each generation. Another problem is that, as we have seen, reached people groups can become unreached. Just a quick glance at any list of UPGs will reveal that large numbers of them are from parts of the world that were once Christian.

Once again, this is a reminder that the *Great Commission* is not something we are called to complete, but a lifestyle we are called to adopt.