MISSIOLOGY IS MEANINGLESS

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Category: Bible & Mission

Over the years, I've tossed the term 'missiology' around pretty freely on this blog. I even produced a list (badly in need of updating) of the best missiology books. However, having used the term fairly frequently, I have to admit that I am becoming rather disenchanted with it.

Missiology isn't exactly a term that crops up in most everyday conversations (unless you life is as strange as mine!), so it would probably help to define it. That source of all wisdom, Wikipedia describes missiology as:

> ***Missiology*** *is the area of practical theology that investigates the mandate, message, and mission of the Christian church, especially the nature of missionary work.*

This definition is as good as any, but behind the seemingly straightforward definition lies a couple of issues.

Firstly, missiology is a very broad field, it covers everything from thoughtful Biblical reflection on the nature of mission to theories derived purely from the social-sciences which define the missionary task and proscribe methodologies to be followed.Â This sort of breadth of approach is probably inevitable and while it is confusing, is not, in and of itself, negative.

The problems arise with the second issue; the way in which people use the term 'missiology'. All too often people talk about 'missiology' without making any distinction between the different approaches to the subject. To say that something is 'missiological' is verging on a meaningless statement. What sort of missiology does it refer to? Is it good missiology, or bad missiology? The questions could be multiplied.

A parallel could be drawn with the word 'theology'. While we can often get away with saying 'theology' on its own, there are times when we have to resort to hyphented-theologies; reformed-theology, pentecostal-theology, African-theology and what have you. The only hyphenated-missiology that I have come across is David Smith's term, managerial-missiology which he used in his book Against the stream. If we are going to be able to use missiolgy as an unambiguous term, we need some more hyphenated-missiologies!