METRICS OF MODERNIST MINISTRY

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Category: Quotes

Let's face it, "The dehumanising metrics of modernist ministry" is not the snappiest title for a couple of blog posts. It is unlikely to draw the crowds who are looking for the next big secret for Christian ministry. However, if you don't read Mark Meynell's series you will be missing out. In two posts, entitled The Present and The Future, Mark does a superb job of identifying the way in which the Englightenment or a modernist worldview has an impact on Christian ministry. It isn't comfortable reading, but it is very important. The problem with a worldview is that we adopt it and accept its assumptions without even thinking about it. This means that our life and ministry can be shaped by forces which that we aren't consciously aware of - they are so self-evidently right that we don't question them.

Across the two posts, Mark identifies five issues, which I'd like to highlight. For the most part, these are things I've written about, too and all have relevance to cross-cultural mission.

The economics of effectiveness

> *... I fear a sinister trend has crept in. For if weâ€™re not careful, we can seek an effectiveness shaped more by Wall St than theÂ via Dolorosa...*
>
> *But in ministryâ€¦? I hear a lot of talk about constantly seeking to have anÂ effectiveÂ ministry. And who doesnâ€™t want that? But how on earth do we measure that? The Wall St resort is to use numbers and graphs (which of course have their place): whether bums on seats, cash given tax efficiently, staff size, baptism register etc etc etc. (Or Bible translations completed, for that matter.)Â But that is not necessarily, or even inherently, kingdom ministryâ€¦ after all, itâ€™s pretty interesting to study Jesusâ€™ reaction to crowds in the gospels â€“ he was usually getting away from them; or at least suspicious of theirÂ intentions.*

David Smith's excellent book on overseas mission,Â Against the streamÂ gives an excellent analysis of this issue if you want to look at it in more detail.

The impatience with slowness

I've blogged on this themeÂ *ad nauseam*,Â (try this for example) but rarely with Mark'sÂ incisiveness.

> *Love isnâ€™t the drug. Speed is. We want everything yesterday. As the old credit card ad had it,Â â€œAccess takes the waiting out of wantingâ€ . And as life speeds up, our impatience thresholds deteriorate. So now, we can be incensed by a slow wi-fi speeds that hinder access to google images by a matter of seconds. But honestly! Life isnâ€™t all a Formula 1 race in which milliseconds really do count.*

> *But this impatience affects profoundly ministry. Which is a problem, because a brief concordance search of the word â€˜waitâ€™ in the New Testament will demonstrate that it features rather a lot. From my cursory glance, it looks as though the most common adverbs used in conjunction with waiting are â€˜eagerlyâ€™ and, yes you guessed it, â€˜patientlyâ€™ (Romans 8:25,Â Hebrews 6:15,James 5:7).*

The franchising of norms

> *But we must take care never to let the next revolutionary (yet another modernist concept) â€˜packageâ€™, usually but not always from a highly â€˜successfulâ€™ and branded global ministry based in America, become the backbone of your work. There may well be things to learn, but if it is your primary source, youâ€™ll only abandon it as soon as the next â€˜betterâ€™ (i.e. well-marketed) package appears.*

The nature of the Church is to be a multi-cultural, multi-lingual body. We lose something very important when we allow ourselves to become a monochrome reflection of our real nature.

The hubris of strategy?

> *Â I have preached on The Good Samaritan a number of times and have often made this point. If the reason the Priest and Levite failed to help the dying man was their commitment to legalistic holiness, our contemporary excuse for not â€˜going to do likewiseâ€™ is more likely to be our commitment to our strategy. And a dying man / homeless beggar / uneducated refugee / disabled child(delete as appropriate)Â just isnâ€™tÂ strategic.*

I wrote a blog post on this issue a few years back, inspired by something Tim Chester had written.

The slavery of novelty

> *The modernist is abhors the status quo, is hardly ever patient, and is usually dissatisfied. And there is a sense in which this is a good thing. We never want to be static. And in fact, there is a spiritual benefit to this mindset, when it isÂ constantly striving towards what God has called us to in life and lifestyle. But battling in holiness is one thing. Constantly looking for the new ministry buzz is quite another.*
>
> *...the very nature of our kingdom â€˜productâ€™ â€“ the gospel, that is â€“ is not so much its antiquity, but its eternity. We donâ€™t need toÂ sing with the psalmist â€œa new songâ€ Â every week â€“ unless we realise that Godâ€™s newest song is only 2000 years*

> *young for it is the song of the Lamb. Of course the song needs rearticulationÂ and reharmonising in every new generation or culture. But it isnâ€™t essentially a new song anymore. Not really.*

These quotes from Mark's blog are out of context and he is more nuanced in his arguments than I've indicated here, so I do suggest (insist?) that you head over and read the full posts.

We are often quick to point out how the Christian message should impact the lives of others, but the biggest challenge is whether we will allow the Gospel access to those unspoken assumptions of our lives, the things which drive our attitudes and our ministries and which we seldom even think about.