SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT POWER

Posted on November 19, 2012 by Eddie

Category: Church: World

A few weeks ago, I quoted from a piece by Simon Cozens in which he said:

> *And while we love to talk about leadership in churches and in mission, we really donâ€™t like to talk about power. Jesusâ€™ whole life and death was a demonstration that the power of God is made perfect in weakness. The Devil tempted him to accomplish his mission through asserting power, and he resisted. And yet how often in mission do we succumb to the same temptation.*

To get the full sense of this quote in context, you should read the whole article, but I don't want to cut and paste the whole thing here. Simon's observations struck a chord with me and over the next couple of weeks, I'd like to explore the role of power in missionary work. These first few thoughts are drawn directly from an essay I wrote six or seven years ago, which you can download if you want to:

In non-denominational settings the voice of the Southern Church is being heard more often. According to LeeÂ international mission conferences were predominantly Western until the Lausanne meeting in 1974, but since Lausanne the mixture of participants hasÂ been much more equitable. However, while there may be a good representation of Southerners in International gatherings, it is still Westerners who dominate the discussions.Â

It is my experience that many international gatherings have a good representation of Â Southerners (though their numbers often do not reflect the reality of the World Church). however, Southerners are often placed at a linguistic and cultural disadvantage. The dominance of English as an international medium makes it more difficult for non-English speakers to participate in discussion and debate. Also, open discussion and argument on a conference floor is a very Western way of achieving group consensus, but is not very comfortable to many Asians and Africans who prefer more indirect methods of achieving the same aim.

Southern Churches are slowly but surely increasing their influence in World Christianity. However, it is still true that the most influential Churches and individuals tend to be based in the West. This is partly due to historic reasons but also due to the fact that though the Western Churches may be declining, they are still rooted in the richest and generally the most powerful societies in the world. This gives the Western Churches a degree of economic power and influence within the Christian communion which is out of all proportion to their true size.

Interestingly, my final reflection on Lausanne III in Cape Town picked up on this same theme:

> *I haveÂ already highlightedÂ the way in which all of the conference presentations had to be given in English.Â The conference chairman explained that this was done to facilitate the interpretation into other languages. While this was an issue, it was not an insurmountable*

> *one. Having everyone speak in English marginalised all other languageÂ communities and reduced them to a lower status, which was unfortunate. It was desperately sad to see people struggle to read statements in English and coming across as dull and boring, when they would undoubtedly have been exciting and interesting in their own language. On the last morning we were reminded that we have to listen to the voices from the margins of the Church â€“ sadly, the message of the conference was that we would only listen to the margins if they speak English.*