HOKEY-COKEY CONTEXTUALISATION

Posted on July 23, 2013 by Eddie

Categories: Bible & Mission, Mission, Observations

> *You put your right arm in, you put your right arm out...*

Most people are aware of the concept of contextualisation. The notion that missionaries should present the Gospel in a way which speaks into the culture to which it is being addressed. The result is that the expression of Christianity in the UK today is different to its expression in contemporary rural Africa and both are different to the way in which the Apostles lived and worshipped. The message doesn't change, but the cultural expression does. So far, so good.

However, one of the implications of yesterday's blog post on mission paradigms is that we don't just need to think about the culture that the Gospel is being contextualised into, we also need to think about the culture that it is being contextualised out of.

Let's be honest; British Christians don't always have the enthusiasm or spiritually vitality of their brothers and sisters in the majority world. We have much to learn from them, but this doesn't mean we have nothing to contribute. For example, the British church has a great tradition of Biblical studies and expository preaching. Yes, these need to be contextualised for new situations; but they should not be minimised. Equally, Christians from other parts of the world bring strengths from their history and traditions.

Cross cultural missionaries need to build on the strengths that they bring from their background and apply them in a culturally appropriate way. They need to contextualise in two directions.

The increasingly shrill voices I hear that suggest that Western missionaries need to become more like Latins, Africans or Asians are missing the point. Western missionaries need to become better Westerners and better cross-cultural servants.

Of course, I fully realise that for much of mission history, Western Christians have imposed their culture and norms on the rest of the Church - and it still happens. However, as the pendulum swings back, we need to avoid the opposite extreme.

By the way, if you are not sure what contextualisation is, this video might help:

Global Connections Conference 09 Contextualisation from Eddie Arthur on Vimeo.

Eddie Arthur of Wycliffe Bible translators talks about the importance and implications of contextualising the Gospel.