PARADIGMS AND POUNDS

Posted on August 1, 2013 by Eddie

Categories: Mission, Observations

A few days ago, I wrote a piece which suggested some of the elements which need to be taken into account in developing a new paradigm for Western involvement in mission - but I didn't mention money. However, it is often suggested that the way to renew mission work is to stop sending missionaries and to send money instead. The new paradigm in mission is to support local/national/native (missionaries rather than send Westerners).

This is a huge question and I'm not going to draw any satisfactory conclusions in a short blog post, but here are a few fairly random thoughts.

- Rich Christians should be generous with their money. End of story - there is no need for debate on this.
- However, while generosity is right, it can have a negative impact by creating dependencies, lack of local accountability and such like. These issues have to be carefully balanced and managed and donors need to understand the them. Vinoth Ramachandra recently wrote an excellent post exploring some of these questions.
- The regulations on transfer of charitable funds from the West to other countries may involve the imposition of fairly stringent conditions on the partners in the developing world which are not always helpful.
- The case for supporting national workers as opposed to Westerners has sometimes been overstated. Mark Pickett has written an excellent review (part 1, part 2) of one influential book which throws the baby out with the bath water.
- It is NOT a new paradigm! Whether the West is sending money or people, we still have the West as the one providing the resources and the rest of the world receiving. The seat of power and influence has not moved, the only thing that hs changed is the way in which the power and influence are expressed. A new paradigm of mission needs to see a rebalancing of the relationship between the West and the rest. We need to learn to receive as well as to give and to value contributions beyond the financial ones.

There is no easy solution to this issue (though plenty of people claim to offer just that). The Wycliffe Global Alliance, a grouping of mission agencies, churches and denominations drawn from all continents apart from Antarctica is working on this issue; it's going to be interesting to see where things fall out in the Bible translation world.