REASONS TO BE CHANGING (PART 3)

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To my mind, there are three reasons why the Western missionary movement needs to be transformed.

- **Most obviously**: because of the growth of the Church in what used to be called mission fields.
- **Most importantly**; because our theology and practice of mission have often been based on a few proof texts, rather than on a holistic reading of Scripture.
- **Most urgently**; because the church in the West has changed dramatically over the last few decades.

I've blogged on the first two issues numerous times over the years, but I've not said a great deal about the third one. However, this week I read two blog posts which give a very challenging assessment of the Church situation in the west. I strongly recommend that you read both posts in their entirety.

The first is by John Stevens from the UK:

> *In the not too distant past, perhaps even into the late 1950s, gospel ministry in Britain involved calling people to live according to the beliefs and values that the society around them, at least outwardly, affirmed and supported. Conversion did not intrinsically require such a dramatic change of world-view, culture and values. Today this is no longer the case. The rapid collapse of both public and private Christian faith over the past 150 years, which resulted in the inevitable abandonment of Christian culture and values, means that evangelism is no longer a matter of calling British people to â€œcome homeâ€ to what they purportedly believed already, whilst offering them relief from the guilt they felt because they had not lived up to the standards to which they gave their intellectual assent.*

Kevin Bauder writes from a US perspective, but his words could equally apply on this side of the Atlantic.

> *American Christians have been living as if the sun shone upon them, but the shadows are falling and the light grows dim. The time has come to abandon the daylight paradigm and to adopt the paradigm of the Dark Age. Christians must adjust their eyes to see in the night.*
>
> *What assumptions must Christians adopt during the Dark Age? Their basic perspective can be summed up in a few brief propositions. First, the expression of their views will be increasingly unwelcome, especially in the public square. Second, their ability to operate from the relative insulation of a subculture will be directly challenged. Third, pressure will increase, both officially and unofficially, to call good evil and evil good. Fourth, Christians will have no weight to throw around in either the social or political spheres.*
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> *Under this altered perspective,* ***Christians must not view themselves as Moses, leading a***

> ***nation into the promised land. They must not even view themselves as Elijah, calling a chosen people to repentance. They must view themselves as Mordecai or Daniel, as exiles in a brutal and foreign landâ€"just as they should have all along**. (Emphasis mine.)*

If these perspectives are true, and I believe they are, this poses a real challenge for those of us with a calling to encourage the British church to be involved in world mission. However, I don't see this as a counsel of despair, my first two bullet points give plenty of reason for encouragement and hope.

- The growth of the World church gives hope for the future of the Church in the UK. The more we are involved in serving and learning from our brothers and sisters around the world, the better equipped we will be to face the challenges of the future. The growing church in Africa and Asia has faces challenges very similar to the ones now confronting the Church in the UK and we can learn so much from them. However, if our attitude to mission is the commonly held (but counterfactual) view that it is our role simply to give and not to receive, we will be in a bit of a mess.
- Theologically; the success of mission is dependant on the sovereign action of God, not on the actions of Christians in one part of the world. If the British church doesn't play a role in world mission, it is the British church that will suffer. God will accomplish his purpose with or without us. If a vision to serve the peoples of the world doesn't motivate us, then self-interest should!

I picked up on these themes in my short talk at the celebration for work at the Wycliffe Centre last week. I also went into this in more depth in a talk called Mission out of Exile at the last Global Connections conference.

By the way, the title is an obscure cultural reference and should not be taken to imply that you have missed parts one and two, nor indeed that there will be a part four.