GETTING THE BALANCE

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Category: Observations

I am proud to belong to an organisation that believes in and practices holistic mission. We translate the Scriptures, working to proclaim the message of the Gospel to the most marginalised people on the planet and we work to provide those people literacy and basic education, the necessary precursors for economic and social development.

Of course, holding these two strands together isn't always easy. Despite Jesus' example of meeting both physical and spiritual needs, the Church seems to swing from one to the other. When we first joined Wycliffe, many people were suspicious of getting involved in social action; it was seen as watering down the Gospel and ignoring peoples' eternal needs. Literacy work was fine if it was tied to reading the Scriptures, but you should take it too far. There was a fear of 'the social Gospel', whatever that is.

However, over the last few years, things seem to have shifted through 180 degrees. In a recent article, Carl Beech of CVM expressed this very clearly:

> *It may just be the people or organisations that I â€˜followâ€™, but as I look through my Twitter feed I notice that the vast majority of comments are on issues such as justice, food banks, trafficking, gender issues, politics etc.*
> *All of this is of course very good indeed. Before you get grumpy with me, yes I do think that Christians should be engaged with the world, and yes I do think we should be leading the charge in many of these areas. Itâ€™s fantastic that Christian leaders (mostly, if not exclusively women, in fact) comment on the papers on BBC News and Sky TV. Itâ€™s great that the Evangelical Alliance has staff who are engaged with parliament and itâ€™s fantastic there are big ministries engaged with family life, politics, trafficking and poverty.*
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> *There is however a noticeable and surprising absence in all the comment. The stories of radical transformation through the proclamation of the gospel. Sure, there are some, but in no way to the same frequency as the other stuff. Iâ€™ve started to wonder why this is.*
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> *After all, any speed-read through the gospels and you soon notice that most of the content is about finding and saving the lost. Yeah ok, itâ€™s old-school terminology, but thatâ€™s what Jesus calls people who donâ€™t know him, so thats good enough for me. So I ask the question: â€œIf the majority of the content of the gospels is about salvation, why isnâ€™t that reflected in our activity and comment?â€*
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> *Have we lost confidence in the fact that the simple proclamation of the gospel has the power to radically transform lives? I donâ€™t think itâ€™s a lack of confidence in the gospel that is at the heart of the problem.* ***The problem is that we have drowned out the message of the cross through lots of activity that was inspired by the cross in the first place.***
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> *In a nutshell â€“ have we stopped actually telling people about Jesus?*

> *Also, have we stopped believing that the radical transformation of society and the end of injustice will come through people meeting Jesus Christ? (Emphasis mine.)*

I believe that Carl has hit an important nail right on the head here; though I would possibly be stronger in my criticism. It is absolutely right and proper that Christians do work to relieve poverty and injustice, but hungry people need Jesus, too, not just food. I fear we may have forgotten this.