THE GREAT COMPASSION

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"An older generation are committed to global mission, while younger people are committed to global compassion." Is this true? If it is, is it a problem?
Category: Bible & Mission

> *An older generation are committed to global mission, while younger people are committed to global compassion.*

This is according toÂ John Stevens of the FIEC who was speaking at the recent Global Connections Conference. I think it's fair to say that not everyone agreed with what he said and a small storm brewed up on Twitter about it (sadly, world mission doesn't attract enough attention for a large storm to develop).

For the record, I think that John was partly right. I think there is a large and increasing proportion of the Church for whom mission is seen in terms of compassion or works of mercy and nothing more. However, I'm just not sure that this falls neatly into different generations in the way that John suggested.

My observations of the mission scene in the UK suggest that people are increasingly motivated by a desire to help relieve poverty, work for justice and defend the oppressed, but there is less willingness to proclaim the Good News of Jesus. We are happy to be involved in helping people out of poverty, but reluctant to tell people that they need a Saviour.

I have nothing against poverty relief, working for justice and the like; far from it. However, these things must go hand in hand with proclaiming the Gospel. They are a part of mission, not the sum total of it.

On the other side of the equation, we mustn't tell people about Jesus without also helping them when they are in need. This makes a nonsense of the words we are speaking. That being said, I don't see this being a huge issue in most British church circles.

I plan to return to this theme in more detail at some point in the future, but for now I'll just simply reiterate that Biblically speaking works of service and proclamation of the Gospel are intimately entwined. Separating them in the way we do is much more to do with modern culture and worldview than it is to do with the Bible narrative. Compassion without proclamation is a nonsense in Biblical terms. It's not a bad thing, but it ain't mission.

You might want to take a look at this post in which Chris Wright talks about this dichotomy.

Edit: John Steven's short talk is now available online here.