SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT MISSIONARIES

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Some thoughts on missionaries and an excuse to play some good music!
Category: Mission

Missionaries were part of the wallpaper of my childhood. From time to time there would be a strange adult at our week night supper table and I would be introduced to Miss X who was a missionary in some far flung country. These missionaries seemed to be a harmless enough bunch of people, a little dull and strangely dressed, perhaps, but they were unlikely to cause any problems. However, it was clear from my mother's reaction that I was supposed to regard these slightly dishevelled people with a great deal of awe and admiration. They were missionaries, labourers in God's harvest and I should feel privileged that they were clearing up the dessert before I could have seconds!

Over the years, I met a large number of these people. They would regularly turn up at Church youth group or University CU meetings to tell us tales of derring-do on the mission field.

Missionary talks were predictable: their slide set would always end up with a sunset and at some point in the talk they would say, â€˜ I may be a missionary, but I'm an ordinary person, just like youâ€™ (at which point everyone in the room would think â€˜you are fooling no one but yourselfâ€™).

In my experience missionaries were a little eccentric, but like the earth in the Hitchhikers Guide, they were "mostly harmless". I was of course, aware that there were other ways of looking at missionaries. They were rapacious neo-colonialists who destroyed cultures and bribed people to adopt a foreign religion.

The song Missionary Man by the Eurhythmics captures this nicely.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3baOdzHyLno

To be honest, I was never quite sure how this image of the colonial oppressor tied up with the rather mild mannered missionaries who had eaten my mother's Yorkshire pudding, but the image was there..

It is very easy to find fault with the Western Missionary movement of the last 200 years. However, we should recognize that by and large it was a success. The phenomenal growth of the worldwide Church over the past hundred years or so can be traced, in part at least, to the pioneering work of missionaries from the Western world. That being said, I don't want to appear to remove God from the throne. It is His mission and He is the one responsible for the growth of the Church around the world. Equally, I think it is important that we recognise that much of the most spectacular growth of the Church (for example in China since 1948) has happened in a post-missionary setting. However, whichever way we look at things, the missionary movement has been, under God, a significant factor in the growth of the Church around the world, and in that sense, if no other, is a success story

This is the introduction to a paper entitled "The Modern Missionary Movement, Was it All Bad", which I presented at a conference a few years back. I go on to discuss some of my own experiences and what can be learned from them. This is then followed by responses from various other people. You might find it all rather interesting.