EVANGELICAL CHURCHES AND OVERSEAS MISSION

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Category: Churches and Global Mission

This is the closing paragraph from a superb reflection on the place of mission today by theologian and church leader, Steven Holmes. Please go and read the whole thing.

> *And so we live in this place where UK evangelicalism has lost its missionary vision, and cannot, yet, embrace a new one. Mission weekends are now an oddity amongst our churches; interest in global mission is perceived as a strange and specialist concern. This is a far-reaching, and (I believe) potentially disastrous shift in our evangelical identity; I am convinced that we are at our best, and we are truest to ourselves, when we boldly and unashamedly commit to and celebrate the work of bringing knowledge of the gospel, and signs of the kingdom, to all in the world who do not yet know to name Jesus as Lord.*

Steve suggests that there are three key factors in the broad loss of missionary vision within the British Evangelical Church.

1. A loss of confidence in the concept of conversion.

2. The success of the missionary enterprise and the growth of the worldwide church.
3. Post-colonial guilt.

Steve unpicks the latter two of these in some detail and promises us another post on the first one.

For what it's worth, I think Steve is spot on with his analysis. However, I would add a fourth factor which is benign neglect. Because of the three factors Steve mentions and the insanely busy lives that clergy and most people lead today, the issue of mission has been allowed to slide from the forefront of church life to become an add-on. This has then reinforced the impact of the three primary factors creating a viscous circle which is gaining speed. I highlighted a particularly striking example of this tendency here.

For churches to address this issue, they need to make determined steps to break the circle. These don't need to be particularly dramatic, but they can be effective.

Steve highlights the fact that one of the impacts of changes in the world and mission is that we no longer have the sort of mission biographies that stirred my generation into getting involved in this sort of work. That is true, but we do have books likeÂ Kingdom Without Borders: The Untold Story of Global ChristianityÂ which do have the capacity to encourage a new generation of people to get involved in a new type of mission. However, we need people who are more influential than me and who reach a larger audience, pushing this stuff.

Of course, I realise that things are not all doom and gloom everywhere. Steve's blog post emerges out of a great mission weekend at St Andrews Baptist Church which I was involved in leading. There are many churches who have a huge mission heart and who are getting to grips with the new realities of our world. But I fear that it is too little and it may be too late.