CHURCH PEOPLE

Posted on May 20, 2014 by Eddie

Category: Observations

I heard some amazing stories last week.

There was the large South African church which was running social involvement and evangelistic programmes across the country and in other African nations. A small church in Singapore isÂ planting churches and running schools in Cambodia; this may not sound much, but when you learn that the pastor's wife died for her faith while helping one of these schools it all gets a little more serious.

We heard about a West African denomination which is looking to plant churches in every village in their country. However, before they can do that, they need to increase the number of Bible schools available, so that they can train the pastors and evangelists they require in order to get it done.

In another part of the world, a church living under a very hostile government is running a school and a pastoral training institute despite huge amounts of persecutionÂ from the authorities. At the same time, they are supporting a large number of house churches that are going under the radar; meeting and making disciples without the government being aware of it.

Perhaps the most impressive story was of the evangelist who travels into countries where the religious climate is very hostile to Christianity. He has been imprisoned numerous times and while banged up, has led many people to the Lord. He has planted many churches in countries where most people don't realise there are any Christians at all.

We heard of people who had planted tens of Churches in situations which we would not think of as being conducive to Christianity and of pastoral training institutes where it was expected that the students would plant a new church as part of their training.

The amazing thing about all this is that in all of these cases, people were working outside of the normal mission structures. These churches and evangelists are all from the majority world, not from Europe and the US.

So where does this leave Western Mission agencies? I have argued numerous times that we need to see a paradigm shift in the way that our traditional missions work (see here and follow the links). However, I'm now starting to wonder whether I was advocating enough change. It is clear that in some way, much of the Western movement needs to reorientate it to support the work of local churches around the world who have taken up the mission baton with a vengeance. However, I can see (at least) two problems with this:

- Western money and power can be a great way to snuff out indigenous movements. If things aren't done carefully, we could cause more harm than good.
- These new mission movements around the world are edgy. They don't have all of their theological 'ts' crossed and 'is' dotted. Experience shows that this means that there will be those in the West who will want to boycott these movements, while others will want to impose

a more rigid orthodoxy upon them. Neither of these responses are likely to be helpful.

I knew the Church around the world was growing; I've written about it often enough. But the sheer scale and audacity of some of the movements I heard about last week was breathtaking. Not only that, but these things are mostly happening in environments which are hostile to the Gospel. This means that we don't hear about them generally and I've had to disguise their situations. If mission involves "finding out where God is at work and joining in", then we have some interesting challenges ahead of us over the next few years.

This is my second post inspired by last week's World Evangelical Alliance Mission Council conference.Â