INTRODUCING CHRISTIAN MISSION TODAY: INTRODUCTION

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Seven world trends, four definitions of mission and eight issues of concern in missiology: the Introcution to Mike Goheen's book
Category: Observations

Over the next few weeks I'm going to be making notes on Mike Goheen's bookÂ Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History and IssuesÂ and posting them here as I go. I'll be doing this without comment andÂ primarilyÂ forÂ my own reference. However, I hope the brief summaries will be of interest to others who may not wish to read the whole book.Â

We still often see â€˜missionâ€™ as being a unidirectional movement from the West to Africa, Asia or Latin America. People are sent from a home base to the field. The word mission is used more frequently these days and has been broadened in scope, but in the Evangelical tradition it still carries much of itâ€™s traditional meaning.

The word â€˜missionâ€™ is derived from the Latin *mittere* to send and was first used by Jesuits in obedience to a call by the Pope to draw people into the Church. Protestants later adopted the term.

At the start of the 18C over 90% of Christians were in the West and missionaries were motivated to take the Gospel to where it was unknown. However, dramatic changes in the world have made that missionary paradigm unsuitable for our age.

Changing World Church

Two thirds to three quarters of the worldâ€™s Christians now live in the southern continents. There is much vibrancy and life in the South, meanwhile there is a decline in the Church in the West.

Another big change is the growth in Pentecostalism, which may be the most important church movement of the 21C.

Changing Global Realities

The Collapse of Colonialism: The relationship between mission and colonialism is complex, but it was important. The collapse of colonialism has an impact on how we carry out mission today.

Globalisation: This is the spread of western economic progress, especially through information technology, around the world. It has benefits, but also leads to growing inequality and the growth of the consumer culture. It may be the biggest challenge facing world mission today.

Urbanisation: over half the worldâ€™s population lives in cities and this will rise to 80% by the middle of the century. The urban setting is the scene of enormous social and economic problems. Cities are a new mission frontier.

Staggering Social and Economic Problems: the extent of poverty and hunger in our world is appalling. We grow enough food to feed the worldâ€™s population, but it isnâ€™t spread evenly. Disease, climate change and pollution are other changes which threaten us. If the whole world used resources at the same rate as N. America, we would run out in ten years.

Soaring Population: Population is growing exponentially.

Resurgence of Religion: Christianity and Islam are both growing, despite the modernist assertion that faith was irrelevant in our world. There is a mission challenge associated with meeting new religions.

Tectonic Shifts in Western Culture: the speed of change and onset of post-modernism all raise new challenges for the mission in the West.

A New Understanding of Mission

Four definitions of mission:

WCC in 1963: â€œwitness in six continentsâ€

Chris Wright: â€œour committed participation as Godâ€™s people, at Godâ€™s invitation and command, in Godâ€™s own mission within the history of the world for the redemption of Godâ€™s creationâ€ .

Ecumenical Missiologists: â€œmission is witness in life, word and deedâ€ .

Lausanne: â€œthe whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole worldâ€ .

The Landscape of Mission Studies Today

Mission is rooted in the word of God, but must address the time and place in which it lives. So missiology needs to change.

Fresh Reflection on Scripture and Mission: Need to return to the whole of Scripture and see what it says about mission, not just to a few texts such as Matthew 28:19-20. We need to listen to majority world theologies, not just our historic enlightenment based approach.

Reassess the History of Mission: If all of the life of the church is mission, what does mission history look like? How is mission perceived by the targets, not just the senders?

Reflect on the nature of Mission: We start from the nature of the Triune God, but how does this filter down to some of the narrow tasks of mission such as evangelism and cross-cultural ministry.

Contextualisation: We see many different theologies developing as the gospel takes root in new situations. There is one gospel, but many embodiments of it.

The Gospel and Western Culture: We need to understand the roots of western culture firstly to know how the gospel can be lived out within it, but also because western culture is being exported around the world.

Missionary Encounter with World Religions: How are we to understand and witness to other faiths?

Urban Mission: This is a growing priority. How do we follow Jesus in the favelas and shanty towns?

Understanding the World Church: How do we address world Christianity from the context of mission?