HISTORICAL PARADIGMS OF MISSION

Posted on October 22, 2014 by Eddie

Three paradigms; a few factors and thirty odd pages. The history of the world mission movement briefly (and brilliantly) summed up by Mike Goheen. With notes by me.
Category: Observations

â€œMission is the participation of Godâ€™s people in Godâ€™s mission to renew the whole creation and the whole lives of all its peoples and cultures.â€

However, mission takes different shapes depending on its historical and cultural context.

The mission of Godâ€™s people will always be worked out in a particular context at a particular time.

Rather than look straight at our own context, it is good to learn from the last 2000 years of mission history.

WHAT STORY DO WE WANT TO TELL?

Need to return to the distinction between mission (the whole life of the church) and missions (one part of mission: establishing a gospel witness where one does not exist).

For the last 200 years, missions have dominated the imagination of the church. If we tell the story from the point of view of â€˜missionsâ€™ or the expansion of the church, it looks something like this:

- Spread through the Roman Empire
    - As a persecuted religion
    - As a state religion
- Christianizing of Europe
    - Germanic, Frankish, Anglo Saxon
    - Slavonic
    - Scandinavian
- From Europe To the World
    - Catholic Missions
    - Pietist European Missions
    - European/N. American protestant missions
- Ecumenical Partnership of worldwide church: Unreached peoples.

This kind of history is missions history; the story of Christianityâ€™s expansion.

This is valid, but it isnâ€™t the whole story.

Walls (and Escobar) take a more nuanced approach which looks at the way that the cultural diffusion of the faith deepens and enriches the Christian faith. The key is the movement and translation of the faith from one context to another.

The Gospel first takes root in Jewish soil, then diffuses into a Hellenic context. The movement of Christianity as suggested by these two is:

Walls	Escobar
Jewish	A Jewish church in mission
Hellenisitic-Roman	Missionary expansion into the Greco-Roman world
Barbarian	Evangelisation of Barbarians and making of Europe
Western European	As above
Expanding Europe and Christian Recession	Empire and Mission from the Expanding south
Cross-cultural transmission	The shift of Christianity to the South

Another way at looking at history is Boschâ€™ and Myersâ€™ approach of looking at paradigms. Various important events signal seismic change and a new way forward for the church.

Bosch	Myers
33-313 Early church paradigm	33-200 Apocalyptic â€“ early church paradigm
150-1453 Eastern church paradigm	200-500 Greek-patristic paradigm
313-1800 Roman Catholic/medieval paradigm	600-1400 Christendom-medieval Roman Catholic
1517-1800 Reformation paradigm	1500-1700 Reformation-Protestant
1800-1918 Mission in the wake of the Englightenment	1750-1950 Modern mission era
1918-today Ecumenical or post-modern paradigm	1950-today emerging mission paradigm of the third millenium

Others suggest a simpler version in which the paradigms are pre-Christendom, Christendom and post-Christendom. This chapter divide history into early church, Christendom and Enlightenment

paradigms.

EARLY CHURCH PARADIGM

Arose out of the Jewish context into which it was born.

The clearest mission characteristic was the attractive power of the local congregation. Christian communities exerted a magnetic force on thousands.

Church took a clear stand against the idolatry of the Roman Empire. Part of the attraction of Christian church was rooted in a distinctive people who did not fit in to the culture.

The early church broke down the class, race and gender barriers and stereotypes imposed by the Empire.

The church showed a massive amount of love and care for the poor and isolated.

CHRISTENDOM PARADIGM

Two factors lie behind the paradigm shift:

- The contextualisation of the Gospel to the Roman Empire
- The conversion of Constantine

Church became a dominant institution at the centre of power.

The Ambiguity of the Christendom Paradigm

The churchâ€™s position was compromised by power.

The problem wasnâ€™t that the state accepted Christianity â€“ this opened up new avenues for mission and could have been good. The problem was that the church lost a focus on mission.

They stopped criticising power and lost focus.

Newbiggin says that Christendom represents the first great attempt to translate the universal claims of Christ into political terms.

There are positives in terms of the Church playing a role in society, but negatives as the church became shaped by society rather than by the *missio Dei*.

Monastic mission was a real positive of this era.

The Protestant Reformation and Its Aftermath

Laid the groundwork for the eventual emergence of a new paradigm for mission:

- Discovery of the biblical framework of salvation by grace etc.
- The consciousness of the individualâ€™s state before God

Initially protestants werenâ€™t missionary in orientation. First stress was on renewing the church in Europe.

Anabaptists challenged the Christendom model and also said that Europe itself was a mission field.

Pietism was a reaction to what seemed to be a cold, cerebral reformation faith. Pietistic missions were strongly individualistic; dominated by the idea of saving souls. This is the strength and weakness of pietistic mission.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT PARADIGM

The Enlightenment led to a new paradigm of mission.

The secular and naturalistic Enlightenment had no place for God and religion was relegated to the private sphere. Human reason and science are the only avenues of truth.

Mission in Western Culture

As the Christendom settlement broke down, the Christian community had to renegotiate its relationship to culture. However, the church had lost its ability to respond in a missionary fashion and became sidelined.

The scope of the Gospel was reduced to the individualâ€™s relationship to God and lost its cosmic scope.

Mission in the West was reduced to evangelism.

Mission Outside the West: the Modern Missionary Movement

The post-Christendom church did not sufficiently understand its own missionary context, but it did reach out into the rest of the world.

The modern missionary movement was primarily about the expansion of the church. Mission from the West to the Rest. The gospel was transmitted in western dress. The problem was twofold:

- The West was becoming scientifically and economically dominant, so there was a huge

confidence in western culture in and of itself.
- The gospel had been identified with the west for so long, it was hard to separate them.

In the late C19, mission got unpleasantly tangled up with colonialism; but that is not the whole story.

Three motives for the missionary movement:

- Obedience to the Great Commission (Carey started this).
- Constrained by Jesus love.
- Millenial expectations

This period also saw the rise of the missionary societies

This is part of my continuing series making notes onÂ *Â Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History and IssuesÂ by Mike Goheen.*