AN EMERGING ECUMENICAL PARADIGM FOR MISSION

Posted on October 28, 2014 by Eddie

Ten factors which are being worked through by five different traditions: a picture of the emerging mission paradigm today.
Category: Observations

The church is present in every country in the world, itâ€™s boundaries are coextensive with the inhabited world.

This shapes the mission paradigm for today.

TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM

During the C20 it became increasingly clear that the paradigm of mission that had shaped the churchâ€™s understanding was inadequate. There are various theological and missiological strands now being worked out in response to this.

The following points are all trends in relation to some aspects of the traditional paradigm.

Mission in All Directions

In the C20 it became clear that the West was not as Christian as was supposed and the church in the rest of the world was growing. Mission became from everywhere to everywhere.

Missiology of Western Culture

A missiology of the West is important, not least because it helps negotiate the impact of globalisation in traditional cultures.

Missionary Ecclesiology

The failure of the church to get involved in mission led to the establishment of mission agencies. The relationship between churches and agencies is a subject of ongoing negotiation.

Contextualisaiton as a Response to a Western Gospel

Mission by diffusion takes one cultural form of Christianity to another part of the world. **Mission by translation** takes place when the gospel is distinguished from the cultural mould and interacts with the culture producing new forms in a new context.

Missio Dei as a Response to Anthropocentric Mission

Enlightenment notions of progress were key to mission, but current views are more modest, seeing mission as a participation in what God is doing.

Liberation as a Response to Development

The churchâ€™s social involvement was based on development principles and did not acknowledge the unjust underlying structures which led to poverty and oppression. Liberation theology is controversial, but it continues to have an impact.

Mission in Weakness and Suffering

The economic superiority of the west could not help but colour mission to some extent. Bosch advocates a move from being â€˜missionary masters to become weak and vulnerable, to take up the cross and embrace sufferingâ€™.

Missions in Partnership in Response to Missions as the Task of the Western Church

Vitnoth Ramachandra believes that â€œa partnership that involves thoughtful, mutual listening among Christians from every tradition and culture within the worldwide Church is indispensable for a faithful, united witness to Christ,â€ but he is pessimistic that this will happen any time soon.

Holistic Salvation as a Response to Spiritual or Humanised Salvation

Salvation in Christendom was spiritual and future. Compassion was a by product of salvation or a bridge to preaching. These were drawn together through the Enlightenment stress on progress and human advancement. Today, there is an on-going search to unite the various aspects of future and temporal salvation through a more complete Christology. This is developed in a future chapter.

Unity as A Response to a Proliferation of Denominational Traditions

The ecumenical energy from the early C20 has burned itself out, but there is a continuing recognition that unity and mission are bound together. However, there are huge practical questions that revolve around this one.

Theology of Religions as a Response to Western Superiority

Neither Christianity, nor modernity, has destroyed other religions. Christianity has to exist in a multi-faith world. How does mission approach those of other faiths?

Urban Mission

Massive demographic changes mean that huge numbers of people are now found in mega-cities, not in small villages.

Pentecostal Mission

The growth of Pentecostalism has huge significance for mission. The stress on pneumatology in mission is important.

MISSION TRADITIONS TODAY

Reflection on these themes takes place within a number of different traditions.

Protestant Ecumenical Tradition

This tradition, or the Conciliar tradition is represented by the World Council of Churches and its Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). Itâ€™s origins can be traced back to Edinburgh in 1910. Which led to the development of the WCC and International Mission Commission (IMC) which merged in 1961.

Ecumenical mission theology has developed through the meetings of the IMC and CMWE.

The ecumenical tradition is marked by careful attentiveness to current trends and contemporary issues. Many current issues in missiology first arrived within this tradition. However, the concern to be relevant also involves possible dangers Tension emerges in a number of questions:

- **Evangelism and Social Concern**: some believe that concern for social issues has eclipsed the commitment to evangelism.
- **Missio Dei**: in the 1960s there was a stress on the world setting the agenda for mission which sidelined the church.
- **Christ and the Spirit**: There is a thread in the ecumenical tradition that separates the work of the Spirit and the Son.
- **God and Other Religions**: again there are some in the tradition that do not see the work of Christ as unique.
- **Gospel and Culture**: some glory in the merits of culture to the extent of syncretism.
- **Evangelism**: it does not seem to be a pressing concern.

Protestant Evangelical Tradition

Evangelicals were part of the IMC for the first half of the C20. However, fear of liberalism when the IMC and WCC merged led to their withdrawal. The first Lausanne conference in 74 is the defining event for Evangelicals.

â€œThe whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world.â€

The devotion to evangelism is nurtured by a commitment to the uniqueness of Christ and the gospel. Evangelicals continue to invest heavily in missions while the other traditions are slowing down.

Concern for evangelism can be tied to an individualistic and future orientated view of the faith. The cosmic and corporate dimensions can be lost as a result. Individualism can also lead to not seeing sin where it is embodied in oppressive and unjust structures. This is sometimes equated with a â€˜social gospelâ€™.

Though evangelicals are becoming more involved in justice and political issues, there is still an underlying concern that these things represent syncretism or a dilution of the gospel.

Roman Catholic Tradition

Catholic mission thinking has changed markedly since Vatican II. Prior to that it involved extending the reach of the Church where it was institutionally absent or weak. Now it is taken to involve various form of social concern etc.

The key theme is that mission revolves around the *missio Dei*. The document *Ad Gentes* is important in this context.

Proclamation is central to mission. The impact of liberation theology from Latin America is also significant.

A lot of attention is being paid to the importance of evangelism in a culture of modernity.

Eastern Orthodox Tradition

Western thinkers have tended to define mission in their own terms and then rejected the Eastern Church on the basis of that.

Since the 1950s the Orthodox churches have been involved in the WCC and CWME and have been more involved in mission.

Love is the starting point for theology and mission. There is a strong stress on incarnation and resurrection. Mission and ecclesiology are held closely together. Unity is an absolute key.

Witness through liturgy is very important. People should experience Christians as a worshipping community.

Pentecostal Tradition

Pentecostals tend to be involved in wider Evangelical groupings, but it needs to be treated apart.

Its sheer size is important. It dwarfs traditional evangelicalism. Wonsuk Ma distinguishes between classic denominational Pentecostalism, Charismatic Pentecostals in other denominations and Indigenous or Neo-Charismatic Pentecostals outside of the West. It is hard to pull these threads together.

Themes common to them are; proclamation, eschatological urgency and the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostal involvement in mission has tended to be activity rather than reflection. However, there is a growing literature on Pentecostal mission.

Pentecostalism challenges the Enlightenment and the traditional church.

Evangelism as a task of every member of the church and work among the urban poor are more typical of Pentecostalism than other traditions. The exuberant worship of Pentecostal churches has also been important in mission.

There needs to be a dialogue between Pentecostalism and other traditions, from which all participants could learn.

This is part of my continuing series making notes onÂ *Â Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History and IssuesÂ by Mike Goheen.Â* If you are finding these notes helpful, a small contribution to the running costs of Kouyanet would not go amiss - or you could get us a book from the list on the right.