TENNENT CHAPTER 1: MEGATRENDS

Posted on January 9, 2015 by Eddie

â€œI am convinced that if we are attentive to the refreshing winds of the Holy Spirit during this tumultuous and yet thrilling time, we will have a missiological rebirth where, side by side, with the global church, we will see a remarkable renewal of the churchâ€™s life and faith like we have not known.â€
Category: Observations

Megatrends that are Shaping 21C Missions

From Moratorium and Malaise to Selah and Rebirth

Missionaries are often excellent storytellers and have been able to give a great picture of missions as being â€œover thereâ€ and different. We have gained a picture of mission as people from the West going abroad. We are the bearers of mission to the world. However, this is not the full picture:

- 85% of Yaleâ€™s Campus Crusade group are Asian, while all of the Buddhist group member are white.
- There are more Anglicans in Nigeria than in Europe and the US combined. The William Carey memorial chapel in Leicester is a Hindu temple while India sends out 41,000 cross-cultural missionaries.
- The ten most resistant groups to the gospel are in Western Europe.

Philip Jenkins says

> *â€œin another generation, the phrase â€˜a white Christianâ€™ may sound like a curious oxymoron as mildly surprising as a â€˜Swedish Buddhist.â€™ Such people exist, but a slight eccentricity is implied.â€*

This introduces the changed world in which we do mission today.

SEVEN MEGATRENDS THAT ARE SHAPING 21 C MISSIONS

Megatrend #1: The Collapse of Christendom

> *â€œThe Western world can no longer be characterized as a Christian society/culture in either its dominant ethos or in its worldview. Christendom has collapsed, and twenty-first century missions must be reconceptualised on new assumptions.â€*

Christendom existed both in formal/legal expressions and in more implicit expressions. In the UK, the established church gave Christianity a privileged position. In the US, despite the separation of church and state, there is a civil religion that gives Christianity an elevated status.

Moving from the Centre To The Periphery

Christendom sees Christianity at the centre of culture and the mission field at the periphery. It is assumed that all citizens grow up as Christians and the gospel does not need to be rigorously

defended. In Christendom, Christianityâ€™s contact with other religions has been through missions or military intervention.

Today that has changed. Even in the West we find ourselves on the periphery of the world Christian movement and living in a new mission field.

Moving from Jerusalem to Athens

Tertullian asked â€œWhat has Athens to do with Jerusalem?â€™ the academy with the church. Jerusalem signified a society framed by revelation; culturally and theologically stable, with Godâ€™s word at the centre. Athens represents scepticism, dialogue and pluralism.

We are no longer proclaiming the gospel from Temple mount in Jerusalem; we are seeking to persuade the gospel into peopleâ€™s lives on the raucous plurality of Mars Hill.

Moving from a Geographic Pluralistic Identity to a Global Identity

Christendom envisages a clear geographic separation into a Christian and a non-Christian world.. The 1910 Edinburgh conference divided the world into two spheres.

This is simply no longer the case.

The Western world can no longer be called Christian. Christians in other parts of the world have long known how to live as minority communities within a larger non-Christian society. They donâ€™t have to adapt to life in a post-Christendom word because they never lived in Christendom in the first place.

Western Christians have had little preparation or precedent for life on the margins. We donâ€™t know how to conceptualise mission without seeing ourselves at the centre of things.

- We have to rediscover missions and the gospel apart from Christendom. In this, we can learn much from Christians in other parts of the world. We have to learn how to occupy the cultural periphery with prophetic authenticity.
- We need to learn how to respond to the challenges of other religions and secularism in a robust fashion.
- The mission field is everywhere. We can no longer assume that people in the West understand the Gospel. Their view of Christianity is as likely to have been formed by the Da Vinci Code as by the Bible.

Megatrend #2: The Rise of Postmodernism: Theological, Cultural

and Ecclesiastical Crisis

> *â€œThe Western church has responded in very different ways to the collapse of Christendom and the emergence of postmodernity, but none has managed the transition without experiencing some form of crisis.â€*

The rise in post-modernism is marked by a scepticism about the certainty of knowledge and the trustworthiness of history. This is the famous â€œsuspicion of metanarrativesâ€ .

The church has been unsure how to respond to this challenge. How should we resist? Is the loss of Christendom and the rise of Postmodernity a blessing or a challenge? Does postmodernism mark the end of religious faith in the West?

The mainline Protestant churches aimed to stay intellectually respectable at the centre of culture. This inevitably led some to a compromise with the culture and an abandonment of confidence in Scripture and the supremacy of Christ.

Relativistic pluralism was as common in the mainline church as in wider society, which led to a discrediting of the rationale for missions and evangelism. The terms â€˜missionâ€™ and â€˜missionariesâ€™ became associated with colonial abuse, the Crusades and forced conversion. In 1972, the World Council of Churches called for a moratorium on missions, and the mainline churches agreed.

Under John Paul II, the Roman Catholic church stood against the postmodern trend and people left the Catholic church in droves. Benedict XVI seems to favour a smaller, distinctive church rather than a larger culturally accommodated one.

Many who left the mainline Protestant Churches or the RC joined one of the conservative, growing Evangelical movements. However, these churches are also ill-equipped to deal with the cultural shifts they face.

Some Evangelicals responded by losing confidence in Western missionaries and seeing the only appropriate way to support missions as being through supporting nationals: sending dollars not people.

Mega-churches understood the collapse of Christendom, however they refused to occupy the margins and portrayed Christianity as useful and user-friendly. They tried to get rid of the strangeness of Church, but also refused to challenge the materialism and commercialisation of Western Society, uncritically embracing entertainment culture. These churches have typically paid little attention to cross-cultural missions apart from short-term stuff.

Emergent churches have also understood the collapse of Christendom, but they have tended not to

challenge post-modern epistemology. It is too early to say what impact these churches will have on missions.

This is not the whole story, but it is illustrative of the fact that our transition from Christendom has not gone particularly well.

Megatrend #3: The Collapse of the â€œWest-Reaches-The-Restâ€ Paradigm

> *â€œWestern Christians have been slow to grasp the full missiological implications of the simultaneous emergence of a post-Christian West and a post-Western Christianityâ€ .*

What once were the mission fields are now the heartlands of Christianity. We need to remember that Jerusalem, Antioch and North Africa were also once Christian heartlands. The Christian centre of gravity has shifted multiple times.

There were those who predicted that the whole world would become secular, but that hasnâ€™t happened. Vibrant new forms of Christianity have sprung up all over.

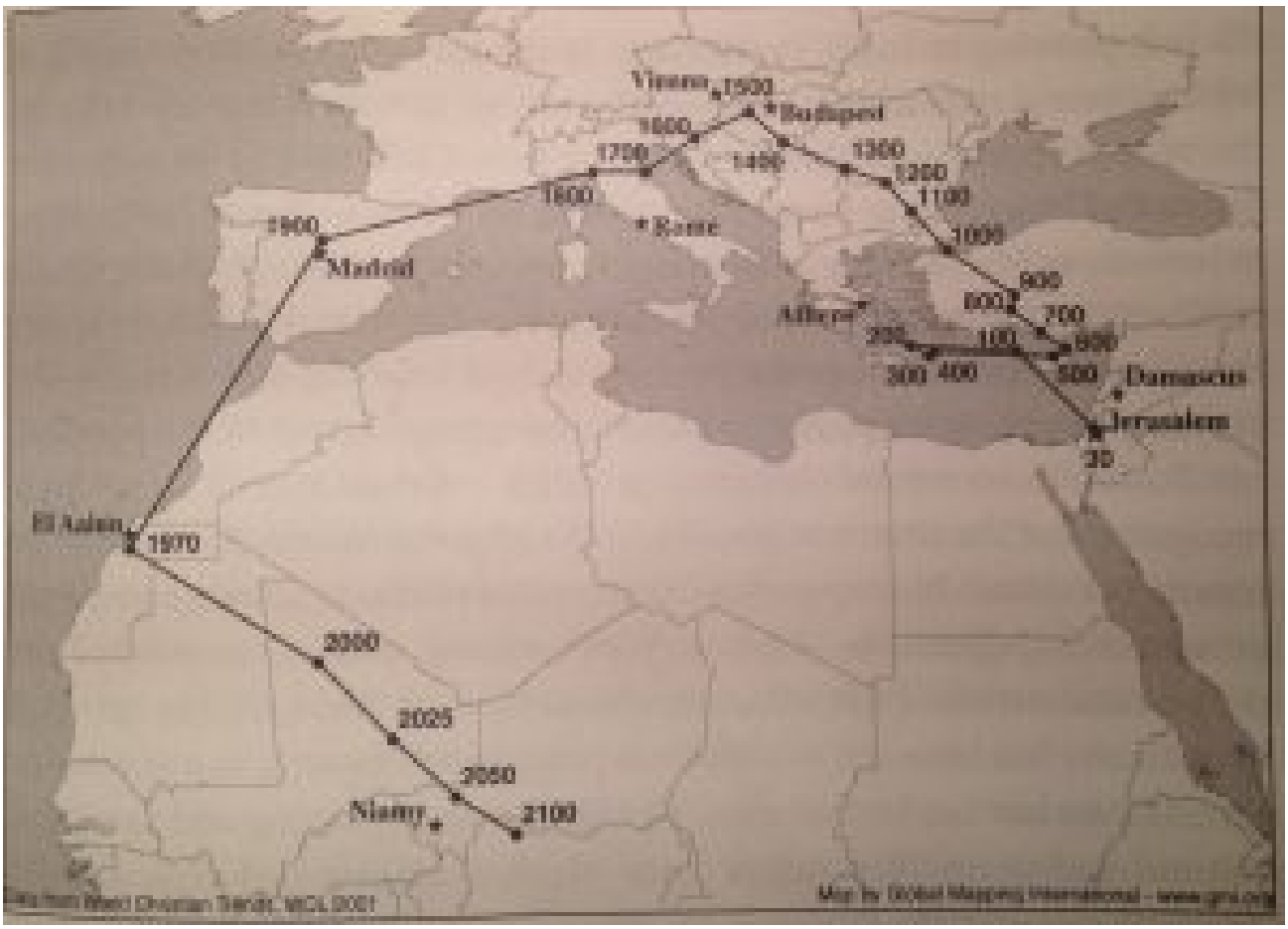
However, our missiology has generally not changed to meet this reality.

Megatrend #4: The Changing Face of Global Christianity

> *â€œThe simultaneous emergence of multiple new centres of Christian vitality has created a multidirectional mission with six sending and receiving continents.â€*

This has been well predicted and documented by Bruggeman, Sanneh, Walls and others. Jenkins brought it to a wider audience with Next Christendom.

The statistical centre of gravity has shifted through the years as in this graphic.



(Tennent p. 35)

The church is not only moving southwards, but also eastwards as is shown by the growth of the church in Korea. The church is growing in both India and China.

Andrew Walls has shown how through history the church grows at the periphery while declining in the Centre. However, the church has never had as many dramatic and simultaneous advances into new situations as it has today.

> *â€œMost Western missionary training and support structures assume a Western initiative in the development of strategy and assume a movement from the West out to the peripheries of missional engagement.â€*

However, in the C21 only about 12-15% of missionaries are from the West.

Megatrend #5: The Emergence of a Fourth Branch of Christianity

> *â€œWe can no longer conceptualize the world Christian movement as belonging to Roman Catholic, Protestant, or Eastern Orthodox communions exclusively. The twenty-first century is characterized by enormous changes in Christian self-identity, which influence how the Christian message is understood and shared.â€*

The identity of the church has undergone major changes; from the Great-Schism between the Eastern and Western churches to the Reformation. The three great branches of Christianity have had geographic and political identities as a fall out from Christendom.

The worldwide spread of Christianity makes this tripartite framework untenable. Many of the new Christians pouring into the church owe no allegiance to any of these historic structures. Many of them belong to new, independent Charismatic or Pentecostal movements. Some of these movements push the boundaries of orthodoxy. Other new Christians claim to be following Christ from within Islam or Hinduism (insider movements).

If these numbers stay small, the traditional tripartite division of Christianity may remain tenable. However, it would appear that the various independent streams account for the second largest block of Christians, outnumbering both Protestants and Orthodox.

This new grouping is hard to categorize. Their emergence is not due to the sort of historical schism which makes the other groups easy to identify. There is also a wide variety within the group, which makes it hard to identify the common points. However, they are so important to the present and future of the church that it is imperative that we find a way to talk about them.

Megatrend #6: Globalisation, Immigration, Urbanisation, and New Technologies

> *â€œGlobalization has fostered dramatic changes in immigration, urbanization, and technological connectivity. The result is that the traditional sending structures and geographic orientation that have dominated missions since the nineteenth century are no longer tenable.â€*

Christian witness is always a contextualised event and today it occurs against the background of complex connectivity that lies at the heart of globalisation.

Immigration

The West is facing a demographic crisis with population growth well below replacement levels.

When the EU was founded it represented 14% of the worldâ€™s population, today it is 6%. The median age of the population is also rising.

As a result, there is a huge amount of immigration into the West, much of it from Islamic countries. In some countries those who attend the Mosque weekly outnumber churchgoers.

The US bucks the trend of population decline, but is still seeing large amounts of immigration, mainly from Asia.

These changes will have an impact on missions. The immigrant populations are the most likely next generation missionaries to the West. It is also possible to reach the nations of the world within the West as the old geographic certainties break down.

Urbanization

There has been a massive movement of people into cities; especially in the developing world.

Implications for missions:

- Most church planting and missions strategies were formulated for rural contexts. This must change.
- Urban populations face unprecedented levels of poverty and corruption. We need to find appropriate ways to live out the gospel in these contexts.

Technology

The growth of information technology is well documented and it has brought great benefits. However, it also makes it very difficult for the gospel to gain a hearing amid all of the competing voices.

We need to find new ways to proclaim the â€œgrand narrativeâ€ of the Christian message in the global marketplace. This means that we must not comodify listeners or dilute the message. We need a robust approach to discipleship that produces a robust, culturally savvy and theologically literate church.

Megatrend #7: A Deeper Ecumenism

> *â€œThe simultaneous emergence of post-denominational identity among many as well as the emergence of thousands of new denominations, requires the forging of new kinds of unity that transcend traditional denominational and confessional identities.â€*

As the new churches of Africa, Asia and Latin America grow, our understanding and discourse about church and mission history will need to change. The Western view of Church history is rooted in the

Roman Empire; this is not true of people from other parts of the world, where history has been shaped by other movements and empires.

We will need to find ways to engage with Christians from around the world who do not share our view of history and denominations.

> *â€œWe can no longer afford the kind of entrenched sectarianism that has often characterised fundamentalism and evangelicalism. This does not mean that we must relinquish our distinctive theological convictions. On the contrary, being in conversation with the global church will not only serve to enrich our own theological perspectives, but, more importantly, it will also lead us to a deeper understanding of the depositum fidei, that ancient apostolic faith that forms our common confession.â€*

However, this will mean distinguishing more clearly between essential truths which unite all Christians and the peripheral issues. The advent of the world church gives us an opportunity to live out John 17.

THE NEED FOR SELAH AND REBIRTH

The collective force of these trends means that we have to do more than simply tweak our missiological assumptions. We need to completely rethink how we train and prepare missionaries and how we envision the church and the mission field. Business as usual is not an option.

Perhaps we need to call for a period of readjustment and reassessment of the mission movement. A musical pause: Selah!

> *â€œI am convinced that if we are attentive to the refreshing winds of the Holy Spirit during this tumultuous and yet thrilling time, we will have a missiological rebirth where, side by side, with the global church, we will see a remarkable renewal of the churchâ€™s life and faith like we have not known.â€*

This post consists of my personal notes taken fromÂ Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century (Invitation to Theological Studies Series)Â by Timothy Tennent. Once you have read all my notes, please buy the book!