DON'T JUST DO SOMETHING

Posted on April 28, 2015 by Eddie

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Category: Observations

One of the regular themes of this blog is that Christian mission is a more complex business than it may seem at first glance. Not everything that claims to be Christian witness is actually effective or even comprehensible to other people. It's also true that not all forms of aid or financial support are effective in helping the people they are aimed at; in fact some forms of outside development aid can actually be harmful.

This isn't rocket science and shouldn't come as a surprise. However, I also hear the refrain that "we have to to something" or "it's better to try to help than to do nothing". Really? What if your attempt to helpÂ does more damage than good? Is that really better than doing nothing?

Another response is that God can use anything to save people, so we shouldn't discourage any evangelistic witness, however ill thought through it is. In my teen-age years, I had a friend who had become a Christian in an incident which led to over 50 deaths and hundreds of injuries. God can use all sorts of means to draw people to himself, but that doesn't excuse us from being thoughtful and reflective.

There are ties when "just doing something" is not the best course of action.

These somewhat dyspeptic reflections are inspired by an excellent piece in the Guardian which looks at how best to respond to the earthquake in Nepal. It is well worth reading the whole thing (and the comments), but here is a quick couple of quotes to whet your appetite:

> *Something that has been much discussed in the international aid community is the lack of coordinated response to the Haiti disaster. Ragtag brigades of well-intentioned do-gooders flooded the country: students, church congregations, individuals who had previously vacationed in the area, all clambering over one another looking for a way to make their mark and do good, but lacking either the skills or coordination to have an impact. Indeed, many ended up slowing down the aid efforts...*
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> *What Nepal needs right now is not another untrained bystander, however much her heart is hurting. Nepal has one international airport for the entire country, which has itself sustained damage. That airport needs to be used for emergency supplies, immediate aid for the victims, and qualified, professional relief workers...*
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> ***Do not donate stuff.** Secondhand goods are difficult to distribute in a disaster area and are hardly ever what is actually needed. It is easier, and often in the long run cheaper, for organisations to procure goods themselves and distribute based on need. If you want to give away things you no longer need, sell them and donate the money to the relief fund. Or give them to a local charity shop, which can convert them into cash on your behalf.*

If you are based in the UK, the best way to help the situation in Nepal is through the DEC, which

draws together a number of well qualified aid and development agencies.