MISSION IN 2050

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I go to a fair number of mission conferences and in general, I meet people like me. Middle class, middle aged, white people - most of whom are male. There is often a smattering of Asians and a few Latins or Africans, butÂ they tend to be in the minority.

This is regrettable, but it is understandable.Â The modern mission movement originated in Europe and the United States and its leadership still reflects its history. However, there are changes. Broadly speaking, Western mission agencies were founded to send people from Europe and North America to other parts of the world. Today, an increasing number of western based agencies concentrate on funding local pastors and missionaries in other parts of the world, rather than sending out missionaries. There are also an increasing number of African, Asian and Latin mission agencies sending out missionaries across the world, in the same way that their western counterparts have been doing for centuries. The location has changed, but the model is very similar.

However, from time to time at mission gatherings, you meet people who don't fit the mould. They don't seem comfortable with the studious, cautious atmosphere of the typical international gathering. They are more charismatic (in all senses of the word) and less interested in some of the missiological and strategic discussions that take place in these settings. To be honest, the first impression you get is that they are not very serious about mission.

Then you hear them talk.

Then these people come alive; they tell stories of being imprisoned, of planting churches in cities hostile to the Gospel, of people coming to faith in the most amazing ways, of God at work.

We have no idea how many independent, itinerant, local preachers there are. People who have become Christians in North Africa, Central Asia and elsewhere, who have adopted a missionary lifestyle at huge personal cost. However, I strongly believe that these people, not the formal agencies that we are used to, are the future of mission.

They may be its present, for that matter.

A couple of weeks ago, I suggested that the future isÂ not particularly rosy for British mission agencies. Â However, this doesn't mean that mission itself is in any danger. God will build his church around the world and people will continue to be drawn to him.

However, as the shape of the world church changes, so the shape of mission will change. Mission agencies are a Western solution to the problem of how to resource world mission, albeit one that has been picked up in other parts of the world. Other cultures will come up with other solutions. The success of the Western missionary movement over the last 200 years will, ironically, lead to its eclipse.

The transition to new forms of mission will be uncomfortable at times and we will pass through some rocky moments. However, I firmly believe that the development of new ways and structures

for reaching out to the world will be very exciting and that we are living on the cusp of a new age of rapid church expansion across the globe.

This is the fourth and (probably) the last post in a series on church and mission in 2050.