LOTS OF GOOD THOUGHTS (NONE OF THEM MINE)

Posted on June 4, 2015 by Eddie

I submit that the flaw in the â€œword and deedâ€ paradigm is that it has encouraged us to focus attention on the parts rather than on the whole, which is God's new order.
Category: Observations

First of all, some thoughts about the big picture of what mission is:

> *By mission is meant the effort to effect passage over the boundary between faith in Jesus Christ and its absence. In this understanding of mission, the basic functions of Christian proclamation, dialogue, witness, service, worship, liberation, and nurture are of special concern...*
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> *But if mission itself is nonnegotiable, equally important is the demand that the form and patterns of mission be kept flexible and responsive to the changing historical situation. Failure to distinguish between these two elements will result in paralysis or aimlessness...*
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> *Mission must precede the church. Jesus the Messiah formed his disciple community for the express purpose of continuing his mission. If Jesus had had no mission, he would have had no need to gather and commission a group of disciples to continue what he had started; and they could happily have dispersed to their homes and customary occupations when he left them. But the four gospels make it clear that Jesus was imbued with a compelling sense of his mission and committed that mission to his disciples. The renewal of the church as the twentieth century ends is linked to recovery of the priority of mission...*
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> *Three things must be kept in focus. First, the rule of God is prior to mission. Indeed, mission is the means by which God's reign is being realized in the world. In the second place, as a corollary, we note that mission is prior to church.10 The church can only be called into being by the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom. Jesus began by proclaiming this gospel and gathering together those who responded. These he taught and then commissioned to continue doing what he was doing. In this age the task of proclaiming the gospel is never finished, for each generation must hear it for themselves. The church becomes something other than a living witness to the gospel when it seeks to preserve the faith through an institution or sacerdotal system. Rather, the church lives out of the gospel by proclaiming the gospel. Third, at Pentecost the Holy Spirit endowed and equipped the disciple community to continue the mission of Jesus Christ in the world...*
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> *Mission is a supremely practical affairâ€"it happens on earth even though its origin and motivation come from beyond. The way mission is conceived and carried out inevitably reflects the historical context in which it is set...*
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> *But there is an in-built tension between theory and practice. The mission movement has been tinctured by activism. Missionaries have been caricatured as individualists impatient with rules and external constraints. The important thing was to get on with the work. In the long run, the development of mission theory has been a desultory affair...*

And that takes us back to my earlierÂ comments about proclamation and social action.

> *William Carey issued his historic appeal in 1792 for missionary action on the basis that Christians ought to use â€œmeansâ€ for the spread of the gospel. Carey's phraseology was instinctively broad and inclusiveâ€"ranging from direct preaching to agricultural development, Bible translation, and printing, from the founding of local churches to the creating of institutions of higher education. By contrast, in the twentieth century the problems have arisen primarily at those points where we have insisted on keeping the elements separated and compartmentalized with differing values assigned to the parts. These values have been derived from certain assumptions made by competing schools of thought as they have engaged in polemics against one another...*
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> *Our thinking about Christian witness in the twentieth century has been controlled by a paradigm stamped by the Enlightenment. This means we have identified witness in terms of discrete components and then tried to determine the proper balance among them. We noted above that this has precedent neither in the Bible nor in nearly nineteen hundred years of church history...*
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> *I submit that the flaw in the â€œword and deedâ€ paradigm is that it has encouraged us to focus attention on the parts rather than on the whole, which is God's new order. Once this partial way of looking at Christian witness was accepted, it was impossible to arrive at the whole. We live in the constant frustration of trying to achieve balance and defend priorities. But the wholeâ€"that is, God's new orderâ€"is always greater than the way we add up the parts. Such arithmetic does not correspond with God's...*

These quotes are taken from the most excellentÂ Changing Frontiers of Mission (ASM)Â by Wilbert R. Shenk (which is a great name!).