MISSION AND A CHANGING FAITH

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I find this quote fromÂ BEYOND CHRISTENDOM: Globalization, African Migration and the Transformation of the WestÂ (which is an excellent book, by the way) to be very thought provoking:

> *The ultimate achievement of the Western missionary movement was its pivotal role in the dramatic shift in global Christianity's center of gravity, which has witnessed the emergence of the non-Western world as the new heartland of the faith. It is not the first time in the history of Christianity that massive cross-cultural transmission of the faith has produced an epochal transformation? As in earlier shifts, the ideas and constructs that dominated in the previous age are radically modified or else eliminated in the new age as the contexts and priorities of the new center(s) invest the faith with new attributes and expressions.*

In other words, the ChristianityÂ that isÂ developing around the world will look very different to the Western form of the faith which inspired the mission movement. The Church in Africa, Asia and elsewhere will be shaped by the concerns and experiences of Christians in those parts of the world; not by the concerns and experiences of Europeans and North-Americans.

Some people find this sort of statement troubling; they imagine that it means that people are wateringÂ down Christianity, stepping off the straight and narrow. However, in truth almost all Christians, wherever and whenever they have lived have practiced their faith in a way that reflects their culture, language and concerns. The Apostle Paul would find a modern British church very strange and I'm sure that we would be equally uncomfortable with a first century gathering somewhere in Turkey.

The genius of the Christian religion is that it is founded on the historic event of God becoming man and living in a human society. God comes to us and meets us where we are, in our language and in our culture. To be sure, he wants to transform us, to make us better. But he wants to make make us better Africans, Asians and what have you. His plan was never to make the whole world into Europeans or North Americans.