THE PAPERS WANT TO KNOW WHOSE SHIRTS YOU WEAR

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Some thoughts about politics and mission inspired by the international reaction to the death of a famous husband.
Category: Mission

Two days ago, theÂ world was rocked by the news that David Bowie had died. Newspapers and radio stations suspended their normal coverage and gave us stories about his life and assessments of his contribution as an artist and style icon; many of them liberally sprinkled with quotes from his work.

I think there are two reasons why so much has been written about Bowie. Firstly, he was genuinely a remarkable artist. Few, if any, modern musicians have managedÂ reinvent themselves and their music in the way that Bowie did. His influence is enormous. Secondly (and slightly more cynically) Bowie came to prominence when the current crop of newspaper and radio editors were in their teenage years. He was important to the decision makers and so his story gets told in some depth.

In the light of the media coverage in the UK, I was somewhat surprised to come across this story from an African website.



> *Somalia: the famous top model, Iman, loses her husband David Bowie*

In this situation, David Bowie wasn't the star, he was simply the husband of a famous Somalian woman.

Now my point is not to belittle David Bowie or his memory. What I find interesting here is the reminder that the rest of the world does not share the obsessions and interests of the West. People in different places do not see the world in the same way and do not have the same interests and concerns.

This goes deeper than views about the life and work of a musician.Â We make a big mistake when we assume that the rest of the world wants to be like us, that everyone shares our values of materialism, individualism and secularism. We struggle to understand groups such as ISIL because we can't imagine a world in which David Bowie is more famous for the woman he married than for his music.

I believe that we see the same sort of dynamic at work in the church. Western leaders are all too quick to assume that their concerns and issues are shared by Christians around the world, when this simply isn't the case. Given that the majority of Christians now live outside of the heartlands of Europe and North America, it can be argued that the concerns of Westerners are actually a minority interest within the worldwide church.

A couple of further thoughts. To be a missionary means learning to see the world through the eyes of others. You can't share the message of the Gospel with people if their interests and world-view are completely foreign to you. This means taking time to learn about people, to understand them, to share their lives and to speak their language. There is no short cut to cross-cultural mission. And the same thing is true of evangelism at home; we can't simply assume that we understand what people are concerned about.

"It's time to leave the capsule if you dare."