MISSION, VISAS AND A NOT A REFERENDUM

Posted on June 16, 2016 by Eddie

Some thoughts on visas, immigration and world mission, while trying hard to avoid the referendum!
Category: Observations

Though this post touches on the issue of the referendum, it is not arguing for a vote in either direction. If you want partisan blog posts, or to post comments arguing for one side or the other, there are plenty of places you can do that.

One of the arguments that Christians use in arguing for Britain to remain the European Union is that it allows for the free movement of missionaries within Europe. I agree that this is a good thing. However, Europe is growing increasingly secular while the Christian faith is growing by leaps and bounds in other parts of the world. The most important thing for world mission, is not that Europeans can circulate within our continent (though that is good, as I said), but that missionaries from outside of Europe can come here. Therein lies a problem.

I know very little about the visa regime in other countries, but I do have some experience of things here in the UK. Currently, it is extremely difficult to get visas for Christians from Africa and Asia to come and work in this country, even for a short time. Our ability to learn from Christians in parts of the world where the faith is growing is compromised by the British government's immigration policy.

Bible colleges also have a great deal of difficulty in getting student visas for people from outside of the UK. One of Britain's most significant contributions to world mission over the years has been the quality of training that we have provided to people from across the globe. Not only does the lack of visas mean that we can have less impact on the wider world, the lack of overseas students means that a number of colleges are now facing significant financial problems.

Another problem with the current regime is that non-EU spouses of British nationals can only reside in the UK if they earn over a certain threshold. So, if a British missionary meets and marries an American, an Australian or a Peruvian they would not be able to settle in the UK unless they earned far more money than the average missionary actually takes home. A number of friends and others that I know have been unable to return toÂ the UK to bring up their children because of this rule.

Whether the UK leaves the EU or stays in, the visa rules as they stand are not helpful to the cause of mission and I don't see any indication that either side is addressing these issues.

If you do have a vote in the referendum, make sure you use it, whichever side of the fence you are on.Â

Sorry - I couldn't resist this!