BREXIT AND WORLD MISSION

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Categories: Church: UK, Church: World

I had been planning to avoid writing anything about the results of the referendum for fear of offending people or adding to the unhelpful things that are being said on all sides. However, I recently read a comment on a friend's Facebook page that now the UK has voted to leave the European Union, the continent of Europe has been cut off from the Gospel and that prompted me to note down a few thoughts.

Up till this point, there has been no change in the visa and residence situationÂ and missionaries from the UK are free to move around the EU as they always were (likewise, missionaries from the rest of the EU can come here). This may well change at some point over the next couple of years, but at the momentÂ we don't know what those changes will be.

It is also important to remember thatÂ Europe is not the centre of the Christian world. The majority of missionaries in the world don't come from or work in Europe. Though the events of the last week are very important to us, they have limited impact on American missionaries working in Asia or Asian missionaries working in Africa. God's mission is a massive, complex and multinational phenomenon and we can only begin to understand it if we look at it from a standpoint that transcends our national or regional context. This is true, even when we look at our own situations. The majority of missionaries toÂ Europe (including the UK) in the future are likely to be drawn from Africa, not from the traditional missionary sending nations. It is far from clear what impact Brexit will have on majority world mission to Europe.

Some Things Have Changed

So far, I've mentioned things which have not changed significantly. However, even in the few days since the referendum there have been some significant shifts.

The first thing to note is the fall in the value of the pound against many world currencies. This has a big effect on people who are looking to exchange their holiday money, but a much bigger one on those who live overseas on a permanent basis. In all likelihood, the pound will regain some of the ground it has lost in the last week, but it is unlikely to reach pre-referendum levels in the near future. This means that missionaries or development projects whoÂ are dependant on support from the UK will see a significant drop in their income for some time to come. If you are involved in supporting people or projects overseas, you may well want to consider whether you can help with this.

The second thing is the rise in racism and xenophobia which has been noted since the referendum. People did not simply become racist overnight on Thursday; the xenophobia which we are seeing expressed today has deep roots. However, it cannot be denied that aspects of the leave campaign have stoked the hostility to immigrants and that some people believe that the result of the referendum has given legitimacy to racist expressions. While Christians must condemn this upsurge in racism, it also provides an opportunity to reach out to the immigrant population; something we are not always good at doing. I love the 'safety pin' campaign that was launched yesterday, however, I'm sure that churches can do more to reach out to people and to befriend them in a situation in which

they feel vulnerable (this article is worth a read on the issue).

The final thing to mention is that the church in the UK is divided and this will inevitably have an impact on our mission to the world. It is far too simple to say that we have taken a decision and that we need to move on. The margin in the referendum was so narrow, the consequences are so huge and the feelings involved are so strong (a good analysis here) that it will take a long time to work it throughÂ .Â However, if we are serious about this Christianity thing, we will eventually need to find a way to reconcile and move forward.

God's mission to the world will carry on whatever the British nation and the British church does; we are not as important as we might like to think we are. However, we do have a part to play and above everything else, we will miss out if we are not involved. We need world mission much more than world mission needs us.