A NEW PROBLEM THAT ISN'T SO NEW

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Category: Observations

Today's post is a quote fromÂ Mission MattersÂ by Tim Chester.

> *One of the major challenges facing mission in the future is the interface between southern and northern mission. This offers a wonderful opportunity for constructive partnership with mutual learning. Already models of mission are developing, of partnership with Western funding and technical skills facilitating non-Western organisations in mission. But money is a complicating factor in partnerships The rhetoric of equal partnership is hard to sustain when money is involved. The reality is that "he who pays the piper calls the tune". The relationship between a rich Western church with declining numbers and a vibrant, growing, poor Southern church will be a key issue in mission in the coming years.*
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> *Pal addresses this issue in Galatians. Some people in Galatia were teaching a message that, Paul says, 'pretends to be the Good News, but is not the Good News at all' (1:6-7 NLT). They are saying that the Gentiles who have put their faith in Jesus also need to be circumcised. Paul's response is this: 'if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all' (5:2).*
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> *But there's another thing going on here. There's an under lying assumption in what the false teachers say. It's this: 'You Gentile Christians ought to listen to us Jewish Christians. You ought to do what we say. After all, our church in Jerusalem is larger, stronger, older, better resourced, more established. We have a long history stretching back to Abraham. The Good News came from us. We're your mother church. We're just being maternal. We Want to look after our children.'*
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> *Think how that might sound today: You African or Asian Christians ought to listen to us British Christians. You ought to do what we say. After all, our church in Britain is larger, stronger, older more resourced, more established. We have a long history stretching back to the Reformation. The Good News came from us, We're your mother church. We're just being maternal. We want to look after our converts.' No-one says it quite like that, but sometimes that's the subtext.*
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> *But Paul rejects this. He wants a partnership of equals. He wants partnership, not dependence. That's one of the central themes of Galatians. In Galatians 1:12 he says of his message. 'I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.' The gospel message is not from Jerusalem. It's not the property of the Jerusalem church. Nor the British church. The gospel did not originate with us.*

I think this quote is superb. Firstly because it illustrates one of the most pressing issues in mission at the moment. The issue of money in partnership is something which we addressed in the Global Connections code of best practice forÂ church to church partnerships.

However, the real reason that I appreciate this quote is that Tim turns to Scripture for his understanding of the situation. There is a tendency within the mission world to turn to the latest management theory or (more rarely) to development studies to find solutions to our problems. It's not that these things are wrong, there is a good deal to be learned from the literature in these fields; but they shouldn't be our first port of call when we want to understand what God is doing in the wider world.