O WAD SOME POWER THE GIFTIE GIE US

Posted on November 8, 2017 by Eddie

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Category: Observations

Over the years, I've written a fair bit about the way that missionaries from the UK talk about the countries where they work; try this post for example.

I've often thought that it would help things if British Christians could experience some of what it's like to be on the other side of the fence; to feel what it's like to be the objects of someone else's mission. Well, in a revived blog post, the Wee Flea (David Robertson), has provided just such an insight.

> *â€œOver paid, over sexed and over hereâ€ was one common saying concerning the American Glâ€™s during the Second World War. I doubt that this is the appropriate description for the growing number of American missionaries who are coming to Scotland today in order to take part in a different kind of warfare â€“ the spiritual battle for Western Europe.*
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> *This is a subject dear to my heart â€“ I have been involved with American missionaries for over twenty years and continue to encourage them to come to Scotland. Bear that in mind as you read the rest of this article. I am writing from the perspective of someone who wants American missionaries here and who believes moreover that we need American missionaries here.*

From this auspicious start, David goes on to list some rather serious problems.

> *Another aspect of realism is to avoid stereotyping and to seek to understand the culture you are coming to. A few years ago I looked at the Southern Baptists missionary website on Scotland (it has considerably improved since then!) â€“ it was appallingly inaccurate â€“ almost to the point of being offensive and laughable. The scary thing is that this information is what Southern Baptist missionaries come armed with. According to the website â€“ Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism are infiltrating the country through â€˜ambitious East Indian businessmenâ€™. â€“ Mormonism and the religion of the JWâ€™s are taught in public schools â€“ â€˜Scots enjoy football (soccer), rugby, cricket, golf and Highland Games. On a sunny day beautiful parks are filled with families and their dogs..â€™*
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> *As well as avoiding romanticism and stereotyping, realism means grasping and understanding the spiritual state of the nation. Scotland is in a bad way spiritually â€“ but it is not helpful to act as though there were no evangelical Christians in the country nor is it helpful to come across with a superior mindset which screams â€˜I am here to tell you how it should be doneâ€™. There is a distinct lack of humility in some of the presentations I have seen.*

He then picks up on a theme which is dear to my heart and one that I've repeated here more than once.

> ***It is also helpful to be realistic about what you can do.*** *I have met men who tell me with a straight face that their mission is to bring revival to Scotland and Ireland; to unite the churches, to â€˜disciple tomorrows leaders todayâ€™, â€˜develop a CPM (church planting movement) that will envelop the whole nation for Christâ€™. Much of this is the Christian equivalent of spin and corporate business talk. Meaningless except to those schooled in the jargon. It is better to be honest. I know that saying you are running a pensioners club in a rundown area of an inner city is not quite the same as â€˜bringing revival to Scotlandâ€™, but it is more realistic.*

Why do people speak like this?

> *The trouble is that American missionaries are often funded by individuals or churches who want to know what their money is achieving. Plus there is a lot of competition for a limited amount of cash â€“ and when there is any kind of recession it is missionary work that often gets hit first â€“ so each missionary is in the unenviable position of having to sell their work in order to obtain funds to continue it. In such circumstances it is not surprising that jargon and exaggeration come into play.*

Please go and read the whole post, it really is excellent.

Please don't see this as an attack on American missionaries - well not entirely anyway. My point is that this sort of unthinking stereotyping and hype is not unusual and its certainly not just Americans who are guilty of it. I see plenty of examples from the UK, too.

Oh, if you don't know where the title of this blog post comes from, it's from Burn's poem To A LouseÂ which seemed appropriate in the context.

O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion:
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,
An' ev'n devotion!