THINGS HOME MISSION CAN LEARN FROM OVERSEAS MISSION

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I believe that the skills and experience of cross-cultural missionaries are crucial to the future of the church in the UK: the start of a blog series.
Category: Church: UK

Missionaries are an odd bunch; they talk about exotic places, they swap stories about suffering from strange diseases, they speak foreign languages and they are often rather out of touch with life in the UK. It's good to have them around, to listen to their encouraging and heartwarming stories, but all too often, what they say is out of touch with the reality of being a Christian in twenty-first century Britain.

OK; that's a caricature; I know that and you know that, but like all caricatures, it carries a grain of truth.

However, I believe that the skills and experience of cross-cultural missionaries are crucial to the future of the church in the UK, let me explain.

Not so long ago, Christians tended to talk about mission as something that happened overseas, while evangelism was what we did in the UK. I know there were exceptions, but the generalisation stands. The point was that we saw Britain as having an Evangelical background; there was a cultural understanding of the faith and all we had to do was call people back to beliefs that they had abandoned. What we needed was the revival of something that was there, but dormant. However, outside of the UK on "the mission field", people didn't know about Christianity at all and mission work was all about starting from scratch with a non-Christian or profoundly anti-Christian population.

I'm not convinced that things were ever quite this simple, but broadly speaking this is how we used to view things. Today, however, things have changed. There is a growing realisation in the church in the UK, that we are living in a post-Christian, multi-faith world and that we can no-longer assume that people have a basic understanding of the Christian story. Not surprisingly, we are increasingly talking about mission as something which happens in the UK as well as around the world.

This is where I think that the skills and experience of cross-cultural mission workers is important to the church in the UK. Missionaries and mission agencies have spent decades (in some cases, centuries) sharing the Gospel in situations where people are hostile to the Christian faith. They have developed skills in reaching across cultural, religious and linguistic boundaries - the same skills which are needed by the church in the UK today.

There is a wealth of knowledge and experience available out there for people in the UK to learn from; individual missionaries, mission training courses and seminars, websites and what-have-you. However, my impression is that church leaders in the UK are either unaware of what is out there or that they are unwilling to use resources produced from outside of their own constituency. This bothers me; cross-cultural missionaries have spent a couple of hundred years making mistakes and learning from them, there is no reason for the church in the UK to repeat those mistakes - they need to make their own (new) mistakes.

This post is by way of an introduction to a new series on the blog that will look at ways in which the church in the UK can learn from the experience of cross-cultural missionaries. I've no idea how long

the series will be, but when it's finished, I'll put links below to all of the post. This won't be rocket-science, but I hope it will have some practical ideas that others, who are more talented than I am can run with.

Posts In This Series

- Introduction:Â I believe that the skills and experience of cross-cultural missionaries are crucial to the future of the church in the UK: the start of a blog series....
- Go:Â When push comes to shove, there is one basic difference between long-term, cross-cultural missionaries and the average church member. ...
- Study:Â How well do we understand the culture that surrounds us?...
- Contextualise:Â When Paul spoke to a Jewish audience, he started off with the story of the Jewish nation, when speaking to Greeks, he worked from inscriptions on statues and Greek poetry. ...
- Serve:Â If you just preach the word but donâ€™t do the deeds then you are not credible, if you just do the deeds without preaching the word then you are not audible....
- Don't Look Down: Looking down on a class of people, and holding them in contempt for their reading habits, has far more to do with liberal, middle-class prejudice than it has to do with Christianity.Â ...
- Speak:Â To a newcomer, a phrase such as "we will now enter into a time of worship" conveys far more background information about the person using it than it does about what is going to happen next in the service. ...
- Religion:Â Learn from people who have been there and done that....
- Stories:Â Taking one of Jesus' amazingly creative parables and turning it into an alliterated, three-point, logical sermon has to be the ultimate in literate processing. ...
- Pray:Â It would be easy - very easy - for a Western rationalist to dismiss all of this. I'm a biologist, I know what causes diseases! ...