FEAR, SUPERIORITY AND MISSION

Posted on January 17, 2018 by Eddie

The starting point of mission is the foot of the cross, Â where acknowledge our full dependance on Christ and our utter need of forgiveness.
Category: Observations

I was rather struck by this quote fromÂ Engaging Globalization, the book I referred to yesterday:

> *A survey of global mission leaders reported that evangelizing Muslims was their second-highest priority. The disquieting news was that two-thirds viewed Muslims unfavorably, believing that Islam is more prone to violence than any other religion and that Muslims are unfriendly to evangelical Christians.* ***How are we to love our Muslim neighbors if we are afraid of them?*** *What is the responsibility of our churches to help parishioners better understand Islam and engage Muslims positively? (Emphasis mine)*

With regard to the specific question, there are a number of good resources here in the UK to help people understand Islam and to share the love of Jesus with their Muslim neighbours. In particular, I'd point people to the Friendship First Course and to Steve Bell's excellent bookÂ Grace for Muslims?: The Journey from Fear to Faith. However, I think this quote also raises some wider issues which are worth mentioning.

The first is President Trump's use of the wordÂ *sh*tholeÂ* (or was itÂ *sh*thouse*?) to describe some countries in the Caribbean and Africa. Now my issue isn't so much that the president used childish and offensive language, but that many of the people who support him would identify themselves as Evangelicals. If you look down on other people, fear them, or see them as inferior, you are in no position to share the good news of Jesus with them.

A year ago, I wrote a post about the future of the American mission movement, the words I wrote then are even more important today:

> *Sadly, in Facebook and Twitter discussions, Iâ€™m seeing an increase in the number of self-identified Christians in the US speaking about foreigners (especially Muslims) in derogatory and hostile terms. It is hard to see how those who view people as their implacable enemies can reach out to them with the Christian message in any coherent fashion. This can only lead either to a retreat from global mission or to the adoption of a superior, neo-colonial approach which will be counterproductive in the modern world.*

However, things aren't hopeless; this amazing article shows what the church (and the United States) is at its best.

The other thing that came to mind reading the original quote was a discussion which has been carried on on Twitter about the difficulties in getting middle-class Brits to lead or plant churches in the working-class areas of the North of England. You can get a flavour of the discussion here. My thoughts are that there is a genuine cross-cultural issue here. As a working-class lad who grew up to be middle class, I sense that middle-class people often feel both superior to and fearful of their working-class neighbours. This sort of attitude which is engrained in the British (English?) class

system is very hard to overcome.

The point of these three linked situations is that feelings of fear, racial superiority and distrust are massive barriers to sharing the Gospel. The starting point of mission is the foot of the cross, Â where we acknowledge our full dependance on Christ and our utter need of forgiveness. If we truly understand what we have been saved from and how much it cost, we can never feel superior to anyone and if Christ is for us, who can stand against us? Perfect love casts out fear.