WHAT IF AGENCIES TOOK THE MISSIO DEI SERIOUSLY?

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This post raises the important question of what should drive us in our mission; what we find to be practical, or what we believe about God and the way he is at work?
Category: Observations

Missio Dei or 'The Mission of God' is a trendy term that you will find cropping up with increasing regularity in evangelical books about mission. I've posted about it on numerous occasions and you can find a list of these posts here. Despite the increasing popularity of the term it is a complex concept which is rarely unpacked as it deserves (see this post for more detail).

However, though one can find references to theÂ *missio Dei* scattered through the mission literature, it seems to be little more than a buzz word and has little impact on the way that people actually go about doing mission.

In order to push this thought forward, I'm going to ignore my own advice and adopt a simplistic definition ofÂ *missio Dei.Â* I realise that much more could and should be said, but I'm trying to keep this blog post down to around 500 words (I failed).

A traditional view of mission is that God delegates the task of mission to the church. TheÂ *missio Dei* view of mission is that the Triune God has a mission and that he calls the church to participate in that mission with him. The difference is subtle, but extremely important and in my view it has huge implications for the way in which we talk about mission and involve people in it.

It changes how we do recruitment. Rather than calling (guilt-tripping) people to come and do a task which wouldn't get done without them, we would be inviting people to join with what God is doing around the world. We can be certain that Christ is building his church and that God is reconciling all things to himself in Christ and it is an amazing privilege that God allows people like us to be involved as part of this process. We would also give much more prominence to the communities which God has placed people in. Rather than recruiting individuals and then working out how to get their church and other supporters on board, agencies would help churches to identify, train and send their members.

It changes how we raise funds. I've attended enough fund raising workshops and training sessions to be aware of some of the jargon. It is important (especially with major donors - jargon for rich people) to let them know that their money is achieving something. Major donors like to know that their money is being spent well and want to see results. If you look at the fundraising pages of some agencies, you will find stories and videos from donors telling how their gift transformed the lives of some people somewhere and inviting you to do the same. Now, without wishing to decry the generosity of donors (major, or widows with mites), money doesn't transform the lives of people - God does. If we are serious about theÂ *missio Dei*, we will be honest that we can't promise results when people give money. The Spirit blows where he will and God will use our generosity in the way that he sees fit.

This isn't saying that funds shouldn't be well accounted for and wisely used, not at all - there are all sorts of reasons why we have to give good account of how money is spent. However, the Christian call is to be cheerful, generous givers and that means not expecting or demanding a return or impact.

Missio Dei changes how agencies work together. Mission agencies will say that they don't compete, but they all produce their own magazines, have their own branding, Twitter feeds, Facebook pages and what-have-yous. To the outsider, it certainly looks like competition. It is true that behind the publicity machine there is a good deal of cooperation in some areas - especially when it comes to working together on the field. However, if we were serious about the idea that mission is God's activity and not ours, we would be much less precious about organisational boundaries. I am convinced that many agencies in the UK could and should merge, creating stronger and more viable entities.

If you go to a mission festival of some sort, there will typically be a zone in which the various agencies display their wares. There will be lots of brightly coloured stands, each one more eye-catching and technologically complex than the next. Friendly agency reps stand around, like Moroccan carpet salesmen trying to entice you into their shops, attempting to interest you in the work that they are doing. If we took theÂ *missio Dei* seriously, I think we would rethink these sorts of things entirely. Rather than agencies trying get people interested in them, there would be a team of people listening to the punters (and their churches), seeing what they are interested in and pointing them in the right direction. You wouldn't actually need stands from individual agencies at all - which would save a good deal of money. With a bit of creativity, the zone could still be attractive and inspiring, but it could also send a very different message to the one you get today.

Of course, none of these ideas will be adopted, they are just not practical. However, this then raises the important question of what should drive us in our mission; what we find to be practical, or what we believe about God and the way he is at work? If we are serious about theÂ *missio Dei* then mission-as-usual is not an option.