WHAT ABOUT THE UNREACHED

Posted on March 14, 2018 by Eddie

If a church feels that the Lord is guiding them to support mission work in Heckmondwike, no-one from the outside should tell them that they shouldn't do this because Heckmondwike is "reached"

Category: Church: UK

For the last two days, I've been exploring the idea of churches in the UK using some of their mission budget to support mission work in some of the places in the UK where there are very few Christians (first post, second post). Today, I'd like to explore an objection that is often raised when this sort of suggestion is made; What About The Unreached?

Here are a few brief bullet points to get us going:

- Firstly, no-one is suggesting spending the whole of the church's mission budget in the UK. This should just be part of a broader approach from the church.
- Increasingly, people from "unreached" groups are finding their way to British towns and cities. You don't have to travel the world to meet these people and introduce them to Jesus.
- Their are parts of the UK where the levels of church-going and Christian adherence are on a similar level to Japan. It is important to reach these people, too.

However, when you make these points, particularly the last one, some keen missionary is likely to reply that people in the UK are, by definition, not unreached.

Says who?

Very often, mission writers and speakers use terms such as "unreached", "unengaged" with a certainty and authority that they cannot legitimately carry. These terms are not Scripture, they are simply statistical concepts, based on a dubious socio-ethnic view of humanity which some people have adopted and defined according to their own criteria. The fact that there are three different definitions of "unreached" in common use, is an indication that these concepts are not as solid as some like to assume.

I have no objection to organisations deciding on definitions of terms like "unreached" in order to help them make decisions about the deployment of their personnel. If they find it useful, that's fine by me. However, I do have a huge problem with people defining these terms and then seeking to impose their definitions and their world view on others. Your definition of "unreached" is an opinion, not an objective fact. It doesn'tÂ matter how many big budget organisations agree with you. Other people have different opinions which are just as valid as yours and some aren't even asking the same questions as you.

For what it's worth, I believe that terms such as "unreached" are of some use in some parts of frontier mission. However, I also believe that they are blunt instruments which are very badly adapted to life in complex modern cities with high levels of migration and inter-marriage - especially cities in the post-christian world.

However, I am very much opposed to people from outside of a situation, applying statistical terms derived in another culture and another worldview and imposing them on churches working among marginalised communities. If a church feels that the Lord is guiding them to support mission work in

Heckmondwike, no-one from the outside should tell them that they shouldn't do this because, according to their model, Heckmondwike is "reached". Use your model to inform your own work, not to impose your views on others.

In an important 1991 paper, Samuel Escobar addressed some of the issues of what he terms "managerial missiology". If you are interested in this subject, you really do have to read this one - though you might need library access to get it (Escobar, S. (1991) A Movement Divided. *Transformation*, **8**, 7-13.) In the meantime, this sentence will have to do:

> *Properly speaking, the managerial school, more than a missiology, is a methodology for mission and if it limits itself to that realm accepting the need to enter into dialogue with theology and other methodologies it could make a valuable contribution to mission in the third-millennium.*