DOES YOUR MISSION AGENCY HAVE A MISSION IV

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Corporate reflection, based on the Bible with input from mission history and the social sciences is the main job of mission leadership today; everything else springs from this.
Category: Observations

I'm coming towards the end of this series on mission agencies and in this post, I'd like to briefly raise the subject of "missiological reflection". This has become a fashionable term in some circles and is sometimes presented as the cure for all of the ills of the mission movement, though exactly what constitutes missiological reflection is rarely explained. For my part it is simply an extension of Karl Barth's oft repeated maxim that we should preach with the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. Just as preaching should be biblical and relevant to the outside world, so our reflection on mission should be biblical and well informed.

For me, there are a number of essential components of missiological reflection.

It is Corporate: the aim in a reflective process is to bring different people from different backgrounds and experiences together to reflect on the work of the mission agency. At its simplest, this could mean leadership teams or boards taking time to reflect as a group. However, in an ideal world, the groups would be much more diverse than this and would bring in informed outsiders who would have something to contribute.

It is Biblical: the starting point for any reflection and consideration of the work of a mission agency must be the Scriptures. In practical terms, I believe that this means that the whole of a meeting needs to be infused with input from the Bible; it isn't enough simply to start with a devotional and then move on to the main business of the day. We also need to bring the whole narrative of the Bible to bear and not just concentrate on one or two "mission" passages from the New Testament. The whole ethical and moral load of Scripture has an impact on the way we carry out our mission.

It is Interdisciplinary: missiological reflection involves bringing in input from a number of different domains including mission history and the social sciences. In this case, I mean mission history in its broadest sense which includes both the recent experiences of the mission agency under consideration and the broader trends of history over time. Some people might baulk at the relevance of the social sciences for reflection on mission, but if you do not understand things like population trends and socio-economic dynamics, you will not be able to think through the way in which your agency is relevant to the societies that you are trying to reach.

It is Iterative: the whole purpose of reflection is to lead to real world change, which in turn provides further ammunition for reflection.

So What Do You Do!

The first thing that needs to happen is that everyone involved in the reflective process needs to be prepared. This inevitably means that someone needs to prepare some materials for the group to work through. This could involve preparing some briefing papers to cover specific issues or, perhaps, everyone could agree to read a chapter from a particular book. Ideally, each person would read around the subject, too, bringing in ideas and concepts that others may not have touched on.

The actual reflective process can take various forms. It could involve a guided discussion, led by one

of the team or an outside facilitator. Various techniques such as focussed conversation or world cafÃ© can be used to encourage discussion and input. Alternatively, it could be a time of quiet meditation, prayer and sharing together. If the process is well thought through, it doesn't have to take too long, however, it should be a regular discipline for mission leadership at all levels.

The objection is often raised that this sort of process is all very well and good, but it's a bit wooly and distracts from the main job of leadership. I would counter that ***this sort of reflection is the main job of mission leadership***. This is what it is all about. Without adequate, serious, well-founded reflection we will continue to do things in the way that we have always done them. If we do adapt to changing circumstances we will do so on a pragmatic and short-term basis, not with a long-term, biblically-based mindset.

Many, if not most, mission leadership teams will need to bring in someone from outside their group (either from elsewhere in the organisational structure or from a different background altogether) to help them seriously engage in this sort of process.