UNSOLICITED ADVICE TWO: IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU

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In seeking to promote their own work, mission agencies can (intentionally or unintentionally) sideline other people. This isn't good!
Category: Observations

Mission agencies all produce various types of publicity materials; magazines, web pages, videos, social media and so on. Broadly speaking, this publicity has two audiences. The first is existing supporters; in this case, the agency aims to inform and inspire people so that they can continue to pray and provide financial support. The second audience consists of those who don't yet support the agency and in this situation, the aim is to recruit them as supporters or even as potential missionaries. This might seem rather cold and transactional, but agencies spend a significant amount of money on publicity and it has to serve a purpose. Not only that but having a particular aim or audience in view allows agencies to produce better, more focussed materials.

However, there is a danger inherent in this process and that in trying to promote a particular agency, other people involved in the wider work can be sidelined (intentionally or unintentionally). Let's look at three parties whose roles can be downplayed.

Other Agencies: for the most part, mission agencies work in close collaboration overseas. There are exceptions, but I suspect that most people in the UK would be surprised (and encouraged) by the extent to which agencies attempt to support and complement each other. In the UK, there is a sense in which agencies are in competition; each seeking to raise support from the same sources. On "the field" this sense of competition does not exist in the same way and cooperation is the norm. However, this sense of cooperation is not always well conveyed in agency publicity. You have to work quite hard to see any mention of other agencies and partnerships in some mission publications. I was made painfully aware of one organisation which steadfastly refused to mention Wycliffe even when they reported on joint projects. Careful wordingÂ of the stories gave the impression that long-term Wycliffe colleagues and friends actually worked for the other agency. They never actually said so outright, but they worked hard to give that impression. It all left a rather nasty taste in the mouth - all the more so because outside of the UK, I had worked very well with this group.

Local People: I've touched on this numerous times before, so I won't say much here. Agency publicity aims to encourage people in the UK to support the organisation producing the publicity. In order to do this, the agency has to demonstrate that they are meeting a real need. So far, so good. The problem arises when in order to demonstrate the value of their work, the agency gives the impression that local people are completely without agency themselves. Mission interventions are complex, but they always rely on some sort of local initiative and support, even in apparently hostile or hopeless situations. If we give the impression that local people are passive victims, waiting for our help (of whatever sort) we do them a disservice and we aren't painting a true picture.

God: it should go without saying that the prime mover in all mission is the Triune God. However, this isn't always obvious in mission agency publicity. This is particularly obvious in some recruiting and fundraising pieces. The impression is given that if only we do something or give an amount of money then certain goals will be achieved. The problem is that we can't make these kinds of promises - only God can guarantee the outcomes of mission work. Our funds may help to make something

happen, or it may fail spectacularly - that's the nature of mission work. But Christ is building his church, whatever does or does not occur with our projects.

So; one bit of unsolicited advice for mission agencies: **it's not all about you!**