MISSION AGENCY FUTURES: THE PROBLEM

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Four issues which should force mission agencies to rethink their approach to their work.
Category: Observations

This short series will take a look at the sorts of changes that mission agencies will need to make in the future, but before getting to the specifics, we need to lay some groundwork. Yesterday's post considered what it is that mission agencies actually do and today's will look at why they need to change.

Today's mission agencies emerged in a context where the west was broadly Christian and the rest of the world was not. The role of the agencies was to take the Christian message - in word and deed - to the wider world. However, things have changed.

Demographics

There is no need to spend a lot of time on this, it's an issue that has been hashed and rehashed over the years on this blog. Today, the majority of Christians are found in the southern continents, not the historic Christian heartlands of the West. This, in itself, poses an existential problem for agencies, but other issues flow out of this.

Theology

This is another topic that I've addressed over the years and this quote captures the issue (read more here):

> *First, let us recall that within the last century there has been a massive southward shift of theÂ centreÂ of gravity of the Christian world, so that the representative Christianlands now appear to be in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and other parts of the southern continents.This means that ThirdÂ World theology is now likely to be the representative Christian theology. On present trends (and Â I recognize that these may not be permanent) the theology of European Christians, while important for them and their continued existence, may become a matter of specialist interest to historians*

Read this post for similar thoughts.

The point of this is that not only are the majority of Christians around the world, non-western, but they also don't think and theologiseÂ in the same way that westerners do. Mission agencies don't just have to address a demographic issue, they also need to face up to some theological ones, too.

Mission

Likewise, as the church expands and broadens her base, our understanding of what constitutes mission is changing, too. This post discusses some of the issues. The missionary scholar, Andrew Walls says that the Western mission movement is in its old age, while the Korean Scholar, Moonjang Lee makes says the following:

> *â€œThe modern Western missionary era has ended, and a new paradigm for global mission*

> *has not yet been devised. Although various aspects of the colonial paradigm for Christian mission have undergone revisions in order to negotiate with the changing environment in global contexts, we might say that we are still trapped in an old habit of thought and practice in Christian mission that needs radical adjustment and modification.â€*

Lee, M. (2016) Rethinking the nature of Christian mission: a South Korean perspective. In *The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness,* (Ed, Van Engen, C.E.) IVP Academic, Downers Grove, pp. 125-139.

Power

The numbers and the innovation in the church may lie outside of the west, but the power, influence and political clout almost all lie in North America and Europe. The disparity between the affluence of the western church and mission agencies and many of those they seek to serve contrasts sharply with Paul's experiences in the Book of Acts.

What this all boils down to, is that mission agencies find themselves in a changing world; all this is summed up in a quote from David Smith, which I have used many times on this blog:

> *â€œ... agencies and institutions that once did pioneering work at the cutting edges of the Christian mission have too often been left facing in the wrong direction as the battle has moved on. In this situation they face a stark choice: either they engage in a radical re-formation, repositioning themselves to respond to the quite new challenges of the twenty-first century, or they are doomed to rapid and rather sad decline and extinction.â€ (David Smith: Mission After Christendom)*

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