

FUTURE CHALLENGES MARTIN LEE – MAY 2016

I do hope that you have found being here helpful. It has been good to hear other voices, especially voices that may not often be heard in conversations about mission.

I am sure that we will all take away many things. I want to reflect on what I have heard and will be touching on seven quick points. There are many more that could be added, but these are the ones that I want to reflect back on. Well six are reflections, and one I actually haven't heard and wonder why.

- Centrality of the gospel
- Agencies need to do something about their governance
- Agencies need to collaborate, innovate and take risk
- Churches need to be at the centre
- Discipleship here and everywhere
- Mutual respective partnership is vital
- Don't forget the hard places

1. THE CENTRALITY OF THE GOSPEL: One clear message that I heard was "Christ is sufficient". The gospel is central to all that we do. It is not an add on to our social programme, but the core of everything.

Throughout history there has been much debate about the meaning and breadth of mission. The modern missionary movement, especially since the end of the eighteenth century, was one of the main players in bringing a limited meaning to mission:

- It was conceived mainly in geographical terms, with the purpose of taking the gospel from the Christian West to the mission fields of the non-Christian world
- The purpose was to save souls and to plant churches in foreign countries by means of the preaching of the gospel. Having said that medical and social care were key parts of a society's work historically. It has been good to have EMMS here celebrating their 150th anniversary.
- The agents of mission were principally missionaries (who had a sense of an individual subjective call to the mission field) and the societies that sent them

The opposite is true today and perhaps mission even means whatever you want it to mean. It is no longer from here to there, but local and not just cross-cultural, no longer just missionaries. In particular the evangelical church over the past 30 years has rediscovered social action, social justice and creation care – and I hope we all say a huge Alleluia to that. Integral Mission, the coming together of the false separation between word and action, seems to have won in our terminology.

However I wonder if it is the real situation. In discussing this on his blog about 9 months ago – www.kouya.net – Eddie says this "In my experience, that isn't how the term Integral Mission is used in general parlance. I would argue that in general use, the term integral mission is now used to describe various forms of social action, but that the overt proclamation of the Gospel has more or less dropped off the agenda. In practical terms, holistic mission isn't holistic and integral mission isn't integrated; a huge chunk of what mission is all about is simply not included."

I feel that there are several issues here.

ISSUE 1 - Have we become too careful in our use of words?

I would contend that some agencies, still committed to proclamation and integral mission - and practising it - have become too shy about saying they do.

ISSUE 2 - Have some of us actually dumped proclamation?

I was recently looking at a job description for a position called “Director of Mission”. I searched in vain for the words evangelism, conversion, proclamation, sharing Christ, coming to Jesus – you name it and I looked for it – even mission was only in the title. Instead it had terms like “working for the financial, social and spiritual transformation of communities.”

ISSUE 3 - The evangelical church is more interested in supporting social action

Evangelicals seem much less inclined than in the past to fund more overtly evangelistic ministries. Giving overseas had also decreased, except in the areas of relief and child sponsorship. People are much more inclined to fund ministry with poor African children, than evangelism among wealthy Japanese businessmen.

ISSUE 4 - Church members struggle in gospel confidence

The EA website says:- “Is the Church in the UK as confident in the gospel as it should be? It appears that while mission is clearly at the heart of what many churches are doing, talking about our faith as Christians is proving increasingly difficult.”

As mission agencies, we need to keep the centrality of the gospel in our work. Steve made a clear call to us and Sarah’s challenge on the first afternoon still rings in my ears – so we need a wake-up call?

IS THE GOSPEL CENTRAL TO YOUR MINISTRY?

2. AGENCIES AND CHURCHES NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THEIR GOVERNANCE: I was very challenged by Chris’ comment about trustees. It is vitally important that we are well run, but legislation is now taking that to an extreme. It is only a part of a trustees’ role whatever the Charity Commission says. Being well run and balanced books is not the “be all and end all”.

I have been banging on about this for some time now. There are many ways that Board operate, but I like the starting point that it is not just the fiduciary responsibilities imposed by the Charity Commission and Companies House. Rather there are three distinct areas:-

- Fiduciary - “Conformance”, control mechanisms
- Strategic – “Performance”, direction setting
- Generative – Robustness for the future, sense making

	Fiduciary	Strategic	Generative
Key Question	“What’s wrong?”	“What’s the plan?”	“What’s the question?”
Board Focus	Define Problems Review results	Solve problems Shape strategy	Frame problems, make sense
Board Process	Parliamentary	Logical and empirical, discussion	Informal, creative
Problems are to be	Spotted	Solved	Framed
Decision Making	Resolution	Reaching consensus	Framing the question
Board sees their role as	Oversight and authority	Strategist	Fresh perspective
Performance Metrics	Facts, figures, finances	Strategic indicators, competitive analysis	Signs of learning and discernment

We haven’t time to unpack all this and there is a paper on the governance hub on the Global Connections website designed to help trustees. Can I beg Board members – spend more time on the generative stuff? The “what does the future bring” questions? The “should we exist” questions? Get some fresh perspective. Above all seek external voices to speak to your trustees – especially those who will stretch you and challenge you.

WILL TRUSTEES GIVE FRESH VISION TO THE FUTURE, RATHER THAN PERPETUATE THE PAST?

3. **AGENCIES NEED TO COLLABORATE, INNOVATE AND TAKE RISK:** Another thing that was said by Chris was “as a church youth worker, it is like being part of a rugby scrum”.

There has been an enormous growth in the number of mission agencies. There are many reasons for that, one of course is that the whole meaning of mission has changed as we discussed earlier. There is a plethora of smaller, one country or one project ministries. That is not necessarily a bad thing, some are dynamic and visionary. There is no time to think through the large number of reasons, both good ones and there are many, and not so good ones.

Lesley too called us to action in this area – collaboration not competition. Can we find new ways to collaborate? Is there no one out there we can partner with? Let’s try to be innovative in this area, even if we get it wrong. We need permission to fail – as Ruth, Lesley and Sarah reflected to us - be brave and experiment.

However I wonder if that is enough – there are just “too many agencies guys”. It is time for us to be bold.

- Can we find ways to work together in new ways? How many of us have thought about maybe a federation model with other similar groups? The secular world is far ahead of us in this.
- Can we find ways to help new innovative projects be encouraged and linked in, rather than having to form yet another charity?
- Do some of us need to close down, or merge with others? Sadly when it gets to that stage, it is too late and is usually a takeover.

It is of course not just an agency problem. Christians around the world are now found in some 41,000 denominations. These range in size from millions of members to fewer than 100. The vast majority of denominations are found in the Independent and Protestant traditions. By 2025, there will likely be 55,000 denominations (from Center for the Study of Global Christianity).

Here in Europe I get increasingly depressed by the fragmentation in the evangelical church. A recent paper talked about 14 tribes in among UK evangelicals. Pete Broadbent has written an excellent article about 8 tribes – so we can’t even agree on how many tribes there are! Division has even become “I won’t associate with him as he is talks to him.” We have made disunity an art-form. I wonder what is God’s heart towards his church?

CAN AGENCIES FIND NEW WAYS TO COLLABORATE? CAN WE GET OUR TRUSTEES TO AT LEAST PUT THIS ON THEIR PACKED AGENDA? MAYBE GC NEEDS TO DO MUCH MORE HERE?

4. **CHURCHES NEED TO BE AT THE CENTRE:** Our Global Options conference in 2004 followed on from Survive or Thrive. Since then there has been a shift to agencies involving churches more in the whole process of missionary selection. I have been encouraged to see that change take place. However it seems to have got a little stuck. I wonder if it has just become a mantra that we don’t really believe, but we put up with it!!

So I would challenge agencies to ensure:-

- a) The sending church is fully involved at the earliest opportunity
- b) The sending church feels the person is still “theirs” so fully involved in all major decisions
- c) Communications between the three partners – agency, church and mission partner are exemplary

However our starting point is often – what do we have to offer churches? Actually the question is “What do churches want” and can we provide anything needed. We need to think of ourselves much more as consultancies – and consultancies need to offer wanted products and services. Can I commend Bryan Knell’s book to you all.

I would ask and plead that agencies take this issue seriously and not just continue to dabble.

HOW CAN AGENCIES SERVE THE CHURCH IN NEW WAYS?

5. DISCIPLESHIP HERE AND EVERYWHERE: We talked a lot about discipleship and the need to disciple younger people in a missional lifestyle. However I wonder if many of us in church and mission leadership need a dose of radical discipleship ourselves. It sometimes seems to me that we are ones who are in need of help.

As I look at the global south, yes there are huge problems and I often hear that the church in the global south is “one mile wide and an inch deep”. However that is not my overall experience. Prayer is often more everyday than in the western church, as we have heard from Israel and Harvey. Dependency on God, rather than wealth, generosity and hospitality, rather than selfish individualism.

Of course there are excesses that many struggle with such as the excesses in the prosperity gospel. Israel raised that issue yesterday – it is easy for a rich westerner who has never experienced poverty and comes from a dualistic mind-set to teach against even the good parts. There is a major issue around theological education, but we need to be careful it is not just western theology based on the enlightenment. However for me, there is a huge contrast with the marked spiritual poverty of many churches in the West. Some have said to me that they find the western Church one inch wide and not even an inch deep? Too harsh? Maybe but maybe not. Where is the power of prayer in our network – a dependency of God alone?

Our younger speakers highlighted this need for discipleship. However I do believe that this must be the role of the local church, and I am unsure of the role of mission agencies with individuals in this area. It is not a way for mission agencies to do recruitment in a new way.

So do agencies have anything to offer in this area? I am sure that we could find innovative ways to help churches:-

- a) Learn from the global south about discipleship
- b) Assist in the contextualisation
- c) Introduce church's to each other
- d) Help ensure mission is part of the DNA of church life.

That takes time and building relationship, and will be costly. It is not a fund and people raiser, but the opposite.

IS THERE ANY ROLE FOR MISSION AGENCIES TO WORK ALONGSIDE CHURCHES TO BRING GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES TO DISCIPLESHIP? CAN CHURCHES AND AGENCIES LISTEN AND LEARN TOGETHER?

6. MUTUAL RESPECT AND COLLABORATION: It has been interesting to hear Lucio, Israel and Harvey all allude to the sense of lack of welcome as equals. At the Global connections conference in 2011, Peter Oyugi (a Kenyan missionary to the UK) said this: “We could cite examples of situations where due to years of some Western missionaries being patronising and domineering in the mission fields, contributions of those from the global south have been practically ignored. Those of us who have come to the UK can experience the same thing.”

After a consultation at St Saviours Guildford in 2014 on how can we listen to the Global church, Phil Simpson (formerly of CMS) said: “For me the issue is that we need to tackle our inherent national pride (God is British or actually for me as an English male an ‘Englishman’) and ‘decolonialising’ our mission, shifting to taking more of a lead from the Global South – especially the diaspora in our midst – including their voice in what we plan and do.”

I think many Westerners, especially those involved in cross-cultural mission, have realised the need for more respect, mutuality and equality. So this is not a rant about our colonial past. However how

can we as a mission movement help the church in this country realise the riches in their midst? To quote Harvey, British Christians prayed for revival and when it came did not recognise it as it was black.

Do we have a role to play in helping the church change to a position of welcome, respect and partnership between equals? Can God's new community of all nations and tongues here in the UK and throughout the world be a community of mutual encouragement and learning, engaged together in showing forth God's love in His world?

We can seek unity in diversity that flourishes where we understand and trust one another in our differences as well as in our agreements, listen humbly to one another, seek forgiveness where we have injured our brothers and sisters in Christ, and rejoice in the multi-coloured grace of God.

In the words of Andrew Walls **"Together we can be a new community – a hundred places learning from each other, with no one single centre of Christianity or single type of mission activity."**

CAN WE HELP THE UK CHURCH BECOME A MORE WELCOMING PLACE FOR PEOPLE OF OTHER ETHNICITIES, ESPECIALLY MISSIONARIES IN OUR MIDST?

7. PLACES WHERE CHRIST IS NOT KNOWN: One sad thing though is that the growth of the church is not consistent. Yes Asia now has large numbers of Christians compared to 100 years ago but with such a huge proportion of the world's population, as the percentage of Christians of the total population is small at just 8%. OK - maybe China is an exception, but Asia as a whole just doesn't begin to compare to sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

There are still vast numbers of people especially in parts of the Middle East and Asia who have never heard of Christ and many countries still where Christians are few and far between. Indeed some countries have seen Christian fleeing elsewhere due to war and conflict and persecution such as Iraq and Syria.

Yet according to the Atlas of Global Christianity, 85% of all Christian mission is aimed at other "Christians". Much mission deployment is still trying to sustain the growth of the churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Other research reveals that as many as 86% of all Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists do not personally know a Christian.

I have a problem with how some people deal with the issue of unreached people groups and the focus on ethnicity and language alone. Yes this is important but middle class Buddhists in Japan have few Christians among them, middle class Hindus and Sikhs seem almost impossible to reach. We need something more nuanced now people are mixed up in an urbanised world.

So in my mind, much too much of what we call mission focuses on "Christians". There are more people alive today that do not know of Christ or experienced Christian care or even met a Christian than ever before. We cannot ignore this and something needs to change.

IS ENSURING WE SERVE THE HARD PLACES A KEY PART OF OUR MISSION AND CHURCH'S STRATEGY?

Life's challenges are not supposed to paralyse you; they're supposed to help you discover who you are. Let's not let the challenges of the changes in mission and the church worldwide paralyse us, but spur us on to new ways of engaging in God's mission in God's world.

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