

Notes from Martin Lee

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It is always hard to have an overview of key issues – as there are so many. For your interest, we are thinking about using the next Global Connections conference (November 4th to 6th 2009) to look at either:

a) What do conversion, transformation and similar words really mean to us? Are we trying to Christianise people and make them adapt to our model of Christian culture, or to bring to a living relationship with God?

b) What do we mean by mission? Are the five marks of mission (proclamation, discipleship, loving service, justice and creation care) a helpful model? Probably also reflecting on the Mission of God and integral mission as well (integral in the sense of mission being our DNA, not our Western interpretation of that term to try to bring together evangelism and social action).

These two issues actually undergird much of the practice of mission and I would be pleased to hear people's views on these issues.

With regard to *Encounters*, I do wonder if there have been some major trends missing. I list a few of them below, grouped into various sections.

1. **Political and economic issues** as they affect mission - victory of free trade, 'democracy' being the only acceptable political system, misuse of power by the West, the rise of the new economies (Brazil, China, India), the growing rich/poor divide. All have, or will have, an enormous impact on how mission is undertaken and by whom.

2. **Globalisation of structures.** Many civil society structures are looking at new ways of responding to globalisation, and the mission world is rather behind. We still have a Western dominated model, and call it international!! Are there better models for global partnership which aren't western controlled multi-nationals.

3. **Urbanisation as the greatest people movement.** Migration is an issue for us Brits, but the greatest people movement currently going on is increasing urbanisation, especially in the less economically developed world. All the increase of the world's population in the next twenty years will be in urban environments - much more strategic for mission than the little bit of migration into the UK that the Daily Mail gets so excited about!! There are of course migration issues and opportunities. What about the effect of the Brain Drain on the church in the Global South and the non-powerful economies?

4. **The rise of individualism** as part of the Western mindset, and how we continue to export this. But is this becoming two way now with Bollywood and the new media? Yet at the same time we are now looking for 'identity'.

5. Religious trends such as the "**demise of Christendom**". The percentage of practising Christians in Europe and the West in general is said to be in sharp decline, especially among the young. The spiritual weakness of the Western Church, demonstrated by the apathy and lack of commitment to Christian lifestyle and values by those claiming to be practising Christians, is bound to have an impact on mission. The Western church is theologically weak and dominated by the prevailing individualist culture, yet still wants to dominate.

6. **Institutional Racism in mission** - a real hot potato. It is really there but will we ever acknowledge it? Why is corruption always associated with the poor, as if the West is immune? I constantly hear about the corruption in the African Church from rich Westerners on visits. Let's remove the plank in our own eye!!

7. There has been a move away from church and mission agencies being involved in **service delivery** (hospitals, education) in the less economically developed world (except children's homes and HIV), while this is being rediscovered by Christian groups in the West as we get government funding. Why is this? Has the self sufficiency mantra won? At the same time what explains the dominance of the specialist new projects such as HIV and street children, while major issues such as community health, malaria and TB are ignored?

8. The **demise of the traditional, generic missions** - the victory of individualism leads to the starting up of so many new ministries every week that I am at a loss to know whom to contact next. At the same time, local churches are becoming the new mission agencies.

9. **New models of mission** such as "Business and Mission", the rise of short-termism from Western churches and child sponsorship. Business and mission has so many categories – business as mission, job making, job taking, business for mission. Are we really prepared to evaluate short-term programmes?

10. How **technological advances** can be both beneficial and the opposite in mission. Many mission partners are now on skype, seeking pastoral advice from the home church. Is this good or bad? On the other hand, I have heard of a mission partner who now phones on their respective mobiles the six local pastors in the villages that he is 'mentoring' to see how they are getting on - is this support and encouragement, or yet another way of control?

11. **The rise of legislation** – both local and international. Risk assessment, child protection, insurance, visas – the list is endless. Will that be the main driver behind what we do and don't do?

The list is endless. How do we decide the key drivers and issues?

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