

Notes from Rose Dowsett

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In general, I think we all need to keep working at finding writers from the global south, so that we can hear opinions and observations from them. I know this is far easier said than done - I constantly struggle with getting non-western writers for Global Missiology projects I coordinate for the WEA Mission Commission. But I think at the moment we say far more about listening to the global south than we actually practise. That may mean encouraging contributions written in a different form and format, or more question and answer conversation type pieces, or translating pieces written in other languages, or...

Topics? Here are some suggestions.

1. We have been talking for a long time about encouraging global south churches to engage in their own theologizing. How about an issue which shows lots of examples of just that, and what it means in specifics? And I'd then explore how contextualized theology does or doesn't make it harder to have universal agreement on core beliefs and ethics. Even the ancient creeds (Apostles', Nicene, etc) arose from specific contexts and are expressed in particular forms and language; is that still what we would expect/hope all Christians everywhere would still embrace, or what are the implications of encouraging contextualization? I think the issues here also contribute to the current confusion in the UK as to what we mean by 'evangelical'. How far are we believing/saying/doing the same things but in different language and ways, and how far are we developing paths leading in fundamentally different directions? Does contextual theology inevitably lead to fragmentation, or is it possible still to have meaningful unity? Given current struggles and arguments within UK evangelicalism, I think this is an area we simply have to grapple with far more openly and honestly than we have done - and there are mighty few fora where we can have an honest debate without somebody or other shouting 'heresy'. I think confusion here also contributes to many younger Christians concluding that the only kind of mission they can engage in has to be relief or development based.

2. Short-term mission. Probably this is one of my hobby horses, but I do despair that now we spend more money and more energy in getting people doing what I would call baptised tourism than into the slog of long-term mission. I realize that there are some situations where someone can contribute helpfully in a short time, especially in supporting long-termers in some clearly defined way. I also understand that for some people such a trip is life changing, and that most long-termers nowadays have done a short term visit previously. However, I think the balance is completely out of kilter. Moreover, even if most long-termers now have done short term, most short termers don't go on to become long termers, and research says that after five years a high proportion of short termers have lost all interest. It seems that many short term trips are a variation on an adventure holiday, with a vaguely Christian twist. Vast quantities of Christian money are diverted to support this. Is this right? Also, biblical mission must involve the kind of incarnational lifestyle which by definition cannot be achieved in a short trip. We should make short trips clearly observational and learning trips, and not use the term 'mission' in them. We need to help individuals and churches understand that really significant mission still requires long-term investment, learning a language, trying to understand a culture, growing to know and be known and trusted... In our impatient culture, we need to recapture the importance of 'a long obedience in the same direction'. And we also need a thorough review of how we prepare people who do go on short-term trips, and how

we follow through afterwards so that a higher proportion of them will develop a lifelong global heart and mind, and be catalysts in their churches and communities.

3. Legislation, both UK and EU. The past 10-15 years we have seen a torrent of legislation which impacts our society deeply, and has huge implications (and costs) for churches and mission agencies. It also shapes the psyche of younger folks coming through to colleges and agencies, as well as costing agencies a vast amount of money. So - employment law, health and safety, what you can and can't ask when recruiting, religious and other discrimination laws, public benefit, access, risk assessment, keeping records and data protection, etc, etc. How is all this shaping what we can and can't do, what our overheads are, etc. and how is it likely to affect us in future? Probably most people in our churches, unless they are themselves employers, haven't the foggiest idea how this legislation is affecting us - and probably many are completely unaware that most legislation is generated by people committed to a liberal humanist bias which is often anti-Christian.

4. Money... Hmmmmmmmmmm. There are especially, difficult issues like how can we responsibly within the UK rationalize the number (and quality) of training institutions, and of agencies... (Now that should provoke some lively debate!!). Can we develop less costly ways of training, and models for mission service? I don't think either of these is sustainable in their present form, apart from a few gold-plated institutions or agencies with wealthy patrons or large endowments (and we don't have too many of those...). We are far too polite and genteel to state that we are competing for money - but I think we are. We all like our own traditions and distinctives, but our prior commitment should be to ensure good training and well-run agencies for the next generation with an over-riding focus on serving the next generations rather than maintaining ourselves, in the very best interests of world mission. That means that some of us need to be the seeds that die, not just because we've finally run out of cash but because we see sharing resources while we still have them will better ensure the future.

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