Looking Back to Move Forward:  
Some Lessons and Challenges from Mission History

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Introduction

When my children attended primary school in India they dreaded the exam period – which seemed to recur rather frequently. They would have to endure a couple of weeks of written exams. For several nights before a particular test they would memorise, verbatim, the answers for particular questions in preparation for regurgitating this in the exam. One time my son came unstuck in a geography exam, his methodology failed him. After the exam he reported, “I knew all the answers, but I forgot which answer belonged to which question!”

When I taught missiology in India I sometimes encountered students who did not want to think about missiological questions, but, like school children, wanted set answers to standard questions. I kept saying to them: “there are no easy answers. In the particular situation you will find yourself in, you need to know: what are the key questions to ask?” Only when you know what are the right questions can you then develop appropriate answers. I say this by way of introduction – and perhaps excuse – because I come to you more with questions than with answers.

In this paper I want to consider some factors which affect the future of mission organisations and thus need to be considered for determining mission policy. For each factor I will do this by moving from historical examples to then examine what questions arise for us today. In turn, I would like to consider the role of finance in determining mission policy. I do that through the example of the correspondence between Lesslie Newbigin, as a newly arrived Church of Scotland missionary to India, and the General Secretary of the organisation, based in Edinburgh.

How does the big picture of socio-political events impact upon mission? I contrast the example of the growth of Christianity in Korea versus Japan, and then explore another Indian example. How did the changing political scene at the time of Indian Independence affect the “mass movements”?

For two hundred years Protestant missionary organisations operated with an assumed direction, from the West to the majority world. I ask whether the current organisations, bequeathed to us from this movement, can effectively serve as a conduit for mission in reverse.

We are on the eve of celebrating the centenary of the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, in 1910. One of the consequences of that conference was the birth of the modern ecumenical movement. In conclusion, I ask, what today does mission have to do with unity, or, more pointedly, disunity. To move forward, what are the lessons we need to learn from our recent ecumenical history?

The Role of Finance

Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations subject to budgetary requirements.

We are in the midst of the biggest financial crisis for at least a generation. Those of you who are involved in mission leadership will know better than I the impact the crisis is having on your organisation (Gaines 2008). Does the financial crisis require that what we refer to as the great commission to be re-written? As Bishop Newbigin once quipped: “Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations subject to budgetary requirements’. For our traditional mode of operation, a major evangelistic opening would be a major financial disaster”
Are we right to say, “more money, more ministry” (Eskridge and Noll 2000) and consequently now – less money, less ministry.

I want to make a historical connection between our current financial woes and those of mission organisations during the late 1930s, when at that time they too faced severe financial constraints upon their operations. For my PhD research I have been studying aspects of Lesslie Newbigin’s life. As a young Church of Scotland missionary in rural Tamil Nadu there is a very interesting record of correspondence between Newbigin on the field and the secretary of the Church of Scotland Foreign Mission Committee (FMC), the Rev Dr Alexander Kydd based at 121 George Street.[1]

Kydd is the weary secretary who, year after year, presents his annual report to the General Assembly. [2] It is a tale of woe; the mission is in a dire financial situation, year on year the deficit is growing. In contrast the number of suitable candidates coming forward is dwindling. Kydd faces some very hard choices and the stress he is under takes a personal toll, forcing him to retire early due to ill health. The annual reports that Kydd presents to the General Assembly are not a pretty picture. From 1936 to 1945 there is retrenchment, reduced numbers of missionaries, problems in recruiting missionaries and accumulative financial deficits, which, because of their persistent nature, cause the FMC to even consider the total abandonment of one of its fields, or else across the board reduction to their work. Does this sound similar to today’s scenario!? Kydd’s reports continue to harken back to the more abundant years of the early 1930s trying to awaken a declining home church to the growth of the “younger churches”, and the FMC’s resultant responsibility.

More importantly however, these reports provide an insight into the mission policy of the FMC (particularly that expressed by the general secretary) and the adaptation of that policy to a changing context at home and abroad. As you know the world was changing very rapidly during this time with the growth of nationalism and rapid de-colonisation. Kydd’s response throughout this time is to plead for more money to the assembly. If we only had more money then we could continue to do what we had successfully done in the past – run our vast array of mission institutions.

Repeatedly the FMC appeals to the Scottish churches to preserve its financial well-being, the assumption being that if the FMC can attain sound financial footing, and recruit adequate personnel, it therefore has the warrant to continue its existing mission policies regardless of the changing context on the “field”. For Kydd finances rather than events on the field dictated the future direction of the FMC. If finances could be procured to avert the current crisis then the status quo of current mission policy could be maintained. The FMC’s missionary endeavour remains locked into maintaining their institutional heritage, any departure from such “sound methods” being deemed “disastrous”. The current role and practice of the FMC is essential to the field, and despite financial constraints should be perpetuated.

Repeated failure on both fronts eventually prepares the FMC for a more fundamental reassessment of its relationship to the “younger church”. These factors, combined with a rapidly changing context during the war years, the rise of nationalism, and the growing voice of the “younger church”, force the FMC to reassess its role, the rationale being that these circumstances, rather than being understood as adverse, should be perceived as being providential to guide the FMC in the evolution of its relationship with the “younger churches”. This marked a fundamental change of focus for the FMC, from the past to the future, from the mission to the indigenous church.

Newbigin, the young, enthusiastic missionary in rural India saw things quite differently. [3] In his letters home and to Kydd, rather than the financial woes of the mission, Newbigin’s attention is grabbed by the profound growth of the indigenous church, and what he described as the “spontaneous expansion of the church” (Newbigin 1960b). In contrast to prevalent missionary attitudes which saw the urban institutional work of the mission as being central, Newbigin recognises that what was considered peripheral – the village work – should be
given central priority to facilitate “building up the church in the only place where it is growing”.

Newbigin’s basic orientation was to the “only” place of church growth – the village. At the start of his tenure as a district missionary he intimated a fundamental shift away from maintaining the mission institutions, to serving and equipping the local church, in this instance through lay leadership training and developing the role of women.

Newbigin saw the financial crisis as an opportunity to realign the mission to the village church and, in so doing, jettison some institutional obligations, Kydd sees the future much more bleakly, the future of the mission being intimately bound with the future of “the country and Empire”. [5]

Kydd and the FMC did not read the situation well. Their response on how they should relate to the indigenous church which they had birthed came only when their hands were forced by financial constraints. It is easy for us to recognise the mistakes of our predecessors. To look back and say, it was obvious, they should have made those changes. The questions we face are not that same 70 years on but are we doing any better today? How are we responding to the financial crisis? What role does declining finance and recruitment have in changing our mission policy? Do we see the financial downturn not as a threat to mission operations but as an opportunity for change? And, if so, a change in what direction?

A related issue is the necessity of educating supporters during these days of change. Why do people support missions? How do we maintain the loyalty of our supporters when faced with the need to make changes? Or does the need to maintain supporters also mean that we keep doing what is expected of us?

Another important issue which arises from this historical case is the relationship between “young Turk” missionary and senior missionary statesman. How are decision made? Hudson Taylor, with the CIM, was the first to devolve decision-making to the field, away from the UK home base. For a mission organisation to make a major change in direction are the structures there for the mission to adequately discern the voice of God? In decision making which voices have most weight?

The Big Picture: “You in your small corner and I in mine” [6]

Planning mission policy and strategizing is often done with the focus primarily on the mission agency. When this is done two important aspects are often neglected, the larger socio-political climate, and the role and place of the recipients of the gospel. The reception of Christianity is related to how it is perceived by those assessing it. Who is bearing the message, and what is their relationship to the dominant political power? What is their place in society? Concerning the big picture I want to give two examples of how context can directly impact the outcome of mission. The first example contrasts the response to the gospel in Japan with Korea; the second example is from India.

Korea and Japan

The percentage of Christians in South Korea is about 32% of the total population whereas in Japan it stands at just over 1%. [7] Why such a difference given the sincere and industrious efforts of missionaries in both countries? In comparing Korea and Japan the pre-World War II role played by America is critical. Korea was faced with the threat of Japanese colonialism. In these circumstances many Koreans discovered that Christianity “provided an ‘oppositional ideology’ for resisting the Japanese government”, with many Christians being involved in nationalist movements; in spite of the fact that the gospel presented by missionaries in Korea was “apolitical” and stressed “personal salvation and piety” (Mullins 1995:73). “

[C]ircumstances beyond the control of any mission strategist led to the positive linkage between Christianity and Korean cultural identity and provided the
basis for the remarkable post-war growth of Christianity in Korea. This transformation of “perception” did not occur in Japan, because the source of Christianity was also the source of Japan’s greatest enemy” (Mullins 1995:73).

Christianity came as a friend to Korea’s liberation (from Japan), but as a foe to Japan. We can assume that the missionaries to Japan were just as spiritual, just as zealous and committed as those to Korea. But today there is a stark difference between almost a third of the population being Christian versus just over 1%. We can see with hindsight that significant to the reception of the gospel was the way America was perceived. Where we are working we need to understand the big picture today.

India and McGavran

Predating the above example is the case of the reception of Christianity by dalits in India and by the various tribes in the north east. Christians account for about 3% of the total population but, like butter on toast, they are not evenly spread across the nation. In parts of the north east, such as Nagaland, nearly 90% of the population would claim to be Christian, and about 20% in South India, but in what is known as the Hindu heartland the percentage of Christians can be less than 0.1%. Why these disparities? Most Christian communities are descended from what are referred to as mass movements. Dalits and tribal people, oppressed by Bhraminical Hinduism, sought liberation and aligned themselves to the foreign occupying power and their faith, the British and Christianity. Those with most to gain embraced Christianity whilst those with most to lose, the caste Hindus, largely resisted Christianity. Christianity was – and to some extent still is – regarded as a foreign faith and the Indian Christian community were viewed as an appendage of the missionaries (Kim 2003:34).

During the struggle for Indian Independence Ghandi interpreted mass conversion to Christianity by the dalits as a political act and he indicated that he would use political means to block it (Kim 2003:34-5).

“The price of gaining political freedom from the British Raj would be that religious minorities had to conform to the Hindu majority, and therefore conversion would be severely constrained”. (Kim 2003:34-5). From independence on various laws were passed to limit or halt the mass movements.

Hindu objections to conversion have been concretized in three main ways: by the introduction of Hindu ‘personal laws’, which were disadvantageous for caste Hindus who converted to another religion (1955—6); by the limitation of social benefits for converts from Scheduled Caste backgrounds (1950s); and by the passing of the ‘freedom of religion acts’ in various states (1960s and 70s) (Kim and Kim 2008:195).

These laws worked, effectively blocking mass conversion and halting these movements to Christianity. What happened in the socio-political sphere, piloted by Ghandi, is particularly important because during that time a young American missionary, Donald McGavran, was trying to initiate a mass movement amongst the Satnami caste in Madhya Pradesh. McGavran wrote:

[For the next eighteen years I devoted myself to the evangelization of one caste, the Satnami. I wish that I could record that I was hugely successful but this is not the case. Perhaps 1000 individuals were won to Christian faith but no castewide movement to Christ resulted. By 1950 accessions [conversions] from that caste had almost ceased. True, there were fifteen new small village churches but the movement had stopped (McGavran 1986:56).]

McGavran writes that out of this the basic theory and theology of the Church Growth Movement (CGM) emerged, being “hammered out on the anvil of experience” (McGavran...
cited by Pinola 1995:75). He claimed that “The principles underlying the Indian case histories presented are timeless and apply to many lands….Group conversion from within a people applies all round the world”. (McGavran 1973:x-xi) McGavran and the CGM persisted in arguing pragmatically that, if certain principles for creating people movements were observed, great church growth would ensue. McGavran developed his theories on the back of JW Pickett’s study (1933; 1936). But he failed to understand the big picture. Conversion had become politicized; Ghandi had shifted the goal posts to effectively halt these movements (Laing 2001; 2002). Again, with the benefit of hindsight it is easy for us to be critical of McGavran, in failing to see the bigger political picture. For us today, beyond our mission policies, what aspects of the socio-political context help or hinder people from coming to Christ? How to we develop the eyes to interpret these factors? Should mission policy be adapted in light of the socio-political context?

Mission in Reverse – Mission to the West

For nearly forty years Newbigin worked as a missionary in South India. When he “retired” to Britain Newbigin was often been asked: “What is the greatest difficulty you face in moving from India to England?” Newbigin’s answer was always the same, “The disappearance of hope [from western society]” (Newbigin 1983:1).

After nearly 40 years of missionary experience in India Newbigin could say of the West, “Here, without possibility of question, is the most challenging missionary frontier of our time” (Newbigin 1985:36). Hope has disappeared and the West has rejected Christianity and turned to a form of paganism which actively resists the gospel. In the West Newbigin found “a paganism born out of the rejection of Christianity [which] is far tougher and more resistant to the Gospel than the pre-Christian paganisms with which foreign missionaries have been in contact during the past 200 years” (Newbigin 1985:36).

With over 200 years of experience in training and equipping people to take the gospel cross-culturally to others what is the role of mission societies today in reaching the post-modern, post-Christian West? Western mission societies are uniquely placed to equip the Western church which has largely failed to be missionary, but has thought of mission in terms of foreign mission. That is not a new question.

In the 1980s Professor Wilbert Shenk interviewed all the major mission agencies in Europe (including UK). He wanted to find out if the lessons learned from those 200 years of missions could be utilised for mission to the West. Shenk travelled Europe asking two questions: What was attitude of old established mission agencies with regard to mission to the West? Most had a charter for foreign mission. Did the mission agency have any training programmes in the West dedicated to training missionaries to approach modern western culture and work in their own country? All the mission agencies gave that same answer – no, we don’t do anything regarding mission to the West. Shenk’s second question was simple: Ought there to be? All said yes there should be. Shenk realized that it was a time of inertia, churches were in decline, but unsure of what ought to be done. Churches were totally unprepared. Denominations admitted they were in trouble, but had no imagination, no will to try something new. Shenk recognised the need for new missiological foundations rather than repeat the mistakes of past missionary training, which was “by the seat of your pants” (or trousers, depending on what side of the Atlantic you are on!) (Shenk 2006).

I know this is not main concern for this conference but I want to ask you the question that Shenk asked over twenty years ago – what are you doing to equip the western church to engage missiologically with western society? How are mission agencies today facilitating what missionaries referred to as the “blessed reflex”? – allowing the growth and the vitality of the church in the majority to revive the flagging Christianity of the West. As General
Simatoupong of Indonesia asked, "Of course, the Number One question is, Can the West be converted?" (Newbigin 1990:13)

In 1988, the Lausanne (LCWE European) Committee met for a conference in Stuttgart, where "All agreed that the spiritual paralysis within the churches is the greatest obstacle to the evangelization of Europe's spiritually hungry millions". In order to rectify this situation they gave a call, reminiscent of the Macedonian Call:

Come over and help us! We Christians in Europe confess that we need to learn from the churches in Africa, Asia, and the Americas in their unselfconscious, winsome ways of sharing the abundant life of Christ. So we invite the church worldwide to work with us in partnership for the re-evangelization of our continent and the still unreached (Cited by Glasser 1989:5-6).

We know that many missionaries have come (and are coming) to the West. But are mission agencies ready for mission in reverse; to be a conduit for mission from the majority world to the West, a complete reversal of the historical direction of Protestant mission. This is important for missionaries and for missionary training.

Training for Mission: the Unnamed from Cyprus and Cyrene

"Christianity is spread primarily by local believers and developed by them in local ways. Attention to the activities of foreign missionaries has tended to obscure this fact...", that Christianity primarily spreads “from below” (Kim and Kim 2008:211-2). The biographies of missionaries and the histories of mission societies give us a biased account of the spread of Christianity, hogging the limelight. But it has been repeatedly attested that those most effective at propagating the faith are local believers, who are often unseen, untrained and unnamed. Paul gets the limelight in the Book of Acts. But the very significant work of crossing the huge cultural barrier, breaking out of Judaism to preach to Gentiles was by unnamed men from Cyprus and Cyrene (Acts 11:19-21). And within a few chapters in the book of Acts the centre for Christianity moves from Jerusalem to Antioch (Laing 2006:167). “Christians today move around the world as the first Christians moved around the Roman Empire – for employment, as slaves, as domestic servants and due to persecution. As they do they spread their faith. One of the unforeseen consequences of contemporary globalization may be the further spread of Christianity from below" (Kim and Kim 2008:212). What is our response to this diaspora of Christians scattered around the world, with some Christians placed in very strategic places such as in gulf countries?

Dr Walter Hollenweger was professor of mission at the University of Birmingham in Britain (1971-89), and simultaneously taught at the Selly Oak Colleges. In a personal reflection on his career Hollenweger recalled, and contrasted, his experience of training future missionaries, with that of teaching majority world students. Of the missionary candidates he wrote:

Most of them were well-meaning young people with rather weak educational backgrounds, especially regarding their language capacities, but with strong convictions about being ‘called’ to missionary work.... They believed with all their hearts that their conversion experience and their British understanding of the New Testament were sufficient preparation for missionary work — a catastrophic misunderstanding when confronted with the situation overseas (Hollenweger 2005:87).
Regarding majority world students he recalled that “typically were better educated than the missionary candidates” (Hollenweger 2005:87). Through these and other experiences he came to the following conclusion about missionary training:

because mission is about church growth, we must invest our resources in indigenous evangelists, pastors, and theologians, who can do the job better and cheaper than Westerners. This fact is slowly but surely dawning on some mission societies. Moreover, in many places of the world the departure of missionaries has given the indigenous churches an important evangelistic impetus (Hollenweger 2005:87).

Another conclusion he arrived at was that now the West was receiving this “blessed reflex” as a consequence of the global spread of majority world Christians:

because mission has to do with our ecumenical calling, we ought to begin now at our doorsteps. The Lord has sent us hundreds of missionaries from the Third World. They are the direct or indirect product of our mission efforts. Now they come back to us in the form of immigrants, refugees, and foreign students.... They help us in understanding our ecumenical calling. They might also vitalize our worn-out Christianity (Hollenweger 2005:88).

There is opportunity and responsibility to give and receive. The western church needs humility to learn of the profound syncretism of western culture with the gospel. The combination of enlightenment ideals with Christianity has produced a church timid in its witness, relegated and privatized by society, complacent about it fragmentation into many divisions, and without the will or knowledge of how to change, how to be missionary in western society. In the West we need to relearn our ecclesiology, how the church embodies God’s mission to the world. And we can do that, not be looking back to the glory days of past Christendom, but by learning from those who come to the West from vibrant dynamic churches.

The migration of majority world Christians to the West for a variety of reasons presents us with challenges and opportunities (Hanciles 2003). Opportunities which mission agencies are more strategically placed to respond to and serve as a channel for the blessing of the churches.

First, how do we provide training for the vibrant Christians who come with a very wide range of needs and abilities? The West, with its heritage of theological education and vast resources has responsibility to provide ongoing training to the most able in the majority world. Of course there is always the danger that many trained in the West will not return to the majority world to develop theological education there. And there is also the danger notably of American colleges cherry-picking the best from the majority world to serve on their teaching faculty. The second issue concerns those from the majority world who stay on in the West. How can the Western church be renewed through them? It seems that the “mainline” churches and, for example, the African Diaspora are passing each other by, like ships in the night.

**Mission and (Dis)Unity**

“The ecumenical movement was in large part the outgrowth of the missionary movement” (Latourette 1954:353). “Comity, conference, and co-operation became common practice on the mission fields. And in due course this had its effect upon the sending churches” (Newbigin 1961). We are on the eve of celebrating Edinburgh 2010. In doing so we look back at the missionary conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. The very pragmatic Edinburgh conference explored avenues for better cooperation in mission. This was not from any
theological impetus towards unity but from the compelling motive of evangelism, the conference delegates, under the influence of the chairman, John R Mott, adopting the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions slogan, “the evangelization of the world in this generation,” as their own watchword. The main contribution of Edinburgh towards the relationship between mission and unity came from what Edinburgh constituted rather than from what actually took place at the conference. In constituting a continuation committee Edinburgh “ensured that international and inter-denominational missionary cooperation should move from the stage of occasional conferences to that of continuous and effective consultation” (Newbigin 1970:67).

As a result of the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century the church underwent a major revision of its ecclesiology challenging the assumptions inherited from a defective and now redundant Christendom ecclesiology. This combined with two other factors, the demise of Christendom, and the missionary encounters of western Christianity with the non-western world, (Newbigin 1953:1-25), brought us to what was referred to as a recovery of ecclesiology. We recovered an understanding that the church has a dual calling to mission and to unity and that these aspects are inextricably bound together.

One of our biggest problems in the history of Protestant missions has been the separation of mission from the church. The church is understood as a community called out of the world to worship God and nurture believers. Mission is delegated to specialist organisations which take the gospel to the ends of the earth, and plant churches. Ralph Winter made the claim that one of the biggest failings of missions has been not to take that extra step beyond planting the church, to establish mission organisations (Winter 1978:339-340; Cf. Fung 2008:7). I think Winter is wrong in advocating that we perpetuate this dichotomy between mission and the church. The Protestant missionary movement, with the advent of mission societies is a historical peculiarity, which emerged because of the failure of the western church. Our biggest failing has been our failure to grasp that the church is God’s mission to the world. We hold onto outdated, irrelevant models of the church rather than seek to embody the missionary nature of the church. And this separation between mission organisations and churches continues to be detrimental to both.

Bishop Newbigin, with many others, argued that church unity which was tangible and locally visible, belonged to the true nature of the church and the demonstration of this unity was essential for the effective witness of the church. He understood the two as emanating from the heart of the Gospel and as therefore essential to the dual calling of the church: “The connection between the movement for Christian reunion and the movement for world evangelization is of the deepest possible character. The two things are the two outward signs of a return to the heart of the Gospel itself” (Newbigin 1960a:19).

It is not possible to account for the contentment with the divisions of the Church except upon the basis of a loss of the conviction that the Church exists to bring all men to Christ. There is the closest possible connection between the acceptance of the missionary obligation and the acceptance of the obligation of unity. That which makes the Church one is what makes it a mission to the world (Newbigin 1960a:11).

That which God has joined together, let no-one separate. The whole ecumenical movement, the quest to recover the unity of the church, is a product of the missionary movement. But, as evangelicals, we have a terrible track record of holding together what God has joined together. Take for instance the mission theology of the Lausanne movement versus Geneva (the CWME), which for decades polarized thinking into either camp, one which understand proclamation as primary, the other which held to humanization. If mission and unity belong to the heart of the gospel then our effectiveness in mission is profoundly undermined by our divisions and fragmentation. Jesus, in his high priestly prayer, prayed that we might be one so that the world might believe that Christ has been sent by his Father (John 17:20-3).
the end of his life Newbigin wrote that “nothing can remove from the Gospel the absolute imperative of unity. I am sure that, for so long as I have breath, I must continue to confess my belief that God intends his Church to be ... ‘an outward, visible and united society” (Newbigin 1993:253).

What are the practical implications of this in our work for world mission today? Can we continue at evangelicals with our two mandate approach? We, as evangelicals, have a mandate for world mission, and ecumenicals can get on with their discussions on church unity – and neither the two shall meet. This denies our recent history, that ecumenism arose out of the missionary movement and must continue to inform it.

Conclusion

I have looked at various historical examples with the hope that rather than repeat the mistakes of history, we will learn from them. For the Church of Scotland in the late 1930s the signs of a deteriorating home church were manifest in declining interest in mission expressed by reduced giving and missionary numbers. In contrast, on the field in South India, there was tremendous growth in the village churches. But this was largely independent of a mission shackled to its institutions. The historical inertia of the Church of Scotland made it difficult to turn the juggernaut to change direction. At that time, whilst Kydd looked backwards, others, with more prescience looked forward. In preparation for the Tamaram Conference (1938) Hendrick Kraemer stated that “the Church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it. The Church ought always to be aware of its condition of crisis on account of the abiding tension between its essential nature and its empirical condition” (Kraemer 1938:24-25). Kydd wanted to maintain his course, the status quo, by fine tuning the sails. But what was needed was a completely different change in tack, a fundamental change in direction. Further north, in the state of Madhya Pradesh McGavran was focused on starting a mass movement amongst the Satnami caste. He did not recognise the clouds gathering on the horizon which would halt the whole progress of mass conversions across India. More recently Shenk and Hollenweger highlighted that, although mission organisations recognised a crucial opportunity, they failed to capitalise on it. For us today are we too focused on the immediate crises and demands, on our own responsibilities? Can we also see the horizon, read the signs of the times and respond appropriately (Matt. 16:2-3)? Are we seeking to hold the same course despite the weather, or is it time to change tack? Are we aware that the church “is always in a state of crisis”?

Our traditional focus on mission organisations and missionaries has obscured the fact that “Christianity is spread primarily by local believers” (Kim and Kim 2008:211). The church is the mission; the church is God’s mission to the world. How then can we heal the rift that has developed between mission and church? There is always a time-lag between our theology and the embodiment of that theology. Historically Protestant mission had a poorly developed ecclesiology. We galloped ahead of the church eager to do mission, without the appropriate ability to think missiologically.

During the twentieth century we gradually recovered the relationship between our thinking and praxis. But now we have the opposite problem. We are not galloping ahead of our missiological thinking but lagging behind it. Our structures and institutions are too static, hindering the proper embodiment of our theological formulations (C.f. Newbigin 1968:282). We are locked into particular patterns of doing mission and being church because of our historical legacy. We now have an adequate theology of missionary ecclesiology, what is required is its proper embodiment (Laing 2009). In this the role of mission organisations is critical, as bearers of the missionary impulse, to re-educate the churches and overcome this ongoing dichotomy between mission and church. Could 2010 be the opportunity for the creative advance that Edinburgh 1910 was?
Bibliography


Footnotes
[1] Most of this correspondence is in Accession 7548, Box 130, of the Foreign Mission Records of the Church of Scotland, at the National Library of Scotland, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, EH1 1EW, UK.
[3] After language study Newbigin was district missionary in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, from 1936-1946.

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