Insights into the mind(map) of a European missiologist!

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I was asked to offer a presentation comparing Evangelical mission with Ecumenical mission in post-Communist Europe. Developing a mindmap ensured that I gave balanced and equal treatment to both of these approaches. The downside of speaking from a mindmap is the lack of a 15 page script from the speaker! The upside of speaking from a mindmap is the lack of a 15 page script from the speaker! What you get here are the introductory notes to help you navigate the mindmap.

Evangelical mission has tended to favour relational approaches to pan-European reflection and activity. This has produced some stimulating work but has its strengths and weaknesses. Its themes have sometimes overlapped with those of the ecumenical mission. It has tended to be somewhat activist and generally pragmatic.

Ecumenical mission has been conciliar (through Councils and Assemblies), has established some lasting programmes, but also has its strengths and weaknesses. It has tended to be somewhat theoretical and reflective.

In each instance I have noted the exemplary activity of several mission agencies that have taken the post-Communist context of Europe into account.

In the presentation I noted several areas where there are signs of some convergence between representatives of each approach. These include regular consultations between the European Evangelical Missionary Alliance leaders and the European Ecumenical Missionary Council leaders (some of whom are the same people!). The International Association for Mission Studies brings together missiologists from across both evangelical and ecumenical traditions, particularly within the regional bodies in the British Isles, Francophone Europe, Scandinavia, and Central & Eastern Europe. Alpha, as a practical evangelistic and introductory discipleship tool, is an interesting example that has crossed from charismatic Protestantism into Roman Catholicism and, more recently, Eastern Orthodoxy.

However, I believe that there are still three important areas of divergence that point to an agenda for dialogue between the two traditions in mission. These involve the need to address, a. The question as to who are the proper agents of mission; b. The question as to who are the proper objects of mission; and, c. The question as to what are the proper means and methods in mission. In turn these will require attention to the Church and Agency/Society in Mission, attention to our differing evaluations of the spiritual status of those who affiliate only loosely with our respective traditions and, finally, attention to those theological and biblical insights that inform our mission practice.

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