

'The times they are a changing'
Reflections on Industrial Mission

The contribution of the Church to mission that seeks to work with economic understanding is well established. In particular the contribution of Industrial Mission (I.M.) being the most obvious example with its commitment to Chaplaincy to the work place.

The recently published volume '*The Church and Economic Life*' Edited by Brown and Ballard makes a significant contribution to our understanding of this work. In bringing together extracts from official reports and working papers published since 1945 it shows how the Churches have sought to understand economic change. In addition it reflects the growth of industrial mission by drawing on the writings of Chaplains.

The changes that occurred during the 1980's and 90's with Chaplaincy becoming less and less based on work places is recognised as being a point of major change. In this period IM became progressively more involved with issues of unemployment and work creation schemes. The natural follow on from this work was a commitment to with the regeneration developments that dominated so much thinking from the mid 90's onwards.

In the midst of these changes there continued to be examples of traditional industrial mission. The work of David Welbourne in Guildford and Malcolm Torry in Greenwich being two examples of traditional industrial visiting, though in both cases visiting was only an element of their work. Alongside these models of visiting the development of a few Town Centre Chaplaincies and Chaplains to Asda Stores ensured that the flag of IM was being flown.

The retirement of David Welbourne as led to a review of the future of his post and a question of what ministry is appropriate for the immediate future. (See paper Mission Shaped Economy.)

The publication in 2005 of '*Prosperity with a Purpose*' in some ways reopened up the debate on the Churches contribution to the debate on wealth creation. In the autumn of 2006 a new set of essays will be published that seek to explore in greater theological detail the issues raised in 'Prosperity with a Purpose.'

The recent publication of '*Crossing the Sea of Fire*' by Wlfe Wild which explores issues of global capitalism in the light of St. Mark's Gospel shows that there may be a renewed interest in asking how do Christians respond theologically to both economic change and globalisation.

In London the future of IM is facing a period of change. The closure of 'South London Industrial Mission' in 2006 after nearly 60 years of operation offered the opportunity for a rethink of mission based activity to people in the work place.

The closure of SLIM led to the formation of a new organisation 'Mission in London's economy' an ecumenical based organisation that is seeking to identify the most appropriate methods of work within London. It is interesting to note that in many ways it is reinventing old style visiting and receiving support from Churches that have over the years have withdrawn their funding for this work.

It will be a couple of years before we know what the outcomes of the new style of working will mean. It is important that careful monitoring and evaluation is undertaken.

The work of the 'St. Paul's Institute' and 'All. Hallow's by the Tower' on seeking to identify ways of responding to globalisation and the City of London also offer opportunities for learning about ways of reaching out responding to economic change from a theological perspective.

The title of this paper 'The times they are a changing' is intended to stimulate further thought on what is needed in the arena of theological reflection on economics and work. The changes are seen in the move from traditional models of IM to reflection on economic change and globalisation. The reality for many Christians is that they live within a fast changing world but rarely find the opportunity to think about what this means.

The paper 'Mission Shaped Economy' offers a model that seeks to build on what went before. It may or may not influence the thinking that underpins the planning for mission to the economy in North East Hampshire ie the follow on from the ministry of David Welbourne. It is a contribution to the ongoing debate that is intended to open up the opportunity for change.

It is my view that we are going through a period when issues of economy and theology are returning to the Churches agenda. The focus in a limited way is within the institutional bodies and is not yet filtering through to the local Church. The opportunity that is on offer is to seek to stimulate that debate in a creative way.

The average Christian will not read Brown and Ballard or Wilf Wilde, this said the momentum that led to the publication of their books offers an opportunity for new approaches. The contribution of ICF could be to offer insights through their 'Fellows' by seeking to root the debate in solid ground that is both theological and based on understanding of the changes in the global economy.

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