WISDOM IN MISSION

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Category: Observations

This week I spent a day at the annual Wisdom in Mission consultation which was held at Launde Abbey. WIM is sponsored by the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide and brings together a small group of mission practitioners, leaders and academics for 24 hours of reflection and discussion.

There were three hour-long presentations each followed by an hour of discussion and an additional two hours of discussion and questions. This made for a relaxed, and collaborative atmosphere. All in all, it was rather good.

I gave the first presentation, so its hard for me to be objective about it, but people seemed to be fairly positive. I gave a brief insight into what I was going to present here and at some point, I'll put the whole thing on line.

The highlight of the consultation was a superb presentation by Simon Batchelor of Gamos on the development of systems for using mobile phones to transfer money and make payments in the developing world. The best known of these is MpesaÂ in Kenya. Â On the surface, using phones to transfer money may seem simply a technological and financial issue. However, the underlying principle which pushed Simon and his team to move the idea forward was to help the poor people who suffer from the high cost and unreliability of money transfers in their situations. For example, it is very difficult for people in African cities to send money to their rural families or for small start up businesses to buy supplies in another part of the country.Â The elegance and simplicity of solutions such as Mpesa have made easier and cheaper for people to transfer money and have made a significant contribution to the development of the countries where they are being applied.

The story of the development of Mpesa is a fascinating story of entrepreneurship, technical ability and excellent networking. Equally, it is a story of divine coincidences, wisdom, prayer and service. I was very touched to learn that the team who kickstarted this system which is now used to transfer vast domes of money around the world, make no money out of it. They don't take a transaction fee, and they don't charge for licences. They wanted to help poor people, not make money for themselves.

We had a debate as to whether this actually fell under the heading of mission. For my part, I'm not worried about definitions; whatever it is, it's blooming good!

The third and final talk was by Krish Kandiah of the Evangelical Alliance who gave a thoughtful reflection on the use of social media in mission. One fascinating aspect of Krish's talk was that there were very few people in the room (apart from Krish and myself) who were active users of any social medium other than Facebook. Our engagement with social media needs to be well thought through and appropriate; but we do need to engage.

This left me with the question; if a consultation doesn't have a hashtag, does it really exist?