THE FUTURE OF MISSION 2: MONEY, RISK AND FOOD

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Some thoughts on an excellent conference from a somewhat jet-lagged participant!
Category: Observations

It came as something as a shock to me when I realised that I was rich and that the Bible verses about the dangers of wealth all applied to me. I grew up in the industrial North-East of England and my dad, who was a coal-miner, died when I was twelve. We were not very well off, even by the standards of one of the poorest regions in the country. However, when I got to West Africa, I realised that compared to most of the people I was working with, I was extremely rich. The whole thing took Â while to get used to.

It took even longer to realise that our comparative wealth had an impact on the way in which people perceived us and the message that we had come to share. In an excellent conference session (conducted by Skype), Jonathan Bonk unpacked some of the implications of economic inequity for the work of missionaries. It was fascinating stuff. I was reminded, again, how in the early days of Christianity, it was a religion of the poor, not the rich. However, the reality of the modern missionary movement has often been that it involves people from rich countries taking the message of Jesus to people from poor countries. With the best will in the world, it is hard for the message not to be influenced by the status of the messengers.

However, other papers this week have underlined how this pattern is changing. There are a whole series of mission movements developing in Africa and Asia who don't have the relative wealth that is a feature of Western missions. Often, Christians from poorer countries are going overseas to work with the intention of sharing the Gospel with their employers in much more well-to-do situations. This is a much tougher situation than the one that Sue and I experienced in Africa.

This morning, we had an interesting session looking at risk and mission. We talked about the various types of danger that mission workers face; violence, disease, stress and so on. However, there was consensus in the room that the biggest risk of all was that the people of Asia would not get to hear the good news about Jesus. In our increasingly risk-averse world, it was inspiring to hear this. I think it's a message that we need to be reminded of in the UK.

A couple of days ago, I wrote a blog post that looked at discipleship in terms of eating a meal with Jesus, yesterday, there was a suggestion that we need to look at the global mission movement as a "pot luck dinner". People from each country bring food and we sit down and share it together. We may not fully appreciate everyone's offering, but as we eat together, we learn to appreciate one another and to understand what we all contribute. It's a nice image.

There is a lot of thought provoking stuff being shared at this conference. Unfortunately, I'm somewhat jet-laggedÂ so I'm struggling to synthesise everything that I'm hearing. I suspect I'll have more to say when I get home and finally wake up!