PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON CONFERENCE TRAVEL

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Some thoughts on Argentina, languages, grilled chicken and my fragile ego
Category: Observations

Last week, I spent a few days in Cordoba, Argentina attending a conference of the Wycliffe Americas Area. Today, I'm going to post a few personal reflections and tomorrow, I'll write something about the importance of the event for world mission.


Cordoba Cathedral

Often after trips like this, people ask me what I thought of the country; generally my answer is that I saw an airport and a conference room and very little else. This time round, because of the vagaries of travel, I actually saw three airports and a conference centre. Unusually, I also had a short trip into the centre of Cordoba, which seemed very nice. I also had a bus trip across BuenosAires from one airport to the other, but my main impression was of heavy traffic and traffic lights - I don't think I saw the city at its best.

For me, the most obvious thing about the trip was that I found myself in a context where I didn't speak the language. I arrived early for the conference and spent the much of the Sunday with the family who run the centre, where we were staying. Their English was better than my Spanish, but it was still very difficult to communicate. The daughter Anita who was two or three, took a shine to me and spoke non-stop and very quickly, totally oblivious of the fact that I couldn't catch a word. It is good for people like me to be put in situations like this. Most mission conferences take place in English and speakers of Spanish, French and other languages have to get by with simultaneous translations - it's good for me to experience how the other half lives. That being said, after a couple of days, with my fluent French and school Latin, I was more or less able to follow most of the conference talks - but they were on subjects that I'm very familiar with. Meal time conversations were another matter altogether.

A week in a country doesn't give you any authority to speak on the local cuisine. However, I've no doubt that the grilled chicken we had for Sunday lunch (see photo) and the barbecue that we had for the conference celebration meal were among the best that I've ever eaten - if not the best.



There was a time when I spent a lot of my life going to conferences and meetings around the world. These days, I do very little and it's a year since I was last on a long haul flight. In one sense, I miss the travel. It's nice to see new places (however briefly) and it's even better to meet up with friends and colleagues that I rarely get to see.

However, there is also a less tangible thing that I should mention; in the mission world, where the financial rewards are not exactly stellar; status is often indicated by the amount of long-haul travel that you get to do. The more important you are, the more you have to travel to meetings around the world. It's an invisible thing and something which isn't always acknowledged, but it is a reality - at least in the circles I move in. As I said, these days I hardly ever travel; in some senses, my status in our organisation has been reduced - I've had a demotion. It's an odd feeling at this point of life. I've no doubt that I'm doing what I should be doing, but from time to time I do struggle with my loss of status and profile. Hopefully, I'll grow out of it.