

Where now for us both?

Baby Camara died today Lord,
You died too; I heard your call,
You said it was for us all,
But he could never have heard,
By your stripes we're cured,
But baby Ceesay died today.

Baby Lamin died today, Lord,
Final sacrifice, an oxygen tank, a village beyond tears,
For a lads' night out, a new car, ex-colonial beers,
"Justice issue", "healthcare inequality" steal us from our task,
As emotional death behind a grinning Sunday best clothes mask,
As baby Manjang gives out more mourning.

Baby Fatou died today, Lord,
I try not to wonder what happens. Is her soul well?
Or just birth, two days septic agony, eternal hell?
Like a train born on a cliff-edge, a terminal condition,
Mum's tiny virus a twisted helical ignition,
How many tomorrow, Lord?

Baby Abdou's dying now Lord,
Tired eyes shutting, like channel-flicking European youth,
Hearts shutting, terrified of an overwhelming truth,
As mother's blank eyes beyond tears crinkle beyond tears like a dry leaf,
A doubt makes Western faith feel frail, fading candle brief,
Can't you save us both?

Mike B

Mike is an adult MK who lived in West Africa throughout most of his childhood. He worked in a clinic close to where he grew up during his medical training placement. Already strongly affected by growing up in a poor society, the impact of spending those weeks with people living and dying in poverty further reaffirmed his desire to make a positive difference in such a place in the future. His poem unashamedly raises more questions than answers, painful and difficult questions that don't have easy or trite answers. These are questions that we should all ask as Christians and ones that should spur us all into action. Now a junior doctor, he continues to write poetry that challenges his readers to express an authentic and practical faith in action. We have been privileged to work with many spiritual MKs who think and act in the same way, challenging us personally never to settle for the status quo of an easy life and miss out on making a difference in this lost and needy world.

This Educare focuses on the issue of money and how our MKs cope with living in such an unequal world. As ever, we welcome any feedback from our readers.

Eurotck 2010 is scheduled for late March in Spain. See page 5 for details.

MKs and money

Background

Many people over the years have mentioned about MKs and money in passing, but I don't recall seeing many articles specifically on an issue that touches every one of our children to some extent. The classic picture is of an MK growing up trapped between two societies with very different levels of income and expectations. Typically our children's passport countries are in the developed world, but they grew up in poorer countries. They experienced poverty and its consequences – under-nutrition, contaminated water supplies, poor health and healthcare access, limited or no access to good educational opportunities, cramped housing and more all leading to high death rates and low life expectancy. In such societies they are among the elite who can afford proper food and water and who have access to good health care and education. They also have experienced being the poor relations in their passport countries – sometimes living at levels deemed to be “below the poverty line” when there. They have experienced their peers spending large amounts of money on frivolous and unnecessary fashion or hobby items – spending sums of pocket money on them that would feed a family for weeks in their host country.

This represents a huge tension in their experience and thinking and raises some massive questions about how to understand and best respond to all of this.

Of course there were always exceptions to this picture such as MKs who grew up across Western Europe and in wealthier East Asian countries. As mission becomes increasingly global the picture is more varied than ever with Latin American, African and Asian families living and working in places wealthier than their passport countries. This globalisation trend helps exaggerate the differences of income within the mission community as well. There were already wide differences between different Western missions based on funding patterns which meant that some families had several times more income than others working in the same locations. Adding in mission families from the global “South” often means that their income is lower again. Some missions have practiced pooling of incomes to even out these differences, but this is very much the exception, a few others practice a limited team tax system. However, most support on location for less well-funded families is down to the ad-hoc personal generosity of well-off workers.

There is also a shift so that proportionally fewer MKs are growing up in rural areas or poorer districts of cities in developing countries. Increasingly they are in major world cities living fairly comfortably in middle class areas near to their international/MK schools.

All of these factors present challenges and opportunities in developing our MKs attitudes to money. It is up to us as parents and MK workers and supporters to help our children make the most of the opportunities.

Problems

What kind of money attitude problems can arise from the MK experience?

It is possible to become judgemental towards “worldly” Western Christians who are easily perceived as self-indulgently wasting money which could be used to better effect if given away. It is also possible to become critical in a counter-productive way that alienates people and leaves the MK isolated in negativity. This could also be true for Korean, Chinese or middle class Latin American churches, where the apparent emphasis of many people can be material comfort and security. Bringing a challenge by teaching and example is one thing, negativity and criticism that leads to isolation is quite another. Allied to this can be a real anger towards rich Christians – however their money is used, unless almost all of it is given away.

There can be reverse pride that exalts the idea of having grown up without a lot of resources available; a belief that it is somehow a superior experience that makes them superior people. Poverty may well be seen as a virtue in and of itself, where counter-cultural ascetic values are taken to excess and replace consumerism and waste. On the other hand there can be anger with the poverty they had to witness, or relative poverty they had to endure. That anger may be ill-focused, or may find an object in blaming specific people such as the parents, under funding donors, locals who help keep people in poverty, or anyone else they perceive to be responsible for failures. That anger can often be directed at churches and organisations that are willing to send people out, but without support or with limited support – full pay for a pastor, half pay for a missionary as an example. Having said that, it is not unusual for pastors' kids to grow up with issues like this. Few pastors take up the role for financial gain: for every flamboyant televangelist there are thousands of pastors who only make a moderate living or struggle to pay the bills. This situation is only exaggerated for missionaries.

Even more problematic is fickle support where missionaries on the field are suddenly informed that funding is to be reduced or withdrawn. This is not an unusual scenario even in good financial times, but one that is more marked during recessions like the current one. An enforced departure from the field, or struggling along on reduced and scanty support are both situations that can trigger long term resentment in MKs.

There may also be a problem with being the recipient of low grade or old goods that the donor has no particular use for. The classic dried tea bag story still has its modern parallels with mission families often at the bottom of the pile. Most of our generation (45+) grew up with hand me downs, especially in larger families, and very large numbers of people of all ages shop in charity/thrift stores, so it isn't usually a problem if the second hand things are good quality, it is the dumping of poor or useless articles that can cause resentment.

A flip side of this is that some sensitive children may feel guilty that they should receive gifts. Most of us have had the humbling experience of receiving from someone who we know doesn't have a lot of resources. If this kind of thing happens often, sensitive children may question whether what they are doing and receiving is right.

Long-term negative impacts can be unresolved anger with bitterness either ill-focused or specifically directed at individuals or even towards God – “after all I experienced all of this because of God's direction to my parents”. A counter-reaction may be to set out to avoid any hint of poverty leading an MK to take the most lucrative career path possible in order to never experience need or lack ever again.

Advantages

The good news is that, although we have seen many of the above problems and negativity, this is the exception rather than the rule. The vast majority of the MKs that we know have a Biblical, well-balanced view of money and want to use their lives to make a difference both practically and in terms of the Great Commission. The other good news is that there is a lot of positive action that we can take to help the process along: we are not just fatalistic victims. We have a great God who knows our needs, understands our limitations and frailties and who has given us clear directions on this crucial issue in His word.

Most MKs are well aware of the value of money because of living in poorer societies and because of the need to trust God to provide it. This means that they are unlikely to waste money on unnecessary items; a feature that can be taken too far as already observed, but mostly a real advantage. They are frequently good, careful money managers who will avoid building up debts. Many adult MKs are committed to poverty alleviation and understand this as a Gospel element. This commitment extends as far as major life choices as they deliberately train in medical and

other professions that are useful in mission and poverty alleviation. Campaigns such as Drop the Debt and Jubilee have their support, and this taps into something “cool” and very much a live concern among young people in the developed world. Part of this commitment will also involve donations to other charities involved in this kind of work. Even if the income is limited, they will still be giving.

Most MKs are refreshingly non-materialistic and non-consumerist. Growing up in societies where people matter more than things and where small gifts or amounts of money make a big difference has a major long-term impact on their thinking. They would tend to reject the Christianised versions of comfortable materialism and the prosperity teaching that may be used to justify such lifestyles. Given that their attitude doesn't become negative or destructively critical this is good, as their lives are lived devoted to the Lord and to others because of that commitment. Jesus' teaching on this was clear in that we cannot serve both God and money (Luke 16v13) and the lifestyle of many MKs often comes close to this ideal.

Lessons of faith have often been learned throughout childhood as they have seen God provide money from one source or another – sometimes in response to specific prayer. Such answers to prayer help develop faith and trust in God.

Making the most of the advantages

As in so many areas, what we role model as parents has one of the biggest impacts of all. If we as parents are content and trusting the Lord then our children are far more likely to learn the same attitudes. If we constantly pass on fears that somehow there won't be enough money or resources, or if we are critical of under-funding donors our children will learn that. It is interesting that most adult MKs with issues in this area have parents who spent a lot of time talking about money and funding – frequently not positively!

Prayer should be part of what we model for our children. There is a balance in this as it is good to train the children in praying and expecting answers, but overdoing this can lead to an excessive emphasis on money and concerns about it. We want to encourage faith in a provider God, not have them constantly straining for the next lot of money to come in.

Good teaching is important too. The Bible has a lot to say about money, and they need to understand the balance that is there, rather than just a few proof texts for our own stance. That balance includes understanding that wealth in itself is usually a good thing, but that the wealthy have responsibilities to give generously and wisely rather than hoard or live in self-indulgence. This is particularly so for wealthy Christians whose money is an important tool in spreading the Gospel. For many MKs they are at least the relatively wealthy ones in their host societies so this understanding is relevant to their own experiences there. They also need to know that they can receive graciously and to be content as Paul said in plenty or in want (Phil 4v11&12). “Enough is as good as a feast” was a favourite saying of my grandfather. He wasn't an actively practising Christian, but he hit on this Biblical truth when he quoted this little proverb – and it was something he knew from hard personal experience having grown up in poverty, but living through to much better times as an older man.

Neither Jesus nor any of His disciples felt guilty about receiving gifts when they needed them, nor should any of our parents or MKs. Above all we are here to serve God, not be a slave to our money and possessions. Understanding this and teaching it as part of God's whole counsel to our children is the key to them having the right attitudes to carry into adulthood.

Eurotck 2010

Following the success of Eurotck 2007 at Mosbach in Germany, delegates there were very much in favour of organising another conference. This will now take place at Peñiscola in Spain just before Easter next year, immediately after the European Member Care Conference (EMCC) at the same location.

The planning committee has now booked the conference centre, recruited several presenters, is arranging the timetable and putting other practical arrangements in place.

The aim will be to develop many of the themes that we were already discussing in 2007 in the light of the many changes since then. There will also be one or two new themes. The overall plan is to have several plenary sessions along with seminars where there will be a choice between educational and care/welfare options. The conference is aimed at mission agency sending staff working in member care, churches sending out families, MK school staff concerned for Commonwealth, European and other non-Anglophone children studying there, and for anyone else committed to the education and welfare of mission families.

The details are as follows

Dates – 28th March to 1st April 2010

The conference will open with a plenary session on the evening of the 28th March and delegates will leave on the morning of the 1st April

Location – Hotel Papa Luna, Peñiscola, Spain

This is the same location as EMCC. Peñiscola is an historic town between Barcelona and Valencia on the Mediterranean coast. The nearest major airports are in these cities and the train station of Benicarlo-Peñiscola is accessible from either city.

Costs – Early booking (Before 15th Nov)	€200
Standard booking (Before 16th Jan)	€220
Late booking	€240

All prices are per person, and are all inclusive of full board from the 28th March to 1st April, the conference rooms, registration fees and resources.

More information – bookings will be taken through the **Global Connections website** in euros or sterling; follow this link <http://www.globalconnections.co.uk/events/relatedevents/eurotck.htm>

The Eurotck website will post most information about the conference over the coming months. For enquiries contact mk_tck@yahoo.co.uk and specify it is a Eurotck enquiry in the subject title.

We look forward to seeing many of you there!

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