

Hidden Loss and Grief in the Missionary Life:

Charting the Land of Sorrow and Teaching the Language of Grief

Kara Suzanne Githens

Loss and grief are a part of the very fabric of our human existence. From birth to death our lives hold a myriad of losses. As was poignantly explained to me several years ago in a Facilitator Training at the Dougy Center, our first experience in life involves loss. To be born from our mother's womb means leaving a safe, warm environment where every need is met. Every one of us must leave the womb in order to live, yet in taking our first breath to live, we have lost.

Knowing that loss is intrinsic to our very life, cultures, societies, and families have developed rituals and traditions to help us as we seek to come to grips with the reality of our losses. In

good. For those in Christ, the physical loss experienced is very real since we are limited in our finite understanding. Yet there is hope, a hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the

research, writing, thinking and discussion focused on the impact of death. And there has been some excellent work on the impact of trauma and the losses then experienced. But what of the myriad of losses that are experienced along the journey of life? The in between time, the dash between the date of birth and the date of physical death, holds so much. There are marriages, births, changing schools, moves, travels, friendships gained and lost, jobs changed, health problems, and the annual birthday milestones and more. The list could go on. That is true for all of us no matter where we live, across generations and cultures. Life keeps marching on with change, which means loss. For many, these losses are unobserved, hidden, and forgotten. For most, life goes on in a healthy manner, but for some these hidden losses can be crippling.

HIDDEN LOSSES are crippling many on the missionary field and they don't even know how to identify where it all began.

That brings us to the focus of this paper: *Hidden Loss and Grief in the Missionary Life*. My life experience, training, and study on loss and grief in the missionary life have shown me how critical it is that this issue be addressed. Hidden losses are crippling many on the missionary field and they do not even know how to identify where it all began. Therefore, we will

thinking about loss, for many, physical death will be what first comes to mind. This certainly is a loss of enormous proportions. For those without Christ it is the ultimate loss—a permanent separation from God and all that is

resurrection of all who are in Him! The physical loss then is temporary, although profoundly painful and life altering for those who are left behind.

In considering loss and its subsequent grief, there has been much

first explore the nature of loss in the missionary life by looking both at the history of missions and what we know of missionary individuals and families today. In essence we will spend some time discovering and charting this land of sorrow where many missionaries are now living.

Next we will delve into a greater understanding of the nature of grief. The literature on understanding grief is not conclusive, nor is it always clear. There is, however, some consensus that the grief experienced in the missionary life is real. Thus, we must try our best to learn the available language of grief so that we can teach it to missionaries who can then use it when they need to ask for help.

Finally, we will address how the church and missions sending agencies can walk alongside missionary individuals, families, and children as they recognize their losses and grieve. It is my hope that churches and missions agencies will be equipped to give missionaries a compass for the land of sorrows and a dictionary for the language of grief. In doing so, perhaps we can further reduce preventable missionary attrition. Beyond that, conceivably our missionaries and their children could be healthier as they have the tools to deal with the inevitable realities of loss and grief that will come into their lives.

The Nature of Loss in the Missionary Life

Missionary Loss through the Lens of History. Throughout the ages the cost of following Jesus to the ends of the earth to make disciples has always included loss. In fact, it is something that Jesus repeatedly called us to do, to deny ourselves and be willing to lose everything. He states in Matthew 19:29, “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.”¹ With these words, Jesus assumes we will be leaving people and things behind for His sake and He gives us a promise to hold onto for the future—an eternal reward. Despite this very true and real promise to which missionaries can and should cling in their losses, the losses still hurt.

In reading *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*,² an incredible chronicle of the advance of the gospel throughout the world, we discover the individual sacrifices that so many missionaries have made. From the advance of the gospel during the first century throughout the Roman Empire to the current efforts to reach the 10/40 window and the unreached people groups, there are incredible stories of triumph. And there are incredible stories of pain and loss.

Looking at the history of missions, we are indebted to those who served in

the nineteenth century, which is often called the “Great Century” of missions. As Tucker notes, “Imperfect as they were, it was the nineteenth-century missionaries...who, in a relatively short period of time, turned what some may have thought to be a declining Caucasian religion into the largest and most dynamic religious faith in the world.”³ It is during this time that William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Mary Slessor, Amy Carmichael, Hudson Taylor, and many others sacrificed so much for the sake of Christ.

This is the generation of missionaries who traveled by ship to unknown lands, some with their belongings packed in a casket so that they could easily be buried if needed. Many never saw their families or their homeland again. Some suffered shipwrecks in which all their belongings were lost. Many endured tropical illnesses such as malaria for which there were and still are no cures. Others left children behind in boarding schools in their home country as there were no adequate schooling options for them abroad. The losses this generation of missionaries endured are often difficult for us to comprehend today.

Looking more closely at the lives of William Carey and Adoniram Judson, two of the “heroes” of missions, we see that their lives were wrought with loss and grief. Each of these men buried two wives and their own little children,

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and suffered from tropical illnesses in their respective countries of India and South Asia. William Carey's first wife, after arriving in India, began to suffer from a mental illness from which she never recovered. His children struggled while their father was absorbed in his Bible translation and evangelism work and their mother was incapable of functioning. They also faced privation because a fellow missionary team member mismanaged the missionary funds for the team.⁴

Adoniram Judson endured a year and a half of imprisonment. When released, he enjoyed only two weeks with his wife Nancy and his daughter Maria. He was then required to help translate and negotiate between the English and the Burmese governments,

Adoniram Judson, the countries of India and Burma have believers in Jesus Christ today. These men tirelessly labored to give the people and language groups whom they served their first translations of the Bible—a priceless gift. Their legacy is incredible and their reward in heaven is certainly great! The often hidden and forgotten side of their stories is that these men and their families lost so much. Perhaps knowing their stories, we may even think they lost and sacrificed too much.

It is easy to look at past history with what we know and believe today about having a healthy life and ministry balance, family health, and physical health and judge these missionaries too harshly for not better taking care

tieth and twenty-first centuries, loss in the missionary life looks a little different, mostly because of the advances of technology. Missionaries are no longer shipwrecked at sea, thanks to the invention of the airplane. Yet, the loss of leaving behind people, places, and things still remains. The struggle of cross-cultural adaptation remains as well. This time of cultural adjustment and transition has always brought with it loss.

Arrival in a new culture often strips new missionaries of their feelings of being in control of their circumstances. ...Feelings of incompetence may produce a vague feeling of loss for who they were before. Initial forays into language learning reduce a well-educated and productive adult woman [or man] to a child status, or even worse. One missionary in

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and during this time his wife died. A couple months later his daughter Maria also died. These compounded losses and the incredible grief drove Judson into a deep, deep depression which eventually lead to him building a hut for himself in the jungle where he dug himself a grave where he kept vigil for days on end.⁵ In short, today medical and mental health professionals would diagnose him as being clinically depressed and actively suicidal. Although he had none of the professional support that is available today, thankfully Judson had the support, prayers and love of his fellow missionaries and the native converts. This along with his enduring faith in God, despite his circumstances, carried him through. Eventually he emerged from this place of darkness and was able to continue his life and ministry.

Because of William Carey and

of themselves and their families. We must understand that this generation of missionaries on whose shoulders we now stand viewed life, loss, and suffering differently than we do today.

Within the missions culture of the United States and Great Britain at that time, their losses were most likely minimized, hidden and misunderstood. Perhaps it was because these missionaries had no other options but to endure, there was no use talking about what could not be changed. We must also recognize that the churches and missions movements that sent them did not have an understanding of how to train, prepare, and support the missionaries they sent. Nor did they have the resources we have today. They were simply obeying Jesus and sending missionaries to go and make disciples of all nations.

Missionary Loss Today. In the twen-

Romania exclaimed the humbling recognition that even the neighbor's dog understood more language than she!⁶

This struggle to adjust to a new language and culture is one of the many hidden losses in the missionary life. I use the word "hidden" as we do not often recognize the experience of cross-cultural adjustment as something that holds significant loss. There is no funeral for the identity of the competent missionary who now feels lower than a dog. Yet, anyone who has experienced a cross-cultural adjustment can relate to the feeling of temporarily losing yourself and your ability to communicate and to be known.

The realities and struggles of a cross-cultural adaptation are experienced differently for every man, woman, and child on the mission field today. Being married, single, young, old, etc., all impact how the transition

is experienced. The people, cultures and languages to which an individual is seeking to adapt also play a significant role in how smoothly the acculturation process takes place.

Even though there are so many differences and distinctions in the lives and experiences of missionaries throughout the world, there are some common losses. We have already briefly touched on the common loss of identity and the ability to communicate and have determined that these are “hidden” losses. For the sake of brevity we cannot explore and delve into each kind of hidden loss. Therefore, I will simply list typical losses, some of which are not often identified and noticed (see box).

The list is by no means exhaustive, but it does begin to paint a picture of the millions of seemingly inconsequential and yet truly significant losses that can add up in the life of a missionary or a missionary kid. Some of these things may sound normal and to be expected.

Others of these losses are more subtle. A poem by Alex Graham James titled “Mock Funeral” poignantly depicts the impact of such losses.

Mock Funeral

There was no funeral.
 No flowers.
 No ceremony.
 No one had died.
 No weeping or wailing.
 Just in my heart.
 I can't...
 But I did anyway,
 And nobody knew I couldn't.
 I don't want to...
 But nobody else said they didn't.
 So I put down my panic
 And picked up my luggage
 And got on the plane.
 There was no funeral.⁷

The loss in the life of a missionary as experienced in the past was often final, as there was no return to the home country or to the previous way of life. The challenge of today's losses

Typical Losses Missionaries Experience

- **Language** – the ability to communicate
- **Identity**—This is a significant struggle when first going to the field and then again when returning to stay in the “home” country at retirement or before. Missionary kids often have tremendous struggles with their identity both coming and going.
- **A place in society**—being known and valued
- **Life skills**—knowing how to drive or use public transit, how to read foreign maps, how to ask for help, how to do banking, how to shop
- **Sense of safety**—especially in countries with high levels of gang violence, war, etc.
- **Family**—knowing grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and other family members
- **Friends**—It may take a while to develop trust or sufficient language skills for new friendships to be developed.
- **Intellectual and professional peers**— Sometimes missionaries struggle to find peers because of their position of authority or the vast difference in formal education levels between the missionary and those he serves.
- **Places**—family vacation spots, favorite restaurants or coffee shops, schools
- **Things**—favorite foods, toys, family keepsakes, familiar furniture
- **Pets**—Sometimes a cherished animal must be left behind.
- **Smells**—the smell of flowers, food, familiar places, street markets

is our constant mobility. Today we do not say goodbye forever. We say goodbye again and again and again. As one missionary woman stated, “The only constant in this life is the constant cycle of farewells—both on the field and at home!”⁸

The high mobility and the constant cycle of farewells that is typical of missionary life today has an impact on the entire missionary family. It can, however, have a distinct impact on the life of an MK (missionary kid). The experience of some MKs involves them living in boarding schools where they are coming and going between the school and their parents' home for a few months at a time. Others experience abrupt evacuations due to violence. Still others have moved

numerous times as their parents have been shuffled from country to country throughout their ministry. Each one of these moves and plane trips means leaving people, places, things, dreams, and opportunities behind. It means saying the dreaded word “goodbye” one more time. In short, it means that something has changed, yet again.

The lack of constancy in the life of an MK can be difficult for a child or teenager to cope with and understand. It can lead to feelings of both physical and emotional insecurity. For some it hinders their ability to make friendships and appropriately attach to those around them. These too are hidden losses. Although hidden, the lifelong impact of such losses can be truly significant.

Teaching the Language of Grief

Having identified some of the realities of loss in the missionary life, both for adults and children, we must seek to understand how to respond. The word “grief” is the word we use in the English language to describe our usual responses to loss. This word is commonly used but rarely understood. There is a language of grief that we must seek to comprehend.

Before we go further in our discussion, we must first acknowledge that not everyone grieves in the same way, for the same amount of time, or with the same depth of emotions. Just as the losses are unique to each person, so is the grief. A missionary’s family culture,

living because they do not know the language of grief and how to ask for help.

In this section we will first explore what are some of the key barriers to healthy grieving within the missions context. We will then seek to describe what healthy grieving can look like in the life of a missionary. The barriers to grieving that we will discuss are by no means all of the barriers that exist. They are, however, common barriers that most missionaries and missionary kids will face at some time in their lives.

Barriers to Grief

The five barriers that we will explore are: a lack of time to process, fear of denying the good, a lack of permis-

ture.¹⁰ There is no time to respond to the losses and thus to grieve.

The second barrier to grief is something that pioneers in the field of MK care, David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken, aptly describe as “fear of denying the good.” In speaking of missionary kids (third culture kids) they state, “It seems that some... believe that acknowledging any pain in their past will negate the many joys they have known. To admit how sad it was to leave Grandma in the home country feels like a denial of how glad they were to return to their friends in the host country.”¹¹ While this statement was made regarding missionary kids, I find it to be true of adult missionaries too. I have seen

I HAVE SEEN MANY A MISSIONARY fear that if they acknowledge the pain and hurt of the losses, they will be seen as ungrateful. Or perhaps even worse, they worry that people won’t believe that they trust in God.

host culture, and home or passport culture will also influence the response. One’s personality, gender, and support system will likewise impact how one reacts to loss. We must also recognize that there is no “right way” to grieve.

That said, it has been noted by many that when losses are not appropriately grieved, it can lead to something called “unresolved grief.” Frederick Jansohn gives a helpful description of how unresolved grief comes about:

In order to avoid dealing with loss, a person can form a habit of avoiding grief to the point that he or she rarely deals with even the small losses. These losses build up, each one contributing its share of negative symptoms. The person is then caught in a vicious circle, expending more and more of his or her resources to overcome the mounting symptoms of loss until the resources are depleted.⁹

This is the reality that many of our missionaries and missionary kids are

sion to grieve, accumulated grief, and ambiguous grief. **The first barrier, “lack of time to process,” is a very common part of the missionary life.** As we discussed earlier, missionaries today experience a high level of mobility and fast transitions. This can make it difficult to absorb the impact of the losses experienced and to find healthy ways in which to respond. It is often a surreal experience to say goodbye to an entire way of life before boarding an airplane and then in a matter of hours or perhaps a day or two later, everything has changed. The language, culture, weather, people, etc., are all different. Often in the excitement and anticipation of the new, what was left behind must be shoved aside. There is rarely an acknowledgement of the drastic change and the many losses that just occurred when the plane doors closed at the place of depar-

many a missionary fear that if they acknowledge the pain and hurt of the losses, they will be seen as ungrateful. Or perhaps even worse, they worry that people won’t believe that they trust in God. Both missionary children and adult missionaries must be able to embrace the paradox that both the pain of the good-byes and the joy of the hellos are true and can be felt at the same time. Again Pollock and Van Reken encourage us to remember that, “...mourning a loss doesn’t mean that the mourner isn’t recognizing the good in the present and the future.” If missionaries and their children are going to be able to find ways to grieve, they must be able to admit the pain of loss without fear of denying all of the good that has happened in the past and all of the good that will happen in the days to come.

The third barrier we will explore

is the “lack of permission to grieve.” Pollock and Van Reken again help us understand this barrier.¹² In their writing they describe how many MKs have been told repeatedly that they must be strong. While this may be true, it often carries with it a message that it is somehow weak to feel the pain of their losses. An added complication for many missionary children and their families is the challenge to admit that there are things that are painful and hard even when good and noble causes such as feeding the poor, preaching salvation, and serving amidst war are being done. They have not been given permission to grieve.

In my life as a missionary kid and the life of many other missionaries and missionary kids that I have known, I have seen this reality play out. This barrier is very closely related to that of the fear of denying the good. Sometimes it not the missionary culture or family that has not given an individual

about until these have accumulated into an overwhelming mass.”¹³ Physically speaking, this would be similar to having a thousand little paper cuts. One paper cut can often be easily ignored. But, if your hands were cut again and again, they would become raw and would most likely need some medical attention. Although the losses many missionaries experience may seem trivial and small, much like the paper cut, their accumulated effect cannot and should not be ignored.

The fifth barrier to grief is that of “ambiguous grief” which is a response to, “an unclear loss that defies closure.”¹⁴ This barrier stems from the reality that we have been discussing for much of this paper—hidden losses. The losses are hard to acknowledge and therefore the response of grief is muted. The groundbreaking work of Dr. Pauline Boss in her book entitled *Loss, Trauma, and Resilience; Therapeutic Work with Ambiguous Loss*

Healthy Grief

As missionaries and those who care for them recognize that these five barriers to grief often exist (a lack of time to process, fear of denying the good, a lack of permission to grieve, accumulated grief, and ambiguous grief), there is hope that they will be able to find ways to respond to their losses and to grieve. We now must consider what healthy grief can look like. As mentioned before, there is no “right way” in which every person should grieve.

In Western culture many psychologists, counselors, and mental health professionals have embraced Kübler-Ross’ theory and observations on stages of dying and have equated them with the stages of grief. Although there has been very little substantive research on the five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance), this is how many people today expect the grieving process to occur.¹⁶ For many people, denial, anger, bar-

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permission to grieve, but rather it is the individual himself who has not permitted himself to grieve. This is a significant barrier to be overcome for healthy grieving to take place. Without it, we will continue to ignore the losses and we will not allow ourselves to respond—and thus to grieve.

“Accumulated grief” is the fourth barrier to healthy grieving we will explore. This barrier is closely tied in with the aforementioned unresolved grief. Accumulated grief is usually a result of ignoring many small losses and allowing them to build up. “The problem is that most of the losses are so small that a person doesn’t register them as being something to grieve

is very helpful in understanding this barrier. Dr. Boss explains, “...ambiguous loss is the most stressful kind of loss. It defies resolution and creates long-term confusion.... With death there is an official certification of loss, and mourning rituals allow one to say goodbye. With ambiguous loss, none of these markers exists. The persisting ambiguity blocks cognition, coping, and meaning-making and freezes the grief process.”¹⁵ Ambiguous grief is born from a loss that is often hard to recognize, therefore it is also hard to resolve. In order to overcome this barrier to grief we must make a concerted effort to name these hidden losses so that the grief process can be experienced.

gaining, depression, and acceptance have indeed been a part of their grief experience, but this does not mean that these stages are therefore a universal experience.

In considering grief in the life of missionaries we must be especially careful to be culturally sensitive when it comes to the process of grief. “None of the characteristics that we think of as intrinsic to grief can be generalized to the rest of the world—not even crying. ...Crying has diverse forms, reasons for crying, and meanings from culture to culture.”¹⁷

What we can confidently state about grief is that it is a response to loss. Imagine if you lost a piece of jew-

elry or an important tool. The loss may be insignificant or it may be deeply significant. Its value to you will determine how long you will spend searching to find it again. The searching is your response to the loss of the item. When we lose tangible or intangible things that are meaningful to us and our lives, we are compelled to respond and react. That process of reacting and responding is the process of grief.

Therefore, in order to grieve we must first acknowledge that something has been lost. This means the barriers to grieving must be recognized and dealt with appropriately. It is often helpful for those in the grieving process to write a list of all the tangible and intangible things that they have

one brave MK shared a song that she had written during her first year of transition. As she sang *Almost Alone*¹⁸ to the room full of MKs, there was not a dry eye in the room. The chorus of her song speaks of the all too familiar MK loss of a home, being known, and being cared for by someone familiar. Here she acknowledges what she has lost and she expresses how her heart aches in response.

*You wish it'd all go away
Don't wanna face another day
You wish you were home
With someone to hold
Who's not a new face and name to go
with it
You don't feel welcome at all*

destructive and hurtful ways.

It is important to note that recommending that grieving involve releasing and expressing feelings caused by loss is rooted in a Western worldview. There are some Eastern cultures that do not condone or value the expression of emotion. Missionaries from these cultures, therefore, will grieve differently. Although it may look different, they can still find ways in which to honor and remember their losses and express their grief.

The final essential piece of healthy grieving is that of being comforted. This means that those who are grieving often need someone simply to be with them. Words are not always necessary. When a person is grieving, often all

THE MEMORIES of what has been lost can surface at any time. A smell, familiar gesture, a movie scene, a song, and even a packing box can bring an onslaught of emotions.

lost. The list for missionaries and missionary kids is often longer than they first expected.

After acknowledging what has been lost, it is important to find ways in which to honor and remember that which has been lost. Every culture and society has ways in which to honor and remember people who have died. This very process helps bring a sense of meaning in the midst of the pain. This act of honoring and remembering can be done to bring meaning to the many small and big losses that missionaries and missionary children have experienced. The arts such as music, poetry, drawing, painting, remembering and telling stories, writing are often very helpful ways in which to remember and honor losses.

While working at a Transition Seminar for MKs who were preparing to enter or re-enter into American and Canadian culture as young adults,

*There's no one to love and understand
you for who you are
Oh no, something's wrong with your
heart,
It's an eternal hole*

I share Sarah's song as one example of honoring losses. Each person's grief response and way of honoring and remembering will be different. I believe it is safe to say that to grieve in a healthy way, the grief needs to be expressed in some manner. Conversely this means that stuffing away the emotions that come because of loss and escaping into work, ministry, meetings, books, video games, and TV are not helpful ways to grieve. These coping mechanisms of ignoring the pain may function for a while, yet someday the emotions that need to come out will come out. If they have not come out in a constructive and healing manner, they most often then come out in

he/she needs is someone to listen and provide appropriate touch as needed. It is also important for the one who is offering comfort to be available for the one who is grieving. There is no set time frame in which the expression of grief can be turned on and off. The process of grief often catches people by surprise. The memories of what has been lost can surface at any time. A smell, a familiar gesture, a movie scene, a song, and even a packing box can bring an onslaught of emotions. It can be a powerful thing for a missionary or missionary kid to have someone in his/her life who is willing to simply listen and be there whenever needed.

Ultimately, the truest and best consolation is found in the Holy Spirit. He is the One that Jesus promised to us in John 14:16¹⁹ as our counselor and comforter. While people have limitations in their abilities to reach out and comfort others, the Holy Spirit

is able to comfort us at any time and in any place. Therefore, I believe it is imperative that those who care for missionaries as well as the missionaries and MKs themselves all be asking for the Holy Spirit to provide them comfort as they grieve. He alone is able to give the peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7).²⁰

If we give missionaries and missionary kids the basic vocabulary of the language of grief—acknowledge losses, respond to loss by honoring and remembering, find comfort in others and ask for help from the Holy Spirit—healthy grieving can be learned. In giving them a language of grief, perhaps some of the pain that has been held trapped inside for so long can be spoken. As they practice and become more fluent in the language

Theology of Suffering

Preparing missionaries with a map for the land of sorrow and a basic vocabulary for the language of grief is vital, but it is not enough. Churches and missions agencies must also assist their missionaries in developing a robust theology of suffering. As missionaries spend time wrestling with what they believe about God and the suffering He allows in this broken world, it will provide them with a compass for when they become overwhelmed by their losses and grief.

To develop a theology of suffering, it can be incredibly helpful to study the lives of the men and women in Scripture. In God's Word we discover that Adam and Eve were the first ones to experience a drastic relocation and transition.²¹ They too experienced the

for which He lost everything is more noble and important than that of any missionary throughout the ages. And He still gave Himself permission to grieve. When He knelt and prayed in the garden of Gethsemane he acknowledged the pain and loss. He knew that He would be raised from the dead and that in the end of time everything would be set right because of His willingness and obedience to die on the cross—and He still grieved. His expression of grief did not deny the good. In reading the Gospels we discover that He sweat blood and was in agony at the impending loss of His innocence and perfect union with the triune God. He was God and He still felt the impact of the losses He would face. Jesus also clearly expressed how He was feeling to His disciples, “My

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of grief, missionaries and MKs will discover that they are not alone in the land of sorrow.

Recommendations for the Church and Missions Agencies

In light of the realities of loss and grief in the missionary life that we have discussed, those who send out missionaries have a responsibility to equip and care for those they send. This means that missionary preparation and training must include in essence a map for the land of sorrow that missionaries so often visit and a basic vocabulary of the language of grief. With these tools in hand, missionaries and their families will be better prepared to face the inevitable loss and grief that their lives will hold.

hidden and ambiguous losses that many missionaries experience today. Studying the life of Joseph can be helpful for many a missionary kid as Joseph in his youth was taken to a foreign land and had to learn a new way of life. Consider also the lives of Naomi and Ruth. These were two widowed (single) women who traveled alone between nations and tried to find a place for themselves in a male dominated society. Their struggles and losses are not that different from what many single women in missions face today. If we look, we will discover that God's Word is full of stories that help us grasp God's sovereignty in the midst of loss and grief within a cross-cultural context.

Furthermore, Jesus must be our ultimate example of Someone who lost everything and grieved. The cause

soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Mark 14:34).²² And lastly, He asked His disciples for comfort and help in praying and asking God for help. He did not try to grieve alone. Knowing how Jesus dealt with His losses and how He grieved can be a source of hope and encouragement for many missionaries today.

Debriefing and Assessment

In closing, it is imperative that churches and missions agencies talk with their missionaries as they come and go from the mission field. A more technical term for this may be debriefing. There are a variety of kinds of debriefings (organizational, short-term, long-term, retirement, MK transition, etc.) and there are some incredible organizations that provide tools and resources in this area. However, it is

understandable that not every church or missions organization will delve deeply into the study and practice of debriefing.

So, at a minimum, it is important that every church and missions organization find a way to make time to listen to their missionaries and help them name their hidden losses and remove the barriers to grieving. This does not always take a skilled counselor or professional. Most often it means being willing to sit for a while and ask helpful questions. This elementary process will be sufficient for many missionaries and missionary kids who are fairly healthy and resilient individuals that are simply coping with the realities of missionary life. They basically need someone who will come alongside them and provide appropriate care and comfort.

Sometimes professional help will be necessary. Here are some indicators that a missionary is stuck in the land of sorrow. Jansohn provides a helpful triage list:

- **Burnout**—no vision, no desire
- **Marriage issues**—lack of communication, romance, intimacy
- **Parent/child relationship**—lack of communication, nurturing, disciplining
- **Unreasonable emotions**—Sometimes a person can go for days and not get out of a chair. He or she may have a “quick fuse” that can trigger intense, unreasonable anger with little provocation.
- **Lack of hope**—It’s hard for the person to consider doing something in the future when he or she doesn’t have enough energy to deal with today.
- **Lack of forgiveness**—This person has typically either refused to forgive or be forgiven.
- **Blocking the past**—This person may refuse even good memories in order to avoid the bad ones.²³

Dr. Boss provides further trademark symptoms of families who are suffering from ambiguous and unresolved grief. “Ambiguous loss is a problem structurally when parenting roles are ignored,

decisions are put on hold, daily tasks are not done, and family members are ignored or cut off. Rituals and celebrations are cancelled even though they are the glue of family life.”²⁴

When debriefing a missionary or a missionary kid, it is important to keep these symptoms of unresolved grief in mind. If these symptoms become evident, it is critical to get the individual, couple, or family professional help from a psychologist or a counselor. The most effective treatment would most likely come from a counselor or psychologist who understands the nature of loss and grief in the missionary life.

If churches and missions sending organizations take steps to debrief their missionaries and assess for initial signs of unresolved grief, the lives of missionaries around the world would be impacted. The missionary who feels like a failure for not being able to energetically engage in his ministry work may now have the chance to get help and return to the field rather than simply burning out and quitting. The single missionary who feels like no one ever really listens to her story may now have a chance to be validated for the pain she feels because of the hidden losses in her life. The missionary kid who fears denying the amazing beauty and good found in his MK life, if he also embraces the struggle and pain of his losses, may now have the chance to grieve.

In essence, a church and/or missions agency has the opportunity to be a part of the healing and restoration of the lives of many missionaries who are broken because of loss and grief. Knowing this should compel us to reach out to every missionary we know to equip him/her with a map for the land of sorrow, a basic understanding of the language of grief, and a compass in a firm theology of suffering. With these tools in hand, many missionaries will be rescued from their aimless wanderings in the land of sorrow.

Endnotes

1. Holy Bible; English Standard Version 2001
2. Tucker 1983)
3. Tucker 1983, 112
4. Tucker 1983, 118-119
5. Tucker 1983, 128-129
6. Kraft 2003, 76
7. Pollock and Van Reken 2009, 159
8. Kraft 2003, 76
9. Jansohn 2013
10. Pollock and Van Reken 2009, 81
11. Pollock and Van Reken 2009, 76
12. Pollock and Van Reken 2009, 80-81
13. Jansohn 2013
14. Boss 2006, xvii
15. Boss 2006, xvii
16. Koningsberg 2011, 8-9
17. Koningsberg 2011, 184
18. Neveux 2012
19. Holy Bible; English Standard Version 2001
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21. Van Reken and Casteel n.d., 19
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Childhood Participation and the Missionary Family

Greg W. Burch

But Daddy can we take Bella?" [A.K.A. adopted dog] my daughter asked me, as we discussed the possibility of moving back to the USA after living a little more than a decade in Latin America. As a father of two children who were born in Latin America and the husband of a woman who was also raised internationally, the topic of transitions in the missionary family has been an important one for our family.

Over the years, while discussing these moves and transitions with other missionary colleagues, I have heard responses like, "children adapt easily to new situations," or "kids are resilient," and "they will just follow your lead." While it might be true that children are resilient and adaptable in some situations, we should not dismiss the notion that children and young people are capable (even desirous) of joining in the decision-making process and participating in choices that the mis-

this paper primarily deals with MKs and their participation in the missionary family.¹

Transitions and Change in the Missionary Family

While it is common for all children to experience changes (e.g. moves, school changes, and even familial disruptions), MKs are often forced to deal with more frequent changes that tend to be more intense than experienced by non-MKs (Pollock 1998, 102).

ing for the missionary family. Many articles and books have been written in recent time to address these issues not only among missionary families, but with other third-culture adults and children as well.

Doris L. Walters (1991) deals specifically with the stresses that MKs feel in re-entry and furlough situations. According to the author, temporary furloughs are a time for the parents and children to rest and relax and present their ministry experiences to churches, schools and other supporters. Those who have experienced furloughs know that a furlough is anything but a "relaxing time" as children and adults reenter their passport countries and meet new people on a regular basis. While sharing one's experience in ministry to supporters can be encouraging to the missionary family, it is certainly not restful and is often perceived to be quite stressful

Those who have experienced furloughs know that a furlough is anything but a "relaxing time" as children and adults reenter their passport countries and meet new people on a regular basis.



sionary family makes when it comes to moves, transitions and even missional engagement.

The topic that follows is specific to issues that missionary children (regularly referred to as MKs or "missionary kids") face internationally and at home. While much could be said about protecting children or even helping young people adjust to new cross-cultural situations, the scope of

Some have described the MK lifestyle as nomadic and transitory. Just a few of the transitions that MKs must deal with are moving from home country to the mission field and a move from country to country or town to town (Larson 1998, 72). Other transitions include furloughs or ministry trips that involve leaving home for short periods of time or prolonged travels. All of these transitions can prove challeng-

for adults and children alike. There are significant cultural and logistical housing and transportation issues that the family must maneuver.²

Four cornerstones are identified as important for MKs successful adjustment during the process of adapting to a new situation (Larson 1998, 73). The first cornerstone is the parental relationship. Parents are encouraged to be in a good relationship and have

their eyes focused on Christ. This will help the child feel secure. A good relationship in most contexts includes an open relationship where dialogue, respect and love is common.

Secondly, the child must feel valued. The emotional perception must be there, it is not good enough for the parent to just value the child: the child must feel valued. This often occurs when children are given the opportunity to express themselves freely without criticism or judgment. This includes the care and respect shown to them by sending churches and mission boards. One child said, “The least we

This will become more fully developed in the pages that follow.

Another aspect that helps in transitions was noted by Dave Sanford. There must be a supportive community that understands your needs and can help with the transition. This would include both emotional and physical support. “There is an interdependency, a reciprocity within these supportive communities that helps us make our transitions” (1989, 107).

Another outstanding resource is found in the work of Susan Johnston. In her work on MKs the author pays special attention to Scripture. She

was distraught when she learned that they were going to return to the USA for furlough. Johnston says, “She saw it as death to her friends and all that she held dear” (2001, 423-424). She was only a second grader, but it was very difficult for her, comments Johnston. The situation became so serious that her parents found her an MK specialist. It turned out that she was scared because everyone was blonde and white in the US and she feared losing her mom and dad in a crowd (2001, 424). Whether the fears and concerns that MKs have about transitions, furloughs or other significant events in the mis-

There must be a supportive community that understands your needs and can help with the transition. This would include both emotional and physical support.



expect of people in the churches and at the Foreign Mission Board is that they care for us as much as they do our parents” (Walters 1991, ix). Children want to know that their parents and others consider their feelings and opinions as important.

Thirdly, the child must understand that what their family is doing is of importance. It must be perceived as something valuable. One way in which a child may understand this, is if they take ownership of the ministry and the reason why they live in a cross-cultural context. If they are simply told, “come along with us” there is little promise of ownership and participation in the mission endeavor.

And finally, there must be evidence of practical and persistent faith. The parents must demonstrate their faith in God and exemplify godly lives. This is critical to helping MKs understand their role in serving cross-culturally (Larson 1998, 73). In this paper I argue that children too must be given opportunities to practice their faith in accordance to their faith commitment as participants on the mission field.

applies a re-reading to the story of Joseph and the experience of change that he goes through in his young life. The experience that Joseph is forced to undergo, in some ways, is comparable to what MKs go through on a regular basis. Change is not easy! In the article, Johnston identifies some of the questions that MKs are asking: “Why do we have to be here?” “Why do you have to be missionaries?” “Why can’t we stay in the Philippines” (2001, 422)? Many of these questions undergird the need for young people to understand that they too are participants in the work. Perhaps an even more difficult issue lies in the fact that some, if not most MKs have not had the opportunity to participate and have a voice in the decision-making process. These and other issues will resurface as we engage with issues of child participation and the missionary family.

Johnston believes children should be prepared emotionally for the change that is to come in either going to the foreign field or reentering the home culture. In the article, she tells the story of her daughter Hannah. She

missionary family are of real concern or not, children cry out for opportunities to communicate and to participate in these decisions and many more.

Children in History

Children and childhood issues are a new development in historical writings. One of the issues researchers face in studying children is that there is very little written by children on their own history. There are virtually no primary sources from children to be accounted for. This is certainly true of the children of missionaries as well. Of what is in existence, most comes from adults about children. One source is missionary biographies. While helpful, missionary biographies are often written through the filters of adult missionaries. Missionary literature, like other historical studies appear to have failed to give children a voice in history. Some memoirs have been written in recent years which yield significant data about the lives of missionary children. Yet, in most cases, these are written by adults looking back upon their childhoods – helpful

– but lacking given the years that have passed and the fading of memories. All of this does not mean however, that such children did not speak up for themselves historically. Perhaps as Jesus said in Matthew 18:3³ “*Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven*” it is also accurate to say that we must become like little children to understand their voice in missionary history.

Children have communicated in history through a variety of ways. They have spoken to us through games (Opie and Opie 1959) and a variety of other ways, such as work (Levison 2000), consumption (Seiter 1993), and organized groups like *Juventud Obrera Católica* (Young Catholic Workers) (Swift 1997). While little is found on the children of missionary

available as primary sources for his research, Ariès approached art to interpret how children were perceived during that time. One of his greatest contributions is his description highlighting the belief that children were not omitted from the Middle Ages, but that they were portrayed as something distinct from how we understand children to be today (1962, 38). It was the very notion of childhood that was missing, not the children themselves.

Since the publication of Ariès’ work, a number of significant perspectives on childhood have developed within the social sciences.⁴ Chris Jenks, who has developed several interesting works focused on childhood issues, is understood to be one of the earlier sociologists to argue for a new understanding of childhood. These views on childhood differ from a child development

generational ethnocentrism where the adult perceives him or herself as superior to the child in every way.

The second perspective developed by Jenks is that of the “The ‘Natural’ Child.” This concept is “organized around the single most compelling metaphor of contemporary culture, that of ‘growth’” (1996, 4). Most people today perceive children in biological terms, that is, children are growing physiologically. Traditionally, childhood has been viewed from this biological point of view and less from a cultural understanding. It was only over time that some began to recognize that childhood might be perceived as different across time and space (James and Prout 1997, 12). Jenks argues that childhood is not just a biological issue. In most cultures of the world there are ceremonial events marking transitions

Missionary children are often perceived as children who are following their parents lead and learning what it means to be a Christian or even a missionary.



parents in mission historiography, other sources provide insight on the place that children played generally in history. A notable example is found in the work of Philippe Ariès.

In 1962 Ariès released a book entitled *Centuries of Childhood*. His research resulted in a seminal theory that altered the future writings of social scientists, historians and others. Ariès wrote primarily about concepts of childhood, including the very perception of childhood and how children were viewed in Western culture (1962, 10). Ariès’ most famous statement is that “in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist” (1962, 128). While this view has often been critiqued over the years, historians and others mostly agree about the basal nature of his work.

Given that very little research on children in the Middle Ages was

or socialization perspectives.⁵

Jenks presents three historical perspectives within the social sciences. **The first perspective is called “The Child as ‘Savage’” (1996, 4).** This notion is derived from the field of traditional evolutionist anthropology.⁶ Jenks comments on this perspective in saying that “a self-styled civilized person, simply ‘knew’ the savage to be different to himself, on a scale of advancement, and thus worthy of study; so we also, as rational adults, recognize the child as different, less developed, and in need of explanation” (1996, 4). This perspective, now viewed as paternalistic and positivist, naturally leads one to view the child as an object of inquiry and in need of protection as an inferior being. This point of view is paternalistic in the sense that it incorporates into itself a protectionist stance of superiority. Ultimately this could be described as

within childhood, not just based on physical dimensions (although it would be at great scholarly risk to conclude that physical development is not a facet of the change process within childhood) (1996, 7).

The third perspective is presented as “The ‘Social’ Child.” This paradigm for understanding childhood is described within the social sciences as a “becoming” and a shaping of children as individuals where “childhood receives treatment as a stage, a structured process of becoming, but rarely as a course of action or a coherent social practice” (1996, 9). While it might be connected to a biological understanding of childhood, this paradigm primarily concerns itself with the socialization aspects of childhood.

The ‘social child’ paradigm is often expressed by Christians who work with children – sometimes even missionary

children. Missionary children are often perceived as children who are following their parents lead and learning what it means to be a Christian or even a missionary. They are perceived as little people in process, yet who have a potential to become something great in due time. Cultural anthropology would describe this perspective in terms of enculturation. Enculturation concerns itself with the imparting of culture through a process where the child gains knowledge, develops skills, learns cultural values and attitudes which will help her or him become participating individuals in society and particular communities.

These views still influence social perceptions of children today. Including how we understand children in and outside of faith-based communities. While this section is primarily concerned with historical perspectives

as child agency here), the child is viewed as an active social agent who participates in society and is held in contrast to that of social determinism (James and James 2008, 122-123). This is not to say that children create their own reality, but rather it leads to the idea that within their world, they are bringing about change to society due their very existence. Even the homeless street child, who is often viewed with disdain and a mixture of pity, is understood to be someone who creates new ways of social interaction and change in society. As children, they impact our life and society by way of their agency. This is recognized in everyday actions, whether small or great. Children are bringing a new set of perspectives for what it means to live. This idea of children as social actors in society is often ignored within mission circles where MKs are concerned.

church, society and the home.

Traditionally in the Church, some have viewed children as immature people who are to be trained and brought into line with God's likeness. That is, it is the job of parents and other concerned Christians to follow Proverbs 22:6 and "train up a child in the way he should go" so that "when he is old, he will not depart from it" (KJV). Throughout history, the training philosophy of raising children has often served as a guide for parents and church leaders alike. Early Church father John Chrysostom provides a good example of this position. Chrysostom was of the belief that it was primarily the job of Christian parents who were to restore children to the likeness of God and by doing so they would refine the image of God in them (Guroian 2001, 68).

This study identifies that children of missionaries are understood tradi-

Scripture plays a significant role in helping us understand the place and participation of children in society.



on childhood, the study recognizes that history influences the present, and thus these generalized views feed into popular ways of understanding children today, including how churches, missionary boards and even parents engage with children of missionaries. With an understanding of past paradigms on childhood, the study now looks toward recent discussions on human agency, children in society and child-participation theories as alternative avenues for understanding children and their place within missionary circles.

Human Agency and the Missionary Child

Recently within the social sciences, the concept of human agency has pointed a way forward in our understanding of the participation of children within society and the home.⁷ In human agency (better understood

While the social sciences have been helpful in developing this understanding of social agents and more specifically the capabilities of children and young people, Scripture also plays a significant role in helping us understand the place and participation of children in society.

Human Agency in the Bible

One of the key insights we draw from Scripture is the *imago Dei* understanding that all human beings are created in God's image.⁸ Given the place of the *imago Dei*, it is difficult to escape the notion that children are individuals made in God's likeness and who create and act by contributing to the development of society and community. The issue of agency is an important one that ought to be understood theologically if there is to be an appropriate missiological understanding of MKs and their participation in

tionally as recipients of care only (in contrast of the view that highlights their agency), which requires adult role models who can provide them with instruction, protection and training, leaving little room for their active participation in decision making processes in the home or in ministry assignments. Agency, while now widely accepted within the social sciences, has seemingly received a slow reception by many Christian ministries concerned with MKs and other children in our communities.

What this topic on human agency adds to the conversation is an emerging theological component that will open the door to understanding the place of children as social actors within our mission communities and households. One would think that MKs in particular, given their role in families that are dedicated to the service of the kingdom, would easily be associated

with the idea that they, due to the image of God notion, are active participants in family and ministry matters. This paper presents the idea that they are no longer to be perceived via the lens of social theory that understands them only through savage, natural or social paradigms (see Jenks 1996, 4-9), but rather they be understood through a biblical lens that describes them also as social actors in life.

Biblical examples of children exerting agency have eluded many scholars for centuries. While it is appropriate to understand human agency as human phenomena within the social sciences, Scripture too must be part of the con-

forget; the scribes and priests being reprimanded by Jesus who focuses on the agency of children.

It was the action performed by the children that created the environment for Jesus' lesson and ultimately an active participation in the kingdom of God. There was no one coercing the children to act out, it was rather a spontaneous act fulfilling a prophetic word spoken by the Psalmist years ago. Jesus responds to the scribes by reminding them of a Hebrew passage they surely must have known: "*From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise*" (Ps. 8:2). The commentators, Walvoord and Zuck

stewards of creation and to "shape the world in imitation of the creator's own primordial activity on the first six days of creation" (Middleton 2005, 212). This includes all of humanity, children, adolescents and adults, regardless of disabilities, gender, age, ethnicity or color of skin. In this regard, "The use of *imago Dei* language in Genesis and elsewhere functions to . . . affirm the dignity and agency of all humanity" (Middleton 2005, 206). Children, based on this notion of human agency, are active in their own history-making as kingdom actors who are understood as equals in service to the King.

In the words of Jürgen Moltmann,

As Jesus is healing the "blind and the lame," the scribes and chief priests scorn Jesus in response to the declaration that the children are making: "Hosanna to the son of David."



versation in order to fully develop a missiological foundation for a more integrated participation of children in the missionary family.

One biblical passage that highlights the place of child agency in Scripture is found in the book of Matthew:

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise" (21:14-16)?

In a fascinating turn of events, children are seen taking center stage in the proclamation of Christ as Messiah. As Jesus is healing the "blind and the lame," the scribes and chief priests scorn Jesus in response to the declaration that the children are making: "Hosanna to the son of David." Children here are presented as active participants in the kingdom of God. It was a moment the crowds will never

contend that "by receiving their praise, Jesus was declaring he was worthy of praise as their Messiah" (1989, 69). This was not a situation where children were simply patted on the head and told "nice try," No! Jesus accepts the designation of the Messiah as a result of this act by children (Gundry-Volf 2001, 46-47). In this passage, it is the children themselves that are actively proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah, the hope of Israel. And it was the children, the "untrained in religious matters and the least likely to play this role, [that] in fact take it up" (2001, 47). The children, in actively taking up this role, choose to become active participants not only in society, but in the kingdom of God as well.

Human Agency and Transformation

Passages focusing on the *imago Dei* are linked together with passages like Matthew 21:14-16 in demonstrating that human beings are entrusted with a special power to create history, be good

"As his image, human beings represent God on earth; as his *similitude*, they reflect him" (1993, 219). If they reflect God, they too inherently have the ability to create. The act of creation is naturally a God mirrored performance that humans (and all children regardless of age) encompass. Middleton concurs that "essential to the meaning of the image in Genesis Chapter 1 is the dynamic power or agency that God grants humans at creation" (2005, 205). This ability to create and act, that Moltmann and Middleton refer to, plays an essential part in transforming social realities. Children, as they create and act, can contribute to transformation in society and within ministries. This is very significant for MKs who, while they are understood by supporting churches and mission boards to be active in their parent's ministries, should be supported in their own efforts to bring change and act within their own spheres of influence. What results when children are dismissed, because of their age, by

churches, mission agencies or even parents, is a form of powerlessness that brings despair and negative emotional responses. When children are denied a role in acts of creation and transformation they can develop a sense of hopelessness that sometimes results in anti-social behaviors.⁹ Realizing aspirations, or from a theological perspective, the creative act of realizing a God given asset, is an essential step towards empowering young people.¹⁰

Children are rightly recognized as some of the most vulnerable people in society. It is recommended that advocates for MKs call for a new empowerment of these children. This should comprise of a new focus on including children in decisions that affect their involvement in ministry and other significant issues like the timing of a move and furloughs.

Child Participation and Missionary Children

Based on these new understandings mentioned above, new models for MK participation will result in creating

that even those living in marginalized contexts are capable of participating at all levels in society – including in the development of organizational policies (1992, 7).¹¹ In saying this, it is not suggested that institutions or parents should relinquish their authority or not establish rules and appropriately discipline children, but rather it points to the need to invite children to help design and take ownership of ministries in cross-cultural contexts. This will result in better informed missionary children who are more active in fulfilling the family's role in missions.

Another helpful approach comes from the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire is best known for the dialogical relationship in current pedagogical theory. This notion is contrasted to what he refers to as a banking education approach (2003, 91). Banking education primarily defines education as top-down pedagogy where information and directions are deposited into the brain of a child with very little critical analysis or processing of the importance of such information.

all have something to learn from one another, thus increasing the potential for a more meaningful approach to fulfilling a family's mission objectives.

In addition to a more thorough understanding of a family's vision for ministry, children and adults are encouraged to focus on problem solving. Problem solving includes the place of discovering solutions to common issues such as ministry opportunities, the need to move to a new geographical location due to a furlough and discerning God's guidance in any given situation. These all become issues that can be discussed in family forums and among mission leadership.

As children and youth progress in their knowledge of God's mission and their own development and maturing, their active participation should be encouraged from passive participation to energetic involvement. In applying Hart's participatory theory to MKs and their involvement in church and society, it would be advisable to consider a progressive approach, where children and youth

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open-space for deeper conversations that include young people in the major decision-making processes in life. Some of these models will lead to further relinquished control by adults, through facilitation and mentoring models, resulting in increased voice and participation for children and young people.

Roger Hart and his work on child participation is an important foundational advancement to encouraging all children as active participants in Christian ministries (including the mission field). While written specifically for projects working with children in poverty, Hart recognizes

In contrast to banking education, the dialogical relationship is an important step in the formation of children as social actors who are increasingly looked to in decision-making processes. Freire's work, when implemented in our own context, calls for dialogue that transcends a simple list of rules or orders and converts into allowing for more participation on behalf of MKs and others who play an important role in missional engagement. When this becomes part of the overall communication strategy between parents, mission leaders and child participants, it results in an acknowledgment they

are mentored and guided from limited participation (due to age and maturity levels) to full-participation in family decisions. Mission boards, churches or even parents should not arrive at this point without preparing themselves to listen and to trust the capabilities of the young people themselves. There will come a time when the child or adolescent is ready to become actively involved on all levels if they choose to be. Increased participation will lead to increased responsibility. This type of participation should be encouraged. Parents and those in mission leadership should take into account

basic child development and maturity levels as participation increases. I am not suggesting that we expect a very young child to plan and implement a complex mission project, but rather we move towards the child/youth led participation in accordance with their level of maturity and development. As we recognize developmental differences between those children in early childhood stages, middle and those of adolescence, new opportunities will arise for involvement. Perhaps for a young child in his or her early years, decision-making might include what to take to the field or what not to take. During these early stages, it might be as simple as encouraging our children to participate by choosing their toys or other things to take with them.

As children grow and mature, more significant participation should be included in major family decisions.

shouldn't we. On one occasion, when moving from Venezuela where our children were born, to the USA for study leave, we allowed our children to choose which stuffed animals to take (as you can imagine we ended up with far more than we would have chosen for them) and other issues like choice of other toys and important items to them. This was an important decision making process for them. This will look different for those who are considering a move with middle-aged children or adolescents.

In acknowledging their place as subjects, rather than objects who have no voice, we are declaring that children and young people also have something to teach us as parents, mission leaders and agencies. As was noted earlier, it was Jesus who recognized the important role that children play in the kingdom as he looked to the book of

us to churches we would visit while on furlough. They were not forced to attend, but often enjoyed interacting with old and new friends alike. On one occasion, they were so excited about a church visit they decided to hand out all of our prayer photo cards with an accompanying appeal letter to every church attendee. As they raced around the foyer handing out our information I couldn't help but notice the enthusiasm and joy they had as they participated in this church visit. They were very excited about the part they played in our family's role in the service. Not only did they do a great job connecting with potential supporters, but they helped people understand God's concern for the Great Commission.

So back to the story about our Costa Rican dog Bella. After several family forums we decided to bring Bella to

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This becomes very important as children enter into adolescence. It is at this stage where young people should play a significant part in all family decisions. This might even include decisions to move to a particular field or not. Each family will have to make many of these decisions together and find appropriate ways for children and adolescents to be involved in a variety of choices concerning their family's future. Based on the research, it is highly recommended that older children and youth have significant opportunities to make decisions within the family unit.

Our family has made several international moves to distinct locations. When our children were younger, it was not possible to involve them in questions of should we move, or

Psalms (8:2) to support the sporadic declaration by children that he was indeed the Messiah (Matthew 21:15). If Jesus permitted the participation of children, why don't we?

In many cases, children and adolescents desire to be a part of the Great Commission. Children and young people, if given a chance, will provide insights that those of riper years fail to understand. My own children have certainly spoken into the life of my wife and mine many times. On occasion this has included helping us to see the need to address certain issues as a family, including where to stay while on furlough and what churches to visit. One particular church visit stands out to me. We often gave our children the opportunity to go with

the United States. Our children were right. In their words, "she is a part of our family," and has proven to be a connecting piece, linking our time in Costa Rica with our new lives in the United States. Whether it is something as simple as making a decision about bringing a pet or a more significant choice about country location and ministry opportunities, children and young people desire to be participants in the missionary family and cross-cultural ministries around the world.

Endnotes

1. While acknowledging the budding field of study on third-culture kids (TCKs) and cross-cultural children (CCCs), the primary focus of this paper is on MKs. Others, such as those with diplomatic ties, humanitarian aid or international business connections can also

benefit from this discussion.

2. In her research, Walters contacted two hundred MKs and sent them questionnaires. Eighty-five responded to the questionnaire. In order to validate the responses the author received from the eighty-five respondents, she performed seven additional interviews with children of missionaries. As a result of her interviews and questionnaires, some MKs shared that being home on furlough was the worst part of being an MK. They said they felt like “outsiders.” Some of those interviewed described their time on furlough as “sad” and “lonely.” Even others described their furloughs as a “traumatic experience” (1991, 8). One MK, upon being interviewed, said “furlough was traumatic with a capital T! I never wanted to tell my peers at school that I was a missionary kid because they would look at me funny and start watching my every move” (1991, 9).

3. All Scripture references taken from Today’s New International Version unless otherwise noted.

4. In addition to what is presented here, other views, primarily from developmental psychology and psychoanalysis, are presented by Allison, Jenks and Prout. The authors trace out an historical understanding of different concepts concerning childhood. These perspectives are entitled: (1) The evil child, (2) the innocent child, (3) the immanent child, (4) the naturally developing child, and finally, (5) the unconscious child. For more on these pre-sociological understandings see James, Jenks and Prout (1998, 10-20).

5. For an early foundational work on this topic see Jenks (1982).

6. It is perceived as evolutionist because of the suggestion that society evolves. Anthony Giddens suggests that the evolutionist position, as seen in functionalism “has looked particularly towards biology as the science providing the closest and most compatible model for social science” (1984, 1). The reason why biology is modeled upon is that it is believed that social systems are guided best by biology in helping to conceptualize adaptation in society, as seen in evolution.

7. An early understanding of human agency is connected to the work of Edward Palmer Thompson. Agency is described as a conscious effort to create history and to bring about change in that very history (1963, 12). The idea that humans can bring about change and create is essential to Thompson’s definition of human agency. Sociologist Margaret S. Archer presents the idea of human agency by noting the emphasis of ‘being’ over and above that of ‘action.’ Archer identifies agency as the ability “to make a difference.” The overall emphasis in Archer’s understanding is on ‘being’ rather than ‘doing’ (1995, 18). Archer theorizes that children are recognized as agents through their being. 8. In addition to key biblical passages like

Genesis 1:26; 9:6 and James 3:9, additional passages in the New Testament, identifying the image of God within a Christological context, are John 1:1-5, 2; Corinthians 4:4-6; and Colossians 1:15-23. The implications of this Christological understanding of the image is that “Christ is the image of God in the ultimate sense...and is the divine image in that he is the one who reveals to us the glory of God” (Grenz 1994, 176).

9. This is not to say that all children and young people will not struggle with adjustments and transitions, rather, by empowering them in their roles and lives as MKs, they are now given the opportunity to participate in kingdom activities where their participation will bring a new sense of purpose to their lives.

10. Traditionally, power is described as the “capacity of some persons within a social relationship to be in a position to carry out their own will toward creating intended and foreseen effects on others despite resistance” (Christian 1999, 11). Scripture advocates a different understanding of power that involves the creative action of the child and adult in fulfilling their God-given ability to speak into issues of justice and righteousness in society.

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Greg W. Burch (Ph.D.) is the department chair of Intercultural Studies and director of the Global Development and Justice M.A. program at Multnomah University. He served in Latin America alongside his wife and children for nearly a decade and is author of the book Community Children (2005) and other writings on mission and international development subjects.

Christianity and Animism in Melanesia: Four Approaches to Gospel and Culture

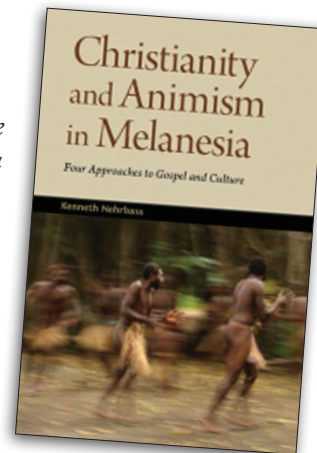
By *Kenneth Nehrbass*, Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey, 2012. xx, 225 pp, paper, \$11.99.

—Reviewed by *Graeme J. Humble* (Dr. of Intercultural Studies). Graeme Humble has studied Melanesian missiology since 1986 and is currently a Senior Lecturer in the School of Theology at Pacific Adventist University in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

Nehrbass' book is a welcome addition to the missiological literature on the interaction between traditional religion and Christianity in the Pacific. My long experience with ministry in Papua New Guinea drew me to immediately order this book as soon as it was available. I have not been disappointed. Nehrbass addresses the thorny issues that missionaries face in ministry to traditional societies—the relationship between customary beliefs

son, MS, and department chair of the International Studies Department. He has published missiological articles in *Missiology* (2011), *Melanesian Journal of Theology* (2011) and *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (2012).

The book's first section, "Biblical and Anthropological Models of Animism," consists of two chapters: a brief resume of Biblical and early church responses



PNG traditional quest for *gutpela sindaun*—"the abundant life or life in all its fullness" (chapter 5); the process for repairing badness through shamanistic activity based on traditional understandings of causation of misfortune and sickness (chapter 6); the ethics of retribution and taboos, particularly as they relate to the life of the clan group (chapter 7);

the phenomena of cargo cults due to the confluence of traditional epistemology and aspirations, together with reactions to western colonial and mission influences (chapter 8); and

NEHRBASS ADDRESSES THE THORNY ISSUES that missionaries face in ministry to traditional societies—the relationship between customary beliefs (which he calls *kastom*) and Christianity.

(which he calls *kastom*) and Christianity. His ethnographic methodology draws rich cultural data from the Pacific island of Tanna in Vanuatu, that in turn serves as an excellent case study for "missionaries wish[ing] to transform the worldview of people from animistic backgrounds" (25) in other areas of the world.

Kenneth Nehrbass worked as an anthropological and translation consultant for the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Vanuatu, and also taught theological courses at various institutions across that nation. He is currently an assistant professor of International Studies at Belhaven University in Jack-

son, MS, and department chair of the International Studies Department. He has published missiological articles in *Missiology* (2011), *Melanesian Journal of Theology* (2011) and *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (2012).

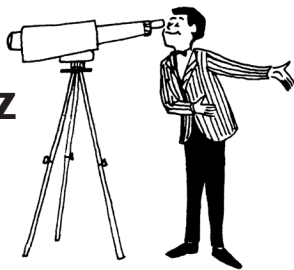
Part 2, "Kastom on Tanna" (chapters 3-9), investigates various key aspects of traditional belief on Tanna such as: the relationship between myth and traditional knowledge (chapter 3); beliefs in ghosts and spirits with concomitant insights into Tannese cosmology (chapter 4); the interaction between magic (or *mana*) in the quest for goodness—"health, peace, abundant crops" (49), which, as an aside, resonates with the

the place of rituals in establishing and maintaining relationships within Tannese society (chapter 9).

In Part 3, "Kastom and Christianity on Tanna," Nehrbass discusses the interface between traditional Tannese religion and Christianity in its various historical manifestations, noting in particular the missions' attitudes toward *kastom* and the divergent missiological models they employed in the evangelization process (chapter 10). Within this context, Nehrbass' field research draws the reader into his investigation of current attitudes of Tannese churchgoers toward *kastom*. Using the two

Continued on page 19

As seen
through
the **LENZ**



Our last annual EMS conference emphasized the missionary family. The two papers presented at regional conferences regarding this theme are published in this edition of the *Occasional Bulletin*. Both Kara Githens and Greg Burch do an excellent job in presenting the various struggles of both missionary parents and children, and the proposed solutions to overcome

these struggles. Most readers who have had missionary overseas service will identify easily with these challenges. But for those who are in process of going abroad, or for churches who support missionaries and want to be alert to missionary care in coming alongside of workers who are facing or will face these struggles, this edition of *OB* should be kept on file for future reference.

Ken Nehrbass' book *Christianity and Animism in Melanesia* as reviewed by Graeme Humble is an excellent introduction to the challenges of understanding a primitive culture and world view in the Pacific region of the world. We are pleased to recommend this book to our readership.

—Bob Lenz, editor

Continued from page 18

theoretical models that emerged from his field-work—the gospel-response axis and the cultural-integration axis (chapters 11 and 12), Nehrbass posits a matrix of individuals and churches on a gospel/culture grid that plots the degree to which they have contextualized the gospel and reacted to animism: mixers, transplanners, contextualizers and separators (chapter 13).

My main critique of Nehrbass' work does not revolve around the content, which is superb in its coverage of the traditional issues that Christianity encounters as it interfaces with animism. The contextualization grid is also a most useful tool for denominational leaders or church planters in self analyzing their approach to mission. The main concern that presents itself is the organizational style of the book. A number of chapters consist of only 3-4 pages and could easily be combined as sections in a larger chapter. Of particular concern, the first chapter, which establishes the Biblical base of the study, was relatively scant in content. Considering that this study focused on Christianity and animism, this reviewer felt that the biblical and

theological issues should have received more attention and drawn on a wider variety of primary sources instead of a heavy reliance on McDermott as a secondary source. Future editions also might do well to reconsider the use of the term "Melanesia" in the title, as Tanna represents only a very small part of that vast area of the Pacific.

Despite these structural peccadilloes I have no hesitation in recommending this book to academics, mission practitioners and local church leaders alike, both in Melanesia and further afield. It is a gold mine of cultural content and mission methodology for missiologists, missionaries and members of the body of Christ who are endeavoring to understand the worldview values of animistic peoples in order to assist them in becoming disciples of Jesus Christ within their own cultural contexts.