

Jonathan J. Bonk. ed. *Family Accountability in Missions: Korean and Western Case Studies* (New Haven, CT: OMSC Publications, 2013). 326 pp. ISBN: 0-9762205-6-3.

A careful reading of this book plunged me into a trance, which I was not able to get out of easily. It so closely reflected my life as a missionary and as a father of a Baguio-born son in the Philippines. Each chapter I visited evoked memories that made me laugh, cry and feel heartbroken. Because of my sense of empathy, it was very difficult for me to criticize the issues of other missionaries. Rather, I appreciated their great efforts on the mission field; their experiences could be mine. The agenda they discussed was all about family responsibility, which is the most important for parents. That responsibility, particularly in a foreign land, ought to be taken more fully into consideration because the missionary family is more vulnerable.

It is worthwhile to look closely at the contour of this well-organized book, which contains a variety of case studies and experiences from long-term missionaries. It is unique in that it explores issues very effectively by using the various genres of biography, Bible study, sermon, testimony, interview, survey, analysis, statistics, and dialogue.

Chapters 1-2 and 6-27 deal with the following twelve issues— (1) missionary families then and now, (2) Korean culture and English language, (3) third-culture children, (4) the education of missionary children, (5) the provision of education for the children, (6) the relationship between the church and the missionary family, (7) American policy between the church and the missionary family, (8) Korean mission financing, (9) mental and emotional health, (10) family resilience, (11) Korean missionary families and retirement, and (12) American missionary families and retirement. Chapters 3-5 deal with missionary family, missionary marriage, and missionary children in terms of biblical principles on family responsibility. Chapter 28 presents a summary of suggestions regarding financial support, family matters, awareness of multi-cultural contexts, multiple responsibilities, and trust in God, with the writers pointing out the weaknesses of their past experiences and then proposing alternatives for improvement. The book also includes addenda covering three subjects for practical information—Korean missionary children's educational needs, a Korean missionary retirement survey, and the care of missionary kids.

The twelve issues enumerated above are addressed in the form of a dialogue between presenters and respondents. I have summarized the substance of each of them as follows:

Issue 1 (1-2). A biography of a Korean missionary family in the past and present chronicles many episodes that happened on the field between the parents and children, focusing primarily on the children's education. As their response, a Canadian missionary couple, feeling sympathy with what is common to many families serving cross-culturally, suggest that time prioritization is an important factor relative to cultural differences and how they relate to children's education.

Issue 2 (6-7). The presenter emphasizes that children's education for English language and other culture should involve the parents to a greater degree in order to sustain their home culture and identity and that the children should learn to appreciate the diversity in the world and the complexity of local identities. The respondent applauds the fact that children can become global Christians embracing both East and West and offers a positive impact on the world challenges.

Issue 3 (8-9). In the initial stage, the reentry of bi-lingual or bi-cultural (multi-lingual or multi-cultural) children to their home culture causes cultural shock and the transition takes time to be familiarized. However, this reentry is considered an advantage when bi- or multi-lingualism demonstrates a wide range of cognitive development and cultural consolidation is achieved.

Issue 4 (10-11). The presentation points out the importance of a proper education for the children, proposing that both mission agencies and the church should cooperate to make an excellent educational system and support the scholarship. The response agrees with those suggestions and compliments a radical education system (*i.e.*, homeschooling), which is against Korean ethos.

Issue 5 (12-13). Here the presenter, after providing a brief historical survey of the educational systems that missionaries in the last half century chose for their children, feels that the parents should help their children in choosing the proper system (*e.g.*, homeschooling, national schools, online programs, or boarding school). The respondent, agreeing that there are opportunities for choosing the educational system, suggests rather that MK parents

should take the initiative to educate their children, considering which educational system would be the most appropriate for them.

Issue 6 (14-15). Two concerns are raised in relation to the education of children and married life, the former being its high cost and the latter fueling stress, burnout, or depression; in this case, the church should offer both understanding and professional assistance. The respondent, complimenting in his discussion that the case is a good testimony, proposes that an established agency is to provide professional supervision on the field as a partner for the missionary team.

Issue 7 (16-17). Shared is the story about a particular church (Park Street Church) in America that experienced a radical change from apathy to enthusiastic support for missions, two of the results being that it made a full-support missionary policy and ensured the long-term mutual accountability. The respondent encourages the leadership of the church that took these bold policy for secure missionary work and accountability steps for making upgrades in effective mission.

Issue 8 (18-19). Emphasizing that high-quality financial support is necessary for a missionary family's well-being, because it is an investment which is of great value, the presenter addresses these two issues—preparation of future mission and alleviation of the future suffering of the missionaries, which should be dealt with missionaries, mission agencies, and supporting churches. The respondent, agreeing with the presentation, summarizes the issue in his own words.

Issue 9 (20-21). Addressing the significance of member care, the presenter cites results of a survey that proposes the Korean style of passion and self-sacrifice for missions can actually contribute to the problem of inadequate member care. His 'solution' includes the need for multiple sources of support, such as counseling and mental health services. The respondent adds that member care should start at home and be continued in the host country.

Issue 10 (22-23). The presenter shares the many lessons he learned through a bad experience caused his mission agency which resulted in severe hardship for his family. While such is not a common thing, an awareness of financial management needs to be considered to ensure the stability of family life. The respondent offers three suggestions to further undergird family resilience—

teaching how to normalize, teaching how to communicate a matter, and providing counsel.

Issue 11 (24-25). The presenter's claim is that retirement is one of the important issues in which accountability is needed, yet the situation in which he is now is not adequate in dealing with this problem, given the present decline in the economic and social climate. The respondent affirms that this is not a simple issue because it depends on what the individual may face, and that too many missionaries are not adequately prepared for this impending reality. Thus, providing a retirement plan is considered imperative.

Issue 12 (26-27). Presenting six cases studies, which are of one retired individual, two churches, and three missions agencies in North America, shows diverse plans and approaches to retirement in North America. The principles presented at the end of each case study are helpful for the understanding the general trend of how retirement of missionaries is handled. In general, churches in North America are categorized into two groups of continual support or no support; mission agencies are trying to help retire missionaries with possible plans and resources. But most of Korean missionaries, though yet young to retire, are aware of the necessity of preparing secure plan and system in the near future, surveying the Western policy.

Family Accountability in Missions deals chiefly with case studies of Korean missionary families, which begs the question—Can this book serve as a general guide for new Asian and Western missionaries? I submit that the answer is affirmative. First, the agenda of this forum was all about the family issues, particularly the children's. Although some issues are perhaps unique to Koreans, many of the others are common to all families. The attitude that Korean missionary parents showed toward their children's well-being is the same with all missionary parents. For example, both Asian and Western missionaries encounter problems, such as when the children suffer cultural shock, racial differences, or identity crisis (49-50). Secondly, it is an international Christian community in that the forum participants got involved with the presentations and the responses. The striking thing was that the cross-cultural dialogue produced no criticisms or arguments. Thirdly, the questions raised through the case studies in this research are expected to facilitate general applications for many missionaries. Those questions make the readers think and reflect on

similar situations they may face or discuss possible solutions for the different problems. Fourthly, Korean missionaries follow the same experience as Western ones. "Today, Korean missionaries often repeat the 'old days' experience of Western missionaries." (190) One of their experiences included the family accountability accompanying the issues. New missionaries can learn much from reading a lot of case studies on the same agenda dealt with in both Korean and non-Korean (*i.e.*, other Asian, American, and Western) missionary lives.

It is high time to appreciate the work of foreign missionaries to Korea (particularly Americans), because of the growth that Korean churches have experienced. "Missionaries to Korea set a remarkable example of self-sacrifice, even to the point of giving their lives, and of relentlessly planting churches everywhere they went. These foreigners kindled a passion for the gospel that Koreans are now taking to the mission field." (154) In fact, Korean missionaries are known for their passion and self-sacrifice, that nation now sending more missionaries than any other country—over 25,000. Korean churches spend more than a half billion U.S. dollars annually on world missions. Although Korean missions just started in the early 1980s, it has gone through many trials. "The young Korean mission movement has already experienced the same range of problems that modern Western Protestant missions have encountered since their inception more than two centuries ago." (226)

A young child tumbles over and over again in learning to walk properly. It is like growing pains that every adult has experienced. What matters is to know the problem first and then to find a solution. I assume that Korean churches have already found it, and now the implementation is following. This dialogue is an evidence of even greater improvement.

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