

‘Material Provision’ or Preaching the Gospel, Reconsidering ‘Holistic’ (Integral) Mission.

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Synopsis

Differences in understanding of ‘holistic mission’ between West and non-West, discovered by the application of pragmatic linguistic insights, are shown to be causing serious problems in its implementation. Solutions proposed including missionary ‘poverty’ in ministry and use of local languages in addition to traditional anti-dependency measures, imply the need for revision in current Western missionary practice.

I Transition to Holistic Mission

We 'cannot properly help a person ... while disregarding his or her ... material or bodily needs ...' and 'merely' preaching the Gospel is a 'misunderstanding of God's purpose' says Rene Padilla as part of an occasional paper of the 2004 Forum for World Evangelization, hosted by the Lausanne movement at Pattya, Thailand. Padilla cites the well known British theologian John Stott in his support. However, Glenn Schwartz rings warning bells by pointing out that current mission activities create unhealthy dependency. He is 'working hard to encourage church leaders, particularly in Africa and America, to stand on their own two feet and to discover the joy of breaking out of the stranglehold of dependency.' These two approaches are quite different from each other and it must be asked if these authors have realised that their strategies are inadvertently at loggerheads? Is there any resolution to these differences and what is the way forward in mission?

Christopher Little explains how the parting of the ways in the evangelical Christian church occurred following disagreement between those who advocated the ‘horizontal’ (relationships with men) as against the ‘vertical’ (relationship with God) roles of the church.¹ According to Little the evangelical wing of the church turned to follow a more horizontal direction in the early 1970s – represented especially by a ‘change of mind’ at the Lausanne convention in 1974.² For Little, this represents an abandoning of the legitimate role of the church in the world as after all ‘... the deepest impoverished state a person can suffer is alienation from God and therefore the greatest demonstration of his compassion is the remedy for this plight’.³

¹ Christopher Little, ‘What Makes Mission Christian?’ pp. 78-87 In: *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*. January 2006. Volume 42, No. 1.

² Little, ‘What Makes.’ p. 79.

³ Little, ‘What Makes.’ p. 85.

Underlying this switch in emphasis, I suggest, is the current state of ideology in Western nations. Western Christians are influenced by an academia that has for centuries denied the role of God in human lives. Christians living in the West should be acutely aware that they see the world through tinted spectacles, with blinkers barring from view significant aspects of the nature of people and the nature of God as understood in the majority world.

Appeals for cultural sensitivity by Western nations relating to the non-West seem increasingly to fall on deaf ears. Reasons for this include: First. Increasing emphasis on *short-term* mission meaning shrinking opportunities for learning cultures and languages. Second. The end of the cold war and the ever rising confidence of the West in its own capabilities has reduced the need for cultural sensitivity. Third. The rise of the internet and global communication in general enables geographically isolated communities to continue to relate closely to their societies of origin, thus reducing the need to identify with a foreign (non-Western) people even if a Westerner is living among them.

Even should the more experienced advise new missionaries to learn language and take a more accommodating and understanding approach to the culture they are meeting, new workers often ignore this. They are not looking at a clean-slate scenario of 'untouched people', but a legacy of repeated expressions of a lack of cultural knowledge by their predecessors. Some African people, having given up hope of being understood by Westerners, are becoming less willing to be open, if only to minimise damage in sensitive areas (which is many areas) of church and community life.⁴

The West's perception of international concerns is narrowing as a result of its operating from an ever shrinking pre-suppositional base.⁵ Mission emphasis today is on short-term involvement providing technical assistance. Those who consider these issues to be neutral to broader theological or ecclesial issues in Africa are unfortunately misguided for at least two reasons: First. African religion is rooted in a search for power, including financial power, so projects with outside funding become part of how Christianity (or other 'religion') is understood in Africa. They are not seen as 'extra's' to the church, because there is no extra space beyond the category of 'religion' that can be occupied by 'secularism' as is the case in the West. (This is a part of what it means to be 'holistic'.) Second. Relatively poor locally funded African church budgets are often dwarfed by ambitious schemes funded and administered from abroad.

Central to this article, is the understanding that word meanings, including the meaning of the term holistic itself, arise from the context of their use. In parts of the world where the dominant worldview is secular, it means that the Gospel is to be presented in hand with finance and technology to improve people's lives. In parts of the world

⁴ Jim Harries, 'Language in Education, Mission and Development in Africa: Appeals for Local Tongues and Local Contexts.' *Encounters Mission Ezine.* Issue 19 August 2007. http://www.redcliffe.org/uploads/documents/Language_in_Education_19.pdf accessed 10 Oct. 2007.

⁵ One reason the 'pre-suppositional base' is shrinking, I propose, is because inputs from outside of the West are increasingly being presented in Western languages, so obviating the need for Westerners to consider the loss of detail incurred in the course of translation.

where the worldview is ‘magical’, it means that the Gospel is accompanied with ‘magical’ powers to improve people’s lives. (I acknowledge that the term ‘magic’ is very difficult to define or translate. Numerous anthropological accounts of African people point to their dependence on ancestral spirits, witchcraft, vital forces, mystical powers and so on, that I here refer to as ‘magic’.⁶) One people’s science becomes another’s magic.⁷

II Biblical Background

I include this opening section on the Bible, to indicate clearly what Western advocates of holistic mission seem to ignore – that God’s Word in the Bible is not spread hand in hand with projects, finance, aid or technology.

It was an amazing feat for Noah to build an ark that was to carry a multitude of animals and marked a new beginning for mankind. After Noah, God chose Abraham to be his faithful follower.⁸ Abraham, as Noah, was not without his failings. He managed to acquire wealth from Egypt then Abimelech by telling lies about his wife.⁹ Whether it was right or not for him to make Hagar pregnant has been debated ever since. God chose Abraham’s second born son to be the son of promise. He was to have 12 (male) grandchildren through his youngest son, that went on to be known as the founders of the tribe of Israel. The Bible tells us much about the course of these 12 tribes through history. At times success, and then many times disappointment when the people failed to heed God’s word. Jacob and his sons were taken to Egypt, then their descendents left again under the leadership of Moses, (see the book of Exodus) but despite periods of great prosperity under kings like David, they were later again taken into exile. Many of the tribes disappeared from the subsequent historical record. Yet, through God’s amazing grace and power, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin came to be known as the Jews and have maintained their ethnic identity up to today.

Perhaps out of frustration with the failings of those who were specially called by God (by then known as the Jews),¹⁰ God chose to extend his salvation plan to the whole earth through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus known as the Christ or the ‘anointed one’. Jesus succumbed to the wrath of his fellow Jews resulting in his cruel crucifixion at the age of only 33 after a few years of itinerant ministry within the confines of Judah, Samaria and Galilee.¹¹ As well as a teacher of God’s profound truths Jesus was a miracle worker and had a heart of love greater than any other man before or after him. This love was demonstrated in the ways that he interacted with those around him, culminating in his shameful (from a human point of view) death. Never having risen to political fame or having vast quantities of earthly wealth, Jesus nevertheless acquired great renown because, Christians believe up to today, he is God incarnate. His followers continued his ministry after being filled by Godly power,

⁶ See: Jim Harries, 'The Magical Worldview in the African Church: what is going on?' *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXIV, No. 4, October 2000. pp. 487-502.

⁷ It should be clear that asking an African person ‘do you believe in magic?’ is not a valid test for this thesis, both because people will understand the term ‘magic’ in different ways, and as they will respond in respect to particular agendas.

⁸ Genesis 9-12.

⁹ Genesis 12:10-20 and Genesis 20:1-18.

¹⁰ Romans 9.

¹¹ See the Gospels.

resulting in the existence of bodies of believers around the world up to today known as the *ecclesia* or church. Up to now those in the church, colloquially known as ‘Christians’, continue to follow the example of Jesus and proclaim his teachings around the globe.

Some years after the life and ministry of Christ and his disciples Christian writings were gathered together with what had become the Jewish canon of Scriptures to form the Bible, as it is today. That Bible remains the written text that guides and inspires Christians. The words contained in it are considered uniquely inspired by God himself to provide counsel in all areas of life. Ever since, and even before the canon was closed, Christians have been challenged to know just how to interpret the Bible. This has become a particularly critical issue since the Reformation in 16th Century Europe resulted in the formation of the Protestant church whose numbers include the World Evangelical Alliance and churches affiliated to it.

Even modern translations of the Bible do not mention many things that have become a normal part of day to day life by many in the English speaking world. Especially technological things, things arising from science and from more recent thinking about society and the nature of man. There is no overt mention of electricity, of vehicles, of rockets or telescopes, even of strategies, programmes or projects in the modern sense. The Bible does not advocate hospital medicine or primary and secondary schooling, formal universities are not discussed or referred to, pensions are not even alluded to, neither is formal insurance in case of theft, damage or death. The Scriptures rarely even mention countries outside of the Eastern Mediterranean basin and seem not to anticipate that one day there will be nuclear power, space travel or x-rays as a means of examining one’s teeth. Terms (and concepts) such as bureaucracy, socialism, capitalism, development, AIDs and sustainability are not found in the Bible.

Every generation of Christians looks to the Bible for answers to questions as to how they ought to live. They attempt to understand the Scriptures through the guidance of God the Holy Spirit. They want to do the will of God. I am here trying to point out that knowing the will of God is no straightforward mechanical task. God has not left us with closely defined instructions in a legal document. In the current globalising world, questions on what to do and how are more pressing than ever – as certain people in the globe find themselves with the technological means and powers to influence the lives of others on a hitherto unknown scale. How are they to know the will of God in this circumstance?

The practice of Jesus himself could support diverse positions in this regard. How did he respond to people who he met? Does Jesus’ healing many sick people justify Western medical projects as part of Christian mission today? Does Jesus’ feeding 5,000 set an example for us to follow, or in the light of the response of those who he fed,¹² is it teaching us *not* to feed people, as Jesus’ temptations strongly imply?¹³ The words that people find on studying the Bible have to come out of their own cultures.¹⁴ It has often been suggested that people read out of the Bible what they want to,

¹² John Chapter 6.

¹³ Luke 4:1-13.

¹⁴ See Jim Harries, ‘Pragmatic Linguistics applied to Translation, Projects and Inter-cultural Relationships for Frontier Missionaries (not only for Bible translators): an African focus.’ <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/articles/pragmatic-linguistics.html> accessed 12th Jan 2008.

although that is not entirely true. I arrive at the positions that I do from the context of what I believe to be a life of commitment and sacrifice in God's service, guided by his Word and lead by his Spirit.¹⁵

III Power in the Church

Personal observation (in Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia) has taught me that donors offering finance and material to the Third World (African) church thereby acquire power to influence the church concerned. I have considered this in more detail elsewhere.¹⁶ An offer of aid is like a trap that recipients cannot usually avoid. This is particularly true in contexts of 'poverty' in which the extended family is powerful, and in which needs for finance are increasingly being advocated (such as education, health, the need to have things and so on) as is happening as the 'poor' world is being incorporated in the globalising process. That is to say – because a leader's refusal to accept assistance that has been offered will undermine his/her authority, s/he can be forced to accept an offer of help in order to maintain popularity even if knowing that the overall impact of the assistance will not be to the people's advantage. Thus a receiver, at least in Africa, generally cannot avoid putting him/herself into a position of dependence, even if they are aware that this is 'unhealthy'.¹⁷

IV Different Understandings of 'Holistic'.

A basic, important but little considered matter in the discussion of holistic mission, is the implicature (what is implied by the use) of the term *holistic* itself. Whereas it may be clear to Westerners that the material side of holistic mission is achieved through rational means, others (certainly in Africa) are busy bringing it about through what can loosely (given the weaknesses of English in this area) be called 'magic'. Many African people have traditionally understood that they prosper if they can please their ancestors. The same reasoning can now be applied to the acquisition of wealth and prosperity in the modern world. So Balcomb tells us that for African people; 'the goods ... could be accessed by pre-modern means'.¹⁸ People debating the advantages of holistic mission are understanding the term 'holistic' in profoundly and importantly different ways!

Examples of the 'magical' approach abound in Africa. The classic is perhaps the African funeral and death-rites, that are increasingly being incorporated into churches in some parts of the Continent (including Western Kenya that is my home). Some African people will use massive amounts of time and resources in funerals and burial programmes. Additional ceremonies often occur again months and years after burial. An important orientation of all these activities is ensuring that the ghost of the departed not be troublesome, that is that s/he not interfere with people's *acquisition of*

¹⁵ Jim Harries, 'Biblical Hermeneutics in Relation to Conventions of Language Use in Africa: pragmatics applied to interpretation in cross cultural context.' *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Volume 30, No. 1, January 2006. pp. 49-59.

¹⁶ Jim Harries, 'Power and Ignorance.' on the Mission Field or "The Hazards of Feeding Crowds". <http://WWW.geocities.com/missionalia/harries.htm> accessed 15 Jan 2003.

¹⁷ David Maranz. *African Friends and Money Matters*. (Dallas: SIL International 2001)

¹⁸ Balcomb, Anthony O., 'Modernity and the African Experience.' In: *Bulletin for Contextual Theology African Theology*. Volume Three, No.2, 1996. <http://WWW.hs.unp.ac.za/theology/mod.htm> accessed 29 Sep 2004.

important basic needs. The same orientation is reflected in a pre-occupation in African churches with cleansing; that is a rallying of spiritual forces aimed at the removal or de-activation of troublesome ghosts or spirits of the dead (driving out evil spirits). The difference between Africa and the West is not in the desire to meet needs, but in *how they are to be met.*¹⁹

African people who deeply and implicitly believe in magic cannot (from a Westerners point of view) get their act together to run projects on the basis of Western rationality. Westerners who assume their rational route to be correct get frustrated, de-motivated and even give up when they realise that those being 'targeted' are the very people damaging the structures that they so carefully set up, because they are interpreting them from the perspective of their own cultures. How felt-needs are to be met; through Western rationality, or through combating untoward spiritual forces, is an important question.

Designers of formal holistic mission strategies are typically Westerners. (If they are non-Westerners, then they will be imitating Western blueprints.) Non-Westerners are consumers of such 'mission'. Holistic mission designed by the non-West will be a combining of the Gospel with 'magic' (as defined above and see also Harries²⁰) and not Western rationality.

The west assumes that physical needs should be met through donated contributions. This is clearly not the pattern given by the Scriptures. The classic instances in which Jesus fed thousands as recorded in the Scriptures are given as 'miracles' (Greek *semeion* – signs). That is, Jesus did not raise funds and purchase bread in order to feed 5000, but instead he multiplied a few loaves so as to suffice to satisfy thousands of people.²¹ Similarly, Jesus did not heal people through the use of bio-medicines, but by praying for them and on the basis of their faith.²² Jesus was a healer and 'miracle worker', and not a project coordinator, highly trained scientist or fundraiser. It is non-Western societies and not the rationally oriented West who are in this respect more closely in line with the Scriptures.

The difference between these is important. 'Spiritual healing' (for want of a better term) and miracle working are not dependent on foreign links and a distant economy. They do not create dependency. Their operation is not restricted to a particular people of a particular culture and a particular economic and social class. Spiritual gifts of healing and miracle making may be given to anyone who genuinely believes in Christ.

Those who understand holistic mission as being the utilization of Western reason from the platform of the global economy to be communicated together with Biblical teaching are not following a Biblical model. The economic rationality that underlies today's globalisation was not there at the time of Jesus. It is surely wrong to assume that because Jesus fed people by miracles (on very few occasions) and healed people (rather more often) Western Christians now have a mandate to create material dependence of the rest of the Globe on them by imitating his actions using alternative

¹⁹ See also Maranz. *African Friends*. p. 135.

²⁰ Jim Harries, 'The Magical Worldview.'

²¹ John 6:5-13

²² For example see Mark 2:5.

rational means. An extra-rational justification and foundation for rationality is a questionable mixing of categories.²³ Modern technology and foreign funded projects are not neutral mediums of action, but have numerous implications for the society to which they are being applied. These have been outlined in brief above. Making peoples and societies dependent on technologies that they cannot from within their own worldview understand, control or perpetuate is in creating a high level of vulnerability to foreigners, immoral.

V Holistic Mission Gone Wrong

Whether or not he was himself anticipating this Padilla's words,²⁴ once validated by people like John Stott at the Lausanne congress, have been interpreted by others as ecclesial license for relief and development work. Padilla categorically states that '... holistic mission is mission oriented towards the satisfaction of basic human needs, including the need of God, but also the need of food, love, housing, clothes, physical and mental health and a sense of human dignity'.²⁵ Hence 'the atmosphere generated by the (1974) Lausanne Congress has been described as 'euphoric,' particularly for relief and development workers who "could now appeal to the evangelical constituency as family, without the fear of either being rebuked for preaching the 'social gospel' or being charged of compromising on evangelism.'"²⁶

Did Padilla realise that his legitimizing of the understanding that provision of mutual assistance should be a part of Gospel preaching in the Third World would result in a class-segregated church leadership? That is, that proclaiming the importance of the church's role in meeting physical needs can illegitimise the evangelistic efforts of those not privileged to have access to a material surplus (or technological know-how)? Given that the church is now multi-cultural and multinational, that is a slap in the face to two-thirds or more of the World's Christians. Should such Western domination of the world church (as then occurs because it is the West that has the economic powers to provide for the 'basic human needs' mentioned, and this provision buys power) that suggests that a church not linked to benevolent Western donors cannot be preaching the true Gospel, be encouraged?

The ancient message deeply rooted in Scripture and church tradition encouraging persistence in Christian faith and service even in a context of poverty, suffering and trials never mind persecution is nowadays all too often replaced by materialist consumer-driven Christianity. That is saying in effect that non-Western Christians are given official (foreign) ecclesial approval to move to churches that have the most generous donors.

Surely choosing a church according to the possibility of socio-economic advance through donor contributions is ignoring Biblical mandate? Christ called his disciples

²³ That is, justifying the spread of dependency-creating 'rational' technologies by Christ's command to minister to people spiritually.

²⁴ Padilla, 'Holistic Mission.'

²⁵ Padilla, 'Holistic Mission.'

²⁶ Padilla, 'Holistic Mission.' This quote is taken from: Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, (eds.), *The Church in Response to Human Need* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans 2003), ix.

to *leave* their worldly society in order to be his followers.²⁷ 1 Kings 17 tells how God sent a *famine* (and not food-aid) in response to the sin of Ahab. The Apostle Paul endured much affliction in the course of his preaching. With the possible exception of the collection for Jerusalem, he initiated no ‘compassionate ministries’ in the modern sense. (I believe that the collection for Jerusalem was not assistance for the materially-deprived, but the making of an ecclesial / prophetic statement.²⁸) Why then are modern day prophets insisting on being prophets of profit?

Padilla tells us that:

All too often, the stumbling block and the foolishness that prevent non-Christians to turn to Christ is not really the stumbling block and the foolishness of the gospel centered in “Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23), but the self-righteous attitude and the indifference to basic human needs on the part of Christians. The first condition for the church to break down the barriers with its neighborhood is to engage with it, without ulterior motives, in the search for solutions to felt needs. Such an engagement requires a humble recognition that the reality that counts for the large majority of people is not the reality of the Kingdom of God but the reality of daily-life problems that make them feel powerless, helpless, and terribly vulnerable.²⁹

Have the financial donor/dependency implications of the way this can be heard by a Western audience been sufficiently thought through? It seems to say that ‘those with money *must* give it to those without it’. Have Christians always sought to resolve other people’s ‘problems’ in this way? The foolishness of the Gospel and offence of the cross³⁰ include that someone should give up worldly prestige or advantage on entering the Kingdom of God. God’s Kingdom is like a treasure hidden in a field³¹ promising a deep heartfelt peace and eternal reward to those ravaged by the storms of life. The insistence that the cross be accompanied by material reward is an offence to the Gospel. The quote above bypasses the possibility, implicitly believed by millions of people around the world, that felt needs are met *through* the Gospel itself. It is their faith in God that helps people to overcome the ‘powerlessness and helplessness’ described by Padilla. It is through trusting in God that demons of poverty, disease and helplessness are driven away. What do we say to people who believe this? Remember that Christ himself was himself heavily engaged in removing demons.

It is widely understood that a genuine Christian life will raise someone’s economic standing. That is, someone will be better off as a result of becoming a Christian, without the church being actively involved in ‘social action’. Many reasons often given for this include:

* stable monogamist Christian marriages rooted in true love and mutual respect between husband and wife.

²⁷ John 15:19.

²⁸ Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: the history of Paul’s collection for Jerusalem*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1992.)

²⁹ Padilla, ‘Holistic Mission.’ pp. 19-20.

³⁰ Galatians 5:11.

³¹ Matthew 13:44.

- * avoiding excesses of alcohol and drugs.
- * in the classic Protestant sense – expressing one’s Christian commitment through diligence in one’s worldly calling.
- * mutual support from a wide Christian family.
- * overcoming fear of ancestral spirits and thereby avoiding expensive and time consuming funeral rituals otherwise necessitated.
- * undercutting the fear of witchcraft that dominates many societies and binds them to relations of mistrust, hatred and suspicion.
- * a unified and purposeful view of life, that arises from belief in the power of a single, concerned and influential God.

These are extremely powerful factors contributing to improvements and changes in people’s circumstances. Associating the Gospel strongly with Westernisation, which holistic mission seems to imply, may by orienting people primarily to a search for material wealth, deny them access to the above. ‘Striving’ in life comes to be for money and relationship with donors, instead of for productivity, personal holiness, morality etc.

‘The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist’ shares Stott.³² But is it always easy to identify and discern ‘evil’ and injustice? Once identified, how is it to be tackled? Depending as it does on the desirability of ultimate ends, identifying evil is a theological process. The Bible is replete with examples of redemptive suffering. Is it better for someone to live with pleasure and joy for 70 years and then go to hell, or is it better to struggle and suffer for 60 years and then spend eternity in heaven? Definitions of evil that ignore such questions make implicit theological assumptions. On what basis are these assumptions made if not faith? Surely this points to the foundational importance of faith and theology, i.e. ‘preaching’ to bring about social change.

What should be done to someone whose actions we find to be evil? Are they to be punished? Is change to be forced? Or is the primary role of a Christian to point out where they are wrong? The former is tempting, but inter-culturally often paternalistic and arousing of (justified?) opposition, even if this is underground. The latter while a demanding and complex task is part of the essence of traditional missionary work, classically carried out by means of teaching and preaching that ‘holistic mission’ proponents seem to be so unhappy with. Should the church join West governments in using its economic, educational, social or even military might to forcefully extinguish evil whenever it is ‘spotted’, or is there a valid alternative of ‘appealing’ to people through preaching?

Even if we choose to leave aside the ultimate questions regarding evil discussed above, complexities still abound. Is it wrong to steal, if theft is the only way to avoid death through starvation? Is wife beating to be condemned out of hand if it happens in a community in which the alternative is prostitution that results in aids? Is dictatorship to be outlawed if it is the only way to maintain peace between warring factions? Family disputes are notoriously difficult for outsiders to handle. Who will identify the ‘evil’ in the actions of husband and wife to one another, or that occur within a foreign

³² John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 1975.) p. 24. cited in Padilla, ‘Holistic Mission.’ p. 12.

community? Ethicists have for Centuries argued the relative advantages of deontological (norm based) as against teleological (end based) understandings of good and bad.³³ Do we now have the solution? Is it good to allow your child to enjoy eating chocolates from morning to night if he/she wants to, if the long term effect is an early death through a heart attack caused by obesity? Is it good to assist African populations to mushroom if there is no visible way for them to sustain their increased population density, such that people end up engaging in mass homicides such as occurred in Rwanda in the 1990s? When are actions evil, and when does 'aid' become 'interference' in other people's lives? There are other similar examples that could be given.

Short-term mission is these days much on the increase. So is the differential in wealth between the poor and the rich parts of the world. So is the degree to which the 'poor' world imitates and depends on the rich. Short-term workers from the West are greatly materially advantaged by comparison to most African people who they come to meet. Is it helpful for them in addition to be told that they have divine authority to condemn the evil that they find? That is, that which appears to them to be evil, given their (frequently very limited) life experience and contextual training? An ecclesial stamp of approval on what can easily be a narrow bigoted perspective is not, it seems to me, doing anyone any favours. Much better to concentrate on 'merely' preaching the Gospel' (see above) than to blunder forcefully, blindly and destructively into other people's affairs.

To say that 'The church fulfills her vocation as "light of the world" not merely by preaching the Gospel, but by letting her light shine through 'good deeds' ...' (Matthew 5:16)³⁴ is absolutely correct. I doubt whether any preachers would disagree. If some disagree, then let us pray for them to change.³⁵ The importance of the life and work of preachers to the effectiveness of their message has long been known. Differences between the current age in the West and New Testament times are that in the West: First. Preached words are themselves no longer considered effective either in drawing blessing or driving away bad spirits. Second. That love is all too often these days interpreted as being expressed financially in monetary generosity and gift giving, and not in empathising, spending time with people, listening or understanding (except with rational or quantitative ends in mind).

Christians born and raised in the West are facing a dilemma; secular norms threaten to undermine their faith. Already historically Christian nations present a secular face to the world. 'Secularism' is an example of a great non-translatability. It does not make sense in the 'religious' majority of the world. I dare say that it does not make sense to God either, or to those who hold it in tension with some kind of 'private religion'. This confusing state of affairs should cease to be the front which the West presents to the world.

The key to comprehending a people has always and every-where (except perhaps in the West in the last few Centuries or decades?) been to understand what they believe about God(s). The key to bringing lasting heart-rooted change to a community is to

³³ Norman L. Geisler, *Ethics: alternatives and issues*. (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House 1971.) p. 13.

³⁴ Padilla, 'Holistic Mission.' p. 21.

³⁵ As suggested by the apostle Paul in Philippians 1:15-18.

enlighten people on more of the great truths of who God is and what he is like. If the West is to have a helpful message for the world then it should share what it knows about God, and not its confusion about 'secularism'. 'Social action', in the broad sense of the word to be a part of the work of the church is normal. But – promoters of 'integral Gospel' are unwittingly playing into the hands of people whose agenda can do more harm than good by promoting unhealthy dependency because what they do is rooted in secularism.³⁶

The problems of holistic mission are in its implementation. In reality people's problems are complex, so finding solutions is complex. It is in giving license to Western people to force their solutions onto African (and other Third World) communities using Western money and technology that holistic mission has not been helpful.

VI The Anti-Dependency Movement

The growth in 'holistic mission' in encouraging wealth transfers from the West to the poor world' has aggravated dependency concerns. Schwartz is in my view correct to say that 'dependency on outside funding' ... is 'one of the most difficult problems facing the Christian movement at the beginning of the 21st Century'.³⁷ He is absolutely correct to say that modern missions methodologies result in 'the Gospel itself [being] distorted' and that people's interest in the Gospel for the sake of material possessions means that 'something goes terribly wrong in the spread of the Gospel'.³⁸ Schwartz has 'stood in the gap', filling that difficult and apparently contradictory position of being the American who is telling people to give (or in the case of Third World churches *receive*) less!

Robert R. Reese calls dependency '... a perversion of the Gospel'.³⁹ He points out that 'under the title of partnership local churches or associations have been able to circumvent established missionary policy based on field experience'⁴⁰ thus agreeing with other authors such as Rheenan that partnership has simply '... frequently become a disguised form of paternalism'⁴¹ and Helander and Niwagila's saying that in Tanzania 'fixation in the roles of "rich giver" and "poor receiver" has taken place'.⁴² 'There cannot be a partnership in a setting up of dependency and patronage'⁴³ say

³⁶ See Jim Harries, 'Is Secularism a Mystical Religion? Questions of Translation in Relation to Millennium Goals and Mission in Africa.' 2007. Unpublished document.

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Glenn Schwartz, 'Is there a Cure for Dependency amongst Mission Founded Churches?' 2000. <<http://wmausa.org/page.aspx?id=83812>> accessed 17 Feb 2007.)

³⁸ Schwartz, 'Is there a Cure.'

³⁹ Robert Boyd Reese, 'Dependency and its Impact on Churches Related to the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Christian Fellowship.' PhD Thesis. Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. May 2005. (Version that I read did not have the original page numbers.) p. 64.

⁴⁰ Reese, 'Dependency and its Impact.' p. 9.

⁴¹ Gailyn Van Rheenen, 'Money and Missions (revisited).' MMR#13, 2001, <http://vlib.anthotech.com/bin/jump.cgi?ID=1077> accessed 20 March 2002.

⁴² Eila Helander, and Wilson B. Niwagila, *The Partnership and Power: a quest for reconstruction in mission*. (Usa River, Tanzania: Makumira Publications (number seven) 1996.) p. 74.

⁴³ Helander and Niwagila, *The Partnership*. p. 85.

Helander and Niwagila. 'The sharing of material resources is perhaps one of the most difficult matters in the history of partnership'.⁴⁴

Promotion of dependency may be inadvertent: 'American missionaries in Zimbabwe almost automatically seem to be preaching a prosperity gospel even if this is not their intention ... In such a situation, missionaries need a strategy just to avoid adding to dependency. ... yet Africans are embracing them with zeal'.⁴⁵ Such inadvertency occurs because African people make an implicit link between the Gospel and the wealth of foreign visitors; as if the wealth has arisen directly *as a result of* the Gospel. Western preachers may say things that are true in their own context, but far from true in the African context. For example, someone from America saying that they 'trust completely in God' is assumed to mean this as 'in addition to their pension and medical insurance'. Such not being picked up by African listeners results in the prosperity Gospel. Much could be added – many Christians visiting from the West claim to be 'spreading the Gospel' while being mostly engaged in dispersing wealth. 'Bringing the Gospel' can be like a cover for handing out money and material.

The solutions that Schwartz advocates to resolve dependency issues include: First. To recognise that non-dependent churches are healthier. Second. To address the issue with serious determination. Third. To teach local people of their obligation to give to their church. Fourth. To encourage spiritual renewal. Fifth. To ensure there is local ownership.⁴⁶ Reese talks of the need for the mission programmes that do not create dependency, good training for missionaries, and mission euthanasia.⁴⁷ He advocates steps that Zimbabwean churches and the American churches relating with them ought to take to resolve dependency issues.⁴⁸

I stand with the above in the solutions they advocate for resolving dependency. I add additional ones below.

VII Additional Means for Overcoming Dependency

I would like to make two suggestions in addition to those above as aids to resolving the *dependency issue*. I do so in order to encourage 'missionary work'. I believe that the unity of the church will be aided by having more and not less people travelling between its branches and to the unreached. But I see such work as needing to have a different character than is common today. Western missionaries all too often use their control of the purse strings to 'take charge' of or dictate (even if unwittingly – see above) to churches. I propose that Western missionaries not subsidise their ministries. In much of Africa Western missionary superiority is almost guaranteed because official languages used are European. I propose that missionaries insist on ministering using local tongues.

1. Missionary Poverty Westerners are these days reluctant to take leadership in Africa through fear of accusations of paternalism. This is very different from in the West

⁴⁴ Helander and Niwagila, *The Partnership*. p.125.

⁴⁵ Reese, 'Dependency and its Impact.' p. 37.

⁴⁶ Schwartz, 'Is there a Cure.'

⁴⁷ Reese, 'Dependency and its Impact.' pp. 77-80.

⁴⁸ Reese, 'Dependency and its Impact.' p. 76.

itself, where different races of people are actively being integrated into society. At the root of this difference is the wealth of foreigners on the African scene that (combined with their failure to learn local languages – see below) keeps them aloof from and so ignorant of local people's ways. This ignorance, plus the 'don't bite the hand that feeds you' mentality inhibits what could otherwise be helpful cross-cultural interchange. The church, as a foundationally egalitarian body, should be leading the field in resolving this perpetuation of inter-racial barriers.⁴⁹

I do not mean by this that Western missionaries should be too poor to keep themselves and therefore go hungry. Yes it is good to have a 'simple lifestyle', but most important is for missionaries *not to use their Western wealth to further their ministry*. This is in line with the Biblical model, of missionaries making their living by receiving from those whom they serve (1 Corinthians 9:11). The absence of foreign funding will force Western missionaries to operate according to the contours of African culture. Not being preoccupied in promoting their own culture will result in opportunities of all sorts for missionaries to learn from locals. (This is not to say that missionaries should stop people from benefiting from what the West has to offer. They don't need to stop them at all. Only, their own energies should not be spent in promoting 'Westernisation' (which is what 'development often amounts to) but in interacting with people using locally available means.)

2. Use of Local Languages Operating one's Christian ministry in the local language has numerous effects and benefits that are these days rarely considered. It results in 'enforced humility' as the missionary begins as 'learner'. Using someone's language, is boosting *their* self-worth and a sign of respect for *them*. Using a European language tends to confine a missionary to the upper classes, but using a local language enables ministry across the economic spectrum. Knowing and working in the local language will ensure a 'fit' between ministry and the local context. Knowing and working in the local language will be building a foundation that local people will understand and can imitate. It is a way of avoiding serious blunders in communication.

Setting a foundation for people in other than their own language will, especially in this day of global communication and if the language is rooted in a very different culture, make them dependent on the owners of that language. This is currently happening over much of Africa, and in so rendering people incompetent in their own communities prevents what could have been helpful progressive thinking and activities from occurring.

VIII Conclusion

Implementation of 'holistic mission' strategies across Africa (and presumably further afield) has inadvertently resulted in serious problems, especially unhealthy dependency of African churches and communities on the West, and a serious impeding of local African initiatives and ecclesial or social/economic development. At root of the above difficulties has been the failure to realise that word meanings arise from the context of their use. 'Holistic' in the West implies the designing and

⁴⁹ Jim Harries, 'Issues of Race in Relating to Africa: Linguistic and Cultural Insights that Could Avoid Traps.'
<http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/articles/issues-of-race-in-relating-to-africa.html> accessed 12th Jan 2008.

funding of carefully thought out strategies to improve the physical wellbeing of African Christians as a part of mission. The same term being widely understood in Africa as meaning that 'holy' Christians ought to prosper materially, is resulting in serious theological distortions – whereby God is given the credit for what Westerners are doing (the prosperity gospel).

In addition to anti-dependency measures promoted by Schwartz, this author advocates two mission strategies to be followed at least by some Western missionaries to remedy this situation. First, for Western missionaries to minister in languages indigenous to the people being reached. Secondly, that they not subsidise their ministry using outside resources. These two strategies, together known as 'vulnerable mission', will enable a clear contextual communication of the Gospel and an empowering of non-Western Christian communities.

For details of Vulnerable Mission conferences to be held in 2009 see www.vulnerablemission.com, and for more articles on this topic see <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/articles/index.html>