

**The Futility of Western Teaching on
Development in the Third World (Africa):
comparing ‘magical’ and ‘scientific’ worldviews**

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Glossary

References to ‘Africa’ or ‘Africans’ are to Sub-Saharan Africa and its indigenous peoples.

Abstract

Because the magical and scientific worldviews are essentially insurmountable, information shared between people within these positions is transformed in the process of communication; science as communicated, becomes ‘magic’ as received, and vice versa. ‘Science’ communicated to Sub-Saharan Africa is often rendered effective only if either

Westerners or mystical forces stand in the ‘gap’ that results. If the foundations of disciplines like economics are not there, then neither can economics, as known in the West, stand. Use of an ‘international’ language like English, tied as it is to a secular scientific worldview, is found to be a handicap to many African communities. The commonness of our humanity is shown as insufficient to close inter-cultural communication gaps. A three prong approach to communication with non-Western communities is advocated: to use their language, not to falsely boost Western activities using foreign funds, and to put theology at centre stage.

Introduction

My explorations into the development teaching from the West to Africa have resulted in a discovery little less than amazing. Western academia considers itself to be rooted in objectivity, science and fact. But, the very objective, factually oriented scientific academics, when they apply their knowledge to Sub-Saharan Africa, end up teaching magic. This occurs for at least two reasons. One, if the recipient culture is one in which ‘magic’ is a normal accepted part of life, introduced teaching is appropriated on the same basis. Two, because in the course of translation of explanations from one worldview to another gaps inevitably occur, and these will not be filled if the original and target cultures are too different for the basis of the relevant non-magical processes to be mutually understood.

I take magic as being the means of achieving ends through the intervention of mystical or vital forces. Note that the character of these forces runs in parallel with scientific laws; the outcome of the application of or activity of the forces is often that which should also be expected by a scientist. But the deeply comprehended nature of what is happening is of a different order altogether than that of science. One of the problems with Western

‘development teaching’ in Africa is that, in ignoring the characteristics of the magical belief systems it meets, it undercuts the logic of its own operations.

1. The Insurmountability of the Magical Worldview

Even for a scientist, the impossible can happen. For example; scientists cannot understand how moving object A can pass stationary object B, given that as A approaches B the distance between A and B is halved an infinite number of times. If it is halved an infinite number of times while A can go on drawing closer and closer to B, it should never pass B, or infinity wouldn’t be infinity.¹ In the scientific worldview it is assumed that an inexplicable process is governed by scientific laws that are *yet to be discovered*. The force of gravity is a good example of this; not knowing why gravity happens does not prevent scientists from believing science.² Similarly, discovering effects that do not *seem* to be subject to mystical powers does not undermine someone’s belief in mystical powers.

Scientific and magical worldviews survive attacks on their comprehensiveness. Someone with a magical worldview will always interpret all that happens to them or that they perceive, to be magical in origin. This does not preclude the possibility of prediction. Whether a chicken’s producing an egg every day is scientific or magical, does not change the fact either that the egg is produced, or that it’s production is predictable. The same presumably applies to the falling of rain, the burning of paper, the transmission of sound waves from one person

¹ See Zeno’s paradox’s, as found at Mazur, Joseph, nd. ‘The Motion Paradox: The 2,500-Year-Old Puzzle Behind the Mysteries of Time and Space.’

<http://members.authorsguild.net/mazur/work1.htm> (accessed 5.01.08)

² “The question of **why** atoms attract one another is still not understood.” Howstuffsorks, nd. ‘How does gravity work?’ <http://www.howstuffworks.com/question232.htm> (accessed 5.01.08)

to another and so on. But if all these things that Western people assume to occur by science can also happen by magic, what really is the difference between the two?

A key difference in these worldviews is in the causative agent. In the scientific worldview, the causative agent is 'nature' – something that does not exist in the magical worldview.³ The causative agent in the latter is a mystical power of some sort – something that does not exist in the scientific worldview. Nature is considered to be impacted by natural forces but magical powers by mysterious forces. The two worldviews do not meet.

This author being born and bred in the West, but subsequently having lived in rural Africa for many years, has realised just how pervasive Western man's scientific view is. Whatever Western man sees happening in rural Africa, he can explain using his own worldview. Someone being spirit possessed he calls emotion. A rain maker's producing rain he assumes to be coincidence. People's love of 'palaver'⁴ he sees as arising from their ignorance of science and rationality. Someone's being healed through prayer he considers to be placebo. Attempts at manoeuvring mystical forces through animal sacrifice he finds to be motivated by a desire to eat meat. Hence Westerners can make a close study of Africa life, as many anthropologists have done, without in the least compromising their Western scientific worldview!

³ See Harries, Jim. 2007. 'Pragmatic Theory Applied to Christian Mission in Africa: with special reference to Luo responses to 'bad' in Gem, Kenya.' PhD thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham, UK, 2007. <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/15/1/Harries07PhD.pdf> (accessed 20.9.07) This is 'nature', in the sense of being a "physical power causing phenomena of material world" (Sykes, J.B., 1982. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford: Clarendon Press)

⁴ Sopova, Jasmina. nd. 'In the Shade of the Palaver Tree.' http://www.unesco.org/courier/1999_05/uk/signes/txt2.htm (accessed 7.01.08): "The palaver is a traditional African institution of debate and consensus whose democratic potential has been overshadowed by modern political systems."

Western people are slower to realise that the reverse also applies. As they can pass over all magical beliefs because of their superior knowledge of science, so people rooted in the magical worldview can pass over scientific beliefs through their superior knowledge of mystical causation.

Given the above then, teaching someone in a way that appears contrary to their own deeply ingrained worldview, may well not change their worldview, but simply extend its boundaries. Then no matter how scientific someone considers their explanations to be, someone rooted in the magical worldview will appropriate them into their pre-existing framework. No matter how scientifically trained or oriented the Western development worker, in other words, the people he teaches who have not appropriated the scientific worldview, will take him to be a magician. That is, they will take him to be teaching magic, and will understand what he teaches to be magic.⁵

Just to mention – asking such a person “do you take me as speaking of magic or of science” is generally a useless question, because for the respondent the terms *science* and *magic* will be defined by his/her own worldview. Science can, for example, be considered to be ‘Western man’s magic’. Here we see a serious but often unperceived drawback of language use – words neither carry cultures, or cross cultural barriers. They are, after all, just sounds. Different people saying they believe in magic, or in science, can mean very different things.

2. What it is to be Teaching Magic

⁵ The reverse of course also applies: a Western man will seek for a scientific basis for that which he sees a magician perform.

Someone's speaking on the basis of a scientific worldview to a listener of a magical worldview, will result both in gaps in what is communicated, and in communicating content that is not intended. Examples that *illustrate* the likely kind of outcome of such intercultural communication are given below:

1. You give someone a bicycle, ride ahead with your bicycle and expect them to follow you, but the bicycle you have handed over does not have a drive chain.
2. You give someone a guard dog, but they take it as a pet.
3. A slightly more subtle example – let's imagine I have a child called Doreen. When I hear the name Doreen I automatically associate it in my mind with her birthday, say December 1st. Yet it would be wrong of me to assume that because I associate that birthday with the name Doreen, someone else will necessarily know the date on having heard the name.

These examples illustrate the *kinds of difficulties* faced by those who would attempt to lead African people who are following the 'magical worldview' with instructions in English that are rooted in a scientific worldview.⁶ The process of translation between worldviews will leave gaps in knowledge that will interfere with understanding and the operation of whatever process is under consideration. These gaps in understanding can be, I suggest, sufficiently consequential (see examples above) such that magic would be required to enable the achievement of the desired outcome. Hence the West in teaching its science in Africa is promoting dependence upon magic.

While such 'promotion of magic' may not last long in a Western setting (if the process requires a magical step in order to succeed, this will be realised and the process disqualified),

⁶ See Harries, Jim, 2000, 'The Magical Worldview in the African Church: what is going on?' 487-502 In: *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXIV, No. 4, October 2000 for the a discussion of the nature of the 'magical worldview'.

the same cannot necessarily be said of many African contexts. The literature on Africa, particularly that exploring its anthropology, is replete with illustrations examples and demonstrations of African people's belief in what we are here calling magic (witchcraft, curses and blessings, mystical or vital forces, spirits, ancestors etc.).⁷ African people are therefore not necessarily taken aback when given processes to follow that will only work in combination with magic. They are resigned to the fact, in other words, that certain things only succeed when carried out or implemented by Europeans (who have this special magical knowledge⁸), and that no end of careful instruction will successfully transfer it to their community. They are almost as determined as they are 'resigned', not to concede this dependence on magic.⁹ Partly this is because 'it works'. The reason that 'it works', from a Western scientific perspective, is not because 'magic works', but because Westerners come to stand in the gap! Also because in today's English speaking world, someone who believes in magic is looked down upon.

How do I mean that Westerners stand in the gap? I mean that the aid and dependency situation that the West 'imposes' onto Africa is self perpetuating regardless of the success or failure of the wisdom associated with it. In other words, development assistance to Africa is driven by other than evidence for the procedural success of its projects. It continues rather due to Westerners' consciences and is implemented on the basis of an assumption that is considered unassailable – that magic does not exist and can be safely ignored. If magical

⁷ Numerous examples of authors who describe the dependency of African society on magic could be given from the anthropological literature. I give three here: Evans-Pritchard, E.E., 1937, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Tempels, Placide, 1959, *Bantu Philosophy*. Paris: Presence Africaine. Davis, Christopher O., 2000, *Death in Abeyance: illness and therapy among the Tabwa of Central Africa*. London: Edinburgh University Press

⁸ See the 'hidden power of the whites' in: Turner, N.W., 1979, *Religious Innovation in Africa: collected essays on new religious movements*. Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Company. 271-278.

⁹ African people will not generally use the term 'magic' to describe their own worldview, as they know that it is held in disdain by the wealthy West. Assuming English to be universal has thus deprived it of vocabulary. See Harries, 'Intercultural Dialogue.'

forces do not exist, then to recognise people's perception of them is to consider those people to be primitive or superstitious. Because these latter terms are taken as offensive, and to use them in reference to a particular colour or ethnicity of people is considered racist, the international community has no choice but to ignore magical beliefs. This unfortunately results in the perpetuation of an understanding of the African scene that is misguided. It perpetuates magic, because the finance invested in the launching and re-launching of projects itself justifies to the African the operation of that project even if it is actually dependent on 'magic'.¹⁰

The above mentioned mechanisms ensure that magically based processes continue to be promoted under the title of 'development aid'. Such aid is far from innocent or inconsequential in its impact. This is for a number of reasons:

1. Aid and development projects result in the perpetuation of gross unhealthy dependency of Africa on the West.¹¹
2. They prevent, by monopolising (for example) the educational scene, African peoples from advancing socially and economically.
3. Magic being closely linked in the African scene with evil, means that promotion of magic is a perpetuation of evil.
4. The Bible and therefore the Christian faith condemns magical practices.¹²

¹⁰ Let me try and illustrate this with a simple example of the promotion of a chicken project. Let's imagine that \$5000 dollars are needed to launch a chicken project, of which \$500 will be salary to the project manager. Even if all the chickens die and their house is consumed by termites, the manager can still consider the project a 'success', as it has given him a reward of \$500. See: Maranz, David, 2001, *African Friends and Money Matters: observations from Africa*. Dallas: SIL International. 150-151.

¹¹ For example, running a 'failed' project as in footnote 10 may be more profitable for an African than running his own project that 'works' but has no donor to pay a salary.

¹² As of course do the teachings of some other 'faiths'.

3. Economics as Case Study

Economists these days have a high profile when it comes to intervention in international relations – especially aid and development assistance. I therefore want to take a brief look at the discipline of economics, and ways in which its teachings promote magic in Africa.

The roots of the word economics, and at least to some extent its history, lie in the Greek terms *oikos* (house) and *nomos* (law). In order to discover ‘African economics’ we can begin by considering African ‘household laws’. The examples that I will take to illustrate these are taken from a booklet written by and for the Luo people of Western Kenya, called *Chike Jaduong e Dalane* (‘Rules for a Man in his Home’).

This small red book written by Raringo¹³ provides guidelines for family life to prevent death. Being 100 by 150 millimetres in size and only a few millimetres thick, the book is clearly intended to be a handbook to be carried in someone’s pocket for reference. The 331 rules contained each answer a question that is first asked about life in a Luo homestead. Having myself lived amongst the Luo people for 15 years, I can vouch for the basic accuracy of the book in relation to Luo people’s beliefs. Here are some examples (translated by myself in abbreviated form) to illustrate the kind of laws that are found:

Law number 111: If two daughters of one home have both been married, it is not permitted for the bride wealth to be received for the younger one before it has been received for the elder.¹⁴

¹³ Raringo, Jacktone Keya, nd, *Chike Jaduong e Dalane*. Ugunja, Kenya: Geranya Agencies

¹⁴ Raringo, *Chike*. 24.

Law number 262: Once having matured a Luo man should leave his father's homestead to begin his own. Luo law states that to do this, a man must have a wife. But then the question arises, if his wife should die can he begin the new home with the corpse before it is buried? The answer given is no, because there are certain rituals that the wife must perform in the new homestead that only a living wife can perform, such as cooking the first meal.¹⁵

Law number 70. This law outlines the procedure to be followed in finding a man to inherit a widow. After waiting for at least three months after her late husband's burial a widow must prepare beer for the occasion. Her inheritor must be a brother or cousin to her husband, and must already have completed bride wealth payments for his other wives.¹⁶

I list these 'house rules' (selected randomly from the 331), to help my Western reader to appreciate how unlike Western economics household practices can be. These rules, designed to avoid death through an understanding of the nature of vital forces (that are controlled by tribal ancestors), will inevitably form the starting point for this African people's comprehension of 'economics'.

Differences are of course much wider than the conventional boundaries of 'economics'. The very words used in the course of describing economic (household) practices such as those above may have very different impacts in the original African community than they apparently do when translated to (Western) English. Here are some specific examples of differences in language understanding that I have found apply in parts of Africa:

¹⁵ Raringo, *Chike*. 50.

¹⁶ Raringo, *Chike*. 16.

- + when a butcher *cuts up a joint of meat* a Westerner expects him to carefully slice through all but the toughest joints by dividing the bones with a knife. In Africa an axe is used much more freely to chop bones.
- + We assume someone in Britain who is *cooking lunch* to be doing so using electricity or gas, whereas in much of Africa they are much more likely to use wood and/or charcoal.
- + A *wife* is alone in the West, but can be one of three in many parts of Africa.
- + Whereas *laughter* indicates joy in the West, it often shows embarrassment or fear amongst African people.
- + *Truth* in the West is to do with objectivity, but in Africa that which is respectful and not offensive.
- + Whereas a *woman being pregnant* is a common topic of normal conversation in the West, pregnancies are not talked about in much of Africa, to avoid attracting magical attack on the unborn child.¹⁷

(If my readers find the above to be slanted against African people and culture then I ask them to bear with me. That reaction is exactly one of the reasons so much of African culture goes ‘underground’ and out of sight. ‘Different’ may not be ‘inferior’.)

I have attempted to articulate such differences between words in an article to be published in the *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, that suggests that words can helpfully be considered to have ‘shapes’.¹⁸ In my experience many people, scholars and laymen alike, tend to ignore such differences in word content and impact, assuming them to be inconsequential.

¹⁷ Note that the truth or otherwise of these examples is not our main point. While some may argue that the examples I have given are less than true, I think they clearly illustrate ways in which language uses *can* differ according to culture.

¹⁸ Harries, Jim. 2007. ‘A Linguistic Case for the necessity of Enculturation in Theological and Economic Teaching based on the ‘Shape of Words’: including a case study comparing Sub-Saharan Africa with the West.’ Submitted for publication to the *Journal of Intercultural Communication*.

This tendency is I think particularly widespread because of the domination of Brits and Americans in global scholarship – many of whom are monolingual and therefore have no experience of the vagaries of translation.¹⁹ I suggest that ignoring differences between cultures, even if using one language, is folly.

4. The Contribution of Wrong Assumptions on Language Use to Dysfunctionality

Many Western scholars and practitioners seem to think that the need to take account of the complexities of African culture is negated if the language they use throughout their interventionary activities is an international one like English. The model of economic progress and development advocated for Africa is these days frequently an *en-masse* transfer of education and resources as well as language from the West to the African continent.²⁰ This is a very convenient stance for those in Western nations. They thereby conclude that their product (education, technology etc.) is exactly what is needed around the globe. This is how Western scholars market themselves. But it results in legitimising grossly top-down approaches to ‘development’. It obviates the need for Westerners to listen to non-Western scholars, at least until the latter have become conversant and almost totally accepting of the status quo in Western scholarship. Surely it is time native English speaking countries realised that their high valuation of English arises because it happens to be their own native tongue, and not because it can possibly stretch to articulate the vast multitude of cultural contexts amongst the peoples of our world?

¹⁹ I refer my reader to the examples given at the start of section 2 in this essay, that illustrate how consequential differences in understanding can be, such that they can negate originally intended processes.

²⁰ The recently launched Millennium Development Project is a good example of this: United Nations. nd. ‘UN Development Goals.’ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> (accessed 5.01.08)

The dysfunctionality associated with the predominance of scientifically-rooted European languages in Africa (and European languages are used in education through most of the continent) is preventing positive internally sourced development and change from occurring. Maintaining incompetence amongst people through use of a European language may limit their capabilities at challenging the global status quo. But is this moral? While such results in some security (poor disoriented communities do not constitute a military threat) it's gross perpetuation of poverty and all the suffering this implies is abhorrent.²¹ The globe becomes more and more of a polarised place, as whole people are 'written off' in so far as their languages and contexts are ignored in the designing of policies that govern them. This could be avoided if more flexibility in language policy were to be encouraged or allowed, and if even Westerners were to take the time to assist people in addressing their issues by learning their languages and living in a way that is 'vulnerable' to them.

5. Answering the Critics

Translation is at least as much impossible as it is possible. It conceals as much as it hides.²² What it conceals, it can conceal very well, so that much of the world, sitting in monolingual communities, can remain blissfully unaware of what they don't know.

Having considered the question of translatability in more depth elsewhere,²³ I want to attend to the suggestion that inter-cultural dialogue is enabled through having a 'common

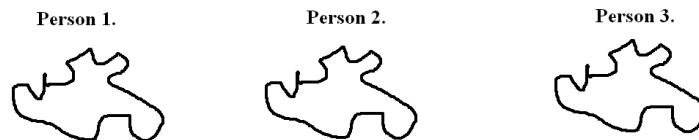
²¹ In short what I am suggesting is that giving more freedom can result in problems, perhaps conflicts, but I believe in the long run that giving people freedom to make their own choices will result in a more positive outcome than restraining their freedom to prevent them from making bad choices.

²² Translators in making choices in their selection of words and phrases to translate into, obviously reject many alternative options.

²³ Harries, 'A Linguistic Case.' Harries, Jim. 2008. 'Intercultural Dialogue – an overrated means of acquiring understanding examined in the context of Christian Mission to Africa.' To be published in *Exchange, Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*. In press.

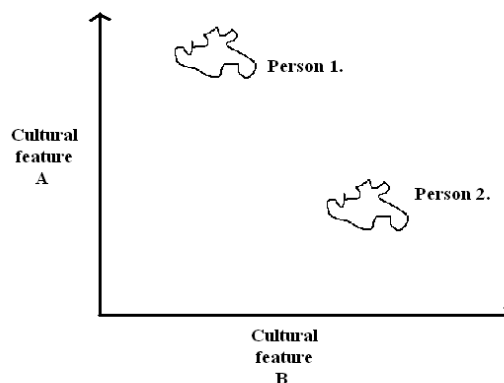
humanity'. It certainly cannot be denied that people from distant geographical and cultural backgrounds have a lot in common. I would like to illustrate this similarity pictorially in Figure 1 in saying that people have the same *shape*, wherever they are.²⁴

Figure 1. Shapes of Humans.



But now in Figure 2 below I illustrate that despite being of the same shape, two people can be found at very different points on any cultural graph:

Figure 2. Two humans on a cultural graph.



Cultural features A and B could be extremely diverse. They could be dress style versus eating preferences, inclination to being loving as against respectful, tendency to walk or use a bicycle, belief in God as against magic, etc. Our common humanity does not prevent us from being vastly diverse in our cultural traits – i.e. in how we express that common humanity.

Figure 3. Closing the Gap Between Diverse Peoples

²⁴ The parts of this arbitrarily chosen human 'shape' attempt to represent all that is essentially human.

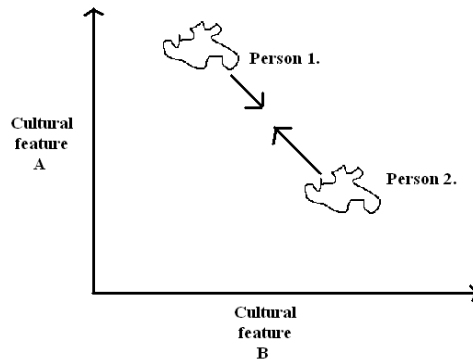


Figure 3 illustrates how the gap between cultures can be reduced, by moving people closer to one another. I presume such moving closer to be desirable for many reasons, such as to enable clear communication and move towards a mutually better way of life. What Figure 3 clearly illustrates however – is that people come closer together if each is moved *in opposite directions*. This strongly implies that an educational system needs to be culturally specific, i.e. that education and guidance for life needs to differ according to people’s culture and life circumstances – something that is not possible when the whole world is being required to copy from the Anglo-Saxon model! I conclude that the commonness of our humanity, does not do away with either cultural differences, or the need for culturally specific education.

The current international linguistic and economic climate simply does not allow a regionalisation of education in Africa, at least much of Anglophone Africa. Being grossly dependent on foreign funds, and officially using the same foreign language for all formal activities, means in effect that foreign wisdom invariably gets pride of place in Anglophone Africa regardless of any lack in its local fit. ‘Appropriate’ thinking or technology, is very hard to find. Whenever it emerges, it is almost instantly squashed out by the owners of European languages, especially English, who act as referees for content as well as grammar in writing. (Publishers will often only accept texts that they know will satisfy native English speakers, as they are the ones who have the money to buy books.) In other words, respected writing in English can have to meet some of the very standards that will prevent honesty on

the part of Africans! One thing that could at least help this situation and give people a change to think for themselves; would be for Africa to end its subservience to European languages. Financial incentives of all sorts to those who operate in European languages are however so great (jobs, international travel, scholarships, social prestige etc.) that such thinking for oneself can quickly amount to economic suicide.

One of the net outcomes of the various arguments presented above is that development advice coming from the West to Africa is put in such a way as to render success logically impossible. Unless, that is, mysterious magical powers or Westerners come to its rescue. Hence many efforts made by Westerners from their ivory towers to stimulate ‘development’ in poor countries of Africa are futile. Worse than that – they are distracting people from the progress that they might have been making, and promoting dependence, lies and corruption in the process. But then – what is the alternative?

Note that underlying my arguments is a basic belief in the ‘goodness’ of the world, and the goodness (or potential goodness) of mankind. A belief, that is, that given the freedom to do so, people can make good decisions that will lead to mutual advantage. If this were not the case, and African people were irretrievably evil, then the Western world’s overseas development policy perhaps ought to continue as it is.

6. The Way Forward

I consider myself more optimistic than those who think that the way forward in the West’s relationship to Africa is ‘more aid or nothing’.²⁵ It is time, I believe, for that depressingly

²⁵ This seems to be extremely widely assumed, as (almost?) every ‘project’ engaged in by the West in Africa and other ‘poor’ parts of the world involves the transfer of material resources from the West.

limited set of options to be swept out of the back door and forgotten. It's social reductionism is close to criminal.

I want to explore the 'way forward' under three headings. All three are closely inter-related, and together I believe they constitute a valid basis for future Western involvement in Africa, that will avoid the promotion of magic.

First is the necessity to recognise the importance of language. It is time for the crude levels of relationships that are enabled when using European languages to relate to people in Africa who are of a very un-European culture, to end. Development advice for Africa needs to be formulated and presented by people familiar with the languages and cultures of a people and region. The present situation is an embarrassing mockery, in which overseas experts direct projects in Africa from distant offices through foreign-funded local managers. On the ground, everyone can be fully aware just how foolish project policies can be, but how to tell the boss out of sight in his distant office when he doesn't have a grasp of the (language and culture) with which he might have understood?²⁶ For more details on why language is such a key and difficult issue see other articles.²⁷

Second is the need to have foreign personnel working in African countries in financially vulnerable ways. The current strength of the association between White, wealthy and imprudent in Africa is generative of serious racism.²⁸ One straightforward way of rectifying

²⁶ This, and the risk that funding could be cut as a result, results in the 'failures' of a project being kept secret, as explained by Rich a number of times with reference to the Millennium Development Project in: Rich, Sam. 2007. 'Africa's Village of Dreams.' *The Wilson Quarterly*.

http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=wq.essay&essay_id=231264 (accessed 5.01.08)

²⁷ Harries, A Linguistic Case. Harries, 'Intercultural Dialogue'. Harries, Jim. 2007. '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 10.10.07)

²⁸ One could almost say in Sub-Saharan Africa; veneration of Whites.

this, is to have Westerners working on projects in Africa that they must *not* themselves pay for. For once a White man's professional colleagues in Africa will not be financially dependent on him, so will be able to speak truthfully to him. For once the European will, instead of using foreign money to bail out his position or project, be forced to seek a solution that depends on and draws on a local community. (A position the national who he hopes one day will take over from him, will certainly be in.) Not constantly being busy handling finance can enable an outsider to take time to learn the local language, then learn to operate in a way that is locally appropriate.

Africa receives a *vast* amount of foreign aid of all sorts from 'the West'. Yet there is also a 'stand-off' by Westerners and a strong feeling that Africa should be running its own affairs. This especially so as to avoid accusations of neo-colonialism, imperialism, being domineering and so on. This is ironic in a number of ways. First, that Western nations should be dishing out aid, but not taking responsibility for its impact.²⁹ This despite the fact that the degree of aid provision of different sorts can dwarf other economic activity and orient a whole country to the pleasing of foreigners. Second, that it prevents Africa benefiting from contextual expertise. While swamped with books, technology and know-how from the West, local alternatives can hardly get off the ground. The exclusion of Westerners from visible authority positions that is these days required for reasons already mentioned is a blight on the prospects for real progress in Africa. From the African point of view such exclusion is considered legitimate because Europeans who back their words with foreign money, finding their language in use, easily prematurely take and are given too much power. This would be rectified if Africa could receive valuable and genuine help, if 'foreigners' were to confine

²⁹ Harries, Jim. 2008. 'Providence and Power Structures in Mission and Development: Initiatives from the West to the Rest: a critique of current practice.' In Press. *Evangelical Review of Theology*.

themselves to only operating in African languages, and refuse to back their activities with foreign money.³⁰

The final topic that I can hardly do justice to in this paragraph but must mention, is a getting away from a ‘top down’ approach. The above strategies go a long way in taking us in the bottom-up direction. Development workers who use local languages and rely on locally available resources³¹ for their activities are to a large extent *forced* to be bottom-up in their strategy. The other important way to ensure ‘bottom-up-ness’, to demonstrate genuine humility and to reach to the very heart of a people, is to concentrate on theological aspects of the task in hand. Giving God the credit removes praise from oneself, and is a way of enabling African people to perceive the basic beliefs that underlie the ‘developed’ way of life they desire, and not only the outward expression of such beliefs. Teaching the Bible and teaching theology, in people’s own languages, are in my view the ideal means of bottom-up promotion of development. This is, after all, the means of addressing key issues already discussed above regarding mysterious forces, often translated into English as ‘god’. What *is* the true nature then of God, is an important question that needs urgent attention in Sub-Saharan Africa.³²

Conclusion

The prevalence of the ‘magical worldview’ means that scientific discourse from the West is received in Africa as being magical. Implicit translation from one worldview to another, even

³⁰ Harries, Jim. 2007. ‘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 5.01.08)

³¹ That they themselves do not solicit.

³² See also Harries, Jim. 2007. ‘The Name of God in Africa’ and related contemporary theological, development and linguistic concerns.’ <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/articles/name-of-god.pdf> (accessed 5.01.08)

if the language (such as English) is the same, leaves gaps in comprehension on the part of the receiver of communication in different areas of life, including economics. The fact that people of all cultures share a common humanity is shown to be insufficient basis for clear intercultural communication, and does not prevent science being transformed into magic or vice versa. Three recommendations made to Westerners working in Africa are that they: use African languages, do not invest financially in their key activities, and give priority to theological teaching. Thus Westerners may get to the position of being an aid to 'bottom-up' African development.

