

Heart-Led Development: an East African Study

By Jim Harries,
Kima International School of Theology
PO Box 75
Maseno
Kenya

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Abstract

A consideration of indigenous Christianity is the opening to an appeal for a culturally sympathetic approach to mission and development in Western Kenya that draws on linguistic / pragmatic theory. Classical 'development' thinking is narrow and too materialist in its base for adoption by Christians. Christ gave us an example to follow by accepting people as they are and walking amongst them in poverty. This is contrary to the problematic heavily Western and financially oriented interventions into the non-Western world that we see from Western churches today. The latter forces itself onto people by sheer economic power, frequently creating havoc to delicate community structures, distracting people from more useful pre-occupations and causing serious distortions in Christian theology. A transformation is needed in mission and development strategy.

"What does your church do to promote development (*maendeleo* - Kiswahili, *dongruok* - Dholuo)" asked the theological student. "Well, we arrange to have coffins made for people" replied the church elder. (Yala, Kenya, May 2004)

1.0 Introduction

'Development' activities originating from the West tend to be rooted in secularism. This is problematic for African Christians who in their lives are very spiritually oriented. I argue below that what is often known as spirituality, could more accurately be known as heart orientation, and that such a heart orientation is needed for 'development' in Africa to link in with where people are and hence to take root.

A translation of 'Holy Spirit' back into English from prominent Western Kenyan languages is "cleansed heart". For example *Roho* that is used to translate Spirit (*pneuma* / *ruach*) in the Scriptures is considered a synonym of *chuny* (*Dholuo*) or *omoyo* (*Kiluiya*), which can in turn be translated as the English 'heart' (Ogutu 1975:87).¹ Churches that are oriented to *Roho*, which are commonly known as 'spiritual churches' are perhaps more accurately rendered in English as 'heart-oriented churches'.

The terms 'holy' (Hebrew *qodes*) as against cleansed (Hebrew *tahor*) are not distinguishable in many African languages (Mojola 2003). 'Holy' in the non-ritual sense seems to be unknown, so a 'holy state' is widely identified as being a 'cleansed state' (hence the Kiswahili term for holy is *takatifu*, literally 'cleansed'.) Hence when considering what is 'holy' in East Africa, we must understand this as being in peoples minds in part at least as what has been 'cleansed'.

¹ *Chuny* is strictly the liver and not the heart, but can be translated into English as heart as for the Luo people this is the seat of emotions and the core part of human life.

The seemingly ever growing popularity of the Holy Spirit ('cleansed heart') in East Africa should be educative to us. Many Christians of this region, especially those in Pentecostal and indigenous churches, arduously follow teachings based on *Roho* (spirit, 'heart'). The Holy Spirit ('cleansed heart') is to very many the ultimate source of what is good - including development. Power that is widely recognized in Christian circles is that of the 'cleansed heart' (Holy Spirit), hence also cleansing of peoples' hearts is considered vitally important.²

The 'cleansing' referred to in this deeply rooted understanding is of ghosts (*Dholuo jochiende, Luiya ebitsieno*) that trouble people who do not adhere to ways of life laid out by their ancestors. This is why to many people funeral ceremonies and the maintenance of their ancient ways of life are a vital component to development. They are a part of the process of satisfying or pleasing the departed, in other words cleansing the community of them, so as to avoid their returning to trouble people.

In English we can therefore say that these African people are 'people of heart'. Much of what they do, revolves around concern for the purity of hearts – dead and alive. As to be effective in working with people it is important to link in with their own interests and values, so development must be heart-led, and oriented to 'cleansing of hearts'. Not to be 'heart-led' is asking for confusion, misunderstanding, and all too often disaster. Matters of the heart are of concern to God. Hence how to do development is rightly the subject of theology and Biblical studies, in fact the mission of the church.

Secular models of development, be they capitalist, socialist, functionalist, technological, educational and so on, may not be wrong, but still may not work! They may be correct on the supposition that the world is a physical entity within which people interact rationally. They fall down in a world that is 'spiritual' or 'wholistic' and populated by people who are concerned for the cleansing of their hearts and interacting with gods and ancestors.

2.0 Language

An over-simplistic understanding of language, I suggest, has been leading numerous mission and development scholars astray. It is hard to know where to begin in addressing this important issue, for this not to become a paper on pragmatics and linguistics. I suggest that the use of one language (English) internationally and cross culturally is often not a help to the development enterprise. This is for *many* reasons, which I draw on heavily but can in this paper only outline in barest detail.³

1. The critical eye of non-Westerners who can read the Western language concerned prevents the Westerner from stating publicly that which is evidently true, because to do so would either:
 - (a) offend the non-Westerner or
 - (b) cause the Westerner to consider the non-Westerner to be offended according to the formers (often false) perception of the nature of the non-Westerner.
2. There is a limit to how foreign a thing can appear when the language used to describe it has to be familiar. The foreign, obscure and incredible easily appears domestic and familiar when the only metaphors available to picture it are thoroughly commonplace. Hence the above view of the non-Westerner.
3. The fact that people will interpret "in line with their experience of the way the world is" (Yule 1996:141) cuts both ways. Wonderful truths, be they scientific, technological, social or even theological, are frankly grasped in a different way by those in the South than is anticipated by those in the North. Explanations by those in the South do not tell those in the North 'what is', but an imagined middle world somewhere between reality on the ground in the South and Northern mythology and fiction.
4. Enormous context dependence of language unveiled in recent research in pragmatics and discourse analysis has shown that mutual understanding is possible only insofar as one has a mutual context. The more distant the context of communicators, the lower the level of understanding. It is hard to imagine a more distant context than between some Northern and Southern societies.

² This is not to say that such understanding of the Holy Spirit is necessarily correct or orthodox. Whether orthodox or not, it is a widespread and significant understanding.

³ I refer listeners to my Ph D thesis - which is at the moment unfortunately uncompleted and unpublished.

5. While misunderstandings occur in very simple day to day activities, the above applies the most profoundly and intricately to complexities of spiritual life, meaning, value and purpose, that is the bread and butter of the work of the theologian and missionary!

The above brief preview of an enormous literature, has to date been too little applied to development thinking. I hope it is making my readers/listeners aware of the importance of language and cultural learning as a prerequisite for understanding and engaging in cross-cultural mission and development, and thus by implication some weaknesses of scholarly work engaged in by those who have not passed through such learning.

3.0 The Problems of Development and their Resolution

3.1. Imitation of Christ

Imitation of Jesus is an essential part of Christian living. What this means is a question of interpretation. The church, or branches of the (universal) church have at times in history considered this to mean to dress as he desired, (for example many indigenous African churches like to dress the way Jesus is depicted as dressing in pictures) to speak the language that he spoke (on the assumption perhaps that this was Latin!) to heal as he healed, to teach as he taught, to die as he died (as some believers in the Philippines seem to be want to do) or even to keep his face as he kept it (religious – types wear a beard). What does it mean to imitate Christ?

Missionaries are inclined to imitate Christ's words, regardless of the way those words are presented – hence tracts, radio broadcasts even devotional books – none of which (we assume) Christ ever made use of! While such may not be wrong, Jesus' method of presentation of his words may still be worthy of study. This especially at a time when the contextual dependence of language meaning is increasingly recognized.⁴

A man telling his wife "I love you" while brandishing a knife, is different from the one who does the same while holding a bunch of flowers. The former may mean that the husband's feelings about his wife's lover are sufficient for him to kill her because of his jealousy for her: this being quite different from the latter valentines gift! A wealthy businessman offering to contribute to the new church roof is clearly quite different to the same words expressed by a poor old widow. So was the context of the words uttered by Jesus also important?

Jesus walked amongst people becoming materially dependant on them as he shared God's love with them (Luke 8:3). He illustrated God's love through parables and pointed to God's divine plan through miracles. His ultimate act of love was in his sacrifice of himself on behalf of the sins of others. Jesus' love was not primarily one of material giving. (The turning of water into wine and feeding of thousands I take as more exceptions than the rule.) When it came to material giving, this easily backfired (John.6:26ff). Those who followed Christ for the sake of material and social advancement were few, and short lived (Luke 18:23-25).

Although sharing of resources may be a part of a relationship of love, it alone is never sufficient to constitute love. This is for at least two major reasons. One, that wealth shared from a surplus is impersonal. Two, that receiving of alms puts the recipient into a subservient position relative to the donor, which he may put up with even if he doesn't appreciate it, and which implies that wealth may be shared in order to gain an upper hand and not necessarily out of love at all.

Jesus' words were uttered by him from a position of both material and political weakness. This means that they were also received either despite or even because of his weakness. This weakness, in human terms, came to be a part of his words. It was despite his weakness, or was it through his weakness, that he was what he was and did what he did? As giving someone a penny when you have 10 pennies is different to giving them the only penny you have (Luke 21:2-3), so the meaning or at least force of Jesus' words changes if uttered by the powerful.

⁴ FN For example see Blass, 1990:260.

3.2. *The Principle of Poverty*

The vows of the adherents of catholic orders, to poverty, chastity and obedience, remind us that the principle of poverty is not new in Christian circles.⁵ Even such orders would appear to face difficulties in the current world – where what may be classed as ‘poverty’ on one Continent, may be extravagant wealth on another.

The famous sending out of the 72 has prompted much debate (Luke 10:4). Why did Jesus instruct his followers to take neither bag nor purse? Was this to be a lasting ordinance, or a passing phase? The famous missionary Paul seems to have followed this principle. He went around taking collections (Romans 15:27) and not giving handouts (except of course to the Jerusalem church for whom the collection was intended). Paul made collections from those whom he evangelized, apparently in order to quell ill feeling in his sending church.⁶ (The tension between Paul and the Jewish church in Jerusalem, sometimes known as ‘the circumcision’ is very evident in the pages of the New Testament. Unfortunately the New Testament is silent on whether the latter accepted the gift Paul carried to them, which would have demonstrated acquiescence to and a unity with the fast growing non-circumcising Gentile church. A few years later the Jerusalem church was of course destroyed.) The other apostles (apart from Paul, if one considers Paul as one of the 12 apostles) who remained in Jerusalem give the impression of having been poor. At least they were referred to as ‘the poor’ (e.g. Romans 15:26).

Some simple rational reasoning soon reveals what might be the advantages of ‘poverty’ for a missionary. A man poor in the eyes of the world who has an aura of contentment, is likely to arouse admiration. A poor man is not an immediate threat to those in or hungering for power as a wealthy man would be, thus enabling him to live peacefully with people in an otherwise competitive society. Not being a threat, a poor man can extend a listening / learning ear into a situation from which a powerful man would be cautiously excluded. Such listening / learning of a foreign people and culture is vital to gain an understanding that will enable evangelization. A poor man is not going to be under pressure to utilize his resources to help in this, that and the other situation, which would be demanding of his time and energy, so again is left free to be otherwise (spiritually) engaged. A poor man does not acquire a stream of visitors, as a rich man in a poor environment may, who have set out to tell stories that may or may not be true aimed to convince him to part with his wealth.

Luke 16:13 tells us clearly that “no servant can serve two masters . . . you cannot serve both God and Money.” It is clear that he who serves God will still, at least in a modern consumer economy, have need for money. The point is that he need not strive for it, maximize it, or orient himself to it. Let him orient himself to serving God, so that others come to provide for his material needs (this being of course a Biblical principle, see for example Numbers 18:8-9).

3.3. *Valuing People as they are*

Christ was born and raised in the community in which he later ministered and taught. He transformed people from being fishers of fish into fishers of men (Mathew 4:19). This seemed to be a natural transition for them, once they had come to know God and his ways. It did not require the adoption of a foreign way of thinking, but a Godly reorientation of their familiar way of life.

This is not what happens when Westerners get involved in ‘development’ elsewhere in the world. In communities that have never produced a surplus, thinking economically is entirely foreign. (In many African societies life’s activities are based on guidelines and taboos passed down from ancestors, and not economic calculations.) Yet this is what is required for a project to be sustainable. A project is likely to involve considerable material and financial investment. Thus a material inducement is put out for someone to reject their peoples’ way of life in favour of a foreign one.

⁵ As noted by Reimer (2004) in relation to Orthodox Christianity.

⁶ “Because it was only by the volitional participation of his churches that the collection would testify to the genuineness of their faith in Christ and thereby confront the Jerusalem Christians with the undeniable fact of the legitimacy of their membership in the body of Christ.” (Nickle 1966:127)

To be able to hone someone's capability to function in a community, it would seem one needs to be a part of that community. Certainly this is true of language. Even the most accomplished linguist would have trouble training people to advance in a language with which he/she is unfamiliar. So also a culture or way of life that follows patterns set up by language and language use.⁷ A Chinese person training British people will only be able to succeed in so far as he has first either adopted the British way of life (language), or has explained and taught the Chinese way of life (language). The former will require considerable prior effort on his part, and the latter considerable prior effort on the part of his students. (On the basis that this Chinese man's words will not link in accurately at depth with the British culture without an appreciation of the Chinese culture from which they arise.)

Development initiatives, as also mission 'from the West to the rest' these days tends to work on the latter principle. The rest of the world is expected to change and comprehend Western language and thought, so as to be able to apply its fruits to their lives. As it is impossible to erect the roof of a house before one has put up the walls, so the fineries of 'development', such as the rules of economics and sustainability, are unfortunately not discernable until the rest of the culture has to a large extent been acquired. A Chinaman to learn English ways while living in England may be easier than the English to learn Chinese ways from one man staying in their country. So the difficulty faced by, say, African people to learn English ways sufficiently well while living in their own communities and continent. This degree of difficulty is such as to render this exercise effectively impossible. In reality, whenever an Englishman is trying to explain a particular capstone of his culture necessary for 'development', he is in effect having to explain the whole kit and caboodle of his way of life. 'Success' is the transformation of an African person into a British person. A ridiculous project given its impossibility, bearing in mind that even should one person be so transformed, that leaves him with the same level of difficulty in transforming those who remain.

This model of development is the one being implemented around the world, or certainly in Africa. In some countries all children are taught and even taught-in European languages with such an aim in mind. The net result of this is great frustration, time wasting, and far from breeding independence this is in effect a way of funneling a whole people into a climate akin to 'worship' of the Western father-land!

Christ accepts and values sinners. So, Christians seeking 'transformation' need to accept and value people as they are. Change that is advisory is dependent on the nature of the original state of a person. To advise on 'change', one needs to know that state. True knowledge comes from experience. Hence development policies promoted by Christians around the world should be peculiar to each culture, understandable by that people, and arising from where they are. Not from where they might be according to some idealist hypothetical model. The change agent is first required to change, and to change the most, before he can effectively bring others to helpful change.

4.0 The Stand Required of the Church

4.1. Third World Church not a Landing Point for Excess Wealth

The existence of a world-wide church, is an incredible opportunity for people from distance corners of the globe to share in fellowship. Such opportunity needs to be nurtured, and should not be abused.

Its abuse arises when one party considers itself dominant over the others. That is when, instead of respectfully accepting the different ways in which diverse peoples worship God, one party out of the many aims to dominate the whole scene.

This happens when a branch of the church, that from the West, gets so hung up on the notion of its own superiority as to become pre-occupied in its relationship with the rest of the church around the world in issues at best peripherally Christian, and at worst grossly secular.

⁷ While the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is rarely accepted in its entirety, 'moderate Whorfianism' is often considered largely correct by academics. That is, that the particular nature of a language has a very influential determining affect on a society (Chandler nd:www).

I might not take the above as being wrong in itself, if it was engaged in through such a means as to leave other parties free to choose whether or not to participate, and the degree of their participation. That free choice, whether or not to be involved in the world-wide Westernising process, is at the moment not there. Except, that is, for the very strong.

The Scriptures warn us frequently about the entanglements of wealth (for example see 1 Timothy 6:9). Western Christians try, to various degrees, to take a stand against the materialism around them, hard as that might be.⁸ They rarely consider the necessity of assisting the rest of the world church in taking a similar stand.

The force of wealth is rarely comprehended. An offer of finance of whatever form is hard to resist, and is hence an imposition. Should church leader A want to refuse an offer of finance by foreigner B to fund project C, he had better look out! Not all in his church will be as spiritually minded as he, and should it be discovered that he has turned down food to help the hungry, jobs to help the unemployed or clothing for the poorly dressed his neck could be on the line.⁹ Picture a situation where we have church A and church D. Donors tend to have a certain determination in what they do, (they also have to succeed in finding a recipient in order to propagate their trade) so imagine their having been refused by church A, then going to church D. How will members of church A respond on discovering that the new buildings, clothing, food, jobs and prestige being enjoyed by church D would have been theirs if it had not been refused by their pastor?

I hope it is becoming clear that aid, projects and assistance to the 3rd world church are almost invariably an imposition, to the extent that even the least thought-out of development innovations, when backed by sufficient funds, will be welcomed with open arms. Then the fighting for a share of the cake ensues. Corrupt practices are inevitable given the rootlessness of incoming funds. (Funds that 'drop out of the sky' like this are 'up for grabs' as they have not been earned and their ownership is ambiguous). Such impositions cause fights, split churches, distract people from more meaningful occupations than fighting for money, and damage the reputation of the church in the eyes of the world. Those Western Christians who see churches around the world as landing points for their particular vision of compassion and development, are creating major damage in the process. The degree of this damage has only begun to be alluded to above.

4.2. Not to Devalue what is not Western

Organisations promoting development and seeking to offer aid, work under particular pressures and have particular agendas to fulfill. Money that has come in, must go out. Their rationale and *raison d'être* is rooted, not in poor non-Western communities, but fairly and squarely in the West. They depend on their donors, and it is their donors who they must please to ensure their growth and sustainability.

Their donors, even if they be Christians, clearly live within a world that is influenced by a certain culture. While many of their values may be guided and even rooted in the Scriptures, the latter is a means of transforming a way of life and not a way of life in itself. (The Bible must clearly be read by people in their language. It is therefore invariably interpreted through their culture. The Christian way of life will therefore vary from culture to culture.) Donors will seek to guide the use of their funds along lines with which they are familiar and in ways that make sense to them in their own worldview. Anything contrary to their (Western) view of life, is likely to be given short shrift.

This means that Western funding, unless very carefully watched, applies constant pressure towards a Westernisation of the rest of the world. What is not Western, is devalued, and what is Western is

⁸ That is, there is at least in British Christianity, a movement against consumerism, perhaps typified by books such as *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* by Ronald Sider. (1978).

⁹ Whatever else a 'project' in a Third World situation brings, it almost certainly includes spin-off financial benefits for those closely associated with it. If not then it is a no-good project!

promoted. Such is likely to meet minimal real opposition from the non-West where funding is being applied because:-

- 1/ You don't bite the hand that feeds you.
- 2/ Westerners seem to be very clever – so they must know what they are doing.
- 3/ Even if the project is way off target, there will still be plenty of people eating from it.
- 4/ Corruption has taken over, and the thing may already be totally distorted.
- 5/ If they are so stupid as to do this, then why tell them to stop?
- 6/ And so on ...

This results in the ridiculous situation whereby what is foreign and misunderstood flourishes and prospers, and what is indigenous known and valued, flounders. That Christians are contributing to this state of affairs is sad.

I can repeat that at which I have already hinted – being that a Western person having a Westernising influence is almost inevitable. As one cannot help someone to improve their language skills without first learning the language, so one cannot help someone adapt their culture without first learning the culture. True development of a people is facilitated to the degree that someone takes the time to first learn their ways.

4.3. Not to Link God's Word with Finance

Current wisdom in 'development', shared largely by Western Christians in collusion with their non-Christian counterparts, has other ramifications, two of which I will mention here being promotion of the prosperity gospel and racism.

The prosperity Gospel is a subtle but powerful and potentially extremely damaging aberration of God's truth that is currently spreading like wild-fire around the globe. While its particular domain may be Pentecostalism, it branches far and wide beyond the latter into mission and other indigenously founded churches. It is a peculiar hybrid that arises and continues to be nurtured through Western contact with the 'poor' world.

The essence of prosperity Gospel is simple. The Bible speaks of having faith, as a means to secure God's blessing (1 John 5:4). Westerners who call themselves Christians arrive in the non-Western world claiming to acknowledge God's omniscience and power, while carrying numerous absolutely incredible devices and inventions from clothes to calculators, shoes to mobile phones, money to hairspray! It is a short route to the conclusion that these must be the amazing things that God brings. Christians' 'God talk' and emphasis on prayer, shows clearly that such come through prayer. In no time then prayer and even the whole of worship and Christian life, is oriented to the acquisition of such. Role models exist to exemplify the possibility of success, being those local Christians who have succeeded in getting a link with donors, but give the credit for this to God.

This way of thinking soon comes to dominate the whole of Christian life. Hence suits are worn, English is used, Western devotional books are preferred, glasses are coveted (whether someone's eyes are bad or not), and the 'cargo' is awaited! The same value system is read back into the Scriptures. Moses, Elijah, Paul and even Jesus are assumed to have done the same thing, and thus latched on to what is also known as 'the white man's wealth'.

Perhaps it is time this was called a 'lie' or a 'heresy'. Yet it is not one always propagated by intent. It just happens – wherever a Westerner opens his mouth backed by Western money, as those from the non-western world attempt to understand him from their cultural perspective.

The fight against racism reflects the Western value¹⁰ that all people are essentially equal. (This value is clearly deeply rooted in Christianity.) Efforts made especially by Christians in the West to counter racism

¹⁰ Clearly not shared by everyone around the world - notably India with its caste system.

are admirable, but pitiful given the degree of worldwide inequality. I am frequently struck by the attention given to asylum seekers by British churches, who have temporary residence in UK while their cases are looked into. They may be showered with wealth and attention, efforts being made to avoid their expulsion as if it is through landing on British soil that they have become human, while the millions of their 'miserable colleagues' left at 'home' can be relatively ignored. Such shows of wealth perpetuate racist notions.

For Western efforts at countering racism by raising the wealth of foreign residents to local standards to be consistent, then the reverse would also need to apply. That is, that Westerners who are foreigners outside of the West should reduce their wealth, in order to generate equality! Such not happening means that the rest of the world is a constant source of racist thinking – in which white skin is associated with being rich.

5. What is not Realised about the Church in Development

5.1. The Unchristian Character of Development

The adamancy of the Western church in its promotion of 'development' seems to be convincing the rest of the world that the latter must be inherently Christian. This is an incredible supposition on the basis that, especially for protestants, the Bible is claimed to be the foundation for the Christian life. There is a difference between using the Bible to guide a presupposed orientation to 'development' and deriving 'developmental thinking' from the Bible.

I would hazard to suggest that it is only perhaps a certain interpretation of the Scriptures that convey what is known as 'development'. No-where in the New or Old Testaments do we find evidence for either the advance of science or technology, or the setting up of the kind of institutions associated with 'development' today - such as hospitals, formal educational facilities, budgeting for business management etc. Considering such as a part of Christian mission or ministry is in effect syncretism.

I imagine that it is through prosperity coming to be measured by the abundance of 'things' in the West, that the expression of love through the giving of gifts has become prominent, that has in turn brought a lower and lower valuation of the life of those who are materially poor. Yet the giving of gifts is only one means of sharing love and compassion, and one that may be far from the best. Certainly (as argued above) it can hardly be taken as 'Biblical'. It ignores expressions of love through sharing time, learning from one another, encouragement, heart-sharing, attending key familial events such as weddings, funerals, celebrations, anniversaries, praying, singing together and so on and so on and so on.

5.2. Wealth that Results in Submissive Contrition

The power of wealth in forcing its way is also frequently not realized. I have alluded to this in 3.1. above. It is a rare and strong pastor who can refuse the offer of a 'development project' to him or his church. This applies almost regardless of the advisability of the project's actual aims. It may be a project to enable chickens to lay blue eggs with green spots, or to tie-dye clothes, or to vaccinate trees, or to (re)invent wheels – as long as it comes with money to support it that is OK. 'Better the project (money) come here than go somewhere else.'

This means in effect that the whole decision making process as regards the advisability of projects easily remains with the donor(s). Recipients can anyway hardly be expected to assist in such a process, as their outlook and objectives are not those envisioned by a donor. The long-term calculated vision of a Westerner is unlikely to be shared by a recipient, who has more immediate needs and perhaps an immediate shortage of food in mind.¹¹

5.3. 'Projects' are followed by Confusion and Havoc

¹¹ I am here skipping numerous linguistic and cultural considerations in my over-simplistic presumption that donor and recipient actually understand one another.

Havoc frequently ensues following the receipt of donor money or a donor project. This is covered up whenever possible – through fear that a donor’s realising the impact of his development initiative may discourage him from giving further help. Sometimes cracks cannot be covered over and examples are legion in which long time friendships and church associations are blown to smithereens by the lust for material gain engendered through development initiatives. The fighting in Buru Buru church of God in Nairobi, Kenya resulting in violence that was fully reported in the Kenyan media is just one example (for example report see Anon 2003). I would not like to share many examples, suspecting that such would make me unpopular amongst the church leaders who are hoping for a continued supply of development / aid.

I suspect that major churches, such as the Anglican or Catholic, have made some progress in ensuring that development aid that enters their non-Western parishes does so in such a way as to minimise havoc. This can be done by the careful formulation of guidelines that are vigorously kept so as to dampen the impact of aid and projects. Having a non-local in charge helps in this process, as jealousy will be less biting to him than to a fellow countryman who is raised from ‘rags to riches’ just because he can sweet-talk foreigners. Careful experienced donors also learn to try and avoid having a divisive influence – although they usually have to learn by first making mistakes. In these days of easy global communications there are more and more self – appointed amateur development experts around who do their damage, get their fingers burnt, then disappear.

A relatively good grasp of English and its usage seems to be a barrier to understanding what is happening on the part of Western visitors to Africa. Many do not realise that knowledge and ability in a certain area, e.g. language, does not mean that what is known is being put into practice in expected ways. In other words, the wide spread of European languages (particularly English) dampens the perception of European people to very deep and very significant cultural differences that amongst other things affect 'development'. What a Westerner hears is familiar, only because the non-Westerner has spent many years learning what is foreign! Much local reality remains hidden!

5.4. Outside Projects suppress Local Initiative

The question has to be asked how ‘success’ in development is to be defined? If ‘we’ succeed in ‘developing them’, then is that success or is it social engineering or the material domination of a people? It is in this area that the final and perhaps most difficult questions need asking, as to the true impact of ‘successful’ development, should such ever occur.

To peoples accustomed to seeking blessing and progress from ‘gods’ (however defined), white peoples pre-eminence in development activities (even if out of sight their influence is rightly assumed to be critical) easily renders them identifiable as if they are gods. This can result in blatant idolatry.¹²

Perhaps the most profound insights into the impact of many development projects would arise from considering the counter-factual. There appears to be a crass but widespread assumption that without aid and development initiatives economies and societies outside the Western world would be stood-still in the stone-age! This assumes no initiative and pitiful levels of intelligence on the part of non-Westerners. (If intelligence really is so pitiful, then what chance for the success of projects once handed over?)

One outcome arising from the habitual link between projects and foreign funding, is a serious devaluing of academia and human knowledge. It is a devaluing of local knowledge, because its implicit message is that knowledge alone is never of any worth, unless it is knowledge of how to use outside funds. The implicit message is that someone cannot help himself, but must be helped! A sad message indeed. In fact self-help while probably a more arduous process than merely plucking from a donor tree, may be exactly what can help an initiative to succeed, as it ensures that it will be valued. Dependence on funds gives the advantage to the wealthy and not to the intelligent (these two may, but may not, be correlated). Finally it

¹² It is striking how white people seem to come to fit the space left by the Luo people in their lives for God. " ... in whatever the Luo did ... they depended on God for their success" says Ogutu (1975:118). These days they depend increasingly on Whites.

devalues learning because it is all too often driven not by a growing knowledge of effective implementation, but by ongoing pressure from relatively ignorant donors.

The stir created by and dominating effect of foreign funded initiatives in Africa alone, is such as to buy up the best brains on the continent into serving foreign interests in incomprehensible and unnatural (to them) ways. Not in tune with local ways of life, such initiatives are constantly clashing with peoples own judgments. The promotion of foreign languages severely hampers the development of indigenous languages, that are the ones people understand. It is perhaps the narrow mindedness of initiators of foreign – funded and originated projects that is actually responsible for the cataclysmic continuity of rampant poverty in Africa and elsewhere, through suppression of local initiative. Let the church not share in the guilt in this.

6.0 Conclusion

A transformation in the approach used by the Western church to the non-western World is badly needed. This needs to be a revival of truly Godly and wholistic thinking, to replace the mimicking of secularist methodologies that is today so widespread and debilitating. These are areas in which the church needs to lead and not to follow. Transformation comes through the heart – an empowering from God’s heart to man’s. In development terminology such enables progress through local initiatives in line with local lifestyles. Not through ‘development projects’ initiated from outside.

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Bible quotes are from the New International Version.