

# The Glaring Gap, Anthropology, Religion, and Christianity in African Development

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## Abstract

Careful reading of studies on language of education in Africa reveals a gaping gap in comprehension. A careful study of the history and practice of anthropology reveals a covert concealing of large arenas of knowledge about African societies from view. The above gaps in understanding result in debate on African development frequently ignoring 'religion'. African development seems not to be progressing on its own; great ideas on development rooted in western thinking typically collapse when handed over to African management. This article considers how the above 'gaps' in anthropology and linguistic studies have contributed to the dummification of academia that has in turn handicapped Africa. It considers a new engagement with 'religion', especially Christianity, as the way forward.

## Keywords

Mission, Christianity, Africa, anthropology, linguistics, development, education

## Introduction

This paper states what is obvious, but rarely so obviously stated; God is not optional. That may sound more like a line for an evangelist than for an academic, which possibly makes this paper remarkable. The paper looks at issues of language of instruction in Africa. It goes on to draw on the author's personal experiences and observations as long term Africa-missionary and scholar. It then considers some of anthropology's reflections about itself. These three foci all point to one controversial conclusion; that religion, more specifically Christianity, is a necessary component to African development.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am not in this article looking at 'comparative religion'. Partly because, linguistically speaking, I do not see it as a legitimate exercise to try and compare systems that are in many ways incompatible / incommensurable.

Masses of research point to the value of the use of indigenous languages in early education in Africa. African people themselves seem not to want this. A key reason identified for this in this article, is that Africa is monistic. African people's belief in 'magic'<sup>2</sup> means that their understanding of what the process of education should achieve is different from the Western one. African people do not necessarily expect the schooling of their children to give them some kind of ordered self-understanding and grasp of the world around them that is rooted in objective truth. They are accustomed to having magically based systems produce for them. They expect nothing different of formal schooling.

I share a subjective outline of the course in life that had me reach the kinds of conclusions that this article outlines. I see the backing of the work of some other scholars, cited in this article, as a confirmation regarding my own pre-existing convictions, rather than the initial means of their discovery. Following an informal phenomenological course of research, I had already been convinced that the missing component to African development was not provision of capital, or technical education, but was very much in the arena known as 'religion'. Hence I shifted from promoting agriculture, economics, secular-development, and formal education, into seeking to work with indigenous African Christian congregations. A concealing of truth on the part of anthropologists pointed to by Fenella Cannell and others has been confirmation and not an initiating of a truth that I had already perceived.

Cannell demonstrates that anthropology arose on the back of particular Christian doctrines. Neither anthropology, nor even secularism as a whole, could have developed as they have and be what they are if the community in which they were founded had not been profoundly Christian, suggests Cannell. Anthropology has had to engage in deceptive theoretical acrobatics in order to defend its position, especially the misguided notion that it is somehow objective and answerable to no religious faith system. As a result of this deception anthropologists and sociologists have been trying to deny African communities vital insights that could have enabled appropriate indigenously-fired styles of development.

## **1. Language of Education in Africa Today**

My focus on the linguistic scene in Africa today is especially on the debate over the relevance and importance of the use of African languages in education and

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term 'magic' loosely in this essay to describe the orientation to causation of monistic people, for whom the spiritual and material are inseparable.

formal governance. The very existence of a raging debate on the choice of language for use in early years of primary schooling in Africa is in many ways remarkable. The question in view is: when African children attend school, is it helpful for them to be able to understand what the teacher is saying? Put in this way the answer seems to be glaringly obvious; who would want to send their child to school to be taught using a medium that they cannot understand? Yet incredibly and repeatedly the response from African parents is that they would rather their children be taught in a language that they do *not* understand. African parents, whose children have in their pre-school years had little or no exposure to English, are rushing to have their children taught in English medium schools. The industry of private primary schooling using English is booming even in countries like Tanzania where general English comprehension amongst the population is incredibly low.<sup>3</sup> Research by Brock-Utne and Desai shows that children have the same preference as their parents.<sup>4</sup>

Examples of studies done to identify this phenomenon are legion. I will look at only a few of them below to illustrate my point. Almost invariably, they find that children taught using a language that they already understand do better in school than children who cannot comprehend what is being talked-at-them. The studies done advocate that African languages (usually mother-tongue although in some cases trade languages such as Swahili) be used in early primary education.<sup>5</sup> The baffled author of the study frequently has to concede that despite what is being proposed appearing to be eminently logical and sensible; the chances of uptake in native African communities are almost zero. The recommendation to use African languages may be followed when European<sup>6</sup> linguists are in charge, but African people will generally not continue such practice when left to their own devices.

Studies on the appropriate language for education have not been confined to Africa. Wayne P. Thomas and Virginia P. Collier looked at language minority students in the USA.<sup>7</sup> They found that: 'it is crucial that educators provide a

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<sup>3</sup> Gibson Ferguson, 'The Medium of Instruction in African Education: The Role of Applied Linguistics', in: Sinfree Makoni and Nkonko Kamwangamalu (eds.), *Language and Institutions in Africa*, Cape Town: CASAS 2000, 99.

<sup>4</sup> Birgit Brock-Utne and Zubeida Desai, 'Expressing Oneself Through Writing — A Comparative Study of Learner's Writing Skills in Tanzania and South Africa', in: Birgit Brock-Utne *et al.* (eds.), *Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa — Highlights from a Project*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers 2010, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ferguson, 96.

<sup>6</sup> I use the term 'European' essentially interchangeably with 'Western'.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne P. Thomas and Virginia P. Collier. 'A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement.' Center for Research on Education,

socioculturally supportive school environment for language minority students that allows natural language, academic, and cognitive development to flourish in both L1 [primary language] and L2 [secondary language].<sup>8</sup> That is, their research came out clearly in favour of the provision of early school education in mother tongue, to children resident in the USA whose home languages were not English.

Ayo Bamgbose reports on a project (begun in 1970) in Nigeria that was intended to discover whether there were advantages to be gained through use of mother tongue for six years instead of the normal three years of primary schooling. The outcome was 'strong support for the use of a child's mother-tongue for learning and teaching in the primary school' presumably because of the difficulties involved in 'trying to acquire concepts in a foreign language . . . while also learning the knowledge conveyed in the language.'<sup>9</sup>

Zubeida Desai concludes her South African study by suggesting that 'in a context such as Khayelitsha it makes more sense for learners to be taught in their mother tongue till at least the end of grade 7.'<sup>10</sup> Desai had already told us that even the (South African) 'Department of Education publicly acknowledged that matric pupils (that is, Grade 12 learners) studying through a language other than their mother tongue (that is, all African matriculants) are at a distinct disadvantage.'<sup>11</sup>

Stephen L. Walter and Christine M. Ruth tested whether the use of Kom as language of instruction in Cameroonian schools would be advantageous. Kom taught students did vastly better than those who had been taught in English. 'Of particular interest is the fact that the Kom-medium schools scored substantially higher on the test of oral English than did the English medium schools' report Walter and Ruth, demonstrating that use of the mother-tongue in early education improved even the learning of the European language.<sup>12</sup> They go on to report that 'the lowest performing Kom-medium schools still

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Diversity and Excellence, 2002, website *eScholarship* of the University of California, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/65j213pt>—page-1, accessed 23 August 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas and Collier, 324.

<sup>9</sup> Ayo Bamgbose. 'Mother-Tongue Education: Lessons from the Yoruba Experience,' in: Birgit Brock-Utne and Rodney Kofi Hopson (eds.), *Languages of Instruction for African Emancipation: Focus on Post-colonial Contexts and Considerations*, Cape Town: CASAS 2005, 245.

<sup>10</sup> Zubeida Desai, 'A Case for Mother Tongue Education?' in: Birgit Brock-Utne *et al.* (eds.), *Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA)*, Dar-es-Salaam: E and D 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Desai, 62.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen L. Walter and Christine M. Ruth. 'Results of the First Year of the Kom Experimental Project', unpublished document, 2008, 7.

out performed the best of the English medium schools . . . .<sup>13</sup> A study carried out by Williams 'shows that fifth-year primary pupils in Malawi, where the medium until grade 4 is Chichewa, have no worse reading abilities in English than primary 5 pupils in Zambia, where the official medium is English from year one' (cited in Ferguson).<sup>14</sup>

It is amazing in many ways that this kind of research on what is such an obvious truism, that children learn better when taught using a language that they understand, should even be continuing. In 2000 Ferguson had already concluded that 'there is little dispute in academic and policy making circles that an indigenous local language, related to the mother tongue, is the most effective medium of early education. . . .'<sup>15</sup> Ferguson suggests that the preference for European languages on the part of many African people is 'a profoundly political one'<sup>16</sup> not to do with acquiring understanding but with getting 'better paying modern sector jobs. . . .'<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately use of non-native languages as educational medium could be resulting in education losing its transformative role, as well as being a violation of 'linguistic human rights and social justice.'<sup>18</sup>

## 2. Anthropology's Love Affair with Secularism

I would like to begin this section by outlining a puzzle that I personally faced when as a British born Westerner I set out to live amongst native African people in their own physical and social contexts. Some scholars may argue that my particular experience and resulting reflections from living with African people are intensely personal and so foundationally subjective. I could attempt to defend taking such a subjective position in various ways, such as to claim that pretensions of objectivity are usually illusory.<sup>19</sup> The failure to take account of learning that has not passed a rigorous screen of objective criteria is a failing in academia that has resulted in vast swaths of human experience being left

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<sup>13</sup> Walter and Ruth, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Ferguson, 96.

<sup>15</sup> Ferguson, 97.

<sup>16</sup> Ferguson, 98.

<sup>17</sup> Ferguson, 100.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew J. Gandolfo, 'Education Medium and African Linguistic Rights in the Context of Globalization', *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 7/3 (2009), 328.

<sup>19</sup> Jim Harries, 'The Great Delusion: Post-Colonial Language Policy for Mission and Development in Africa Reviewed', *Transformation, an International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 29/1 (2012), 44-61.

unstudied. I allude to my very-personal field experience because it provides an independent verification of the arguments presented by the scholars that I will look at subsequently in this section.<sup>20</sup>

Mixing with African people forced me to reconsider my view of what it was foundationally to be human. Having been born and reared in the UK, I considered certain characteristics of human beings that I commonly came across to be 'normal' for everybody on the globe. I wrongly assumed that what I found to be normal in the UK must be universal. As a result of finding that many African people did not possess certain of what I had assumed to be universal characteristics of humanity my foundational anthropological presuppositions were undermined.<sup>21</sup>

Although a believing Christian, I had gone to Africa thinking that it was my specialised training in agriculture that would be of most value to the people. My interest in agriculture became my pretext for exploring the African community around me. In the course of doing this, I discovered that the differences between behaviour of British people and African people (already mentioned above) that seemed to result in the latter being 'poor' were more foundationally connected to what I held to be Christian values and behaviour, than to any lack or otherwise of technical agricultural and other knowledge. Many of the Zambian people I worked with at the time seemed to be aspiring to Western ways of life, with which I as a Brit was identified. I realised that people's interest in me was motivated by their desire to share in aspects of Western life. Because it was, if anything, following Christ and not following agriculture that could give them what they were looking for, I determined that it would be more helpful for me to teach the Gospel than to teach farming. I made a career switch from being a Christian who taught agriculture, to full time engagement with Christian discipleship (sharing the Gospel).

I was in due course gradually exposed more closely to the discipline of anthropology. This was a relief, as the relatively Marxist-orientated university at which I was studying at the time (University of East Anglia (UEA), 1994/1995) did not seem to do justice at all to my experience by then of already having spent three years living closely with African people in Zambia. My time at UEA was really my introduction to the whole field of social science, which began to allow me to explore Weber and Durkheim as well as Aristotle, Plato, Gramsci, and others.

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<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed autobiography go to Jim Harries' website, *Meeting the Indigenous Church*, <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/harries-bio.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> I use the term anthropological here in a generic rather than in a specialised sense.

From about 2001 I extended my research avenues into the field of linguistics. This enabled me to acquire further ‘answers’ to the puzzles I was facing in the course of ministry in Africa. The realisation that there is more to language than semantics was especially useful, and opened up many subsequent explorations into pragmatics and related areas. Pragmatics underlies my understanding of language and education, as articulated earlier in this article. I became convinced regarding the importance of the use of African languages in formal as well as informal contexts on the African continent. Reading deeply and widely in diverse disciplines not only enabled me to acquire (I trust) ever deeper insights, but also to write numerous articles.<sup>22</sup>

Despite all this research and writing, there was still a gap. That gap was to the effect that — secular-backed academics seemed to totally miss the kinds of changes in human behaviour that I was indentifying as arising out of Christianity. Even anthropology, with all its sensitivities to cultural and religious contexts, just seemed to be blind to many of the changes that Christianisation was bringing and could bring to previously non-Christian societies — such as many found in Africa. This gap was all the more striking given my own personal day-to-day experience of living in an African village, by this time in western Kenya, and constantly coming across diverse forms of Christian expression. These forms of Christian expression were often not Western-guided mission-founded misfits transplanted into African communities, but variously indigenised practices that were evidently being taken very seriously in the lives of numerous people.

The age of the internet advanced to a point at which it had become possible to search for answers to some questions by launching a discussion in the *anthropology network* on *LinkedIn*. The provocative title I chose was: ‘Anthropology grew out of Christianity. This makes the study of the Christian faith uncomfortable for anthropologists. It’s too much like looking in the mirror.’ Respondents were plentiful, and often damning! One after the other launched spirited attacks against Christianity, seeming to consider it incredible that any thinking person could take the Gospel seriously in our 21st century world. Given the enormous size and impact of the Christian church globally, I had to ask myself why the response of anthropologists (or at least those people interested in debating on such an anthropological forum) to Christianity was at best dismissive and commonly so derogatory? Why, I had to ask myself, did anthro-

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<sup>22</sup> Over 30 articles have already been published in peer-review and professional journals. I have published three books, with a fourth one on its way.

pologists have so little respect for a faith that is evidently enormously influential around the world that they are supposedly studying?

Whether Christianity had a part to play in the formation of anthropology as it is today, was clearly an important issue to many respondents. The general view was that such a notion is preposterous. For anthropologists to give credit for some of the building blocks of their beloved discipline to the much berated Christian faith was more than many participants in the above discussion forum could begin to imagine. Some apparently mature people left in a huff wondering how such an incredible notion could be taken seriously in today's world. At the same time, there always seemed to be others to take their place, and discussion continued over months and months reaching well over 1000 contributions by the end of February 2013.

Eventually, someone was able to point me to Fenella Cannell, and the conspiracy was uncovered! Looking at Cannell's writings and then those of Talal Asad, finally threw light on the matter. Christianity has been 'anthropology's theoretical repressed' says Cannell.<sup>23</sup> So then, Cannell explains, anthropology grew out of Christianity. Later it rejected the theological roots that had nurtured it. This did not only happen with anthropology. The whole of western academia seemed to follow this route. This begins to explain why the very things that Christians are so enthused about as to be ready to die for can through following Western scholarly norms be rendered almost totally invisible to people who happen not to be Christian.

'In the nineteenth century evolutionary thought,' Asad tells us, 'religion was considered to be an early human condition from which modern law, science and politics emerged and became detached.'<sup>24</sup> This is to Asad clearly a view that is dated. Asad questions various features of the widely assumed existence of the category 'religion' (see also Cavanaugh).<sup>25</sup> Ironically perhaps according to Asad 'what appears to anthropologists today to be self-evident [about religion] . . . is in fact a view that has a specific Christian history.'<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Fenella Cannell, 'The Christianity of Anthropology', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11 (2005), 341.

<sup>24</sup> Talal Asad, 'The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category', in: Michael Lambek (ed.), *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell 2002, 115.

<sup>25</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Kindle edition 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Asad, 122.

Having invented 'religion' as an apparently self-evident category, it seems that anthropology then disbelieved its own invention.<sup>27</sup> So according to Cannell's study entitled 'The Christianity of Anthropology', Christian theology 'was increasingly backgrounded [by anthropology] as time went on.'<sup>28</sup> She adds that 'Anthropology came to believe . . . its own claims to be a secular discipline [when] it had in fact incorporated a version of Augustinian or ascetic thinking within its own theoretical apparatus.'<sup>29</sup> Anthropology has been denying its own religious roots, but actually 'is not always so 'secular' as it likes to think . . . [although it often fails to] remember its own theological prehistory.'<sup>30</sup> Its despising of its own history meant that 'Christianity was for many years marginalised in the ethnographic account.'<sup>31</sup> Those who had studied Christianity did so 'almost against their will [and] rather simplistically' while taking its 'main distinguishing feature . . . to be its hostility to local patterns of understanding and behaviour.'<sup>32</sup>

In a perhaps rather telling way, the above negative valuation of Christianity by anthropologists was not achieved through scholarly study, as much as some kind of knee-jerk reaction. Mauss, Weber, and Durkheim had all 'proposed that Christianity played a key role in the creation of a series of complex but definite one-way changes in social process [and] . . . all three were skeptical about the advantages of modernity.'<sup>33</sup> In short — not wanting to give credit to what they had come to despise, anthropologists threw history into the bin and credited some unknown objective process with what it had actually been bequeathed by 'religion' (specifically Christianity)! It was disconcerting for anthropologists to see Christianity reflected back to them when they looked into the mirror. Human features that have been bequeathed to its followers by Christianity have erroneously been taken as if they are universal. As a result of this, once celebrated impacts of Christianity on human communities came to be delegated to the proverbial dustbin of assumed irrelevance.

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<sup>27</sup> E.E. Evans-Pritchard, 'Religion and the Anthropologist', in: E.E. Evans-Pritchard (ed.), *Social Anthropology and Other Essays*, New York: Free Press 1964, 166.

<sup>28</sup> Cannell, 'Christianity', 341.

<sup>29</sup> Cannell, 'Christianity', 341.

<sup>30</sup> Cannell, 'Christianity', 352.

<sup>31</sup> Fenella Cannell, 'Introduction', in: Fenella Cannell (ed.), *The Anthropology of Christianity*, Durham NC: Duke University Press 2006, 7-8.

<sup>32</sup> Cannell, 'Introduction', 12.

<sup>33</sup> Cannell, 'Introduction', 2.

Anthropologists see Christians as portraying an 'appalling distance . . . between man and . . . God'<sup>34</sup> without realising the great consequence that this 'distance' can have. "The divine . . . belonging to a world transcending, superior to and radically incommensurable with the world of time and space' was according to Hegel<sup>35</sup> responsible for the 'personal interiority' associated with the West, which led in turn to the 'creation of the modern Western person under capitalism.'<sup>36</sup> God being so apparently 'absent' caused Christians to be 'imitating God through a process of the constant exercise of the will in the process of self-fashioning' shares Cannell, citing Hegel.<sup>37</sup>

What is now known as 'modern', therefore, according to scholars in prior centuries, grew out of Christianity. Hence Cannell says that 'to my mind the model of time implicit in the concept of modernity is itself derived from the Christians theological idea of the transcendent.'<sup>38</sup> Modernity is the 'beyondness' of social science then is grounded in heaven that is the 'beyondness' of Christianity, shares Cannell.<sup>39</sup>

Asad points out that certain ideas that grew from Christianity are now in the West associated with religion as a whole. An example of such is the widely pre-supposed understanding that 'a practitioner cannot know how to live religiously without being able to articulate [the relevant] knowledge.'<sup>40</sup> To Asad, the view of religion held by the famous anthropologist Geertz was 'a modern, privatized Christian one.'<sup>41</sup> It has been the Christian church that has pre-eminently 'occupied itself with identifying, cultivating and testing belief as a verbalisable inner condition of true religion,<sup>42</sup> which has led to the ironic situation now that 'religion [can be considered] optional in a way that science is not.'<sup>43</sup>

Drawing in part from Weber's famous thesis on the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism,<sup>44</sup> Cannell points out that anthropologists are stuck on an over-narrow view of Christianity both as ascetic<sup>45</sup> and an inevitable route to

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<sup>34</sup> Cannell, 'Christianity', 339.

<sup>35</sup> Cannell, 'Introduction', 14.

<sup>36</sup> Cannell, 'Introduction', 20.

<sup>37</sup> Cannell, 'Introduction', 21.

<sup>38</sup> Cannell, 'Christianity', 350-351.

<sup>39</sup> Cannell, 'Christianity', 351.

<sup>40</sup> Asad, 120.

<sup>41</sup> Asad, 125.

<sup>42</sup> Asad, 126.

<sup>43</sup> Asad, 127.

<sup>44</sup> Cannell, 'Christianity', 341.

<sup>45</sup> Cannell, 'Christianity', 350.

secularism.<sup>46</sup> While ascetic ideologies have indeed ‘shaped the language and procedures of social science itself,’<sup>47</sup> we need to remember that there is ambiguity and paradox in the Christian message.<sup>48</sup> It seems that there is much to Christianity that anthropologists regularly choose to ignore.

Cannell considers the notion of a free gift. Maranz recognises how this notion of ‘free gift’, is foundational to Western Society: Maranz explains how Westerners struggle to come to terms with the absence of such a notion amongst African people, that results in African people consistently linking friendship with material advantage.<sup>49</sup> Mauss looks at the notion of ‘free gift’ in some detail. He considers that ‘gifts’ are traditionally based on “obligation and economic self interest”, so are not free at all.<sup>50</sup> According to Parry (cited in Cannell) “an elaborated ideology of the ‘pure gift’ [demanded a] specific belief system . . . [which is] salvationist [and] places an emphasis on the idea of charity and alms, contributed as ‘free gifts’.”<sup>51</sup> Here Parry appears to refer to Christianity. Christians believe that a free gift has been given by God. That free gift is Jesus Christ’s giving of his life on the cross. Hence Matthew 10:8b (NIV) tells us ‘Freely you have received, freely give.’ After all, ‘While we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Rom 5:8 NIV). Christ gave himself freely to us, so we should give ourselves freely in Christian service to others. We are left with a paradox; while according to Mauss there is no such thing as a free gift; Christian belief is based on the belief that God made a free gift available to mankind. Taking Maranz’ implicit understanding that Westerners believe that ‘disinterested friendship’ is possible<sup>52</sup> as true; it appears that the notion of free gift that arises from Christianity could foundationally underlie Western ways of life.

The final part of Cannell’s work that I want to look at in some detail, is her suggestion that the dualism found in the West has its origins in Christianity. She goes to great pains to point out that such dualism could only emerge from Christianity with certain doctrinal formulations, and that Mormonism (which she considered a type of Christianity)<sup>53</sup> because of its failing to divide the

<sup>46</sup> Cannell, ‘Christianity’, 341.

<sup>47</sup> Cannell, ‘Christianity’, 351.

<sup>48</sup> Cannell, ‘Introduction’, 42-43.

<sup>49</sup> David Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters: Observations from Africa*, Dallas: SIL International 2001, 66.

<sup>50</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, translated by Ian Cunnison, New York: WW Norton and Company 1967, 1, from website *Goodmachine.org*, [http://goodmachine.org/PDF/mauss\\_gift.pdf](http://goodmachine.org/PDF/mauss_gift.pdf), accessed 20 July 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Cannell, ‘Christianity’, 337.

<sup>52</sup> Maranz, 65.

<sup>53</sup> Cannell, ‘Christianity’, 349.

mortal from the divine<sup>54</sup> could never have brought it about. 'It has been widely argued that in Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant, disdain for the flesh and for the material world fosters in various ways a dualistic vision in which the material, and the here-and-now, is radically opposed to the spiritual and to a heaven . . . which . . . will replace the material' reports Cannell.<sup>55</sup> It is this ability of Christianity, and at least to an extent some other 'world religions' such as Judaism, Islam and perhaps Hinduism, to create dualism out of monism that I want to come back to later in this article.

This article implicitly raises a number of questions about 'other religions'. For example; can Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists also contribute to African development? I would tentatively say 'yes of course'. I say tentatively, because I have not done the research to back this, and am not well informed on 'other religions'. Being myself a disciple of Jesus, I accept his truth claims and a critical need for others to become his disciples. That need is not directly related to issues of development, although it is apparent that the Christian West kick-started a great deal of what is these days colloquially known as 'development'. A true Christian believer, it would seem evident to me, would want to share the insights and blessings he has with others. How to do this? For example, whether to enter into dialogue with other 'religions' or unbelievers, I have considered in more depth elsewhere.<sup>56</sup> In my view the Scriptures and Christian tradition and history are our guide. This leads to other questions some of which I have addressed in yet another article.<sup>57</sup>

Cannell and Asad point to a foundational relationship between religion, especially Christianity, and anthropology (as well as social science in general and even Western philosophy as a whole) that is pragmatically ignored by many scholars today. It is clear to Cannell and Asad that modernity and secularism have been built on foundations originally laid by Christianity. Recognition of this history of the Western world raises an implicit question concerning

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<sup>54</sup> Cannell, 'Christianity', 351.

<sup>55</sup> Cannell, 'Christianity', 338.

<sup>56</sup> Jim Harries, 'Intercultural Dialogue — An Overrated Means of Acquiring Understanding Examined in the Context of Christian Mission to Africa', in: Jim O. Harries (ed.), *In Vulnerable Mission: Insights into Christian Mission to Africa from a Position of Vulnerability*, Pasadena: William Carey Library 2011, 129-144.

<sup>57</sup> Jim Harries, 'Biblical Hermeneutics in Relation to Conventions of Language Use in Africa: Pragmatics Applied to Interpretation in Cross Cultural Context', in: Jim O. Harries (ed.), *In Vulnerable Mission: Insights into Christian Mission to Africa from a Position of Vulnerability*, Pasadena: William Carey Library 2011, 227-240.

the role of religion for African people who are seeking to achieve development by imitating the West.

### 3. Religion in African Development

Careful examination of issues in the above two areas of scholarly endeavour (linguistics and anthropology) with respect to Africa, have revealed a gaping gap in each case. Those who have been advocating for the use of mother-tongues amongst African people have been puzzled as to why the African people themselves have a very strong preference for the use of European languages in education. This preference applies even if it means that their children will not understand what they are taught when they enter primary school. It applies even though African people perceive the 'lack of fit' between European languages and their own ways of life. Then we have also seen a major omission from the field of anthropology. Whereas anthropology claims to be secular, we have seen that its origins are very much religious, and more specifically, Christian. Whereas anthropology claims to extend its scholarly antennae to all without partiality, we find that it is actually foundationally strongly biased against religion in general and Christianity in particular. Of course anthropology and linguistics are related disciplines. Many linguists study anthropology, and anthropologists certainly make use of linguistics. This leads me to the hypothesis that the gaps found in the above disciplines as described above that I also found as a result of field experience, may be of the same origin.

Perhaps it is this 'gap' that is, according to Drummond, troubling British Christian churches in their missionary endeavours.<sup>58</sup> Christian mission, once much more clearly focused on the transmission of a spiritual message, seems increasingly to be being upstaged by 'Christian development', in which Christian principles may be the motivation or the background, but the task is a secular one.<sup>59</sup> Some Christians, particularly those from Europe, are failing to perceive the social relevance of the Gospel itself that they hold dearly. Hence 'mission' is for many Christians these days deeply influenced by secularism. Mission is these days more likely to focus on short-term medical teams, building projects, running orphanages, or building relationships than direct involvement with the Gospel or with saving souls as was at one time the case.

<sup>58</sup> Fred Drummond, 'Is the Rain Coming?', *Idea* (May/June 2011), 16.

<sup>59</sup> Alexandra Livingston, 'Maintaining Invisibility: Discerning the Importance of Missiology in Global Development', submitted papers in *British International Studies Association* 2011, website of the *British International Study Association*, [www.bisa.ac.uk](http://www.bisa.ac.uk), accessed 22 November 2011.

Emeritus Professor Prah of South Africa advocates for the use of mother-tongues in Africa.<sup>60</sup> Prah has little or no time for Christians or Christianity. To him, 'religion should be a private affair.'<sup>61</sup> Prah's comment that 'Unless one assumes that converting Africans to Christianity represents development . . .' is clearly intended sarcastically,<sup>62</sup> as are other comments he makes on Christianity.<sup>63</sup> Brock-Utne, another champion of African languages, makes no case for the promotion of religion. A lot of the scholarship that Brock-Utne and Prah have spawned has no time for Christian belief. This is remarkable given findings in the study edited by Prah on the role of missionaries in the promotion of African languages. The conclusion repeatedly drawn in this study, that even Prah has to concede to,<sup>64</sup> is that Christian missionaries have been by far the largest and sometimes the only evident force favouring the development of African languages. The foundations on which Brock-Utne, Prah, and other promoters of indigenous languages are seeking to build have almost without exception been laid by Christian missionaries. Even now the church may be the only formal institution running using African languages.<sup>65</sup> In Kenya as in Cameroon; the contemporary Christian church is a major fortress for African languages. Despite such clear evidence, Prah and others seem intent to ignore the role of Christianity in relation to the linguistic issues that they are pursuing.

Such internally-driven self-perpetuation of supposedly authoritative academic discourse that actually ignores large swaths of human experience needs to be re-evaluated. There is an urgent need for anthropology and other social science disciplines to re-examine their roots. In the historically Christian West social scientists presuppose the existence of Christian values and practices. They are not disappointed, because the societies they work in 'at home' are profoundly shaped by Christianity. That cannot be said to be the case in all the areas in which social scientists, especially anthropologists these days work.

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<sup>60</sup> Kwesi Kwaa Prah, 'Going Native: Language of Instruction for Education Development and African Emancipation', in: Birgit Brock-Utne *et al.* (eds.), *Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA)*, Dar-es-Salaam: E and D, 2003, 14-34.

<sup>61</sup> Kwesi Kwaa Prah, *The African Nation: the State of the Nation*, Cape Town: CASAS 2006, 334.

<sup>62</sup> Prah, 'Going Native', 26.

<sup>63</sup> Prah, 'African Nation', 156.

<sup>64</sup> Kwesi Kwaa Prah, 'Introduction: Winning Souls Through the Written Word', in: Kwesi Kwaa Prah (ed.), *The Role of Missionaries in the Development of African Languages*, Cape Town: CASAS 2009, 1.

<sup>65</sup> Kody Bitjaa, Denis Zachee, and Joseph Roger Ndjombog, 'The Involvement of Churches in the Development and Promotion of Cameroonian Languages since 1960', in: Kwesi Kwaa Prah (ed.), *The Role of Missionaries in the Development of African Languages*, Cape Town: CASAS 2009, 229.

Continuing with the same unexamined presuppositions while outside of the West may result in making a mess instead of in bringing enlightenment.

This kind of scenario can be compared to the activity of mountaineers. A true mountaineer wants an authentic challenge; the higher the mountain the more enthused he is to climb it. When Western scholars look around the world they see towering peaks all around them called Hinduism, Buddhism, African traditional religion, and so on. When they look at Christianity, they see a low hill! They do not realise that their deciding to call themselves atheists or agnostics does not undo their own history. The reason the Christian mountain appears less rugged and tall is because the mountaineers begin their adventure while already near its peak! As a result they can despise their own mountain, while admiring others. Self-depredation, however, even if rooted in ignorance of one's own history, is usually not healthy.<sup>66</sup>

Social scientists have been able to ignore Christianity while plying their craft because Christianity continues to work even while ignored by them. Failing to recognise this has become problematic when the same social science has been transferred outside of the Christian West, of particular interest to us here is Africa. Evidence strongly suggests that Africa is Christianising.<sup>67</sup> Social scientists, who often work in Christianised regions, prefer to ignore this development and its implications.<sup>68</sup>

Let us look at the above linguistic scenarios from the perspective of Africans. For as long as they can remember, African people have participated in ways of life these days identified with 'poverty'.<sup>69</sup> One hundred or more years ago, Europeans came onto the scene. Following their arrival, African people were exposed to options in life that their forefathers would not have imagined could be possible. New exciting, attractive, and contemporary ways of life have

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<sup>66</sup> Every analogy has its limitations. I am not by the above implying that different religions are equally effective at leading us to God.

<sup>67</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: the Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002, 39.

<sup>68</sup> A case in point would be that of Meagher who had not anticipated the prominence of 'religion' that ended up being the focus of her research in Nigeria. (Kate Meagher, 'Trading on Faith: Religious Movements and Informal Economic Governance in Nigeria', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 47/3 (2009), 406.)

<sup>69</sup> Careful studies looking back to pre-colonial African history find phenomenal (on today's terms) indicators of poverty, such as 50% infant mortality (David Beach, 'Zimbabwe: Pre-Colonial History, Demographic Disaster and the University', *Zambesia* 26/1, (1999), 12) or over 60% infant mortality (F.H. Melland, *In Witch Bound Africa: An Account of the Primitive Kaonde Tribe and Their Beliefs*, Philadelphia: J.B.Lippincott Company 1923, 52) Melland cites Smith as finding infant mortality rates averaging as high as 90% (Melland, 52).

emerged. New options have come in hand with new languages. Those African people who manage to master these languages become wealthy and powerful beyond the wildest dreams of their forefathers. While the way that wealth is produced may remain a great mystery; that access to it is achieved through language knowledge is plain. Knowledge of that language is barely associated with world-understanding, real wisdom or even common sense. The language can work through creating relationships which result in incoming wealth even in the absence of these things. This kind of dependency is the name of the vehicle which carries African development forward. What African parents' desire for their children is knowledge of the language that can enable them to prosper. Knowledge of that language is key. Nothing else compares with it in importance.

It is important to remember that African communities thrive on monism. That is to say that their understanding(s) of cause and effect is not confined to the material realm. Spiritual and material are to many African people not distinct categories. 'Science' does not exist as a distinct category.<sup>70</sup> The use of the term *magic* with respect to monistic communities has been much disputed, yet it may be appropriate to make my point here.<sup>71</sup> That is to say — in so far as African people are accustomed to seeing things happen by magic (other than through physical cause and effect), the fact that their children may not be comprehending what they are taught in the lower years of primary schooling is hardly important. What is important is that the 'magic' works.

That which is found in the West which traditional Africa has been missing is dualism. Because African people have not known what dualism is, they have not known that they have been missing it. Because they know that what they desire is something that is found in the Western world, many want as much of the Western world as possible, including a Western language in education. Often they want to take the same on board according to the principles that

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<sup>70</sup> I appreciate that there is much dispute on this and some African scholars claim that science was known amongst African people long before the coming of the European ways. (Kofi Asare Opoku, *The Traditional Foundations of Development*, Cape Town: CASAS 2007, 5). This is to me clearly a problem of translation, and depends on how one defines science. It is also part of a wider problem in Africa, of African people trying to restore vestiges of self-respect and pride in their own people's achievements in the light of massive European incursion on their ways of life. ('We have been culturally deluged by western influences indiscriminately foisted on us' says Prah, 'African Nation', 187).

<sup>71</sup> Jim O. Harries, 'Magic, Science and Theology in African Development', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35/1 (2011), 17-30. Jim Harries. 'The Magical Worldview in the African Church: What Is Going On?', in: Jim O. Harries (ed.), *Vulnerable Mission; Insights into Christian Mission to Africa from a Position of Vulnerability*, 203-224. Pasadena: William Carey Library 2011.

they understand, which are principles rooted in a monistic way of life.<sup>72</sup> Noting Africa's complaints on the assumptions by Westerners of their own superiority, Westerners have in part withdrawn from the front line of the African development project. They would rather leave Africans to develop their own continent, with themselves standing aside as advisers. Yet for African people to develop their own societies using the language of someone who decides to stand aside (for which read 'aloof') is nigh impossible! Because African languages are increasingly limited to the domestic and other limited spheres of use, African people have little hope of advancing their communities using their own languages. As long as monism continues to be the interpretive screen through which dualism is received, dualism loses its dualistic nature on reaching Africa. African people have found that the best way of maintaining its powerful dualistic qualities is not by trying to appropriate it into their own contexts. Rather, what is known to work is an importing of a dualistic system lock stock and barrel, through imitating as closely as possible the contexts (including language) in which dualistic systems function in Europe. Attempts by Africans to adapt such systems to their own (monistic) ways of thinking, they reason, are likely to kill them, and usually do.

The answer to our dilemma is staring us in the face. 'It has been widely agreed that in Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant, disdain for the flesh and for the material world *fosters in various ways a dualistic vision* in which the material and the here-and-now, is radically opposed to the spiritual' (my emphasis).<sup>73</sup> This is best combined with a view of the divine as 'belonging to a world transcending, superior to, and radically incommensurable with the world of time and space.'<sup>74</sup> It is on these lines that Hom tells us that: 'any unity of heaven with earth was [to Hebrew people] temporary and inexplicable from a human point of view.'<sup>75</sup> Yes, religion (Christianity) is the missing piece in the kit of the African development specialist. 'He [Christ] is the stone [the] builders rejected, which has become the capstone' (Acts 4:11 NIV).

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<sup>72</sup> Hence the Kikuyu, a people in Kenya, are said to have a 'pragmatic and experimentative approach to supernatural powers' (John Karanja, *Founding an African Faith: Kikuyu Anglican Christianity 1900-1945*, Nairobi: Uzima Press 1999, 2.) Many African people do not put their traditions aside on meeting Western scholarship or Christianity. Instead, they attempt to combine the two.

<sup>73</sup> Cannell, 'Christianity', 338.

<sup>74</sup> Cannell, 'Introduction', 14.

<sup>75</sup> Andrew R. Hom, 'David's Stone: Early Judeo-Christian Thought and Some Temporal Roots of IR', paper presented at the BISA annual conference, 29 April 2011, 11.

We would do well to take a close look at epistemology. Contrary to a perhaps popular view that monists can easily grasp dualistic understandings, the fact is that monism is a complete system in itself.<sup>76</sup> On the material plane alone, monism is impenetrable.<sup>77</sup> I suggest that a careful study of the way it has been penetrated historically will inevitably reveal a role of spiritual agents. That is; a face off against monism must be religious. This must be, even if for no other reason, because monism cannot help but to recognise all agents as being 'spiritual'. A secular approach to a monistic community then, is a religious approach without realising. Such failure to realise, is usually not helpful.

Cavanaugh searched high and low for a definitive classification of religion. He concluded that 'religion' is 'virtually anything humans do that gives their lives order and meaning.'<sup>78</sup> It is in the process of seeking order and meaning that humans change their societies. Before the advent of dualism this invariably happened through a religious process.<sup>79</sup> The tried and tested 'system' for bringing about such change that we are here looking at, is Christianity.<sup>80</sup> We have found above that Christianity can be a means to dualism. Unless or until African people get a handle on dualism, it is hard to see how they can engage in indigenously powered 'development'.

Because of this key role for religion, our focus here being on Christianity, unless linguists and anthropologists correct their view, they may be handicapping rather than helping the process of bringing favourable change to Africa. As it was in the past in Europe, so in the future in Africa, the God Christians proclaim through his Word is likely to be the most effective agent for transformational change in Africa. This is of course implicitly recognised by numerous Africans who find themselves in church every Sunday; even many African people working for secular agencies who omit 'religion' from their carefully written reports, flock to fill churches on Sundays.

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<sup>76</sup> Harries, 'Magic, Science and Theology', 18-20.

<sup>77</sup> Harries, 'Magic, Science and Theology', 18.

<sup>78</sup> Cavanaugh.

<sup>79</sup> I state this in the conventional sense of the term 'religious'. I have elsewhere stated that secularism is a religion. It is a peculiar religion, in that it claims not to have any beliefs in the 'divine'.

<sup>80</sup> I do not make a comparison with other 'world religions', as to do so using Western English, a language much infiltrated by Christianity, would anyway be to communicate a Christianised version of the same. See also footnote 1.

## Conclusion

This article presents a conclusion that appears evident and that has apparently for various reasons herein articulated been concealed. It explains apparent anomalies or gaps in some linguists' and anthropologists' accounts related to Africa. Such explanation is aided by the re-interpretation of wider scholarship in the light of personal experience of the author. Restrictions of length mean that it has not been possible to consider all scholarly contributions related to the issues addressed herein. It is hoped others will assist in thus extending the research.

Many linguists are amazed by African parents' preferences for their children to be taught from their very early years of schooling using foreign languages of which they have little clue before entering school. My own experience of living and working in Africa has had me notice a blindness to Christian things on the part of secular scholarship. The very Christian things to which they are blind seem to be making key necessary contributions towards the kinds of 'development' that Africa is widely perceived to need. Certain anthropologists have thrown further light on their colleagues' reluctance to value or even carefully study Christian things that I have often noted on the African scene. They further make a case for Christianity as necessarily underlying much that is often considered 'good' in the West, including anthropology itself. Following their lead, I propose a critical need for Christianity (including Christian mission) to be brought out of scholarly shadows and into the light of research and investigation. This could bring to the surface impacts of Christianity on African and other people that could for them, as for Europeans in prior history, be vital prerequisites for critical aspects of socio-economic development.

This article is a roll call for religion. It could be considered an apologetics for the Christian missionary enterprise. Careful consideration of its conclusions will inspire Westerners interested in intervening or participating in the life of the African continent to do so free of the shackles of a secularist straitjacket. Belief, faithfulness, love, kindness, an understanding of Holy Scriptures, humility, holiness and a handle on eternal truth are more important for the African development project than has recently been realised. A clear view of the might, power and set-apartness of God is proposed as critical for the same. This article advocates for a levelling of the field of global engagement through a revitalization of theologically guided thinking and action. Everyone, after all, has access to God. The conspiracy, as it appears to be, of modern day humanities, that has had it try to conceal religion and especially Christianity from view needs to be recognised for the deception that it is. The foundations of the West in Christianity need to be acknowledged and re-energised.

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