

Meeting the Indigenous Church: a personal account of an African missionary journey

By: Jim Harries (PhD)

2009

Dedicated to John and Janet Butt of Andover, Hampshire, for their constant encouragement and love for me albeit from a distance over almost all the time I have been in Africa.

In memory of Goliath Kasabula, my housemate, colleague and friend in Zambia – who passed away in a road accident in 2006.

Thanks to Fackson Ntaimo for having carefully read through this document and giving it his approval for publication.

In appreciation for all those with whom I have been on this journey. In appreciation to God for giving me the privilege of being his servant, albeit in small ways.

Contents

1. To Zambia.
2. Explaining to Goliath
3. Getting Laughed at.
4. Project Vetoed.
5. Relationships with Nationals
6. Farm Business Venture
7. Money a barrier to relationships.
8. Saturday Fellowship
9. Venturing into African Language and Theology
10. Youth Seminars
11. Change in Direction
12. Surveying local Projects
13. Videoing the School
14. Start of University Studies
15. Radical Thesis.
16. Zambia trip 1992
17. Staying in Zambian Village
18. From Zambia to Kenya.
19. The Approach to Kenya
20. Travelling with the Bishop
21. Prosperity Gospel
22. Involvement with AICs (African Indigenous Churches)
23. Under the Skin
24. *Roho* Church
25. *Nomiya* Church
26. *Luong Mogik* Church
27. Legio Maria Church
28. Mystic Gospel Church
29. Response to Indigenous Churches
30. Other churches
31. Yala Theological Center

32. To Kima International School of Theology
33. Siaya Theological Center
34. Home
35. Conclusion

Introduction

“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it” (Luke 9:24). This and related verses from the Christian Scriptures have been in my mind ever since I first came to Africa. I could either serve God whole-heartedly or half-heartedly. I wanted one day to be able to say with Paul “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7) and say that “I have in my life followed the direction of Love”.

The requirement to ‘love’ has underlain my decisions. That does not mean that everyone has always agreed with the kinds of decisions I have made – as love works with intelligence. Love’s decisions are not made in an intellectual or cultural vacuum. They depend on one’s understanding of reality. My decision to work on a vulnerable basis has, to me, been the most effective expression of ‘love’ that I could give.

Note that references to ‘missionary’ should be taken as to a Westerner who is in Africa for the purpose of spreading the Gospel. References to ‘Africa’, are to sub-Saharan Africa.

1. To Zambia.

The magnificence of a view of the world from above the clouds was breathtaking. This flight to Zambia in August 1988 was my first ever time in a plane. Soon we were to land in the hottest driest place I had ever known. I would have opportunity to explore a world that I had up to that point only ever read and heard about. Could such a thing really be happening; me going to Africa? What kind of welcome would I receive? Would I be able even to survive in such a strange and hostile place? How will it work out? Little did I know how my philosophy of language was to be challenged and radically altered in forthcoming years. Little did I realize that the Western resources that I anticipated would be an asset in ministry, would turn out a bane of ministry!

I had completed agricultural training a year earlier. Then I had gone on to do a certificate of education. For a long time as a Christian I had felt challenged about giving my life in the Lord’s service. This especially while training in agriculture. Many speakers at our college Christian Union had challenged us to use our agricultural skills in service of the poor who really needed them. Yet, I did not consider myself up to the task. In October 1987 while at teacher training college in Wolverhampton I believe that God called me into long-term service in the Third World. His speaking to me then, not in an audible voice but in giving me a deep inner conviction, continues to motivate me today to continue despite the difficulties that I often face.

I first met some mission representatives at a conference for would be Christian teachers overseas in Nottingham in January 1988. Before that I was also considering going with secular bodies like VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas – a British government body that placed young people in service ministries in the Third World). Two months later I attended the orientation in London with the Africa Evangelical Fellowship. They accepted me to go to Zambia. My trip to Zambia was delayed due to problems obtaining a work permit. The frustration of waiting had me hitchhike to Spain. I came back quickly to the UK when I was informed that my flight was a week away. I was just 24 years old.

Agriculture was my love and fascination. Yes, I was born again, but Britain had told me that it was not my faith but my farming skills that I had that were of value. I was confident in what I knew about agriculture.

Already on first arriving in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia, I was exploring the crops people had planted in the mission compound. I had read about tropical plants – now I could see them for real. I thought about what lay ahead. I anticipated many years of service in Africa. I intended to transform farming practices. To enable people to grow more food and grow it better. That would help alleviate Africa's hunger problem. I had little inkling at the time as to what I would actually be doing twenty years later. Many surprises awaited me. Had someone told me at this point that I should study at a theological college – my response would have been “no way”. I had yet to learn the vital importance of the use of local languages and local resources in mission – what was to become known as ‘vulnerable mission’ some years later.

I wondered what my reception would be like. I was to teach at Mukinge Girls Secondary School. I was to teach primarily agricultural science, and to be involved in running the school form. Who was I going to live with? I didn't have a clue. I was convinced God had called me to serve long-term in the Third World. The rest was yet to be discovered.

Leaving Lusaka for Mukinge was my first (and last – so far) time in a six-seater plane. The pilot, a missionary colleague, pushed the throttle on full. The whole plane shook menacingly. Down the runway and up we went. Miles and miles of thinly-covered woodland passed below us on the journey.

We landed at Mukinge airstrip. What a classic scene it was. The scene was unreal. Just like those glossy pictures used by Mission Aviation Fellowship to promote their work. The shining white and red aircraft was in no time surrounded by a crowd of African people of all shapes and sizes. Fascination was written all over their faces. For the first time I was face to face with the incredulous reception given by Africans to the White man, his ways and his technologies. This aeroplane represented power. Where there was power – a crowd gathered. They sought to discover what interesting new baggage had come this time around. Amongst the other baggage was a 24 year old White man.

There was a commotion. “Where is this young White man supposed to go?” People didn't seem too sure. “The girls' school,” I said. Soon I was in the back of a pickup. We followed dusty roads. Everything was dry. People looked on. A wooded stony hill stood on our left. We arrived at the compound for teachers of the missionary school. Once occupied entirely by White missionaries, white-painted detached residences were scattered along both sides of the road interspersed by trees. We stopped outside one of them. At last I was finding out where my home was to be.

Preparations had not been made for my arrival. “He will stay with you”, Goliath was told – as I arrived. Just a year or two older than I, Goliath did not live up to his name. He was incredibly short. He wore a perennial smile. My unexpected arrival did not perturb him. We entered the scantily furnished house. What else would one expect of a house occupied by a bachelor? It had three-bedrooms. Goliath picked up a ‘broom’ made up of some kind of grass, without a handle. Dust flew as he swept what was to be my room. “There you are,” he said.



Mukinge Girls Secondary School and area from the neighbouring hill.

The single uncovered electric bulb hung nonchalantly from the middle of the ceiling. The walls were dirty, by my British reckoning. There were mosquito screens over the window. They didn't seem to be very effective as mosquitoes flew back and forth in their droves, near to the ceiling. Their whirring sound filled the room. I put my suitcases on the floor and my bag onto the bed. I had the use of a chest of drawers that had seen better days. So this was to be home.

Kitchen facilities were basic. Cooking was done on an electric stove on the floor. The tap dripped into the bare sink. Here too, the screens on the windows were unkempt. Past the kitchen was the front door. From it four or so steps led outside to the bare earth floor littered with occasional leaves. A table and a few chairs occupied the dining area; some easy chairs were alongside in the sitting-area. To my reckoning, the furnishing was spartan. (In many ways, in hindsight, it was luxurious. Certainly by comparison to what I have had in my home since 1997!) The contrast with the homes of missionaries was evident. The latter were much more 'comfortable'. The African fear of being identified with wealth, even if I wasn't understanding it at this point, was just beginning to dawn on me.

I was already on a course of medicine to prevent malaria. I put a net over the bed. But what was to stop mosquitoes having lunch at my expense before bedtime, I did not know? I had brought many tubes of insect repellent with me. "Would they really work?" I asked myself? I pulled the top off one. A fly landed on the stick, and sat there till I chased it away. "What?" I thought to myself? "Hey, that's useless"...

I soon learned to 'clap'. Hear or see a mosquito – and 'clap your hands' – just maybe the mosquito will be unlucky and be trapped and splatted. If it does, and you find a red blob on your hands, then you know that the mosquito has already had lunch.

For some reason unbeknown to me – the mission had contravened its policy. Missionaries from the West were not supposed to share accommodation with Africans, but there I was in the home of a Kaonde man. No one had made any other plans.

Goliath was, presumably, intrigued by this turn of events. I don't think he expected a White man to land on him out of the blue. Goliath became my local informant. I had to be told the simplest things. I was dying to explore some more. I wanted to know who was around. I was keen to get involved at the secondary school. I needed to find out what I was to teach.

This response, known by some as 'hit the ground running', was a typical of Westerners on arriving in Africa, I later discovered. The desire to get busy, to be influential, to re-orient the 'poor' community around one into something better can be overwhelming. Looking back, it is easy to see

that my task orientation was over-done. Meanwhile though – like so many missionaries new on the field – I knew no better.

2. Explaining to Goliath

Having Goliath as my housemate proved to be a great privilege. We got on well, and I enjoyed learning from him. He taught book-keeping at the school. At the time he was not married. He married a few years later. We used to call him GK – for Goliath Kasabula. The lady he married was also GK – for Grace Kabonda. Funny to me at least also – was that *jike* (pronounced ‘gk’) in the Kaonde language was an egg.

I soon found myself walking around the school and up to the hospital compound. I would walk with various Zambian teacher colleagues. When we walked, while invariably we would have some destination, it often felt as if we were walking for the sake of walking. Walking with friends was more an activity to be enjoyed, than a means of getting from A to B. Often we sang as we walked. In my recollection – that was especially at night. The songs we sung were usually in *Kikaonde* or other Zambian languages.

Zambia is said to have 72 languages. All of these are in the Bantu group – so they are all related. Of the 72, seven of the African languages are ‘official’ languages recognised by the government. Most of the official languages are quite widespread, but Kaonde is one of the seven that is less widely used. Many songs sung in Zambia are in the more dominant languages (Bemba, Nyanja, Tonga, Lozi), but sung throughout the country. The official language for government purposes is English. The teaching of local languages was introduced into the school curricula during the time I was in Zambia.

What was testing about Goliath’s walking, was his pace. I have never known anyone who would walk so slowly. Not that there is anything wrong with walking slowly. But it was very hard to walk anywhere with him, without finding that I had left him way behind.

It was on one such walk that Goliath asked me a question. I had been in Zambia for less than a month. We were walking through the secondary school compound. Our conversation of course was in English. I knew very little Kaonde by then. I don’t recall the conversation that prompted the question. But I know that he asked, “Why have you come here”?

My mind went back to the presentations I had given to my supporting churches in England. I was not one to go to Africa without first having worked out why. I had made use especially of Isaiah 58 at that time. My going to Africa was a part of God’s plan to alleviate poverty. I was going to get justice done for the poor. I was bringing good news, and was going to demonstrate the good news of Jesus by establishing effective agricultural practices. I was already occupied working on this in my own mind. I was seeing opportunities to develop the school farm. I was perceiving the weaknesses in Zambian economic practices. I saw that I could really make a big difference.

My problem now, was how to explain all this to Goliath. He was a Zambian, in Zambia. He now represented the ‘poor’ who I had come to rescue. Was I to tell him – that he was poor and ignorant and I had come to enlighten him? Was I to say to him what I said to the folks in England? I did; even though it was a shortened version. I cannot recall my exact words. Maybe: “I have come to help you, because you are poor,” or something like that. His eyes, when he looked at me, spoke

volumes. “Not another do-gooder come to tell us we are stupid,” his eyes exclaimed, then his words supported his eyes.

We walked on in silence. I did not know what to add. It was somehow different walking alongside the ‘real African’ in Africa than it had been talking about doing it back in UK. Was I going to tell the Zambians that they were poor, and they needed me to rescue them? If not, then what was I there for?

Had David Maranz written his book a bit earlier, he might have helped me. After a long stay in Africa and a survey of materials from sub-Saharan Africa, Maranz concluded that – usually the only basis for a relationship between a Westerner and an African was the former’s money.¹ I was to discover that in many ways such was the bottom line. A few years later in 2001 I was to be told in a gathering of 60+ Zambian pastors – that having a missionary from the West who didn’t have money was a waste of time.

3. Getting Laughed at.

Some months later, I was again walking through the school with some teacher colleagues. By this time I had become a little more established. I was planning and running events at the school. I was looking for students to participate in activities. I was instigating projects that would boost the productivity of the school farm. I was on route to making the school self-sufficient in vegetables (so I thought). I mentioned something as we walked. My colleagues laughed at me in response.

The potential of the Zambian people was very evident. The Zambian school girls weren’t softies like some British girls. Perhaps this was because there were no boys around. But it was more than that. I recall watching a girl climbing a tree with an axe. She had been told to cut a branch. She just climbed up, not thinking twice about it, and proceeded to cut it off. Down she came again. All that didn’t phase her in the slightest.

Was I impressed with our young female students? They were attractive to me of course, as girls would be to a young man. But beyond that, they were physically strong and disciplined. They came across as motivated and keen to learn. They were enthusiastic. And in addition – wow could they sing.

A year earlier I had been training to teach agriculture in the UK. We had been told “make it practical.” It was my intention to give Mukinge schoolgirls useful skills. Not just pointless book-knowledge. So I arranged trips and developed the school farm. I felt enthused over what I was doing. Then one of my classes protested to the Headmaster about me. They refused to have me teach them again. Contrary to my advice, the Headmaster conceded to their request. They wanted to know what was on the syllabus. Their aim was to pass the exam at the end. Not to know fascinating, useful, important things that were going to turn around agricultural production in Zambia.

¹ According to Maranz in his book ‘African Friends and Money Matters’ (Dallas: SIL, 2001, page 9). This book is an excellent read for someone wanting to better understand Africa.



Girls preparing to work on the farm at Mukinge Girls Secondary School, circa 1990.

A new realisation began to be forced upon me. I think this applies more widely across Africa; in a way profoundly differently to what I had known in the UK, people did not take ‘education’ as being something to help them to understand themselves. Of over-riding importance was the certificate. Whether what one learned in pursuing the certificate was ‘relevant’, was very much secondary.

The occasion on which my colleagues laughed at me was a bit different. I had put a notice on the board. It was important information intended for the school’s pupils. Someone else had added another notice subsequently. Their notice was covering mine. When I looked at the board, my colleagues alongside me, I was shocked and offended that another teacher should have covered over my important notice. Then my colleagues laughed. My mind was in a whirl, “Why are they laughing at me?” I asked myself? They were puzzled at my offence. Later I realized that laughter often covers embarrassment in Africa. It does not mean that the one being laughed at is being mocked. Something else to think about; how could I pretend to be understanding my Zambian colleagues – when I did not know even the meaning of their laughter?

4. Project Vetoed.

My education seemed to have taken forever. After completing 6th form in 1982, my first degree had taken five years because I did a year’s work before starting, then I worked on another farm in a middle year. Then I did teacher training for another year. I had spent too long in college. Now in Zambia I was ready to prove myself.

Our headmaster died suddenly in a road accident at the end of 1988. He had been a much respected man – certainly by my missionary colleagues. I had heard it said that if he were to leave or die, it would be hard to find a substitute who could relate so well to missionaries. Not all our Zambian teachers were as endearing to foreign missionaries as he had been. An acting headmaster was appointed, but Mr. Mwanza was very much missed.

Before he died, Mr. Mwanza had talked to me about the school farm. He was very keen for it to be developed. He encouraged me to come up with options. That was the kind of challenge that I wanted. We were already developing the piggery. The chicken house was under renovation. We were planting groundnuts in addition to the normal maize and beans. But all these were relatively low-income projects. So I began to look at the possibility of developing a poultry unit for laying hens.

I conducted a feasibility study for a 200-layer unit. We seemed to have all that was needed. The mission truck that went to town every week could bring the food. My cash-flow projection was

manageable. The local bank indicated they could help us with a loan if need be. This seemed to be a way of fulfilling the vision of the late headmaster. Everyone was in favour. All that remained was to get a green light from the school board that met three times annually.

The school board was made up entirely of Zambian nationals, except one member. The mission (Africa Evangelical Fellowship) still considered it wise to have their representative on the board, and for that representative to have veto-power. Very paternalistic, some may think? Maybe you don't need to guess what happened on the day of that meeting? The one mission representative vetoed the layer project, apparently directly in the face of everyone else's enthusiastic approval.

My Zambian colleagues came to apologise to me after that. They seemed to be embarrassed to find that one American could simply overturn a plan envisaged and approved by all the Zambians. I was not disappointed. I suspected that he knew what he was doing, and that he was probably right to have used his veto. Certainly in hindsight, years later – I am glad that he used his veto. He saved me from a lot of work, and then from having to realize that the support of the teachers was not going to turn out as 'real' as it had sounded to me as I planned the project. That is – verbal support from African people for something often does not necessarily translate into physical support. People's preference to encourage someone in what they want to do can be misread by Westerners if they think that the person who encouraged them will then be there to assist them in implementation.

A similar thing was to happen some years later, by which time I was in Kenya. Fortunately my prior experience in Zambia prepared me. In Kenya, the program being looked at was that of theological teaching. "Yes of course it will work" my colleagues told me. What I did not realize at the time but was able to prove later was that implicit in that encouragement was the assumption that I would administer it and fund it.

5. Relationships with Nationals

I had anticipated finding Zambians and missionaries working in glorious harmony. After arriving in Zambia, the reality was not always like that. My school-teacher colleagues seemed to have bones to pick with the missionaries. Many of my colleagues were university graduates. They saw themselves as members of the educated elite in the country. They had been exposed to Marxist and post-colonial theories. They were paid by the Government and not out of mission coffers. They questioned whether many of the missionaries were even Christians. They were apt to suspect them of being 'in it for the money'.

Questions about the faith of missionaries arose when their behaviour did not seem to tally with the Zambian understanding of what it was to be a born again believer. Some missionaries would not go to church; they were not very social to Zambians preferring to keep themselves to themselves or to mix with fellow Westerners. They were inclined to give scientific processes the credit for what God had done for them. The foreign missionaries on the station were supported by churches in their home countries, whereas Zambians were paid by the government. The rates of pay they were receiving from the government had been reasonable on the international scale in the 1970s, but had subsequently fallen drastically to well below the kinds of income level enjoyed by many of the missionaries.

Such feelings were not confined to secondary school teachers. Our teachers mixed freely with hospital workers and other mission employees. There were tensions in other departments of the mission – including the services department, the hospital, the church, and so on. There were

tensions over the weekly fellowship meeting of mission staff. Missionaries had been meeting every Sunday night. Zambians felt excluded, so started their own gathering in competition the day before. They called it ‘Saturday Fellowship’.

Criticism went both ways. I was living very closely with the Zambians. I struggled to understand and appreciate all that they said and did. But I felt we had a rapport. I was sharing a house with a Zambian after all. I walked with the Zambian people back and fore, whereas other missionaries used vehicles.² I ate African food. I joined the Zambian teachers’ Bible studies. I was learning the Kaonde language.

For all the efforts made by both sides, relationships between Western missionaries and African nationals were not always easy. The cultural gap was just too vast. Understanding of things was different. Economic levels were too far apart. The income of Zambian teachers had at one time been reasonable on Western terms. But the collapse of the Zambian economy had put paid to that. The Zambians could not maintain the kind of lifestyle being enjoyed by the missionaries. They had no vehicles, few household appliances, no overseas trips, struggled to send their children to quality schools, and so on.

I was still young, so flexible in my thinking. (So I thought.) So I felt free one day to speak out about a habit of the Zambians that was annoying to us Westerners. The relationship between Zambians and Westerners, (national with missionary) was characterised by certain things. One of these was the likelihood that a Zambian making an impromptu visit to a Westerner, was invariably going to ask for something. I personally found that to be the case time and time again; whenever a Zambian came to my door and appeared to be making a social visit, the main part of their agenda seemed to be to request, typically for money. Because I felt that I was close to the Zambians, I felt free to mention this; after someone had come and asked me to buy them their engagement rings.

A little later I was shocked to discover that my words had not been confined to the ears of my school colleagues. They had gone beyond the African teachers, and a complaint about my observation had reached the ears of the head of the mission station. Suddenly we were in crisis. Nothing really came of this crisis. Tensions were high for a while. Then it blew over. But clearly not all relationships were friendly and amicable all the time.

I have already cited Maranz’ reference to this; that money is often the only basis on which a Westerner relates to Africans (see footnote 1 on page *). This should be taken as a challenge for Western missionaries (and potential missionaries). Are we as Christians just going to accept that the basis for relationship between the Western and African church is always money? Surely that is a travesty for a Christian? Where are the Western Christians who are prepared to meet the challenge of going beyond this?³

My efforts at developing the piggery continued. We repaired the building using donor funds. Many pigs in the villages were relatively small, often black and white, local breeds. They grew slowly, and not particularly large. I managed to get hold of some commercial breeds.

Leftover food was regularly taken to the piggery. Mukinge Girls School had 500 students. A lot of the staple food was often left after a meal. This is call *nshima*. It is a thick white porridge. Its

² I do recommend that some Western missionaries to Africa get by without their own vehicles. Such can open the door to a much closer relationship with nationals.

³ My target readership for this text is Western missionaries and potential missionaries to Africa.

constituency something like that of mashed potatoes. This kind of staple is liked in much of Africa. Often it is made from maize. Otherwise sorghum, cassava or even bananas. It is basically flour mixed with water and boiled. Schoolgirls would use wheelbarrows to transport left over *nshima* to the piggery. Pig food, then was free.

The arrival of the new pigs drew a lot of attention. Some grew to be enormous. A sow gave birth to eleven piglets that grew quickly. We seemed to be on to a winner. Eventually the day arrived for the first large pig to be slaughtered. Methods for slaughtering pigs seemed to leave something to be desired. Pigs can be quite dangerous when they are angry. A strike to the head with an axe seemed to be the preferred method of killing. On one occasion a pig ended up running around squealing with the axe stuck in its head. Once dead, the axe continued to be used to divide the meat into portions. Bones were hacked at until they splintered and broke.

The marketeer in me came out. I set the price of pork at K65.00 (sixty five kwacha) per KG. It took a bit of effort; but eventually we sold all the meat. We made a lot of money. I was rejoicing. At this rate we could make enough money to further expand the piggery. But things didn't work out just as I expected.

The headmaster who had taken over from Mr. Mwanza was called Fackson Ntaimo. The latter name was a 'corruption' of the English word time. So many people's names were of that nature. You had Mr. Bicycle, Mr. Wardsister, Mr. Farmacy and so on. Ntaimo was a bit older than I. A university graduate, he was the best candidate that could be found to be headmaster after the death of Mr. Mwanza. I liked him, and we got on well.

The time came for me to give Fackson the report on the piggery. "We need to keep the price at K65.00" I said. "No," he responded "we teachers can't afford that. The price should be K35.00."

I pride myself on being a bit of an economist. "But if we can make K65.00, then we can develop the piggery and have many more pigs" I argued. "Then in due course the market will be swamped, the price will come down again, and there will be lots of pork available at the new price." Back and fore we went. I argued my very best case from my economics training. Fackson insisted that the price stay at K35.00.

To me, more was at stake than a few pigs at Mukinge. In my mind was the economy of the whole of Africa. Fackson looked across the desk at me. He was ready to sit and talk. But he wasn't ready to budge. How can the agricultural sector in Africa progress I asked myself, if people will not seek the best price? In class also I had been encouraging pupils to sell their produce at as high a price as possible. They often refused to acknowledge the value of my advice. My vision of an agricultural revolution for Africa was fading. How could people grow more food, if they want to sell what they have at a low price?⁴

6. Farm Business Venture

"Teaching scientific agriculture to someone with no business sense is wrong" I said to myself. "What use is it to know all modern agricultural technology, but not be able to set a price?" I was still trying to solve Africa's agricultural woes. I was losing the battle on the pork. Well – what of vegetables?

⁴ Kenneth Kaunda's (president of Zambia up to 1991) promotion of 'humanism' had given the country an orientation towards socialism.

Our girls seemed very enthusiastic, but good results were not always so easy to achieve in vegetable growing. Vegetable growing needs a lot of care. Mukinge teachers, and others, seemed to do very well growing vegetables on their home plots. But it was very difficult to grow a large amount for the whole school. Motivation, it appeared, then became lacking. The solution I came to; was to provide girls with the opportunity to grow their own vegetables, and sell them to the school for good money. After all – they were always short of money.

FBM (Farm Business Venture) was born. I cannot begin to articulate all the details of this super-plan here. In my own mind; it was guaranteed to work. It didn't take long for the shocks to start coming through.



Teaching on the growing of groundnuts – Mukinge Girls Secondary School, circa 1989.

FBM was a European Community agricultural policy, in miniature. Girls were given the seed they wanted at a low price. They were given a piece of ground to work on for a small charge. I was available to provide all kinds of technical assistance. Once their vegetables were ready, the school guaranteed to purchase them at an above market price. With relatively little effort, girls could be enabled to subsidise the rather meagre pocket money they apparently often had at school. All that was needed was determination on their part.

The project flopped, as do so many in Africa. It met opposition from my fellow teachers. Very few girls came forward. This option for making money was clearly not favoured. A wonderful flawless (in my view) idea on paper very quickly hit the rocks in practice. According to my reasoning using my English, this should have worked. In the Zambian context it did not. How often has this pattern been repeated up and down Africa? I did not realise at the time that English could have been the problem.

Later I perceived that the use of English often resulted in inaccurate translations from the African languages with which people were thinking. What appeared to be one way in English could be very different in the original African language. Hence planning things for Africa using non-native languages (in the context of non-native cultures) was highly problematic. In this case I had been planning by assuming much of the context to be the one I was familiar with in the UK, rather than realizing that the difference in context there in Zambia was such as to render by plans ineffective.

7. Money a barrier to relationships.

Walking gives time for talking. Especially when it is at a snail's pace whenever I walked with Goliath. The rhythm of walking can be conducive to conversation. Hence walking hither and thither provided me opportunities for learning. Walking has the drawback of being slow, and having

limited 'carrying capacity'. Many of my missionary colleagues could have been a lot busier than I, and had tasks to fulfil that required sometimes carrying people or things. The option of walking and the talking that it evoked was not open to them.

Missionaries and nationals made efforts to mix with one another at the mission. Frequently a missionary would invite nationals to their home, typically for a meal. After the meal people would chat. Quite often Western missionaries liked to play games; especially card games or board games. The nationals who were present often excused themselves and left early. I wondered at times why they would leave so quickly.

Sometimes Africans would avoid Whites. At other times they were strongly attracted to them. My brother came to visit me in Zambia. We were at the Victoria Falls in the South of the country. My brother was excited by all the new experiences he was having. We were walking back from the waterfalls towards our campsite. A young African man approached my brother. His smile seemed to go from ear to ear. He was the friendliest looking person you had ever seen. My brother responded amicably to his overt expression of warmth. I was concerned. I looked back over my shoulder. My brother knew he had found a great friend. Moments later he ran to catch me up. After exchanging a few words, the Zambian lad had asked him for £5.00. What a disappointment.

Something was taking me a while to understand. The penny dropped one day when I was walking with Goliath. We had been to see some friends of his at the Mukinge hospital. The long walk back (about 1 mile) gave us a chance to talk. My relationship with him and other Zambian teachers also made it easy for them to be open. We were fellow teachers. I was not their boss. They were not dependent on my fundraising. Also we were young. Most of us were under thirty. African people feel freer to speak openly with a young man, than an older man. I was British and they were Zambian, but we were able to mix and share.

That day with Goliath I realized something new. What he told me was to go on to play on my mind for a long time. As we walked down a slope towards the teachers' houses, Mukinge hill behind us, Goliath confided something. "Respectable Africans avoid Whites," he told me. I was puzzled. "Why?" I asked. The opposite had become apparent to me. Western missionaries sometimes avoided Africans. Some did not even want to go to an African church. They preferred to worship at home – perhaps with a recorded church service from the USA. "Because if an African spends time with Whites, people think he is after their money" Goliath confided. Well, that made sense, when I thought about it.

How sad though. A Western missionary would come to Zambia. He wanted to make friends with Africans. The Africans were jealous of his money. An African close to a White would be assumed to be after his money. So an African who didn't want a reputation of financial greed, would avoid associating with Whites. It could be Whites' generosity that prevented them from having close friendships with African people.

8. Saturday Fellowship

Saturday evenings my colleagues would go down the road to the hospital. They did not ask me to join them. They just went. It seemed I wasn't invited. That was OK. Many Saturday evenings I was anyway otherwise occupied. Saturday evening was like 'their time'. Why shouldn't I leave them to do what they wanted?

We would meet regularly once per week as teachers in an evening to study the Bible. I remember us moving meticulously through the letter of James. We seemed to take every verse apart. It was good and challenging stuff. We sat in a circle in someone's home. Many contributed to the discussion. I was invited to join these studies from early on. Saturday evenings, however, were different. I was never invited.

I began to be inquisitive about Saturday evenings. Why was I not invited? What was happening that was different from other gatherings? I discovered that the Saturday gatherings were called "Saturday Fellowship". That sounded innocent enough.

I was already aware some of my colleagues' ambivalent attitude to local churches. Especially those who were not members of the local Kaonde tribe did not like to attend local churches. Many confined their worship to events at the school. We had worship at the school every Sunday at 9.00 a.m. with all the girls. That typically went for 1½ hours – the sermon itself often taking an hour or more. Then in the evening teachers were expected to lead devotions with the girls in their classes. That again was over an hour. But that didn't explain why they avoided local churches.

Gradually I became aware of a mixture of fear and disrespect for the local churches. The lack of respect was based in their being led by uneducated villagers. Also being in Kaondeland, they used the Kaonde language and not the more prestigious English in their services. Some teachers had a limited understanding of Kaonde. But there was also fear. The fear had to do with the reputation of the Kaonde for witchcraft. Association with local churches could result in relatively well-off secondary school teachers being bewitched by jealous locals.

Eventually the day came. I decided to ask about 'Saturday Fellowship'. I wanted to invite myself. I asked another teacher whether they would allow me to join them for their Saturday night meetings. There was a pause. My colleagues looked at each other, not quite sure for a few seconds as to how to respond to my inquiry. Then: "yes of course" I was told.

The reason for the ambiguity of my colleagues' responses transpired in due course. The White missionaries used to meet every Sunday evening. They had named their gatherings "Missionaries Meet". The senior Zambian staff in the station were offended through being excluded. Amongst those were the secondary school teachers. At the time, missionaries did not allow them into their circle. So they set up "Saturday Fellowship" in opposition to the missionaries' meeting. By the time I arrived in Zambia, the Sunday meeting had already been opened up to all including Zambians. But the Saturday gathering continued. Now a missionary (myself) was wanting to gatecrash the exclusive Zambian meeting that had been set up in opposition to the exclusive missionary one!

Going to Saturday fellowship was in effect my first visit to an indigenous African 'church'. No Western missionaries had been involved in founding that fellowship. It was by Africans for Africans. What a privilege to have been able to join it!

Even in this case the activity was in many ways a Western one. The fellowship was conducted in English, and of course Christianity had been introduced from the West, even though this gathering was initiated and run by Zambians.

That did give me reason to pause for thought – as to how often when a Westerner serves in Africa, they do so in a very Western project or institution. Westerners are ready to help the African to do the Western thing. But how rare in contrast for a Westerner to be available to participate in the 'African thing' – and this applies even to African initiated churches.

Saturday Fellowship was the forum in which I once tried to ‘correct’ the Zambian Christian outlawing of alcohol. Evangelical churches in Zambia, as also Kenya and elsewhere in Africa, do not allow the use of alcohol. To me at the time, alcohol in moderation was not a sin. I presented a Biblical case for that. When I had finished, I sat down. Goliath stood up – and proceeded to demolish my case. I should have known better than to attempt so simply to undermine the Zambians.

9. Venturing into African Language and Theology

Before going to Zambia, I had not thought much about learning the local language. Being a secondary school teacher – I was under little pressure to do so. Then one day I picked up the Kaonde Bible. My eye was caught by the end of every line of text. The letter at the end of every line of text was a vowel. There was not one consonant. Strange I thought. I discovered that every single word in the Kaonde language ends in a vowel. Interesting I thought. I looked at the strange combinations of letters on the paper. I felt challenged to know what they all meant. Also – I would listen to people chattering. The whole African way of life was fascinating to me. What were those people saying? Were they just saying the plain ordinary kinds of things that we English people would say on meeting each other? Or were they as Africans saying things that we in UK wouldn’t think to say?

My desire to explore and discover underlay my interest in *Kikaonde*. I imagined a hidden world being opened up to me through knowledge of the language. I wondered what that world would be like. I was sure that the topics of conversation in that, to me, strange part of the world couldn’t be the same as those of the UK. I was eager to know more.

My sense became a conviction – and the more so as I engaged in language learning. I was given a TEE (Theological Education by Extension) class to teach. Of course I could only teach those who knew English. Sometimes I would walk past the Kaonde class. This was a much larger group. It seemed to be noisy, active and having a wale of a time. Conversations in Kaonde always seemed more animated than did those in English. Preaching in Kaonde was more lively and resulted in greater attentiveness. There was a secret there somewhere that I wanted to explore. Before long I was spending ½ an hour every morning working on learning the Kaonde language. I would engage in conversation with local people as often as possible. They seemed to appreciate it. One proud moment came, when I found my Kaonde to be better than the English of a lorry driver who came to make a delivery to the school. As a result I answered his questions using the Kaonde language.

Years later I would come to realize the critical importance of the use of African languages in the African context. I would see how the fact that Zambian education and government was conducted in English, was such a major drawback to the country – especially in the globalising world of the 21st Century. One reason for this is the duality of the meaning system in English in Africa. English words have a correct ‘English’ meaning, but also a meaning arising from the way they are used in Zambia. The confusion of not knowing which of these is intended greatly troubles communication.

I was also desirous to know what was going on in the local churches. That it wasn’t identical to the church in the UK was abundantly clear. So what was happening in the villages around the mission station? Perhaps unfortunately – I was not attending a village church, but the mission station church. I approached the pastor. I asked if I could join him on his pastoral rounds. He agreed. For whatever reason, his pastoral rounds didn’t seem to amount to much of consequence. Perhaps my

presence made him nervous as to what to do and say. We walked to a few places, but soon ended up just sitting and chatting with folks in an apparently aimless way.

An African pastor's rounds were to me to be worthy of exploration. They were a route by which to explore another world. So also was TEE (theological education by extension) teaching. Many TEE teachers in Zambia were paid a small salary by missionaries. They were given a motorbike with which to travel to distant villages. During school vacations, I volunteered to accompany the TEE teacher who was based at Mukinge mission. My knowledge of *Kikaonde* was sufficient to have got the gist of what was said in a class. Off we went, with me on the back of the motorbike. We rode for many miles out into the miombo woodlands that surrounded the mission for as far as the eyes could see. We went to two supposed class locations. We found no students at either, so we came back again. Not quite the groups of excited enthusiastic rural African 'disciples' that I had anticipated meeting. It would take me a few more years before I could seriously explore an African church scene in much more detail.

10. Youth Seminars

Another attempt to minister in village churches was through youth services. This attempt also failed. The nature of the 'failure' was educational. My Kaonde-speaking teacher colleagues had a rota. According to that rota, a couple of teachers would hold a weekend youth seminar at a different church every other weekend. I volunteered to join them on this. I was welcomed. I ended up making one trip. The details of it are hazy. A Zambian colleague of mine and myself walked about 10 miles out on a Saturday morning. We joined the church for a service. I said a few sentences in rather broken and partial *Kikaonde*. The singing of the choirs at the church was fantastic. Unfortunately for some reason the church hadn't been expecting us, so we had to return home the same afternoon.

My colleague Allan noted how different it was walking with a White man as against his normal experience of there being two Africans. Whenever we reached a village, the children would run after us shouting *Muzungu*. Adults we met on route almost invariably started on seeing me, and made a point of greeting us. "Normally no one takes any notice as we walk along," Allan told me. Many Africans have made similar comments to me when we have walked to places. They do not know what it is like being a White man in Africa.

Having volunteered to be on the visiting rota, I was invited to the meeting planning the next three months program. Yet again – the outcome of what appeared would be a simple 'planning meeting' was not quite as I had expected.

Before going on to the main business, we had an additional item on the agenda to discuss and deal with. One of the missionaries had obviously taken note of and been impressed by our youth-seminar program. He must have felt we were doing a good work. He wanted to help. So he offered to give us two bicycles. We were to use the bicycles to pursue the program.

Discussion ensued on how to keep and use the bicycles. The discussion went on for more than four hours, and remained unresolved. Who would keep the bicycles? Who will repair them if they break? Are they to be used only for the youth seminar program? What else can they be used for? Can they be used for church ministry other than the youth seminars? What exactly counts as 'church ministry' – for example, does travel to funerals? What is to be done if someone takes a bicycle without asking for authority to use it? So the questions continued. – Answers were not to be

found. One outcome was that because time ran out no youth seminars were planned for that term. I do not know what happened to the bicycles, but as far as I am aware the visiting program was discontinued.

Being in that meeting was a mind-blowing experience. This offer of two bicycles had thrown us into turmoil. The committee just could not handle it. It forced me to realize that African people may not share the ease with which the West handles material items. The nature of the gift – to the committee, also made it hard to handle. Everyone had need of a bicycle, but no-one wanted to appear to be selfish in taking something to which they did not have a right. I discovered that a simple gift from a well-meaning Westerner could destroy a program of ministry.

11. Change in Direction

Two years into my three year term as agricultural science teacher at Mukinge Girls Secondary School, my great hopes on what I would achieve in promoting agriculture in Zambia were somewhat dashed. It had looked to be easy to develop the farm at the school: We had a captive workforce. They appeared to be co-operative. The girls were hard working. In the surrounding community, labour was cheap and easy to come by. Poverty was widespread in the community around us. I had, I thought, the knowledge and training to make things happen; but our agricultural projects were not taking off. Yes, I was teaching agricultural science. Yes, we were following the curriculum. Yes, the girls could pass the exams. But I was a long way from being able to pass on the knowledge needed for the ‘take-off’ of agricultural development.

The problem, as far as the school was concerned, was my fellow teachers – it seemed. They were refusing to raise the price of pork. They were not behind Farm Business Venture. They were interested in short term gain and not long term advantage. They had to change.

Our missionary boss Steve Weindt from the USA was due to visit the station on one occasion about two years into my time in Zambia. I sent a request to him – if he was free, for us to meet. He agreed. On the prescribed day, he came to my house. We sat. I presented my case. “You have to tell the teachers to change” I said “or we are not going to get anywhere”. I appreciated Steve’s wisdom in his responses, but I was not to be side tracked easily. A lot was at stake. As far as I was concerned – the future hope of Africa was at stake. How could Africa be helped agriculturally, if people did not understand and follow elementary economic principles?

We talked and talked and talked. The hours went by. “The Africans are wrong” I told Steve. I knew I was right. No way could one develop the school farm as a commercial venture the way they wanted to do it, I assured him.

I consider that I was right in my bare bones economic analysis. Later I realized that my Zambian colleagues did not expect the projects that I had instigated to continue after my departure. “We need another missionary (i.e. White) to run the farm” they said. Why did they know it wouldn’t work? Did White men have a special magic? Was it because only White missionaries would invest foreign funds into what they were doing? Or did they realize that the social dynamic of their community precluded such commercial activity? That is – they had to be seen to be profiting at the expense of any infrastructure set up by missionaries? I did not quite know why – but it became clear that they did not expect projects to outlive the foreign missionary.

As Steve and I talked, I realized that I needed to make a change in direction. He was not willing to call the teachers and tell them to change. He was not willing to force the teachers to do what I said.

A new challenge came to me. I thought I was in Zambia to show people how to improve their agriculture. That clearly wasn't working and couldn't work in the way I had envisaged it. The subset of Zambian people I was working with clearly showed that they were not ready to take on board what was needed for 'agricultural development' to take off as I thought it should. What was I going to do about it?

As I sat and as we talked then as Steve prayed for me, a renewed sense of purpose came to me and overwhelmed me. I had been trying to force my Zambian colleagues to change. Now I needed instead to get to know them better. I needed to work with them. I needed to be able to show them how to change – from the inside. That required me to understand them and what was going on. I have carried the same conviction ever since. I determined to work *with* the African people and not against them.

This required a lot more than simply saying 'what do you want' then trying to provide it for a community. This question has too many difficulties associated with it – such as just *who* is being asked, and do they have a real choice if donor funds are a part of what is on offer? (Donors invariably attach strings to their money, but because they offer money it is hard to refuse them.) The way to ensure that one was pulling *with* the people, I determined, was to use *their* language and *their* resources in whatever was one's ministry.⁵

I expressed my thanks to Steve. After we had prayed, he left. Much of what I continued to do for my last year at Mukinge did not change much. But my orientation changed. I continued to teach and run the school farm. But now I was determined to know what was going on around me. I sought to find my part in it. I began to doubt whether I was really going to spend my whole life teaching agriculture. The way forward was a bit hazy.

12. Surveying local Projects

Shortly after my meeting with Steve, I purchased a motorcycle. Before that I had gone everywhere on foot. Now I wanted to be able to go further afield. I wanted to find out what was happening in the community around the school. I ended up travelling through much of the North West Province of Zambia by motorcycle.

My primary interest was still in agriculture. I recall visiting a farmer near Mukinge. I asked him about his fields and crops. He pointed out the boundaries of the land that he had been allocated by the chief to use. Then he showed me the piece of land that he had planted. "Why didn't you plant more maize?" I asked him. "Because I would not want to have food when others don't." He responded. Every year there was a hungry season in Kaonde-land. This farmer could have planted more of his land. Then he would have had a larger crop. The larger crop would have meant that he had food during the hungry season. He chose not to grow more food. Had he grown more, he would have been under pressure from neighbours to share his food with them. Had he not shared it, their jealousy would have been expressed as witchcraft that could have killed him and his children.

Learning the above was yet another confirmation to my conviction that it was best to carry out one's ministry using local resources. That is – I discovered that an African with a surplus of

⁵ These principles later came to be known as the vulnerable mission principles.

resources in a context of need was likely to arouse the jealousy of his neighbours. Such jealousy is in Africa translated into witchcraft. This means that many people fear having a surplus, as it could bring them calamity through the witchcraft of others. A foreigner's well-intended donation could result in fear, calamity and even in running away or some other means of compensating for the surplus.

One reason I chose to purchase a motorcycle, was the horrifying experience I had the first time I ever used Zambian public transport. 'Public transport' in that part of Zambia meant riding on the back of a truck. We teachers were called to a seminar about 100 miles away along bush tracks. On the way there, we froze as we got rained on in the back of a truck. That was uncomfortable enough.

On the way back, the only available transport was an old truck with bald tyres that was carrying bags of maize meal to Kasempa. I joined the other people perched on top of the bags of meal, and off we went. An hour later, we ground to a sudden halt. Our front right tyre had a puncture. It was replaced, and we set off again. Half an hour later, suddenly the truck began to weave and shake. The men, women and children, probably about 30 of us, all began to shout and scream in horror. The truck swerved to the left. On the left the road sloped steeply into a dip. Screams turned into a crescendo as bags and people toppled over the side of the turning truck. I thought quickly, and to avoid being covered by the rolling truck, dived forward over the cab, landing hands first in front of it on the ground. Fortunately the truck only rolled onto its side and no further. No one was killed. The most serious injury apart from mine was a dislocated shoulder. I suffered a fractured wrist, causing me to wear a plaster on my left arm for the following 6 weeks.

I devised a questionnaire to help me to understand what was needed to achieve 'rural development' in this area. The research I did was to help me subsequently when I did my Masters degree in rural development. I set out to ask the questions I had listed to as many people as possible who were in some way involved in rural development. I was struck by the fact that whenever I interviewed a Westerner, we had a fascinating and animated conversation. But when I came to interview Zambians it was different. Not that they couldn't answer my questions. They knew 'the answers', and could respond to my questions. But when questioning Zambians, my interview was thoroughly dry and boring. I later realized what was happening. The Zambians I spoke to were educated. That education had come from the West. They knew what I was talking about. Hence they could give me answers. But – that education did not touch their hearts. Answering was a routine like writing an examination paper. But their worldview was different, so my questions did not inspire them. To do that, I would have to learn a lot more about them first.

In that last year, I spent many weekends and school vacations 'on the road'. I sought out projects related to agriculture and visited them. There was one project that was encouraging local farmers to use oxen for ploughing. By the time I arrived it was in decline. "Kaonde men are hunters and do not have the patience to look after cattle" I was told. I visited another site in the area that had every conceivable rural enterprise – crop farming, dairy cows, pigs, chickens, fruit trees and all. It was run by Danish Aid from People to People. I found the Zambian director. He was drunk. All the Whites had left earlier that year – their five year term being over. On revisiting the project some months later milk was being thrown away as the truck that could take it to the dairy was broken down. Ladies were carrying water from the stream on their heads as the water storage tank was leaking. The director was not there. All the pigs and chickens were gone....

I visited Government projects. Some of these were developing new varieties of crops and intensive systems of agriculture. The project staff must have been encouraged by my arrival on the scene.

They told me they desperately needed new donors. Existing donors were pulling out, and they could all lose their jobs. Could I help them? Their interest was more in their salaries than whatever improvements they might achieve for agricultural production in Zambia.

I was glad that I began my agricultural career in Africa on a small scale at a secondary school. These were the kinds of projects that I would have loved to have initiated and got involved in. They were the kind of thing I had believed in. But they all only worked as long as outsiders were in control. They were all failing once foreigners and foreign funding was withdrawn. Some were failing disastrously.

Before leaving Zambia in 1991, I was able to attend the Lusaka show. I approached the ‘Danish Aid from People to People’ stall. How can you explain the terrible situation of your project in North West Province? I asked the stall holders – some Westerners – presumably from Denmark? Their response was an embarrassed silence. It was as if – when Whites got involved in this part of Africa; failure was the norm.

13. Videoing the School

By 1991, I had taught at Mukinge for three years. The place meant a lot to me. I loved working on the farm. I valued the relationships that I had developed with Zambians. I appreciated the opportunities I had to contribute to the lives of Zambian girls through the school. By this time, I had a place to do a Masters degree in Rural Development at the University in East Anglia in the UK. Thereafter I was expected to do at least a year of Bible College before coming back to the field. I was going to be gone for at least two years.

I had learned a lot. I had made a 180° turn in a lot of my understanding as to what I was to do for ‘the third world’. I was doubting my vocation as an agriculturalist. I was determined to apply what I had learned to whatever further study I did in the UK. ‘Conventional’ approaches to agriculture and rural development were no longer going to satisfy me. I was looking for something different; a way of working in Africa that would be of truly long-term benefit to the people I was to interact with.

While sitting with some Zambian colleagues, I asked the headmaster if he could permit me to make a video of the school and school farm. Having been there for three years and considering the Zambians to be my friends and colleagues, I considered this request to be a mere formality. “No” came the response”. I was gobsmacked.

Later Fackson relented.

“Yes OK” he said “as long as you confine yourself to the fields and agricultural areas and not the main school.”

“Why?” I asked.

“We know what you Whites do” he told me, other teachers nodding in agreement.

“You come here and live it up, but then you tell people back home how much you are helping the poor. That is why when you take pictures you prefer people to be dirty and wearing rags. You just want to use us to make more money for yourselves.”

I made a video, but I only included the farming areas of the school. Neither the school offices nor other facilities were a part of it. And no scenes of dirty Zambians dressed in rags.

That this should be a Zambian view of missionaries, was not as incredible to me as it had been at one time; although it was still striking. I have had to ask myself often which is the most important. The way I perceive myself, or the way nationals amongst whom I am working may perceive me? One answer is to say that most important is the way that God perceives me. I do not subscribe to the view that as a missionary I must somehow constantly be ‘pleasing Africans’, but this kind of experience does make one think.

14. Start of University Studies

I enjoyed the purposeful tapping of my feet on the smooth concrete as I walked across the UEA (University of East Anglia) campus. I swung my briefcase in my right hand. It felt good to be engaging with some serious academia. I felt confident. Ahead of me was an excellent opportunity to really get to grips with some of the issues that I had found while in Zambia, with the help of the best of British academia. From the ‘African bush’, I had a place at this prestigious institution. UEA was one of the ‘old’ universities. My first degree had been at a mere polytechnic. By this time the ‘old system’ was gone, but I still felt privileged for this belated prestigious opportunity at the age of 27.

Being on a Masters program was like the fulfilment of a dream. It seemed impossible. My humble first degree was in practical agriculture. It was not even an honors degree. I had been amazed to have been accepted onto this course. I had applied, while I was still in Zambia, while doubting my prospects of being accepted. I wanted to do rural development, as that had become my interest. (‘Agriculture’ seemed too narrow.) Others turned me down, but UEA (University of East Anglia) accepted me. Now I had come to begin studies.

Not everyone would have taken a ‘scientist’ such as me directly onto a post-graduate course in social science like this one. Something obviously convinced the authorities in Norwich – who could not even give me an interview as I was in Zambia when I applied and was accepted. The admissions committee was right on at least one thing though. Having three years of experience in tropical Africa under my belt I came back with many questions that I had not been asking before I went. I was motivated to search for some answers. Those answers could not come from the field of science. I was looking to the ‘arts subjects’, which I had once despised, for some direction.

It did not take me long to find out that I was in the wrong place. Those without a social-science background had been asked to come a month early. The basis of disciplines like economics and politics were laid out to us. That won’t work I repeatedly said to myself as we had the basics of development theory laid out to us.

One student on the introductory course was from India. He made incredibly horrid noises all the time he sat in class. Like a mixture of coughing and vomiting. Everyone else ignored him. I tried to do the same. It wasn’t easy. I wanted to tell him “for goodness sake shut up.”

My cohort of students didn’t seem to have “seen the light”. A colleague had worked for years in the West African Sahel. It was good to ‘talk about Africa’ with him. He bragged constantly about the size of the budget he had been responsible for spending. I made friends with a Japanese girl. “So it is the people that need changing” she said, reflecting on my comments. Her comment made me think. The dominant view at UEA seemed to be that it was people’s context that was denying them development. That included low rainfall, lack of capital, too many diseases etc. Perhaps a lack of

the kind of knowledge they could get through education. But no one seemed to want to say that perhaps the people in Africa could help themselves, or ‘develop themselves’.

That the people couldn’t help themselves seemed to be standard belief. The West was going to ‘rescue’ the majority world. The people had to be taught to understand and follow the West’s prescription. They had to learn to do what they were told. That was the dominant perspective on rural development that I found at UEA.

So called ‘Marxist’ models of development were prevalent. Redistribution of wealth from rich to poor was widely called for. The structures of free-market capitalism were blamed for the woes of the poor. There is a lot of sense in that debate. But surely ‘the poor’ were being presented to us as far too innocent? Do they do nothing ‘wrong’ that they couldn’t change by themselves to improve their lot? Are they merely victims, needing the superior knowledge of Western experts? Were they to be told that their plight was caused by others? If so, that would hardly encourage them to use their own initiative and to do things for themselves. There was little recognition for what had come to be my deeply held understanding. That is, that conversion to Christianity was itself a major and important (if not in some ways essential) step in the pursuance of development.

My ‘digs’ were in a small mid-terrace house close to the center of Norwich. A desk and my newly acquired laptop computer just about fitted beyond the end of the bed in my room. My hosts enjoyed spending almost every evening chain smoking while watching TV below me, as I struggled with my assignments. My landlord realized that I had a German connection. When I told him that I came from Andover (in Hampshire, UK), he would respond by saying “oh Hannover ... I was there after the war.” His hearing wasn’t perfect.

Both landlord and landlady were dutifully amused by this bachelor’s attempts at cooking for himself Zambian style. Nshima (a thick paste made with maize meal) was on the menu most days. Quick and simple; usually with a couple of sausages.

DRBC (Dereham Road Baptist Church) was just down the road. I became a member. I continue to maintain close links with them to date, although my main home and sending church is Andover Baptist Church (in Hampshire).

A few different men would at times come to take advantage of the other spare room in my landlord’s house. One such in due course disappeared without paying his rent. He was later found sitting with the drunks and down-and-outs in Norwich center. Another was a medical student from Rostock in East Germany (this was just a year or two after re-unification). I became his ‘British friend’, aided by my German speaking skills. “I am hardly the typical Brit,” I would have to remind him often as he probed me for insights into his new found hosts. This friendship opened the door to my first visit to what had been the ‘East Block’ in 1992.

This German friend used to refer to ‘common people’ in the UK. Initially when he said that, I just accepted the phrase. Later he asked me whether it was OK to talk of ‘common people’. “Ja”, I responded. But later had to retract that and advise him not to use that phrase. Language is complex, I was continuing to realize.

15. Radical Thesis.

My grades at the university got lower as the year advanced. That is – the more I found myself disagreeing with the ‘party-line’. For my thesis I received a grade of 50%. And the pass mark was

50%. A month into the course I had thought about giving it up. But I did not like starting something and not finishing it. I determined to get out of it what I could. I did manage to acquire many insights that have been an ongoing help to me.

In an essay I wrote I suggested that it was witchcraft beliefs that underlay poverty in Africa. I actually got a decent grade for that essay; presumably because of the novelty of my insights. But I was not given room to build on those insights. No one at UEA (University of East Anglia) seemed ready to accept that people's witchcraft beliefs could form the basis of under-development, and that perhaps the best way to help people to develop would be through challenging those beliefs by exposing them to the Word of God.

By the time I began planning my thesis, I was somewhat frustrated. Someone somewhere was wise enough to see what was happening, and pointed me to a very suitable supervisor – Dr. Tony Barnett. “Faith in Jesus makes a difference” I told him in our first meeting. He did not seem either perplexed by or antagonistic to that claim. I shared the Gospel with him. I told him how I had been inspired by the difference that faith in Christ had made on people's lives. I gave examples of farmers who were able to be much more productive once they had overcome the fear of the jealousy of their neighbours. I shared with him how serious the Zambian people were in appropriating the Gospel, and how, on their own testimony, it frequently transformed their whole lives.

I then discovered that my thesis supervisor Tony Barnett was a Jew. Uh oh, have I offended him?, I asked myself. Well, I had not. He was not that closed a Jew. Rather – he was very interested in my ‘thesis’ – that heart change is an important and necessary prerequisite to development in Africa. Tony's supervision was very helpful. He seemed to agree even with some of my ‘wilder’ ideas.

One memorable day of discussion with Tony comes to mind. “If people can have a genuine hope in God that is greater than their fear of witchcraft,” I shared with him “then that can enable incredible social transformation”.

“I agree with you” he said. “I wish I had such a message of hope to share with others. But I don't have that. That is what you Christians have. The message that we Jews have is not for everyone, as is yours. You are on to something important. I wish I had such a message to share. I wish you well.”

One author that Tony directed me to was Max Weber. What he wrote, almost 100 years earlier, was what my experience had shown to be profoundly true. He did not agree with Karl Marx's version of history. Instead, Weber pointed out that a people's economic status often depends on their religious beliefs; being Hindu, Islamic or animist – has a major effect on whether one can become materially a ‘developed’ nation, according to Weber. He referred to the key role of Protestantism in enabling Western Europe to go through the enlightenment and the industrial revolution. That is what I had begun to see in Zambia. It was people with faith in God who could advance themselves economically, because they did not fear being bewitched by jealous neighbours.

Another author Tony Barnett introduced me to was Evans-Pritchard. I read the abridged version of his book about the Azande in the Sudan. In it, after a time living with the people, Evans-Pritchard articulated the nature of and impact of witchcraft beliefs. He indicated that even friendship with him, as a relatively wealthy foreigner, was dangerous for the Africans amongst whom he lived. This is because it could result in their colleagues being jealous of them. Jealousy for the Azande operated through a witchcraft substance, and aimed to kill – according to Evans-Pritchard. The kind of thing I had come to observe but not to understand very well in Zambia.

My thesis was not what the people at UEA were looking for. I entitled it “empowerment or impoverishment,” because I perceived that many so called ‘development’ efforts were not really helping the poor. Rather, by orienting them along unhelpful avenues in seeking advance and fulfilment through foreign donors, they could easily be impoverishing them. I guess that contributed to my only getting 50% for the thesis.

16. Zambia trip 1992

Another thing that won’t have helped my grade for my thesis was my hurried departure in the summer of 1992. I was determined not to ignore that which I had found on the ground in Africa. By this time I had been back in the UK for almost a year. I was under intense pressure by the general British establishment to take on a more standard British view of Africa. The understanding of Africa people worked on in the UK was not the Africa I had come to know between 1988 and 1991. I desired to go back. I wanted to keep my feet “on the ground”. So I began to plan a trip back to Zambia in the summer of 1992. I was to fly to Johannesburg for what was to be another pivotal experience, in July 1992. Johannesburg seemed to be the best place to purchase a motorcycle. Hence I had to quickly finish and hand in my thesis, and I had less time to make corrections and improvements on it.

I wrote to the African Evangelical Fellowship missionary director on the field. Really a formality it seemed; I wasn’t sure that I really had to ask for permission to make the trip, and couldn’t think why my request would be refused. Those were the days of snail-mail. A response was slow in coming. I pushed ahead with plans anyway.

I arrived in South Africa just a few years after the removal of apartheid. Legally it may have been removed, but in peoples’ minds I found that it was still very much there. I stayed with a White couple I had heard about while in Zambia. I visited the Africans in their servant quarters. By comparison with many Zambians, they were very wealthy. They had electricity, a large television set, and a comfortable way of life. But also strikingly they did not seem to have the kind of freedom to interact with Whites that I knew from Zambia.

I made my way from South Africa to Zambia. My relationship with the mission did not go as well as I had hoped. In hindsight – I would have been better off not asking to be allowed to make my trip in the first place. There was not much I could do about it by the time I realized what had happened. I travelled north, taking 3 or 4 days to reach Lusaka. This enabled me to ride slowly and enjoy the scenery and areas I passed through. I stayed a night in Harare’s mission guesthouse, before going on to Zambia.

My welcome by my colleagues of a year earlier back to Zambia was however a bit cool. This occurred in Lusaka, then in the mission station at Mukinge, then on my trip back to Lusaka. Initially I did not know just why that was. Eventually I realized what was happening. The church governing body had taken my letter requesting that I make a visit seriously. They had discussed it at the church council. They had decided that there was no point in my making a visit, when my planned return to the field was anyway just a year away. They advised me not to come. All the missionaries and Zambian church workers had heard that I had been told not to come on this visit. Then there I was. I came across to them, it seems, like a rebel.

Thinking about that time in Zambia, still hurts today. A wedge was put between myself and my missionary colleagues. It was a painful wedge. It seemed that non-conformists to the mission

society weren't appreciated. But I did not want to be non-conformist. My error had been, it seems, to ask permission, then to assume it had been given before it was given.

I had travelled north steadily on my newly acquired 200cc Yamaha motorbike. It had been my first time ever in South Africa or Zimbabwe. The wide plains, hills and valleys of Africa opened up before me on my lonely ride. I carried 20 litres of spare petrol in a metal tank on the back of the bike – but I never needed it. Passing through Zimbabwe, it was a time of drought. I crossed over dry river beds and a parched landscape. Frequently, I passed massive boulders, the size of factory buildings. These were a striking characteristic of the Zimbabwean landscape.

This was Zimbabwe twelve years after Mugabe had come into power. From the Zambian perspective, it was a place of great wealth and prosperity. The drought was serious, but perhaps not all that unusual for Zimbabwe. It was interesting to me to see an African country parts of which were still dominated by Whites, and only a few years after the beginning of African rule. I was often struck at how well looked after and clean the roads and shops were by comparison with those in Zambia.

After my time at Mukinge, I rode by bike south towards Mongu, through the game-reserve area adjoining the massive Kafue national park in Zambia. It was probably not the wisest thing – for a lone motorcyclist to chance meeting with elephants, lions, buffaloes or other untoward members of God's creation. For the adventure though, it seemed worth it at the time. At some points in the journey tsetse flies chased after me and would swarm around me should I stop the motorbike. As with moving animals, they considered that I was also worth following for the prospect of some sweet blood.

For parts of the journey, the track I followed was sandy. That is always dodgy on two-wheeled transport. On one such a stretch, despite much care, I was travelling at around 20mph when my wheels entered a narrow rut. I lost control of the bike. It twisted sideways. I landed on the ground, the bike flew over me, coming to a halt on its side a few yards away. Fortunately I was not hurt and the bike was not damaged. I was by that time already in a populated region. A couple who were digging over their field nearby came running over. I was able to brush myself off, and continue my journey. A few days later I had reached Lusaka. I left the bike there, and flew back to the UK.

My purpose of going back to Zambia, in addition to the acquisition of a motorcycle for use in my anticipated long-term return a year later, was really to 'check' that what I was believing on the basis of my previous experience was 'still there'. Life is so different in Africa from the UK. Spending time in the UK, where everything was translated into English Africa was very much, in my view, misunderstood. I wanted to re-check on reality. The key time for doing this, was the month spent in a village near my old mission station of Mukinge. More on this below.

17. Staying in Zambian Village

While at Mukinge, I was able to stay in a village and learn a lot more about the Kaonde people. In order to arrange this, I went to see the headmaster of the girls' school, Fackson Ntaimo. He was willing to help me find a place to stay. We were soon buzzing around on motorbikes searching for a suitable village for me to stay in. It was not proving easy to find. Then I was reminded about a boy called Lason who had stayed with me for almost two years while I was teaching at Mukinge.

Lason had volunteered to be my vegetable gardener a few years previously. Initially I tried to put him off. He was about 16. I didn't see the need for a gardener at my home at the time. When he persisted, eventually I allowed him to continue officially and paid him a small amount monthly. Then he wanted to go to school himself. My home was much nearer to his school than his was. I was alone in the house at the time, having been moved away from Goliath's place because Whites weren't supposed to live together with Blacks. (I did not understand all the reasons why this rule was there at the time.) After consulting with some missionary colleagues, I invited Lason to come and stay with me.

I then had to answer some difficult questions. How was I going to live with this African lad? The questions came particularly around food. I was anyway eating 'pretty rough' – bachelor style. But now, how was I going to do things with the African living in my house? Was I going to share Western food with him? Then I would get him habituated to something that he would not be able to sustain. Would I make others jealous, and thus spoil him? Perhaps we ought to eat separately. Then he would use food from his cupboard and me from mine? Then when he took something from my cupboard I would have to accuse him of stealing. Or perhaps I ought to eat African food, so as to avoid the above issues? I decided on the latter option.

So Lason came one day with all his worldly wealth in a little bag in his hand. We would share the responsibility for cooking. He would do most of the gardening. He stayed with me for more than a year. Now, over a year after he eventually left, I was asking him for accommodation.

"Can I come and stay with your family", I asked him?

"Yes, welcome" came the response.



The village.

So for over a month, I slept in Lason's hut, about eight by ten foot made of mud and thatch, about two miles away from the Mukinge mission station. I set about finding out what was 'really happening' in the rural African community around me.



Staying in Lason's home, 1992.

A book published in 1923 helped me to know what to look for. Written by a British colonial officer called Melland, it was entitled "Witchbound Africa – an account of the primitive Kaonde tribe and their beliefs". The title itself spoke volumes. I was beginning to discover that indeed many Kaonde people were bound by witchcraft fears and beliefs. My research took two avenues: First, to share in peoples' lives and activities and try and hear and understand what was going on. Second, to approach some key people, most of whom I had gotten to know while teaching at Mukinge previously, and ask them about the kinds of beliefs that I had read about in this book.



Talking around the fire of an evening near Lason's home.

The outcome of my research was, to me, incredible. The world that Melland had described in 1923 was not gone. It was still there. Visitors would come and visit Lason's family and they would talk. Sometimes I would be in the house, and they would not even know that I was there. They talked, and I heard. The talk was constantly about witches and witchcraft. I went to visit the old men. I asked them about the 'obscure' beliefs that I had read of in Melland's book. They might have been obscure to me, but they weren't obscure to them. They confirmed the things that Melland wrote about. Snakes with heads of people. Small people with their heads turned backwards who liked to eat children. Other people who would die and be buried, but then would rise from the dead and appear again somewhere else. Of course, pastors will insist that a widow be 'cleansed' (from untoward spirits associated with the death of her late husband) by sleeping with a brother to her late husband, before she marries someone else. No self respecting pastor would allow his son to marry a widow who had not been 'cleansed', I was told. And so on...

This time in the village did all that I had hoped for, and more. I felt that I was now better informed about what I had seen in a hazy way a year previously. Answers to many of my questions about

'development in Africa' were becoming clear. What was going to help the African people, I was now certain, was knowledge of God. Neither money nor technology was at the root of the poverty that I was seeing around me. It was fear of witchcraft. (Those who have while others are short are the ones likely to be attacked by jealous witches. Therefore, almost the best defence against witchcraft attack is poverty.) That which could rescue these people was, clearly, the truth about the almighty God. My agricultural knowledge at this time seemed to me like 'dirty rags' (Isaiah 64:6). Why pass on knowledge of seeds and soil when people's hearts were aching through fear of death by witchcraft, and the same witchcraft was resulting in them deciding to produce less? What these people needed most of all, as the antidote to their poverty, was clearly the hope that comes with knowledge of the living God. That is, to recognize that the death of Christ on the cross offered new hope, filling with God's Spirit, and being born again to the things of God and eternity.



A typical meal-time in Lason's home.

With this realisation came also a fear. A fear, that is, of my missionary colleagues. Will they understand? Will they accept such a key role for the Gospel? Many of them were heavily engaged in compassionate ministries; especially medical work. Now there is nothing wrong with compassion. But for some it was as if compassion was more important than the Gospel. The Zambians considered at times that some missionaries were not saved because they seemed to value their compassionate ministry and their Western lifestyle more than they did getting alongside African people and sharing God's word with them. Many people in the West, Christians included, seemed in practice to think that it was Western technology, money and languages rather than the Gospel that would 'save' Africa. Were they going to appreciate an alternative view; that what is of overriding importance on the mission field – is sharing a knowledge of Christ?

18. From Zambia to Kenya.

Events over the following year proved my fears to be grounded. It was extremely painful to be accused and rejected by some of my missionary colleagues. It was like a nightmare come true. I longed to go back to Zambia and continue in ministry there. But it was not to be. Instead, in October 1993, I had to make a new start. This time my destination was Western Kenya.

I came to Kenya through my friendship with a Bishop of a Kenyan church who happened to be studying at All Nations Christian College in the UK at the same time as I was. He invited me to join him in his work. I agreed. I came to Kenya as his guest in October 1993.

19. The Approach to Kenya

In Kenya, I was determined to apply what I had learned in Zambia. This included many things, such as those mentioned above regarding African people's lives being much troubled by witchcraft. I was determined to work with the Kenyan people, and not against them. I hadn't come to tell them where they were wrong. I wanted to work with them on their level. That way, whatever I did would not be set apart and superior. The sustenance of whatever I was to set up shouldn't depend on outside funds. Thus it wouldn't create dependence. By not loading myself up with foreign money, I would not be privileging my own activities above those of African colleagues. By learning and then using local languages, I was hoping to become familiar with what was going on around me.

There were two principles that I followed particularly. These have subsequently come to be known as the principles of 'vulnerable mission'. That is – that in ministry I determined to use only local languages, and only local resources. This strategy, I can say in hindsight, has worked extremely well.

Kenya had a population of about 28 million in the mid 1990s. This includes 40 different tribes with their 40 different languages. The *Kiswahili* language however unites the country, and English is the official language. The Luo people amongst whom I found myself living were one of the large five ethnicities. The others are Luyia, Kalenjin, Kikuyu and Akamba. Unlike Zambia, Kenya had never been very oriented to socialism, and that plus the fact that it had once been colonised by many Whites meant that it seemed to have a stronger infrastructural base than Zambia. Tribal tensions and divisions in Kenya, I discovered in due course, were greater than those in Zambia. I found myself living in what had during colonial times been a 'native reserve', 60 miles or so from the Ugandan border, and 25 miles from Kisumu (the third city of Kenya).

My host in Western Kenya was an African Bishop. The church he led was Pentecostal. Some Finnish and later English missionaries were involved in it. The Bishop himself had joined it after being forced to leave the Anglican Church. The latter, he often explained himself, could not accommodate the charismatic enthusiasm for Christ that he had begun to know and express.

While frequently known as Pentecostal or charismatic churches, the essence of the Bishop's new discoveries in Christianity were his belief that God was the provider of 'everything' in life. This was different to the view promoted by Western missionaries who saw faith as being more to do with that part of life known as 'religion'. The Anglican church's maintenance of the latter was frustrating to the bishop and people like him who preferred to see their faith not only as a means of relating to a distant God, but also a means to material prosperity and social prestige. This prosperity was acquired especially by the effective removal of ancestral ghosts, who were otherwise considered to be holding people into a state of poverty.

The Luo people believe that after death people can become either good or bad ghosts (spirits). Those who become good spirits are those people who have also lived good fulfilled lives, and had respectful treatment after their death (especially at their funeral). Disgruntled people are likely to become 'evil spirits' and to come and trouble especially those whom they hold to blame for their situation while they were still around.

I met with a characteristic feature of some independent churches in this region on my first morning in Kenya. The Bishop and myself were sharing a room in a backstreet hotel in Nairobi. At 5.00

a.m. suddenly I was awakened by the Bishop's noisy babbling prayer that went on and on, in a language that I did not understand. He prayed in this way as he lay in bed.

The next day I was asked to drive the Bishop's fully loaded old car. We drove cross country from Nairobi to Kisumu. The vegetation much of the way was very different to what I had known in Zambia. Rainfall levels were clearly higher here than in Zambia. I was in suspense as to just where I would end up living. I had little clue. Some places in Africa are pretty desolate and unfriendly to someone accustomed to life in the UK. I was full of trepidation.

We arrived at our destination in pouring rain at 8 p.m. It was about as desolate as I could have imagined. We were not in a rural area, but in Kisumu – a large town. I did not realize that this was a stop-over and not our final destination. We were at a very grey and grubby house. Inside it was hot like an oven. The air was heavy with the rancid smells emanating from the slum-like dwellings all around us. The African people presumably didn't have a clue as to how shocked I was to think that this would be my home for years to come. They were too busy laughing and chattering away in some coarse tongue. Then at 11 p.m. to my great relief, I realized this was only a stop-over, and we set off for our final destination. Just one hour's drive on, and we were welcomed to a lavish supper at midnight. The next morning I found myself in a place carpeted with green grass, populated by lush trees, and with air that was sweet and fresh to breathe.

20. Travelling with the Bishop

There followed a time of considerable cultural strain. I had come to work with my African hosts. My response to suggestions was therefore largely 'yes'. Apart from beginning with the learning of Kiswahili, I did not have my own agenda at this stage. I became the driver and 'visiting speaker' on evangelistic trips to various locations. As a White man I was in many ways the center of attention. But I did not always realize the extent to which this was the case at the time.

Being the center of attention in this way, affects the whole dynamics of wherever one is and what one is engaged in. People coming to a gathering at which I was present would have hopes and expectations of handouts and donations. The critical part of events was, in many ways, the moment when I was asked to stand up and share what I had. If they were not going to benefit immediately, then people would be hopeful that I would give them some clues as to what they needed to do in order to achieve some future advantage. For example, I may announce the beginning of a new project, another gathering or a procedure that they could follow in order to acquire something from the wealthy West, that I to them represented.

Our trips were mini-expeditions. The car we used was old. The bishop spent a whole day most weeks sitting at an 'open air' garage in the local town getting it serviced. Everything was checked, and many things required repair every week. The owner of the vehicle had to be present as it was repaired. Otherwise his vehicle would either be neglected as more important jobs took priority, or it was thought that mechanics might replace good parts on the vehicle with older ones they had obtained elsewhere. (It is widely known that Africa, as other non-Western cultures, are so called 'shame cultures'. This means that people will bend rules if they can do so without being found out and shamed. The way to make sure that they not do this, is to be there observing so as to catch them in their misdemeanours.)



The author considering fish for purchase.

Our trip on this occasion was to begin early on Saturday morning. I was up at 5.00 a.m. Breakfast was ready by 7.00 a.m. We were ready to go; then began the process of waiting. The bishop's intentions for an early departure were frustrated by an endless string of visitors. Each needed his attention urgently, and most received it. The visitors all came to plead their various financial needs. The Bishop being the beneficiary of funds from overseas donors saw it as one of his roles to hand out money to almost everyone who came.

On a good day (as on this occasion) we got away at 10.00 a.m. We drove for an hour to our destination. The most reachable person at the church community we were visiting was a lady who had a shop near the main road. We explained that there was to be a crusade that morning at 11.00 a.m. We were ushered into a room behind the shop and given soft drinks. Soft drinks continued to be served as we sat on hard chairs waiting to be told where to go next. Lunch came and went. We walked briefly around some local business premises. A church member had opened a business with a lathe. I was asked to bless it. I laid my hands on it and prayed. We went back to the hard chairs to sit some more. Just occasionally, conversation turned to English and I contributed a sentence or two. Mostly I understood nothing. I wrote a letter to someone in the UK. The hours dragged by incredibly slowly.

At 5.30 p.m. we moved on. We drove a mile or two to find a ring of thatched mud huts surrounded by trees and fields. Here we were served with bread and tea. (*Chai* – tea made by mixing water with milk heated together, and having tea leaves added.) Again it was a great time of friendly laughter, talking and reminiscing about previous days and activities. Great that is – for those who had reminiscences in common, and who understood the African language which conversation would constantly lapse into.

About an hour later, just after it got dark, we were on the move again, this time to the home of the pastor. We parked right alongside the mud thatched house of the pastor for security reasons – lest anyone should come to steal the car at night. “When will we begin?” I asked a few times. I did not get a clear answer. After 11.00 p.m. supper was served followed by more tea. At midnight a small crowd gathered in the pastor’s living room, and our service began.

I had prepared a message to share. My turn came at about 1.00 a.m. I was very tired, and so it appeared was everyone else, so I cut my message from 20 to 5 minutes. Not everyone was as concerned about time. Others preached noisily and exuberantly. More than once, nearly all those (mostly ladies) present came to kneel in front of us crying noisily wanting our prayer. I couldn’t believe the way that our gathering went on and on. Eventually at 2.30 a.m. it ended. I was shown a bed in an adjoining room. Whoops – that was close. I almost stepped on a baby that had been laid on the floor in the dark. A dungy smell filled my nose and delayed the encroachment of sleep.

Next morning’s service in the church was to be at 9.00 a.m. By the time we had washed and had some breakfast it was 11.00 a.m. We went to begin the service with about 20 people. By 12.00 noon the number had risen to about 90. The reason for the especially high attendance, I realized later, was because we had come with a vehicle and with a White man. That part of the service that was translated to English was very suggestive of the same: it promised health, wealth and prosperity – if only people would ‘pray right’.

The above is just one instance of the way I learned to function with one particular African church. There were many adventures, and many frustrations. The greatest frustrations perhaps were with time keeping. It was extremely difficult for a task-conscious Westerner like me to run at their pace without feeling that I was wasting time. Added to this was the feeling increasingly that while I was joining people in worship, it was almost as if I was the god they were worshipping. That is – the objective of the worship seemed to be to acquire the things of and achieve the life of British people.

21. Prosperity Gospel

It is true that God only knows the hearts of men. How the African people understood or understand the Gospel as preached in Africa – it is not for me to judge. I can only share, honestly, my carefully meditated thoughts on the matter that I have acquired over many experiences and conversations with numerous people.

I was fascinated, and at times deeply frustrated by the messages shared by some African church leaders. Often at funerals, in churches, home gatherings, and so on – the theme could be very similar. “Look at me. I have succeeded. You also could succeed if you do what I do,” some would say in effect. Some had a gift of charisma which meant that they were good at winning over White people, and good at getting them to part with their money.

“I have just received KSh50,000 (£450/\$700)” a church leader shared with me one evening in his house. He had a look of victory in his eyes; as if he had killed an animal. “I have succeeded again”, he seemed to be saying “at convincing British people that their money should come to me.” I had an empty feeling in my stomach. That money from a UK church included contributions from old widows who were sacrificing their meagre pensions. Something seemed wrong for such a person to be considering himself to have achieved a victory by winning that money. It was a victory over what?



A funeral in action.

A particular church leader loved to testify about his salvation. “I was a drunkard and an adulterer” he liked to say. He would articulate some details of the above. “When Jesus found me, at first no one would believe that I had really changed” he would add. “People had given up on me” he explained, and justified saying so using various examples. The last born son of a family was usually considered responsible for ageing parents, and took over the parents’ homestead. He was the lastborn. His family was so sure he was a useless drunk and would not even survive, that the second youngest son had been given this responsibility. I had to agree – God had wrought an incredible change.

At one time, we were told by a church leader that a couple from the UK had travelled to Kisumu. They had about £40,000 in hand to give away to the poor. They did not manage to find the African contact who they had come to meet, but they did come across this particular preacher. He managed to convince them that he was the most worthy recipient of the money. The day they met him, they handed over the money, we were told.

Someone else oversaw the building of a significant cathedral in Kisumu. “Did we (Africans) have to raise even a shilling towards its building?” was the rhetorical question he once directed to an African congregation. “No,” was his retort. “The Whites paid for everything. And we can get them to do it again.” Meanwhile Whites who came to see the project were told that everything was being done using local money.

That Whites were valued for their money and little else became clearer and clearer to me as the years went by. This should not really surprise us. Many Westerners are very presumptuous, it seems to me. Some Westerners may be wise and powerful in a Western Church context. But for that wisdom to be equally and immediately applicable amongst a culturally vastly different people, is asking a lot. Many Africans however have become adept at convincing Whites that their wisdom carries over across cultures, in the interest of the money that then flows. My case, because I chose not to use money in my ministry, would turn out differently.

22. Involvement with AICs (African Indigenous Churches)

Many people classify churches in this part of Africa into three types; mission churches, Pentecostal or ‘modernising’ churches, and AICs. The former are founded and often still much influenced by

missionaries and they follow the example of non-Pentecostal Western churches. The Pentecostal churches are often inspired from the Pentecostal movement that is also there in the West. The AICs are founded by African people themselves and are more inclined to interpret Christianity through African eyes, rather than through appropriated patterns based on Western ways of life.

My involvement with AICs (African Indigenous Churches) increased as time went by. It was the fulfilment of an interest I had gradually developed. My involvement in 'Saturday Fellowship' in Zambia contributed to this interest. It was also an obvious course to follow; if I wanted to know what and how 'Africans did it for themselves' – what could be more natural than to take an interest in churches founded by Africans for their own people?

The director of YTC (Yala Theological Center) encouraged me in pursuing this interest. He consistently supported YTC over its first 13 or so years even though many others had dropped out. He was a devout member of an indigenous church; hence he encouraged visits to indigenous churches.

Much has been written about AICs. Clearly there are many differences between them as well as certain features that they have in common. Many of them like to have a uniform, or church clothing. Their services tend to be long. Their activities can appear to be 'ritualistic'. To a Western Protestant unfamiliar with such - they are very strongly oriented to the dead. That is – the Bible and Christian teachings are taken as aids to help pacify, remove and/or benefit from the powers that the dead represent. This includes witchcraft as well as so called 'ancestral practices'. Many of these features also apply to missionary-founded-churches, but classically and especially strongly to AICs. Below, I want to relay my experiences of fellowshiping with and relating to various AICs in turn, so as to give my reader a flavour of what they are about.

This is not to say that I only had fellowship with AICs. On the contrary, my home church is not an AIC, and I also frequently worship with various mission-founded churches. Worshipping with AICs has the advantage of getting a flavour of what is 'under the skin', that may be concealed when African people are following foreign forms or pleasing Westerners in the hope of obtaining donor funds.

23. Under the Skin

I have already mentioned above, something that struck me regarding Westerners' involvement in Africa; Westerners always come to Africa, and work in Westernized parts of Africa. Usually they function in a Western language, and a pseudo-Western context. Even from within Africa, their message is 'come to the West'. This implies that African traditions are to be left. Not to be transformed.

Texts and teachings, including Christian ones, come from the West, and Africans are asked to 'adapt' them for their culture. When African people come to the West of course the same happens. The West wants to meet them on their (Western) territory, and to engage with them using their (Western) languages.

Typically, when a Western missionary goes to Africa, he will set something up to which to invite Africans. He / she may well set that up *with* Africans, who will be happy to join in, providing that the missionary finds the funds.

In my mind was an alternative approach. That is, to move to African territory not only geographically but also economically, culturally and linguistically; then to be used by God to transform the African context from the inside.

One way of ensuring that this happens is to use local languages. Another way to ensure that one does not set up foreign structures, is not to use outside resources. Local people will only use their limited resources to support something that they believe in. This does not mean that a Western missionary must cut him/herself off from their own people and ‘go native’. Rather; it means keeping what one has that is foreign separate from one’s ministry with the people. One may have a computer, Western food, Western friends and so on – but then needs to make efforts to keep these distinct from one’s ministry with the local people. Such valuation of the people will, or at least ought, to be appreciated by them.

One means by which I have actualized the above, is through involvement with indigenous churches. That is churches founded by Africans themselves, and / or that do not seek strongly to imitate Western church forms. Involvement with such churches begins to give a view of how Christianity in Africa would appear if left to the Africans. It is a way of seeing God work in African peoples hearts with relatively little effort to please Westerners. It opens the possibility, I believe, of transforming African ways of life by being used in service of the Gospel, rather than ‘attacking’ them from the outside.

The following chapters of this biography describe some of the indigenous churches in this area, and their practices. That will begin to give my reader an idea of the nature of the missionary task from this perspective. It can almost serve as a ‘baseline survey’ from which a missionary / theologian needs to work.

Working from the ‘inside’ as here advocated, has of course been the norm of missionary work for centuries. Only recently has the West had the economic power to ‘purchase’ kingdom-influence around the globe. The ‘inside’ way of working results in facing challenges that are very real, and very unlike the need for more fundraising. The challenges, it seems to me, are really much more akin to Biblical challenges. They require intense missionary dedication, long term commitment, and not primarily administrative prowess. This is often a long-slow haul; planting deep roots. This is of course how nationals themselves have to work. Therefore; a missionary who works from the inside is beginning to present a sustainable model of ministry that nationals could imitate. Enjoy the read.

24. Roho Church

As the years went by and I attended many indigenous church services, what were initially very extra-ordinary experiences began to feel more ‘normal’. Worshipping with a Roho church is one such. This particular church worshipped under a very makeshift structure. A wooden frame of a hut, sparsely thatched, was about the size of a large sitting room in a British home. The floor was mud. A low wall separated the ‘altar’ from the area of the congregation. Myself and two other men sat at the altar. About two boys, two other men and twelve or so girls and women sat facing us. The men were on stools. The women sat on a reed-mat on the floor, legs stretched out straight in front of them.

The service began with kneeling and prayers, including the Lord’s Prayer repeated three times. At one point, really to mark the beginning of the service, all the people faced the cross and flag that was behind the building. (There were no walls to this building.) All (except me) shouted, stamped

and gesticulated while intermittently clapping. This, I realized later, was cleansing our church of any evil spirits – that should flee out of the back door, frightened by the sudden noise and jumping. ('Evil spirits' are of course of those 'ancestors' who are for some reason unhappy and come back to trouble people. There was no back door, but we did what we did as-if it was there.)



An indigenous church in action – Roho.

After reciting a few more prayers, the ladies busied themselves by rolling up the two mats they sat on, and leaning them against one corner of the building. A lad, no more than 11 or 12 years old, strung the cord holding a large drum over his shoulder. With the drum now sticking out in front of him and resting on his stomach, he proceeded to beat one side with his left palm, and the other with a short stick using his right hand. Meanwhile, two ladies had picked up heavy metal rings of about 6" diameter, and cranks from old bicycle pedals. One lady led the others in noisy singing as these instruments were rhythmically beaten at top volume.

Even more unexpected to me than the singing and its accompaniment, was the lively dancing that ensued. The men were relatively passive. It was the women who were the most lively by far. The atmosphere of the singing seemed to intoxicate them. Suddenly one started spinning around. As she did so, she raised her arms. Twirling at an incredible speed, other women formed a ring around her to prevent her from careering off to one side out of control. This happened repeatedly. After spinning the lady would grab someone, force them to kneel beside her, and relate something into their ear. The person then went out to the flag and repented of the 'sin' of which they had been informed. 'Repenting' consisted of stamping their feet, clapping, gesticulating and shouting loudly for the offending spirit to leave. (Sins and spirits are generally considered to be synonymous.)

When the service leader motioned the singing stopped. The same lady who had been spinning around now engaged in another form of prophecy. She knelt, with her hands folded behind her back, leaning forward with her face close to the ground. She growled, roared and barked. In between those noises she would utter more words of prophecy with a sharpness and urgency. The rest of us listened silently and attentively. When finished, she was prayed for, and came out of her state of possession. Mats and stools were returned, and people went back to their places and sat down.



Worship in an indigenous *roho* church.

Interpretation of visions and dreams followed. A lady would stand and then kneel facing the men who were sat at the front. After greeting, she began to describe what she saw in her dream up to its end. Three or four ladies in turn knelt and recalled their dreams. One of the men at the front proceeded to interpret. Most dreams foretold death, according to the interpreter, that arose because of some sin. The interpretation would include a prescription of prayer that could prevent the calamity. The person who had dreamed went out to repent at the flag-post by stamping, clapping her hands and shouting while facing the flag, to chase away that bad thing.

The time of interpretations was followed by a time of teaching. The three men at the front were given opportunity to bring a message. Some of the best Bible teaching I have heard has been at Roho churches at this time. The teaching was interspersed with encouragement for us to be faithful in our Christian walk. Finally a song was sung to accompany the offering. A closing prayer brought the service to an end.

25. Nomiya Church

Whereas the Roho churches of which the above is an example were founded in the 1930s, the Nomiya churches were founded even earlier in 1905. The founder John Owalo had been a Catholic and then a Muslim. In a vision the faithful are told, Owalo was taken up to heaven. In heaven he met Jesus. But, when he wanted to bow down before Jesus, Jesus himself deterred him by saying that only God was to be worshipped. God gave him a knife, which was to be used for circumcision. He was told to begin a new church, in which men were to be circumcised. Ever since then, to be a male leader in this church one has had to be circumcised.

The songs that are regularly sung by members of this church are those written by one of the founders. The songs appear to be rooted in some Catholic musical tradition. Gowns are worn by church members, much as in the Roho churches described above. Muslim-style hats are favored. Shoes are left at the entrance, as is common to many indigenous churches. Proceedings in Nomiya are particularly male-dominated. Polygamy is encouraged. The Nomiya specialize in carrying out burial ceremonies, perhaps even more than other indigenous churches, although these are very important for many of them. Often they will carry out ceremonies for a fee for non-church members concerned for the state of departed family members, because returning to the grave for a 'memorial service' is an important ritual for many in this part of the world.

A very prominent brightly clothed row of men stood facing the congregation from the front. Non-circumcised and non-males are not permitted on this platform. These men led, although the women

often lead the singing. A liturgy is used from Nomiya's own prayer book. Many Nomiya churches, presumably because of their roots in Islam, take Jesus as a prophet and not a member of the Trinity. Their emphasis is strongly on there being One God, worthy of all praise. Heavily rooted in the Old Testament, they like to recite the Ten Commandments.

One of the ceremonies linked to the recent circumcision of some boys from this church on the visit I am here describing, was a dance. Two boys came to the front of the church. They danced slowly and methodically with their knees bent, rhythmically circling their shoulders. The congregation watched, and then in due course, applauded. The rituals associated with circumcision are important, and include the need for slaughter of a sheep. The Nomiya church clearly supports the practice of animal sacrifice. At the end of one funeral, at which the late was reputed to have been a witchdoctor, a Nomiya bishop who had conducted the burial made an announcement to the effect that: when they returned for the memorial service, a sheep must be slaughtered.

26. *Luong Mogik* Church

Founded more recently, *Luong Mogik* has come out of the SDA (Seventh Day Adventist) church. They are very stringent in following the letter of the law regarding the Sabbath. For example, they insist that no fires be lit or cooking be done by their members on the Sabbath (Saturday); the only food they will eat on the Sabbath is that which is cold and was prepared the day before.

At many churches people leave their shoes at the door of the church. This is often justified by pointing to the fact that God asked Moses to remove his shoes when he was on holy ground (Exodus 3:5). This church, as also Legion Maria at times, insists that shoes be removed on entry to the church compound and not only the church building. Almost everyone dresses completely in white. A good number of members regularly sit outside the church during the service; usually because they are in some way unclean. *Luong Mogik* follows many Old Testament regulations, whereby for example contact with a dead body will render someone unclean for seven days. A woman is considered unclean when she is having her monthly period, and so on. The unclean people stay outside, mostly sat on the grass, throughout the service. A church service can take six hours or more.



Worshippers at another indigenous church – *Luong Mogik*.

Inside, I am invariably invited to sit at the front facing the congregation. I can be very glad for this, because then when the whole of the rest of the congregation is caught up in some healing activity

like hopping or jumping I don't have to join them. Scriptures are often recited – especially John 3:16. As is very typical in indigenous churches, men sit on one side and women on the other. The whole congregation, including those sat outside, are one-by-one given opportunity to share a vision or report. Some may at this stage chase away some bad spirits. They will do this by turning to the back of the church and shouting and gesticulating with their arms. Almost everyone else in the congregation will join them in doing this. Anyone requesting prayer for sickness is noted (mentally) to be called to the front for prayer at a later point in the service.

Following this time of reports, leaders will share what they have, then comes perhaps the most important time of prayer. A man is brought to the front. After some commotion accompanied by singing, he falls and lies flat on his back motionless, with church members clad in white stood in a circle around him. One of three white flags stood at the front is draped over him covering all but his legs. Two men run around the church building three times with the other two flags. Leaves, flowers then a few small handfuls of soil are thrown on to the flag covering the man. A brick is laid on each side of him. Church members sing loudly, many jump up and down aggressively with their two legs together. Water is squirted in a ring around the flag-covered man. Eventually the flag is removed and the man told to leave the building – presumably to repent outside. The hope is – that the spirit who wanted to harm him has left as it has been fooled into thinking that he is already dead and buried.

Another man has said he wants prayer. Surrounded by a circle of 6 or so men, he is twisted around. When dizzy, he begins to lose his balance, but the circle of men stop him from falling, and instead keep turning him and throwing him from side to side in the group. Eventually he does fall to the ground. He is thumped with a bible. A lady has gone and removed a leafy branch from a tree. He is struck repeatedly with it. All this is done so as to remove the spirit that has been making him sick. Now laid on the floor, he is rolled back and fore over a distance of 3 metres or so. Some men step repeatedly over him. He is stood up. He is encouraged to jump repeatedly. First one, then two, then more other men jump with him. While jumping they encircle him. The spirit would have trouble knowing which his victim is, should he be trying to return because the men are circling with him so closely while jumping. Eventually this activity ends. The spirit is assumed to have been driven away, and to be too confused to return. People return to their seats.

Many people spend almost the whole Sabbath day at the church compound. The major focus is clearly on healing. Testimonies are given of people being healed from being dumb, lame or mad. Ropes can be used to symbolically tie and untie the sick. A rope is tied to the rafters of the church building. It is thought to add power to the healing processes going on.

27. Legio Maria Church

Immediately striking on arrival at a Legio Maria church on a Sunday morning is the sight of those devoted who have come early and are already at prayer. They kneel at various locations in the compound before crosses and variously coloured flags which are there for the purpose. More come as time goes by, removing their shoes at the gate, and joining their colleagues.



Members of an indigenous church choir – the Legio Maria.

The church building has only one chair – that for the Father. Around 9.00 a.m. worshippers enter to find a table in the center with a picture of an African lady lit by the light of two candles. A young girl draped in white kneels in front of that table. Others kneel in a circle around her and the table. Men are on the right, and women on the left. The girl begins to sing. Those kneeling around know just when and where to join in the chanting-song. This continues for about 50 minutes. Many prayers in the words of the song are directed to Mary the mother of Jesus. Kneeling almost non-stop for 50 minutes on a hard concrete or earth floor – can be quite taxing on the knees.

A few minutes later the main service begins. This is modelled on a pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic mass. A mixture of Latin, Kiswahili, Dholuo and even English is used during the service. Proceedings begin when the Father enters. He gets dressed with the help of some altar boys at the front as the congregation sings one of a number of chants. Ladies typically lead the singing. The singing, and proceedings in general, are broken up by noises from people in the congregation including loud wheezes, groans and cries. One man brought a dove in a hand-held cage into the church. This sits beside him. It ‘coos’ periodically, adding to the general cacophony of sounds.

The service is punctuated by intermittent changes in position. Possibly 50% of the time the congregation is kneeling, 30% standing and 20% sitting on the bare floor. The movements of the congregation are prompted by the activities at the front of the Father and his two altar-boys. Sometimes a kneel is sustained only for a second or two before a return to the standing position. After handing out wafers to those who go and kneel in front of the altar, there is a more general invitation for those wanting yath (‘medicine’). That is – water that has been blessed so that it is considered to have healing powers.



Father of Legio Maria church in his home.

Specific healing rituals in Legio Maria occur before or after the main service. After the Father has completed and left, congregants line up in the church, and then go out in procession. The line moves out and around a circle before all kneel facing the cross in the center. One of the men (on other occasions more than one) then goes from person to person around the circle. He carries a whisk made from the tail of a cow, which he uses to brush up and down someone's body. Presumably it is those suspected of having an evil spirit that are given more attention. Various people are shouting, groaning or crying as they kneel as all this goes on.

Once the process is completed, congregants gather in the shade of a tree sat on the ground within the compound to receive direction and advice from the father, and other leaders. When this is over, and this last process may take some time, people leave.

Legio Maria is perhaps the most 'feared' of indigenous churches. That is not without reason. I have had wooden guns pointed at me by young men in Legio Maria. They can be very aggressive if one breaks rules that one may not be aware of. Wearing shoes into a church, for example, is a very serious offense. Someone can be forced to kneel in the gateway of the church compound, and be brushed by the tail of a cow to remove any evil spirits that they may not have been aware of. Having my hands in my pockets while standing in church has at times evoked an aggressive reaction.

28. Mystic Gospel Church

Some churches that seem to have been more Western-influenced are more Pentecostal in style. Mystic Gospel is an example of such.

In the Mystic Gospel church, men and women sit on separate sides. On the visit that I made that I describe here, the atmosphere was very expectant even before the service began – as people sat and began to pray with hushed voices. Some were crying. The opening of the service was relatively quiet. Things built up gradually from there. Almost every song was followed by loud spontaneous prayer by the whole congregation. Everything was translated between Dholuo and Kiswahili. As the speed of the preaching increased, so the translator had to work at an ever more incredible pace.

The teaching I heard was good sound Biblical teaching. It was promoting holiness. That is especially sexual holiness and purity. The whole congregation listened intently and seemed to hang

onto the preacher's every word. The congregation would all shout loudly in affirmation whenever the preacher gesticulated by raising his arm.

While the final response of the congregation to the teacher was relatively subdued – the same cannot be said of the preacher who stood up later. He began slowly. He assured people repeatedly that it was not crying that made someone to be holy. But we all knew – that we would cry. Gradually the preacher accelerated his pace. It became harder and harder for me to hear the interpreter, but the Luo language used by the preacher was clear enough. Some of the congregation at the back of the church began to sob silently. The level of feeling continued to rise. Eventually, presumably following some signal unknown to me, almost the whole congregation surged forward. By this time they were nearly all crying and wailing loudly. The reason for the large space left between the front row of chairs and the raised platform became evident. This whole space was filled by people kneeling, crying and sobbing loudly.

This crying and sobbing went on for about 10 minutes. Then it gradually receded. The preacher then announced that it was time to pray for the sick and the troubled. 2/3 of the congregation came forward again, and knelt praying often with their arms spread up. The preacher and pastor prayed for each in turn. When almost everyone had gone, one lady suddenly threw herself around violently while shouting loudly. Two men grabbed her, one on each arm, to restrain her. The remaining congregation closed while singing and clapping loudly. The lady continued to throw herself around. The two men, helped by others, pinned her to the ground while praying loudly and aggressively for the offending spirit to leave her. Eventually she was quiet and all returned to their seats. (A similar procedure occurs every week in this church.)

As is often the case in indigenous churches, collecting money was another key exercise that had to ensure that every individual gave what was required. That required the handing out of individual named envelopes and took twenty minutes or more. When all was completed in the church, everyone shook everyone else's hand outside in a long line. More announcements followed regarding services to be held in different places, before the people dispersed. We had been in the church for 5¼ hours.

29. Response to Indigenous Churches

It is hard to describe the nature of my response to these indigenous churches. Initially often it was a response of shock. Instinctively a response of condemnation: "they are wrong and they shouldn't be doing this"!

I had to ask myself how I was going to respond to 'wrong' practices. I realized that simply to condemn indigenous churches would be easy. Many, it seems, take that position. Frankly though – then I would have to 'condemn' many other churches in Africa also. To a Westerner, close contact with an African church is often repulsive. Many of their practises are in the West are considered to be 'wrong'.



Baptism in the Yala River.

Making a link with the OAIC (Organisation of African Instituted Churches) was helpful. That is a continental body that seeks to work with indigenous churches. I am loosely affiliated with this body to date.

One big advantage of working with AICs as against other churches in Africa, is that in a sense they are more honest. That is because they are not seeking to raise Western donor funds, they do not have to be oriented to pleasing donors. This means for a Westerner they are a great place from which to learn about African people's heart-felt responses to Christianity.

Once one has 'condemned' a certain church or group of people, of course, one will be repulsed by them. That is, if I was to condemn AICs; I guess I would have just one audience, and then they in turn would condemn me. Instead as it is, because I do not condemn them, I am invariably asked to share the Scriptures with them whenever I meet them. That is – I am given many opportunities to share my hope in Jesus Christ with them. Hence, rather than condemning, I choose to use time spent with AICs as opportunities to learn and to humbly share God's truth.

My main reason for regularly visiting AICs and other churches is to inform them of our Bible teaching program, and to encourage them to join it. While there for that purpose, I join them in their worship service.

30. Other churches

The above will have given the reader an idea of the nature of some of the indigenous churches with I am working. My aim is to reach them with the Bible and with the good news of Jesus. This requires working from a position of understanding and appreciation of what they do. Thus to be able to be used by God to be a genuine testimony to his love and his truth. This does not mean that I agree with all that they do. My experience has been that to work with any African church is extremely difficult for a Westerner. Many (all?) have practices that can be abhorrent to Westerners. One advantage of working with AICs, is that they are not primarily setting out to please Westerners, or to get money out of Westerners. I can therefore in some ways feel more free with them than with other churches. I have already mentioned above that I am not involved in resource distribution. I do not assist these (or other) churches financially or materially. I believe that this in itself gives me licence to interact more freely with them.

Only the Lord knows what impact at depth I have had on these AICs over at the time of writing approaching two decades of interacting with them. I suspect that a good number have been challenged to seek God's word in a way that would never have been the case otherwise. Ironically, I

suspect that my working with AICs has also been a boost for other churches' to take theological education more seriously, so as not to be surpassed by their more indigenously oriented brethren.



Fishing boat on lake Victoria.

The above list of AICs does not include all the churches in the area. There are many other varieties of AIC that I have not yet described above. There are also many Pentecostal churches in the area, as well as mission churches. The Anglican Church and Roman Catholic Church are especially populous in my home area.

I want to go on below to describe the ministry that I have been engaged in this Kenyan context. If my reader is struck by the difficulties, problems and tensions that I have met in this ministry, then please be assured so have I been. I continue to be surprised by just how difficult it is to carry out ministry in rural Africa. The difficulties are usually not evident to the casual observer or short term visitor. I understand this as being because they arise from areas of African 'culture' unfamiliar to and largely out of view to the West.

31. Yala Theological Center

By February 1994, I had been in Kenya for less than five months. I was learning *Kiswahili* and had begun teaching some extension Bible classes. My time in Zambia had convinced me of the importance of teaching God's word. That was my expressed preference. Local church leaders were very interested in what I wanted to do. They seemed to be in favor. A meeting of local pastors was arranged. Twenty or more gathered together one afternoon in Yala with me in their midst.

This gathering took upon itself the appointment of an executive committee for what was to be called YTC (Yala Theological Center). Before the meeting ended, the new chairman stood and made an announcement. "Thank you for appointing me as chairman", he said "I had a vision before we came together for today's gathering. In the vision I saw a pot of money descending to us from the sky. Let's be encouraged by what will come of this new school."

That short opening speech set the tone for what we were to see over the next decade and more. I was wary about the extent of African people's orientation to money. I was not able to anticipate at the time just how strongly this would come across. What I had in view was a teaching of God's word that would transform local churches by encouraging them to be more attentive to God's word to them through the Scriptures. What my colleagues seemed to have in mind was that they had 'got' a White man, and that this had to be financially lucrative for them.

December 1993 found me in Nairobi. While there I searched for theological teaching materials. I was already familiar with the evangel books that we used in Zambia. (A set of books widely used for theological education by extension amongst evangelical mission churches in Africa.) I found them available at a discount. I purchased some, and took them to Yala. A group of people had expressed their interest in joining our class, to begin in January. I asked them to buy books from me. Nobody had any money. So, I gave out the books expecting to be paid back later. I was never paid.



A class of Yala Theological Center in the early days – circa 1994.

Our board met periodically. I was committed to being available to teach. I was just as committed not to fund our teaching, beyond what was absolutely necessary. This issue became pivotal in all our meetings. I was just as determined not to be the director of the program. There were already many theological teaching programs in Africa run by Whites. I was not about to start another. It would be better for me to join an existing program than start a new one for no good reason. Often Whites would start things in which they were in charge. Then handing over to Africans always proved very difficult; this especially because they would try to run things in a Western way. Africans could neither afford nor understand that. To avoid such difficulties, if this program was going to get anywhere, then it would have to be run by African people from the start.

I explained the above frequently to our board, and to others. It seemed to be beyond them to take it on board. They didn't mind if I wasn't going to be the director of the program. But they certainly saw it vital to get money from outside of the country through me. Every board meeting would very soon get around to this issue. I was put under enormous pressure to provide funds. I refused. Some board members made a point of coming to see me individually. They did their best to convince me that I should provide funds. I would explain the above and other reasons for not funding the program. That board member would resign. Our remaining board was of three people, including myself.

Periodically the board agreed that members should contribute an amount of money monthly towards the operations of the fledgling school. Every one of us would agree. Then they would give nothing. It felt like a trick to convince me to give.

This went on up to September 1996. (In the meantime in 1994/5, I had spent over a year back in the UK.) The teacher who had been our great hopeful at the start of the program had turned out to be a thief and conman. The board told me that if no money was available from outside, then there was no point in continuing with the school. It was at this point that I went to KIST (Kima International

School of Theology). I began teaching there two days weekly. My stipend from Kima from thereon, about £30.00 per month, went to YTC.



First graduation ceremony of Yala Theological Center – 1994.

When this provision of funding was set up, there was much rejoicing. At last our board got what they wanted. Although it didn't take long before that money was allocated to its various uses – paying rent and support of a few people, and we were back to the same issue. I was still determined that I not be in charge of the program. To ensure this, I could not have veto power over the income that we had. That is, if I was to take advantage of the fact that the money on which YTC was running was coming through my hands to determine YTC's decisions; I would be the de facto director. Therefore my role was simply to hand over the money every month to the duly appointed person, regardless of what happened to it.

I continued handing over the money every month without fail for more than ten years. Often the funds were abused or misappropriated in different ways. Eventually instead of our board members contributing to the program, they were getting paid. Every meeting, the key issue was how to divide up the cake, and then how to get more money. Any discussion on the details of the program or how to improve it was very rare. Even teachers who came to help us could be seen as 'evil-in-disguise', as it could mean more people coming to share in the limited pie. Meanwhile rumours were rife that our board members had acquired extra wives. When Kima cut the funds in 2006 after 10 years, all our original board resigned their positions.

Much more happened in the teaching over more than ten years than can be related in a short account such as this. The total number of people who we taught must be in the hundreds. We had many interesting and valuable classes. At the same time, the reality never met the level of the talk. Frequently classes were opened with great acclaim. People in the locality of the anticipated weekly class would assure us that they were very keen to learn. Then before long the class would dwindle, and often die. Sometimes the students we remained with were the mentally challenged. Teaching at YTC, for me at least, was often enormously frustrating.

Some may wonder why I should even continue with a program that was clearly not a great "success". I believed (and continue to believe) that this is where I should be. My African colleagues had assured me that the school would 'work'. I was determined to see it through. Surely it is possible for African people to run an informal theological teaching program without outside funding or management? The conclusion I am forced to suggest, 16 years later – is that it is

not possible. The reason for this is because, in this part of Africa, formal Christian ministry is only engaged in if there is hope for material gain.

African people I am familiar with believe in the holistic Gospel. That is, they expect to get material or social advantage (prestige) in return for their efforts in furthering Gospel work. If they do not see such benefits, then some of them no longer see the point in that Gospel work. This applies especially if the work is at all formal, and/or follows a Western style, e.g. language, or if a Westerner is involved with it. Hence it does not really apply to AICs (African Indigenous Churches), but certainly does apply if a Westerner is a part of the administration of the program.

The ‘material advantage’ that my African colleagues are looking for can arise from one of two sources; either from Western money or inputs, or through the manipulation of ancestral powers. Many indigenous churches work on the latter. Those that do not, and that includes many mission-founded churches, operate on the former.

The situation I found myself in with YTC also forced me to ask questions about language. What my African colleagues were saying frequently proved not to be true. They made promises, especially regarding what they would do to help us at YTC, which they subsequently simply did not fulfil. Does that mean that they are liars who were simply trying to deceive me for some hard-to-fathom malicious reason? Or was there something that I did not understand?

This question prompted me to take a scholarly look at language. My PhD, which I began in 2003, helped me to this end. I began by looking at semantics. Surely I was missing something here? I was surprised to find that semanticists could not account for how words produce the meaning behind them. They could only reason circularly – if something is true then the words used to describe that thing in the way that is true are the true words.

The book I had on semantics pointed me to pragmatics. Meaning arises from the context in which words are used, said the book. Well – that explained it. The African people seemed to be telling me lies. But to them, in their context, what they were telling me was what was normal and expected. So when they said ‘lots of people will come to your class’, they meant – if you pay them. From their own experience, they expected a White man to do no less.

That is not to say that they weren’t deceiving me, because deception is normal in this part of Africa, especially of a foreigner. An individual might see nothing especially wrong in deceiving me, because he knew that everyone was trying to deceive me so as to get money out of me. I did not need to feel offended by what any one person said. I did need to realize the context in which he spoke. The context was one in which it was normal to deceive foreigners.

To learn how a people use their language, I discovered, it is very helpful to use their own language. Many important aspects of what is going on are omitted when they have to translate their thoughts into poorly understood English. Someone only using English would have trouble understanding the issues. Another problem with English is that most of its speakers internationally do not take kindly to the kind of deception going on in Africa. In the use of African languages, however, deception is normal. The existence of such deception-contexts means that translation from African languages into English is in detail impossible. This is because, while contexts are not carried in words, they are essential for words to be correctly understood.

I supplemented my efforts at learning Dholuo using a Luo-language book written in the 1930s. To understand, I had to be constantly asking questions. That was helpful for a language learner. I had to ask if I didn’t understand the words. But often also I had to ask even if I did understand the

words. That is because – without asking for confirmation, it was hard to believe what was really being said. It was hard to locate the gel or pattern that bound the words together for them to make sense. I could try giving examples here, but that could get complicated and would need a lot of explanation. In short – it is hard from one kind of upbringing to appreciate things that people take very seriously in another part of the world. Translating that book, with constant help from ‘locals’, while living in the Luo community – was as a result an important educational exercise for me. It has continued to give me an edge in understanding the various thoughts and activities of the Luo people.

Our policy from the beginning in YTC had been to use local languages. That is – Kiswahili and Dholuo. Not everyone was in favour. English would have been much more prestigious and lucrative. (Knowledge of English is enormously valued in Kenya. A good knowledge of English is widely seen in Kenya as being equal to someone having a good education.)

As time went by, I realized that learning of language was really just the beginning of the process of learning to teach God’s word effectively in Dholuo. I had once thought that once I had learned another language then I would simply need to teach what I would have taught using English, in that language. I had assumed that by doing that, I would be relevant to my hearers, and my message would have ‘gone home’.

Gradually it became clear that it wasn’t so simple. It is possible to ‘know’ a language, but not know how to use it as locals use it. It is more difficult to know its habitual expressions, how its various words are used in relation to people’s lives, or the likely impact of the words. Simply transferring over meanings from English still leaves discourse in another world from the locals. A missionary has to ask how they can take world of the people they are reaching seriously in what they teach? An important question is: can a missionary go along with the way local Christian leaders are presenting the Gospel to their local context? If so, then what is the point of taking great efforts at learning language and coming from the West just to teach what local people can just as well teach themselves? If not, then will that not result in teaching in such a way that clashes with indigenous churches? What if even respected leaders are basing what they do on what seem from a Western vantage point to be clearly misunderstandings? Should a missionary remain quiet, or should they speak out? If they speak out, who will take notice anyway, as the missionary remains really quite ignorant of local conditions, and if operating on a ‘vulnerable’ basis will not be prepared to spend money to back-up their words?

So then, use of a local language is essential in order to become familiar with the ways in which one’s teaching can be appropriated. But – it is only a step along the way. Learning the language is essential in order to begin to follow the remaining steps. But those ‘steps’ aren’t short and simple. They are deep, wide and long. In order to know what needed to be taught to the students in our classes, I needed to be participating in the kinds of lives they lived. I realized that often didn’t happen in theological education from the West to places like Africa. Instead, things are taught that address issues back in the West.

Fortunately I have been able, at least to a degree, to join in the lifestyles of my students. I was after all living in a ‘typical’ house in a ‘typical’ Luo village. My visits to numerous indigenous churches (I also visited many mission churches) helped me to appreciate the issues being raised and addressed in Luo Christian communities. Being able to advocate solutions that did not set me apart from locals was (and is) more difficult. Extra-enlightenment thinking (i.e. thinking that is not inspired by the enlightenment that occurred in Europe) is the norm in much of Africa. Prayer

rituals of various kinds including animal sacrifice and other activities oriented to removal of demons are very normal. It is hard to be so pro-active against demons when one perceives someone's problem as being caused by malaria parasites or poor financial planning.

We had an enthusiastic local teacher help out for the early months of YTC. Later he caused considerable disruption through stealing. From 1995, for a while I was the only teacher. Our director gradually became more interested and motivated by the teaching as the years went by. A scholarship offered to us by KIST generated more interest in teaching in subsequent years. Fred Okello taught half-time (as the other half he studied at KIST) for about two years before he resigned. Then David Asembo did the same for about 7 years. He resigned, then unfortunately died a year later. Later we had Phillip Omondi, then Colin Abwao, Alex Oyoo then later still Fred Akali. In due course two girls – Tabitha Awuor and Jacqueline Achieng' helped us in the teaching. Teachers tended not to stay with us for long. The overt reason was usually lack of money.

It seems that much was wrong with YTC in the minds of locals. Most of all probably – that we were not demonstrating the 'holistic gospel'. That is, YTC provided neither spiritual healing, nor outside money in its teaching program. Various people encouraged us to turn our classes into sessions for prayer for the sick, or at least to have a focus on such prayer. We did not do this because it would make us into a church and not a school. (Competition between churches was already hot. Many church leaders were wary that we might have taken their members away instead of just educating them and leaving them in their original churches.) I have already explained many of the reasons why we did not provide outside money. That would have made our teaching dependent on the charity of the West – which was not my aim.

The above forced me to rethink the 'holistic gospel'. From the West 'holistic gospel' seems to mean that mission efforts should include efforts at improving people's physical wellbeing and so to take account of the whole person, and not only the soul. This is effected by provision of money and/or technology along with the Gospel. In Africa it seems to mean – do not accept any Gospel mission from the West unless you are financially rewarded.

32. To Kima International School of Theology

The Yala teacher mentioned above (who unfortunately turned out to be a thief) had once been a student at the Kima Bible College, that is about 11 miles from Yala across the tribal border in Luyia land. He had told me various stories about Kima. One that sticks in my mind; he told about missionaries in his own time who while they were on the ground would use their personal money to supplement the diet in the dining hall. One outcome of this was that students would despise any local person who would take over from a missionary, amongst other reasons because their taking over would inevitably mean a lower standard of diet. That was not entirely new to me as I had often heard similar things said in Zambia.



Students at Kima International School of Theology, circa 2000.

At a board meeting in Yala in September 1996, the discussion as usual turned to finance. My response, as usual – was that I had no source of funds, and that it was better for us to remain independent of donors who would tell us what to do, and force us into their particular non-contextual program of theological education. On this occasion, however, the board decided that if no money is forthcoming, then we should close YTC.

I had purchased a bicycle a few days earlier. (Before purchasing the bicycle I had been moving between classes on foot.) I decided to look for this place ‘Kima’ that I had heard about. Who knows – maybe I could teach there part-time? I had by that point made very few long distance trips by bicycle. I got to Luanda about 8 miles away, and asked directions. KIST (Kima International School of Theology) was 4 miles further on. The KIST watchman stood my bicycle to one side when I arrived, and took me to the Principal’s office. There I found an American by the name of Steve Rennick.

There began a relationship that I continue to greatly value to date. I was amazed – that a denominational school such as that one at Kima (sponsored by the Church of God, Anderson, in the USA), could even consider bringing someone like me, having just emerged from ‘the village’ on my bicycle, on to their staff. But they did. A few months later I started teaching at Kima, and my stipend was duly allocated for my services that went to YTC.

By this time Steve had been in Kenya just over a year. I found him to be full of questions. “What are you doing there in Yala?” Steve would ask. I would explain what we did and why. He would listen somewhat incredulously “Why do you do this and that in such and such a way,” he would go on to ask.

In between my explanations, he would recount his own experiences at KIST. We were able to compare notes. The unexpected (at the beginning) difficulties Steve had faced at Kima, gave him a strong appreciation for what I was doing and why. Not that he was about to do the same. He told me that in his first year he had tried spending time in the villages. He explained that usually he got sick as a result. The nature of the foundation of the work at KIST was anyway such that it would hardly allow him to take on a more culturally sensitive ministry.

KIST (Kima International School of Theology) had been under Kenyan leadership for some time by 1994. At that time it had been called Kima Theological College. It was still receiving some funds from the mother church in the USA. In 1994 the last remaining foreign missionary couple on the station (that in earlier years had scores of missionaries) blew the whistle. They felt that the few funds coming in were being abused, as very little actual teaching was going on. When the matter

was looked into, it was decided that a new school (called KIST) should be founded on the same site under international management. That management was to include the Church of God in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya as well as the USA. Steve Rennick, an American, had been asked to establish this new school. Within a few years we were able to offer a BA in Bible and Theology, that took four years to complete, as well as a 3 year diploma also of Bible and Theology.

My ongoing relationship with KIST has proved very valuable to me. I continue to teach there part-time to date. In fact, had the door to KIST not opened, I may well by now have been in Nairobi. I felt it was irresponsible to continue to expose myself to 'rural Africa' alone (without other Westerners) as I had been doing. The missionaries at KIST provided me with a local support-network that kept me functioning across the border in Luoland for five days per week. I have filled administrative posts at KIST such as acting Dean and acting Principal – but only on a part-time basis. I have been much happier when just teaching two days weekly.



Myself (on right) and the then-Principal of Kima International School of Theology (2002 to 2009)
Rev. Dr. Don Smith.

As well as giving me company with Westerners, KIST provided me with a location at which to leave my computer. Computers were becoming more and more essential as the 1990s progressed. KIST had electricity, and security. At home I had neither of these things. I kept my gradually accumulating collection of books at Kima. In fact – anything of particular value that I didn't need everyday I could keep in my office there, which was much better arrangement than attracting thieves to my rural home.

KIST gave me in some ways a much more amenable interaction with students than I had in Yala. Teaching at KIST is in many ways much easier than it is in Yala. Students come to class well fed. There are desks and chairs. An administrative structure is there to help the teachers. A large library is on-hand and students can be asked to read things. The language of instruction being English made life easy for me – even if it wasn't in the best interests of the students. (Many years of looking into this matter have convinced me that it is not appropriate for me as a missionary who is taking God's word to support the use of English because of its long-term deleterious impact on Kenyan people and society.)

I have been able to take advantage especially of opportunities to connect the curriculum with churches in the locality. My interest, relationships, language skills and orientation had me arrange field-trips by KIST students and visits to KIST by local church leaders. I did this as often as

possible. I was responsible for instigating a program of outside visitors to come to KIST to give formal lectures. I also managed to get a number of courses on to the regular curriculum that forged close links with the local church scene, and in one case a course was taught using Kiswahili.

Ironically, and this may be surprising to some, the pressure to remove these contextual courses was to come from African people. Contrary to the popular conception that African people would prefer to address their own issues in theological training – many Africans preferred an American curriculum. There are various reasons for this. One, that American knowledge is by far the most lucrative financially. Qualifications that are accredited outside of Kenya can give a better chance of employment even in Kenya than those originating in Kenya.

We were able to come up with a style of teaching that is very contextual. This has formed the basis of a course called ‘elders counsel’. In this course visitors from the locality are invited to speak at KIST. They are not given advance notice of the topic. Students prepare a list of questions to ask the visitor. These are presented to the visitor one by one, with students carefully taking notes on what he or she says. Questions are addressed to a visitor using mother tongue. The visitor is required to answer questions asked using mother-tongue (in my home area Dholuo or Kiluyia) or Kiswahili. Analysis of the translation going on is a part of the central process to the very course.

Although valuable for me as a place where I could behave more like a Westerner, KIST and similar institutions have some serious problems. One of these, in my view, is that it is very hard to build in a learning curve for missionaries. On the surface, KIST was very much like an American school. Westerners coming in to administer it like to feel that they are on familiar territory. African people, as mentioned above, are for many reasons glad to keep things as American as possible. The deep tensions of this arrangement only slowly became apparent. Every new administrator from the West seems to have to re-learn the same lessons.

33. Siaya Theological Center

In 2004, it seemed appropriate to expand YTC (Yala Theological Center). The administrative center for the district that included Yala was Siaya. It is within relatively easy reach. We decided to try to open a new school in Siaya.

Our initial contact in Siaya was an old friend of the YTC director. The director and I cycled to Siaya and were fortunate to find Lucas Owino. “Welcome. Yes that is a great idea. We will give you all the support you need. I am sure you will find a lot of people very interested in this program Siaya” he told us. We made an arrangement for an inaugural meeting a couple of months later.

The distance from Yala to Siaya is about 25 miles. We arrived at Siaya by bicycle at 9.00 a.m. After sitting in Lucas’ office for three hours, we went to the showground for our meeting. The meeting that had been advertised for 9.00 a.m., eventually began at 12 noon. It was a baking hot day. We met for about 2 hours then we left again for Yala. We provided no refreshments to those who came.

Being a larger town, work in Siaya was quite different to that in Yala. Church leaders in Siaya were much more prepared to receive Westerners to come and set up their projects than had been even people in Yala. Presumably this was because many Westerners came. This meant that the Siaya church leaders were very up-front with their demands for the money that they wanted. In an

informal meeting with Siaya pastors, I was told that I need to hand over at least \$50.00 if I wanted an audience with the pastors.

Con-men were thick on the ground. My travelling by bicycle, already having been in the area for years, and being fluent in the Luo language, did not put them all off. Many strategies were employed to try and get money out of me. One man told us that he had turned down an offer to be paid an extraordinarily high salary just so as to be able to serve in STC – a ruse to encourage us to pay him. Inside and outside of the church, I had to be constantly alert to the ploys of various conmen.

Various meetings were arranged, and we set up a board to lead us in Siaya. We were privileged to have an ex-chief as chairman to our board. We set up a weekly class, and had a regular attendance of about 9-12 people for almost 3 months. At board meetings, our chairman would announce eloquently to all present that they should not be interested in the White man's money, but that all had to be ready to give themselves sacrificially towards the establishing of this school. A few weeks later I cycled a considerable distance to visit the ex-chief at his home. "Give me money now, or forget this teaching program" he told me in effect. I did not give him any money, and neither did I see him or most of the rest of our board or class ever again.

Lack of attendance caused our school in Siaya to collapse. I spent some time in the UK on furlough. When I came back in December 2005 I found that the school had died. Only one of our board members – Lucas – remained. By this time the director of the Yala school had also ceased making trips to Siaya. And our one prospective teacher had resigned. A pastor I had known for many years came to mind. We went to visit him. He agreed that we could teach a class in his church. The week we were due to open classes, he took me aside and asked me for money for different family needs. I refused to give any to him.

A new board was formed, and met periodically. The issue at every meeting was – how to get money. The person targeted was me. It was extremely wearing to have 3 men sit with me for hours on end as they tried every trick in the book to convince me that I had to find some money. Eventually after much exasperation and about five meetings, each lasting 3 hours or so, the board told me that they could not help me if I had no money. They were happy for us to use their church premises, but I should expect no further help from them beyond this.

Eventually two breakthroughs occurred that could help us go further in Siaya. One was finding a student (Thomas Oyoyo), who was a competent leader and very dedicated. He taught a class for a while when I was out of the country in early 2007. He continued even when he remained with only one student. At the end of the year, the class had pretty much died, so we moved it from that church back to the Siaya showground. Again the class died, so we moved it 4 miles out of town to a place called Ndere, where now almost a year later teaching is just beginning to pickup.

Attending a 'pastors' conference' one day in 2008 helped me to understand what we were up against. The people who had arranged this conference obviously had access to foreign money. I happened to find the conference in session at midday, and was invited to share a very good quality African lunch. I stayed on to hear the first session after lunch. Over one hundred people were in attendance. This is the kind of number I had hoped we might be dealing with in STC. It did not take long for me to realize why we weren't getting this number of people to our classes.

"If someone calls you to a pastors' meeting" our speaker said "and does not offer to feed everyone, provide accommodation, and cover your transport costs, then don't go".

It was clear that the value of teaching for church leaders was to be assessed by how much money came with. That of course would depend on its having strong overseas links (to the West). This confirmed something that I had suspected on many other occasions; people funding pastors' conferences, can be killing local initiatives in theological education. For any church thing to succeed, it has to come from or at least be funded by the West, it seemed.

The other 'breakthrough' was with a Father of the indigenous church called Legio Maria. I began visiting him when another Legio Maria pastor told me that this was the man who trained him. It is rare to hear of a 'training program' in an indigenous church, so I wanted to find out more. The church is just off the main road between Yala and Siaya, so it was easy to visit him. After a number of visits, and a few times worshipping with the church on a Sunday, I asked Father Gabriel two questions at a go. First, could he allow us to use his church as the base for a class? Secondly, and it would not be practical to teach at such a distance from home if he could not accept it, could he offer me accommodation every Monday night after the class? I am grateful that Father Gabriel was able to respond affirmatively to both requests.

This class, at Kirindo, Legio Maria, has run since May 2007. Attendance has sometimes been low, but the class has not died and at times has been very strong. It is ironic that this should happen at an AIC denomination which is heavily criticised by many. The main point of criticism is that they consider their African founder to be Jesus. Many of the students at this class are from other churches, and not from Legio Maria.

Thomas Oyoyo joined our program as a student after our latest board had already declared that they had no support to offer to STC. I approached our chairman and suggested that Thomas be appointed the director of the Siaya School. He agreed. Thomas has continued to fill that role since then.

34. Home

Being a single male missionary in a foreign land, can be quite a lonely experience. Someone once asked me while I was in the UK whether I ever thought about getting married? "Most of the time" was my response.

Convinced by the legitimacy and importance of what I was doing though, I was not in a hurry to find a partner who could end up taking me away from it. Western women, I often observed, had a lot of needs that were not easily satisfied in rural Africa. They need women friends of the same culture, supermarkets, running hot water for their hair, and numerous other things. Time and time again I have seen men taken home from the mission field by pressure from their wives who could no longer cope with the stress of field conditions.

Many suggested that I should look for an African woman. Westerners who made such a suggestion, were not as familiar with the nature of African women as I had by this time become. I knew that once I entered into such a relationship with an African woman, it would be difficult to deter the whole extended family from trying to milk it. It is perhaps even more difficult to find an African woman than a Western woman who is not interested in material things. Western women who come to Africa generally anticipate taking a drop in living standard. That is to them a part of their ministry. African women, as African people generally, associate Godliness much more strongly with general material prosperity. It could be much more difficult to find an African woman who

could accept voluntary poverty, as compared to a Western woman, once an alternative came into clear view.

God had given me a love for children. For many reasons, families in my home area in Kenya were often overstretched to look after all their children. Sometimes this was because of the death of the parents of young children. A rise in population meant that land was relatively scarce. Even more though – children who used to be put to work at a young age, were all occupied in learning English and learning about Western ways often from early morning to late in the day, up to six days per week, in school. Children had little opportunity to do work, but expected to be fed, clothed and have the costs of their schooling paid for them.

Once having found a suitable house-mother, I began to look after disadvantaged orphans. The home that was on offer was my home. I had (and have) no intention of establishing anything formal like a ‘children’s home’. The money available is my regular missionary income which I was receiving from the UK as my missionary stipend. I could use some of this to support children because I was not running a vehicle, and my rent payment was low because I lived in a simple village house. I decided that I would prefer cycling and keeping children in my home, than having a vehicle and not being able to afford to do so.

I preferred to take children who were still young. The procedure I use, is to approach pastors of local churches. Many of them already know me well, and the other children I am already living with. I explain to them how we live with the children to make sure they understand. I ask them to prayerfully search amongst their flock for children who are neglected, who are full orphans. The house-mother and I then talk with the relative concerned when the pastor brings them. Typically this is a grandmother but it could be another relative. We explain that once we took on a child, we would take full responsibility for them. The child needed to come on a short visit, then go and spend a night with their grandmother or relative. If the child tells the grandmother that they like us and want to come and live with us, then once they came back, we take the child on ‘for keeps’.

At different times I have had up to 14 children. Some I have kept pretty much from birth, while others have come when older. Many have left of their own accord on reaching their late teens, or even twenties. Many are now married, and I continue to relate to them in various ways. This means that I now have surrogate-grandchildren. It has been an enormous privilege to care for and raise many children in my home in this way over many years. A privilege not shared by many single men. Looking after people’s children is yet another way of forging links with the community including Christians and churches around me.

My aim is to bring up the children in an ‘indigenous way’. I do not try to give them a ‘special’ upbringing that draws from my background in Britain. To do so would be to spoil them, to remove them from their own people, to give them values that they could not sustain in their own context, and so on. It could make it difficult for the girls to find husbands. It could make competition for places in my home so hot as to bring problems arising from local people’s jealousy. Jealousy would be bound to result if English was to be our home language. Such could result in children being mocked by their friends in their school. In my home I have neither running water nor electricity. The children help carry the water and for lighting we use paraffin lamps and LED torches. Our home language is *Dholuo*, and sometimes *Kiswahili*.

35. Conclusion

On the basis of what I believe the Lord has been teaching me, I propose that some Western missionaries from the West to places like Africa ought to carry out their ministries using languages and resources of the people they are to minister to and with. This is known as 'vulnerable mission'. For more details on vulnerable mission, please see www.vulnerablemission.com .