

Evangelical Review of Theology

GENERAL EDITOR: THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

Volume 35 · Number 1 · January 2011

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical
theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by



for
WORLD EVANGELICAL
ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

Magic, Science and Theology in African Development

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KEYWORDS: *Theology, vulnerable mission, language, resources, witchcraft, economics*

The consensus that aid has failed is nearly universal among those who look at the data.¹

This exploration into the development teaching from the West to Africa² has resulted in a discovery little less than amazing. Western academia considers itself to be rooted in objectivity, science and fact. But, the very objective factually oriented scientific academics, when they apply their knowledge to Sub-Saharan Africa, end up teaching magic. This occurs for at least two reasons. First, if the recipient culture is

one in which 'magic' is a normal accepted part of life, introduced teaching is appropriated on the same basis. Then, in the course of translation of explanations from one worldview to another, gaps in communication inevitably arise because equivalent words in different languages do not have identical meanings. These gaps will not be filled if the original and target cultures are too different for the basis of the relevant non-magical processes to be mutually understood.

Magic is here considered as being the means of achieving ends through the intervention of mystical or vital forces. Note that the character of these forces runs in parallel with scientific laws; the outcome of the application of or activity of the forces is often that which should also be expected by a scientist. But the deeply comprehended nature of what is happening is of a different order altogether from that of science. One of the problems with western 'development teaching' in Africa is that, through ignoring the characteris-

¹ Andrei Schleifer, 'Paul Bauer and the Failure of Foreign Aid', 379-390 in *Cato Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 3. (Fall 2009), 380.

² References to 'Africa' or 'Africans' are to Sub-Saharan Africa and its indigenous peoples.

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tics of the magical belief systems it meets, it undercuts the logic of its own operations.

The 'middle ground' considered in this essay is theology. It is suggested that the 'insurmountable' gulf between magical and scientific worldviews can be bridged by faith in the one creator God; who is the subject of biblical discourse. God's intervention, if indeed he is the one wise and orderly God witnessed to in the Scriptures, undercuts the chaos of traditional 'magical' views, and supplants the narrowness of positivistic scientific reductionism. A further explication of God's bridging role is the subject of other articles by this author.³ This essay, by pointing to the paucity or absence of alternatives, directs us to the need for theological discourse in local languages as a pre-requisite for African development.

I The Insurmountability of the Magical Worldview

Even for a scientist, the impossible can happen. For example, scientists cannot understand how moving object A can pass stationary object B, given that as A approaches B the distance between

A and B is halved an infinite number of times. If it is halved an infinite number of times while A can go on drawing closer and closer to B, it should never pass B, or infinity wouldn't be infinity.⁴ In the scientific worldview it is assumed that an inexplicable process is governed by scientific laws that are *yet to be discovered*. The force of gravity is another good example of this; not knowing why gravity happens does not prevent scientists from believing science.⁵ Similarly, for adherents to the magical world-view, discovering effects that do not seem to be subject to mystical powers does not undermine belief in mystical powers.

Scientific and magical worldviews survive attacks on their comprehensiveness. Someone with a magical worldview will always interpret all that happens to them or all that they perceive to be magical in origin. This does not preclude the possibility of prediction. Whether a chicken's producing an egg every day is scientific or magical does not change the fact either that the egg is produced or that its production is predictable. The same presumably applies to the falling of rain, the burning of paper, the transmission of sound waves from one person to another and so on. But if all these things that western people assume to occur by science can also happen by magic, what really is the difference between the two?

3 For example see Jim Harries, 'International Development Without Money? Some Theological Reflections', 175-187 in *The Goal of International Development: God's Will on Earth as it is in Heaven* (Pasadena: WCIU Press. In Press.) <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/articles/international-development-without-money.pdf> (accessed 7 July 2010) and Jim Harries, 'The Name of God in Africa' and related contemporary theological, development and linguistic concerns', *Exchange, Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research* 38 (2009), 271-291. See also www.vulnerablemission.com.

4 See Mazur (Joseph Mazur, 'The Motion Paradox: The 2,500-Year-Old Puzzle Behind the Mysteries of Time and Space', <http://members.authorsguild.net/mazur/work1.htm> accessed January 5th 2008) for details.

5 Howstuffworks, nd. 'How does gravity work?' <http://www.howstuffworks.com/question232.htm> accessed 5 January 2008.

A key difference in these worldviews is in the causative agent. In the scientific worldview, the causative agent is 'nature' (in the sense of being a 'physical power causing phenomena [in the] material world')⁶—which does not exist in the magical worldview.⁷ The causative agent in the latter is a mystical power of some sort—something that does not exist in the scientific worldview. Nature is considered to be impacted by natural forces but magical powers by mysterious forces. The two worldviews can run in parallel without ever meeting.

This author being born and bred in the West but subsequently having lived in rural Africa for many years, has realised just how pervasive western man's scientific view is. Whatever western man sees happening in rural Africa, he can explain using his own worldview. Someone being spirit possessed he calls emotion. A rain maker's activity resulting in dark clouds he assumes to be coincidence. People's love of 'palaver'⁸ he sees as

arising from their ignorance of science and rationality. Someone's being healed through prayer he considers to be placebo. Attempts at manoeuvring mystical forces through animal sacrifice he finds to be motivated by a desire to eat meat. Hence Westerners can make a close study of Africa life, as many anthropologists have done, without in the least compromising their western scientific worldview.

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

Given the above, teaching someone in a way that appears contrary to their own deeply ingrained worldview may well not change their worldview, but simply extend its boundaries. Then no matter how scientific someone considers their explanations to be, someone else rooted in the magical worldview will appropriate them into their pre-existing framework. No matter how scientifically trained or oriented the western development worker, in other words, the people he teaches who have not appropriated the scientific worldview will take him to be a magician. That is, they will take him to be teaching magic, and will understand what he teaches to be magic.⁹

Asking people the question, 'Do you take me as speaking of magic or of science?' is generally a useless question,

6 J.B. Sykes, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 674-675.

7 Jim Harries, 'Pragmatic Theory Applied to Christian Mission in Africa: with special reference to Luo responses to "bad" in Gem, Kenya' (PhD thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham, UK, 2007), 132. <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/15/1/Harries07PhD.pdf> accessed 20 September 2007.

8 'The palaver is a traditional African institution of debate and consensus whose democratic potential has been overshadowed by modern political systems'. (Jasmina Sopova, 'In the Shade of the Palaver Tree' http://www.unesco.org/courier/1999_05/uk/signes/txt2.htm accessed 7 January 2008.)

9 Of course the reverse also applies: a western man will seek for a scientific basis for that which he sees a magician perform.

because for the respondents the terms science and magic will be defined by their own worldview. Science, for example, can be considered to be the term used by western man for 'magic'. Here we see a serious but often unperceived drawback of language use—words neither carry cultures, or cross cultural barriers. They are, after all, just sounds. Different people saying they believe in magic, or in science, can mean very different things.

II What it is to be Teaching Magic

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

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

These examples illustrate the *kinds of difficulties* faced by those who would attempt to lead African people who are following the 'magical worldview' with instructions in English that are rooted in a scientific worldview.¹⁰ The process of translation between worldviews will leave gaps in knowledge that will interfere with understanding and the operation of whatever process is under consideration. These gaps in understanding can be sufficiently consequential (as the examples above show) such that magic would be required to enable the achievement of the desired outcome. Hence the West in teaching its science in Africa is promoting dependence upon magic.

While such 'promotion of magic' may not last long in a western setting (if the process requires a magical step in order to succeed, this will be realised and the process disqualified), the same cannot necessarily be said of many African contexts. The literature on Africa, particularly that exploring its anthropology, is replete with illustrations, examples and demonstrations of African people's belief in what we are here calling magic (witchcraft, curses and blessings, mystical or vital forces, spirits, ancestors etc.).¹¹

¹⁰ For further discussion on the nature of the 'magical worldview', see Jim Harries, 'The Magical Worldview in the African Church: what is going on?' in *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXIV, No. 4, (October 2000), 487-502.

¹¹ Numerous examples of authors who describe the dependency of African society on magic could be given from the anthropological literature. Here are just four examples: E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,

African people are therefore not necessarily taken aback when given processes to follow that will work only in combination with magic.

They are resigned to the fact, in other words, that certain things succeed only when carried out or implemented by Europeans (who have this special magical knowledge¹²), and that no end of careful instruction will successfully transfer it to their community. They are almost as determined as they are 'resigned', not to concede this dependence on magic.¹³ Partly this is because 'it works'. The reason that 'it works', from a western scientific perspective, is not because 'magic works', but because Westerners come to stand in the gap. Also, because in today's English speaking world, someone who believes in magic is looked down upon.

1937); Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959); Christopher O. Davis, *Death in Abeyance: illness and therapy among the Tabwa of Central Africa* (London: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); Gerrie Ter Haar, (ed.) *Imagining Evil: witchcraft beliefs and accusations in contemporary Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc. 2007).

12 See the 'Hidden Power of the Whites', (N.W. Turner, *Religious Innovation in Africa: collected essays on new religious movements* [Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Company, 1979], 271-278.)

13 African people will not generally use the term 'magic' to describe their own worldview, as they know that it is held in disdain by the wealthy West. Assuming the English language to be universal has thus deprived it of vocabulary. (See Jim Harries, 'Intercultural Dialogue—an overrated means of acquiring understanding examined in the context of Christian Mission to Africa', *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*. 37 (2008), 174-189, for related discussion.)

What is meant by Westerners 'standing in the gap' is that the aid and dependency situation that the West 'imposes' onto Africa is self-perpetuating, regardless of the success or failure of the wisdom associated with it. In other words, development assistance to Africa is driven by other than evidence for the procedural success of its projects. It continues due to Westerners' consciences and not because it 'works', and it is implemented on the basis of an assumption that is considered unassailable—that magic does not exist and can be safely ignored. If magical forces do not exist, then to recognise people's perception of them is to consider those people to be primitive or superstitious.

Because these latter terms are taken as offensive, and to use them in reference to a particular colour or ethnicity of people is considered racist, the international community has no choice but to ignore magical beliefs. This unfortunately results in the perpetuation of an understanding of the African scene that is misguided. It perpetuates magic, because the finance invested in the launching and re-launching of projects itself justifies to the African the operation of a project that is dependent on 'magic'.¹⁴

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

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

1. Aid and development projects result in the perpetuation of gross unhealthy dependency of Africa on the West.¹⁵
2. They prevent, by monopolising (for example) the educational scene, African peoples from advancing socially and economically.
3. Magic being closely linked in the African scene with evil, means that promotion of magic is a perpetuation of evil.
4. The Bible and therefore the Christian faith condemn magical practices.¹⁶

III Economics as Case Study

Economists these days have a high profile when it comes to intervention in international relations—especially aid and development assistance. The following is a brief look at the discipline of economics and ways in which its teachings promote magic in Africa.

The roots of the word 'economics' and at least to some extent its history, lie in the Greek terms *oikos* (house) and *nomos* (law). In order to discover 'African economics' we can begin by considering African 'household laws'.

Examples here taken to illustrate these are from a booklet written by and for the Luo people of Western Kenya, called *Chike Jaduong e Dalane* ('Rules for a Man in his Home').

This small red book written by Raringo¹⁷ provides guidelines for family life to prevent death. Being 100 by 150 millimetres in size and only a few millimetres thick, the book is clearly intended to be a handbook to be carried in someone's pocket for reference. Each of the 331 rules contained in it answers a question about life in a Luo homestead. Personal experience of having lived amongst the Luo people since 1993 confirms the basic accuracy of the book in relation to Luo people's lives. Here are some examples (translated by myself in abbreviated form) to illustrate the kind of laws that are found:

Law number 111: If two daughters of one home have both been married, it is not permitted for the bride wealth to be received for the younger one before it has been received for the older.¹⁸

Law number 262: Once having matured a Luo man should leave his father's homestead to begin his own. Luo law states that to do this, a man must have a wife. But then the question arises, if his wife should die suddenly before he has entered the new home, can he begin the new home with the corpse before it is buried? The

¹⁵ For example, running a 'failed' project as in footnote 14 may be more profitable for an African than running his own project that 'works' but has no donor to pay a salary.

¹⁶ As of course do the teachings of some other 'faiths'.

¹⁷ Jacktone Keya Raringo, *Chike Jaduong e Dalane* (Ugunja, Kenya: Geranya Agencies, nd.).

¹⁸ Raringo, *Chike Jaduong e Dalane*, 24.

answer given is no, because there are certain rituals that the wife must perform in the new home-
stead that only a living wife can perform, such as cooking the first meal.¹⁹

Law number 70. This law outlines the procedure to be followed in finding a man to inherit a widow. After waiting for at least three months after her late husband's burial a widow must prepare beer for the occasion. Her inheritor must be a brother or cousin to her husband, and must already have completed bride wealth payments for his other wives.²⁰

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

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

When a butcher *cuts up a joint of*

meat a Westerner expects him to carefully slice through all but the toughest joints by dividing the bones with a knife. In Africa an axe is used much more freely to chop bones.

We assume someone in Britain who is *cooking lunch* is using electricity or gas, whereas in much of Africa they are much more likely to use wood and/or charcoal.

In the West, the word *wife* usually refers to only one woman living with a man, but in many parts of Africa, the 'wife' could be any one of up to three women living with a man.

Whereas *laughter* indicates joy in the West, it often shows embarrassment or fear amongst African people.

Truth in the West is to do with objectivity, but in Africa that which is respectful and not offensive.

Whereas a *woman being pregnant* is a common topic of normal conversation in the West, pregnancies are not talked about in much of Africa, to avoid attracting magical attack on the unborn child.²¹

(Any readers who find the above to be slanted against African people and culture please bear in mind that such a reaction is exactly one of the reasons so much of African culture goes 'under-

19 Raringo, *Chihe Jaduong e Dalane*, 50.

20 Raringo, *Chihe Jaduong e Dalane*, 16.

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

ground' and out of sight. 'Different' may not be 'inferior', and I am trying to bring some of these things into the light.)

Such differences between words have been articulated in an article published in the *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, that suggests that words can helpfully be considered to have 'shapes'.²² It seems clear that many people, scholars and laymen alike, tend to ignore such differences in word content and impact, assuming them to be inconsequential. This tendency is particularly widespread because of the domination of Britains and Americans in global scholarship—many of whom are monolingual and therefore have little experience of the vagaries of translation.²³ Ignoring differences between cultures however, even if using one language, may be introducing folly.

IV Wrong Assumptions on Language Use

Many western scholars and practitioners seem to think that the need to take account of the complexities of African culture is negated if the language they

use throughout their interventions is an international one like English; however they do not realise the gross changes and approximations that have occurred in the course of translation from African languages to English. The model of economic progress and development advocated for Africa is these days frequently an *en-masse* transfer of education and resources as well as language from the West to the African continent.²⁴

This is a very convenient stance for those in western nations. They thereby conclude that their product (education, technology etc.) is exactly what is needed around the globe. This is how western scholars market themselves. But it results in legitimising grossly top-down approaches to 'development'. It obviates the need for Westerners to listen to non-western scholars, at least until the latter have become conversant and almost totally accepting of the status quo in western scholarship. Surely it is time native English speaking countries realised that their high valuation of English arises because it happens to be their own native tongue, and not because it can possibly stretch to articulate the vast multitude of cultural contexts amongst the peoples of our world.

The dysfunctionality associated with the predominance of scientifically-rooted European languages in Africa (and European languages are used in education through most of the

22 Jim Harries, 'A linguistic case for the necessity of enculturation in theological and economic teaching based on the 'Shape of Words': including a case study comparing Sub-Saharan Africa with the West,' *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, Issue 18, October 2008. <http://www.immi.se/intercultural> (accessed 7 July 2010).

23 See the examples given at the start of section II in this essay that illustrate how consequential differences in understanding can be, such that they can negate originally intended processes.

24 The Millennium Development Project is a good example of this. (United Nations. 'UN Development Goals.' <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> accessed 5 January 2008.)

continent) is preventing positive internally sourced development and change from occurring. Maintaining incompetence amongst people through use of a European language may limit their capabilities at challenging the global status quo. But is this moral?

While such results in some security (poor disoriented communities do not constitute a military threat), its gross perpetuation of poverty and all the suffering this implies is abhorrent.²⁵ The globe becomes more and more of a polarised place as whole people are 'written off' in so far as their languages and contexts are ignored in the designing of policies that govern them. This could be avoided if more flexibility in language policy were to be encouraged or allowed, and if even Westerners were to take the time to assist people in addressing their issues by learning their languages and living in a way that is 'vulnerable' to them.

V Answering the Critics

Translation is at least as much impossible as it is possible. It conceals as much as it hides.²⁶ What it conceals, it can conceal very well, so that many Westerners, especially those sitting in monolingual communities such as the USA and UK, can remain blissfully

unaware of what they do not know.

Having considered the question of translatability in more depth elsewhere,²⁷ the argument I present below counters the suggestion that inter-cultural dialogue is enabled through having a 'common humanity', despite the fact that people from distant geographical and cultural backgrounds have a lot in common. This can be illustrated pictorially in Figure 1.

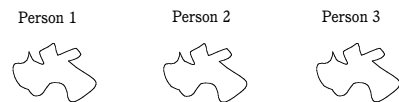


Figure 1. Shapes of people.

Fig. 1 suggests that people have the same *shape*, wherever they are.²⁸ But now Figure 2 below illustrates that despite being of the same shape, two people can be found at very different points on any cultural graph:

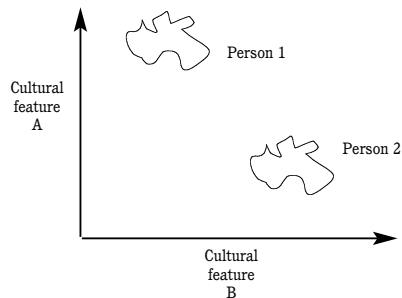


Figure 2. Two people on a cultural graph.

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

26 In making choices in their selection of words and phrases to use, translators obviously reject many alternative options.

27 Harries, 'A linguistic case for the necessity of enculturation'. Harries, 'Intercultural Dialogue'.

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

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

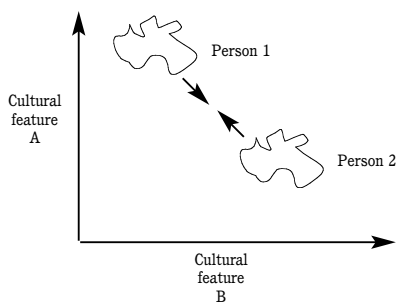


Figure 3. Closing the Gap Between Diverse Peoples

Figure 3 illustrates how the gap between cultures could be reduced by moving people closer to one another. Moving closer may be desirable for many reasons, such as to enable clear communication and a mutually more acceptable and better way of life. What Figure 3 clearly illustrates, however, is that if people want to come closer together, each one must move in *opposite directions*. This strongly implies that an educational system needs to be culturally specific, i.e. that education and guidance for life needs to differ according to people's culture and life circumstances—something that is not possible when much of the world is being required to copy from the Anglo-Saxon model. From this it can be concluded that the commonness of our

humanity does not do away with either cultural differences, or the need for culturally specific education.

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

In other words, for writing in English to be respected it may need to meet some of the very standards that will prevent honesty on the part of Africans. One thing that could at least help this situation and give people a chance to think for themselves would be for Africa to end its subservience to European languages. Financial incentives of all sorts to those who operate in European languages are however so great (jobs, international travel, scholarships, social prestige etc.) that such thinking for oneself on the part of Africans can these days amount to economic suicide.

One of the outcomes of the various arguments presented above is that development advice coming from the West to Africa is put in such a way as to render success logically impossi-

ble—unless, that is, mysterious magical powers or Westerners come to its rescue. Hence many efforts made by Westerners from their ivory towers to stimulate ‘development’ in poor countries of Africa are futile. Worse than that—they are distracting people from the progress that they might have been making, and promoting dependence, lies and corruption in the process. But then—what is the alternative?

Note that underlying this article is a basic (theological) belief in the ‘goodness’ of the world, and the goodness (or potential goodness) of mankind. What we mean is that, given the freedom to do so, people can make good decisions that will lead to mutual advantage. If this were not the case and African people’s ways of life were irretrievably evil, as has been assumed for the Lele of Congo and others,²⁹ then the western world’s overseas development policy perhaps ought to continue as it is.

Scientific texts being transformed into magical prose as described above should give Christians great cause for concern. So called ‘modern education’ spreading around the ‘poor world’ may be closer to the magical papyri of Acts 19:19 than the ‘true gospel’ that Paul was preaching.

VI The Way Forward

This article represents a more optimistic position than that held by those who think that the way forward in the West’s relationship to Africa is ‘more aid or nothing’.³⁰ It is time for that depressingly limited set of options to be swept out of the back door and forgotten. Its social reductionism is close to criminal.

The ‘way forward’ is explored below under three headings. All three are closely inter-related, and together they constitute a valid basis for future western involvement in Africa that will avoid the promotion of magic.

First is the necessity to recognise the importance of language. It is time to end the crude levels of relationship that are enabled when using European languages to connect to people in Africa who are of a very un-European culture. Development advice for Africa needs to be formulated and presented by people familiar with the languages and cultures of a people and region. The present situation is an embarrassing mockery, in which overseas experts direct projects in Africa from distant offices through foreign-funded local managers. On the ground, everyone can be fully aware just how inappropriate project policies can be, but the problem is how to tell the boss in a distant office when that person has no clue to the language and culture with

29 Mary Douglas, ‘Sorcery Accusations Unleashed: the Lele revisited 1987’, 177-193, *African Journal of the International African Institute*, 69 (2) (1999), 178.

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

which he is dealing.³¹

Second is the need to have foreign personnel working in African countries in financially vulnerable ways. The current association between white, wealthy and imprudent use of funds (in comparison with nationals) in parts of Africa is generative of serious racism.³² One straightforward way of rectifying this is to have Westerners work on projects in Africa that they do *not* themselves pay for. When white Europeans' professional colleagues in Africa are not financially dependent on them, they will be more likely to speak truthfully. It is common for Europeans working in Africa to raise more funds abroad when finance gets short for some reason—for example misappropriation through corruption. But instead of using foreign money to bail out their position or project, the Europeans should seek a solution that depends on and draws on a local community. (This is a position the national

who he hopes one day will take over from him will certainly be in.) If the local community simply allow the project to collapse rather than bailing it out, then one wonders whether they were serious in wanting it in the first place. If outsiders were not constantly busy handling finance, it would give them more time to learn the local language, and then in turn to learn to operate in a way that is locally appropriate.

Africa receives a *vast* amount of foreign aid of all sorts from 'the West'. Yet there is also a 'stand-off' by Westerners and a strong feeling that Africa should be running its own affairs; this is especially to avoid accusations of neo-colonialism, imperialism, being domineering and so on. The resulting duplicity on the part of donors—on the one hand, needing to be in control, and on the other, wanting to avoid being seen as being in control—is ironic in a number of ways:

First, that western nations should be handing out aid, but not taking responsibility for its impact;³³ and this despite the fact that the degree of aid provision of different sorts can dwarf other economic activity and orient a whole country to the pleasing of foreigners.³⁴

Second, that it prevents Africa ben-

31 This, and the risk that funding could be cut as a result, results in the 'failures' of a project being kept secret, as explained by Rich a number of times with reference to the Millennium Development Project (Sam Rich, 'Africa's Village of Dreams.' *The Wilson Quarterly*, 2007. See also http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=wq.essay&essay_id=231264 accessed 5 January 2008.) Jim Harries, 'Language in Education, Mission and Development in Africa: Appeals for Local Tongues and Local Contexts', *Encounters Mission Ezine*, Issue 19, (August 2007). http://www.redcliffe.org/uploads/documents/Language_in_Education_19.pdf accessed 10 October 2007, and Harries, 'A linguistic case for the necessity of enculturation.'

32 One could almost say in Sub-Saharan Africa, the veneration of Whites.

33 Jim Harries, 'Providence and Power Structures in Mission and Development Initiatives from the West to the Rest: a critique of current practice', *Evangelical Review of Theology* (2008, 32:2), 156-165.

34 'Foreign aid...[is] the predominant source of financial resources for much of [Africa]...' (Dambisa Moyo, 2009. *Dead Aid: why aid is not working and how there is another way for Africa* [London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books, 2009]), 25.)

efiting from contextual expertise. While swamped with books, technology and know-how from the West, local alternatives can hardly get off the ground. The exclusion of Westerners from visible authority positions that is these days required to avoid the appearance of paternalism is a blight on the prospects for real progress in Africa. From the African point of view such exclusion is considered legitimate because Europeans who back their words with foreign money, finding their language in use, easily take and are given too much power. This would be rectified if 'foreigners' were to confine themselves to operating only in African languages, and in some cases at least refuse to back their activities with foreign money.³⁵

The final topic is getting away from a 'top down' approach; it can hardly be dealt with sufficiently in this paragraph but it must be mentioned. The above strategies go a long way in taking us in the bottom-up direction. Development workers who use local languages and rely on locally available resources (that they themselves do not solicit) for their activities are to a large extent *forced* to be bottom-up in their strategy.

The other important way to ensure 'bottom-up-ness', to demonstrate genuine humility and to reach to the very heart of a people is to concentrate on theological aspects of the task in hand.

Giving God the credit removes praise from self, and is a way of enabling African people to perceive the basic beliefs that underlie the 'developed' way of life they desire, and not only the outward expression of such beliefs.³⁶ Teaching the Bible and teaching theology in peoples' own languages are the ideal means of bottom-up promotion of development.

This is after all the means of addressing key issues already discussed above regarding African people's mystical forces, often translated into English using the term 'god'.³⁷ What is the true nature of God then is an important question that needs urgent attention in Sub-Saharan Africa.³⁸

VII Conclusion

The prevalence of the 'magical worldview' means that scientific discourse from the West is received in Africa as being magical. Implicit translation from one worldview to another, even if the language (such as English) is the same, leaves gaps in comprehension on the part of the receiver of communication in different areas of life, including economics. The fact that people of all cultures share a common humanity

35 Jim Harries, 'Issues of Race in Relating to Africa: linguistic and cultural insights that could avoid traps', <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/articles/issues-of-race-in-relating-to-africa.html>, accessed 5 January 2008.

36 The Christian church has clearly had an enormous role to play in the development of the West to where it is today but this is a role that is often concealed by secular re-interpretations of history.

37 African names for 'vital force' are often simply translated by the English term 'god'.

38 Harries, "The Name of God in Africa" and related contemporary theological, development and linguistic concerns', 271-291.

is shown to be insufficient basis for clear intercultural communication, and does not prevent science being transformed into magic or vice versa. Three recommendations made to Westerners working in Africa are: that they use

African languages, do not invest financially in their key activities, and give priority to theological teaching. Thus Westerners may get to the position of being an aid to 'bottom-up' African development.

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