

# Evangelism or Social Justice: Reconsidering the Case in Africa

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## *Preliminary Note:*

Reference to *Africa* here should be taken as being to sub-Saharan Africa. For the purposes of this essay, *Africans* are those people who are original residents of sub-Saharan Africa. Such reference should be taken as being to those within the area of the author's knowledge and comprehension. Clearly the author neither knows nor understands all of Africa or all Africans.

My use of the term "outsider" is usually with reference to a Westerner in Africa, but may also imply any foreigner in a community with which he is not familiar. I assume that other parts of the majority world have similar issues to those being faced as a result of outside intervention into Africa.

In this article, I assume that encouraging "economic development" is a perceived significant means of bringing about social justice.<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Western Anabaptists concerned for global-wide mission and development face a dilemma. On the one hand the primacy of the importance of proclaiming the spiritual message of salvation seems to be abundantly clear in the Scriptures. On the other hand—it can seem very wrong to be pre-occupied in declaring such a message in contexts of major injustice. It would seem one ought to resolve or at least address injustice or poverty before or while sharing the Gospel.

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*2* While it is true that some Western Anabaptists may be more concerned for solidarity with the poor than they are for "economic development" in the classic sense, I think it is very difficult for Westerners not to get involved with "poor people" economically. Once they are so involved, then their economic involvement can in turn easily dominate their role, especially as perceived by the indigenous people they are reaching, but even by fellow Westerners. The practice of vulnerable mission endeavors to form and maintain key relationships between missionary and some indigenous people that are clearly not economically motivated.

This article complicates this apparently simple picture on two fronts. It asks whether an outsider to Africa whose words and activities are backed with foreign money can be so sure that they are hearing and being heard, and that it is not their money that is both distorting their message while attracting those interested in wealth. Secondly, it points to issues in language use, understanding and translation: is clear communication even possible if the assumptions underlying the different parties' uses of the language concerned are so vastly unlike as to be mutually incompatible?

This article advocates for a recognition of the legitimacy of indigenous Christian agency. It suggests that outside intervention should not be hegemonic. It suggests that profound contribution to extant debates pertaining to indigenous contexts should be engaged in local languages presupposing local categories of thought by at least some of the Western missionary/development force. Outsider Anabaptist missionaries can most helpfully move in this direction through themselves using indigenous languages and relying on locally available resources. I believe that doing so would be being true to the Anabaptist tradition of identifying with marginalized people (as Anabaptists' own history is one of marginalization) and focusing on the great commission.<sup>3</sup>

### **Why Are Outsiders in Charge?**

Discussions on evangelism and social justice by Western missionary organizations and development agencies presuppose the making of a choice. The question of which of these should be the priority being addressed by outsiders (in our case to Africa) seems to presuppose that they have a directing role or even are in charge of evangelism and social justice in Africa. Why are outsiders in charge?

Human society tends to be complicated and integrated. People who live together for generations and who share a common language and history determine their actions, behaviors, and responses, in complex ways according to certain concerns. This kind of complexity is reflected in the way they use their language to express themselves. Outsiders are unlikely to grasp the contextual complexity of what is going on. The understanding that says that language learning is a process of picking up rules of grammar and substituting different sounds to those one would use in one's own tongue is unfortunately inadequate. In reality, accurate learning of a language is learning in totality how people integrate with one another in the full complexity of human society, in engage-

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<sup>3</sup> David A. Shank, *Mission from the Margins: Selected Writings from the Life and Ministry of David A. Shank*, edited by James R. Krabill (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2010), 272, 275.

ment with its environment, throughout the full life-cycle. That is no mean task. Until it has been very well achieved, missing pieces of understanding can throw an outsider way off the scent of what is going on. An outsider being able even to begin to achieve something like a native comprehension assumes an achievement of a level of acceptance, and willingness of a local community to allow the outsider into their confidence. Racially related differences such as of skin color and other features can so mark out an outsider as to make the above level of integration extremely difficult. Non-racially related features can do the same, such as the nature of someone's hand movements or facial expression, their failure to pick up certain clues in communication, or their particular family background or connections.

I would like to ask: why does a community such as the above give an outsider a choice of how they should lead them? Given the kind of complexity that I mention above, does a choice like the above as envisaged by an outsider actually exist for them? Who gets to define what goes on in a community? Is it an outsider? Is it then entirely in the outsider's terms according to the categories decided by the said outsider? Can the community even comprehend the categories that the outsider uses in the first place? In our case, how does the community understand what is "evangelism" and what is "social justice"? Even if they have an inkling about them, can African people or others from the majority world grasp the depth and breadth with which Westerners understand these categories in protracted deliberations arising from particular visions for their future?

When the outsider has to lead in the process of either evangelism or development of indigenous people, something seems to be wrong. Now of course if indigenous people are not Christ-believers, then Christians have been commissioned to share the Gospel with them (Matthew 28:19). Then the outsider might be the one to take the initiative in Gospel outreach. But have outsiders been similarly commissioned to make others wealthy (i.e., to encourage their economic development)? Westerners may feel guilty about their own wealth, which they may seem not to be able to do without. Is that sufficient cause for converting "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) into "go and spread your consumerist habits so as to relieve your guilt."<sup>4</sup>

Why are outsiders making decisions and dictating their terms to indigenous African people? There is at least one very good reason for this. It is very hard for anyone to stand up to a person who is offering to give them great

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<sup>4</sup> For more on aid to the poor as a means of relieving guilt, see David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1981).

wealth. It is especially difficult for the "poor" to make such a stand, and even more especially difficult for the poor in countries where corruption is rife.<sup>5</sup> Is someone who is being approached by an outsider whose brother works hard fulltime for a month to earn as little as \$40.00 going to insist that the gospel come without money attached? Even if the person themselves should want to take such a stand, will they be able to resist the enormous extended family pressure to capitulate to the accepting of a gift that amounts to, say, ten years' wages? We must consider this in the light of Jesus' warning that "we cannot serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). Are outsiders, by offering "development" or social justice (that needs foreign money, as it inevitably does) as an alternative to the Gospel, seducing African Christians into implicitly contravening Jesus teaching in Matthew 6:24?

The last sentence above may only be touching the tip of an iceberg. All things being equal, some African people are likely to realize that development/"social justice" can be financially more lucrative than merely the "gospel" or evangelism. What then if the same Africans have difficulty distinguishing the material from the spiritual, or the secular from the religious? If so (see later in this article) then we are not giving them alternatives—Gospel or money. Instead, we are telling them that there is a gospel with more money, and there is a gospel with less money. If the gospel with more money, i.e., the one that comes with a commitment to the bringing about of social justice, is preferred, could that be the prosperity gospel, the gospel of covetousness, that may according to Ephesians 5:5 be a gospel that is idolatry?

Why is the West still "doing" development for Africa? I can come up with at least two prominent answers to this question. One is that it is because they cannot do it for themselves. Then we ought to ask how come in Africa, mostly well over one hundred years after the arrival of the white man, despite endless efforts at educating and giving a leg-up to local people, they still do not "develop themselves" without outside help and expertise? Two may be that even though they could do development for themselves they prefer not to do so because someone else doing it for them comes with extra subsidy.

If it is the former, what is being missed, and are we so sure that we are teaching people all that they need for kinds of development that enable social justice to take place?<sup>6</sup> If it is the latter, and our very offers of help are preventing

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5 I.e., the poor living in societies that use the patron-client system.

6 With respect to this point, see especially Jim Harries, *Secularism and Africa: In the Light of the Intercultural Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015) and Jim Harries, *New Foundations for Africa: Beyond Religious and Secular Deceptions* (Bonn: Verlag fuer Kultur und Wissenschaft, forthcoming).

people from "doing their own thing" in probably a better way, then it may be time to do some serious re-evaluation.

I suggest that there is something wrong with the process that outsiders these days engage in. That something wrong seems to be closely connected to the relationship between the gospel and development. It could be exactly that instead of being presented as it is, the gospel is *all too frequently* presented as a way to prosperity under a guise of social justice. Could it even be that indigenous people who are trying to identify the true gospel are defeated because of the enormous pressure they are under from outsiders to comply with the "gospel of money and prosperity"? Could it be that genuine believers are having to avoid those presenting "social justice" and may be being forced into the hands of those perceived at least by Westerners to have unorthodox teachings, just to avoid corruption?<sup>7</sup>

We asked in this section: why are outsiders in charge? More profoundly, why are North-Atlantic Christians discussing the appropriateness or otherwise of evangelism as against social action for Christian communities in the global South? A helpful answer to consider I believe is that the reason they are doing this is because the West continues to have inordinate power over Southern contexts, like those in Africa. That includes the power of Western churches over African churches. This power extends to the holding of financial purse-strings, and apparently to seeking to determine the parameters of debate pertaining to the African church, that is in English and rooted in Western ways of thinking, which says that a critical issue in ministry among the poor is getting the right balance between evangelism and social justice.<sup>8</sup>

## African Ways to Say No

Having re-evaluated the appropriateness of outside determination of African Christian contexts (and other African contexts), I want to consider the nature

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<sup>7</sup> From personal observation, churches in Africa that are dependent on outside funding can as a result be weakened. Incoming funds tend to attract people interested in money, and to result in corruption. Yet if these outsider-dependent churches are advocating correct doctrine, then someone leaving them so as to avoid corruption may be moving in the direction of unorthodoxy.

<sup>8</sup> I would add that having power may not itself be the main issue here. People have always had different degrees of power over one another. The issue is perhaps having power that does not come hand in hand with responsibility, and thus with vulnerability to the context over which one has power. A parent who has power over their children is also responsible for them. Sometimes outsiders coming to Africa have considerable power arising particularly from their resources, but because they can at any time simply back down and leave they do not need to be fully responsible.

of indigenous responses to such wielding of power.

I have already mentioned above that an initiative that comes into a poor community with outside funding is hard to refuse. This should give us cause for concern. Inter-cultural communication is not only about language, meaning, or the development of appropriate relationships. It is also about power. Given the power imbalance between outside bodies seeking to promote evangelism or social action and indigenous populations being targeted: how can the latter actually say either "yes" or "no"? Do the latter have a choice?<sup>9</sup>

Indigenous people can say "no." They can direct outside interventions to follow their own interests in subtle ways that are not necessarily reflected at board meetings or in public (in the West) debates. One clear strategy that tempers outside domination is to take the money in apparent agreement, but *implicitly* on one's own terms. That is, to do what is necessary to enable the money to flow, then to use it in ways that make sense indigenously rather than according to the foreign logic apparently being imposed. Endless outside projects into Africa and the majority world as a whole are, I suggest, handled in this way at least to a degree. For the West, these projects may sometimes be considered to "fail." For local people, they have acquired the funds without excessive compromise to their freedom or way of life.<sup>10</sup>

"No" is not a much loved word in Africa. African people concerned for inter-subjective harmony prefer to agree with one another rather than to say "no" to one another.<sup>11</sup> Mutual verbal agreement may be more important than co-operation in the said project. The question "should we do x and y together" is very likely to meet a verbal and emotive "yes" response. No is not said verbally, because it is not desired relationally. No can be said through action. That is, according to the way that action, or lack of action, follows supposed agreement. This is a critical and vital point to grasp, but I suggest is also just the tip of yet another large iceberg that I now want to examine in more detail. *Evangelism* as conceptualized in the West may be accepted in principle, but not in practice. *Action for social justice* the same.

A running issue throughout this article is the question of which implicit

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9 For more on this, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

10 David Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters: Observations from Africa* (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2001), 150–1 explains this in some detail with one or two examples.

11 I say this on the basis of personal experience, but see also Maranz, *African Friends*, 162–9.

translation of a term I am referring to. Certainly African Christians familiar with English are likely to be doing *evangelism* as they know it. Just as certainly, they are likely to be seeking for *social justice*, as they know it. But are they even comprehending evangelism as envisioned in the West, or social justice as envisaged in the West? If what is happening in or is envisaged by the West are different things to what is happening or being envisaged in Africa, then why are we using the same words to describe both? They cannot help but be different, as the way they are perceived or done is bound to be influenced by the cultural understanding of the group concerned with practicing them. The same words are used to describe both when English is the language in use by both. This is one thing that makes the use of English in considering African issues particularly difficult. It underlines the incongruity of contemporary practices being explored in this article.

### Saying "Yes" or "No" to Outside Domination?

In order to respond in favor to one or the other of evangelism or social justice, presumably one needs some understanding of just what the two alternatives are and what they mean or imply. We could say that evangelism is the religious approach, whereas social justice is a more secular approach. How will such a contrast be understood in Africa?

Brent Nongbri may be able to help us here. For many Western people it is self-evident, says Nongbri, that "religion is...a universal feature of human cultures, and the individual World Religions are culturally specific examples of this general phenomenon of religion."<sup>12</sup> Nongbri's extensive research has found that this is actually not the case. "The isolation of something called 'religion' as a sphere of life ideally separated from politics, economics and science [the stuff of social justice!] is not a universal feature" Nongbri tells us.<sup>13</sup> Historically, and contemporarily, it appears that many people do not make a distinction between the religious and the secular. What will such people make of our debate between evangelism and social action?

It seems that the understanding that there is something called "religion" arose in post-1500s Europe.<sup>14</sup> European languages, including certainly English, has terms like "religion" and "secular" that seem to define this distinction. For other people around the world such a distinction may be no more than a

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<sup>12</sup> Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (London: Yale University Press, 2013), 24.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 80.

"thin veneer";<sup>15</sup> they quite likely make no such basic distinction. If they make no such basic distinction, then how if at all, do they differentiate between evangelism and social action?

Richard Madsen has told us of Asian people, that apparent secular beliefs have been a creation of Western scholars.<sup>16</sup> I suggest that does not only apply to Asia. How, though, can Western intellectuals "create" a belief on behalf of other people? A critical way in which this can happen is through choice of language. English has terms such as "secular" and "religious" that are widely used in its discourse. Non-western people reading such discourse, even if the above distinction for them is lacking, will acquire some understanding of those terms. They will need to respond to those terms in some way in discussion. Often they are guided as to the way in which they are required to respond. They may have read many books from the West. They may well have been educated using a Western curriculum. They may well use the terms when communicating in English. They will really have little choice if the debate is about those terms. They will use the terms according to their own understanding. Their Western readers not having grasped such might in turn easily re-apply a Western understanding, and re-interpret what they read or hear according to their own presuppositions. Hence Western scholars can receive frequent re-affirmation for something that does not actually, for the indigenous people, exist. Nongbri points out that there are neither terms that translate religions or secularism in most languages, nor concepts that represent them.<sup>17</sup> Other scholars are saying the same thing. Do non-Western people like Africans even have terms in their languages that distinguish evangelism and social action in the way that Westerners perceive them?

Nongbri looks at the difference between description and re-description.<sup>18</sup> We can put it this way: African people may very accurately describe a situation using English terms in the way they understand them. Their description may be accurate and true, for them. Unfortunately (or fortunately) the fact that they use English means that their speaking or writing can become available to a wider set of listeners. (If they use a language other than English, then the key issue here is how a translator will render that language into English

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15 Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 7.

16 Richard Madsen, "Secularism, Religious Change, and Social Conflict in Asia," in *Rethinking Secularism*, eds. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 254.

17 Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 2.

18 Brent Nongbri, "Dislodging 'Embedded' Religion: A Brief Note on a Scholarly Trope," *Numen* 55 (2008): 443.



terms, like evangelism and discipleship or religion and secularism, for the sake of a native-English readership.) Those other scholars will *re-describe*. That is to say, it will be easy for them to apply their own meanings and implications into words used by Africans according to their African understandings. Such re-describing of the categories they use being different from the original will be at least inaccurate, or perhaps, plain wrong. When many scholars coming from the same background make the same kind of error, then they have invented something that is not there.

What does a world in which religion and secularism, or evangelism and social justice, are not clearly distinguished, look like? Nongbri explains that "we may very well be actively presenting back to ourselves the taxonomies that help to establish our own contingent and inevitably provincial social world as if their components were self-evident, natural, universal and necessary."<sup>19</sup> The same applies, I suggest, to our look at the contemporary world beyond the West. Thus we relieve ourselves "from having to do the much harder (but perhaps more necessary) task of re-imagining—outside of the framework of religion—how humans...might" actually interact in the majority world.<sup>20</sup> My aim in this article is not to articulate what that looks like. It is merely to point out that it is something that is different—and that the difference may be important.

The choice the West might see between evangelism and social justice is not the same as the choices others are seeing. That includes those "others" from Africa and the majority world who are good at English. Should it be evangelism or social action? Neither. Should it be some combination of evangelism and social justice? No, not that either: that is still incorrectly assuming that "evangelism" and "social justice" are some kind of universal culturally-neutral norms. What should it be? The right course of action, actually, because it must be devised using indigenous categories unfamiliar to them, must be one that outsiders will not understand. It may be as "beyond" the Westerner to understand as the contrast between evangelism and social justice<sup>21</sup> is beyond the understanding of many Africans.

## Biblical Models

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 455. Nongbri's comments are made with reference to the ancient world. I find that a lot of what he says is just as applicable to parts of the non-western world in contemporary times.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Nongbri's reference is to the ancient world. I have here substituted "majority world," on the assumption that much of the majority world still functions in some similar ways to the ancient world.

<sup>21</sup> As understood in the West.

Scholars consider that in biblical times, the modern distinction between religion and secularism was not yet known.<sup>22</sup> We should not expect to find a sharp distinction between evangelism and social justice in the Bible. Most scholars of the Bible may well agree that we do not see such. At the same time, the Bible is frequently used to justify either an "evangelism" option, or a "social justice" option, or some combination of the two in the West's approach to Africa.

In discussing the Bible perhaps we ought to make overt reference to the language (as well as the version) of the Bible we are using. Native English speakers accustomed to a dualistic distinction between evangelism and social justice will generally, or at least commonly, read the same back into their Bibles. African readers will find and read their own particular assumptions back into their Bible. A Bible translated into a language uses pre-existing words that people already know. As a result content from those words is transported into the Bible. Reading of an indigenous language Bible from a basis of indigenous presuppositions will reveal indigenous content. From the above we should realize that because of implicit translations in and out of English being based on vernacular understandings, an African person will find their own "culture" being expressed even if they read the Bible in English.

Given the above, or despite the above, I think we can still say something about biblical teaching regarding evangelism and social justice issues. First I think we can fairly boldly say that biblical characters almost invariably did *not* relate to people while having big external backing for projects they were initiating. Neither Paul, nor Jesus, nor Elijah, nor even Moses operated with foreign funds to back their words and actions.<sup>23</sup> This means that their audience did not need to feel obliged to agree with them in order to ensure an incoming flow of funds from them.

Differences in languages/cultures did arise. A major one the New Testament points to is the issue of circumcision. For the Jews this appears to have been a presupposed absolute necessity. For the Gentiles any prospect that they might be circumcised could have been quite horrifying. The solution the New Testament comes up with is neither that Jews cease circumcising, nor that the Gentiles all be circumcised. It is rather that those who needed circumcision could be circumcised and those who did not need not. Note that whereas from the Western dualistic perspective, i.e., that which draws a clear line between

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<sup>22</sup> The distinction arose around 1600. See Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 74.

<sup>23</sup> With the possible exception of Paul's collection for Jerusalem, for a discussion on which see Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The history of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992).

evangelism and social justice (religion and secularism, etc.), circumcision or its absence hardly seems a big issue to write home about. For people who did not draw such distinctions, it might have been.

Many scholars would these days agree that the Bible needs to be interpreted contextually. This strongly implies that certain contextual differences between people reading the Bible, such as that of circumcision or not circumcision, should be permitted. The original biblical record pertains directly to people who lived in the Mediterranean basin, and little further.<sup>24</sup> The people receiving the Gospel in the New Testament record had intermingled, traded, and even intermarried for centuries. They were not as foreign to one another as are Europeans vis-à-vis many Africans today.<sup>25</sup> It seems we ought, on contrasting Europeans and Africans, to expect differences on a scale essentially unheard of in the biblical record. We should not, it seems to me, expect others to simply grasp Western approaches to mission, like the contrast between evangelism and social justice. If we cannot expect them to "grasp" such, then presumably neither should we impose such.

### The Appropriate Response

I want to draw further on Nongbri in our search for what should be an appropriate approach to missions' intervention in the light of the above. Nongbri's 2008 paper considers an approach to scholarship whereby academics who realize that "religion" is a new phenomenon (since 1600) talk of *embedded religion*. They by this means try to get away from the error of assuming that as religion is understood now, so it was then. To an extent, Nongbri tells us, they succeed. But he also points to a problem that arises in the process. That is, scholars who used the term "embedded religion" still considered that which was embedded to be the same "religion" that Nongbri is suggesting actually was not there at all. In other words, authors who talked of embedded religion are having their cake and eating it.<sup>26</sup> Use of the rhetoric "embedded religion" saves authors from the very essential task of re-imagining things outside of the framework of religion

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24 I do not mean to imply by this either that it is therefore irrelevant outside of that context, or that interpretation needs to be a complex process involving particular historical awareness. Rather, I am simply pointing out that biblical actors did not face the breadth of cultural difference that contemporary missionaries can be up against.

25 Scientific estimate suggests that separation between African and European populations could have happened as long as 100,000 years ago (<http://www.pnas.org/content/94/15/7719.full>), allowing, presumably, for a lot of cultural distance to arise.

26 Nongbri, "Dislodging 'Embedded' Religion," 452.

altogether.<sup>27</sup> While Nongbri concedes that "there is no simple way out of this problem,"<sup>28</sup> so considering religion to be embedded does not necessarily help. Nongbri might have added that "correct" understanding of what is foreign has to be found in that very foreign thing, i.e., in that context. As for Nongbri, embedded "religion," so for our case embedded notions of the separation between evangelism and social justice. I suggest, drawing on Nongbri, that the "formula" that is to be found that will helpfully address a given context must be found through the engaging of the Gospel with that context, and not simply by extrapolating out from the West.

I suggest that we run the same danger as above with respect to questions of evangelism and social justice. Even if we say "neither" is fully appropriate, it is something else that is needed: Western missionaries and development workers will still continue to think on the same axis, of evangelism versus social justice. They will endeavor to embed their thinking into African reality—a process that does not avoid the main problem; that the categories they have in mind are simply not there.

This is where I go back to section one of this article. In the first section I asked: why are outsiders in charge in the first place, and why are they being consulted in the making of key decisions? Similarly, why are discussions pertaining to people's futures conducted in languages that are impregnated with numerous unfamiliar categories including those never known to humankind until recent centuries, languages that are incomprehensible to them?<sup>29</sup> Even if people are to learn something in foreign languages (Isaiah 28:14), I suggest that they should not be denied the opportunity to make sense of the details of their lives in a language that they understand and that tallies with their way(s) of life.

I will not be so bold as to say there is no place for donor-funded intervention on the side of the West to Africa. I have pointed to many issues of power, but I leave open the possibility that someone will find a way to help the poor using foreign funded projects. I would suggest though that there *is* a place for intervention that is not outside funded. Issues that arise from a chronic power imbalance are not resolved by the choice of either evangelism or the pursuance of social justice. An individual organization, church, or person may not be able to resolve global power imbalances. But they just might with careful thought and humility be a part of a few intercultural relationships that are genuinely *not*

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27 Ibid., 455.

28 Ibid., 458.

29 For example, the assumption that there is something called "religion," and a particular distinction between evangelism and social action.

based on Africa's awe for the West arising from its money. People who so relate will *begin* to be equipped, I believe, to consider issues *related to* the question of evangelism and social justice through indigenous eyes.

Another facilitator of the kind of sensitivity in relationship I am advocating for above would be use of the appropriate language. A big problem with the use of English in Africa, for native English speakers, is that in their "native" use of the language they carry many, let us say, "culturally related presuppositions." We have looked primarily at just one—the assumption that there is a distinction between religion and not-religion (i.e., secularism). Someone talking on the basis of such an assumption can quickly get to the place where they are at cross-purposes with someone who is not. If the language in use assumes the difference and it is the language of the outsider, it becomes particularly difficult for the outsider to hear what is actually going on among indigenous people who do not assume the difference. Should the outsider allow the boot to be on the other foot, so to speak, and accept to use the language of the indigenous people, they will stand a much better chance of being enlightened.

This article does not claim to *answer* the question of the preference to be given to either evangelism or to social justice. I hope some of the reasons for not so giving an answer are clear in the above. There is no right answer to what is, in a sense, a wrong question.

The practice of mission that I am advocating, whereby some Western missionaries operate on the basis of local resources using local languages, is what we call *vulnerable mission*. The case for vulnerable mission has been made and is being made much more widely than only in this article and as a means to resolve many other issues loosely related to the choice between evangelism and social justice. Other material produced by the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission can be accessed at [vulnerablemission.org](http://vulnerablemission.org). Use of local languages and resources is a means of depowering the foreign missionary, while enabling understanding. Insights from such "vulnerable missionaries" could throw light on other questions on mission, justice, development and beyond. In another sense, vulnerable mission is itself the answer to the issue addressed in this article. I advocate that the practice of vulnerable mission be encouraged.

## Summary and Conclusion

Because the West's agenda regarding the choice between evangelism and social justice is presented to Africa with the force of money behind it, and in languages whose cultural foundations are not African, the discussion regarding the right choice between them is typically Western and not African. The poor who are the targeted recipients are easily left with little choice but to respond "yes" to what is offered, even if they then say "no" through their actions or in-

actions. Any apparent enlightenment arising from an intercultural context in which even an original description that was accurate is re-interpreted inaccurately because of the use of wrong presuppositions, is a mirage. In other words, try as one might to do otherwise, deep profound lasting sustainable relevance to a context needs to arise from within that context. Outside inputs must be appropriated in order to speak clearly. Even biblical models of working seemingly do not involve intercultural imposition of outside ideas and practices, but internally driven life transformation. The question of what is appropriate for Africa, between evangelism and social justice, seems to be irresolvable because it presupposes an absent distinction between "religion" and "secularism." Approaches to mission and development vulnerable to local contexts are preferable to parameters of thinking that are designed by "outsiders."

The Gospel reaches the heart. Unfortunately, it's likely that Western Anabaptists' promotion of social justice could quickly become much about the pocket. This would be particularly sad given Anabaptists' reputation for empathetic grass-roots engagements. Evangelism is not done by heartless, bodiless robots. It is done by real people who need to be committed to all of Christ's commands including that of loving one another. At the same time, evangelism, "priority," social justice, church, people, love, and all other terms or categories that one might evoke in a discussion about evangelism and social justice using English, will not mean for Africans that which native English speakers might imagine. For love to be expressed in a comprehensible imitate-able and sustainable way, it should not draw on outside resources that will lead to dependency. It should be practiced through engagement in local languages. Such engagement will reveal just how different pursuance of "social justice" may be to that classically envisioned from the West.