

FROM THE NEED FOR BLOOD TO THE NEED FOR VULNERABLE MISSION: REACHING TRIBAL PEOPLE

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INTRODUCTION

Outsiders undermining the foundations indigenous or tribal peoples live by, without solid alternatives in place, is a real danger that Boaventura Santos points to in his book, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. He calls a destructive cutting away of indigenous knowledge epistemicide.¹ This article considers how a missionary to tribal people can best respond to, or anticipate and avert, dangers of epistemicide.

For some, the appropriate response to the danger of epistemicide is to build a wall around tribal communities, to keep foreigners out. The latter was revealed to be the policy with respect to the people of North Sentinel Island, leading to many presumably considering John Chau a fool to have even attempted to reach them with the Gospel.² Yet apparently, given their aggressive stance to any intruders into their world, the inhabitants of the island, may not be peaceful amongst themselves. If they represent a norm for pagan people, then leaving tribal communities 'untouched' is leaving them in the grip of fear and violence. Some epistemicide seems to be called for.

Thus we have a puzzle. Left alone, tribal people's ways of life may be far from idyllic. Leaving them alone may not be much different from ignoring the pleas of a woman who is constantly being beaten by a violent husband. Should one intervene? Add to that, Jesus' command to take his word to 'all nations' (Matthew 28:19). The question I raise is: In the light of today's ongoing accumulation of stories about inappropriate paternalism by Western people vis-à-vis those considered 'primitive', how should one intervene?

LESSONS DRAWN FROM 'VULNERABLE' EXPERIENCE WITH TRIBAL PEOPLES

The context for my initial learning regarding this question was my term as a missionary to the Kaonde tribe in a rural part of Zambia from 1988 to 1991.³ I learned at least four things:

1. The ways of thinking of my Zambian colleagues was vastly different from mine, as someone born

1. Santos, Boaventura de Sousa, 2016, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. London: Routledge and Francis Group.

2. <https://www.newsweek.com/missionary-killed-arrows-isolated-tribe-island-body-christianity-john-allen-1229537>

3. Fictional accounts of this time, and my more recent missionary-learning, is recorded in these two books: Harries, Jim, 2018, *African Heartbeat: and a vulnerable fool*. London: Apostolos Publishing Limited, and Harries, Jim, 2019, *To Africa in Love*, London: Apostolos Publishing Limited.

and raised in the UK to a 'white' family. This is true despite implicit and sometimes explicit efforts of mission publicity and public media to persuade to the contrary.

2. Amazingly, many of my missionary colleagues who ran into outcomes of such different ways of thinking on a daily basis, rarely seemed to take the trouble to explore its roots.
3. African people were responding to economic pressures. Often this was very simple: agree with and comply with Western ways, and you prosper. Disagree or confront, and you are side-lined.
4. While indigenous people's day-to-day discourse had a lot of overlap with discourses going on in the UK, they were not identical. Learning the language helped me to realise that key Western expectations, such as the need for efficiency, were absent. (This often continues to be striking to me. My own mind quickly runs to seeking ways in which a task can be performed more efficiently. This requirement hardly seems to trouble those we could call tribal people.)⁴

When doors subsequently closed to my return to Zambia with the same mission, I instead followed a lead to a particular village in Kenya in 1993, where I have lived to date. Given the experience I've described above, I was convicted that whatever ministry I was to engage in, should not build on access I had to resources from outside, and should be conducted entirely, as far as was possible, using indigenous languages. This stand initiated what could almost be described as a 'battle' with members of the local tribe. They saw me as a potential source of the globally valuable language of English, and a link to donors in the wealthy West. I sought to value knowledge of their languages (and traditions, beliefs, cultures, etc. that to them in a sense are of little value), and at all costs to not act as a means for them to become materially wealthy. The form of the 'battle', was endless meetings that were often many hours long, seen by local colleagues as forums at which to try to wring money out of, and sense into, their British friend. The last such meeting I experienced was about 17 years later in 2010, after which time I stopped having formal meetings.

I have been enabled, by God's grace, to begin to share the lessons I learned with others. We call the practice of using only local languages and resources in ministry with indigenous people 'vulnerable mission'.

4. For more on this see Reynolds. (Reynolds, Thomas E., 2008, *Vulnerable Communion: a theology of disability and hospitality*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press.) In Anglophone African countries known to me, indigenous people freely refer to themselves as being members of 'tribes' when using English.

It is vulnerable, because it leaves a foreign missionary very dependent on local people, languages, and resources, and liable to be pushed and pulled back and forth by the sway of the indigenous. It leaves a missionary vulnerable to injury – without outside money, one’s ministry success depends on local whim. Using indigenous languages, the outsider always seems to be the ignorant one. The question then arises; what is the value of a foreign missionary? This question forces a missionary to search their heart, be willing to be belittled, and seek God’s guidance. We share the message of vulnerable mission through the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission—a global alliance of missionary and development workers wanting to share good news with tribal (and other) people without dominating them.⁵

One hopes that by offering new insights to tribal people in a way that they are able to understand (using their own language) and are free to reject (without losing financial incentives) will result in an intelligent and selective adoption of what is new in a way that brings transformation, rather than an epistemicidal undermining of people’s original ways of life that leaves them hanging. If the insights offered are not understandable, the ‘vulnerable’ missionary goes back to the drawing board and prayer room.

TRANSFORMING KNOWLEDGE

Many missionaries and development workers seek to help tribal people to transform their ways of life by a means that is empowering. This kind of transformation often proves elusive. Interventions into peoples lives from the outside can, I suggest, easily get caught up in issues that compromise their long-term best interests. A particular ideology that I consider can bring about unhealthy epistemicide (destruction of local knowledge) is that of secular modern liberalism. Modern liberals tend to presuppose certain pre-existing qualities. This arises from liberalism’s contemporary requirement for ‘religious neutrality’. Dominant Western liberal worldviews these days operate on the basis that there is a universal to all of mankind, which we can call secularism. In addition, they see a more poorly defined category rooted in a kind of psychological weakness of humans, called ‘religion’. Secularists find religion, or to be more precise religions, to be problematic, thus preferably religion should be a ‘private’ affair. Secularists insist that these religious affairs should be inconsequential to dominant aspects of people’s social-economic life. Modern liberals therefore seek to at all costs avoid crediting any one ‘religion’ with singular positive transformative power, lest that religion come to be seen as strategic, something that would undermine their ideology. As an analogy, we could say if liberalism represents thought and action, and religion represents food, then liberals simply assume all people to be well-fed, needing no particular dietary attention.

5. vulnerablemission.org

Another way to understand the attitude of liberals to religious affairs is by pointing to an assumption by liberals, that all people are culturally equivalent to Europeans of around 1800. In my interpretation, Ibram Kendi articulates how Western scholars, once having through becoming secular let-go of an immediate and constant need for the Grace of God for all, interpreted the absence of the kind of Christian history Europe had gone through in Africa, to genetic inferiority.⁶ By 1800, the massive historical impact of the Gospel on European people had begun to be taken for granted. Some scholars searched for ways of life independent of the church—a trend that has continued. This results in a ‘blinking out’ of Christianity’s historical and positive transforming impact on people’s lives. Wise approaches to working with tribal people need to see through these deceptions. This requires Westerners to undo certain mainstream presuppositions.

For the purposes of this article, I present a simplified four-stage transformative process of social⁷ movement from the pre-historic, to the primitive, to the free-thinking, to the modern. This is illustrated in Table 1 below that draws strongly on the work of René Girard.⁸ In practice, some of each earlier stage remain extant in subsequent time periods, but the focus changes.

Prehistoric People

In the prehistoric time period, emotions such as anger and the belief that ‘my’ problems were resolved by killing another, held wide sway.⁹

Primitive People

These are those who took advantage of the fact that the use of focused murder, that we could call sacrifice, was enabling of social order and could save a community from violence. Girard suggests,

I think religion starts with sacrifice. ... Sacrifice is the lightning rod for the community’s violence, because it mobilizes the whole community against a fake enemy, who is not a member of the community, thus preventing people in the community from killing each other.¹⁰

This was sometimes translated into rituals, such as animal sacrifice accompanied by invocations.¹¹ These

6. Kendi, Ibram X., 2018, ‘Black Doctoral Studies: the radically anti-racist idea of Molefi Kete Asante,’ *Journal of Black Studies*, 2018, 49(6)m 542-558, 552.

7. The wider implications of the term social arising especially from its deep roots in modernity result in its carrying some meanings and contextual impacts that are unhelpful for our purposes. For example, a common, but according to Reynolds false assumption, is that society is made up of autonomous individuals. (Reynolds, Thomas E., 2008, *Vulnerable Communion: a Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 83.)

8. <https://iep.utm.edu/girard/>

9. Michael Hardin discusses the destructive violence that is associated with ‘pre-religious’ human communities. (Hardin, Michael, (ed.), 2015, *Reading the Bible with Rene Girard, Conversations with Steven E. Berry*, (Foreword by Scott Cowdell,) Lancaster: JDL Press, 32.)

10. Hardin *Reading*, 43.

11. A detailed graphic articulation of traditional sacrificial rituals as practiced by the Nuer tribe of Sudan, who are related to the

rituals extended the pacifying impact of human killing through imitating its emotional impact—a kind of ritual deception convincing people that their enemy had been done away with. This assumes that a public display of murder, re-enacted on an animal, could result in some of the same cleansing effects that people experienced when a troublesome (real or supposed) person/group was done away with. Controlled sacrificial rituals and the absence of the need to kill allowed other options and enabled humankind to begin to develop civilisation.

Free-thinking People

People in this category draw their strength on their faith in the self-sacrifice of Christ on the cross for them. Genuine faith-based focus on the death of Christ, the innocent victim who was God, does away with or at least seriously reduces, the need for others to suffer on their behalf.

Modern People

These people substitute for the blood of Christ, supposedly scientific secular alternatives such as psychological and sociological comprehensions. This becomes a means of assuaging their innate schadenfreude, or desire to see others suffer on their behalf.

Table 1. A Simplified outline of a four-stage Transformative Process¹²

Time-periods	Pre-historical	Primitive	Free-thinking	Modern
Culture	Before written records, gratification sought through killing.	The discovery of the practice of sacrifice, the beginning of civilisation.	Pre-1800 Europe, faith in Christ assuaged the need for live sacrifice.	Contemporary Europe, rationalisation of murderous instincts.
Causation of evil	Other people not liking us, resolved through murder.	Controlled killing and blood sacrifice pacifies emotions.	Consistent power for cleansing of the blood of Christ leads to perception of physical causation.	Fine tuning of physical causation on the basis of <i>efficiency</i> . ¹³
Dominant ideology	Murder	Sacrifice	Religion (i.e., Christianity) ¹⁴	Efficiency

Luo of Kenya that are the main focus of this article, is given by Evans-Pritchard in his book on Nuer religion. (Evans-Pritchard, E.E., 1956, *Nuer Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 197-230.)

12. My construction of this four-stage development draws strongly on the work of French scholar Rene Girard. I have found Girard's articulations to closely match my own experiences in African context. (See for example: Girard, René, 2001, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*. (Translated by James G. Williams) Maryknoll: Orbis.)

13. Reynolds considers the need for 'efficiency' to be epitomizing the illegitimate means of disconfirming non-modern people (Reynolds *Vulnerable* 44, 61, 89.)

14. Some parallels between the impact of so-called world religions such as Hinduism and Christianity with respect to their bringing freedom from sacrificial thinking, are discussed in Palaver, Wolfgang & Schenk, Richard, (eds.) 2018, *Mimetic Theory and World Religions*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Tribal People

For our purposes, we can consider tribal people to have already shifted from the pre-historical to the primitive. Because of its aversion to religion, contemporary secular understanding wants to view them as having gone directly from primitivity rooted in sacrifice, to modernity and efficiency. Given that mission history has often been entangled with colonialism and secularism, many Western missionaries have in effect also sought to fast-track tribal people to modernity. Tribal peoples have been given a "modern" perception of Christianity as being a helpful but not essential 'add-on' to smooth progress. Western secularism sees the Gospel as something one can choose to accept or reject as a facilitator for adopting modernity, rather than realizing its role in providing the foundation for modernity. Secularism sees education as prior to rather than dependent on the Gospel. This is despite the fact that historically, education was a product of the Gospel, which is essential for thriving.

Contemporary missionaries should, I suggest, be wise to the false allure of modernity and seek to be more constrained to Biblical directives. This is, effectively, to seek to provide freedom, release, and empowerment to people, without necessarily directing them towards efficiency and modernity.

The lack of a strong Gospel focus in outreach to tribal peoples has resulted in massive levels of epistemicide, creation of unhealthy dependency, and enormous destabilisation of impacted communities. This is like taking primitive people to a fast-moving river, that lies between them and the modern, without a bridge or a boat. Because they don't have the foundational background to understand why the modern world functions as it does, they end up imitating rather than appropriating modernity. For example, tribal people are introduced to science before they have any basis to perceive it or hooks to hang it on. Such basis or hooks would depend on the Gospel undermining traditional epistemology that is rooted in the shedding of blood.

The False Allure of Modernity

Contemporary missionaries should, I suggest, be wise to the false allure of modernity and seek to be more constrained to Biblical directives. This is, effectively, to seek to provide freedom, release, and empowerment to people, without necessarily directing them towards efficiency and modernity. A major reason for defocusing on modernity is due to difficulties inherent

in transition. I suggest that equating Christianity with civilisation and commerce, for which Livingstone was renowned,¹⁵ was an error arising from the failure to perceive the necessity of the four-stage transitions I articulate above. Christ should be presented for who he is, not as a harbinger of modernity.

There is much Biblical evidence for the transformation from murder (prehistoric) to sacrifice (primitive). For example:

1. The very early story of Cain and Abel depicts an understanding in which the categories were fluid, leading Cain to murder his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8). Later in the same chapter we find a depiction of the beginning of civilisation; Cain's founding the first city ('ir,) arose as a result of God's prohibition of murder (Genesis 4:15, 17).
2. God's role in frustrating Joseph's brothers culminated in their intended murder victim becoming their saviour (Genesis 37:18; Genesis 50:20), portending Jesus' redeeming act on the cross (1 Peter 1:18-20).
3. The frustration of Saul's effort at dealing summarily with David was rooted in his son Jonathan's 'illogical' love for the one who was to usurp his own rightful throne (1 Samuel 19:1-2).

Historically intermingled with the above events, we find an advocacy for, and then later depreciation of, the practice of animal sacrifice in the Bible. Leviticus clearly advocates for sacrifice (Leviticus 1-7). Later the prophets questioned its value and necessity (e.g., Hosea 6:6). The Exile provides a context for belief when sacrifice in the Temple of Jerusalem was no longer possible. Progressive revelation of the Scripture brings more and more of God's grace to light. Increasingly, God advocates for forgiveness/mercy/love instead of sacrifice (Hosea 6:6). This concept has origins in 1 Samuel 15:22, and is re-iterated in Matthew 9:13, where it becomes a foundation for Jesus' own ministry. New Testament revelation brings this to a completion in the crucifixion of Christ as ultimate sacrificial victim. The stories of the Gospels repeatedly illustrate ways in which the powers that be at the time, brought trumped up charges against the innocent Jesus, culminating in a slaughter motivated by an angry mob. The reduction of anger and related negative emotional energy¹⁶ associated with the murder of Jesus is candidly illustrated by its effectiveness in ending a long-running feud between Pilate and Herod (Luke 23:12). It takes Christ's resurrection, however, to enlighten and convince his disciples regarding the inappropriateness of sacrifice, ushering humankind into a new era, that of Anno Domini, 'the year of the Lord,' enabling the reign of

15. Conradie, Sas, 2013, 'David Livingstone's Vision Revisited – Christianity, Commerce and Civilisation in the 21st Century,' *Evangelical Review of Theology* 37(2), 118-130.

16. I use the term 'emotion', in the absence of English terminology that more accurately describes comprehensions that I find in parts of Africa. In the latter comprehensions, emotion is a kind of force, as some native English speakers consider a spirit or spirits. I assume this may be universal to other tribal people.

Christ in people's hearts. It is my understanding, and this is supported by various authors like Girard,¹⁷ Mangalwadi,¹⁸ and even Max Weber,¹⁹ that freedom from the understanding that the appropriate response to one's own suffering must be the suffering of another, underlies the empowerment that enabled modernity, with all its assumed and real benefits.

Tribal peoples have been given a "modern" perception of Christianity as being a helpful but not essential 'add-on' to smooth progress.

Modernity seems to work somewhat well for European peoples. Sharing it with others is proving much more problematic. My more intimate knowledge is of African contexts. In these contexts, so-called modernity (sometimes known as afro-modernity²⁰) has often come hand in hand with unhealthy dependency, what we might call 'dummification' of local people, and various vices. Dummification, as I understand it, arises when people's innate understanding is overtaken by their being over-exposed (especially through financial subsidy) to a fast pace of real-world developments. Keeping up then requires imitation, rote learning, plagiarism, and deception (presenting oneself as having an understanding that is absent, so as to benefit from modernity economically and in other ways).²¹ This kind of culturally 'leaving-people-behind' stokes fires of racism, aggravated by 19th century comprehension of genetics.²² Hence my suggestion in this article is that contemporary mission should concentrate on promoting free-thinking i.e., religion (Christianity), and de-emphasise modernisation and its accompanying "efficiency." (See Table 1 above where I depict efficiency as the dominant ideology of modernity.)

CHRISTIAN MISSION AS SOURCE OF FREEDOM

Using Biblical language we can say that freedom comes through release from the bonds of sin, through accepting the completed work of Christ on the cross (Galatians 5:1). In other words, freedom comes from a knowledge of God's grace which transforms someone's life-orientation from that of a heart of

17. Girard, René, 2001, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, (Translated by James G. Williams) Maryknoll: Orbis.

18. Mangalwadi, Vishal, 2011, *The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilisation*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson.

19. Weber, Max, 1930. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

20. Comaroff, Jean and Comaroff, John L., 2004, 'Notes on Afro-modernity and the Neo World Order: an afterword.' 329-347 In: Weiss, Brad, (ed.) 2004, *Producing African Futures: Ritual and Reproduction in a Neo Liberal Age*. London: Boston: Brill.

21. Makokha, Rt. Rev. Dr. Byrum, personal communication, August 10th 2005.

22. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gregor-Mendel>

stone to one of “a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26). This could be a transformation from the desire for murder, witch-hunting, revenge, and scapegoating, to one of love, forgiveness, patience, and, to take advantage of Paul’s list in Galatians: “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). The vulnerable approach to mission that I present here, is one which predominantly concentrates on advocacy for these things, and leaves people to make their own choices regarding moves towards modernity, or otherwise.

Freedom from the Need to Destroy

Below are some examples of pre-Christian traditions from which many Luo and other people in Kenya have been set free. The major freedom I refer to is freedom from the need to seek to destroy something or someone else in order for ‘me’ to grow:

- I am reminded of a Kenyan, who once shared with me, that his people were horrified when missionaries told them not to steal. At the time, that was like telling them to ‘be poor’! Their economy was one of ‘beating the Jones’s’, by rustling away their cattle. Cattle translate into wives, so children, so in due course soldiers (warriors), so more cattle, wives, land, and food. It took time, my Kenyan friend intimated, for people to learn that they might prosper even more if they stopped stealing than if they continued to steal.
- The Luo people of Kenya have a tradition called *tero buru*. Literally, this means ‘take the ashes.’ While the term is sometimes applied in other ways now, the original *tero buru* was very serious. It was a search for victims to slaughter in notional revenge for the recent death (however caused) of an old man of the village. Young men would dress extravagantly in warrior garb, then move towards neighbours searching for victims to kill.
- Should a woman walk out on her husband then come back later she could not be welcomed back without blood first being shed on her behalf.²³ A sheep had to be slaughtered, to ‘absorb’ the anger of affronted people, who could be dead or alive, before she could be permitted to settle back home. Nowadays when such an issue arises, a church is consulted and prayers (*lemo*) might be arranged for her, without anything being killed in order for the woman to be forgiven.
- African kings once held the power of life and death over their subjects, at times killing droves of people in order to ritually solve a problem or anticipated problem.²⁴ Kings were under pressure themselves, their failure to perform could result

in a crowd initiating the murder of the king.²⁵ Much of the role of those kings has been usurped by pastors who are guided by the Christian Scriptures and thus are much more merciful. The pastors’ ways of solving problems are understood in the modern West, as they share the same Scriptural origin.

- Even now deaths rarely occur without rampant suspicions regarding a responsible witch. Once identified, traditionally, ritual means are sought to take revenge, involving the shedding of animal or even human blood. Nowadays, with the influence of the Gospel, this situation often goes no further than rampant gossip.

These examples illustrate that in contemporary times the above kinds of murderous orientations are displaced by the power of the Gospel. Faith that Jesus’ death is enough to cleanse all of us, itself diminishes hunger for blood in contemporary relations.²⁶ Instead of a sinner (perhaps an adulterer or thief caught red handed) being of necessity annihilated on the spot, a leaf can be taken from Jesus’ book (John 8:1-11) and the person can instead be exorcised.

Freedom from Evil Practices

Exorcism is a widely loved practice in many Christian circles known to me. It locates a person’s evil orientation into an untoward spirit, often identified as being of an ancestor, which can be removed in the name of Jesus. Such removal is often dramatic, involving attention from a lot of people, loud noise, gesticulation, the possessed person writhing on the ground, and so on. The attention itself, one must suspect, is therapeutic.

The kind of possessed people who used to wield massive influence over whole communities (known as *jobilo*) now often find themselves constrained to small groups calling themselves *roho churches* (from the Arabic, *ruach* (روح), spirit). Such groups known to me, believe in Jesus and in the Bible – thus subjecting their prophets to consistent pressure for their activities to be brought in line with Christ’s words and the Old Testament prophetic tradition.

In another example of how the Gospel delivers people from evil practices, the traditional view of a need for healing is that illness comes from social friction and the pressure of tense (‘hot’) relationships. Hence the Swahili term for healing, *ponya*, means ‘to cool’. Such healing once required making one’s enemies suffer. Among the Luo people of Kenya, a son who had slept with his father’s wife was required to drink water used to wash his father’s private parts in order to

23. Mboya, Paul, 1983 (1938), *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi*. Kisumu: Anyange Press Ltd., 21.

24. Simonse, Simon, 2017, *Kings of Disaster: Dualism, Centralism and the Scapegoat King in Southeastern Sudan*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 42.

25. Simonse *Kings*, 369-396.

26. Scripture teaches that “without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). “Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 6:23).

acquire healing.²⁷ Nowadays 'mere' exorcism is widely considered sufficient for someone to be forgiven.

I will not here go into detail on the way the grace of God works in peoples' lives, except to say that joy and thankfulness for what God is doing can translate into an aversion for sin that offends God. Forgiven people internally motivated by gratefulness may lead much more effectively transformed lives than those on whom laws are imposed from the outside.

A girl of marriageable age would once have been dragged kicking and screaming to her suitor by his brothers, an event that often resulted in serious fights with her kin. Nowadays parents who as a result of their faith in Christ have had a change of heart,²⁸ accept that a girl can go willingly, without affront to their investment into her as parents.

Making an incision in order to remove objects passed to someone through evil eye, has become only one of a larger crowd of potential curative techniques. The availability of candles, variously coloured cloth, and other means such as occasionally more dramatic flame thrower displays (enabled through having paraffin that someone can spit over a candle) can substitute for bodily incisions. Whereas feared intense envy once strictly limited accumulation of material things by African people, the Gospel has heralded a new age, in which one could say in brief; that fear of God reduces fear of envy. This has contributed to advances in people's material existence, resulting in availability of means for use in healing rituals that did not used to be there.

Land and boundary disputes remain major flashpoints in rural living. In the past their severity was such, and life expectancy was such, that the living of different families was invariably separated by bush (i.e., areas of uncultivated uninhabited ground). Nowadays, when families often live cheek to jowl, many in my experience offer verbal testimony to having forgiven someone even for moving a boundary marker put down by the elders.²⁹ I assume that faith in God consistently being given credit for this new attitude to boundary disputes, demonstrates a genuine change of heart towards forgiveness rather than insisting on one's land-rights.

CONCLUSION

My major point here is that positive impacts can arise from the Gospel, with little or no need for modernity. Therefore, drawing on modernity and its epistemicidal impacts to undergird Bible teachings is not a necessity. In fact, it can be a handicap, e.g., requiring expensive clothing to appear modern might necessitate income that has to be begged, borrowed, or stolen. Modernity

27. Mboya, Paul, 1983 (1938), *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi*. Kisumu: Anyange Press Ltd, 20.

28. Ezekiel 36:26: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

29. I am often not able to verify whether the verbal testimony given is the end of the matter, or whether some kind of revenge or retribution is also sought.

can be a drawback to the spread of the Gospel. When godly people's 'thriving' is interpreted in modern terms, this implies they should possess vehicles, live in permanent buildings (rather than houses made from mud), have a good knowledge of English that can be very expensive to acquire, and so forth. These things being prerequisites can limit the spread of the Gospel.

I want to finish by discussing how I advocate for missionaries to avoid being proponents of modernity. The prescription I offer is simple, in a sense, yet difficult at the same time. It is not by making specific rules for missionaries, for example that they should not own a computer or eat ice cream (things associated with modernity). My prescription advocates for missionary vulnerability within a local context in two important ways: 1. They should use (entirely) indigenous languages in interaction with the tribal people they are reaching. 2. They should contribute no more to ongoing projects or crises (e.g., health, hunger) than would another relatively poor person in the community who is not related to a sufferer. To these I could add, they should put themselves on a course of trying to communicate with people by imitating the way they communicate with each other. That is, a major part of the aim of a missionary when sharing from the Bible ought to be to do so in the same way as local Christians share Biblical truths.

Allow me to elaborate a little on how to share from the Bible, from personal experience. I find this an ongoing challenge. I believe also rightly so, as helpful Biblical interpretation should not be an outcome of a method, but intervention of God's Holy Spirit, an intervention which is facilitated by many aspects of a preacher's way of life, such as having a contrite heart. I add the suggestion, that it is immersion in local ways of life, both physically but also mentally in one's thought processes, while meditating on Scripture, that results in the most helpful interpretation of the Bible for teaching and preaching. I consider this more important than 'techniques' of Bible study, as can be advocated in teaching manuals.³⁰

Following vulnerable mission practices of not boosting ministry using outside resources or languages, precludes the need to decide which of a selection of projects should be prioritised. Deciding to provide help for one type of project and not another otherwise tends to be a means of controlling a community. The choice of what to help them with, and thereby this means for a missionary to exert power, is done away with by the decision to not provide externally-sourced financial support. Use of indigenous languages bypasses nearly all of today's global modernising initiatives. Use of and comprehension of indigenous tongues, as employed in context, is key to enabling a

30. I consider that learning interpretive approaches, such as for example advocated for by Fee and Stuart, while helpful, should be secondary to meditative exposure to the lived-contexts of the people with whom one will be sharing. (Fee, Gordon D., and Stuart, Douglas, 1993, *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth* (second edition). Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.)

foreign missionary to take indigenous Christians as their models for 'how to minister the Gospel' in that context. The slow pace of impact inherent to denying oneself foreign resources and use of English, helps to minimise blunders that would arise from moving too fast as a result of thinking one knows answers to people's issues.

Vulnerable missionaries should concentrate on freeing tribal people from the bonds of sin, rather than being conduits for the intrusion of modernity into their lives. Much mileage to this end can be achieved by substituting the blood of Christ for traditional sacrifice and enmity. Achieving this through an understanding and proximity to a people can only occur as a result of vulnerability to them.

Slowing one's pace and instead of being the answer to people's problems being a part of searching for meaning through them, contributes to a general vulnerability. Good language acumen will further assist this. Thus a missionary can be enabled, in part at least, to transfer their social and emotional allegiance from their own national colleagues to tribal people.

Doing this results in a wonderful context of open communication and mutual support, a channel along which Christian encouragement and witness can flow freely.

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31. A point repeatedly emphasized by Reynolds (*Vulnerable*).



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