

Chapter 10

Two More Critical Issues

LESSON OBJECTIVE

It is important to understand that:

- There is a debate whether Christianity is a ‘white man’s religion’ or not
- Biblical and historical data answer this issue convincingly
- Changes in the missiological *modus operandi* led to Christian maturing in the non-western world (NWW)
- Churches in the NWW are being influenced by expatriate funds and personnel
- This dominant problem needs a drastic cure
- True ecclesiological indigeneity remains the ideal to aim at

LESSON OUTLINE

In this lesson we discuss:

- Christianity, the White Man’s Religion?
- The Dependency Syndrome
- Six ‘Selfs’ and Six Ideals of an Indigenous Church

LESSON CONTENTS

When the gospel spreads in the NWW, especially among adherents of Traditional Religions, some argue that Christianity is the white man’s religion. Is that true? Let’s consult the Bible and early church history.

Parts of mission-established NWW Christianity depend on overseas funds and personnel. This impedes and cripples evangelism and missionary-sending. Does it have to stay that way? We explore some basics.

*Christianity, the White Man's Religion?*²¹⁷

Where and with whom did Christianity start? Where did it continue? Where did it spread to first and where later? Answers shed light on whether Christianity was originally a white man's religion or not.

The Old Testament

Nobody knows the exact geographical location of the biblical creation story, but many assume that it was somewhere in the north of present-day Iraq, where now many Kurds live.

South of that area, at the top of the Persian Gulf, in the ancient city of Ur, God called Abraham. He was to leave his country and move to another, that God would point out to him. He ended up in Canaan, now known as Israel.

Abraham descended of Noah's son Shem, and therefore belonged to the Semite peoples. At the age of 86 his son Ishmael was born to him by his wife's Egyptian slave girl Hagar. Thirteen years later Abraham's wife Sarah bore him a son of their own, Isaac. Both boys belonged to the Semite race. The Arabs descended from Ishmael and the Jews from Isaac. Isaac's son Jacob was later called Israel. Thus, Arabs and Jews are both Semite peoples. Neither of them was white or black, their color was brownish.

No one would consider Islam, the religion of most Arabs, a white man's religion; neither can Judaism be considered as such.

The New Testament

Jesus Christ was born in Israel, a Jew. As a Semite, He was not white either. Israel is a geographical center point, where the Asian and African continents meet, and close to Europe. After Jesus' earthly

217 Britten, *We Don't Want Your White Religion*, 1997

ministry, Christianity spread from Jerusalem,²¹⁸ then to Judea and Samaria,²¹⁹ and finally from Antioch, Syria, to the ends of the earth.²²⁰

Into what directions did it spread? Christ's apostles preached the gospel to Jews from many nations, lots from present-day Turkey. However, the first years of church history reveal that the gospel remained largely within the confines of Jewish culture, not only in Jerusalem, but also inside the country.

The first story about the gospel being exported from Israel *by a new Gentile believer* was the story of the Ethiopian, who found Christ and was baptized after Philip's preaching.²²¹ So, the gospel went from Jerusalem *to Africa first!* It was not preached *by a white man* but by a *Jew*. It was not preached *to a Jew*, but to a *black man*. The Ethiopian Church originates from this event.

Again years later Paul and his team, travelling in Turkey, were called in a dream to abandon their plans for Bythinia at Turkey's north coast, and cross over to Macedonia.²²² Almost 20 years of Christian missions took place among Semite peoples and into Africa *before the first white people in Europe ever heard it for the first time*.

Then we read that Simeon called Niger (black) and Lucius of Cyrene, North Africa, leaders of the church in Antioch,²²³ sent out Paul and Barnabas. By that time there must have been churches in Northern African countries already. Simeon and Lucius may have been North African missionaries who had planted a church in Syrian Antioch. So, the gospel spread to many areas before it came to Europe for the first time.

In later ages the North African Church was wiped off the map by Muslim armies, and centuries later, after Christianity had rooted in

218 Acts 1-7

219 Acts 8-12

220 Acts 13-28

221 Acts 8

222 Acts 16

223 Acts 13

Europe, European missionaries went into the entire world to spread the gospel. Since the 18th century they also visited Africa.

Unfortunately these missionaries often wrapped Christianity in Western cultural garments. Consider an attitude of superiority and paternalism, plus the assumed rights of colonialist imperialism – often supported by greedy governments – and we understand why Christianity often became a stench in the nostrils of colonized peoples.

However, the missionaries brought many blessings too: not only the gospel, but also the establishment of schools, hospitals, agricultural programs, water pumps, and lots of other blessings to develop colonial communities.

The conclusion is that Christianity, biblically and historically speaking, is not a white man's religion. This false assumption has rather been used as an argument *to reject the way in which it was presented*.

The Challenge

Neither NWW Christians, nor foreign missionaries who visit their continents should stop here. In the second half of the 20th century global Christianity has done its utmost to rid itself of this bad image.

Missionaries are improving their *modus operandi* by developing contextualization, incarnational ministry, cultural adaptation and initiating indigenization processes. These are to continue, as long as the NWW Church matures.

How can this 'maturing' be done? Not by replacing Western theology by a NWW one. Not by throwing all white missionaries out, as some NWW governments do. Rather, the NWW Church should stand up and *decide* that their church *is their church* and that they can run it. *They* then can *decide* that they *pay* for its running costs *themselves*.

These running costs encompass:

- discipling their own converts
- building and maintaining their buildings
- paying their pastors' salary
- developing & evangelizing their areas
- training their own leaders
- reaching out to their cities and country
- starting cross-cultural missionary-sending
- initiating missionary training institutions

The Dependency Syndrome

Few people know more about dependency than Glenn Schwartz, director of World Mission Associates. Glenn was missionary to several African countries for many years and developed an excellent course, called '*Dependency among Mission-Established Churches – Exploring the Issues*'. Let me acquaint you with some of Glenn's findings.

The Problem in a Nutshell

Many mission-established churches in the NWW became dependent on foreign funds and personnel. Often their leaders feel they cannot function without subsidies they have received, sometimes for over a century. They feel that, without these, they cannot reproduce themselves through local evangelism and cross-cultural missions. Often expatriates construct their church buildings for them. They need to learn to rely on God themselves for the funding of their own building- and outreach programs.²²⁴

Many Christian movements in the NWW have difficulty reproducing themselves through cross-cultural missions. They do not send many missionaries to other parts of the world.²²⁵ There are very few indigenous missionary-sending agencies; there is hardly any missiological training; practically no E-3 evangelism takes place and people still receive missionaries, – after having had 100-200 years

²²⁴ From Glenn Schwartz's preface to the course

²²⁵ Ibid. p. 3

of gospel preaching. Even South Africa receives many more missionaries than it sends.

The Problem Is Spiritual

Much of the problem is rooted in the depth-level of conversion, because Christianity was presented in a Western garment – and therefore remained foreign. A related reason is, that for too long certain parts of Christianity have denied the realities of the spirit world, that are strongly interwoven with the animistic worldview. Westerners are seeing now that the Pentecostal teaching takes into account the spiritual world, including prayer for healing and the driving out of evil spirits.²²⁶ Spiritual renewal and restructuring must become part of the way forward.²²⁷

Christian conversions were often an addition to the animistic paradigm, rather than a radical change at the deepest level of people's hearts. Total abandonment of ancestral worship and witchcraft, and making Christ Lord over all areas of life, is not habitually seen. Shorter sheds some light on the matter:

'During the past hundred years ... Traditional Religion has been ... sinking beneath the surface of modern social life ..., but what remains ... is ... the tip of an iceberg. At baptism, the ... Christian repudiates ... little of his former non-Christian outlook. He may be obliged to turn his back upon certain traditional practices, which the church, ... has condemned, ... but he is not asked to recant a religious philosophy. Consequently, he returns to the forbidden practices as occasion arises with ... ease. Conversion to Christianity is for him ... gain, an 'extra' ... It is an overlay on his original religious culture. Apart from the ... condemnations, Christianity has ... had little to say about ... Traditional Religion in the way of serious judgments of value. Consequently, the ... Christian operates ... two thought-systems ... and they are closed to each other'.²²⁸

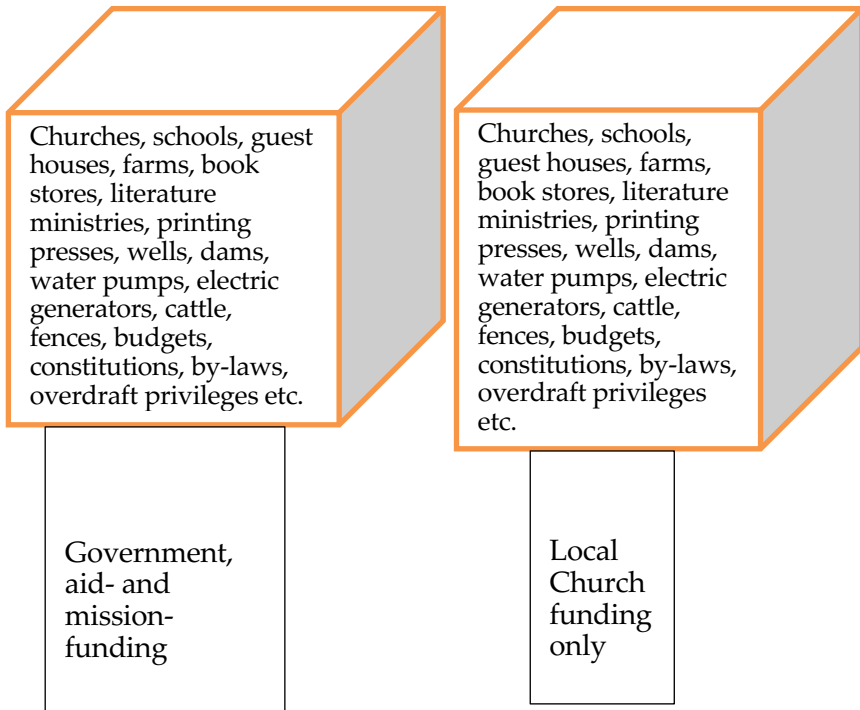
226 Ibid. p. 97

227 Ibid. p. 31

228 Shorter, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation*, 1977:10

Foreign Structures

Many churches in the NWW do not reproduce, because the imported structures were too expensive to maintain, let alone reproduce. Schwartz compares them with a box, full of 'goodies', built on a 'pillar'. When the pillar disappears, and the local church takes over the maintenance of the box, the thick pillar is replaced by a thin one. When local leaders took responsibility for the box, they often inherited an unmanageable structure. Consequently, they feel they cannot send out missionaries because they are preoccupied with maintaining what they inherited.²²⁹



229 Schwartz, p. 5

Local leaders took over the box and the big pillar was reduced by e.g. 10% per year, which did not work because a church cannot indigenize 10% per year. The small local church pillar could not take over the function of the big pillar. It is immoral, Schwartz says, to leave an unmanageable structure to people that cannot afford it.

Ownership

It is not enough when expatriate mission agencies hand over 'their' churches to local leaders *on paper only*, that is *legal* ownership; nor to just fill the *positions* with local people, that is *functional* ownership. People must decide themselves, that this church and its program is *theirs*, and that it succeeds or fails, depending on what *they* do. *That is psychological* ownership.²³⁰ Churches become independent only, when psychological ownership transfers.²³¹

Key Steps

Vocational training is a key-step towards self-reliance. With that, tithing should be taught from the beginning of generating income. Churches can change; there are examples of those that did. Too many NWW Christians count on, that when you just wait, someone will show up to help you. David Barrett said, that with 1-2% of the income of their members, churches are able to *pay all of their bills*, including buildings, pastor's salaries, etc. If members would give 10%, they would have plenty to even send out their own missionaries cross-culturally.

Curse, Or Blessing?

'Foreign money is a poison, a curse, a plague: it creates long-term dependency', Schwartz said. 'Avoid it. It often distorts reality and leads people to feel like they have little or nothing to give back to God. The continuous flow of foreign funding into the NWW reinforces that idea.'²³²

230 Ibid. p. 6

231 Ibid. p. 28

232 Ibid. p. 24

He distinguishes two kinds of fatalism: NWW *fatalism* says: 'We cannot because we have not. We will never have anything. Therefore, we need overseas help'. *Western fatalism* says: 'Let's help them because they have nothing and will never have anything. We'll probably have to help them for another 100 years'. Both kinds are deadly.

How this curse can be turned into a blessing was discovered by the late Rev. Nicholas Benghu, an AOG²³³ pastor in South Africa. God told him to instruct the women in his churches in these four things:

- Teach them how to care for their families
- Teach them how to lead their husbands to the Lord
- Teach them how to produce something, so they can earn a living
- Teach them to give some of their earnings back to God, i.e. tithing

Once a year the AOG women had a conference, and during one weekend, years ago, they took up an offering of 3.7 million Rand – at that time equivalent to over one million US dollars.²³⁴

Of course the real poor need to be helped – Jesus told us to do so. But not all dependent churches are poor. In fact, there seems to be little relationship between poverty and wealth and the concept of self-reliance among mission-established churches. In Tanzania and Malawi church leaders reported that poorer districts are more likely to support their pastors than churches in wealthy districts.²³⁵

Similar Lessons – From Elsewhere

John Dekker, former missionary to the Dani of Irian Jaya, followed these missiological principles in his field:

233 AOG: Assembly of God

234 Schwartz, p. 7

235 Ibid. p. 8

- No foreign funds were used for local church development
- The mission employed no paid evangelists
- Missionaries did not burden churches with unmanageable or unaffordable structures
- Church members paid the pastors by cultivating their gardens and by providing their other needs
- Self-support principles were maintained in church- and community life
- Development of 'rice-Christians' was avoided: no preferential treatment was given to believers in medical or community work
- Stewardship was taught from the beginning²³⁶

Within 10 years after the churches had been planted, they sent out their first cross-cultural missionaries, relevantly trained and culturally sensitive.

Another example is the Friends Missionary Prayer Band in India: they sent out 1,000 missionaries without outside funding, with help of 30,000 prayer supporters.²³⁷ Every 10 (!) members of a band support their own evangelist. Needless to say, it can be done. Churches *can* change, despite a long history of dependency that has hindered their outreaches. But many wonder: 'If overseas money is so easy to get, why do we work so hard to raise funds locally?' And obviously it is hard to say 'no' to what might be one's own salary...²³⁸

Westerners, Watch It!

It would not be fair to present this chapter as if the dependent church in the NWW, is the only party to blame. A word of caution must be directed towards church and mission leaders in the Western countries too. Schwartz again:

236 Dekker, *Torches of Joy*, 1985:193

237 Schwartz, p. 13

238 *Ibid.* p. 16, 17

- National churches cannot reproduce western support models
- People think that the spread of the gospel depends on money
- It can create dependency and stunt giving in churches
- Dependence on western funds reinforces inferiority feelings
- western support can create a mercenary spirit
- Foreign-paid workers are not always more effective
- It robs a church of the joy of being a missionary church
- Employing national missionaries may not be a bargain
- Sending money instead of missionaries compromises the essence of the great commission²³⁹
- There is often an outside agenda behind dependency
- Outside agendas often create and perpetuate dependency, especially when they are funded from abroad²⁴⁰
- Progress locally is determined by outside funds
- Foreign paid local leaders are not free to innovate, out of respect for the donors, or of fear to lose their job
- Both self-image and community image are diminished
- Local value systems may suffer long-term damage
- Short-term assistance becomes a long-term addiction²⁴¹

Money should not become ‘good news’ that accompanies *the* good news.

*Mission-Established Churches Do Not Develop Missionary Outreach Programs, because:*²⁴²

- There is no vision for the unreached beyond their borders
- They adopted a poverty mentality: ‘We are too poor to support ourselves, let alone reach out to others’
- They have inherited expensive, irreproducible structures
- They are in a maintenance-mode of ministry
- They rarely have cross-cultural training centers, mainly mono-cultural pastoral training schools

239 Ibid. p. 25

240 Ibid. p. 35

241 Ibid. p. 48, 49

242 Ibid. p. 89

- They hardly developed missionary sending structures such as mission agencies
- They did not develop prayer movements, to adequately sustain missionary outreach

Churches that stand on their own feet, sending out missionaries and evangelists, are not content with conflicting worldviews. Dealing with marginal conversion is an important first step, if NWW churches are to take their place in globally expanding Christianity.²⁴³

*The Foundation of an Indigenous Missionary Outreach Program*²⁴⁴

- Is born out of a generous, giving heart
- Results of a widespread spiritual renewal, and is not based on only a few spiritually energized people
- Requires special cross-cultural training. Pastoral training only will not meet the challenges missionaries face
- Develops a caring sending base like a missionary agency
- Requires healthy financial support for who serves far away
- Requires faithful reporting to the prayer- and financial supporters who back the missionaries
- Keeps the vision of the unreached before the people
- Is not dependent on foreign funding to start or continue
- Is suspicious of 'partners', wanting to help to make 'your' programs possible
- Is an inspiration for people who pray and finance it with gifts.

Nothing will do more to inspire a church to be mission-minded than testimonies to answered prayer. Self-reliance for NWW churches is not only possible, but absolutely essential for the future of its Christian movement.

Here we could only scratch the surface of the problem. For an in-depth treatment of it I recommend Schwartz's publications. He deals

243 Ibid. p. 97

244 Ibid. p. 90

with many other issues too. Consult his website for more information: <http://wmausa.org>

*Six 'Selves' and Six Ideals of an Indigenous Church*²⁴⁵

Some found the 'Three-Self-concept', defining the indigenous church, lacking. Self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating do not sufficiently define the indigenous church. Schwartz quotes some ideas from Alan Tippett's *Verdict Theology in Missionary Theory*:

Six Marks of an Indigenous Church:²⁴⁶

Self-Image:	the church <i>sees itself</i> as the Body of Christ locally
Self-Functioning:	the church <i>cares for itself</i> and its outreach
Self-Determining:	the church makes <i>its own decisions</i>
Self-Supporting:	the church <i>finances its own projects</i>
Self-Propagating:	the church has its <i>own missionary outreach</i>
Self-Giving:	the church manages <i>its own service programs</i> , e.g. hospitals, seminaries, etc.

Six Ideals for which to look for:

Indigenous <i>Theology</i> :	how the church <i>thinks</i> ; it addresses felt needs of their members, like divorce, polygamy, alcoholism, witchcraft, sickness, oppression, business and public morality
Indigenous <i>Doctrine</i> :	how the church <i>interprets</i> Scripture. Who defines what 'heresy' is?

245 Ibid. p. 86, 87. See also: <http://www.alibris.com/Verdict-theology-in-missionary-theory-Alan-R-Tippett/book/7016115>

246 Italics mine

Indigenous <i>Worship</i> :	how the church <i>feels</i> ; it addresses the question of whether the church is a place to feel at home, where music, worship and language have the local character
Indigenous <i>Hymnology</i> :	how members produce their <i>own music</i> , not borrowed materials
Indigenous <i>Structure</i> :	how the church <i>works</i> ; it determines how decisions are made and where the sources of power are. It has a structure that fits its society, and ensures that structure can be locally funded and is reproducible elsewhere through missionary outreach
Indigenous <i>Leadership</i> :	how the church <i>trains its own leaders</i> .

RESEARCH

<http://wmausa.org> or <https://fivestonesglobal.org/>

MISCELLANEOUS

Recommended books: See Bibliography

Assignments

- Interview one of your church leaders and ask whether the church receives structural financial or personnel help from abroad. Ask his opinion on the issue. Do not display a judgmental attitude!
- Describe how 'indigenous' your church is (or not). Give a brief background as to why it so developed

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Explain with arguments from the OT as well as from the NT that Christianity is not a white man's religion.
2. Explain what the dependency syndrome consists of
3. Give 4 reasons why most NWW churches still do not send out cross-cultural missionaries
4. Explain the spiritual dimension behind the dependency problem
5. Explain why foreign structures are often impossible to manage for mission-established churches when they become independent (use the illustration of the box and the pillars)
6. Mention the 3 forms of 'ownership', tell which of them is the only one that works, and why
7. Explain the relationship between vocational training, tithing, and self-reliance
8. Explain what NWW fatalism is, and what Western fatalism is
9. Mention 3 of John Dekker's 7 principles that you feel would greatly improve your church's outreach program
10. Mention 4 of the 7 reasons why mission-established churches do not develop missionary outreach programs