

**The Africanisation of Missiology:  
The Work of InnerChange South Africa to  
Raise Up Local Missionaries and  
Decolonise Black African Minds (Part I)**

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**Abstract**

InnerCHANGE is an order among the poor. We work and live with people facing poverty. The vast majority of us grew up outside our current contexts of life and ministry. Raising local leaders as agents of missions is one of our core bottom lines alongside making disciples of Jesus. Our South Africa team is being intentional about raising local leaders because we believe that it is a very sustainable way to create a multiplying gospel movement we desire to see in Soshanguve and beyond. We believe that the reason why the gospel was successful from the Jesus's era to now, is because Jesus intentionally invested his time and effort in raising local missionaries who spread the gospel all over the world. InnerCHANGE South Africa has experienced a growing number of community members who have joined forces with it in order to be transformation agents infused by biblical principles. This paper will share some of the stories I am privileged to be a part of and what I am learning about sustaining our vision in intentionally raising community members as missions' agents.

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**1. Introduction**

I am part of InnerCHANGE, a Christian order among the poor. We send teams of missionaries to live and work incarnationally in marginalised neighborhoods around the world – places most people want to avoid or ignore. We seek to live out the good news of Jesus among the poor, both with words and deeds (InnerChange 2016). The vast majority of InnerCHANGE staff relocate from their original place of residence to their current context of life and ministry.

On our South Africa team, we have been serving in the township of Soshanguve since 2008. The majority of our staff have been foreign nationals. As the team leader, I am gradually learning to shift my paradigm of missions seen as a movement of called and committed followers of Jesus from West to the Global South, to a holistic approach of raising local missionaries while being open to including people from other parts of the world as fellow co-labourers in the mission field.

This article will primarily be focused on our South Africa InnerCHANGE team's journey to intentionally find and develop local missionaries so that we could incarnationally live and serve among people living in poverty and be inspired by the gospel to be change agents. My heart is to see a contextually relevant incarnational ministry come to pass in a black African community like Soshanguve. Mavhunga (2011:353) talks about being on the search for “an authentically African standpoint,” and we want to do the same, specifically regarding being good news agents among people living in poverty. On this journey, I find myself asking this question: what type of an African society do we want to become, taking into account African identity, the contribution of the Western world, our Christian identity, and the ecology - the creation of God that we should use in a responsible and sustainable way? As I grapple with

this question, I find my colonised mind standing in my way of proactively participating in the building of an ideal African society.

This is why I find it appropriate to start by talking about colonisation and decolonisation, before I reflect on my colonised mind which is a significant impediment to my implementation of our InnerCHANGE value of context. I will finish this two-part article by sharing about our team's Africanisation of missions with its opportunities and challenges.

## **2. Colonisation and Decolonisation**

### **2.1 Colonialism**

Colonialism is defined as “the control or governing influence of a nation over a dependant country, territory, or people (Dictionary.com 2018).

Onyije and Eboh (2011:42) understand colonialism as “a system of rules which assumes the right of one people to impose their will upon another.” This system inevitably leads to a situation of dominance and dependency, which systematically subordinate those governed by it to an imported culture in social, economic and political life.

Colonisation in its very essence destroys not only the humanity of the colonised, but it also establishes a very unstable foundation of the humanity of the coloniser. It breaks down the self-esteem, self-confidence and the sense of identity of the colonised. It also puts the coloniser in the ungodly role of dehumanising fellow human beings who were created in God's likeness (Wafula et al. 2016:xxiii). Since colonisation is all about domination and imposition, the colonisers of Africa imposed their cultural values and ideologies that we, as black Africans, are still wrestling over whether to adopt them as they are, stay away from them or come up with a hybrid model in order to us to be proactive builders of the ideal society we would like to become.

Some thinkers argued in the past that colonisation helped civilise and Christianise Africa, and that this task was mostly done through missionary schools. This is an implicit argument that colonisation was good for Africa. Terreblanche (2014:353) argues against this viewpoint, saying that the primary task of colonisation was to convert indigenous Africans to Christianity and to inculcate loyalty to indigenous people towards their colonial masters.

Mc Manus (2016:132) believes that it was the intention of “colonialism to affect our psychology in ways that will make us reject” our African indigenous values and get completely tied to Western values, a very ready basis for the exploitation of Africa. An important way to heal from colonialism is to understand and internalise decolonisation.

### **2.2 Decolonisation**

To decolonise is to allow a colony to become self-governing or independent. In Africa, some scholars have advocated for the recovery and promotion of traditional indigenous knowledge systems as an important process in decolonising our minds. They argue that the recovery and maintaining of African indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing contain a web of liberation strategies we could employ as formerly colonised people. Simpson (2004:373) argues that, combined with the political drive toward self-determination, these strategies of decolonisation mark resistance to cultural genocide, vitalise an agenda to rebuild strong and sustainable indigenous national territories, and promote a just relationship with neighbouring

states based on the notions of peace and just coexistence embodied in indigenous knowledge and encoded in the original treaties.

Sherwood (2009:1) views decolonisation as a method required to shift the current paradigm of Western cultural dominance and colonisation's deplorable consequences of amnesia that maintains African indigenous knowledge as second class and unimportant.

Biko (quoted by Mbembe 2007:135-137) was a young man who spent most of his short life thinking about how Black people in South Africa could decolonise their mind in order to actively win for themselves a greater degree of intellectual, political and cultural autonomy. This autonomy was going to birth a sense of solidarity and mutual respect among all the people of South Africa, with the ultimate result being to build a humane society where every member will be valued for who he/she is, and everyone will be part of the building process of an ideal society we all aspire to.

I personally connect the discourse of decolonising missions to our current need to contextualise missions so that it becomes relevant to the people we are called to serve. I am increasingly discovering that one of the main hurdles to the contextualisation of missions in my context of ministry is my own colonised mind.

### **3. My colonised mind**

When I think of a colonised mind, I think of an imprisoned mind, a mind that easily conforms to a dominant narrative and overlooks its own cultural identity. It is a mind that unconsciously and subconsciously rejects our African values and ways and gets tied up to the values of a dominant narrative or the former colonisers. I can identify with this description as a person. Most of my colonised mind has been shaped by other people from my very young age, and I have done a good job at perpetuating it as an adult.

#### **3.1 My upbringing**

I was born and raised in a family of eight children. My parents spoke only French to us. This was very common for Congolese middle class families. The latter saw the fluency in French as the best way to prepare their children for school which used that language only (from crèche to high school in certain areas which had the reputation of providing the best education for children) for education. I was fortunate, though, to also speak Swahili from a young age, because both my parents worked full time and house helpers who did not speak French because of their level of education raised us. They spoke Swahili, which was the common language around, to us. I actually was first fluent in Swahili before I become conversant in French. As a young man, I gained lots of esteem from people with my ability to speak French rather than Swahili or any other African indigenous language.

When I was going through high school, one of my daily prayers and unshaken dream or wish was to get an opportunity to go to university in Europe or North America. People around me who went to school in Europe and North America had the best jobs, and they were the first pick when jobs were available. European and North American education was seen as of better quality than our local or national. I also wanted to have the best education available, and that education wasn't in the Democratic Republic of Congo where I was born.

I did not get the opportunity to go to university in Europe or in North America. I settled for what was available locally. At university, I was taught by some of the best academics in the country. The vast majority of these academics were trained in the West. Very few of them encouraged independent and creative thinking. Most of them encouraged students to exactly

repeat or reproduce what they were taught. Because I wanted to pass and be seen as an intelligent student, I conformed to being a knowledge reproducer and stayed away as much as possible from being a creative and authentic knowledge producer. Looking back at those years, I can see how my mind has been conditioned to copy and reproduce knowledge acquired from someone who is more powerful than me. This way of relating to a higher power has provided safety, security and affirmation from people I work under. This way has also imprisoned, conditioned and colonised my mind in thinking in a certain way: a way that pleases people who have power over me.

In his novel *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe (quoted by Wafula et al. 2016:xxiv) laments the destruction of African civilisation, culture and ways of life by both European colonialists and missionaries. Later on, he reflects upon his own conflicted person as a product of European influence in Nigeria in his book, *Home and Exile* (Achebe 2000). In this book, Achebe sets out on a quest for self-reclamation. I personally can identify with this need for self-reclamation where I will learn to value my African identity and values more than I have so far. This self-reclamation will also stop me from perceiving European and North American value systems as superior to African value systems.

I grew up in the DR Congo and now live in South Africa, countries in which all our lives are saturated by colonial viewpoints inculcated in us from a young age. I have internalised the racial and world view hierarchy of colonisation that has assigned certain roles to different culture groups and instilled in Westerners a sense of superiority and in Black Africans a sense of inferiority (McKaiser 2013:23-24).

### **3.2 Freedom from the pressure to conform**

I am learning to free up my mind and engage it into thinking creatively or out of the box as long as my agenda is to be kingdom like, or to understand in which way decolonisation could be regarded as an element of the Kingdom of Christ. In this process, I am learning to re-educate myself and deconstruct my understanding of what it means to be in a harmonious relationship with people who have power over me. I am learning to decolonise my mind.

Wafula et al. (2016:xxvi) stress that in our current postcolonial Africa, where the Bible has widely been accepted as the supreme rule of faith, particularly in ethics and morality, few indigenous biblical scholars have engaged in critical biblical scholarship, which interrogates the relationship between the Bible and colonialism regarding the issues of language, class, gender, ideology, and human subjectivity. I believe that time has come where we need to interact with the Bible in a way that would free Black Africans up from engaging biblical scholarship only in the acquired language through colonisation such as English, French, Portuguese, Arabic or Spanish. There needs to be freedom from writing to the academic world only, to availing their produced knowledge to ordinary people. In my introduction to the academic world, I once was deeply shocked by a respected university professor when he told me that the primary audience of academic writings is the academic world itself. As I read lots of published books and papers, dissertations and theses, I am realising that so much of what is discussed could benefit ordinary people, my neighbours whom I am coaching to be co-labourers in missions. Yet the style of writing and language of communication keep many of my neighbours from accessing the knowledge-rich academic world. The latter seems to be a set aside club that has set clear rules about what it takes to belong to it and spends less time to grapple with what it means for it to belong to a shared world of intellectuals and ordinary people. The radio talk show host Eusebius McKaiser (2013:6) believes that “some academics cannot write for the public.” He argues that sometimes South African academics do not write clearly, and don’t want the public to understand their ideas. While that claim is slightly

cheeky, he continues: as soon as people understand your jargon, they are able to engage with you and show up the weaknesses in your position or argument. Some academics probably don't want to be engaged or challenged; they don't want to be shown up or exposed! The world sees academics as really clever people. The academia is actually also a safe place for people who are terribly scared of public debate.

Looking at politics in South Africa, today's political power is in the hands of Black people. I believe that their attempts to effect meaningful social changes do not need only to conform to democratic principles learned from the West. Their success will be measured by their ability to contextualise principles of governance learned from different sources so that relevant methods could be applied to bring about the change we all aspire to (Mbembe 2007:144).

As a missions worker, I am gradually learning to deconstruct a lot of my colonised baggage in order to be the person God created me to be. I am aware of the fact that colonialism as an ideology was propagated through education. I am learning to use education to decolonise my mind. In my schooling career, for instance, I learned more about the history and geography of Europe, North America and Asia than Africa. Nowadays, I am intentionally educating myself in the history and geography of Africa, starting from Soshanguve where I live. I know that the colonisers of Africa used their strong powers to introduce a system of education that was so foreign and most irrelevant, whose aim was to ensure that African nations were subjugated and exploited. Education had been accepted worldwide as the gateway to development, but for it to achieve its aim, the content must be tailored to the needs of the society (Onyije and Eboh 2011:41).

From my experience and observation as a tutor, the current South Africa basic education system appears not to have made much progress in shedding previously reified colonial (apartheid system) knowledge to define and determine the knowledge relevant for Black African children. Curricula are deeply seated in the assumption that Euro-centric knowledge is superior to indigenous African knowledge, and this assumption is rife and regarded as truth, because the more Eurocentric you are as a Black African, the better chances you have to land a job. The perception of Eurocentric knowledge as superior has prompted many parents to move their children to former white only public schools and private schools, which seem to have a functional system. But the majority of South African children are still trapped in an under-resourced and dysfunctional system which seem to promote the learning of African indigenous languages and culture. In spite of its good intention of incorporating the latter, because of the system's dysfunctionality township schools still do very little to incorporate the lived experiences of Black African children (Shizha 2006:20-21).

Could we have a well-functioning education system that holistically educates a child in terms of his/her African identity and values as well as other value systems? Absolutely. The government and other stakeholders could put their heads together to figure that out, because education is crucial in every society for the preservation of the lives of the members and the maintenance of the social structure. Under certain circumstances, education also promotes social change and transformation. It is not possible or sustainable for all the township parents to send their children to former white only schools. The constant longing of so many township parents to send their children to former white only schools makes me think of this colonial mind set: "What is White and Western is better than what is Black and African." It also sends a message that quality education is financially expensive. This is where I have some sympathy for the South African students #feesmustfall campaign. I agree with them that the acquisition of quality education should not be the sole privilege of the rich who can afford

our currently expensive tertiary education fees. My opinion on the #feesmustfall campaign taps into my personal push back towards international schools we see all over Africa. While I totally understand why they cater to expat communities so that children could have a consistent educational system even if they have to live in several countries, it is sad to see lots of Black African elite send their children there because this reinforces the mentality that what is Western is superior and what is African is inferior (Walter 1992:261-263). The children of these Black African elite will probably end up going to the West for university and stand a very good chance to become the next leaders of Africa, because they have acquired the “best education” possible. Africa still must fully agree that Western education is the best in the world, because the vast majority of its current leaders studied in the West – and yet excel by their maladministration and mismanagement of their respective countries. Going back to the #feesmustfall campaign, I strongly disagree with the violence carried by students as a means of making a statement about this noble cause. Violence exposes an imprisoned and colonised mind that believes that the best way a build an ideal society is to start destroying the present one. Jesus also describes destruction as the work of Satan, the thief. “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

Our inferiority complex as Black Africans has promoted to this day Eurocentric knowledge as universal, and thus the norm. Western scientific knowledge – produced, universalised and exported to non-Western societies – is still viewed as a vehicle for social change. The whole debate over the democratisation of Africa is testimony to the above-mentioned statement. Some Western countries imposed a regime change in countries such as Libya, Egypt, Democratic Republic of Congo and Ivory Coast with the assumption and strong promise that a democratic government would bring about peace, fairness and a better life for all citizens. It is ironic to witness the opposite of these promises happening in these countries (Shizha 2006:24).

This is a wake-up call for me to realise that bringing to pass a better society for all around me will require more of me than just copying successful models from somewhere else. Raising local missionaries to do incarnational ministry would require a careful and persistent learning posture of making our ministry relevant to our neighbours. I will need to decolonise my mind and my understanding of missions, and be a faithful servant of the kingdom of God rather than a performer who seeks above all his bosses’ approval. My colonised mind has kept me for a long time from internalising and freely implementing InnerCHANGE’s value of context. From the beginning stage of our team in Soshanguve, our founder gave me as the team leader the freedom to contextualise our ministry. But I had the fear of being heretical in trying to be unique. In my upbringing, elderly and experienced people often equated a young person’s display of uniqueness to being a heretic. Also, wisdom was connected to being a “copy-and-paste” kind of a person.

#### **4. InnerCHANGE’s Emphasis on Contextualisation of Missions**

As an order we live by a set of values, and context is one of them. Our value of context reads thus:

“We will mobilize to serve the poor of the world in whatever context that God directs. We understand that poverty comes in a variety of forms and contexts and is not simply defined as a lack of material welfare.”

We believe in being contextually relevant among people living with poverty we serve. John Hayes (2006:113), our founder, stresses that today, as in every generation, “the world

needs Christians who allow themselves to be not only seen and heard, but also touched.” The world doesn’t need more words made fresh, but it “needs more people to live the good news incarnationally, in a way that can be seen, heard and handled.”

Our value of context has helped us understand the great strength of the incarnational model of ministry and its various dimensions. Incarnational ministry works powerfully on four levels – as a model, a method, a message and a spiritual discipline.

#### **a) The model of Christ**

Perhaps the supreme statement of the Incarnation, John declared, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). John added that believers are sent out in the same way that Jesus was sent (John 17:18). As InnerCHANGE staff, we strive to fully be part of the fabric and tissues of neighbourhoods we serve. We fully subscribe to the popular saying: “in South Africa, like South Africans.” We acknowledge that this is a lifelong pursuit ideal for foreign nationals like me.

#### **b) The method**

We believe in reaching out to people in very practical ways. We have also learned while being on the road that one must always earn the right of speaking into our neighbours' lives. Also, one must always earn the right to be heard, and insiders are better than outsiders in communicating good news among a host culture.–Incarnational ministry provides relational leverage that helps us become both cultural insiders and humble learners as we make disciples of Jesus among our neighbours.

#### **c) The message**

As InnerCHANGE staff, we recognise that love is real and is costly. When we move into poor neighbourhoods, we send the message that if love is costly, then those who are the object of such love are worth much. This is especially important to the poor who bear the weight of the world’s low opinion of them in every aspect possible.

#### **d) Spiritual discipline**

Incarnational ministry helps wean us away from self-reliance (our skills and possessions) to God-reliance. Sharing our lives with the least serves as a spiritual fast – a discipline for our personal growth, not as a way of renouncing the world in arid asceticism but as a way of joining with Jesus to embrace the world’s feet and wash them. Spiritual discipline enhances Jesus’ followers’ personal growth by cultivating godly dependence and dethroning consumerism, which distracts from intimacy with God (Hayes 2006:114-120).

Mosala (1989:18) highlights the merit of contextualisation in the gradual creation of the South African society we want to become. He makes a sustained argument that “biblical texts should be read in the context of their production” and in the contexts of reading specific communities. For him, this recognition should lead theologians and missiologists to interrogate the biblical texts for their social class interests and biases. South African theology should be located in the historical and cultural contexts of the people of South Africa. Based on this understanding, he argues, it is the people’s everyday lives that should inform the theological processes and discourses.

A successful contextualisation of missions in Soshanguve would imply a careful and profound internalisation and implementation of Jesus’ new commandment to his disciples:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

We would like to show to our neighbours that we love them so dearly that we would love to partner with them in order to love other people around us. The implementation of the above-mentioned biblical passage has driven a lot of our philosophy and heart to serve our neighbours in the township of Soshanguve. Our neighbours are nowadays our primary co-labourers.

## **5. InnerCHANGE’s Africanisation of Missions**

As a team, our attempt to decolonise missions has led us to focus a lot of our effort and energy to raising capacity from within our context of life and ministry. As a global order, InnerCHANGE exists to make disciples of Jesus and develop local leaders who are marked by merciful action, transformative contemplation and prophetic justice. As a local team, we are intentionally focusing on developing local leaders who will partner with us to make disciples of Jesus among our neighbours. Whenever I pictured our context of life and ministry, Luke 10:2 came to mind:

“He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field’.”

We, in fact, need more workers (teammates) to serve our community and to see a movement of ordinary people who are agents of missions in their places of residence. In order for this to happen, we have realised that we need to raise capacity from within our community, whereas in the past, we primarily relied on teammates coming from the west. We felt led to tap into the emerging leadership of the township and dedicated our resources to develop them. We started an apprenticeship for these emerging leaders because we wanted to train them as incarnational ministers and community transformation agents.

My personal motivation behind the designing of this apprenticeship was based on my personal journey as a leader. “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17), is very true about my life. God has brought in my life people who have spoken with authority, wisdom and compassion that moulded me into the leader I am today. My personal journey towards leadership has led me to encourage our team to live out 2 Timothy 2 1-2 in our involvement with these emerging leaders:

“You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”

The heart behind the implementation of the above-mentioned passage is the belief that for InnerCHANGE to have a meaningful and sustainable impact in a context such as Soshanguve, we need to agree with Nehemiah 2:17-18:

“Then I said to them, ‘You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.’ I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, ‘Let us start rebuilding.’ So they began this good work.”

Our goal is to build our community with our neighbours. Our investment in our community’s emerging leaders is so that we could have a bigger capacity to build our

community and make more disciples of Jesus who are also community development and transformation agents. I believe that sustainable incarnational ministry in a poor community such as Soshanguve should start by things being done for the community like InnerCHANGE did the first few years of its life in Soshanguve, then move to being done with the community like we are learning to do now, so that ultimately ministry could be done by the community itself like we are starting to see many of our emerging leaders lead ministry initiatives in our community.

The reflection on my personal experience of being sharpened by other human beings led me to a deep understanding of Mark 1:16-17: “As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’”

This passage says that Jesus walked, saw Simon and Andrew, and invited them to come and be part of his circle. This example is changing my understanding of what it means to recruit co-labourers. Now I am learning to walk in our neighbourhood and invite people to come and be part of Jesus’s movement through InnerCHANGE. This passage also shows that Jesus knew that Simon and Andrew’s fishing skills were assets to build on to raise human capacity for the kingdom of God. As a team, we also see neighbours as assets and strong potentials to build sustainable incarnational ministry among the poor. One of our jobs is to tap into these assets.

We are learning to exhort our neighbours in telling them that the rock upon which God will transform our community from the inside out is like what Jesus told Peter, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on **this rock** I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18).

We therefore encourage our neighbours to actively be involved in serving their community so that it could indeed be transformed. Colonisation and apartheid taught Black Africans that we are not capable of influencing our destiny. Someone else, the oppressor, was there to do that for us. Our process of decolonising our world would mean us learning to be active agents of our own destiny. Biblical principles help us to decolonise our minds in order to become true change agents as Black Africans. This is why I have come to understand the gospel as the good news of Jesus proclaimed and visibly lived out. For me, the best way to explain and portray the gospel as good news is through how well it is lived out. InnerCHANGE is developing emerging community leaders who will both proclaim and visibly live out the gospel everywhere they live.

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