

**“Is It Post-modern, or Is It Just the Real Thing?”  
-- Challenging Inter-cultural Mission - A Parable<sup>1</sup>**

Jim Harries, Ph.D.  
Kima International School of Theology, PO Box 75, Maseno, Kenya

**Published in “Contextualization” section [www.GlobalMissiology.org](http://www.GlobalMissiology.org) April 2011**

**ABSTRACT**

Difficulties in inter-cultural translation that remain concealed if language use is devoid of context become startlingly evident when different sports are taken to represent different cultures. Widespread tensions these days common in a Third World that is increasingly dominated by the West are illustrated using a ‘parable’ in which dissimilar cultures are represented by cricket and by football (soccer). Lessons learned from the parable include: the impossibility of translation between cultures; the influence of ‘power’ on translation; problems in African scholarship using Western languages; the way English is undermined through its status as international language; how racism is aggravated; the inappropriateness of subsidised foreign intervention; issues in comparing the roles of ‘referees’ (pastors); how lies are propagated; and the relationship between specific traditions and the overall orientation of a people. Recent difficulties in inter-cultural communication are shown to arise from the use of modern communication media. Theology is found to be a singular and exemplary mode of effective intercultural communication.

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally presented at the Toronto School of Theology, Toronto, Canada at 3.00 pm, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2010. Location: Main lecture hall of the Faculty of Theology. The Cardinal Flahiff Basilian Center, 95 ST Joseph Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1J4, Canada. Response was by Prof. John Dadosky of Regis college, Toronto.

## INTRODUCTION

This article is about ‘how to prepare to do mission’ rather than about ‘how to do mission’. The latter is learned, I believe, on the field. Although concerned with mission to Africa, the article aims to speak to Westerners and perhaps only indirectly to Africans. The reader is assumed to have a basic working knowledge of the sports of football (soccer – that represents ‘the West’) and cricket (standing for ‘Africa’).

Sometimes parables are best left without comment. Perhaps this would be the best strategy in this case? On balance though, so as to provoke further thought and discussion, allow me to explicate some of the implications that I see for mission and development activities engaged by the West in Africa today that arise from this parable-cum-allegory, in which ‘football’ represents the West and ‘cricket’ Africa.<sup>2</sup> This commentary is found in the red text interspersed through the parable. Further exploration of the meaning of the parable is found in part 2.

Football and cricket are usually played on open fields with spectators watching from surrounding platforms. Real life games are a little less clear than this, and are played in the midst of the helter-skelter of normal life. Imagine, as you read this allegory, the games of football and cricket being played while all spectators are on the field, and enjoying snacks, talking in groups, relieving themselves and generally being busy and entertained (like at an open market or a mediaeval showground) as the games go on around them ...

### 1) An Inter-Sport Parable<sup>3</sup>

*There were two friends. One called Football was a soccer player, but the other called Cricket loved cricket. One would rant about his soccer, and the other ranted about cricket. Everyone was happy. Nobody understood what the other was saying. God looked on; sometimes approving and sometimes disapprovingly; often imploringly. God dedicated his people (referees and umpires) to encourage players to be true to their game – and to Him. While it is true that the referees and empires were there to uphold the rules of the different games, rule-upholding was only a means to the real aim – for play to be truly fulfilling.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Note that as in all allegories, the application of this parable is limited. For example, there is nothing inherent in either the game of football or cricket that is said to represent the West as against Africa.

<sup>3</sup> The text of the parable is given in italics, and the commentary on it in regular script.

*One day Globalisation came along. He said we should understand each other. He told us how to do 'translation'. "What you do" he said "is that you find a word in the other person's language that has the same meaning as a word in your language".*

*That seemed like a good idea, so they did it.*

*Cricket said "we have something we throw"*

*and Football said "we have something we kick", and they called it ball. They rejoiced to find that the one word worked in both languages.*

*Football had something called offside, and explained that it meant players shouldn't be there when the ball came.*

*"Aha" said Cricket "that must be 'boundary', as no fielder will go beyond the boundary when the ball is in play".*

*"We have something called goal" said Football "and the ball should go into the goal."*

*"Aha" said Cricket "we have something called the stumps, and the ball is aimed at the stumps."*

*Then "we have something called handball" said Football "which is when you touch the ball with your hands."*

*"Aha, that must be catch" said Cricket.*

*"We have something called half-time" added Football, "when players take a break".*

*"That must be the end of an over" said Cricket.*

*"We have something called 'run with the ball'" said Football.*

*"That must be getting a run" said Cricket, recognising that sound.*

*So the conversation continued, and by careful discussion the two sports enthusiasts were able to write up a dictionary called the Cricket to Football and Football to Cricket Dictionary. Here are some excerpts from that dictionary:*

<u>Cricket Word</u>	<u>Football Word</u>	<u>Cricket Word</u>	<u>Football Word</u>
<i>a run</i>	<i>run with the ball</i>	<i>over</i>	<i>half-time</i>
<i>Ball</i>	<i>ball</i>	<i>runs</i>	<i>goals</i>
<i>boundary</i>	<i>offside</i>	<i>spin</i>	<i>corner</i>
<i>Bowl</i>	<i>pass</i>	<i>stumps</i>	<i>goal</i>
<i>Catch</i>	<i>handball</i>	<i>throw</i>	<i>throw in</i>
<i>fall over</i>	<i>sliding tackle</i>	<i>umpire</i>	<i>referee</i>
<i>fielder</i>	<i>forward</i>	<i>wicket keeper</i>	<i>goal keeper</i>
<i>illegal bowl</i>	<i>volley</i>	<i>(point of non-comprehension)</i>	<i>header</i>

*The two were very pleased with themselves for this achievement and had their dictionary published. Some things were hard to understand – for example Cricket could not believe it when he was told of a header, so he decided just to ignore that word. Some words were easy to understand – like the umpire and the referee. (There was a movement at the time to do away with umpires and referees. After all – they contributed little or nothing to the game. But when they were removed, the game always deteriorated.) Cricket was a bit puzzled because in football evidently running with the ball was the same as scoring a goal. Evidently the stumps were the same as a run.*

One very evident point we can learn here regards the impossibility of translation. The reason translation is impossible is little to do with linguistics, but much to do with the context in which language is used. Cricket-speak just won't translate into football-speak, and vice versa. This is because cricket and football are different games. It is as simple as that. On this basis, the widespread assumption regarding the possibility of translation in the course of intercultural communication is misleading. To use Bearth's words: "the prevailing attitude of trust in the translation paradigm as the panacea to cross-cultural development communication ... is ... totally misplaced" (Bearth 2004).

This point is so obvious that it would seem it should not need making. Language is referential. Words refer to things. If these things are not familiar to the 'hearer' of certain words, then no way can they understand what is being said, and similarly no way can the same be said in 'their language'.

*Soon the two friends were able to try out their new found skill called 'translation'. The cricket player had observed a match. A fast bowl nicked the stumps then was caught by the wicket keeper, sending that batsman out after just four overs. The new batsman hit the ball for six but the ball was caught by a fielder before it reached the boundary so he did not get his six runs. When the cricket player met his friend he said "A fast pass nicked the goal then was caught by the goal keeper, sending that player out after just four half-times. The new player kicked the ball but it was handball by a forward so he did not get six goals."*

*Cricket's pleasure at succeeding in football-speak was however cut short by the angry strained expression on Football's face. "That is terrible and you don't know what you are talking about" said Football. He would have none of that. Instead he called his friend Globalisation, who agreed with him that because football was a more powerful sport than cricket, he should teach Cricket to speak properly. "There are right ways and wrong ways of speaking" said Football. "You can't say "fast pass"; you only have one half-time. Only rarely are there six goals in a match and certainly not from one kick!" Feeling reprovved, Cricket from then on learned football ways of talking and whenever he would describe a cricket match to the footballer he would describe it in a football-way, regardless of what was actually happening. The referee was happy; the umpire was perplexed.*

The relationship between translation and power becomes very evident in the parable. Because football is the dominant sport, it becomes the prerogative of cricket to translate in such a way as to please football, and not vice versa. Cricket represents the Two-Thirds World, or more specifically Africa. Before Globalisation came along, cricket (Africa) was 'doing OK', but there was much room for improvement through the training of umpires (African pastors). The notion that there should be wider communication, proved attractive. The production of the dictionary was an interesting exercise that raised levels of contact between footballers (Westerners) and cricketers (Africans). Problems did not become apparent in the course of its theoretical discussion such as when the dictionary was written, but in the course of implementation. Globalisation's friendship with football then sealed the fate of cricket!

Dictionaries do a fine job, in theory. The problems arise in practice – when translations are supposed to work, and they do not. The failure to perceive this non-working of dictionary translations has been and continues to be catastrophic for Africa. The continent is expected to run itself by using European languages; something that is practically speaking impossible.

*Because football was such a fast growing sport, and Football was making an extremely generous contribution to Globalisation's salary, Globalisation tended to hang out with Football a lot, and would agree with him on most things. The translation business was getting more and more difficult for Football to understand. Every time he asked his friend Cricket to talk to him, he came up with the most incredible and extremely un-football-like statements. So, Cricket would say "there are six goals in one half-time", or "the ball can hit the goal if you do not run fast enough then you are out." Cricket seemed to think that one match could go on for days, and he didn't like the idea of having players run up and down the field. He also seemed to think that hitting the ball with one's head was inappropriate.*

*This latter became an enormous issue for Cricket. He refused to accept that someone could head the ball and survive. The umpire agreed with him. For many days Football and Cricket disputed this issue. Eventually Cricket convinced even Globalisation about this, thus forcing Football to revise the rules of his game! From there on heading the ball was considered an offence, and any player doing it gave a free kick to the other side. Football was extremely upset about this. But there was little he could do about it. Globalisation said it was important to listen to the poor, such as Cricket had by that time become, so that was that.*

The situation described in this parable illustrated by the 'practice of heading the ball', shows that there is a kick-back effect from the Third World to the West. Having to ban headers presumably leaves the game of football to be of less value, utility or pleasure than it had been previously. The fact that the 'poor' are less powerful does not mean that they have no power. But it does mean that their power may be inappropriately expressed – there was actually no need at all for headers to be banned in football.

Having to take care that English not 'offend' people of other cultures is certainly reducing its utility for its home speakers. This undoubtedly complex limitation of language is having a profound if hard-to-grasp impact. By way of contemporary example, one can consider a term such as 'primitive'. Once used to describe those who are different, when English became international in scope 'others' became unhappy with being so addressed. 'Foreign' and 'primitive' practices had to be referred to as if they were homely and contemporary. From thereon academia had to ignore differences.

This has massive implications for theology. Sensitive areas of people's lives are frequently 'religious' in nature. Some of the values accumulated and held deeply over many centuries in 'Christian Europe' were bound to clash with those outside of the continent. In the era of globalisation (Globalisation) these have been fudged. As a result many are no longer

recognised even in Europe. Values, doctrines, teachings, principles and fundamental tenets of life once recognised by all as foundational to modern prosperity have been redefined as ‘grey areas’ in order to accommodate non-Westerners (Weber 1930). As a result developing nations are deprived of the very knowledge and understanding that once transformed European nations. Much of theology has gone this way, so that the West is left with secularism – a religion apparently built on a positivistic understanding arising from science which it wrongly claims to be universal.

*Football realised that there was something wrong with Cricket. Sometimes he would talk to Globalisation about it. “There is a deep problem with Cricket” said Football to Globalisation one day. “He just does not seem to understand what football is about. Whenever you want to talk to him about football, he says the weirdest of things”. Globalisation in the course of long conversations began to make plans to take Cricket to see a psychiatrist, then to have him admitted into a detention centre for those with psychiatric disorders. Referee’s and umpire’s protests were ignored. All of a sudden, when this news leaked out, there was a public uproar! The problem was that Football’s supporters felt it was wrong to condemn Cricket like this. Cricket was also upset by the notion that he ought to be in an asylum. Some of Football’s colleagues were arrested and lost their jobs because of these suggestions. Laws were passed declaring it illegal to suggest that Cricket was inferior to Football, mentally deranged, or different in any consequential way. People continued to think such things, but they no longer said them.*

The question of racism arises in our parable when Football accuses Cricket of being mentally deranged. The accusation is clearly not true. The way the accusation is handled however is not to investigate what underlies it but to conceal the issue. The accusation is assumed implicitly by Globalisation to be ‘true’, but as unhelpful, so ‘difference’ is covered over and identification (never mind conscious bridging) of the cultural gap rendered illegal.

While this solves the immediate problem, it leaves the larger issue intact. The fact that a different ‘sport’ is being played (the ‘culture’ is different) is left unaddressed. Addressing it has become illegal. Adding to this the fact that publicly acclaimed ‘role models’ for Cricketers’ people are all of people playing football, we have a situation that seriously impedes the finding of a resolution to the abuse of language and translation that is going on.

Anti-racism legislation in the West, I suggest, conceals from view issues that ought to be addressed: Non-Western peoples are required to continue the pretence that they are no different from people in the West. As a result no course of change from where they are to where they might like to be is even open to discussion. Because quantum leaps do not happen

(Speckman 2007:18) they remain dominated, from outside and stand still; protégés to the dominant Western way of life (Tshehla 2002:19); condemned for ever as it were to second class status.

*Following much discussion, Globalisation and Football together came up with a new resolution on language policy. They called Cricket and told him what they had resolved. On hearing this, Cricket was overjoyed! They had decided that from thereon, because of the difficulties resulting from Cricket's ways of talking, Cricket would stop using the Cricket to Football and Football to Cricket Dictionary altogether! Instead what would happen is that Cricket would be taught how to use proper football-talk, and would use football-talk all the time when talking either with Football or with Globalisation. That way, it was hoped people would stop laughing when he spoke, and (in short) he would stop saying daft things. From this time on Cricket would use cricket language only while actually playing cricket. Whenever asked to report on a cricket match he would use football-talk. He would not translate like he used to do. Instead now he would use proper football phrases. Instead of saying "there were 150 runs as against 121", and translating 'runs' by 'goals' he would say "they beat them 2:1". When a fielder caught a ball and the batsman was out, he would simply say "that was a great pass!" If the ball hit the boundary, he would say "what a shot at goal"! By all means he would make very sure that no outsider ever thought that his team was playing anything but football.*

For cricket to use the 'right language' as far as football was concerned, was clearly to use the 'wrong language' in respect to cricket. That is, those Africans who speak in a way that pleases the West are only able to do so by distorting, ignoring, corrupting or lying about the African context. The accuracy of African scholarly writing that the West is pleased with should immediately be suspect. For a text to be accurate in its description of Africa it must be 'wrong' in respect to Western academia. Its being so 'wrong' for football of course does not guarantee that it is 'right' for cricket, but it means that it is possible that it be so. As for the cricketer forced to describe a cricket match using football speak, so it is usually (if not always) in the interests of an African reporting to the West to re-invent Africa so as to please. Not to do so is to be passed off as ignorant and to lose out on lucrative links with wealthy donors. This incongruous paradox must be overcome or bypassed in order to allow serious scholarship about Africa. The main evident way of doing this, is for scholarship about Africa to be in African languages (discussions of cricket to be in cricket language).

*The playing of cricket, meanwhile, was getting confused. Young players liked to take the cricket ball and kick it around the pitch instead of returning it to the bowler to continue*



*the match. An increasingly popular bowling style was to hold the ball in both hands and throw it over one's head. Players would argue with the umpire. There was a general level of discontent about the small size of the ball and some teams used larger balls. Some fielders were killed because (before heading was banned) they tried hitting the ball with their heads. Some batsmen began to try-out a new version of cricket – in which they took their objective as being to strike the ball in such a way as to hit the stumps on the other side of the green with the ball.*

Unfortunately one can say on the cricket pitch that it is useless activities that otherwise received international acclaim are not considered useless. Clever spin bowls, a heroic catch, a fast run from one wicket to another, a batsman's just clipping the ball with his bat and being caught out – all the kinds of action that can make cricket thrilling – go unnoticed. What draws attention is the two-handed overhead bowl, the dribbling of the ball by the fielders when they should be throwing it back to hit the stumps, and the player who hits the ball in such a way as to knock over the stumps on the far side of the green!

This is what happens when Westerners use their money and their control of Western languages to intervene in Africa. What they promote is almost certainly irrelevant to the basic orientation of people's lives (getting runs in the case of cricket), but African people (cricketers) will put up with it (and speak in favour of it) if it is funded. Meanwhile such activities detract from the 'main game' going on, prevent the development of the main game, and occupy Westerners (footballers) to the point that they satisfy their consciences that they have done what they can and need not trouble to look any more closely at what is happening on the ground.

Unfortunately, (or fortunately) – I suggest that there is no straightforward *non-thinking* way in which a 'cricket match' can be adjusted and changed to become a 'football match', that does not bring chaos. Football and cricket are two different games. Even if (as is widely assumed) football (i.e. Western) culture is better than cricket (i.e. African) culture, this does not mean that chaos is a better option than African culture. It is pointless to tell people to 'stop their culture, do nothing, and learn a new one' as if they are a blank slate. The old will always influence the new; and this will be in a major way. An intense forced advocacy of what is unfamiliar onto a people who do not have the 'tools' to appropriate it threatens the sanctity of their community. A people's survival can be seriously threatened in the process of transition from one sport to another (if such a transition is even possible). Spectators are no longer interested in coming. There is a serious danger of massive starvation

of cricket players (Africans) ... moral standards can fall ... we can be “eroding the autonomy of the native language-culture” (Steiner 1998:494).

Alternative models of development and change are desperately needed. The subsidy of football in cricket-land for no other reason than that ‘football is better than cricket’, needs to cease. Removal of subsidy from football may give people a semblance of truly free choice. If this process ends up killing cricket (Third World cultures), it will only do so when a functional alternative is in place. In other words –African ways of life should be encouraged to continue. That is, cricket needs to be recognised for what it is. Those cricketers who would like to do so can make an effort to learn football language if they so desire. To insist that football language dominate cricket, as at the moment, is inhuman.

*When footballers realised that cricket was falling into disarray they volunteered to help. They invited cricket players to take football training. The football-education sector in cricket-land was expanded. More and more cricketers were taking training in football. As a result more and more fielders were dribbling with the ball, double-handed overhead bowls had become normal, ball size continued to increase, aiming for the stumps was rising in popularity – at times it seemed to have greater importance than getting runs. Of course, footballers remained unaware of the changes going on, because by this time reports of cricket matches were always given in football-speak.*

Teaching cricketers how to play football is of minimal help to the playing of cricket. Although at an ‘abstract level’ principles may be transferable – such as those of fitness, keeping an eye on the ball, communicating with fellow players – the application of such principles will be very different in one sport than in the other. The acknowledgement on the part of cricketers of the help they are getting to play ‘football’ (as it is supposed that they are playing football) is these days almost entirely an outcome of the subsidy that comes with the training.<sup>4</sup>

*These procedures began to get overwhelmingly complex for umpires. A few powerful footballers, having listened to the words of Globalisation began to set up schools of referology designed for umpires. Although there were some basic Institutes of Umpire Training, these could not hope to stand up to these new schools set up throughout cricket land to teach referology to advanced levels using football-speak. Increasing numbers of umpires learned referology – even to advanced levels.*

---

<sup>4</sup> Or the outside setting up and control of the football match.

*Football continued to be a bit concerned about Cricket. He was saying all the right things. That was wonderful and quite an improvement; Football was extremely impressed by it and encouraged him to continue. But there was something missing. When Cricket talked to him; a certain spark was missing. Explanations were tired and a bit listless. So Football began to think on how to put this right.*

*Cricket had been referring to those responsible for guiding their match as 'referee'. But there was another old name that they used to use long ago called umpire. This latter was their own original name that matched with their way of life. So it was agreed that cricket should use that original word umpire, even when speaking football speak. Umpire, it was said, indeed is the same as referee!*

*It is well known by some that in cricket an umpire stands in one spot, and his word is final. In football, on the other hand, the referee runs around, and players argue with him. Cricket was told by Football; 'let's talk about the role of umpire in a match'. This caused some consternation to Cricket. Cricket had been happy to translate, and was ready to tell Football all that he wanted to hear, but now Football, in talking about umpire was touching a tender spot. Cricket wanted to explain what umpire did and who he was. But he could not! If he were to say "the umpire stands still in one place" that would not have made sense at all, as how can a referee stand in one place yet the action in a football match moves up and down the pitch? How can he say that the umpire's decision is never disputed by players when time after time football observed players arguing with the referee?*

*Cricket was left with the delicate task of trying to explain to Football that umpire, even though he is referee, is not the same as referee. That explanation did not seem to make sense. So he explained some things that umpire was not exactly. He explained that umpire was directed by God as was referee. A new study arose, called the study of God's role in cricket – or Crickekan Theology, based on the strange combination of football-speak words that Cricket and his colleagues sometimes used, and the peculiarities of their way of playing football. Many who participated in this study considered themselves to have reached great depths of understanding. Football's friends (who had time and resources for writing) wrote books and articles about Crickekan Theology. Few realised, that actually they had learned how cricket umpire might be understood in the realm of football, which was very different from how he operated in cricket. But, cricket was no longer visible, as it was always reported using football-speak.*

*Meanwhile cricket-play continued to deteriorate. The crowds that used to come and watch were no longer to be found. Spectators were tired of watching constant verbal abuse*

*of the umpire, and the dribbling of the ever growing size of the ball seemed pointless relative to the rest of the game. Runs were rarely achieved – there was little incentive to get more than one or two per match, and anyway players were concentrating on striking the ball so as to hit the stumps on the opposite side of the green. Poverty became the norm, food was short, people were listless, and cricket diseases were prevalent. At the same time, the number of cricketers rose constantly. This appeared to be because cricketers could pretend that they were footballers. This so pleased wealthy footballers that they would give them money. A select few would be taken to football-land to play football. They generally did not do too well there, but Football and his friends were reluctant to concede this because they were wary of being accused of being racist. Some, after acquiring proficiency in football would return to cricket-land with their 4WDs and encourage cricketers to take cricket-speech more seriously. But cricketers in cricket land laughed at them. They knew where their bread was buttered.*

*Globalisation decided to take action. He called upon the football teams to come up with a strategy that came to be called the Millennium Football Project. Leaders identified the problems of cricket, and sought to relieve them through massive injections of finance. The problems were in the soil, in the grass, in the rain, in the stadium, in the taps, in the health-care system and in the access to clothes and food, they decided. They set about resolving these problems. They decided they would resolve at least half of them before 15 years had passed. Many footballers gave generously. Indeed, the football standard of cricket rose as a result.*

Cricketers' saying that the encouragement of the game of football is 'good for them', is a limited truth. What is good that emerges from it is financial investment from football-land into cricket-land. The lie, however, is maintained – for very good pragmatic (but morally dubious) reasons. Kant suggests that lies are not good for society, because once accepted as normal, it is impossible to tell whether someone is telling lies or the truth. Hence from Kant we have an: "obligation to tell the truth under any and all imaginable circumstances" (Wellbourne 1998). The inability to distinguish truth from lies fragments and destabilises. African societies have been and are being fragmented into ever smaller self-interested entities seeking links with the West (football) at the cost of orientation to the common good (a team spirit in cricket). The promotion of lies has an all-round negative impact on society.

So called 'superstitious fears' keep people working for their own common good when they have to. It is sad indeed if we are right to say that foreign intervention is leaving superstition as the main 'glue' remaining to hold African society together; but this may be true. This quote from Simiyu (2009:40) is interesting: "In fact, the saying that Westerners are

individualistic and Africans are communal needs to be interrogated. The prevailing culture in fact shows that Westerners are individualistic in personal affairs and communal in their approach to public service. Africans on the other hand are individualistic in the way they approach public affairs and communal in the way they approach personal affairs.”

*Some engaged in the debate as to which traditions should or ought to be left out, and which ones continued. Many were against the wearing of shin pads by batsmen to protect their legs. Some felt that there was no need for the bails that lies across the top of the stumps. White clothing had long been done away with, in favour of shorts and a shirt – the latter having a number on it. Studded shoes became very popular. Round/oval pitches were replaced by rectangular ones for the sake of efficiency. There was intense debate as to whether the failure of the bowler to bring his feet together while bowling, which just seemed wrong, could be justified simply on the basis that it increased the speed of the bowl.*

Sometimes thinking in respect to African traditions asks ‘which traditions can helpfully be abandoned’ and ‘which ones ought to be maintained’. Our parable gives the lie to this approach. For a start, cricket traditions ought to be evaluated with respect to the game of cricket and not the game of football. The appropriateness of the maintenance of particular African traditions in the modern world will be considered by Africans in relation to African ways of life, but by Westerners in respect to Western ways of life. Because adoption of ‘Western ways’ (football practices) will be in the context of existing ways of life (cricket) the deep nature of football will be transformed.

*One day another football player decided to spend time with Cricket. He was startled by what he discovered, once he had learned cricket-language and shared in their match. Cricket was not playing football! When he told his foot-balling colleagues about this they laughed and told him to get lost. It was clear to them that football was the way forward. Who cares if two-thirds of the world are playing cricket?*

The most crying need arising from the above parable, is that for an overall perspective that takes into account the purpose of life (of a game) and not only processes – such as a good pass, or a fast bowl. Although a fast bowl is a worthy aim in cricket, it is only a sub-aim in relation to the overall objective of acquiring runs. Going even further than this – it is insufficient to say that cricket is about the acquiring of runs – because runs themselves have no utility outside of the game of cricket. The acquiring of runs, to be fully honest, is an objective setup so as to bring certain satisfaction (utility) to society as a whole by providing a game that is pleasant / challenging / entertaining / satisfying to watch or share in.

It is this overall perspective that considers the wellbeing of mankind as a whole that is these days missing, and that is rightfully the realm of theology. It is the theologian who goes beyond game-strategy, short term objectives or even overall objectives of a match. The Christian theologian's God – centred view takes account of the totality of human existence and is a desperately needed to counter the immediate pragmatics of politicians, businessmen and even philanthropists.

This takes us to the thrust of this article. A theologian's pre-occupation with God must not and cannot be to the exclusion of specific human contexts. Far from it – he (she) needs to recognise and engage *with* those contexts. Not to make an effort to do so, is to remain in effect with one (the football) context. There is no one context of language for theology. Theological teaching is not immune to inter-cultural difference. To pretend that it is, is to miss massive opportunities for forwarding the Gospel in the world today. Yes; the great truths of Scripture and tradition are there. They need to be worked on in and *from within* those new contexts. Only thus can (must) theologians save us from the current global madness outlined in this parable. Thus I suggest that; post-modernism should be the theologian's best friend.

## **2) Solution to the Dilemma's of Inter-cultural Communication in Mission's Context**

The parable above illustrates the kinds of difficulties faced in the course of inter-cultural communication. Sports have been used to illustrate the difficulties, because it is not easy to articulate real-life examples. This is not because they are not there; there are infinite numbers of them, but because they remain out of view to the native-English speaking world. Today's 'solution' to these difficulties, whereby one people are allowed to overwhelmingly and comprehensively dominate another, is no solution.

This problematic is greatly aggravated by recent technological advances. The communication revolution has fuelled globalisation in an era of massive economic disparities. Wealth and technology help the West to spread its influence *from a distance*.

- The domination of some people's by others is not new in the world (Nandy 2010:xi).
- The nature of domination is new: "Modern colonialism won its great victories ... through its ability to create secular hierarchies incompatible with the traditional order" (Nandy 2010:ix).

- The way domination is brought about today *is* new: Before the invention of print and radio, languages were spread by *real people*. Those real people engaging with other real people inevitably resulted in a depth of human interaction that raised levels of understanding of complexities on both sides. We could say that language learning was holistic. Language twisted and changed in shape as it went. No doubt there have always been misunderstandings, probably many resolved eventually in war, but there has never before been the prolonged widespread subsidising of ignorance (telling people right ways to talk and write even if they make no sense to them, cf. telling cricketers to use football-speak) that we find in the world today (compare Nandy 2010:xi). Such has arisen because language can nowadays be spread using media that do not require the personal involvement of the owners of the language. “The West is now everywhere ... in structures and in minds” but not in person (Nandy 2010:xi) thanks to the “the technologized bureaucrat” (Nandy 2010:xvi).

The non-Western world seems to be a messed up place. At least this applies to Africa in which ‘things have fallen apart’ (Achebe 1958), and in terms of the West’s relationship to Africa. Our parable illustrates this well. Cricket and football are, in cricket-land, profoundly confused. The game being played is a seemingly pointless mixture of both, the real aim of which is to convince those in football-land to part with their money. ‘Useless’ advice (how to dribble with the ball) is heralded as ‘wonderful’ by cricketers as a result. Efforts at ensuring accountability for the use of funds are a sheer mockery adding to the pretentious chaos. Advice is accepted and a show made of its implementation regardless of its real value or otherwise. Things seem to be hopeless.

It is worth pointing out that many Western projects in the Third World today can only ‘work’ as they do even in a basic way as a result of the absence of Westerners, or in-so-far as Westerners are absent. That is, the presence of a Westerner would profoundly affect the way a project is run, or the way it is reported. In Africa at least, the ending of colonialism has seen Westerners withdraw further and further from the coalface. They have chosen to ‘hand-over’ to Africans (cricketers) the evaluation of football (Western) processes in their homelands (cricket-lands). Projects continue because Africans (cricketers) talk in such a way as to please

footballers, in a way sometimes little to do with ‘truth’. That is, even if one ignores the fact that the projects are trying to make better football players out of cricketers!<sup>5</sup>

There is a way out of this trap. The way is found in the realm of theology. The basis needed for helpful inter-cultural communication to succeed is none other than understanding God. It is in providing umpire / referee (pastoral) training – that relates to specific cricket / football contexts. It is about exploring what God wants to do in contexts, which is discovered when these contexts are carefully examined from the inside with reference to local-language Scriptures, in respect to local issues, from a dynamic of local social interaction, in perspective to the worldwide and historical church.

I am suggesting that human behaviour is profoundly influenced by what is unseen and poorly understood; a *massive* realm that is governed by God.

The word of God that I refer to is the Christian word of God. Spreading the word of God, as spreading anything else, is open to abuse. It can be ‘abused’ if it is spread by power and force rather than by love and persuasion. Power and force may have a role in its spread, but they are never enough alone, because adoption requires intelligent appropriation. Two means these days widely used to spread God’s word to the Third World (cricketers) are by using football-speak, and through ‘buying’ cricketers using the surplus of wealth derived from football. This produces yes-men, lies, deception and corruption, even in the realm of theology.

Some Westerners are needed to buck this system. Those who will be promoting not football but God’s word, and those ready to do so using cricket language, and without luring people through using financial inducements. That is, missionaries from football-land who will carry out their ministries using linguistic and other resources acquired in cricket-land. They have a difficult task ahead of them – because of the terrible reputation that those from football-land have by this time acquired. A reputation for building every relationship outside of the West (football-land) through the use of money and the expectation of money, a pre-occupation with their own culture (football) and language, and a tendency to ignore God.

Football-speak is widely used in cricket-land. Some footballers take that as a reason for using football-speak even when they are in cricket-land. They would not do so if they realised how football-speak is used to follow the contours of (a corrupted form of) cricket in cricket-land. Because when football-speak is used in cricket-land it is rooted in cricket playing and cricket-speak, a footballer wanting to discuss what is going on in cricket-land

---

<sup>5</sup> There is no need for African people to seek to be immoral. Lies and compromises on truth, frankly, in parts of the continent are forced onto them by circumstances, especially widespread use of English.



must learn cricket-speak and learn it in a cricket-way (not from the football-cricket dictionary).

What remains for a missionary to share that has not been corrupted by post-colonial history – is God. God is above human affairs and human corruption. He is a ‘third party’. My sharing about what God has done is not boasting (except boasting “in the Lord” which is legitimate, according to Paul; 1 Corinthians 1:31, NIV). It is not telling of ‘my’ people, or ‘my’ achievements of ‘my’ capability, or ‘my’ expertise – but it is about ‘Him’. He who is the God of all in a way that no language, process, technology, or secular project can ever be. A Christian missionary knows everything, and at the same time nothing. He is everything, perhaps in a sense, but also nothing. While in some ways strong, the nature of his task leaves him in other ways profoundly, innately and structurally weak and vulnerable. This weakness should oblige him to be humble.

What a Christian missionary carries is not seen. It is not a tree, or a medicine, or money, or a concise book of rules. God, we believe, is no more in one place than in another. So a Christian missionary takes a message, as exemplified by Paul’s preaching in Athens, of the ‘unknown god’ (Acts 17:23), who is already in the midst of the people. Bediako goes so far as to say Jesus was already in Africa (Bediako 2006), in relation to mission to that continent, before the missionaries came.

I would go so far as to suggest that *the only* message that can legitimately and non-exploitatively be carried inter-culturally is a ‘religious’ message. The gospel is uniquely tuned in to inter-cultural communication. Certainly by far the best means of intercultural communication is that of the Gospel. This should be at the core; even if other types of intervention follow in due course. Inter-cultural communication about faith can help to lay the moral and spiritual foundations on which a people can continue to build.

Modernism told us that translation is possible and that inter-cultural communication is straightforward. The modern project for the world has been one of spreading Western languages, Western technologies, and increasingly Western money. It has assumed that as a result ‘development’ will take hold. But “the consensus that aid has failed is nearly universal among those who look at the data” says Schleifer (2009:380). The modern project has failed, and this article has shown many of the reasons why.

The missionary model here proposed is no tea-party. We have removed, in effect, the short-cuts that so called inter-cultural missionaries from the West to Africa have followed for a few generations. Not being able to use a Western language, or buy influence with foreign money leaves a Western missionary in a fix. What will he / she do now, and how?

This is an important challenge; but it is not a new challenge. It is the challenge that missionaries always faced before the modern era. It is a challenge that has no pat-solutions. In fact it is *the* challenge of missionary work, the evading of which has generated a church in Africa that worships Western prosperity. Further outlining of how this challenge is to be met goes beyond the scope of this paper. I can describe it in brief summary form as follows:

1. It is a challenge that some Western missionaries ought to take up.
2. It should be followed through the use of indigenous languages in ministry.
3. Ministry should be funded by other-than the missionary or his or her supporters.
4. The whole of Scripture, history and tradition of the church and God's Spirit are there to guide the missionary.

This is what we are calling 'vulnerable mission', more information on which can be found at [www.vulnerablemission.com](http://www.vulnerablemission.com).

## CONCLUSION

An examination of inter-sport translation has allowed us to perceive difficulties in inter-cultural communication, especially with respect to Christian mission to the non-West. Such difficulties point to the need for a primary role for theology in enabling inter-cultural dialogue. Post-modernism's exposing of the poorly founded assumptions of positivism bring renewed challenges to inter-cultural mission, that can best be met through the use of local languages and resources in ministry by Westerners amongst non-Western peoples.

## Bibliography

Achebe, Chinua, 1958. *Things Fall Apart*. Nairobi: Heinemann.

Bearth, Thomas, 2004. 'The Local Language – a neglected resource for sustainable development'. *Internet-Zeitschrift fuer Kulturwissenschaften*. Nr. 15. September 2004. [http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/06\\_4/bearth15.htm](http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/06_4/bearth15.htm) (accessed April 29. 2010)

Bediako, Kwame, 2006, ' "Missionaries did not bring Christ to Africa - Christ brought them." Why Africa needs Jesus Christ.' Lecture presented at Annual School of Theology of the African Institute for Christian Mission and Research (AICMAR), Butere, Kenya, 1st to 4th August 2006.

Nandy, Ashis, 2010 (1983). *The Intimate Enemy: loss and recovery of self under colonialism*. With a postscript by the author. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

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

Simiyu, Oliver Kisaka, 2009. 'Raising Leaders of Integrity.' 29-44 in: *AICMAR Bulletin* volume 8, 2009.

Speckman, M.T. 2007. *A Biblical Vision for Africa's Development?* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Steiner, George, 1998. *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation. Third Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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

Wellborn, Charles, 1998. 'Truth-Telling: An Exercise In Practical Morality.' *Christian Ethics Today. Journal of Christian Ethics*. Issue 019, Volume 4, No 6 December 1998.  
[http://www.christianethicstoday.com/issue/019/Truth-Telling%20-%20An%20Exercise%20In%20Practical%20Morality%20By%20Charles%20Wellborn\\_019\\_13\\_.htm](http://www.christianethicstoday.com/issue/019/Truth-Telling%20-%20An%20Exercise%20In%20Practical%20Morality%20By%20Charles%20Wellborn_019_13_.htm) (accessed May 19. 2010)