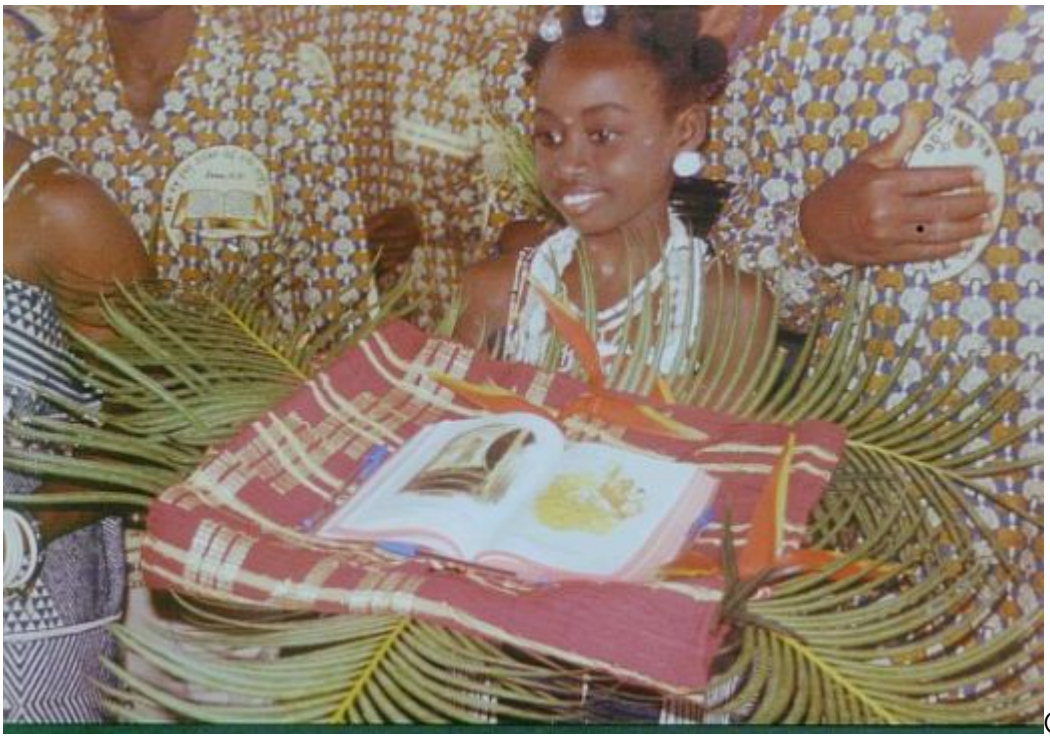
MORE ON UK CHURCH CULTURE AND GLOBAL INTERACTION

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Categories: Mission, Observations

Over the last few days, I've been venting my frustration about the way in which people who are asked to speak aboutÂ cross-cultural mission often have very little background or understanding of the subject (here and here). However, perhaps the most important issue in all of this is the very biblical principle that we should be quick to listen and learn and slow to speak. Could it be that the most important message of cross-cultural mission, today, is that we need to start learning from others rather than assuming that they should be learning from us? It isn't very sexy and it won't pull in the punters at the big conventions but ...

Martin Lee of Global Connections captured this in his introduction to the GC conference earlier this year.

> *At this conference two years ago, Peter Oyugi said this: â€œWe could cite examples of situations where due to years of some Western missionaries being patronising and domineering in the mission fields, contributions of those from the global South have been practically ignored.â€ I have spoken to many of those who have come to the UK who experience the same thing.â€*
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> *After a consultation at St Saviours Guildford last week on how can we listen to the Global church, Phil Simpson said: â€œFor me the issue is that we need to tackle our inherent national pride (â€˜God is an Englishmanâ€™). We need to shift so we allow more of a lead from the Global South â€“ especially the diaspora in our midst â€“ including their voice in what we plan and do.â€*

I think many Westerners involved in cross-cultural mission have realised the need for more respect, mutuality and equality. So this is not a rant about our colonial past. However are we prepared to change to a position of respect and a partnership between equals?

Two years ago Peter Oyugi went on to say: â€œWe can only make progress in the global church through honest dialogue and careful discernment. We must remain committed to the teachings of Scripture that affirm that those who are in Christ Jesus, have â€œreceived the Spirit of sonshipâ€ (Rom 8:15b) and are â€œmembers together one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. (Eph 3:6). There is need for the West to understand the need for change to be Christ-like rather than western-like.â€

So while the numbers are now in the Global South, money and its associated power are still solidly in the West. Partnerships in which money is involved often end up in problems of dependency, destroying that mutually. It nearly destroyed my relationship with friends in Thailand and was unhealthy for us both. Their desire to honour me by always bowing to my suggestion because of my finances. My sense of being needed by them as if they couldnâ€™t do without me. I remember at a Tearfund conference in 1997 hearing someone from Ghana reflect back: â€œPartnership, oh that is the new name form imperialism!â€ That was his experience.

The power of the West is especially relevant in terms of language. At the Cape Town conference, all plenary speakers were only allowed to speak in English. Yes there were pragmatic reasons but for many of the people that I spoke to it was just another example of the West calls the shots.

In physics, there is something called the observer effect, which notes that measurements of certain systems cannot be made without affecting those systems. In one sense there is the same when one culture seeks to interact with another. Can we really listen neutrally when we come from a position of cultural superiority, or power, or inequality in learning and wealth? Even if we come as listeners and learners, do we realise the effect our presence and culture has on others, and this cannot be changed overnight?

Have we really progressed from much from the Edinburgh conference of 1910. VS Azariah from South India concluded: â€œThrough all the ages to come the Indian church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and self-denying labours of the missionary body. You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for love. Give us FRIENDS!

I believe the West has so much to offer into world mission. Our day is not over, but we are now part of the global church and we need to reflect that in our relationships with other parts of Godâ€™s church.