

Title - Church – Mission Relationship: Partnership or Dependency?

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Introduction

In many countries of the two-third world and especially in Africa, missionaries have until recently, gone out mainly from economically advantaged countries to poorer countries, from a more developed economic system to one that is less developed. When the Gospel is received and churches and related establishments are started, the mission's initial input is normally substantial. Such input may be in the areas of finance and governance. The understanding is that the level of missionary input will reduce appropriately over time until the national church takes over full responsibility becoming self governing and self-financing. The time scale for take-over varies from one situation to another but 'take-over' would appear to be a necessary imperative. In most of the church-mission relationships I know in Africa, 'take-over' has never been complete, some partnership exists which is intended to be of mutual benefit. In some other cases, partnership has degenerated into an almost one-sided affair. When this happens, dependency is indicated. One of the reasons, this situation is of concern is that in the same country you may find two parallel Christian establishments, one with a mission origin and it is struggling while the other of indigenous origin appears to be flourishing. Why are their situations different? Mission-established Bible Colleges tend to suffer a more prolonged effect of dependency partly because their operational structures are often too expensive for the national Church. In trying to support the College, the Mission may end up unintentionally creating an attitude of dependency.

Some scenario that point to Dependency

1. A student in a Bible School is a one-parent orphan. The father who supports the family has passed away. The mother lives in a rural village struggling to survive. There are other children – all younger than the trainee-pastor. He made his needs known and a lecturer tries (privately) to help him. Unknown to the College, he has somehow obtained some addresses of one or two Christians in the UK with whom he kept contact with 'favourable' outcome. Sometime later, he reported

his need for money to pay his brother's school fees. He came into a lecturer's office and the cell phone rang – the student's! He was embarrassed and the lecturer who himself had no cell phone was shocked.

Not every appearance or expression of need is genuine. The dependent person tends to have an insatiable desire to receive even when his/her genuine needs have been met. The giver must exercise discernment.

2. In one Latin American Bible College, students pay no tuition or accommodation fees, receive books at 50% subsidy but have to feed themselves – kitchen facilities are freely available. Students felt they needed more assistance and there were serious complaints. With agreement of the national Church leadership, the College was closed for a year to allow for reflection. When it re-opened, most students did not come back, and the few that did were better academically, and spiritually. The College ran well and it became easier for the Church to identify those who were called to serve and for whom some additional support was provided when deemed necessary.

There are times when some drastic and unfavourable action may be necessary to break the dependency cycle.

3. In another Bible College (unspecified), but in a poor country in Africa, students receive full tuition, accommodation and food and some, also pocket money. College went through several crises over food. Students were most reluctant in doing unpaid practical work to help the College eg, taking turns to work with kitchen staff. Spiritual formation was a constant problem. Is it a case of 'the less it costs you, the less your commitment'? When food is freely provided, waste is evident, far more so than if we have to provide it ourselves. Demand for 'more' and 'better' food is common when someone else is paying, and the initiative to make adjustments when money is short is stifled. These are some of the negative dividends of dependency.

4. A well educated and influential 'Christian' lady said to a visiting foreigner from a developed country – (he is involved in some Christian charity work) ... "you have come to bring back some of the 'gold' your grandfathers carried away from our country?" If this is a widespread thinking among a sector of the population, then there are serious implications that go beyond the problem of dependency. How should this donor respond as a Christian? This kind of attitude would suggest that whatever the

donor gives will be received as an ‘entitlement’ or ‘repayment’, an ‘expectation’ that mars any true sense of gratitude. In all circumstances, and for donor sanity, whatever is given must be “as unto the Lord”. Happily, most recipients are normally grateful and this is an encouragement to the one called to give. A lack of gratitude must not lead to a general disobedience of the ‘call’ to give. Neither should a blanket decision be taken say, in a College, because some are ungrateful.

5. A friend of the College heard of the problem of crop failure and was concerned about our students especially when they go home on holidays. He sent some money and this was shared among the students to enable them buy essential food. Several of the students’ churches got to know of this. For this and other reasons, the impression seems to have been created that the students were better off than they who were at home in the villages. A student on graduation was posted to his home church. He was expecting support from his church but instead was shocked that some church members came to him for help! Giving has been generally very poor in several of the churches. What should the College do in future with such kind-hearted gifts? Church congregations may sometimes abandon their stewardship responsibility and seek to depend on outside help.

What is Dependency?

Dependency is the state of relying on someone or something. In this sense, it refers to every created person. We live in a world in which we depend on others. Some dependency is healthy and acceptable while others are unhealthy and unacceptable. The dependency of a normal child on the parents is acceptable while the dependency of a normal adult is abnormal. Why? “The answer lies in the dependent’s willingness and capacity to do his/her part ... dependency goes over the line when people fail to take responsibility where they can.”¹ Dependency is an actual or imagined condition in which people assume that they are not adequate apart from significant help and resources from outside of themselves.

¹ Rickett, D, “Dependency in Mission Partnership” in <http://www.partnersintl.org/pdf/dependency.pdf>, p.1

Biblical Considerations

1. Creation Order

Our relationship with God is one in which God expects us to be completely dependent on Him but along with this He gives us ability and responsibility to think and to work. (Gen. 1-3).

2. Dependency in the Body of Christ

The 'body' image of the Church expects interdependence of its parts. This image depends on the condition that each part fulfils its own function and all parts work for the common good. "No Christian – whether rich or poor, young or old, weak or strong – is exempt from taking responsibility. That's because responsibility makes reciprocity both possible and dependency beneficial."² The two key words here are responsibility and reciprocity. "Both partners recognize their responsibilities and work to fulfil them. Each enters the relationship with a clear picture of what each has to offer and what each stands to gain ... Each honours and upholds the unique and divine calling of the other. Each makes a distinct and complementary contribution to the partnership. Each conducts itself in a manner that safeguards one another's integrity and honours Christ."³ In this, each gives and each receives; in teaching and in learning, in leading and in following.

3. The 'One-Another' Commands

Closely related to (2) above, are the 'one-another' commands which underline some of the practical outworking of the 'body' model of the Church.

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| (a) Serve one another | Gal.5:13 |
| (b) Accept one another | Rom.15:7 |
| (c) Forgive one another | Col.3:13 |
| (d) Bear one another's burden | Gal.:6.2 |
| (e) Be devoted to one another | Rom.12:10 |
| (f) Honour one another | Rom.12:10 |

² Ibid., p.2, (1 Cor.12; Rom12:4 – 8; Phil.2:1 - 4)

³ Ibid., p.3

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|---------------------------|--------------|
| (g) Teach one another | Rom.15:14 |
| (h) Encourage one another | 1 Thess.5:11 |
| (i) Love one another | Jn.13:34f |

These are very important commands to bear in mind in Church-mission relationships as in other Christian relationships.

Clearly, each of these commands flow in both directions. When it is a one-way flow whether that is money or personnel, the danger of unhealthy dependency is indicated. “If one partner maintains control over the decision-making process, the other partner cannot exercise responsibility as a co-labourer. If one partner’s contributions are valued more highly than the other’s, it is impossible to establish true reciprocity.”⁴

4. (a) The Command to Provide for the Poor

The Old Testament teaches that aliens, widows and orphans must not be oppressed but assisted.⁵ In harvesting, believers must bear in mind the weak and the disadvantaged.⁶ The believer and the believing community have responsibilities to do good to all and especially to those of the household of faith.

Both the Old Testament prophets and Jesus had strong condemnations for those who oppressed the weak especially orphans and widows. “He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given.”⁷ Giving is not a permanent unidirectional activity where the perceived ‘rich’ always give to the perceived ‘poor’. We have poor and needy people everywhere and the churches are called to be on the lookout for opportunity to assist. It must not be assumed that only the West can give. There are rich people and rich churches in the non Western world. They must not close their minds to opportunities to give in support of gospel causes in the Western world. And in any case, Christian giving is both qualitative as well as quantitative and each whether ‘rich’ or ‘poor’ can give . Apostle Paul, using the example of the Macedonian Churches, states the principle thus:

⁴ Ibid., p.3

⁵ Exodus 22:21 – 27; Deut.15:7 - 10

⁶ Lev.19:9 -10; Deut. 24:17 - 22

⁷ Prov.19:17; Psal.41:1

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality.⁸

(b) Guard Against Abuse

Having established the Christian obligation to look after the poor, one also needs to point out the complementary obligation not to abuse this charity ... It is noteworthy that the Old Testament instituted a system of welfare, but not welfarism. The poor had to glean the vineyard in order to obtain his next meal.⁹ Ruth was an example here. The apostle Paul insists that “if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.”¹⁰ The Pastoral Epistles emphasized this principle in the care of widows.¹¹ Those whose family can care for them should do so. The Church is not to be burdened.¹² “To link charity to work for those who are capable of it is to treat the poor as human beings with capacity and dignity”¹³

(c) Be Realistic

In the matter of providing for the needy within the world-wide community of believers, we should be as realistic as the Scriptures are. “The very part of the Old Testament which declares that there will be no poor among God’s people (Deut. 15:4) also notes that there will always be poor people in the land (Deut. 15.11).”¹⁴ The call is to do all we can in good conscience before the Lord who prompts us by His Holy Spirit.¹⁵ We must always aim for the best. It was Jonathan Edwards who said, “it is not merely a commendable thing for a man to be kind and bountiful to the poor, but our bounden duty, as much a duty as it is to pray, or to attend public worship ... and the neglect of it brings great guilt upon any person.”¹⁶

⁸ 2Corinthians 8:13f

⁹ Barnes, P, “Looking after the Poor: Biblical Principles”, in *Banner of Truth*, Issue 502, July 2005, p.8

¹⁰ 2Thess.3:10

¹¹ 1Tim5:5 – 7, 9 - 15

¹² 1Tim.5:4,8,16

¹³ Barnes, P, “Looking after the Poor: Biblical Principles”, in *Banner of Truth*, Issue 502, July 2005, p.8

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.9, and cf. Jn.12:8

¹⁵ See 1Jn.3:15

¹⁶ Edwards, J, in Barnes, P, “Looking after the Poor: Biblical Principles”, in *Banner of Truth*, Issue 502, July 2005, p.9

Practical Issues about Dependency in Church-Mission Relationship

1. Avoiding Unhealthy Dependency

Daniel Rickett¹⁷ has suggested some ways that are sure to lead to unhealthy dependency.

(a) *Financing a single individual.*

Working with persons who have no clear church community base or a reputable Council of reference could lead to unhealthy dependency. A few may be doing excellent work but several turn out to be ‘fortune hunters’ – what we call in parts of Africa as “brief case pastors” who spend most of their time writing bogus project proposals. When money is sent to an individual, there is no independent reference of accountability as found in the example of Paul.¹⁸ Giving funds to indigenous workers who are not accountable to their church leadership is always fraught with danger, however effective or charismatic the leaders may be.¹⁹ The call to give includes a responsibility to ensure good stewardship of the Lord’s resources.

(b) *Financing pastors and local churches.*

“History has shown that foreign funding of pastors and churches has proven more often than not to hinder genuine indigenous growth.”²⁰ This may be a generalization for which exception is probably inevitable in extreme cases of deprivation. One of the greatest problems connected with financing pastors is that of equitability with attendant discontent which can sometimes be bitter. Foreign funding of some pastors and not others creates jealousies, and frees them from accountability to the local Christian community and leadership. Local churches get to know and giving is stifled. And when the funding stops or is reduced as it often happens the recipient with his family are badly affected as they face problems of financial adjustment. A lot of thinking and care must go into this whole area so that the attendant difficulties do not outweigh the benefits. Where there is need for this kind of support, it is often best if the Church headquarters receive and decide on its management.

¹⁷Rickett, D, “Dependency in Mission Partnership” in <http://www.partnersintl.org/pdf/dependency.pdf>, p.3f

¹⁸ 1 Cor.16:3; 2Cor.8:16 -21

¹⁹Bennett, C., “Foreign Financing of Indigenous Workers” in Moreau, S.(Ed), Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission, Michigan, Baker, 2000, p.365.

²⁰Rickett, D, “Dependency in Mission Partnership” in <http://www.partnersintl.org/pdf/dependency.pdf>, p.4

(c) *Giving resources based only on needs.*

Needs are generally insatiable and very difficult to determine accurately at all times. Needs must be mutually decided with clear boundaries set. Whatever is given must meet the requirements of responsibility, reciprocity and specifiable results. Closely related to this is the danger of underwriting 100% of the ministry's need without the requirement of a careful, realistic decision on level of contribution by the receiving body. The principle of subsidy or matching grant or one-time projects has been found to be helpful so is the idea of subsidy based on a reducing percentage. Even when good agreements are made, there are always some cases of default and the 'larger' donor is left wondering what to do. I know of a situation when a missionary who wanted to build a health centre for a rural community located far away from any clinic. The condition was that the local community must provide the necessary labour and work with the missionary who is a builder and will provide all the other materials and work with the volunteers. After the foundation was laid, the local contribution ceased and the project abandoned. In another situation, several churches have benefited from the Zambezi Mission 'Raise the Roof' Project where needy churches are required to raise the building to roofing level and the Mission then provides the roofing.²¹

(d) *Hiring Local Christians to run Donor Programs*

This is employment rather than partnership. Normally, the employee's economic situation rises far above those of his peers within the church leadership and again jealousies and bypassing local Christian leadership are real dangers. It is often recommended that the local church office should have responsibility for deciding how much the employee is paid or at least their advice should be taken seriously. The goal is to ensure that the actions taken by the donor do not lead to dependency and create more problems within the community. The issue of remuneration may be different for international organizations that have permanent branches in the country e. g. World Vision.

²¹ Zambezi Mission works in Malawi and Northern Mozambique and I have personal experience of this. The money is given through the Church who decides on a priority list with the Mission

2. Paternalism

This has to do with a father-child relationship. It is an attitude of a government or other establishment that makes all the decisions for the people for whom it is responsible, thus taking away responsibility.²² This has negative connotations in Church-Mission relationship. It is the use of some form of subtle coercion to achieve a good that is not perceived as such by those persons for whom it is intended. An example is when a Mission keeps control of a work longer than is thought necessary because it feels rightly or wrongly that the locals are unqualified and might cause harm to the cause of Christ by taking leadership. Paternalism of this type is almost always resented by national colleagues who see it as attitudes that assume superior knowledge, wisdom and skills. While well intentioned in some cases, it fails to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in young churches and their leaders.²³ As Panya Baba pointed out, “We missionaries must learn to trust the Holy Spirit”²⁴ and not be afraid to hand over work to nationals.

To reduce the effect of this problem, mission leaders must not give any impression in this direction either by what is said or done or in general attitude. There must always be a deliberate and open plan to encourage local leadership as soon as practicable. Also, an agreement and a programme of withdrawal from leadership by the Mission should be in place and reviewed together with the Church. And even when the Mission or its staff withdraws from leadership it is debatable whether such staff should participate as members of the governing committees of the Church. In the case of a Bible College where Mission staff is needed to continue in teaching there are practical problems involved in their continuation on the governing committees of the College. Participation helps the Mission to be aware of areas of partnership that may still be necessary, but local leadership must be left to initiate projects which can be continued even when the missionary is not there.

²² Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary, London, Harper Collins, 1987.

²³ Neumann, M, “Paternalism”, in Moreau, S. (Ed), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, Michigan, Baker, 2000, p.730.

²⁴ Reported by Graham Cheesman from a private discussion he held with Rev Panya Baba who was then the Director of the Evangelical Missionary Society of ECWA, (Evangelical Churches of West Africa), Jos, Nigeria.

3. Missionary ‘Affluence’

Missionaries from richer countries coming to a less rich one face the problem of lifestyle which, in most cases leaves a visible gap of affluence between them and the people among whom they serve. Whatever the economic condition of the missionary staff in the home country, those with whom they serve see them as having access to personal, organizational and philanthropic wealth – which they could draw on for themselves and for persons and projects of their choice. A small seed is therefore sown in the mind – seed that grow and produce the negative fruit of dependency. This visible or imagined ‘affluence’ can sometimes lead to hidden resentment and in the end to open hostility, the root of which may never be made known to the mission staff. That a mission staff is able to live an incarnate lifestyle does not take away the belief that such a lifestyle is by the missionary’s choice, and such a type of choice is not available to his/her local co- workers.²⁵

This position of ‘affluence’ does not refer to Western missionaries only, it refers in varying degrees to mission workers from non-Western countries e.g a Kenyan or Ghanaian or a Nigerian missionary serving elsewhere. If s/he goes to the West, he is regarded as an economic refugee, if he goes to another African country with full support from home, he’s an agent of the Western missionary movement, and if without full support, he is accused of not coming for ‘mission’ but to look for a job! While the missionary call is from everywhere to everywhere within God’s prerogative, those who go must have high spiritual and academic qualifications, seek to cultivate a simple lifestyle, and work hard on relationship with national colleagues.

4. Relief and Development Activities

What is the role of relief and development in combating the problem of unhealthy dependency? Many missions and national churches (at least in Africa) are very much involved in relief and development work. These are aspects of “an inclusive process in which the physical and social needs of persons and groups are given attention alongside their spiritual needs.”²⁶ From a wider perspective, development may refer to

²⁵ Moreau, A. S, “Missionary Affluence”, in Moreau, S (Ed), Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission, Michigan, Baker, 2000, p.645.

²⁶ Ward, T., “Development”, in Moreau, S., (Ed), Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission, Michigan, Baker, 2000, p.272.

the process through which people overcome or seek to overcome the limitations that have plagued their previous condition. Development mission work is intended to be holistic and find support in the prophet's call for social justice. The point of our present concern can be summed up in the Chinese proverb: "Give a man a fish and he eats today; teach a man to fish and he eats fish for a life time"²⁷

The argument is that if we go beyond the salvation of the soul to a holistic proclamation, the educational and economic condition of the receiving country may be enhanced so that the resulting church is more able to be self-supporting as they become self-governing and self-propagating. While relief activities are biblical²⁸ and they are necessary to save lives and reduce suffering, they can soon lead to dependency if not carefully managed. So are development projects if they are completely initiated and controlled from outside. "Human groups simply cannot be pushed into development by outside efforts. Broad-scale community participation and local initiatives are essential."²⁹ The writer's observation is that when a development project is successful, there is the temptation of the church paying more attention to this than the task of disciple making. This must be resisted. Some missions have helped to finance church initiated and executed projects like property development in urban areas and maize mills in rural areas. Good management with proper accountability are important keys to success.

5. Partnership, not Moratorium

There has been some call for a moratorium on mission³⁰ first, because of the high cost of mission from the West to the two-third world and secondly because the local person is better suited to do mission in his own cultural environment. Why support a family, they argue, who has to learn the culture, with over \$50,000 a year when this amount of money may support nearly 100 nationals at \$500 or even 50 nationals at \$1,000? The biblical mandate rather than the finance should determine this question. For those called to go, there will be provision. There is the danger of always measuring God's work in monetary terms. Frank Severn's view is "send both dollars

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Matt.25 - Parable of the sheep and the goats and Lk.15 – the story of the Good Samaritan.

²⁹ Ward, T., "Development", in Moreau, S., (Ed), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission*, Michigan, Baker, 2000, p.272.

³⁰ Severn, F. M., "The Critical Context of Today's World Mission", in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Vol 28, No.2, April 1992, p.179.

and sons and daughters”³¹ The call is to join hands with emerging missionary movements in the two-third world. Chris Marantika, founder and president of the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Indonesia has suggested we set aside the old “three-self” model of mission and introduce a partnership model focussing on “praying together, paying together, and proclaiming together.”³² He proposed that this must be based on good biblical principles and relational transparency of trust, and equality.

The SIM/ECWA experience of partnership in Nigeria has brought out some lessons that are worth noting³³:

- (a) Communication of concepts must be clear and accurately illustrated and even documented.
- (b) Church- Mission partnership is dynamic; Changes can occur for various reasons and both partners must be ready to make necessary adjustments. Sometimes, the changes are for better and sometimes for worse.
- (c) Good interpersonal relationships between Mission personnel and Church leadership are crucial, they are the *sine qua non* foundation of an effective partnership “Where there is trust and mutuality, a bad agreement on paper will still work; where there is suspicion, any agreement, no matter how good it looks on paper, will not work.” Prayer is a vital factor in fostering this relationship.
- (d) Money issues must be honestly addressed. Every mission working in the developing world struggles with the issue of money and potential pitfalls of dependency. Each partner agreed to provide audited reports of money related joint projects.
- (5) Partners that communicate and pray together, stay together.
- (6) No pain, no Kingdom gain The Church- Mission partnership over the years have encountered a Kingdom synergy that comes only through the crucible of real, often painful experience. Tackling difficult emotionally charged problems in a cross cultural context has taught us to lean together on the Lord of the harvest for help and wisdom beyond our combined human resources.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Marantika, C., ”Partnerships at the Crossroads: red, yellow, or green light?” in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (EMQ), Vol.28, No.3, July 1992, p.287.

³³ Calenberg, R., “Mission and Church Partnership Dynamics”, in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Vol.41, No3, July 2005, p.302-310

We have learned that God is faithful. Mission-Church partnership can work even through the failures of human partners.

How can the Mission help the Bible College reduce unhealthy dependency?

Various suggestions were made during a discussion on the theme of Dependency³⁴

(1) Establish a Reducing Percentage System of Support.

This approach is suitable for national College lecturers or Key workers. Mission funds his/her salary for an agreed number of years on an annual reducing percentage scale. This should give the College an opportunity to plan for the take-over of this responsibility. For example, if it is for a period of 5 years, Mission may begin by paying 100% in the first year, 80% in the second year, 60% in the third, etc.

(2) Give without Designation

Instead of giving for designated projects which tends to increase the chances of paternalism, mission should give without specification. This is to allow the College to decide the best way to use the gift. Such an approach increases trust and hopefully challenges the college to strive for responsible decision making.

(3) Endowment

Mission to establish a carefully formulated endowment fund based either in the donor country or in the receiver country depending on which is mutually considered most beneficial in the long term. The interest from this to be given to the college annually as a perpetual arrangement. This guarantees some income for the college and frees the mission from having to take decision each time there is a need.

A variation of the Endowment scheme is to charge the college for each missionary staff the salary equivalent of replacement with a national staff. This should form part of the recurrent budget of the college and the fund regularly and unfailingly

³⁴ The discussion was led by Dr G Cheesman during a seminar presentation to participants of the Belfast Bible College Centre for Theological Education, 12th Dec., 2005

invested in a reasonably assured stock like Treasury Bills through a reputable financial institution.

Any or all of the above can be operated for a given college.

Conclusion

In West-non West Church – Mission relationships, many blessings have resulted as evident in thriving churches across many countries of the two-third world. The problem of unhealthy dependency has been noted and the sincere and loving intentions of mission bodies have not always been adequately appreciated. Even with our Lord Jesus Christ, the first missionary that God sent from Himself, there were problems of dependency and the apostles faced the trauma of Jesus' physical departure. Jesus however promised them his abiding presence. He did not leave them alone and as soon as they experienced the living presence of the risen Lord, their commitment to make disciples of all nations did not wane even in the face of deprivation. They were, eventually, able to take what is committed to them and pass it on to faithful people who have been able to pass it on to others. Perhaps here lies the model for us today: there should be no severance of relationship between those who planted and those who were planted. Both they and us must look together to the Lord in a "tripod" partnership that works together as necessary to do the work that needs to be done. It is one Lord, one Mission and one Church. It is important that specific actions are taken to tackle the problem of Dependency.