Book your Summer Holidays Now

Issue 19 Editor: Jonathan Ingleby

I keep a list of the books I read and a very quick look at it reveals that Summer is when I read most. So we thought that we would dedicate this issue of *Encounters* to the general topic of books and reading, while taking a wider glance at related subjects such as language and narrative. All of this, of course, within a missiological framework. The result, at least to my mind, is an intriguing mix.

Almost a score of missiologists contribute to our lead article, 'Why not Read a Book about Mission this Summer?', a collection of up-to-date reading recommendations ranging from, on the one hand, *William Wilberforce – The Freedom Fighter* to, on the other, *Jesus' Revelation of His Father: A Narrative-Conceptual Study of the Trinity with Special Reference to Karl Barth*, both highly recommended though not necessarily to the same audience.

Jim Harries looks at some tricky issues in the use of language and makes a heartfelt appeal for more attention to the local context(s). Richard Johnson passionately defends the buying, reading and keeping of books and clearly believes that the whole of civilisation depends on our response to this issue! The Editor has been visiting a local bookshop and thinks that he has discovered something which has missiological significance. Finally, Richard Johnson has also given us a fascinating book review on someone who was crazy about mathematics. I was going to include it in the recommendations above, but it is too long and too eccentric. But do read it.

In a sense this edition of *Encounters* is intended to be a little more lightweight than usual (summer holidays and all that). In fact it has a very serious purpose. Communication, language, discourse, reading, education – there can hardly be more important missiological themes.

Go to the Encounters website at www.redcliffe.org/encounters to read what others are thinking on the Discussion Board. Use the Voice your comments form to add to the debate.

Please Note: The views expressed in articles are those of their authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of Redcliffe College.

Why Not Read a Book about Mission this Summer?

Missiologists talk about the books they would like to recommend

Compiler: Dr Jonathan Ingleby, Editor of Encounters.

Summer is supposedly a great time for reading, so we thought we would ask some of the experts in the field what they had been reading recently, and what they thought you would enjoy reading too.

Colin Bulley

Since beginning teaching an MA course on Prosperity Theology three years ago, I have been surprised both by how widespread it is (most of my overseas students have first- or close second-hand experience of it) and by how much heat it can generate rather than light. Hence my pleasure in finding and recommending **Andrew Perriman** (ed.), ***Faith, Health & Prosperity: A Report on 'Word of Faith' and 'Positive Confession' Theologies*** by **The Evangelical Alliance (UK) Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals** (Paternoster). This book describes Prosperity Theology accurately and critiques it positively (what we can learn from it) as well as negatively. It also has some interesting ideas on whether there are two biblical modes of discipleship relating to wealth, a 'discipleship of the road' and 'a settled discipleship of home and workplace' (p.226).

A second book on this subject that I have found very helpful is **Robert Bowman**'s ***The Word-Faith Controversy: Understanding the Health and Wealth Gospel*** (Baker Books). This has the same positive characteristics as Perriman's book and is particularly good on the movement's disputed origins, especially the purported cultic ones. It is written, as one might expect, from an American and more conservative theological viewpoint than Perriman's.

Rob Cook

At first we in the West thought we were the theological players and the two-thirds world could watch and learn. Then we realized that they also had some decent players and our job was therefore to referee. **J. Parratt** (ed.), ***Third World Theologies*** (Cambridge), written largely by indigenous practitioners, decisively demonstrates that we are all in the game together. It is also salutory to learn that a ubiquitous theme is the struggle to overcome the shadow of colonialism and to find an authentic ethnic theological voice. But when does contextualization become syncretism? And who decides?

A lighter but equally enticing book is **W. Johnston**'s ***Mystical Journey: an autobiography*** (Orbis) by a Jesuit missioner to Japan who has spent his life exploring contemplative prayer and attempting to relate it to Eastern mysticism, particularly Zen Buddhism. It is a fascinating insider's account of the massive shift of policy and attitude to other faiths pre- and post-Vatican II and Johnston's conclusion interested me that although there is much overlap of technique and experience between the Zen and Catholic forms of mysticism, the latter remains distinctive in progressing through the void of 'the cloud of unknowing' driven on by 'the dart of love'; the Christian psychonauts insist that the Great Mystery is gracious. Finally, there is **Keith Ward**'s ***Is Religion Dangerous?*** (Lion). I am so pleased that as Ward moves into retirement he is becoming even more prolific. He has been duelling with Richard Dawkins for decades and here he meets the objection that religion is not only false but also downright dangerous. He readily admits that atrocities were and are perpetrated in the name

of God but points out that most of the carnage of the twentieth century was either non-religiously motivated (e.g. the two World Wars) or came out of militant atheism (e.g. the state murders in Russia, China, North Korea and Cambodia). The difference is that religions, unlike Nazism and Communism, contain internal moral checks to counteract rogue elements. Political systems and religions can be dangerous, Ward argues, but it would be just as absurd to conclude that one should therefore ban all religions as to call for a ban on all politics. Typically Ward is bristling with insights and sharp argumentation and I can only whet your appetite with one or two of them.

Philip Fountain

My reading over the past year has largely focused on the intersections between religion and development; an area that is fast becoming a hot topic within the field of development studies. Three books published recently were particularly thought provoking. **Erica Bornstein**'s ***The Spirit of Development*** (Routledge) is a provocative analysis of the work of World Vision and the World Council of Churches in Zimbabwe. Bornstein perceives an 'enchanted development' in which the worlds of economics/development and spirituality/faith are intimately intertwined. **Kathleen Nadeau**'s study of base ecclesial communities in the Philippines in ***Liberation Theology in the Philippines*** (Praeger/Greenwood) offers a critical analysis of the limits of grassroots work by faith actors in the face of wider systemic barriers to poverty eradication. **Laurie Occhipinti**'s ***Acting on Faith*** (Lexington Books) traces religiously inflected idioms of development and the ways these are practised in the relationship of two small Roman Catholic development agencies and rural Argentinean communities. Of the specifically Christian books in this area, I greatly enjoyed ***Development to a Different Drummer*** edited by **Yoder, Redekop and Jantzi** (Good Books). This collection of reflections on North American Anabaptist perspectives of development exhibited a greater sense of self-reflexivity and critique than is generally found among faith-informed texts on development.

Andrew Gammie

Though it is not within my last year's reading, it may be relevant to mention a book that had a profound influence on me regarding enculturation of the gospel message. It is probably seen as one of the 'classics' - I don't know - but it may be beneficial to others, even though perhaps out of date. ***Christianity Rediscovered*** (SCM) by **Vincent Donovan** issues a challenge to understand your field before bringing models of mission to it. Even if seen as rather old now, it is salutory to realise how long the process of challenging conventional mission activity has been going on in the modern era. Perhaps another element of refreshment about the perspective is that it comes from outside the evangelical tradition.

Jim Harries

When Charity Destroys Dignity (Authorhouse) by **Glenn Schwartz** is a drawing together of decades of practical experience in countering mission 'dependency', especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. **David Maranz**'s book ***African Friends and Money Matters*** is a MUST for someone who intends to minister in Sub-Saharan Africa, to begin to get an idea of how people approach the important topic of money. **Lamin Sanneh**'s book ***Translating the Message*** (Orbis) begins to direct us to vital issues regarding mission and translation, as pertinent today as ever.

Alison Hull

My first choice is ***To Give or not to Give*** (STL) by **John Rowell**, which is talking about the support that should be given by the West to missions. John Rowell argues that increasingly modern mission theory holds that indigenous churches can only be healthy if they are self-supporting. But this tends to mean that western Christians are becoming less and less inclined to give generously. What should westerners give in support of global evangelism? What reflects God's heart best? My second choice is ***One Cross, One Way, Many Journeys*** (Authentic) by **David Greenlee**. What does conversion mean globally? Conversion is at the heart of the Christian experience, but is it a process or a crisis event? With anti-conversion sentiment running high in Asia and in the Islamic world, what does conversion mean in a global context in the twenty first century? This book provides some answers. Thirdly, ***Innovation in Mission*** (Authentic) by **Jim Reapsome** and **Jon Hirst** gives a forum for missionaries to come together to describe innovations in their area of expertise from around the world. We live in a changing world, but is the way we do mission changing as fast? This book brings together creative international practitioners to describe new ways of doing mission, across the globe.

Jonathan Ingleby

The best book about mission I have read recently is **Robert Fisk**'s ***The Great War for Civilisation*** (Harper) which you might argue is not about mission in the strict sense at all. Nevertheless for those involvled in mission (especially in the Middle East) it is a terrific read. I also profited by **Lamin Sanneh**'s ***Whose Religion is Christianity?*** (Eerdmans). The question and answer format is annoying, but it seems vital to me that we listen to people from the Global South that are critical of Western Christianity and who believe that 'world Christianity' is the way ahead.

Simon Steer

The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South (OUP) by **Philip Jenkins** is a fascinating sequel to *The Next Christendom*. It describes and analyses the dynamic ways in which the Bible is appropriated, particularly in Africa and Asia, and suggests that 'northern' Christians have much to learn (although not uncritically) from the directness of 'southern' approaches to scripture. It can be unsettling but hugely beneficial to look again at a Bible we thought we knew.

Darrell Jackson

There is only one book I want to recommend and that is **Marrilynne Robinson**'s ***Gilead*** (Virago). This is a rare book. Towards the end of his life, the Reverend John Ames begins a letter to his young son. Set in small town America of 1956, Ames is an average preacher, a reasonable theologian, a man of honour, and a good pastor. What sets his character aside from other literary portrayals of pastors or priests is his profound understanding and experience of grace, 'Grace is not so poor a thing that it cannot present itself in any number of ways,' he writes to his son. The book is written without chapters, as one would expect of a letter. It is the most precious gift that seventy year old Ames' could give to his seven year old son. With so little time to nurture his child and concerned to leave a legacy of the father he might have been, Ames succeeds in being the father he might have been. Books about priests and pastors often fail to understand the motivation for Christian ministry, or misrepresent and distort it. Marilynne Robinson is guilty of neither. Ames is utterly believable and described flawlessly. In his sixties he marries a member of his congregation who bears him a son. Through his letter, the son is introduced to Ames's own father, an eccentric

pioneer preacher, and the family of the Presbyterian minister in town, the Boughtons. The minister's son, Jack Boughton, is everything Ames is not. He is dissolute, has a common-law wife, is an atheist, and is something of Ames's nemesis. Despite this, as Ames and Boughton part for the last time, Ames spontaneously blesses Jack. This paternal response is characteristic of Ames' letter. It is the assurance his own son will one day require; the assurance that a father's love, through every possible turn of life, proceeds only as a consequence of grace. Every time I read this book I am moved and humbled by its spiritual vision. It's the literary equivalent of sitting in utter silence watching the sun rise or set. On each page there are gems to be discovered. As a minister and as a father, watching my own one year old son grow up, I can only pray that I will approach something of the stature of the Reverend John Ames. The book won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize and National Book Critics Award and deserved it.

Manoj Jacob

Lesslie Newbigin's book ***The Open Secret*** (SPCK) gives the reader a refreshing and broader understanding of mission. He notes a change in the understanding of mission from primarily increasing the membership of the church to the doing of God's justice in the world. The expression of mission is looked at from the Kingdom perspective as faith, love and hope in action. Newbigin cannot see a separation of the preaching of the gospel from action for God's justice. He challenges the reader to look at mission with this holistic outlook and this makes the book a 'must read' for anyone who is serious about being involved in God's mission in His way.

Jaap Ketelaar

Two suggestions: (1) **Henry Blackaby**, ***Spiritual Leadership – Moving People on to God's Agenda*** (Broadman and Holman). In my training of church leaders I really like and use this book a lot, because it covers the most important leadership issues from a perspective that is focused on God's agenda. In that way leaders are being taught to be missionary leaders and that is exactly what I believe they are called to. (2) **Peter Steinke**, ***Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times – Being Calm and Courageous no Matter What*** (Alban Institute). Did you ever personally feel insecure when people put the pressure on you? From a psychological and theological angle, Steinke focuses on how you can cope and handle difficult issues in times of anxiousness. A practical 'must read' for the leader for when 'the going gets rough'.

Bryan Knell

What on Earth is the Church For? by **David Devenish** (Authentic) is a very important and relevant book for today. David Devenish is a church leader, who appreciates that mission agencies have a great deal of useful expertise and experience, but also wants to see the church at the heart of mission. Many other church leaders will respond positively to what he has to say. Most mission agency leaders need to listen carefully and be prepared to adapt their structures and practices to equip and resource a new generation of missional churches. Over the next ten years we are going to see major changes in the relationship between missional churches and mission agencies. This book opens up the debate. Others from the agency side need to develop the debate, not in a threatened and defensive way, but rejoicing that so many churches want to be missional. My second choice is not a book but a whole series: ***Briefings***, written by **Glen Myers** and published by Authentic. Good mission books that church members will read are of paramount importance, particularly as so much good material will never be read by the majority of Christians. In 1998 a series of Briefings was started and I have long felt that they should be promoted much more widely. Recently, the

eleventh and probably the last booklet was produced. These 64-page booklets are attractively produced, easy to read, with good maps, relevant prayer points and incorporating summaries in boxes. The titles are The Arab World, Children in Crisis, The Rim of Fire, Poorest of the Poor?, India, The Silk Road, Nomads, China, Buddhist Worlds, Mughals and the Balkans. They are all excellent. There is relevant historical background and interesting cultural insights, but the core commitment is to get to the heart of each situation and the dynamic of what is happening today.

David Singh

I would like to recommend my colleague **Damon So**'s work: ***Jesus' Revelation of His Father: A Narrative-Conceptual Study of the Trinity with Special Reference to Karl Barth*** (Paternoster). His main topic is the nature of the Trinity. He explores this topic through his serious engagement with the exegetical work of James Dunn and the systematic theology of Karl Barth. The book succeeds in not only presenting a critical commentary on Barth and Dunn but adds the perspective of a Chinese Christian theologian. This is where its fundamental originality lies as it seeks to enable the readers to reformulate an understanding of the role of the Spirit within the Godhead and in human salvation.

Brian Stanley

I have three recommendations. (1) **Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing in the Bible in the Global South*** (OUP). Philip Jenkins's second major book on contemporary world Christianity is if anything even more noteworthy than his first (*The Next Christendom*). Unlike many studies of non-western theology, it takes very seriously the oral and popular nature of Christian belief in Asia and Africa. It is all about how southern Christians read the Bible with an immediacy that reflects their indifference to the questions raised in the North by the Enlightenment. Scriptural texts which in the North are dissected and discarded on critical grounds are received by Christian communities in the South as God's word of power addressed directly to their ears. For them, the biblical theme of God's grace encountered amidst poverty, oppression and disease, resonates with their everyday experience. (2) **Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000*** (CUP). What role has the Bible played in the construction or refutation of racial theories? Kidd's book is a welcome attempt to address this question. Kidd began his research with the hypothesis that pre-modern European Christian cultures which accepted the Scriptures as the authoritative word of God were predisposed to view humanity as a single biological family and that, conversely, the erosion during the nineteenth century of confidence in the authority of the Bible opened the door to theories of human polygenesis and the crudities of late Victorian and Edwardian racism. Although Kidd reaches the conclusion that the connection between race and theology was not so simple, he never wholly abandons his initial hunch. Along the way he explores discussions of once hotly debated questions such as 'Did Adam have a navel?' or 'Is the red colour of Amerindian peoples a sign of their direct descent from Adam [widely supposed to be red-skinned], or are they rather remnants of the lost ten tribes of Israel'? (3) **Alvyn Austin, *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832-1905*** (Eerdmans). The conservative evangelical tradition is not generally renowned for its veneration of saints. However, James Hudson Taylor's place in evangelical hagiography has been secure ever since the publication in 1911 and 1918 of the two volumes of his biography written by his son, Dr Howard Taylor, and daughter-in-law, Geraldine Guinness. Austin seeks to side-step the aura of sanctity which has enveloped Taylor himself and focus our attention instead on the ordinary women and men, whether foreign missionaries or Chinese evangelists, who staffed his mission and gave their lives (some of them literally) for the implementation of Taylor's vision. Particularly fascinating is his portrayal of the controversial Pastor Hsi

Shengmo and the way in which he took the simple gospel symbolism of the 'wordless book', introduced to China by CIM missionaries in about 1880, and incorporated it into the traditional colour cosmology of Chinese culture.

Kang-San Tan

Ida Glasser's refreshing book, ***The Bible and Other Faiths: Christian Responsibility in a World of Religions*** (IVP) stands in the tradition of Kenneth Cragg's approach of taking Islam seriously and more sympathetically; without refraining from the need to engage with Muslim thought and practices from a Christian position. ***Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve - Paul and the Early Church*** by **Eckhard Schnabel** (IVP) is a monumental two volumes (1928 pages!) and the latest New Testament study on "early Christian mission." Although the book focuses on the historical account of how the faith of the early church spread, Schnabel's unique contribution comes from his theological analyses of the early church's missionary endeavours and his ability to relate these insights to contemporary concerns. **Alvyn Austin** is Assistant Professor of History at Brock University, Ontario, Canada and his parents were CIM missionaries. His book ***China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Lat Qing Society, 1832-1905*** (Eerdmans) is a critical study on Hudson Taylor and the CIM and will be a source of debate for those interested in analysing the strengths and weaknesses of CIM. Finally, ***A Life of Jesus*** (Tuttle Publishing) by **Shusaku Endo** is a work by someone who is considered to be one of Japan's greatest twentieth century writers, and touted as "the Graham Greene of Japan." *A Life of Jesus* is an attempt to retell the story of Jesus in a Japanese style to a Japanese audience. It is not a biography, nor is it a fictionalised account of Jesus' life. The basic story line is factual but developed into an Asian story form. The final result is captivating, refreshing and brilliant!

Loun Ling Tan

Chris Wright's ***The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*** (IVP), has given me a broad perspective of God's mission and how we should approach the subject, e.g. a holistic missional hermeneutic of the Exodus account, neither over-spiritualising nor de-spiritualising the redemptive act. Also, before reading this book, I had never understood with such depth and clarity the relationship between God's activities in the history of Israel and among the nations. The church today is being confronted with her 'irresistible responsibility' for the rest of the world.

John Wibberley

I suggest the following: **R.J. Berry** ed., ***When Enough is Enough: a Christian Framework for Environmental Sustainability*** (Apollos), which is a collection of essays encompassing theology, climate, creatures, values, economics, agriculture, justice, waste and harmony in creation as intended by Our Creator. It is a book of immediate contemporary practical relevance rooted in the timeless principles of scripture. Also, **D. Bingham**, ***William Wilberforce - The Freedom Fighter*** (Trailblazers), an inspiring book for young people with current relevance to this 200th anniversary year of the Act abolishing slavery. It has highly useful endpapers on thinking through the issues raised and on praying accordingly. There is also the much longer, detailed biography by **John Pollock**, ***Wilberforce: God's Statesman*** (Kingsway) which is highly recommended for adult readers.

Language in Education, Mission and Development in Africa
Appeals for Local Tongues and Local Contexts

Author: Jim Harries, Church of God missionary in Kenya.

Negative outcomes arising from the use of European languages by African people in African contexts are perhaps the least visible to the Europeans themselves. To them, all seems well; their languages are a boon to Africa, and because they are the ones paying the bills, things continue as they are. The power of international languages grows – but what damage is being done in the process? To what extent are language policies making it impossible for people to take responsibility for their own lives?

This article raises logical questions as to the desirability, practicality, morality and sustainability of such use of European languages in Sub-Saharan Africa. What are the implications for the African Continent of continuing to (supposedly) self govern on the basis of that which is not locally rooted? What is actually happening when cultures and legal systems are transported en-masse from point X and dumped wholesale onto country Y?

Short as it is, this article can only survey the issues. But the author's message is clear – the current rate of linguistic globalisation, added to the colonial foundation on which African nations are already based, is handicapping the building of stable productive African societies. Urgent action is advocated to transfer genuine self-responsibility to African governance, to churches, to NGOs and to the public sphere as a whole.

1. Cross-Cultural Self-Deception and its Outcome

Cognition is a prerequisite for communication which leads to understanding. Inference determines the way in which this happens, i.e. how a stimulus will be understood as having meaning. That is, words do not of themselves carry meaning. They evoke meaning through their peculiar impact on someone's cognition and context (Sperber 1995:2). That this process of cognition is largely subconscious is evident. When someone speaks to me, it seems *as if* meaning is encoded in their words. This apparent ability of words to carry meaning can be very convincing, and so very deceptive. Whether it be through long habituation, or whether it is innate is debatable, but it is commonly assumed that words carry meanings. [1]

Differences between people of different cultures and worldviews are reflected (or contained) in the complex cognitive stimulus-response mechanisms of the mind. The cognition systems of people of the same culture share many similarities, thus enabling them to understand one another sufficiently for many practical purposes. The more distant the cultures of origin of the communicators concerned, the less alike are their inferential cognitive networks. Recognising the tendency of the mind to self deception is key in comprehending what goes on in 'cross-cultural communication'. To some extent consciously, but even more subconsciously, the mind works to make sense of whatever stimuli it receives. (My mind will automatically correct and make sense of something that seems wrong. Someone telling me 'I have come tomorrow to help you' I correct as meaning 'I will come'. If someone tells a cook that the toasted wickens are overdone then the cook will assume the person to have meant roast chickens, and so on.) One result of this is that translation of the words of people of a very different culture into a familiar language, will give an impression of understanding, whether correct or not. [2] This impression gains currency with the passing of time as the complexity of linkages in the mind accommodate what is foreign. (The undermining of such supposedly orderly relationship is part of what is called *culture shock*.) Unfortunately, because of the deception mentioned above, a person's use of their innate stimuli-responses in attempting to comprehend what is foreign, has limited accuracy. Because there is an instinctive tendency for the human mind to expect to be functioning in only one culture and *not* cross-culturally, the mind domesticates the foreign. (Venuti 1998:5)

There is no objective map of the mind's stimulus/response combinations. Unlike a landscape with predictable physical features that can be ascertained from a distance, even by different people simultaneously, the cognitive landscape of stimuli-responses resembles a four dimensional multi-textured multi-coloured jungle! The complexity of this pattern is such as to be beyond human capabilities of accurate description, rather as it would be impossible to describe a three dimensional scene if restricted to the language of only two dimensions. We do not know, physicists tell us, what electrons are, what they look like, or exactly where they are – but we know that they exist because of the impact (charge) that they have. Examining our own minds is more difficult than examining electrons, because whereas electrons are 'out there', for our minds there is no vantage point other than from within them.

Translation (between cultures), explaining one kind of four dimensional jungle to another, is fraught with impediments. We do not know what the 'foreign' *is*, only the impact that it has on us. Part of that impact will be on our subconscious, which is beyond our understanding never mind explanation. When someone explains what s/he felt or experienced in response to the foreign, s/he is in effect, I suggest, drawing on an unfathomable depth of their person that is closely linked to the cognitive subconscious. Also, difficulties of understanding will be more serious between unrelated cultures that use the same language, such as when Africans and Europeans both use English. The use of a common language can conceal rather than reveal differences. The implications of this should be becoming clear. That is – that teachings and governance in order to take account of local conditions and avoid making cultural blunders, should be of local origin.

2. Grasping a Foreign Culture

In today's world of shrinking boundaries cross-cultural communication is more and more important inside and outside of the church. I would here like to describe the nature of such communication in what to me is a simple but very helpful way, and from that description proceed to consider the practical possibilities of it occurring.

The practical way in which cross-cultural communication causes difficulties arises from differences in nuanced meanings and *implicatures* [3] of words used. This applies even if (and this is the case that I consider here for the sake of simplicity) one language, let us say English, is being used by both (or all) parties. I illustrate translation differences through Table 1 below.

Table 1. Implicatures of English usage in East Africa as against in the UK

English term	**Implicature in the use of this term in the UK**	**Implicature in the use of this term in East Africa**
Rain	Bad	Good
Fat (person)	Bad	Good
Pension	Good	Bad
Courting	Good	Bad
Tree	Scenic object	Firewood
Paraffin lamp	Rare object	Common object
Table	Every-day item	New and relatively rare item
Bread	Staple diet	Luxury diet
Shoes	Keep feet warm	Required to look modern
Wedding	Ceremony to initiate life together	Ceremony performed for stable couples
Water	Comes from tap	Comes from spring or stream
Chicken	Meat bought frozen	Sleeps in our sitting room

That the above may be generalisations I think does not detract from their validity. If someone considers my examples to be 'wrong', I nevertheless ask them to bear with me in considering implications that are illustrated by them. In addition to having different implicatures as above, the meanings themselves of some words can be different in Englishes in different parts of the globe. An example is 'courting', where the same word is often used in East Africa to describe a process of preparation for marriage that is vastly different to the one practised in Western countries such as the UK.

It is possible for people, as presumably the readers of this article, to gain some understanding and appreciation of the above differences. Description of such differences has been the bread and butter of travellers' tales, anthropological accounts and ethnographies for decades, if not centuries. The question I would however like to ask is: how easy is it for someone to have all such differences in mind in the course of cross-cultural conversation, planning, decision making and discussion? That is, does my having a knowledge that such differences exist enable me to make plans regarding the lives of a foreign (to me) people in a way that means that I can truly take account of the many ways in which they use language, even if the language is English? Or will I in directing my mental activities in other directions (such as planning or conversation etc.) return to a default understanding of language, that is likely to be rooted in the kinds of implicatures familiar to my own people? Even though I may be able to appreciate the educational value of having information such as that in Table 1 above, will I realistically be able to learn sufficiently the implicatures of a second (and even third or fourth) living vocabulary/culture/context so as to be able to intelligently engage in communication with or about a foreign people? How is such a set of implicatures effectively learned? Surely it is only through a long-term exposure to a people, by living closely with them? That is assuming it is possible at all. Another question that arises is: once having understood the importance of being able to grasp the implicatures as well as 'meanings' of words, is it most helpful that the language to be used with that culture be the same international language, or is the learning of a foreign language advantageous? A completely foreign language might provide a vital separation in the mind between meanings and implicatures of 'equivalent' words?

But does all the above really matter? Is it not sufficient to communicate internationally in a language in which meanings and implicatures simply approximate? Is lack of attention to such detail important? I suggest that it is vital that we consider depths of language use, and not assume language to be merely a crude tool for engaging in surface-level interactions. Many examples could be drawn even from the above small Table. A European text saying that a 'fat man came' is not implying (as it would in East Africa) that he is happy and successful, but that he cannot control his eating habits. Not having a pension may not in Europe imply that one has chosen to spend all one's income in culturally appropriate ways on the extended family as it might in Africa (Maranz 2001:16), but more likely that one has not used sufficient foresight. [4] "He lit a paraffin lamp" is an everyday statement in places not connected to mains electricity, but conjures up very different thoughts where people are accustomed to operating with electricity. Such implicatures that are bread and butter to normal communication are, I suggest, vitally important, and a failure to grasp them results in communication failure.

My suggestion on the basis of the above is that any cross-cultural communication at any depth (and human beings tend to like to communicate at depth) requires a deep knowledge by at least one party of the culture of the 'other', plus an ability to keep two language categories (those of the two cultures concerned) separate in the mind so as to be able to communicate using one of the two categories (Mazrui 1993). Such language understanding as is required *cannot* be learned either in a classroom or through professional contact over short periods. The human mind's ability to deceive itself (see above) is too great for that. It requires a long-term vulnerable exposure to the daily life of the 'other' people. Also, such different understandings of words are best achieved when the language in question is

different. That is, that it is helpful to have language barriers in places where there are cultural barriers so as to prevent texts (of all sorts including written and oral) from one culture swamping those in another in an un-translated (i.e. not transformed so as to be appropriate) form.

The above, if correct, has important implications. The cultures of many people within the Western world are, I suggest, sufficiently similar to be able to benefit through communication using a common international language such as English. However, the differences between so-called 'Western' and 'Non-Western' cultures are sufficiently great to make communication via international Western languages such as English more harmful than helpful in the long term. I suggest rather that translation is a vital middle-process, and that this translation should be done by people with great expertise and a high level of exposure to both cultures. Translation on the basis of word for word conversion, or even dynamic equivalence is insufficient. Rather the translation needs to take account of pragmatics so as to translate implicatures. (See, for example, recent translation models based on relevance theory (Gutt 1991).) It is in the long term more helpful to translate between different languages (for example from English to *Kiswahili*) than between the same language (for example between American English and East African English).

What is at stake in the current globalising world is great. Failure to attend to the above concerns is going to handicap severely the functional abilities of non-Western societies who are 'under attack' by Western tongues. This may lead to the disastrous collapse of whole societies, or the invention (or perpetuation) of racial boundaries leading towards a global 'caste system', perhaps akin to that known to exist in Hinduism today. At the very least we may see the rise of fundamentalisms that are linked to the preservation of distinct aspects of 'threatened' cultures that have come to be misunderstood by powerful neighbours. Already it certainly leads to widespread corruption.

3. Cultures that are not 'pristine'

One failure of many missiological writers (and that of others who attempt to make in-depth descriptions of peoples in the non-Western world) is that of not realising that the 'errors' of previous generations of missionaries (colonialists/development workers) have already had a lasting impact. In 99% of the African 'mission field' one is not converting people from pure 'animism' into Christianity, but neither is one assisting (in whatever way) 'normal' Christians of the same sort that we have 'at home'. In addition to the foundational impact resulting from their own culture of origin, the contours of Christianity in Africa have also been profoundly influenced by the particular strategies of previous generations of Western missionaries. Hence we are no longer in a situation of *preventing* people from becoming dependent on and misunderstanding the West. They are already dependent, and have already misunderstood the West, as the West has misunderstood them. Amongst the important questions that should now be asked is how to *correct* gross misunderstandings that have already occurred. This may be more and not less difficult than the original missionary task!

The obvious approach to take to a prior imbalance is to redress it. The actual response being widely expressed on the 'mission field' today, however, is that because someone has already got used to having too much of something, it is best simply to feed the growing appetite. If it is prosperity teaching that people have had too much of, then the response is that the rate of provision of prosperity be stepped up! This seems to be what is happening in East Africa, and presumably also elsewhere. Amongst the reasons for this is the unwillingness of Europeans to share closely in ways of life characterised by poverty, ill health, and presumed associated dangers. As a consequence 'missionary' activity is a *pulling* of people from the African way of life into a European way of life – even when on the African person's home territory. If African people (as others in the world) need education and assistance it should be with a view to their living their lives in a way that fits with how *they* live and not how others

live! The only way to effectively achieve this as a Westerner is to be vulnerable to African people and to reach them in their *own* languages.

This is a situation that needs urgent attention. Yes of course the African people will ask for 'more money'. Who wouldn't? In fact, offering it is putting them into a trap. [5] They have learned from experience that European people have little or no patience to learn their language and culture. Is anyone prepared to prove them wrong on that score?

4. English – the False Prophet

A new missionary (or development worker) coming to Africa is quickly faced with a difficult language question. In many Anglophone countries on the continent, people find they can 'get by with English', so few see the importance of learning an additional tongue. What are the consequences of this decision to 'get by' spread over thousands of foreign workers, and many decades?

Personally speaking, judging by my experience amongst the Luo people [6] which has led to my being fluent in *Dholuo* (the language of the Luo people), it is extremely debilitating. It makes it impossible for me to interact 'normally' with Luo people in Luoland, except for the few who already know me well. Wherever I mix in different social settings I am surrounded by whisperings of 'he knows *Dholuo* …', groans, laughter and other expressions of amazement over my familiarity with this 'tribal' language. The Luo people are surprised, taken aback, and even shocked, to find a white man who is fluent in their vernacular. I may be the only white person in Kenya who is the exception to the Luo people's underlying understanding that "white men are ignorant". I mean - how can one be considered intelligent if one does not understand a people's language? The notion that 'whites are ignorant' being almost constantly perpetuated (every time a White visitor comes to Luoland – which is rather frequently) means that people's initial assessment of my likely intelligence is very low. I can get talked down to like a child, and people will not expect me to understand their real issues. I suppose you could say that the Luo take me as *primitive*. This is an interesting turn of circumstances.

Something is wrong when after 100 years of colonialism there is (perhaps) no other Westerner who is a fluent speaker of *Dholuo* in Kenya, despite this being a language of three million plus people! At the same time the English speaking Western world is an enormously powerful influence in the life of every Luo person today. This means that while British/American rooted international policies have almost entirely taken over much of the lives of the Luo people – there is no one able to intelligently comment on their impact. What does this say about efforts to overcome racism?

We are heading towards a similar circumstance in Africa as the caste system in India. [7] Severe marginalisation and oppression of the Luo language (and many others in Africa) is denying people groups the means (briefly – self understanding) with which to progress. Instead, while their own languages are totally ignored in the formal sector of life and economy, they remain the foundation for all the important social parts of their lives. So they are stuck in a time-warp. The more the West forces its presence into all corners of Africa, the more the people's own development can be hindered as a result. The reader may object that the whole point of an international language is that it will *enable* development. So indeed the theory seems to run, although this kind of development is very much one of 'dependence', usually on charity.

Visionaries imagine an African continent in decades ahead being divided into English, French and Portuguese sections, with local languages pretty much forgotten. The attempt to do this, however, is seriously debilitating millions of people. English (and the other European languages) simply does not belong to Africa. Perhaps it could belong, if a big wall was put up to keep Westerners out. Recent trends, however, in international relations are moving in the

opposite direction. This means that (constant) attempts at indigenising English, are as constantly being thwarted. African uses of English are marked as 'wrong' in the formal educational and governance system in a country such as Kenya. But, whether through ignorance or frustration, African countries far from putting up a fight are figuratively speaking rushing into the jaws of the lion. Throughout much of Africa, the standard for English is British or American. Hence African issues, conditions and problems are ignored, while African people are making guesses and building elaborate structures in the ether in order to attempt to line-up their English with so called 'international' standards. Not only has the African person's own language been consigned to a prior age, but the language that they are forced to use through official orientation and ever increasing links to the West cannot be their own.

Trying to use someone else's language in *their* way while trying to explain things *your* way is intellectual suicide. Too much of this is found in African universities and education and the wider society around them. It is sad. The connection between language and the 'real' world that native English speakers so value is destroyed. English words are said to mean African things. 'Lying' is just the norm – the only way to get by. Corruption is a normal part of life. The spreading of this mantle of Western hegemony spells disaster for the African people, who are at the same time silenced through their own dependence.

The solution to this situation is at once simple and difficult. Westerners who want to intervene to help the people need this advice: DEPOWER YOURSELF (i.e. be poor) and USE THE LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE YOU ARE REACHING! Those wanting to perpetuate cognitive incoherence by promoting the use of European languages in Africa should be aware of the disaster that looms on the horizon. [8]

5. Implications for the Interpretation of Scripture

Having re-evaluated many of the interpretational processes going on between Western and non-Western nations, particularly in Africa, we are left to consider the implications for Biblical interpretation and with it the beliefs of Christians and the running of the church.

As Kuhn (2001) has noted with regard to the self-understanding of African founded churches (AICs or African Indigenous Churches), it is widely appreciated that these churches have rooted their beliefs in local language interpretations of the Scriptures. As a result there is a popular view that these churches have made a conscious decision to move away from Biblical orthodoxy to accommodate aspects of their own culture. I suggest, along with Kuhn (2001:89-90), that this view is, at least in most cases, incorrect. On the contrary, these churches see themselves as following genuine orthodoxy, but now *interpreted through their own languages* as they read it in their own Scriptures. The singular beliefs and practices of these churches frequently arise from their being true to the language used in their translation of the Scriptures.

In saying this I am implying various things:

1. The need for a language to be Christianised in the course of time as it comes to be used in Christian ways (Tshianda 2005:46).

2. The importance of Christian tradition in guiding a new church. I am here differing from the idealist Protestant belief of *sola scriptura* and suggesting that following the Bible without having a historical church to learn from is an inadequate basis for the Christian faith.

3. Following on from the above – it is important to have Christian education and debate occur in the language of a people, so as to enable the language and its use to develop in Christian ways. (See also Harries 2006.) If this fails to happen a church will continue either to be foreign or unorthodox in the true sense, in order to be true to the language that it uses.

What is foreign in a church can take on a 'godly' character. The sound of Latin has for centuries reminded people in the Roman Catholic church of the holiness of God. In the same way nowadays English as the language of international relations and the Christian church, has taken on a divine character for many in Africa and presumably elsewhere around the globe. Much that is culturally European – the wearing of shoes and clothes in general, formal education, clerical garb and the drinking of tea, are being interpreted as Christian activities or rituals. This is an embarrassment for members of the original culture – who find that procedures which were quite rational in their culture of origin have become religious rituals in another. It can certainly make it difficult for the foreign visitor to feel at home in the new foreign but all too familiar set up!

It is extremely difficult for natives, especially of poorer countries of the world, to get a sufficient grasp of English to be able to use it at a formal or an international level. This severely limits their ability to interact with their wider community, and therefore leads to idleness and thoughtlessness. (The only way is simply to allow others to do things for you.) The English that dominates their lives remains out of reach. It is easier just to accept what some foreigner has said than to try and correct them, just to be mocked for your lack of linguistic acumen. It is especially difficult to be inventive and innovative in a language that you barely understand. This difficulty of course becomes exaggerated if the owners of the language, who are particularly likely to find fault, are present. The use of a language such as English in Africa has a stultifying effect and encourages laziness in the church and in life in general.

Christian teaching (i.e. words) as with other teaching, does not easily move across cultural and linguistic barriers and remain intact. Invariably such movement *transforms* it. It is in effect impossible to know just what will 'come out in the wash'. What may be highly orthodox or commendable teaching at the point of origin may be something quite different when assimilated at its 'foreign' destination. The way to ensure that teaching 'strikes home', is to move the teacher with the teaching. That is, the only way to effectively transfer the orthodoxy of Christianity from one culture to another, is to have the person who is familiar with this orthodoxy in the culture of origin become as familiar as possible with the target culture. This is why missionaries (and development workers) must learn the language of the people they are reaching, and be immersed in their culture.

Summary and Conclusion

The way that the human mind responds to stimuli so as to produce meaning or understanding is here shown to be such as to result in confusion in the process of communication across cultures. That is, the mind instinctively corrects 'abnormalities' in stimuli arising from foreign cultures so as to fit its familiar scenery. This kind of confusion, whereby the foreign appears familiar, is one reason why the close governance or control of a people by those foreign to them is often unhelpful.

The same difficulty arises if we consider language use across cultures in terms of implicatures instead of only meaning. Examples given illustrate that the implicatures of words with the same meaning can be vastly different between cultures. Because implicatures are central to communication, familiarity with language (meanings) may not enable someone either to communicate meaningfully or understand clearly.

Increasing rates of globalisation resulting in few, if any, cultures being untouched by the West, means that peoples' response to the West will be affected by their prior experience of it. This frequently being an experience of dependence has many implications that certainly reduce the options for straightforward honesty in communication. For example, because English is invariably accompanied by wealth in its spread around the globe, the misleading impression is given that the use of the language invariably leads to increased wealth as an

outcome. In fact, wherever English appropriates power in a non-English community (especially a poorer community) it condemns non (or non-fluent) English speakers to increasing ignorance over things that are vital for their own lives. The spread of English, because it makes it more difficult for native English speakers to discover 'what is really going on', adds to the recipe for disaster. Vulnerability and language learning should be the starting points for cross-cultural intervention.

The language difficulties explained above are found to be *as* or even *more* pertinent for the missionary task of planting and nurturing churches. The church should be heading the field in ensuring the vulnerability and linguistic prowess of her servants in cross-cultural service.

In particular intervention outside of the West by Westerners for whatever purpose, but especially in church and evangelism, should be conducted in non-Western languages, and with sufficient vulnerability.

Footnotes

1. This 'code model' of meaning has, according to Sperber and Wilson, been extent at least since the time of Aristotle. It is widely believed to date. (Sperber 1995:2)
2. Readers will assume language to have 'cohesion' and 'coherence.' (Yule 1996:140-141)
3. i.e. meanings that are implied in the use of a particular word in a particular context.
4. Maranz points out the importance amongst African people of meeting immediate needs, thus suggesting that savings such as for a pension are immoral.
5. This is clearly recognised in Western societies themselves where many people fall into the trap of taking credit that they end up not being able to repay.
6. Of Western Kenya.
7. Wallbank (1958:27) indicates that the caste system in India has "certain commendable features" especially as it helped "many [immigrants / invaders] with various levels of culture … to live together." Unlike Wallbank tells us in Europe where "backward peoples … were either exterminated or enslaved" (1958:27-28). Which way is Africa heading?
8. Note that the above is not necessarily advocating the saving of every ethnic language on the continent of Africa. I believe that regional languages such as *Kiswahili* can be used and promoted to great advantage.

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A longer version of this text can be found on the web at www.vulnerablemission.com. The website includes a number of useful resources and is well worth visiting.

<back to top>

In the Bookshop
A missiological meditation

Author: Dr Jonathan Ingleby, Editor of *Encounters* and frequenter of bookshops.

The author teaches a postgraduate class on Christian mission with special emphasis on globalisation and postcolonialism. Research in the local bookshop turns up some interesting results.

A bookshop, it seems to me, provides an inventory of the things in our society that people find important for their lives. They buy books about their jobs, hobbies, passions and concerns, hoping to deepen their experience of life and perhaps even reach out to new undiscovered dimensions of existence. Also the books are written by the 'movers and shakers' in the land – certainly this is true of the novels and biographies, but of some of the DIY type books as well (think celebrity chefs) – and this in turn tells us something about our society.

So today I am in the bookshop, with notebook and pen in hand, and wearing my missiological hat.

I go first to the shelves marked **fiction**, the largest single section. The titles are arranged alphabetically and I decide to look just at the 'A's. I am particularly interested in the national and ethnic backgrounds of the authors. The books are all in the English language, of course, though some have been translated from other languages. I find a selection of names that are not evidently 'English' and by means of a little investigation am able to find out where the authors come from: Kader Abdolah (Iran), Chinua Achebe (Nigeria), Chimamanda Ngazi Adiche (Nigeria) Monica Ali (British but born in Bangladesh), Isabel Allende (Chile), Karen Alvtegen (Sweden), Nicola Ammaniti (Italy), Anita Amirrezvani (Iran), Tahmima Anam (Bangaldesh). Of course there are some British writers too (e.g. Martin Amis) but I am surprised (and pleased) to see how many non-Brits there are and what a wide variety of nations is represented. (I should say that I have chosen the 'A's at random but am in no doubt that the other letters of the alphabet would have yielded similar results.) All this speaks to me quite directly about globalisation – in the obvious sense that the authors come from all over the globe – but also about postcolonialism which began as a literary discourse to do with the way that writers from the ex-colonies appropriated the language of the colonisers and mastered them for their own purposes – one of the early books about postcolonialism is called *The Empire Writes Back*.

Clearly the process of 'writing back' is still going on, and it provides us with a window into all sorts of vistas that are part of the landscape of mission: how the Global South has changed since the end of colonialism, how immigrant and diasporic communities are playing their part in formerly metropolitan nations, how Eurocentrism is no longer a viable worldview and so on.

I move on, wondering, as I do, why among the novels there is such a large Science Fiction section, and not finding an answer. The **biography** section is next and it immediately strikes me that this follows a rather different direction when compared with the fiction. While Westerners do not entirely monopolise the shelf space, they predominate. It may be, I think to myself, that our role models are still on the whole Westerners. Despite high profile exceptions – Mandela, Martin Luther King, some sportspeople and musicians – it is still true, I suspect, that power and influence flows 'from the West to the rest'. As it does in the world of mission even now, despite our disclaimers.

I am still on the ground floor, and must hurry on. There is a big **sports** section, with football books taking the pride of place. There are some obvious conclusions here. International

sport is a fascinating example of globalisation. Talent is recruited world-wide, spectator loyalties are alternately fiercely national and oddly cross-border (Manchester United!), the communications revolution, especially satellite television, has had a major influence on the way sport has developed, and great sporting events such as the World Cup and the Olympic Games are the 'religious' festivals of a globalised society. Churches look wistfully at this passion and loyalty and wonder how they can reproduce it in a better cause. There is also a fair size **music** department. I realise that much of what I have been thinking about sport applies to music too.

I am passing by the **children's** section and am now moving to the second floor. First up as you hit the top of the escalator is an impressive **travel** section (including maps and languages). Cue mobility, interconnectedness, networking, tourism, other cultures and the like. This is one of mission's big opportunities, I think, somewhat successfully exploited by means of the short-term mission phenomenon (aka Christian tourism).

The **history** section looks surprisingly healthy, though closer inspection shows quite a narrow range of topics. There is a great deal of military history; European history is mostly about the Nazis. **Politics** also seems comparatively well stocked, especially books on American politics and the war on terror. I meditate in a rather dejected way about the extraordinary ignorance of the history of mission that the Christian public characteristically displays, and contrast this with the situation 100 years ago when Christian missionaries grabbed the headlines in the way that wars (the Great War, the Second World War, the Falklands War, the Iraq War) do now.

Cookery seems a less depressing corner of the shop, with its international flavour (!). **Computing** also feels like a global activity. If the one is about variety and the other about uniformity (Microsoft!) then that is a useful reminder that globalisation both unifies and fragments.

Finally I reach the **YOUzone** (well, that's what this bookshop calls it). I can hardly miss it. A mixture of 'spirituality', 'personal development', pop psychology, health, 'New Age', 'body, mind and spirit', it has a huge presence. **Religion**, I notice, is separate and tiny in comparison and seems to have as many books attacking religion as defending it. What do I make of all this? Is the YOUzone an opportunity for the gospel or a threat? Whatever the case, it certainly seems to mean that the rational certainties of the Enlightenment are under threat, and that this is another radical undermining of a Eurocentric worldview which fifty years ago was still largely in place. Another facet of postcolonialism perhaps. Missiologists take note.

As I put my notebook away I thought to myself that there were several other ways that one could analyse society. Are bookshops all that important, after all? I remember going to one of those huge shopping centres (I think it was Meadowhall in Sheffield) and not being able to find one decent bookshop in the whole place. There were other things, I noticed, that people preferred to buy! Also, are books themselves gradually becoming a thing of the past? (See Richard Johnson's article 'On Narrative and Networks' in this edition of *Encounters*.) I almost went straight home to do an in-depth analysis of the *Radio Times* on the grounds that what people are watching nowadays is more important than what they are reading. This was such a depressing idea, however, that I went and had a cup of coffee instead.

<back to top>

On Narratives and Networks

Author: Richard Johnson, Head of Biblical Studies and Library Supervisor, Redcliffe College.

Rebecca West once wrote about a group of women that she met in the former Yugoslavia:

> None of these women could read. When a boy passed by carrying an advertisement of Batya's shoes they had to ask a man they knew to read it for them. They did not suffer any great deprivation thereby. Any writer worth his salt knows that only a small proportion of literature does more than partly compensate people for the damage they have suffered by learning to read. (*Black Lamb and Grey Falcon,* Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 1993 [1st pub 1942], p329)

I sometimes wonder whether a future novelist might one day write something similar about the internet: 'Only a small proportion of the internet does more than partly compensate people for the damage they have suffered by learning to use it.' However, for many of us the internet has become an inescapable part of life. Undoubtedly, like a garden spade, there are certain things that it can do better than anything else. For example, if I wanted to know the average life expectancy of left-handed men in Norway, or the latest estimate for how many unreached people groups there are in Turkmenistan (always assuming that we could agree on what these words actually meant) I would not think of looking anywhere other than the internet. In other words, it's extremely good for basic information (however meaningless or irrelevant 99% of that information is).

The problem, to my mind, comes when we try to use a garden spade for tasks for which it was not designed - such as surgery. The most probable result will be the death of the patient. And however good at providing information the internet might be, when it comes to more important aspects of life, such as growing in knowledge, wisdom, maturity, and holiness, better tools are available. One of those tools might, for example, be human contact with wise people, with mentors who know what it is to stand in the presence of God. Another might be similar contact with the poor, with those who know what it is to be crushed by the presence of oppression. And another might be contact with the thoughts and dreams of wise men and women throughout history, by a process known as reading (which I guess you are doing at the moment, although on this occasion not the words of anyone with great wisdom). And I dare to suggest that reading, true reading, as distinct from 'looking up information', is far better done from books than from the internet – even if the entire text of every book ever written were available online.

There are some very obvious reasons why this is so, and some less obvious ones. The obvious ones can be easily listed as follows:

- Sitting in front of a computer for a long time is bad for the health – physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual;
- Reading speed is measurably slower when reading from a screen;
- Reading comprehension is reduced. You need to re-read passages more often, and the text needs to be broken up into smaller chunks;
- The binding, typeface, illustrations, quality of paper and general formatting of a book tell you a lot about it (such as its age) before you even begin reading it; whereas you cannot tell from online text whether it was originally written 300 years ago or yesterday;
- You can't read online in the bath, or the result might be much like performing surgery with a spade. You can't read online half-way up a

mountain, or in a desert, or at the bus-stop, or lying down, or even curled up on the sofa in front of an open fire;

- More seriously, in a situation of oppression one can never know who else might be monitoring the sites that are being logged on to from a particular computer.

All this is obvious; but it's the deeper symbolism of each activity that interests me more. For it seems to me that we have here a symbolic battle between the 'network' and the 'narrative' as the controlling metaphor of human life and consciousness. The network is of course represented by the internet – everything links to everything else; there is no beginning and no end, and nothing is stable - what you read today might have been anonymously changed by tomorrow – who knows? You can never say, 'It is finished', for the internet is never finished; all you can do is 'log off'. Every journey around the internet is different, and for that reason is frustrating, because human beings are not designed to cope with constant novelty.

The narrative, in contrast, is represented symbolically by the book, which has the comfort of covers, and a story (whether fictional or not) between them, and a beginning and end; and, most importantly, chapters. One can experience the delight of turning actual pages, rather than scrolling down a screen. Because we are physical beings, the sheer physicality of all of this incarnates the narrative structure of our lives more profoundly than a website can ever do. I can more easily think of myself metaphorically as a book (albeit unfinished as yet, and with joint authorship) than as a website, for our lives do have a narrative structure; we talk about the 'story' of our life, or 'beginning a new chapter', or even 'turning over a new leaf'. The same parallels might be 'intellectually' true if the content of the book is available online, but my hands and heart do not believe it. A book breaks up its content into manageable pieces, as does my life, and simply scrolling through a long, seemingly never-ending document is never quite the same as turning over pages. And I have never 'logged off' with the same emotional satisfaction that I have experienced when turning the final page of a book. (Of course, there is an emotional satisfaction I sometimes feel when logging off; it's the same emotion that one would feel when walking out of a prison and breathing fresh air once more.)

The act of reading a book is always more than 'gaining information' about its content. It's more like beginning a friendship. As one rereads a book, there is a history that you both share, and a familiar backdrop, for the words remain in the same place on the same page each time you take the book from the shelf. However, in re-reading the words one can begin to move beyond them and allow your intuition to ponder anew their deeper significance. Reading and rereading a book over a period of years becomes a meditative, reflective, liturgical experience in a way that reading the same text on a screen can never be; and although it may not necessarily lead to wisdom, it lays some important foundations.

I would suggest that there are important parallels here with mission, for mission is also more than merely communicating 'information'. Whatever their value may be in particular situations, information about 'the gospel' communicated by radio, television or internet can never be as effective as seeing it incarnate in the life of a person.

Of course, a person is more personal than a book. But a book, for me at least, is inherently more personal than a website. I can relate to it in a completely different way. When I look at a book on my shelf, it has a history. I mean that that particular copy has a history distinct from all other copies of the book. It has a history that often predates my birth, which is reflected in the names and annotations of previous readers. And then there is a moment when its own history intersected my history. I can remember when I bought it, where I bought it from, the difficulties of getting there, the conversation I had with the book-seller, the internal debate about whether I could afford it or not, and the occasional serendipity of finding an unexpected

treasure in an unlikely place – like a certain man finding a pearl in a field, or like finding (as I did last month) a first edition of Tolkien's 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' for £1 in a charity shop. It might be that the text is available on the internet, but frankly I really couldn't care. A part of reading (and I'm talking about academic books here, not just novels or poetry) is to bring pleasure – and reading a book brings a great deal more pleasure than reading the same text online.

When I look at my bookshelves, I see a record of my past, and an agenda for my future. I see books I first read many years ago, and books I've never read but still hope to one day. I am powerfully reminded of the things that have been, are, or (I hope) will be important to me, in a more tangible, tactile way than any list of 'favourite' web-sites could ever do. Seeing a book on a shelf is like seeing an old friend in the distance; or perhaps, at times, an old enemy. Life becomes that little bit more real once more. One is taken out of one's immediate preoccupations and reminded of the bigger picture once more.

A website is simply not sufficiently incarnate; the word remains abstract, somewhere out there in cyberspace, rather than 'becoming flesh'. I can love a book in a way that I cannot love a website, even though both may have the same content. I do not want 'the text' in the abstract; I want this particular incarnation of the text, something I can hold, and touch, and even love. Similarly, I do not want an abstract expression of the love of God; I want someone I can touch, and love; although of course we can only groan while we hope for those things that are yet to come. And love has a great deal to do with how we grow in wisdom and knowledge. (Any teacher worth their salt would far rather instil a love for a topic in their students than merely give them information about it.) And love is always concrete, and incarnate. It cannot be abstract, or it is not love.

The books that I hold, and touch, have an aesthetic quality that a website I can only observe can never have; and, because I am a human being rather than an angel or a robot, that is important to me. The medium is at least a part of the message. There are books that I have read purely because of the quality of the production, because they have been beautiful, because I can see that someone has taken great care with them, and I am interested in finding out why they have taken that care. Bill Thompson writes (on the BBC website!), 'in the end, whatever technology may offer us, we will make our decisions as humans, living in the physical world, with aesthetic considerations sometimes trumping the hard-edge practical ones… I suspect the same will apply to the book in years to come, and we will continue to choose them for reasons that defy the market but reinforce what it means to be human.'

To return to the battle of the metaphors, when I read a book I want a narrative and not a network. I do not want my reading surrounded by adverts, interrupted by pop-ups, with words colour-coded to indicate links to hundreds of other sites – I actually want the possibility of closure. Of course, there are obviously some situations in life for which the metaphor of a 'network' is more appropriate than that of a 'narrative'. Spades do have their uses. The problem comes when it tries to be a controlling metaphor; because ultimately we live within a meta-narrative in which reality will, eventually, break in, and this part of the story will come to an end. Within the universe there is time, as well as space; and in the end the narrative, I predict, will be continuing long after the network has gone the way of all dinosaurs.

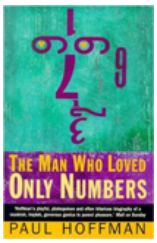
Incidentally, the most feeble argument in favour of the internet is that it provides 'choice'. But frankly, who cares? I simply don't want that degree of choice. I do not want to go into a restaurant and be given a 50-volume menu with 100,000 items in it, all for the sake of 'more choice'. I am human, and I am mortal. There are a finite number of books that I can read, or will read between now and the end of my life; and quite a lot of them are on my shelves already. I simply do not need hundreds of thousands of others. I can only imagine that this

virtual Tower of Babel is another example of human hubris, whose builders have the same motivation as the builders of the original.

I suspect that a generation of children educated solely on the internet will prove, paradoxically, to be the generation that is most ignorant about the real world, for the simple reason that all the time they are on the internet they are not in the real world, but in a virtual world. The real world is a world of flesh and blood, of wind and rain, of incarnation, of love. And one day, when what is even more real breaks in, all that is virtual will pass away.

<back to top>

The Man Who Loved Only Numbers



by Paul Hoffman

Review by Richard Johnson, Head of Biblical Studies and Library Supervisor, Redcliffe College.

Paul Erdös (pronounced 'air-dish') was a Hungarian mathematical prodigy who lived from 1913-1996. He was not a missionary, and did not even believe in God, but his life was so passionately devoted to a single cause that I found this biography one of the most challenging (and enjoyable) books I have recently read. Despite his agnosticism, those describing his life frequently resorted to religious imagery to describe him: he was 'a mathematical monk', devoting his life to 'a single narrow mission' (p25); his energies were 'given entirely to the Temple of Mathematics... To see his faith was to be given faith. The religious world might better have understood Paul's special personal qualities' (p ix).

Much of the book is of course enjoyably mathematical in nature, but let me comment briefly on a number of Paul Erdös's personal qualities which I found fascinating and challenging:

- he lived a completely focussed life, with 'no wife or children, no job, no hobbies, not even a home, to tie him down' (p6). For the last 25 years of his life he spent 19 hours a day working on mathematics; he used to say that 'a mathematician is a machine for turning coffee into theorems' (p7). On one occasion, when lecturing at the age of 83, he collapsed unconscious. The audience were being moved from the room when he regained consciousness. 'Tell them not to leave,' he said. 'I have two more problems to tell them' (p245).

- he had almost no personal possessions. He kept everything he owned in a suitcase and a plastic bag. He needed very little money, and frequently gave away any he had. In the early 1960s he spent a year at University College, London, and one student recalls, 'After collecting his first month's salary he was accosted by a beggar on Euston station, asking for the price of a cup of tea. Erdös removed a small amount from the pay packet to cover his own frugal needs and gave the remainder to the beggar' (p10). Erdös used to say: 'Some French socialist said that private property was theft. I say that private property is a nuisance' (p9).

- despite his individual brilliance, he was a team player, writing mathematical papers with 485 different collaborators – more than any other mathematician in history. For him, mathematics was 'a group activity' (p28), and he loved nothing better than helping others think through their problems. He had a genius for asking questions at just the right level to help others grow in their understanding.

- he was a mentor, going out of his way (literally crossing continents) to encourage others to be interested in his subject. Richard Guy wrote, 'Erdös contributed an enormous amount to mathematics. But for me his even greater importance is that he created a large number of mathematicians' (p41). He was always concerned for the development of the subject as a whole, not for whether he got personal credit for his own contributions.

- he loved children (or 'epsilons', as he called them), and was loved by them in return. He had great compassion for the vulnerable. For example, on one occasion he 'disappeared' from a party to which he had been specially invited. 'Only when everyone was ready to leave did we learn that Erdös had found out that our host had a blind father, who could not join the party... Erdös preferred spending the time with the lonely blind man rather than with the people in the party, who were eager to meet him.' (p136)

- despite his eccentricities, and his almost complete inability to cope with any area of life other than mathematics (severely taxing the patience of his friends), he was deeply loved by them. After his death, one wrote, 'most of all, I will just miss Paul, the human. I loved him dearly.' (p3)

Of course, a life like that of Paul Erdös is as unusual as that of a Francis of Assisi, or a G.K. Chesterton. It would be futile to try to imitate it, but it challenges you to look at your own priorities afresh. And it raises the all-important question: if a man can be so passionately dedicated to the kingdom of mathematics, can a Christian be any less dedicated to the kingdom of God?

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<back to top>
