

## **RESISTING COLONIAL DOMINATION**

The most successful congregations we studied were not dependent on foreign funding, nor were they led by missionaries from the United States or Europe. In fact, we heard frequently that this type of colonial influence eviscerates the church rather than strengthens it. External funding breeds dependency; it keeps the church in a weakened state so it cannot stand on its own. Likewise, outside leaders — whose power is frequently associated with the fact that they have access to money — tend to emasculate indigenous leaders, putting them in secondary roles. Nicholas Bhengu, the founder of the Back to God movement in South Africa, said that on a trip to the United States, God told him, "Don't get the money from your church here [the Assemblies of God]. Go back home and get it from the women in your church. Teach them four things: to do something with their hands, to take good care of their families, to lead their husbands to the Lord, and to tithe." In many ways, Bhengu was one of the early proponents of the Black Consciousness movement. When we were in South Africa, the women in the black Assemblies of God churches had collected more than \$700,000 at their annual meeting, which is the legacy of Bhengu's teaching about self-sufficiency.

The black church leaders we interviewed acknowledged that foreign missionaries brought Christianity to Africa, and for this they are grateful. But those missionaries are no longer necessary. In fact, outside funding sometimes invites corruption. One church leader in Johannesburg said that if Westerners want to make a substantial donation to a church in South Africa, then let them send someone with the money to ensure that it is used for the intended purpose. His rule of thumb is that the external budget of an indigenous organization should never be more than a quarter of its total income. While it is very useful for churches to partner with a nongovernmental organization in building schools and educating children, or providing microloans through revolving credit programs, churches should be able to fund the salaries of their pastors as well as build their own houses of worship. If they cannot do this, then the members do not have real ownership of the organization; they are in a dependent relationship in which the funder can dictate policy. In the opinion of our interviewees, this is not a situation in which visionary leadership can be exercised.

Church leaders also cautioned about congregations from the West sending mission groups to evangelize or engage in work projects. Makeshift work of painting or building houses perhaps gives these visitors a sense of purpose, but it is also taking work away from local people, and the money spent on international travel is completely disproportionate to the monetary value of what these workers contribute. Therefore, these mission trips have to be seen in an entirely different light. The people profiting from the excursion are the foreigners. They are learning about another culture, and hopefully they are not doing too much damage in the process. The truly successful visits are those that result in a genuine partnership between congregations, where there is mutuality in the exchange rather than a one-way transfer.

In our interviews we encountered two additional unintended consequences of missionary activity. We were told that missionaries had "lubricated" the brain drain of people leaving developing countries for permanent residence in the United States. For example, missionaries sometimes facilitate the possibility of people studying in the United States or Europe, and once there students often marry local residents or figure out ways to stay. The other sometimes negative consequence of missionary activity is that, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, foreign missionaries built hospitals and schools parallel in size and maintenance costs to the same institutions in their home country. When these missionaries departed, or funds dried up, the local population was sometimes left with a building and program that they could not afford to maintain.

The implication of the focus on self-sufficiency is not that the West should ignore developing countries. On the contrary; the point, instead, is that Westerners should be sensitive to their impact and focus on partnerships and collaborations rather than domination, however well intentioned their agenda may be from a Western perspective. This point was brought home in a visit to an Assemblies of God church in India. Occupying the pulpit was a white missionary in a very well established church. The songs were all imports from the West. The building was spacious but funded by outside sources. Perhaps there was a place for this missionary twenty years ago, when he and his family came to India. But why had leadership not been passed to a local pastor? Why was he the only one wearing a tie and jacket? Why was his wife, also prominent on the platform, not wearing a sari as all the other women were? The scene felt anachronistic, like it belonged to an era that had passed decades ago. In contrast, we saw exemplary models of leadership transfer in both Kenya and Uganda, where missionaries from the West had turned leadership over to local leaders and the churches were thriving.

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