

# Understandings of *Pneuma* in East Africa, that point to the Importance of ‘Vulnerable Mission’ Practices from the West.

Jim Harries

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**Biographical Information** Jim Harries (PhD), British born (1964) has lived in Southern then Eastern Africa engaging in theological education since 1988. He teaches part-time at Kima International School of Theology (PO Box 75, Maseno, Kenya), and also at the Yala and Siaya Theological Centres. The latter operate in the Luo and Swahili languages, and are oriented especially to outreach to indigenous (African-founded) churches. Jim chairs the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission, which seeks to encourage Western missionaries to carry out ministry in non-Western contexts using the languages and resources of the latter. He can be contacted at [jimoharries@gmail.com](mailto:jimoharries@gmail.com)

## Introduction

The AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) advocates that some Western missionaries to the non-West engage in their ministries using the languages and resources of the people being reached. This style of mission has come to be known as VM; ‘vulnerable mission’. This article attempts to articulate the importance of VM to Western efforts at mission to Africa from a particular angle. First, it points to the importance of local contextual knowledge in order for a missionary to be effective in passing on Biblical (and other Christian) teaching. Second, it points out that in order for such knowledge to be acquired, missionaries need to confine themselves in ministry to local languages and resources.

This article cannot claim to cover all the bases or answer all the questions that may arise regarding vulnerable mission. It sets forth one simple case. Readers are encouraged to look for other articles in order to fill gaps in understanding. A particularly good source of those articles is [www.vulnerablemission.com](http://www.vulnerablemission.com)

This article is not written from an Ivory Tower in the West, or even a university in the South. It has been written rather – from within East Africa by an author who is seeking to implement that about which he writes. The article challenges certain presuppositions in linguistics and regarding causality in the realm of philosophy and economics. Those challenges are rooted in observation and practice. Many contemporary Western missions’ approaches are not working well. The author advocates an alternative approach as a key supplement to existing mission strategies.

This looks especially at the need for effective discipleship of Christians in Africa. It considers the effects of indigenous languages on Christian people’s understanding of the Gospel. It points especially to understanding of *pneuma hagion* (the Holy Spirit) and the prosperity Gospel, considered to be a widespread and serious departure from Biblical truth in church in Africa today, which has been brought about in part as a result of certain Western mission strategies.

Because this article is a comparison of translations, the key terms under consideration will be given in the New Testament language of Greek. *Pneuma*, which is commonly translated into English as *spirit*, *hagion* as *holy*, and *theo* as *God*. This article considers the impacts of words that arise from the ways in which they are used rather than from their more ‘static’ meanings, and so distinguishes between the ‘same’ words in different languages even if they are commonly considered to be inter-translatable synonyms. The Greek (for example *pneuma*) is taken as the original and correct understanding of a term, whereas *spirit* is taken as the current British understanding of this term, and *roho* as the current East African understanding of the same.

## Part 1. East African Understandings of *pneuma hagion*, arising from indigenous languages

Evidence from just two languages is given below to demonstrate complexities in translation of *pneuma hagion* into East African tongues. Traditionally translated into English as *Holy Spirit* (or sometimes *Holy Ghost*)—various options are available to speakers of *Kiswahili* and *Dholuo*.<sup>1</sup>

The term *roho* is very widely used in East Africa (including in *Kiswahili* and *Dholuo*) to translate *pneuma* in the New Testament scriptures.<sup>2</sup> This term apparently reached East Africa through Arabic. The term *roho* came to East Africans, presumably along with many other Arabic terms that spread inwards as a result of trade and other interactions, through communities arising from inter-mixing with Arabs on the coast. This constitutes a translation of *pneuma* by a non-indigenous term.

An alternative term to translate *pneuma* is *moyo* (in many Bantu languages and sometimes in *Kiswahili*), and *chuny* in *Dholuo*. The former refers also to the heart and the latter (*chuny*) to the liver, but in both cases the terms appear to be close in impact to the metaphorical use of heart in English as ‘seat of the emotions’. Biblical scholars will realise that the use of these terms would probably be more appropriate translations of the Greek *kardia* than of *pneuma*—which in a literal sense is breath or wind.

Terms for breath or wind are also available in the above languages. *Muya* in *Dholuo* and *pumzi* in *Kiswahili* can be used to translate breath of English, and air in a case such as that pumped into an inner-tube in a tyre. The Luo term (*muya*) is a relatively common and quite helpful means of translating *pneuma*. *Pumzi* is less frequently used. Wind is best translated by yet other terms. In *Kiswahili* the wind is blowing translates as *upepo una vuma* whereas in *Dholuo* we get *yamo okudho*. The

*Kiswahili* term for wind therefore is *upepo* and the Luo term *yamo*. Both of these terms would make interesting translations for *pneuma* – because both are inherently bad when considered in the spiritual realm by native speakers. *Pepo* (as against *upepo* – wind) in *Kiswahili* is often used to translate demon (e.g. Matthew 4:24<sup>3</sup>) and *yamo* is an evil spirit in *Dholuo*.<sup>4</sup> Use of the terms *upepo* and *yamo* to translate *pneuma* (in the context of the Holy Spirit) would provide the interesting tension of using a word that is inherently evil, with the adjective ‘holy’.<sup>5</sup> Because neither *yamo* nor *pepo* are compatible with *hagion* (*holy*), these terms are not commonly used to translate *pneuma*, referring to the Holy Spirit, in the New Testament.

Yet another term to consider as a translation of *pneuma* (*spirit*) would be *jachien* (*Dholuo*) or *mzimu* (*Kiswahili*). These terms seem to be closer to the English term *ghost*, as they refer to the ongoing presence of someone who is dead in the land of the living. It is widely known that the role of ‘ancestors’ in Africa is often considered to be ongoing in the lives of the living. So much so in fact, that Mbiti chose to call them the ‘living dead’.<sup>6</sup> Translation of these terms for *pneuma* however brings particular difficulties, similar to those of wind mentioned above. That is both *jachien* and *mzimu*, at least in contemporary language usage, are likely to have someone shake with fear. The terms are inherently associated with what is bad or evil. They appear to be totally inappropriate for use with *hagion* (*holy*) and so are not used for this purpose.

Another term would be *juok* (*Dholuo*) or *uchawi* (*Kiswahili*). The inherent ‘evil’ (or bad) of these terms becomes apparent when one realises that they are commonly used to translate the English term *witchcraft*. But perhaps, as in other cases, the degree of ‘badness’ currently associated with *juok* or *uchawi* was not there in their original African uses, but came as a result of the coming of the Gospel? This is suggested by the fact that for some Ugandan Luo people, *Juok* (or *Jok*) is the translation most often used for *theo*.<sup>7</sup> Hoehler-Fatton confirms this in telling us that it is since the 1950s and 1960s that “... the very term *juogi* has taken on somewhat negative overtones.”<sup>8</sup>

Our survey of terms used to translate *pneuma* into two East African languages has revealed an absence of suitable indigenous alternatives, resulting in widespread use of an imported term *roho*. This is unlike the case of God the Father, in which Bible translators have generally been careful to use an indigenous term. In the Trinitarian Godhead in East Africa then, we commonly have God the Father represented by an indigenous name (in the case of *Dholuo*; *Nyasaye*, and in the case of *Kiswahili*; *Mungu*). But God the Spirit (*Roho*) and God the Son (*Yesu*) are given names that are not-indigenous. *Roho* then, is something ‘new’ that East Africans were not familiar with before the recent advent of the White man. This is confirmed by notions, such as that of certain indigenous spiritual churches in Kenya, that they recently received the Spirit, who was before that only known to the Whites.<sup>9</sup>

According at least to some scholars, the introduction of a new term for ‘*pneuma*’ need not have occurred. Christianity in Africa is widely known to have relegated ancestors to the status of demons.<sup>10</sup> Not all African scholars are happy with this kind of demotion of their ‘still living’ (according to Mbiti, referred to above) ancestors.<sup>11</sup> The widespread use in the past of the English word *ghost* to translate *pneuma* is educational. It would seem to have the problem shared by East Africa where ‘ghosts’ are generically known to be evil (or at least bad) leading to the question of; how can a member of the trinity be a ghost? On the other hand though, wouldn’t it be an amazing scoop for the Gospel if what had been considered the activities of ghosts could be recognised as being a part of *theo*’s holy power and a member of the trinity? Whereas the powers that determine the course of fate in someone’s life have long been considered unreliable or evil, wouldn’t it be amazing for the credit for ‘fate’ to go to *theo*, and thus for life to be understood to have a definite and positive purpose?<sup>12</sup>

In East Africa today, at least in part related to *Roho* being a new term, it is widely understood that *pneuma hagion* is a ‘new thing’ introduced in the missionary era. He can therefore easily be confused with the “hidden power of the Whites”<sup>13</sup> and with what is foreign, Western and/or mysterious. This understanding supports the prosperity Gospel. The new prosperity that has come with the European to Africa is spiritually accredited to the ‘new’ thing: *roho*. Perhaps choice of Holy Ghost (*yamo maler* or *mzimu mtakatifu*) to translate *pneuma hagion* wouldn’t have been such a bad choice after all? Then the *pneuma hagion* would have become more truly indigenous to Africa.

I have not here mentioned difficulties found in translation of the term *holy* in East Africa. These are considerable according to Mojola. Suffice it to say that it is difficult, if not impossible, to find East African terms that have the impact of ‘holy’ in the sense of being in the presence of God, rather than a state achieved as a result of some cleansing process.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps terms in East Africa that have translated ‘*theo*’, could more helpfully have been used to translate *pneuma*? *Nyasaye* for the Luo people certainly seems to be a case in point. Tempels’ famous book finds that African people believe in *vital force*.<sup>15</sup> His description of vital force, which seems to equate with Luo people’s original understanding of *Nyasaye*,<sup>16</sup> can seem to have more in common with *pneuma* than with *theo*.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps *Nyasaye* should have been used to translate *pneuma*, and then a new term (Jehovah?) used to translate *theo*? The term which Ogot finds to be equivalent to vital force for the Luo people is *juok* (or *jok*) – which actually is taken by the Acholi and Lango (Luo people of Uganda) as the translation for *theo*,<sup>18</sup> although is by other Luo people taken as a translation for witchcraft.

Paul and Barnabas defended their notion of *theo* to the Lystrans by saying that they believed in the *theo* who “made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them” (Acts 14:15). In taking Paul and Barnabas as being *theo* (verse 11) presumably the Lystrans notion of *theo* was different from the Jewish/Christian one that included ‘creation’ as one of his attributes. The *theo* of the Lystrans seemed to be like a providential force who could suddenly appear and then be placated using sacrifices (Acts 14:13). He was not a ‘creator’, and perhaps had little personality at all? In this sense, his character could be more similar to the spirit (*ruach*), especially in the Old Testament, than to *theo* himself (*Elohim*)? The Lystran notion of ‘*theo*’ seemed to be more like the African one – more of a force / spirit / power, than of an intelligent being.

A further difference between British as against East African understanding of *pneuma* arises from a British tendency to question the very existence of spirits. British people often do this, it seems, without a clear understanding of what ‘spirits’ are. They are assumed to be made up of ‘spiritual bodies’ as against ‘physical bodies’. Some British people suggest that spirits do not ‘exist’. Further investigation reveals that British people’s lives are considered to be impacted by memories of their childhood, psychiatric disorders, sexual abuse, troubling experiences and other such things. British people may claim not to

'believe in spirits' because they attribute other factors (such as the above) to effects that African and other people attribute to 'spirits'. The very term spirit in English is ambiguous. Its origin in Latin is *spiritus*—'breath'.<sup>19</sup> For British people who claim not to believe in the existence of spirits, news of *pneuma hagion* will be received very differently from East Africans, whose issue with 'spirits' is not that they do not exist, but that they all seem to be evil.<sup>20</sup>

Without going into great detail, it should be clear that orthodox Christian teaching takes *pneuma hagion* to be a member of the trinity and therefore one of the three persons of the godhead. *Pneuma hagion* then is referred to as 'he' and not as 'it'. At the same time, for whatever reason related to widespread understanding of the nature of spirit and presumably to the fact that he is referred to by a description (*the Holy Spirit*) as against a name (as in the case of 'God' and 'Jesus Christ') *pneuma hagion* is still in East Africa frequently considered to be a power rather than a person. We may ask—how understanding of '*pneuma*' in terms of personhood is affected by terms used to refer to him in East Africa? In *Kiswahili*, terms such as *moyo*, *mzimu* and *uchawi*, *roho* and in fact also *mungu*<sup>21</sup> do not come into the 'person' category of words, so technically it is grammatically wrong to refer to such as 'him'. It is grammatically correct to use 'it'. In *Dholuo*, there is no grammatical distinction between reference to 'him' as against 'it'.

My reason for referring to the above complexities is not to impress or bamboozle my readers regarding the details of East African beliefs about *pneuma hagion*. But it is to just begin to illustrate the enormous contextual complexity that one has to face in seeking to grasp indigenous people's understanding of such a theological term. I do not believe that this complexity is particularly great. That is – East African understandings related to *pneuma* are no more complex than Western, say British ones. But they are different from British ones.

The above differences between West and not-West (in our case Britain and East Africa) are, in my view consequential. They are affecting peoples' understanding of the nature and activities of *pneuma hagion* for the many reasons stated above. If they are so consequential in determining the understanding of people before they set foot in a church, or in determining understanding of key words that they will meet when they open the Scriptures, then presumably they need to be consequential to those preparing to teach, preach, share or encourage the church with teaching from the Scriptures? That is, theological education that seeks to impart orthodox teaching needs to be aware of the kind of tendencies to unorthodoxy mentioned above so as to counter, prescribe, or counter-balance them.

I consider that the exploration of and consideration of people's pre-understanding of key 'theological' terms such as *pneuma* is a part of what is required in order to bring about contextualization of the Gospel. Contextualization implies being able to communicate God's truth genuinely, penetratingly and honestly to people other than ones own. Neither the term *pneuma* nor people's understanding of it (or of ghost, *roho*, *jachien*, *moyo*, *nyasaye* etc.<sup>22</sup>) is especially or exceptionally complex. The same kind of complexity is found in the use of almost any term in one language as against another – even if it can be a translation of it; hence the widely acclaimed need for contextualization of the Gospel message. It is how to achieve such contextualization that I want to consider in the second part of this article.

## Part II Achieving Contextualisation

The introduced term *roho* has been widely used in East Africa to translate the Biblical terms *pneuma* (Greek) and *ruach* (Hebrew). This is certainly in part at least because alternative indigenous terms are associated with 'bad' or evil, and so have been considered inappropriate to translate a Spirit who is Holy. The effect of the above includes that unlike the term *theo* itself (generally translated using indigenous terms) *pneuma* can be considered a stranger to Africa, introduced in the recent missionary era. He therefore represents what is 'new'. What is also 'new' that has come at the same time, is Western style prosperity. Hence the common practice of spiritually oriented (especially Pentecostal churches) in Africa considering *pneuma* to have brought prosperity, to be given the credit for recent prosperity, and to be appealed to for the sake of more prosperity.<sup>23</sup>

East African understanding seems frequently to be that *Nyasaye / Mungu* (i.e. *theo*) determines fate, hence God the Father, the Son and especially the Spirit (*pneuma*) are widely called upon to bring good fortune. Linking this to an age in which 'good fortune' is associated with Western styles of living, we find *pneuma hagion* being called upon to provide Western goods and lifestyles. This practice is often known as the prosperity Gospel.

The fact that terms which are commonly translatable into English as *spirit* tend to be evil, would seem to be significant. As even *pneuma* can be translated as ghost in Greek<sup>24</sup> it would seem that this problem was there also in New Testament times. Part of the Christian message seems to have been a re-orientation of people's beliefs about *pneuma*. That is, convincing them that *pneuma* can be worshipped, because he can be good, and in fact he can be *theo*.<sup>25</sup> The question of the evil nature of spiritual forces is in Western nations relatively mute, because much causation is considered to be not spiritual at all, but physical, psychological etc.. This does not apply to East Africa.

The above three paragraphs attempt to illustrate to a Western readership that there are contextual differences in understanding of *pneuma* in East Africa as against in the West. They make explicit the suggestion that contextual knowledge is a pre-requisite to the ability to teach, preach and generally communicate God's word correctly in East African contexts. It should be noted that the above make a clear link between language knowledge and contextual knowledge. How can a preacher know about the existence and nature of *jachien* (*ghost*) *yamo* (*wind*) and *nyasaye* (*god*) without a detailed knowledge of the language concerned (in this case *Dholuo*), which can only come from a knowledge of the context in which the language is used?

Neighbouring East African languages are presumably more closely related than are African with Western languages – that have developed in a totally different context. Hence there is a case to be made, I believe, for the advantage of having mission work and Bible teaching in East Africa carried out by people familiar with East African languages, and preferably using East African languages, even if the language concerned is not the mother-tongue of the people being reached.

In order to teach theology, including the theology of *pneuma*, clearly a person must understand that which they will seek to communicate. So an understanding of some accuracy of *pneuma hagion* as already understood by the people to be taught is

needed as a pre-requisite to being able to teach about and of *pneuma hagion*. Particularly key, as mentioned above, is the relationship of *pneuma hagion* to questions of fate and providence.

It has been especially difficult for inhabitants of East Africa in the modern age to perceive the source of their fate clearly, because of attempts by the West (often in hand with the Gospel message) at determining the fate of East Africa's people by other than natural means. That is – extraordinary amounts of financial aid, administrative assistance and scientific insights and equipment have often accompanied the Gospel message, resulting in confusion between the two. This, I suggest, has led to widespread confusion in pneumatology in East Africa that still needs considerable disentangling.<sup>26</sup>

There is, I suggest, a particular need for caution in considering the relationship between the power of *pneuma hagion* and the 'power' that arises from the use of science and technology. If this distinction is not made clearly then it can be very easy for East African people to expect *pneuma hagion* to do for them that which science and technology (still very much foreign visitors in much of East Africa) can do for Westerners. This is, of course, a basis for prosperity Gospel.

Along with many contemporary linguists, I take language to be a pragmatic and not only a semantic system.<sup>27</sup> That is, that for language to be learned accurately and correctly it has to be learned in the context (or a closely related context) to that in which it is to be used. I take it then as a necessity for a theologian who wants to speak helpfully into the East African context, to have learned an East African language, and to have done so in an East African context.

In this sense, I am questioning the value of the un-translated transfer of theological debates and discourses from the West to Africa. Texts and discourse I suggest, because of the contextual dependence on meaning in language, can never be moved intact across cultural boundaries. Instead—they are transformed in the process of being moved. Such transformation usually subverts originally intended meanings and impacts. There is therefore an urgent need for the development of an East African pneumatology and theology that is appropriate for the East African context, and is rendered so appropriate by the existence of an intermediary translation process between Western and East African theological discourse.

Such translation requires knowledgeability at both ends. That is, given the requirement for a pragmatic understanding of language above, a close knowledge of Western 'culture' is needed for someone to understand Western theological texts. Then a close knowledge of East African ways of life are needed to enable a theologian to transfer Western theological insights into East Africa. The question arises, whether this requires an East African person to become familiar with the West before begin able to pass on theology to their own people, or whether it requires a Westerner to become familiar with East Africa, or both? I suggest that the latter is actually the most helpful if not essential.<sup>28</sup>

There has been a widespread understanding, that Western Christians can provide help or support to the East African church, and thus enable African theologians to better do their task, without affecting as such the theology that exists in Africa. This thinking underlies a lot of project activity by Christian NGOs of various sorts involved in fund-raising in the West and 'spending' in Africa. The assumption that such donor activities may not affect the theology on the ground is unfortunately in my view somewhat misguided. Unlike Western theology, African thinking about *theo* is as much<sup>29</sup> to do with power as with abstract reason. *Theo* is as much defined by what he does as by scholarly perceptions of him. When Western-based NGOs show, by what they achieve by the means of science, him as capable of doing great things, then these great things become part of his attributes. It is only a short distance from there to the prosperity Gospel – wanting God exactly for those attributes, and then rejecting him if he does not demonstrate those attributes.

We have found that learning the language and context of an East African people is an essential part of effective missionary work amongst East Africans. An important question that remains is how to go about learning the language, this especially bearing in mind the need to do so as far as possible within the local context. A language needs to be learned, that is, not in a school with formal teachers and a classroom, but as much as possible in the ebb and flow of 'life'.

I have already mentioned above, the tendency in recent years for what was once hands-on missionary involvement to have become the provision of funds for projects. In other words – whereas in previous centuries the West sent many missionaries to Africa, these days the focus is on sending resources. The West has rationalised its way out of on-the-ground contact with African people in various ways, arguing that it's most helpful role is in the provision of money and other resources. Because the West has the money, but Africa has the personnel, then it seems to make sense for the West to provide the money for the African personnel to use. Hence the West has sought to provide the finance to enable the African church to prosper. This has been of limited success for various reasons too complex to go into in detail in this essay. Suffice it to say in brief – that flows of funds from the outside easily occur in such a way as to engender jealousy, corruption, and conflict in recipient communities.<sup>30</sup> In addition, it has proved impossible to effectively delegate responsibility for use of funds to those who are not the source of those funds, leading either to abuses and/or to control from the West in ways that are not helpful because such controllers are ignorant of local realities.<sup>31</sup>

Christian and other activists from the West seeking to promote relief and development in Africa have been slow to concede to problems in the donor model. This is for many reasons. One of these is the predominance of secular thinking that has affected even Christian people in the West, with its suggestion that there is actually *no alternative* to the donor model in relationships with the so-called two-thirds world. This contributes an implicit allegiance with historical materialistic thinking that has marginalised any role for God, godliness, spirits and even 'culture' in development thinking, which has in turn brought an enormous narrowing of options. So, said Wolf, although there is a big question as to whether the poor really can effectively utilise aid from the West, "yet the option of doing nothing is worse ..."<sup>32</sup>

The outcome of such a narrowing of options combined with an activist tendency has been an almost sickening association in much of the world between Western people (language, skin colour etc.) and a slavish unquestioning faith in the ability of outside money to bring positive change to a community. Such has come to be the identity in much of the world, of visitors from what was once the home of Christendom (especially Western Europe and North America). It is an identity which has created enormous barriers with non-Western peoples. Not only can Western foreigners now not be understood, but it is also known that they are unlikely to be content without occupying a powerful position in their host community which they justify to themselves

as being in the interest of its development, and particularly economic advance. This relatively cold, distant and power-hungry face of the Western Christian is not always in the interests of the Gospel, and has certainly made it difficult for Westerners to relate to others without donor-money, on which more and more have become grossly dependent, being constantly in view.<sup>33</sup>

A prerequisite for effective language and culture learning and then effective service outside of the West, I suggest, is creating a distance with dominant donor-oriented Westerners. Not to do so is to be surrounded by yes-men and donor-seekers that are determined to please so as to rise to the top of the list of potential beneficiaries. The front presented by such people is little related to the deep culture on the ground. This combined with the shame African people already often feel due to a constant despising of their deeply-held beliefs (such as those in witchcraft) by the West, can result in gross misinformation being received by the outsider.

At the same time, the donor-oriented approach has become so prevalent, that it is extremely hard to avoid. A Westerner coming into the Two-Thirds world may have the best possible intentions of meeting people where they are and relating with them as equals and fellow human beings. But the barriers to doing this are legion, and appearances of success to this end must often be deceptive. Major efforts are need in order to avoid the image of being a power-hungry<sup>34</sup> ignorant (not being familiar with local languages and conditions) donor.

Ironically, the wide-spread today of Western languages in much of the Third world can make it more difficult still for an outsider to become familiar with local contexts. Today many Westerners visiting Africa may be told: “you do not need to learn our language because we know English”. Local people who have spent often a decade or more learning English can be greatly frustrated if a foreigner then wants to stumble along with them in their mother-tongue! But unless that foreigner stumbles along, then later becomes fluent in that mother tongue, they will not easily become aware of what is happening in the community around them. That could be all right, if it wasn’t for the factors mentioned above including corruption, to which can be added that the Two-thirds world national is unlikely to comprehend anyway the aims of a foreign-designed project, much less to know how to achieve those aims without ongoing dependency on the West. Great efforts, even in the light of opposition from the local community, may well be needed in order to learn and use local and not international languages, and thus to ensure the possibility of local sustainability of a project and a true understanding by an outsider of what is going on around him or her.

Following the above discussion and the case made above, it is possible to make some clear recommendations to those Westerners who seek to have a deep, profound, and effective impact on two-thirds world communities. That is – that they should as strictly as possible confine themselves in their ministry to the people they are reaching to the use of local languages and local resources. This mission style we are referring to as ‘vulnerable mission’. A series of conferences has been held internationally (in Germany, USA and UK) considering and promoting ‘vulnerable mission’—as being vital for some western missionaries to follow in the interests of the future of the church, as well as the people of the Two-Thirds world as a whole. Then teaching (in word and deed) of the persons of the Trinity including *pneuma hagion* can be appropriately contextualised and effective.

Vulnerable mission I suggest, is an important and key part of enabling the contextualisation of theology to occur. It enables a missionary to draw near to the context where insights about *theo* are to be taught, and only thus in effect to enable those insights to become truly a part of the indigenous church.

## Conclusion

This article looks at complex contemporary understandings of *pneuma* (*spirit* and the *Holy Spirit*) in East Africa. It has been found to be difficult to find a term to translate *pneuma* so a foreign word—*roho* has been introduced. This has prevented *pneuma* from acquiring a truly local identity, which has meant in effect that he has easily taken foreign values and significance. That is – *roho* can be seen as a means to the acquisition of money and wealth—a belief widely known as the prosperity gospel. Use of a foreign term has left indigenous fears of ghosts and other ‘evil’ spiritual entities largely intact.

The above complexity of understanding of even one theological term is given as a fundamental reason in favour of the adoption of vulnerable mission practices. How can a foreign missionary teach the Gospel to people without understanding them? How can he or she understand them without approaching them in a vulnerable way? The massive predominance of very un-vulnerable donor based approaches to mission and ‘poverty alleviation’ are noted. They have made it much more difficult for Western missionaries to draw near to local people and be perceived other than as outside donors. Hence this article advocates that more missionaries set themselves the rule of thumb—that their ministry work in the Two Thirds world be carried out using only local languages and resources. This is known as ‘vulnerable mission’.

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<sup>1</sup> *Kiswahili* is a regional language spoken through much of East Africa. Different versions of *Dholuo* (the language of the Luo) are spoken by Luo people in parts of the same area. *Dholuo* mentioned in this article refers to Kenyan-Luo, which is almost identical to the *Dholuo* spoken in Tanzania.

<sup>2</sup> Many East-African language Bibles are actually translations from English and not from Greek. (Misingi. nd. ‘Misingi ya Biblia. 4.3 Roho ya Mtu.’ <http://www.biblebasicsonline.com/kiswahili/04/0403.html> (accessed 6.05.09).)

<sup>3</sup> Biblia, 1994. *The Holy Bible in Kiswahili Union Version*. Nairobi: Bible Society of Kenya. Richard J. Goodrich, and Albert Lukaszewski, 2007. *A Reader’s Greek New Testament. (second edition)*. Michigan: Zondervan.

<sup>4</sup> This use is especially common in South Nyanza, and less so in central and northern Luo regions of Kenya.

<sup>5</sup> Although I here use the term evil, ‘bad’ may be a better translation. (Jim Harries. 2007. ‘Pragmatic Theory Applied to Christian Mission in Africa: with special reference to Luo responses to ‘bad’ in Gem, Kenya.’ PhD thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham, UK, 2007.

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<http://theses.bham.ac.uk/15/1/Harries07PhD.pdf> (accessed 20.9.07.) *Pneuma* is at times translated into *jachien* in *Dholuo*, as in the Luke 24:37. (Bible, 1976, *Muma Maler mar Nyasaye: moting'o Muma Machon kod Muma Manyien*. Nairobi: Bible Society of Kenya. (Bible in the Luo language.))

6 John S. Mbiti, 1975, *Introduction to African Religion*. London / Nairobi: Heinemann, pp.72-73.

7 Bethwell Ogot, 1961. 'The Concept of Jok.' In: *African Studies*, 20(2) 1961, 123-130. p.124.

8 Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton, 1996, *Women of Fire and Spirit: history, faith and gender in roho religion in Western Kenya*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.xiv. (*Juogi* is the plural term for *juok*.)

<sup>9</sup> Shared with me during informal discussion with 'Roho' believers in Nyanza Province of Kenya on many occasions. See also Hoehler Fatton (1996:xiv).

10 In *Dholuo* demon is commonly translated *jachien*, as is Satan/Devil. In Kiswahili *pepo* is considered to be a demon. Mary Douglas provides a good example of ways in which African traditions have been 'demonised' in: Mary Douglas, 1999, 'Sorcery Accusations Unleashed: the Lele revisited, 1987.' 177-193 In: *Africa: journal of the international Africa institute*. 69 (2) 1999, (PDF) <http://links.jstor.org/sici=0001-9720%281999%2969%3A2%3c177%3asautlr%3E2.0.co%3b2-V> (accessed 21.10.05)

<sup>11</sup> Tinyiko S. Maluleke, 2005. 'The Next Phase in the Vernacular Bible Discourse: echoes from Hammerskraal.' 355-374 In: *Missionalia*. 33:2. (August 2005.)

<sup>12</sup> As claimed by: Rick Warren, 2003, *The Purpose Driven Life*. Michigan: Zondervan.

<sup>13</sup> H.W. Turner, 1979. 'The Hidden Power of the Whites: the secret religion withheld from the primal peoples.' 271-288 In: H.W. Turner, (ed.) 1979. *Religious Innovation in Africa: collected essays on new religious movements*. Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall and Co.

<sup>14</sup> Aloo Osotsi Mojola, 2003, 'Holiness and Purity in the Book of Leviticus – a problem in the Luyia dialects.' A paper presented at AICMAR – AST, Butere, Kenya on August 12-15, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Placide Tempels, 1959, *Bantu Philosophy*. Paris: Presence Africaine.

<sup>16</sup> For discussion of the co-identity of *nyasaye* and life force, see: Jim Harries, "'The Name of God in Africa' and related contemporary theological, development and linguistic concerns.' In Press. *Exchange, Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*.

<sup>17</sup> The vital force of Tempels seems to equate to an Old Testament understanding of *ruach* (spirit).

<sup>18</sup> See Okot P'Bitek, 1971, *Religion of the Central Luo*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, p.47.

<sup>19</sup> Latin, nd. Latin to English Dictionary: *spiritus*. <http://www.online-dictionary.biz/latin/english/vocabulary/reference/spiritus.asp> (accessed 6.05.09)

<sup>20</sup> This having parallels of course in Western concerns about 'abuses'. Adults may be said to be troubled following abuse as children. The thing that is talked about, the 'abuse' is the evil. Much news reported by the media is 'bad news'. But, in British English such 'bad news' that trouble people are not known as 'spirits'.

<sup>21</sup> These terms are loosely translatable into English as heart, ghost, witchcraft, spirit, and god.

<sup>22</sup> These terms are commonly translated into English as spirit, ghost, heart, god.

<sup>23</sup> See *Missionalia* 35:3 (November 2007), for example: Bryan Born, 2007. 'Promise of Power – how new Pentecostals responded to rapid social change in Botswana.' In: *Missionalia* 35:3 (November 2007), 43-66, p.64.

<sup>24</sup> *Pneuma* could, by ancient Greeks, be considered to be *daimonion* (Eduard Schweizer, 1968, *Pneuma, Pneumatikos*. 332-455 In: Gerhard Kittel, (ed.) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Volume IV. Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. p.345.) and *daimonion* were considered by some to be "the spirits of the departed" (Werner Foerster, 1968. *Daimone, daimonion*. 1-20 In: Gerhard Kittel, (ed.) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Volume II. Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. p.6.)

<sup>25</sup> In saying 'can be', I mean that one possible translation of *pneuma* is God, because *pneuma hagion* is considered to be a part of the Godhead. Other *pneuma* may not be part of the Godhead.

<sup>26</sup> For more on this see Jim Harries, "'The Name of God in Africa' and related contemporary theological, development and linguistic concerns.' In Press. *Exchange, Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*.

<sup>27</sup> I.e., I take meaning in language as arising largely from the context in which it is used, and not primarily or certainly not only in semantics – the words themselves.

<sup>28</sup> There are many reasons for this suggestion. One is because a theology inevitably needs deep roots, and the deep roots of Western theology can much more clearly be understood by Westerners than by non-Westerners from East Africa. Because understanding is a prerequisite to communication, this suggests the importance of having Western theologians crossing from the ancient seats of the Christian Gospel into new lands, rather than having East Africans (for example) teaching their people theology as a result of short stays in the West. One would hope also that a Westerner's understanding of science will enable him or her to distinguish and thus separate out science from their theology – which is notoriously more difficult for those within holistic African world views.

29 Or more.

30 See: Jim Harries, nd. 'The immorality of Aid to the 'Third World'.' <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/articles/aid.htm> (accessed 4.02.07)

31 I have argued this in the following article: Jim Harries, nd. 2006. 'Difficulties in Giving: what to give, how to give, why to give, who to give, when to give, if to give?' <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/articles/difficulties-in-giving.html> (accessed 6.05.09)

<sup>32</sup> Martin Wolf, 2005, 'How to Help Africa Escape Poverty Trap.' (WWW) [http://coursenligne.sciences-po.fr/2004\\_2005/delpla/How%20to%20help%20Africa%20escape%20poverty%20trap%20FT.pdf](http://coursenligne.sciences-po.fr/2004_2005/delpla/How%20to%20help%20Africa%20escape%20poverty%20trap%20FT.pdf). (accessed 16.05.05)

<sup>33</sup> Almost every Westerner working in Africa, I suggest, is heavily pre-occupied in handing our Western money and resources in one way or another.

<sup>34</sup> In the sense of always wanting one's own projects to succeed by applying great outside subsidy, in this way always being in charge of what is happening through control of purse strings even if technically nationals are in charge.