

Those coming on line before, or receiving Epiphany News will have read of the huge effort by St Martha's Girls' School in north London, to fill a lorry container with everything to start a school in Kinshasa. They were responding to an appeal by Lord Alton and others who had visited the Democratic Republic of Congo on a fact-finding mission with Raphael Mpanzu, a former political refugee forced to flee his country fourteen years previously.



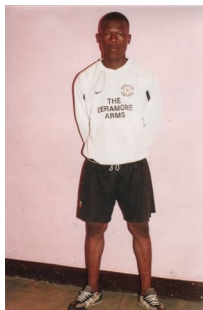
An astonishing achievement but not half as astonishing as the other half of the story. York University Football Club – also sponsored by the Epiphany Trust – decided to match St Martha's effort with football gear: dozens of shirts and shorts, plus ten footballs.

So far so excellent. But how could anyone at St Martha's, York University, or *The Universe* ever dream that what they were doing was going to save lives? Raphael tells me he has absolutely no doubt.

Getting the kit out to Kinshasa was easy, thanks to help from the DRC embassy in London. But the effect was little short of miraculous. Street gang battles were previously the norm; deaths as common as one a week. But the football stuff changed that. Raphael leans forward and, wide-eyed, says: "It saved lives. It broke the violence of the gangs. It channelled aggression into sport instead of killing, and it allowed me to ask them what they wanted to do in life ... Now they began to talk"



He produces some pictures: football is obviously at least as serious as gang warfare. The fact that some of the young men are wearing 'York University Women's Football' shirts, or 'Deramore Arms' (on York's Hull Road!) is undoubtedly funny – within a context that really is no joke.



One ball went to a prison for street children, which Raphael visited with a representative of the Bureau International Catholique pour l'Enfance (BICE). "It was like manna from Heaven Like Christmas ... I didn't expect football would bring peace, bring joy to a prison", he reports. (It is possible, he says, to buy batches of about seven kids out of prison for US \$10,000.)

The container, meanwhile, was another matter. After shipping to West Africa, it became strikebound at Matadi, about 100 miles up the River Congo on its 300 mile journey to Kinshasa. There it sat, quite likely due for looting and ultimate oblivion.

Raphael had gone out to meet it. At last he was picking up the work he had begun fourteen years earlier against poverty, child abuse and 'witchcraft'; back now with his Jediah Foundation, called after his three year old son. (The name means 'Blessing from God').

He digresses to contrast Kinshasa in 1989 and London: thousands of pigeons in Trafalgar Square, made him wonder just how many street children they would feed!

Seventeen years later, things had changed. The dictator Mobutu was gone. The civil war was over and a first national general election would be called for 2006. Providence had kicked off a game that promised immense hope! A newspaper heard of *The Universe* story and showed Raphael holding up its front page. This caught the attention of a Government minister who somehow – after six months – got the container released! Beauty Queen ‘Miss Kinshasa’ led welcoming celebrations on its arrival, followed by – guess what! – A football match!



Next, Raphael was invited to join the Jimmy Carter Foundation as an election observer. Then there is the story of Josephat, an orphan whose uncle also saw the newspaper. Josephat had been accused – incredibly, you would think – of causing his mother’s death by ‘witchcraft’ or ‘ndoki’.

Unfortunately, this is not incredible. In the Congo, explains Raphael, children are seen as non-productive and may be accused of witchcraft. They are sent onto the streets then find their way into gangs and prostitution, with consequences like HIV, prison or worse.

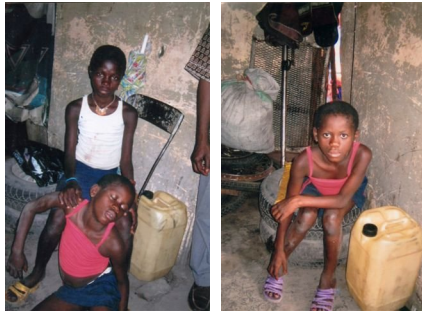
An aunt wanted to poison Josephat, but he was taken to a ‘pastor’ who wanted US \$50 to ‘deliver’ him. The uncle contacted Raphael who arranged for the boy to be accepted by a Catholic orphanage. “I saved that boy’s life,” says Raphael amazed at just how effective his action had been.

This ‘ndoki’ (which extends even to ritualised killing), is worldwide and it is here. The Metropolitan Police believe that the African nine year old boy whose torso was found in the Thames, was killed for ‘muti’, whereby organs and pieces may be used as ‘medicine’ and charms. Proof that this threat is real comes from the Laming Report into Victoria Climbié’s death, the Stobart Report, and the Met’s ‘Project Violet’.

It is easy to dismiss it all as evil, satanic nonsense, but that begs questions about both Evil and Satan, which we cannot dismiss glibly. Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* has been rendered much darker by the West, by the destruction of ancient, often fragile indigenous ways, and by the exploitation – not just of Africa’s minerals but of its soul. “My father,” says Raphael, “was an orphan. He used to describe proudly how he was taken in by good people and became successful. Now all that has gone.”

His overwhelmed sense of Providence stirs faith and optimism, refreshed by ‘the golden heart of the British people’, especially the girls of St Martha’s ... “so normal ... That’s the way it should be for children.”

He produces a picture of a girl of nine lying in the street, drugged and unconscious. He calls the police; she is rescued and the story appears in the papers: the Jedediah Foundation had ‘come from abroad to save lives’.



Most of us cannot quite grasp the full context of some of the bizarre inconsistencies in these stories. Our fumbling consciences are easily touched by compassion, particularly when it comes to faraway evils done to children. We give what we can – but with some detachment, embarrassed if the benefits bring us close to involvement; reticent when the victims are on our own doorsteps, perhaps more *culpable* than just fumbling when it comes to global perspective and responsibility.

Raphael knows it is difficult for people here to understand. Those passionately serious boys posing in women's football strips are not dreaming of being King of the Backstreets of Kinshasa but of Manchester United or following their compatriot, Portsmouth footballer LuaLua. But the students of St Martha's would joyfully share their privilege with the unconscious, drugged little lady he rescued from the streets, threatened with rape and murder as she lay there.

The global awareness of all these young people – Congolese or British – is instinctively big: the trick is to save it from the atrophy of age, and twist the arm of maturity and influence into action. Globalisation demands a global perspective and global responsibility

Just before he left London to return to the Congo in January, Raphael spoke at a meeting of influential British friends of the Jedediah Trust, religious, political and business. "2007," he said, "could be a year of hope. Perhaps now our government can put discipline and wisdom first.

"We must change people's mentality or it will just be a loop, constantly coming back to where we were. The big question is how to tackle the witchcraft thing. A good way will be to work together to bring pressure for legislation. What makes me proud of Jedediah is that influential friends like you give me access to the Government: church meets church; politicians meet politicians and business meets business ...My big project is the children. For me, the keypoint is morality."



The value of what we are able to give, and of the influence we are able to exert, may, as Raphael Mpanzu insists, be vastly greater than we imagine. It can save lives.

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