

Summary Report
Eight Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Conferences
January and March 2009
in the USA, Britain, and Germany

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Various concerns that arose at eight recent international conferences¹ arranged by the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission in 2009 are here examined and summarised by way of a ‘report’, compiled by the chairman of the Alliance. This report is divided into two sections. The first draws specifically on the papers presented by key contributors to the conferences while the second addresses a number of major issues essentially from memory from having attended the conferences. The AVM wants to encourage more Western Christian missionaries to do ‘vulnerable mission’ in their outreach to the non-West. That is, for them to use local languages and local resources in their key ministry.

The first section looks at ways in which speakers at the conferences addressed a number of issues including: difficulties in inter-cultural translation, derivation of meaning in language, partnership in mission, mission that avoids causing disputes in target peoples, difficulties in implementation even of agreed upon mission principles, the disadvantages of alternatives to vulnerable mission, questions of short versus long term mission, missionary accessibility, the key importance of building relationships in mission, and complementarity between vulnerable mission and default mission in practice.

Four topics considered in the second section include the addressing of critics of vulnerable mission who say that discouraging the use of English and ‘handouts’ from the West is contrary to the development of poor nations, and / or contrary to the Bible. The question of whether vulnerable mission is inclusive or exclusive of ‘default mission’ is addressed, and finally reference is made to vulnerable mission in the context of the rise of Islam. The case is made in favour of wider implementation of vulnerable mission.

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Introduction

The AVM proposes that there need to be more Western missionaries who carry out their ministry using the languages and resources of the people who they are reaching in the non-Western world. The above series of conferences occurred in early 2009 to further this end.

This report, drawn up by the Chairman of AVM, draws together insights acquired during the conferences. Many of these are very subjective in nature, and this report certainly does not

¹ These were mostly small conferences. Attendance varied between five and forty per conference.

deny this subjectivity. The outcome of the conferences was almost universally strongly in favour of further promotion and application of vulnerable mission principles in the non-Western world.

This report contains the subjective perception of the chairman of the AVM, the only individual present at all eight conferences. His view may or may not be the official position of the AVM itself, and with which all members of AVM may not necessarily agree in detail.

Some of the same papers were presented at more than one conference.

The following gave a keynote address: Dr. Stan Nussbaum, Julia Pring, Rev. Dr. Steve Rennick, Frank Paul.

The following gave a response to a keynote address: Dan Peterson, Glenn Schwartz, Mike Woods, Rev. Don Armstrong, Louis Krog, Rev. Dr. Steve Skuce, Rev. Hans Schultheiss. Dr. Jim Harries (the author of this article) presented the paper 'Vulnerable Mission in Practice'.

The conferences included a great deal of discussion. Debates looking at the relative merits of vulnerable mission and 'default mission' were held every afternoon of the conferences.

For the original versions of the papers presented and other detailed reports about the conferences go to this url: <http://www.vulnerablemission.com/reports-of-conferences-2009/>

Conferences were held at: Colorado Springs, Boise, Seattle, Indianapolis and Lancaster (PA) in the USA, Andover and Calver (Cliff College) in UK and Stuttgart in Germany.

Some Insights Acquired from Speakers during the Conferences

This section considers specific insights made during the conferences by drawing on the keynote addresses given and responses to them.

A monkey took a fish from the river and hung it up on a tree. "What are you doing" asked onlookers aghast? "Rescuing the fish from drowning" said the monkey.²

Frank Paul told us of the experience of Mennonite missionaries in the Argentinian Chaco.³ Having begun their work in 1943, they decided in 1954 to close all their 'projects'. Instead of running a hospital, clinic, school, local church etc., they saw that it was appropriate for them instead to visit and minister to churches that had been founded by the Indians themselves. This required them to learn the Indian languages. On doing this, they discovered that the Indians would put new things into old categories in their own language and way of life. For example, an aeroplane came into the 'bird' category. Because the particular category chosen would affect the understanding of a word, so a word used in the Toba Indian language could only be understood from within the Toba Indian language, and not through translation.

² Paul, Frank, 2009. 'Das Mennonitenteam im nord-argentinischen Chaco: Geschwisterliche Mitarbeiter indianischer Kirchen und Gemeinschaften.' Keynote Paper presented at Vulnerable Mission Conference, Stuttgart, Germany, 18th February 2009. <http://www.vulnerablemission.com/reports-of-conferences/stuttgart/> (accessed 30th March 2009)

³ Paul. 'Das Mennonitenteam.'

Louis Krog reflecting on Pring's paper perceived the need for non-verbal language to be as culturally appropriate as is verbal or written language.⁴ Pring had talked of the importance of carrying out tasks like shopping, fetching water, queuing for your turn at the grinding mill in the same way as local people, instead of jumping queues or 'buying' oneself alternative means of acquiring essential items, such as supermarkets in towns, as a way of identifying with the people.⁵ Doing this would result in an alignment of language use with that of the local people – for example the phrase 'getting water' being used to mean 'walking to the spring with a bucket', and not 'turning on a tap'. Pring told us that African uses of English have different meanings to those that might be expected from the West. For example, "'you are part of me' means 'I am latching on to you as a donor, come what may'" she said.⁶ Using a people's language is encouraging them to have a "sense of worth and dignity", emphasised Pring. Chris Hurst emphasised the importance of the use of indigenous languages in Bible training.⁷

Peterson enlightened us on the meaning of 'barbaric'. This term, used by Paul in Colossians 3:11, did not mean then what it does now, said Peterson.⁸ Now, we take it as meaning violent, cruel, underdeveloped, primitive. At the time, it was used to refer to anyone who could not speak the dominant global language of the time; Greek. Whereas we say that 'it sounds like Greek to me', the Greeks would have said 'it sounds like *bar bar* to me'. So Paul's message in Colossians was actually saying that "people don't need to understand the language of the Empire, the language of international commerce, the language of high class education. Christ can be understood, and can change lives, even among people who only speak languages that sound to use like *bar bar bar*."

Schwartz' observed "that 'partnership'" is "donor driven missiology" and "in practice usually means that there is a one-way flow of resources [and] would be better termed as 'sponsorship'".⁹ In Schwartz' view, as in Nussbaum's presentation, recent orientation of Western missionaries to working in partnership with non-Western churches is a roundabout way of continuing classic top-down mission styles, by another name.¹⁰ We shouldn't be "*Weihnachtsmaenner*" said Paul, but instead "*gemeinsam mit ihnen bei Christus, der Quelle des Lebens, Hilfe und Rat suchen, wenn Not am mann ist*".¹¹ ('*Weihnachtsmaenner*' are people like Father Christmas (Santa Claus) – who are pre-occupied in giving gifts. Instead, we should be together with people at the feet of Jesus, the source of life, seeking help and advice, when problems come to men.)

The Toba Indians themselves said that they appreciated Mennonite missionaries carrying only the Word of God, because this meant that the Toba didn't end up fighting amongst

⁴ Krog, Louis, 2009. 'Keynote response to "Jesus: Our rule of Thumb" by Louis Krog.' 'Keynote Paper presented at Vulnerable Mission Conference, Andover, UIK, 18th February 2009. <http://www.vulnerablemission.com/reports-of-conferences/andover/> (accessed 30th March 2009)

⁵ Pring, Julia, 2009. 'Jesus; Our Rule of Thumb.' Keynote Paper presented at Vulnerable Mission Conference, Andover, UK, 18th February 2009. <http://www.vulnerablemission.com/reports-of-conferences/andover/> (accessed 30th March 2009)

⁶ Pring, 'Jesus.'

⁷ Hurst, 2009. <http://www.vulnerablemission.com/reports-of-conferences/seattle/> (accessed 30th March 2009)

⁸ Peterson, Dan, 2009. 'A Devotion Presented at the Indianapolis Vulnerable Missions conference in January 2009.' <http://www.vulnerablemission.com/reports-of-conferences/indianapolis/> (accessed 30th March 2009)

⁹ Schwartz, Glenn, 2009. 'Comments on the Presentation by Dr. Stan Nussbaum.' <http://www.vulnerablemission.com/reports-of-conferences-2009/lancaster/> (accessed 30th March 2009)

¹⁰ Schwartz, 'Comments.'

¹¹ Paul, 'Das Mennonitenteam.'

themselves.¹² Thus they implied that missionary's activities amongst South American Indians, and presumably also other peoples such as African people, can cause fighting, jealousy and disputes amongst those being reached. When missionaries don't have money, then churches can live in peace! Missionaries not being pre-occupied in giving handouts is enabling indigenous Christians to be free to worship God in ways that make sense to them.¹³

Krog mentioned the important need to change people's "financial expectations of 'foreign' missionaries".¹⁴ These days, the expectation is that a Western missionary "will come financially equipped to invest in local ministries". If they are not so equipped, then this expectation will bring an additional difficulty to relationship with a missionary! In the long run, a lack of resources may be the best option, as "It is ... all [too] easy to pay for friendship but hard to make real friends".¹⁵

Nussbaum gave an example of a mission board that decided to make language learning mandatory for missionaries, only to find itself ignored by missionaries on the field. "The dominant practice of mission by Westerners is widely divorced from the theoretical study of it" Nussbaum goes on to say,¹⁶ reflecting what Krog found (above). Nussbaum emphasises the importance of addressing the gap between theory and practice, to avoid the current scenario in which principles of operation in mission that are widely accepted amongst missiologists are "routinely ignored at the congregational, individual, and field levels where many decisions are made and carried out".¹⁷ The simplicity of the principles advocated by the AVM will promote implementation of better practice. Telling Western people not to use money or Western languages in their ministry is much less ambiguous than to say 'invest *less* money' or 'learn' (even though you may not actually *use*) local languages. The reasons for the gap between theory and practice are many.

The alternative to vulnerable mission is actually, according to Nussbaum, "insulated" and "controlling" mission. That is not to say that anyone is setting out to do their mission in such a way. Yet, by default Nussbaum says, this will happen. Not knowing the indigenous language insulates a missionary from their task and from the people being reached. Being the provider of essential funds is controlling what is going on.¹⁸ When the missionaries stopped controlling using their money, the Indians were set free to worship in their own way, said Paul.¹⁹ This Indian context in South America is one in which Europeans, in the name of the Gospel, have in the past carried out great injustices.²⁰ Hurst suggests that missionaries "must step into the victim role"²¹ "A missionary as victim means total vulnerability ... anybody can reject his message with impunity, without fear of sanction" added Hurst, (citing Loewen who was quoting Verryn)!²² Pring suggested that 'success' should be measured not by the results

¹² Paul, 'Das Mennonitenteam.'

¹³ Paul, 'Das Mennonitenteam.'

¹⁴ Krog, 'Keynote Response.'

¹⁵ Krog, 'Keynote Response.'

¹⁶ Nussbaum, Stan, 2009. 'Positioning the "Vulnerable Mission" Strategy in Mission Thinking and Practice.'
<http://www.vulnerablemission.com/reports-of-conferences-2009/lancaster/> (accessed 30th March 2009)

¹⁷ Nussbaum, 'Positioning.'

¹⁸ Nussbaum, 'Positioning.'

¹⁹ Paul, 'Das Mennonitenteam.'

²⁰ Latin America, nd., 'Spanish Conquest.'

http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/latinamerica/topics/spanish_conquest.html (accessed 30th March 2009)

²¹ Hurst, Christopher, 2009. '(Subjective) report on the Conference by Chris Hurst'
<http://www.vulnerablemission.com/reports-of-conferences-2009/seattle/> (accessed 30th March 2009)

²² Hurst, '(Subjective).'

one 'achieves', but by one's ability to draw alongside the people.²³ It is the weakness and failings of the missionary that will make the grace of God evident, Woods told us.²⁴

Rennick recognised that vulnerable mission is "repulsed by" triumphalism.²⁵ According to Rennick, the notion that a certain people are 'correct' in what they do because they have more power "is the polar opposite of the very idea and ideals of AVM".

AVM indirectly promotes long-term service in mission. This is not because the principles of vulnerable mission include reference to length of service, but frankly because in most cases it will not be possible to learn to use local languages and have the respect needed for local people to share their resources with a missionary who serves only over a short-term period. Schwartz told us that short-term missionaries "rationalise their own effectiveness".²⁶ That is, they look for means to justify carrying out a kind of mission, the reason for which is actually found within their own desire for convenience. Nussbaum points out that "when vulnerable mission principles are presented, the short-term difficulties of vulnerable mission principles are much more obvious to most people than the long-term disasters they would prevent".²⁷ Yes, vulnerable mission makes for difficult mission. The immediate barriers to apparent 'success' may be many – the need to learn a language, and small beginnings arising from not having outside resources available with which to quickly build one's infrastructure and so on. But unfortunately things that are built quickly, including missionary's projects, can implode or perhaps worse explode and cause enormous damage.²⁸ What is lasting and useful needs deep foundations that typically can only be built carefully and slowly.

Accessibility of the missionary is one concern that seems to hover at the edge of vulnerable mission concerns. How important is it for a missionary to be 'accessible' to the people he / she is reaching? Barriers between a missionary and the people can hinder the progress of the Gospel. These barriers can be physical – walls, means of travel, guard dogs. They can be social and linguistic – a missionary's spending time with a higher-than-normal class of people will tend to exclude the more 'normal' ones, and of course not knowing a language. They can be behavioural – a missionary's not being familiar with expected behaviour should a visitor come to one's home, for example.²⁹ Nussbaum adds that: "The busier a mission worker feels, the less accessible and vulnerable he/she will be considered by the local people".³⁰

A number of presenters mentioned the importance of relationship. The following of vulnerable mission principles can enhance the likelihood of a missionary connecting well to people on the field by removing barriers to good relationship. As well as unfamiliarity with language and culture and having a life-style very different from that of local people, such barriers also arise from relating to people as a patron who has to be 'pleased' at all costs so as to maintain a flow of funds. Schwartz shared his own experience in this area. He was told during his time in Zambia that he could either be popular with the African people, or with his

²³ Pring, 'Jesus.'

²⁴ Woods, Michael, 2009. 'Seattle Conference on Vulnerable Mission Keynote Response.'
<http://www.vulnerablemission.com/reports-of-conferences-2009/seattle/> (accessed 30th March 2009)

²⁵ Rennick, Steve, 2009. 'Here is the keynote address that was presented by Steve Rennick.'
<http://www.vulnerablemission.com/reports-of-conferences-2009/indianapolis/> (30th March 2009)

²⁶ Schwartz, 'Comments.'

²⁷ Nussbaum, 'Positioning'.

²⁸ In other words, projects can fail, and in the process do damage to the people or the community involved with them.

²⁹ While it is common in the UK to ask a visitor their business as they stand at one's door, it is in much of East Africa very rude not immediately to invite a visitor into the house.

³⁰ Nussbaum, 'Positioning.'

fellow missionaries, but that he would not achieve popularity with both.³¹ In effect, his efforts at meeting the African people on their own turf resulted in his becoming unpopular with missionaries. “I have learnt to stay clear of any financial dimension in relationships, as a safe way forward and as the only way to try and teach the Africans the value of trust and true friendship” Pring told us.³² She went on to share that: “We need to be prepared to expose ourselves to have meaningful relationships with the local people; that involves being prepared to be misunderstood, ridiculed, and being constantly watched like an animal in a zoo!”

The final point comes from Rennick, who appealed to ‘vulnerable missionaries’ for the “acceptance, appreciation, and approval of AVM for those of us who have a different, yet equally radical approach, in our missiology and praxis”.³³ Vulnerable mission is not an exclusive approach. A vulnerable missionary may in fact be dependent on the acceptance of default mission practitioners in order to carry out their ministry.³⁴ There is a parallel appeal for default-missionaries to ‘accept’ and appreciate vulnerable missionaries. Economically and linguistically the latter aim to relate to nationals ‘on the level’. Western missionaries who take vulnerable roles, will need social contact and support from those of their Western fellows who practice different styles of mission. Difference has always been characteristic of the church; which nevertheless continues to be one.

Meeting Common Objections to Vulnerable Mission – compiled responses from the conferences

This section addresses major themes that came up repeatedly at the conferences, and particularly attempts to respond to common misunderstandings regarding the nature of vulnerable mission, what it is trying to achieve, and why.

Some people objected that AVM seemed to be opposed to the spread of English and other European languages. They pointed out that that these languages are important to international communication and in assisting Third World countries to benefit from becoming a part of the international community. So why then should AVM be in favour of missionaries using indigenous languages?

The AVM is saying that there is also a place for non-Western languages in mission and the church, and it can point to some of the serious disadvantages of the use of Western languages in certain contexts. The AVM is saying that a lot of missionary activity from the West gives too great a prominence to English at the cost of the development of other languages. It emphasises important and often neglected outcomes associated with the use of indigenous languages.

Should a missionary from the native English-speaking world use his or her English in ministry amongst English speakers outside of that world, this will have a number of effects. First, foreign missionaries will start with an enormous advantage. They will be ahead of others in language knowledge. This position of linguistic advantage can, by making missionaries appear to know more, preclude wider learning opportunities for them. Secondly, the people who later want to continue that ministry, in order to do so in the same way as the missionary concerned, will first be dependent on a prior step – that of learning English. This

³¹ Schwartz, ‘Comments.’

³² Pring, ‘Jesus’

³³ Rennick, ‘Here is.’

³⁴ A Westerner who is working as a missionary in a non-Western field can, in my own experience, benefit enormously through having a close and caring relationship with other Westerners – even if the latter are not working on VM principles.

will often cost money and time that could have been invested directly into ministry. Third, use of English will invariably leave gaps in understanding, because translation from indigenous language expression of issues into English will never be perfect. These gaps could be so significant as to radically transform content and relevance to a people and their community. Fourth, the dominant role of native English speaking countries is such as to make it very likely that they will condemn, undermine, or inappropriately evaluate non-native English texts.³⁵

Use of a native language immediately puts the foreign missionary into a learning role, instead of a position of having superior knowledge. It puts him or her into close contact with local issues or concerns – that may be different from those in the sending country. It is a boost for the prestige of the people to find a foreigner taking their language seriously. Use of the local language will enable the Gospel to penetrate into the culture, as preaching, teaching and living of the Christian life can as a result be in a live way relevant to the people concerned. It will be assisting people to deal with their own issues as they understand them, rather than drawing them into resolving problems as understood by the native English speaking world. For all the values of English as international language then, a Western missionary³⁶ should think very carefully before using English in their ministry outside of the native English speaking world, if that ministry seeks to plant something indigenous rather than transplant what is foreign.

A second common area of misunderstanding concerning vulnerable mission is in relation to helping the poor. It is very common to see ‘assistance to the poor’ as being a transfer of resources from a community that has an abundance to one that has few resources. Many missionary endeavours focus on ensuring a plentiful resource transfer from the ‘wealthy’ to the poor parts of the world.

The AVM does not seek to prevent such transfer from occurring, but does question whether the transfer process should be as hegemonic as is frequently the case today. In other words, the AVM questions whether resource transfer should be the dominating feature of all Christian ministries from the West to the Third World. The current system in which almost (?) all Westerners who move to poor parts of the world are pre-occupied in wealth, technology and language transfers from the West is questioned. The reasons for this include: One, because this easily generates corruption in the receiving community. Two, it counters or stultifies initiative, innovativeness and all kinds of alternatives that could otherwise arise. Third, because it generates gross dependence on the charity of distant economies. Fourth, because it results in a communication barrier with Western missionaries – as locals will be reluctant to reveal any ‘truths’ that could threaten their income.³⁷

Many scholars recognise that it is better to assist people to help themselves than it is only to do things for them. The AVM recognises that people are helped to help themselves when a foreign worker operates using local resources and languages. Their use of local resources means that they will be encouraging local initiative and innovation. The foreigner’s operating according to local conditions means that their way of working will be appropriate for the local person to imitate. Use of local languages means that outsiders can be a part of the

³⁵ Because the meaning of a text is as dependent on the context in which it is used as are the words that are themselves used, native English speakers are bound to ‘misunderstand’ a text that is written in English but in terms of a culture other than their familiar native-English one. Because English is very much owned and controlled by countries such as the UK and USA, people from these countries may condemn texts that are actually appropriate for the people who devised them.

³⁶ Especially a native-English speaker.

³⁷ <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/articles/The-Immortality-of-Aid-to-the-Third-World.pdf>

overcoming of real local issues rather than problems that would be assumed to be there because they are there in the English speaking world. That is, use of local languages will result in the recognition of local difficulties that, once recognised, can be addressed. The AVM therefore takes the long-term view of seeking to aid communities to develop their own productive capacity to avoid the debilitating alternative of ‘dependence creation’.

A third common objection to what people perceive to be the aims of AVM, is that it appears to circumvent Biblical injunctions to ‘give’ to those who are in need. The AVM suggests that the international aid industry may be misinterpreting these Biblical injunctions. The Bible was written in a pre-capitalist era. The Scriptural emphasis on ‘giving’ is built on the foundation of ‘sacrifice’.³⁸ It is based on a much simpler monetary system than is extant in modern times. There was no modern international banking system in Jesus’ day.³⁹ Questions of giving were primarily in relation to people who one was ‘close to’ – not distant cultures and peoples that one only related to electronically. It was a giving closely linked with responsibility. Christ himself refused to turn stones to bread.⁴⁰ Giving is an important Christian teaching, but was throwing around surpluses from a (morally questionable) capitalist economy that undermine whole communities and make vast populations dependent on the charity of a few, ever part of Jesus’ plan?

In addition to and related to the above, is the question of ‘intelligent giving’. Surely it is unlikely that Jesus ever intended that people ‘give and give and give’ regardless of the behaviour of the recipient of their charity. Certainly Western people, in contexts with which they are familiar, will give intelligently. Someone will not give £100 in cash every day to a drunkard who they meet on the street. Certain giving within extended families is carefully prescribed – parents help their children to the point of making them self-sufficient and not to perpetuate dependency on them. Continuation of giving is often dependent on recipient’s careful accounting and demonstration of effective use of funds received. Legal action can be taken against those who abuse funds.

Intelligent giving is much more difficult to do across vast geographic, linguistic and cultural divides that characterise Western mission to the non-West. Instead of being done and administered by individuals, professionals (governmental and non-governmental bodies) come to fill the gap. The dynamics of the giving process change as a result. The ‘professionals’ become dependent on the continuation of the donor-process. Budgets are drawn up that ‘have to’ be spent. Recipients who do not understand the way of life of the donors who produce the surpluses become ‘victims’ to their whim. When ‘telling the truth’ can mean being left a pauper, the temptation for recipients of charity to bend the truth becomes overpowering. Personal initiative to look after oneself in a responsible way can be despised when generous donors favour those who do not ‘help themselves’. Those people, typically in the West, who are driving the donor process, may actually be evading the Biblical command to ‘give’ to their own community by choosing to contribute anonymously to organised charity. Intermediary organisations (charities) can be used by people as a way of shielding themselves from the complications of ‘responsible giving’ because moral equations are deceptively presented by many charitable bodies simply as being of endless (genuine) need, to be met by donated money.

³⁸ Mark 12:42-43

³⁹ Stevens, Marty E., 2006. *Temples, Tithes and Taxes*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers

⁴⁰ Matthew 4:3-4.

The fourth concern addressed in this section – is whether the AVM is saying that ‘the others have all got it wrong’? Is it not implicit, in other words, in advocating that ‘some missionaries should use local languages and resources’ and giving reasons for the same, that those who work in (say) Africa using Western languages and resources in ministry are ‘wrong’? Some conference goers suggested that if the vulnerable mission principles are ‘good’, then all missionaries should follow them in all their ministries everywhere. Others argued that this need not be the case because vulnerable and default ministries can complement one another. Advocating that some missionaries be vulnerable may be a better approach than confronting today’s powerful lobbies that, apparently ignorant of the kinds of concerns addressed by AVM, are strongly in favour of increases in donor activity.⁴¹

It is my conviction that vulnerable missionaries and non-vulnerable missionaries can and must work in a complementary way. If there are missionaries and aid workers who concentrate on outside resources and Western languages who are opposed to ‘vulnerable missionaries’ then one must ask oneself ‘why’? Are they afraid of being exposed? Why are they opposed to other Westerners becoming better informed of that impact of their actions that they themselves are not able to see? Any ways in which pro-donor groups hegemonise the missions’ budget and orientation of churches in Western churches is suspect. Even if ‘giving’ is good, surely they cannot as Christians say that it is ‘wrong’ to seek relationship in any way other than as a patron seeking a client for their funds? Donor-driven charities that are ‘against’ vulnerable mission seem to be trying to hide something.

For different reasons, vulnerable missionaries must also accept an ongoing role, at least for a period, for non-vulnerable ones. (Remember that we are defining vulnerable as; use of local languages and resources in ministry.) The main reason for this is the enormous dependency that has already been created in much of the Third World on Western languages and Western charity. A sudden withdrawal of all Western charitable giving to the Third World could be a disaster that would result in massive suffering and loss of life. Even if that withdrawal was confined only to specifically Christian giving, it would be extremely serious. It is important that awareness of the problems of donor activity be raised, and not that donors curtail their activities in an instant. Then more serious attempts need to be made at reducing the institution of new dependencies. Once some ‘vulnerable missionaries’ are on the ground and begin to operate, it will still take a long time before they will be sufficiently well-informed for their insights to be drawn upon by the West in the design of interventionist’s strategies. (Someone setting out to be a ‘vulnerable missionary’ today will need a long period of time (perhaps 10 years or more) to elapse before they get sufficiently close to the community they are reaching so as to be able to proffer helpful and consistent feedback to the West.)

It is probably true to say that many mission and development organisations are making major efforts at improving the ways in which they use their resources. The discussion on ‘how to make better use of foreign money’ is widespread. That which is new that AVM contributes, is to say that one way to resolve the difficulties of the use funds, is to have some Western missionaries who ‘not use’ (i.e. not ‘control’)⁴² such funds in their ministries in the first place, and then to add the suggestion that they also use (not only ‘learn’ the language but use it) a local language in their key ministry.

⁴¹ The Micah Challenge, for example, receives wide support from the church today. (Micah, ‘Micah Challenge UK.’ <http://www.micahchallenge.org.uk/> (accessed 30th March 2009))

⁴² The main issue at stake I believe is not the original source of funds so much as their control. A ‘vulnerable missionary’ may operate in a context that is subsidised by the West, but will still be ‘vulnerable’ if they have no control over those funds.

While vulnerable missionaries should not have control over resources coming into their vicinity that originate from the West, they can have a role in feedback to the West in a more generic sense. They will be in a unique position to do this for a number of reasons. Unlike many Third World nationals they will not be dependent on donor charity for their own survival, so will be able to speak frankly and openly in a way that many Third World nationals cannot. Having been raised in the West, they will have an understanding of Western language(s) and ways of operating that are very difficult for Third World nationals to grasp, so will be able to speak intelligently to 'the West'. On the other hand, because of the dearth in vulnerable missionaries, and because it takes (say) ten years for someone to get to a position of being well informed, there will be a lag of at least ten years before the Western missionary enterprise is able to benefit from such feedback.

What seems to be needed by way of 'immediate action' is as follows:

1. Major efforts to encourage, recruit and deploy 'vulnerable missionaries'.
2. The creation of new dependencies should be minimised.
3. Investigations should continue, and implementation to follow suit, using the insights and information that is already available despite the dearth of 'vulnerable missionaries' currently on the ground.

Another point to mention is the so called 'threat of Islam'. There is a tendency for people in the poor world to convert to which-ever 'religion' can offer the most money or food. 'Competition' between religions has thus run in parallel with economic capacity. Some point out the need for Christians to continue to give, to ensure that hungry people not be enticed away from their Christian beliefs. This is an important and complex issue, but in the long term it needs to be asked whether this system should be continued? Is it good to demonstrate the divinity of Christ through the achievements of capitalism? If not, and if we believe that the faithful witness of believers is more important than financial inducements to faith, then this is another reason to opt for vulnerable mission. That is – it would be good if competition between 'religions' could be based on their 'merits' and not on how much money is available to them.

Conclusion

The list-serve *pearl* discussion group on vulnerable mission was set up at the time of the conferences, and has been very active ever since.⁴³ Increasing numbers of missiologists and others' participating in *pearl* point to the success of the conferences, and the importance of vulnerable mission in the wider debate on missiology.

A foundation has been established for a new (but old) movement in mission. A case has clearly been made for the importance of having some Western missionaries use locally available resources and languages in their ministries outside of the West. The problems of the failure to do this have been highlighted: dependency and the oppressing of local initiative through use of outside resources, ignorance and irrelevance to local issues of a missionary force that relies on Western languages. Amongst the questions that remain are: who will take the trouble to implement the recommendations underlying the principles of vulnerable mission?

⁴³ Go to this url for information on how to join: <http://lists.vulnerablemission.com/listinfo.cgi/pearl-vulnerablemission.com/>