



ALLIANCE FOR VULNERABLE MISSION

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**Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Bulletin**

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Editor: Jim Harries, PhD, Chairman of the AVM



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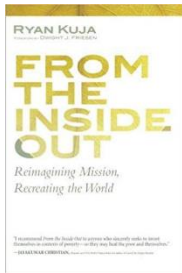
**The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission encourages some missionaries from the West to engage in their ministries using local languages and resources.**

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UK News – mark your diaries. Exact dates pending ... the UK AVM board is beginning to put together plans for a vulnerable-mission related conference to be held at All Nations in the first half of December 2019 (note year. Note 2018, but 2019.) Please make a note in your 2019 diaries, and watch this space!



See below for some discussion of implications of recent work done by Professor John Barclay, Durham University, UK, on vulnerable mission.



- Here is a review of Kuja, Ryan, 2018, *From the Inside Out: reimagining missions, recreating the world*. Oregon: Cascade Books, by Jim Harries.

Kuja was apparently raised in a world where ‘mission’ means two-week trips and one-year involvements. That is a world experienced by many in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, especially in the USA. Kuja is a victim of that system, crying over wounds it inflicts. He speaks frankly, engagingly, perceptively, cutting to the heart of a matter, in a way that needs to be heard.

The fulcrum of the story, Kuja being “ensnared into a rogue political situation and abducted,” is only revealed in the last chapter. More details are not given. That rogue situation causes Kuja’s demise, as far as foreign mission to the poor is concerned.

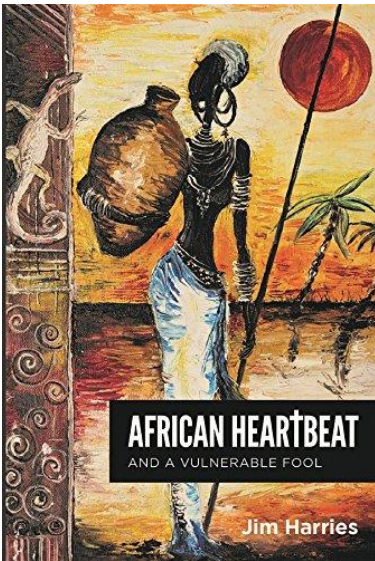
There are times when you think that Kuja is being too judgemental. (Maybe Andrew, one of the characters critiqued, ought to be given more opportunity to speak.) There are times certainly when Kuja is sweeping. Then again, perhaps he is being honest and frank in a badly needed way. Kuja is contemporary; he’s read recent books, and is familiar with recent theories. Kuja’s book ends on a note of defeat. That is perhaps unusual for Christian writing, from the bible on, that tends to be about God’s victory. Perhaps, though, that is necessary, given how far astray the mission of the Western church to the rest of the world, has gone. Kuja points to, “a fissure in the foundation of mission, a crack nearly as old as Western civilisation itself.” He goes on to explore how that crack caused his own endeavours to stumble.

Jesus is rightly given as the archetype of a wounded missionary, best known for ways in which he was wounded. (Kuja’s account makes frequent if not constant reference to Scripture.) Then, in the course of time, people have got Jesus mixed in with the sword and with imperialism. It is refreshing to have a contemporary description of mission that takes account of mission’s shady historical roots. (One wonders about being too quick to condemn what happened in the past that we can no longer understand.) Mission should be carried out in the light of history, Kuja tells us. McMission, however, thrives on ‘poverty-porn,’ and unbiblical notions of charity. Kuja recognises relationships as a plus, and shame as a negative. The questionable legitimacy of using the white West as the measuring stick for everything is acknowledged. Instead of engaging and dealing with difference, the West chooses to ignore it. Kuja pushes his readers towards vulnerable desert places and into roles as prophets.

Have mission efforts of the West become a compliant part of the larger evils of globalisation, Kuja asks? We are left with the challenge: how to free mission from its colonial past? Kuja doesn’t make mention of the wider implications of the ways in which his experiences and insights undermine supposed benefits of globalisation. His prophetic voice should be seen as extending beyond the world of short-term mission, to an effective critique of much that goes on in today’s so called secular world.

The image I come up with at the end of Kuja’s books, is of a man from America being carried to a war-torn region of Sudan on a stretcher, to be laid down to talk to victims of ethnic conflict (using what language?). Kuja’s book is incomplete. It leaves his reader hanging in limbo. One wants to encourage Kuja to continue-on – in research, exploration, and vulnerability. He needs to write part II. After all, Jesus rose from the dead – he didn’t stay on the cross. Kuja needs to be more explicit. He’s told us riddles. Now he needs to unravel some of them. Mission cannot remain merely a sharing of woundedness, across cultural chasms, the unravelling of which Kuja has barely begun to tackle.

- See [here](#) for a short article that looks at ‘A better way forward for transnational higher education.’ Reflecting on this piece, the *AVM Bulletin* asks: Can there ever be globalised use of English that doesn’t advantage native-speakers, as long as native-English speaking countries remain as powerful as they are?



- Listen to [this review](#) of African Heartbeat, by Rev. Dr. Chris Wright (International Director of Langham Trust). (Recorded from CCD conference in Stuttgart, Germany, June 2018.)



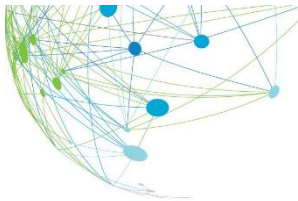
- Frank Paul and Jim Harries attended the recent CCD (Christian Community Development) conference held in Germany. [Click here to hear an interview](#) of Jim Harries and Frank Paul (AVM members) conducted by Sheryl Haw (Director, Micah Global). (Picture – Frank Paul sharing at the CCD conference.)



- See here for [The Inside Edge](#) - some news on working with Asia’s urban poor.



- See [here](#) for Jim’s latest article, published in *Missiology: an international review*. The article is entitled ‘**Resource use as hindrance to sustainable overseas development intervention: A view focused on Pentecostal Christianity.**’ A



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copy of the article as it was before adjustments made for publication, can be found [here](#). Here is the abstract: “The use of outside resources (and global languages) seriously curtails the ability of intervening agents at engaging with non-western societies at an ontological depth. As a result the unhealthy, socially destructive, presuppositional level of people’s lives may not be challenged. Intervention in the lives of the poor using outside resources can obscure the need to engage with people at ontological depth. A case study illustrates how engagement without resources can challenge deep presuppositions associated with poverty. Deep theological engagement with preexisting ontologies from a position of understanding is advocated as the means to premeditated sustainability.”

- [The Faroe islands](#), with a population of just 50,000, are preserving their own language. Then why not other much larger people groups around the world?
- ‘[What if vulnerability is the key?](#)’ asks Brigada, in this intriguing little post. Have a look, and post your own comment.
- Mittwede critiques conventional intercultural theological education in this article: Mittwede, Steven K., 2013, ‘**Cognitive Educational Approaches as Means of Envisioning and Effecting Worldview Transformation via Theological Education.**’ *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 17(2) 2013, 301-324. Instead of just asking students to be able to declare ‘doctrinal truth’, Mittwede tells us that theological educators need to realise that students build the unfamiliar onto the familiar. Educators need to make conscious efforts at building the new on existing scaffolding. This requires intimate knowledge of where students are coming from culturally, to provide anchorage to what is taught. Part of this (Mittwede told me in the course of email correspondence) must be an educator’s knowledge of the indigenous language.
- Materials in Swahili: (I list these here, in the interests of getting African language materials ‘out there’.) Below are testimonies from Muslims who have discovered Christ.

<http://media.morethandreams.org/Download/Swahili/3GP/Ali-Swahili.3gp> (Turkey)

<http://media.morethandreams.org/Download/Swahili/3GP/Dini-Swahili.3gp> (Indonesia)

<http://media.morethandreams.org/Download/Swahili/3GP/Khalil-Swahili.3gp> (Egypt)

<http://media.morethandreams.org/Download/Swahili/3GP/Khosrow-Swahili.3gp> (Iran)

<http://media.morethandreams.org/Download/Swahili/3GP/Mohammed-Swahili.3gp> (Nigeria)

- The *Firth Lectures* for 2018 given by John Barclay, Lightfoot Professor at Durham University, at Nottingham university. Have the overall Title: ***Beyond charity: gift-reciprocity and community construction in the New Testament***. There were three lectures, as below:



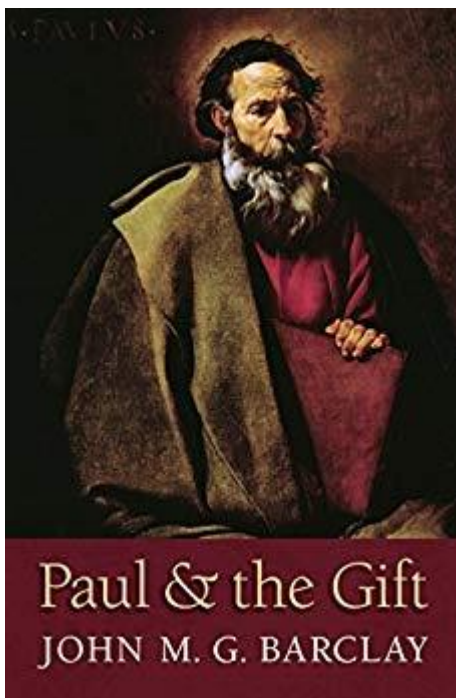
1. [\*\*\*Is Altruism a Christian Virtue? A New Testament perspective.\*\*\*](#) In this lecture, John Barclay questions whether modern notions of altruism are truly Christian. The history of the term 'altruism', suggests that while it clearly arose out of Christianity, it was intended to supplant Christianity, being superior to Christianity. Altruism in its pure sense is about giving without expectation of return. That comes to be a bit like charity without relationship. Hence Barclay's critique, suggesting that in ancient Christianity, there was no notion of 'gift without return', and that we are misled to think that there is such a thing today.
2. [\*\*\*A fresh reading of grace and gift in Paul's theology.\*\*\*](#) In this lecture, John Barclay re-examines gift-giving in the New Testament. "Paul is fully aware that the one-way gift can appear patronising," Barclay tells us, in a comment that seems to speak right into today's dependency-creating mission and development aid that goes around the world. Barclay advocates that consideration of gifts as reciprocal, is a return to New Testament standards, and so suggests that community development should occur on the basis of indigenous assets.
3. [\*\*\*Reciprocity and Risk at the Economic Margins\*\*\*](#), is the title of the paper presented by Barclay at this seminar. In this fascinating presentation, Barclay explores the nature of poor communities in the early centuries of the Christian church. He finds churches to have been mostly populated by the poor. Often, church members doubted the commitment of wealthier people to their Christian faith, knowing that the better off would be under constant pressure to assist their poorer colleagues. The generosity of believers was, for Barclay, a major reason for their success in attracting new converts, this resulting in church-growth.

Barclay very helpfully re-examines the otherwise widely accepted principle in the West, that giving without expectation of return is 'normal' altruistic behaviour. Although definitely rooted in Christianity, early Christians themselves would not have recognised modern 'altruism'. The use of gifts as means of forming relationship is widespread and normal in New Testament times. This suggests that the same ought to apply today.



I believe that Barclay's insights form a useful basis from which to consider vulnerable mission. The 'problem' of the West with respect to much of the majority world, is that it has rejected traditional notions of gift reciprocity. That rejection, plus other factors, has I suggest been in the West itself the basis for enormous capitalist economic growth, and the enabling of the discovery of science and utilisation of technology in the service of mankind. The AVM asks how contemporary Westerners can most helpfully respond to this situation.

Early Christians realised that the "wealthy will drift away from the church" because "they'll get tired of the demands a church will make on their wealth," Barclay tells us in his presentation number 3 above. This helps to explain how contemporary Western missionaries fail to engage with grassroots churches around the world. "To refuse to lend when asked is to break a friendship," Barclay also tells us, yet "you don't want a reputation for being a bottomless pit." These challenges to relationship are complex, difficult, and emotionally loaded. They go a long way towards explaining why the AVM advocates that SOME Western missionaries sidestep these issues at least in so far as they might refuse to be conduits of wealth from the West into all their key relationships.



- The review below, of *Paul and the Gift*, by John Barclay, suggests that this book has much to say in favour of vulnerable mission:

1. It informs us that the notion that gifts can be non-circular, i.e. that you can provide 'aid' for poor communities without buying 'authority' over them, is recent, confined to the West, and misleading.

2. God's grace is incongruous. That is, it is given regardless of someone's 'worth'. Western-resourced mission however almost always directs resources according to people found 'worthy' by the missionary or mission body. If God's grace is incongruous, then why not ours?

A review of Barclay, John M.G., 2017, *Paul and the Gift*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., by Jim Harries.

My position for this review is that of a missionary seeking insights on how to reach the contemporary majority world with the Gospel. The majority world does not share the long and involved post New Testament history of the West. Barclay critiques that history to re-articulate certain original New Testament understandings. This doubles to being a means to understanding the majority world today. For this and other reasons, reading Barclay's hefty

text has been more than an academic exercise in history, it has also been an exploration of the contemporary majority world.

Not being a specialist in Paul's letters, and having limited New Testament Greek, I am poorly equipped to critique the exegetical part of Barclay's work.

Barclay's penetrating analysis of the character of God's grace, as understood from Old Testament to modern times, speaks profoundly to Christian and secular society today. Barclay's first and second chapters are worth careful reading, even for the student who goes no further. Barclay openly acknowledges his debt to Marcel Mauss and his anthropological study of gifts in traditional society, a study that has already spawned much scholarship. Historically, Barclay tells us, the notion of 'disinterested gift' was not there. The modern understanding that a gift can be disinterested has arisen through a polarisation in which gifts are seen to be in contrast to modern market payments, that are guided by depersonalised notions of worth. Kant and other philosophers contributed to the prominence of the understanding that gifts should be disinterested (in Barclay's terminology, non-circular). This has resulted in the wide spread of contemporary understandings of altruism that are contrary to the bible itself. Contemporarily, the notion that gifts can be non-circular is a popular deception, while what is supposedly 'disinterested' (such as aid to the majority world) retains strings!

The pre-Reformation understandings of gifts (and grace), is that a gift expects a return. That return may not be in kind; e.g. a return for a material gift can be in the form of praise, i.e. some ascription of honour. While not legally binding, the premodern obligation to return a gift was nevertheless strong. Societies in biblical times, largely held together by a multiplicity of gift-exchanges, could in modern times easily be considered corrupt.

Ancient, including Biblical, gift giving always sought for a return. This means, that the abject poor were largely ignored – because they could not pay a return. Unless for Jews, who understood that God repays. Modern commentators on gift and grace who do not realise the above history, can inadvertently incorporate theological inaccuracy into their work.

A major stroke of brilliance underlying Barclay's work is the 'discovery' that 'grace' or 'gift' can be perfected in at least six ways. A gift can be classified according to 1. Its superabundance, 2. singularity, 3. priority, 4. incongruity, 5. efficacy, and 6. non-circularity. The failure of historical scholarship to clearly distinguish these categories has been responsible for much confusion, especially since Sanders (1977) dispelled the previously hegemonic notion, that Jews in New Testament times preferred 'works' to God's grace.

Reference to Marcion, Augustine, Luther, Calvin and other more recent scholars helps Barclay to articulate ways in which influential theologians have been responsible for many of the foundational understandings we have of 'gift' and 'grace' (these two terms largely used as synonyms by Barclay) up to today. (Here is immediately a caution to missionaries – non-Westerners may have a very different understanding of these terms!) Luther pushed our understanding of grace towards its being pure altruism, i.e. non-circular, expecting no return. Calvin saw works as signs and proofs of grace. Barth, Bultmann and others added to contemporary understanding in different ways. Throughout, Jews were assumed to be

‘works-based’, missing out on an understanding of God’s grace, until Sanders rightly pointed out the contrary. Sanders failing, however, to distinguish incongruity (undeservedness) from other perfections of grace (see above), left confusing gaps in understanding that Barclay here seeks to plug.

Barclay’s detailed textual analyses begins with five second-temple texts, the most recent of which is post-70AD. By these means Barclay gives clear demonstration of Jewish engagement with God’s grace. These in many ways parallel those of New Testament texts, and are engaged by New Testament authors, including Paul. Barclay explains contextual and paradigmatic assumptions underlying the understandings of grace articulated in each of these texts. He points especially to different approaches to incongruity (how God gives to the underserving). Jewish scholars considered that perfection of grace’s incongruity, i.e. giving to all regardless of their worthiness, threatened to undermine God’s justice and moral nature. Hence, notions of God’s incongruent grace were carefully hedged.

The break with tradition made by Paul, himself a Jew and drawing on Jewish traditions, was to insist that God’s grace is extra-to the Mosaic law, and as a result inclusive of Gentiles. Paul realised that if this is the case, if God’s grace is truly incongruous, then efforts at pleasing God by following the law are worse than counter-productive! Gentiles then, as a group, are no more distant from God’s mercy than are Jews.

Barclay analyses Paul’s letter to the Galatians. In this letter, Barclay tells us, Paul denies the ‘normal’ status of Jewish law. Hence his condemnation of Peter’s inconsistency; declining to eat with Gentiles once joined by fellow Jews in Antioch (Galatians 2:11ff). Paul advocates faith in Christ, described by Barclay as a kind of acknowledgement of personal bankruptcy, instead of law. So then Christian belief, to perfect God’s incongruous grace, requires that any adherence to the law not be salvific.

Christian communities envisioned in Galatians (then later also in Barclay’s analysis of Romans) are not made up of people seeking for honour, now considered of no-worth, but are built on love. The law (Torah), being perceived now as a source of competition and pride, has acquired the status of a curse. Christian believers are freed from its impositions, especially male-circumcision. Then in a twist that redeems God’s role as moral and judgemental agent, they are required to be slaves to Christ!

Communities portrayed by Barclay as arising from Paul’s teachings have radically ceded competition for honour. Instead of so competing, its members acknowledge their own lack of superiority. Instead of to law, such communities have obligations to ‘return’ of the incongruous grace they have received from Christ. These communities, bound by love and not by law, become innovative. Hence Barclay emphasises an under-acknowledged benefit of the Gospel in the non-West today; an enabling of people to live together in peace, without the strife and tensions typically found in communities that build on notions of honour and shame, with an innovative bent.

Barclay’s analysis of Romans adds to his discoveries in Galatians, that Israel has rejected the radical incongruity of grace revealed through Paul to have arisen from Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. Yet Israel’s priority before God can be clearly perceived when Romans is read



with Barclay's six-perfections of grace in mind. For Paul, incongruous grace results in neither lawlessness, nor in God ceasing to be a God of justice. This is because the indebtedness of believers to God arising from his incongruous grace is such that God's grace fulfils and overcomes the law, resulting in community bounded by love, as mentioned above. In fact, for Paul, Christian believers aspire to be slaves of Christ.

Personally speaking, in relation to my understanding of majority world and especially African contexts, Barclay's indicating how Western Christians' understandings of God's grace are influenced by their peculiar history is very helpful. A missionary understanding that history, can work backwards to re-envisage the nature of contemporary non-Western understanding, in so far as it is similar to that of biblical times. Demonstration of the centrality of Gospel to making the West what it is today, implies an urgent need for it to be a key component of sharing the 'good things' that the West is and has today, with the majority world. Barclay's explanations are startling, inspiring, challenging and encouraging-to-faith even to non-Pauline and New Testament specialists. They show a clear desirability of incongruous-grace for human salvation, countering of traditional vices associated with competition for honour and avoiding of shame, resulting in community built on an open welcome to all, and grounded in love. Hence, Barclay's text is a highly recommended read, especially the early chapters, and for non-New Testament specialists, the summaries appended to each of the latter chapters.

Regarding mission to the non-Western world, I believe Barclay, properly understood, strongly implies a need to review contemporary practice whereby the Gospel is often communicated in hand with foreign-aid. That foreign-aid is not, as supposed, received as if there is no need for repayment. Instead, it sets up relationships of unhealthy one-sided dependency. One can add that, whenever such aid is slanted towards a sub-section of a community, it fails to reflect ways in which God's Grace is open to all.



All Nations Christian College and Alliance for Vulnerable Mission.

Dear Friends,

16.07.18

Greetings in the service of the Gospel of Christ.

I am writing to those who attended, or have been in other ways closely involved with, the recent vulnerable mission conference held at All Nations college, UK, May-June 2018.

Our board met earlier this week. In our meeting, we discussed how the conference went. We then went on to look at 'ways forward' in the light of some of the wonderful times we had and important themes we are addressing. Our board has come up with a provisional plan to hold another event, again at ANCC, in the first half of December 2019. (Note the year, 2019, not 2018.)

We noted at our recent meeting, that while we felt that the content of our event was of high-quality, attendance was quite low, especially considering that many public events at ANCC attract large numbers. Our concern is that we may not have marketed our event very effectively.

This letter is an appeal to our constituency. We are very interested in finding someone who can guide us in the PR for our proposed 2019 follow-up event. We are particularly interested in finding the right person at this early stage, while the parameters of the event remain wide open. That is – before we have decided on a title, exact dates, programme, and so on.

Please prayerfully consider whether yourself, or a colleague / friend, might be the right person to assist us in improving our marketing / PR, on this vital issue, of Western missionary vulnerability to majority world peoples.

Please respond to Jim at [jim@vulnerablemission.org](mailto:jim@vulnerablemission.org)

Yours,

Jim Harries

On behalf of our executive board members: Andy Dipper (ANCC Principal), Frank Paul (Germany), Tim Reeves (UK), Peter Stagg (UK - finance), Jim Harries (Kenya).]