



ALLIANCE FOR VULNERABLE MISSION

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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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- **AVM advisory board member Chris Flanders tells us about himself and his recent book ...**



After a first career as a church-planter in northern Thailand, I've been teaching and mentoring university students for the past 11 years here at Abilene Christian University in Texas. I work as a professor of mission and intercultural studies in ACU's [Graduate School of Theology](#) and direct the [Halbert Institute for Missions](#). I find the opportunity for forming students in vulnerable modes of mission to be both challenging and hopeful. The challenge comes as I work with students, both in and outside the classroom, who have been profoundly shaped by an American

form of engaging the world by “powering the outcomes”. That is, many come with a default mode given by our dominant North American culture that says that what we have to contribute to the world is our power, our expertise, and our solutions (I mean, we are American after all!). This missions-from-a-position-of-power approach is particularly pernicious in a default setting that assumes that giving our money (often indiscriminately) is the primary way we can help the world. Despite this, I continue to be hopeful, as there is simultaneously an undercurrent of awareness that such an approach has often left the world in worse shape. Students are anxious to understand how they can live vulnerably, live as friends and not bosses, and use local resources as they participate with God on mission.



I think a key component of this is our attention to the local resource of culture. My book, [AboutFace](#), was precisely about this. A vulnerable approach to mission must always assume that using foreign frames of reference for local theology is a form of domination and coercive power (even if unwittingly transferred by unassuming missionaries). To help (in the case of my research and book) Thai people to learn to think of their local cultural dynamics (face, honor, and shame in the Thai versions) as palaces and not merely prisons is to operate in a vulnerable mode of mission. Of course, to understand such nuanced cultural dynamics takes a vulnerable approach of listening deeply and being a learner as much as, or more than, being a teacher. But, since writing the book, I have heard time and again from those who are Thai and those who work with Thais that learning to think about God from the vantage point of face, honor, and shame is a step in learning to think about God and Christian life in the “key of Thai”. That, it seems to me, is the essence of vulnerable mission.

Jim Harries

New Foundations for Appreciating Africa:

beyond religious and secular deceptions



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- Jim Harries' newest book **New Foundations for Appreciating Africa** is now available FOR FREE download from this address:
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The natural world alone provides an insufficient foundation for life. African people, as others, look elsewhere for guidance. The secularism implicitly taught in educational systems throughout the African continent frequently fails to engage with weaknesses in today's status quo. Here-uncovered Christian roots of secularism can provide a means to interact with African and majority world realities. It is time for dominant western scholars to stop ignoring activity in the divine realm. This book starts by delving deeply into indigenous African Christian expression. Through discussion on the English category religion, it throws light on pressing issues in the contemporary world.

- [10 reasons why your good intentions to fight poverty backfire](http://craiggreenfield.us6.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=e32ec902039af6a2f722566d7&id=3f75d6e2f8&e=f01d47178d) (Craig Greenfield)
<http://craiggreenfield.us6.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=e32ec902039af6a2f722566d7&id=3f75d6e2f8&e=f01d47178d> "Honestly, a lot of damage has been done in poor communities by those who blunder in with big hearts and open wallets. Don't be like that. Instead, check out these "Top 10 Dangers" of giving unwisely, as well as some key questions and concepts to help you move towards a more promising approach..."
- [Why are we still building orphanages in 2016?](http://craiggreenfield.us6.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e32ec902039af6a2f722566d7&id=5938b17207&e=f01d47178d) (Craig Greenfield)
<http://craiggreenfield.us6.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e32ec902039af6a2f722566d7&id=5938b17207&e=f01d47178d> "Can I be honest with you for a bit? I'm so tired of this conversation. Everything should have changed when the evidence against orphanages began mounting up several years ago. I've personally been advocating on this issue for 15 years. We haven't had orphanages in Western countries for decades, and NONE of the major humanitarian organizations like Save the Children or World Vision have supported the placement of children in orphanages for years. For good reasons. So why is it taking so long to sink in for the average missionary or church ministry? Seriously, why is anyone still building and supporting orphanages in 2016?"
- Stan Nussbaum, AVM advisory board member, suggests that vulnerable mission is becoming more of a live option for mainstream mission concerns. When I asked him on what basis he believed that, this is what he wrote:

A main argument against VM [vulnerable mission] is that church planting and growth are hindered or crippled if outside resources are not used when they could be, but that argument is contradicted by the macro evidence over the last century and greatly increasing in the last decade

or two—indigenous movements demonstrating what is possible without outside resources and with contextualized church life, first in Africa, then in China from the 60s, now in the Muslim World and to some extent among Hindus. Those movements don't prove what outside missionaries can do with VM methods, but they do show that outside resources are not all they are cracked up to be.

The growth of the orality movement as a mission strategy by outsiders is something of a bridge between outsiders' activity and the approach that the insider movements are using so successfully.

The book, *When Helping Hurts*, has been something of a game-changer, getting people to take collateral damage into account.

The trend in the donor world, starting with the secular world, to measure program impact instead of program activity is going to expose a lot of non-productive activity and get people looking for better ways to help. VM is one of those better ways.