

# Jim's Journal

February 2011.

## Contents

North American visit Report

Successful Africa ...

Against the Current ...

Yala and Siaya Theological Centres

Old-man Role(s)

KIST

April

Alliance for Vulnerable Mission – moving on from here ...

## North American visit Report

My last Journal included a report on my visit to colleges in Europe but not those in North America.

I learned a lot in staying for a week with a Nigerian priest at a Roman Catholic church near Toronto in Canada. “You don’t want us” he said with reference to evangelical Christians. I could not disagree. Evangelicals often do not want Catholics. I was challenged. If God has sent us to the whole world, shouldn’t we (evangelicals) want to reach out to Catholics?

Numerous PhD students were included in my audience for a lecture I gave on vulnerable mission at St. Michael’s university in Toronto city. I compared football (soccer) with cricket, saying this comparison was like that between ‘cultures’. It is almost impossible for someone to explain how cricket is played using the words we use to describe a football match, I explained. That’s how hard it is to understand the majority world from the West, I added. “Thanks for sharing a new and original approach to mission” said one of the profs.



Eastern University (Philadelphia) proved to be one of my most ‘exciting’ stops. I gave a lecture that seemed to deeply challenge the forty or so graduate students who attended. A



number of sessions were already planned for me for the week, including one lecture open to the whole university. Then I kept getting called back to different

classes as students had more questions that they wanted to ask me following on from my original lecture (see here for a video recording of the lecture <http://media.eastern.edu/v/1287512188/>). Many of the students were preparing themselves for leadership in Christian NGOs like World Vision, Compassion International etc. They became aware of some of the difficulties faced by these organisations, and of the importance of having some Westerners minister in ‘vulnerable’ ways in the poor world.



Further West in Pennsylvania I visited Ambridge Anglican theological seminary. Communication difficulties resulting in plans for my visit being last-minute meant

that I was not able to present my ‘public lecture’ until the end of the week. I had been warned that I may get only three or four people to my lecture – but over twenty showed up. “I think that that is the direction that we are going to have to move in terms of how mission work is to be done” said their missions’ professor at the end of my visit.

Going to Anderson University in Indiana was a bit like going home. I have many friends



there connected to Kima International School of Theology (KIST) in Kenya. I had a Monday lecture with about 30 graduate students. All that week the same students kept coming back to me telling me how much they appreciated what I had shared and how challenging it was to them. In addition I was also able to share with a few other classes, and some of the leadership of the Church of God mission board.

The next week included visits within Chicago. This amazing enormous city hosts numerous seminaries, of which I was able to visit just three (Wheaton

College, Moody Bible Institute and Trinity International University). I confirmed what I had begun to learn in earlier visits: that it was graduate students who had the most appreciation for what I was sharing. While undergraduates also appreciated what I said, the message I was sharing was really of interest to people with *experience*. Many graduate students had already spent some years in inter-cultural ministry. They had tasted ‘real life’. They had come across difficulties, and were ‘back at school’ looking for answers. I was able to give them a few answers and to challenge them further.



From Chicago I headed south.

Unfortunately I discovered that if you have had a series of flights booked with one airline and you miss the first one, you can have them all taken away. Fortunately my brother Tim was on the end of the phone and could make another booking for me! This was a rather expensive mistake.

The folks at Abilene Christian University came across as very enlightened regarding vulnerable mission issues. Many of the professors there are very favourably disposed to what we are trying to do in the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission. The students at Abilene were sharp and keen to learn. I was given opportunity to share with up to 3,000 in one sitting, and to meet many classes as well as voluntary gatherings of students and of university professors.



The ongoing determination of ‘the West’ to carry out all their outreach boosted by foreign languages and money has serious implications. Like in the children’s game in which someone is blindfolded and then given directions as to how to locate an object on the other side of a lawn, local onlookers can end up laughing with incredulity. Unfortunately the Westerners concerned often do not realise they are being laughed at. (Having your own money and using a language to communicate with people that they do not understand well is like working while wearing ear muffs and a blindfold.)

I found a lot of people who I know in Los Angeles, including my cousin Inga and her



husband David with whom I had an American ‘thanksgiving’ meal. I am an adjunct faculty member of William Carey International University, my destination in Los Angeles. I was able to have many personal

meetings with key people, some of whom were very keen on vulnerable mission; one or two people told me that in the AVM we are not radical enough! It is always encouraging to meet such people! I then had two lectures to give, to a group of about 20 and then to a group of about 40 mission leaders (see <http://vimeo.com/17172938> for a video recording of the latter). Both of these lectures went well. I hope that the university will pay close attention to what I shared in their future publications. They are influential in the missions’ world.

The missions’ lecturer at Mid Atlantic Christian University was a founder member of the AVM back in 2007. This visit proved to be a valuable opportunity for sharing about ministry in Africa as well as AVM business. I was given four classes to share, with 40 students out of a total of about 180 students in total at this university.

My time in New York turned out to be quite short – in part due to an 8 hour flight delay. I met some folks from New York university and then visited my aunt near the city. After that I spent three days in the East of England – visiting and orienting our new administrative assistant to the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Fiona Adams. This gave me opportunity to spend time with folks at Norwich Central Baptist Church in Norwich.

### **Successful Africa ...**

Sometimes African people can be dumbfounded by the way the globe seems to see them as the ‘basket case of the world’. From the inside, we in Africa see ourselves, with very good reason, as having made and continuing to make enormous progress!

100 years ago people in this area had no clothes, no square houses, no writing, no wheels, no ... you name it! Now just 100 years later we have roads, cars, bikes, clothes, watches, mobile phones, pens, books, papers, universities, radios, bottles, iron cooking pots, hospitals, schools galore, aeroplanes, tractors, new languages and ... ! African people themselves have often not even had to work for many of these things. They are brought cheaply or for free by NGOs, foreign governments and now the Millennium project. Westerners may think that they are the ones who are bringing these things. In some respects in Africa, people can give the credit to local ‘gods’ (sometimes known in the West as ‘superstition’).

It is strange – that Westerners should tell them (Africans) to give up on their ‘strange customs’, when they prove again and again that the very customs are bringing them enormous wealth!

The same applies in the church of course. Some church leaders get enormous wealth from Western donors. If they go and tell their parishioners that God might want them to suffer, they’ll get laughed at. It does not seem fair to tell people that being a Christian is a way of suffering, when the Christian leaders are ‘doing very well’ out of it all – way beyond the wildest dreams of people just a few generations back. Church leaders are obliged to tell their congregations how to go about getting this wealth. That is, through prayer, education, having a good knowledge of English, and especially through getting a good friend in Europe or America.

### **Against the Current ...**

A question posed to me after I had given a lecture in the USA has stuck in my mind. I did not even get to answer the question at the time, because the same person who asked it tagged about nine more questions onto it without first giving me a chance to respond to it. His question was something like: "why are you going against the stream"? ... "Not only are you trying to swim against the stream, but against a raging torrent" he added, for emphasis. To him, as he heard me share, I seemed to be like a lone voice contradicting so many others in mission today ...

The question puzzles me at times. When I move at grassroots level amongst African communities, things seem plain enough; in my home 'stamping grounds' in Kenya it constantly amazes me how dominant Western forces constantly run roughshod over local people's sensibilities. The fact that local people go along with this need not surprise us - they are paid handsomely to do so. I can see why people in the West aren't 'seeing' this problem. Issues of not understanding the nature of language and translation, and issues of Westerners always backing themselves with enormous outside power renders them blind to many undercurrents in Africa. Westerners invariably back what they do with Western money. They say they must do this as part of the global effort to redistribute resources between wealthy and poor continents. They do not seem to consider the option of delegating the sharing of resources to someone else. This results in a terrific slanting in inter-cultural relationships.

It is time to change the direction of flow - whether it be a stream or raging torrent. Africa is crying out for such a change - but in a language that the international community is not always getting. "Come here and have a look for yourself" is the message of AVM. That requires a vulnerable presence over a long period of time. I suppose people refuse this option in disgruntled discontent saying in effect "there's no money in that"! But we shouldn't be about making money ...

It seems to me there is no excuse for EVERY Westerner to take themselves as being responsible for re-balancing material imbalances of a continental scale. Just because ‘the West is rich’, does not make every Westerner guilty, and then oblige them to be constantly pre-occupied in giving handouts when they are in Africa. Neither does it justify Westerners’ ignoring the way African people define their problems and just substituting their own; "how would I feel if I was in that situation"? Christians should be different. Please pray for this!

### **Yala and Siaya Theological Centres**

The role of context and culture in Scriptural teaching and understanding is becoming more and more evident to me. That is – it is extremely difficult for me as a Brit to ‘teach the Bible’ in a way that meets heartfelt needs of people in this cultural and linguistic context. Hence almost (?) all ministries that are led by Whites have to be outside funded in order to survive and thrive.

While it is almost (?) impossible for Whites to minister without outside subsidy – locals do to some extent manage this. If the *content* that I teach is so lacking, my only hope is a sense (humanly speaking) to have an impact is by life-witness. Especially what I have in mind is evident gutted determination to continue that *must* in the end draw people’s attention. My hope must then be, in other words, that local (especially church) leaders come to the conclusion that what I am sharing must be important, or I wouldn’t be giving up 23 years of my life doing so...

This is very difficult for many reasons. One important one is that for many church leaders, the need for theological education is a money-earner. That is – Westerners are prepared to put money into it and that money can benefit local people, their community and their churches. Accepting that a White man on the ground is giving effective theological education but is not giving them any money in their pocket in the process – is turning away donors; preventing money from coming, staring a gift horse in the mouth, saying no to a fortune .... Now – who wants that?

### **Old-man Role(s)**

I give thanks for having a role in guiding a few Western people and couples who have come to live in my home area. Pray for productive and effective relationships with various newer workers in this area from the West. Pray for me be helpful in advising them.

### **KIST**

Give thanks that KIST student numbers are rising. Unfortunately – much of the ‘rise’ can be ascribed to making studies very cheap. I am teaching an introductory course on philosophy – designed for church leaders and theologians.

Give thanks for the 3 new couples we now have on the ground from America (who have been here one year, eight months and three weeks respectively), and one more couple expected in a few weeks. Give thanks for the COG leadership in the USA who are clearly working hard to keep us afloat and get us going at KIST.

### **April**

Pray for our AVM Administrative Assistant (as from November 2010) Fiona Adams, who plans to bring all of her children (ages 10, 8 and 6) and a nanny to Kenya in April. Her time in Kenya is to include a visit to Jim Harries. In the same month we are also to have the first Church of God missionaries retreat to be held for three years, from 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, in Malindi on the coast of Kenya.

One couple of anthropologists I recently met with have already been living near Yala for almost two years researching on the Millennium Villages Project. The commonality of our

interests (they are also Christians) makes it wonderful talking to them about the people and context in which we find ourselves.

**Alliance for Vulnerable Mission – moving on from here ...**

I am glad to be able to report some very encouraging outcomes to my above visits to colleges and universities. We now have a date and location fixed for a ‘major’ conference in the first week of March 2012, at Abilene Christian University in Texas. Details are still being worked on, but the essence is that in addition to the main site for this conference, smaller conferences in other parts of North America and Europe will be coordinated from Abilene.

I am planning to have my furlough from December 2011 to April 2012. I am still drawing up the ground-plan for this. I hope to visit all my regular churches as well as to make some more college visits. Because of the major conference to be held in Texas, I hope also to make a trip to the USA and may include some college visits there.

Yours,

Jim Harries