



*Group photo of some of conference attendees, All Nations Christian College with Alliance for Vulnerable Mission conference June 2018*

## Jim Harries News and Prayer Letter from Kenya

**Dear Friends,**

Welcome to this Jim's Journal. Some of you may notice that it is a bit late. I wrote most of the content for this journal 3 days after arriving back in Kenya. That is, when I was still very aware of 'living like a European', while re-meeting Africa. In my early days back, contrasts are particularly stark.

I have found that a lot of my friends have been sick in my absence, some very sick. Many have been hospitalised here at the Coptic hospital, where I also help out in chaplaincy work. Otherwise, not much seems to have changed. I am enjoying getting back into engagement with church and community.

### **Contents**

Researchers must be non-influential vulnerable individuals .....	page 1
Report on Children in my Home in Kenya (2018).....	page 2
Why Africa doesn't want Westerners?.....	page 3
Be ready to pray – at any time! .....	page 4
'Please train our pastors' .....	page 4
Africans should ignore who they are .....	page 5
English and a pack-of-lies? .....	page 5
Need to respect people's languages and cultures .....	page 6
The Cock Cows .....	page 7
Europe to look after all of Africa .....	page 7

### **Researchers must be non-influential vulnerable individuals**

Academics have recently realised that in New Testament times, shame was a very powerful force. That is sometimes contrasted with life in the West today, which is said to be guilt-based rather than shame-based.

Shame is a very funny and powerful thing. While reading about shame recently - I realised how powerful it actually is for modern Western people!

When Westerners come to Africa, they find themselves at the top of the pile. In fact – life in Africa is designed that way. Westerners are like gods. For example when it comes to language, in Anglophone Africa, a Brit who comes lands right at the top of the linguistic pile! British mouths spurt gold! Everyone honours them. Then also when Westerners carry money, they can get honour all round, not shame at all.

Many African people, it seems to me, like to honour whites. They have them sit at the front in a church, they praise them, they push them to the head of a queue, they like to have Whites who are very elevated. ... Then they want the same honour when they succeed in imitating Whites.

These days, it seems often, I present myself as a nobody. Like, these days I can travel by bicycle, but everyone else by motorbike. When people realise I don't have money – I don't get treated with super-prestige as Whites typically do. Frankly, when it comes to African things, like African languages and African ways of doing things, then I am behind. I am less competent. Even the fact that I am here in Africa 'alone' at my age, I think makes people wonder: 'why is he here?' (Many Whites use a time in Africa for status or even as a rung in a career ladder. I obviously haven't *made it*. I've stayed in Africa for too long. I don't have a big successful project. Etc. etc.) I sense that when some local people look at me, those who aspire to honour through wealth and prestigious careers – they can despise me. For an intelligent White man not to be rich and powerful is a travesty. It is a contradiction in logic: "What's wrong with him."

*Carrying a load on a motorbike, as one does in Kenya*



Here again, it takes a Christian to fill this kind of role. Our Saviour, Jesus himself, was greatly humiliated – especially on the cross. Now of course a missionary's shame shouldn't arise because of sin – stealing, getting drunk, adultery and so on. But, given Jesus' example, missionaries should take shame without blinking: being ignored, being considered incompetent, being laughed at, being despised, being mocked – if such happens to missionaries they should rejoice.

Suddenly I realised that this is such a big issue, and so obvious! Yet so hard! The West understands itself as very intelligent and powerful. People sending missionaries want them to make a big splash. To change things for the better – visibly (sending pictures home), fast, radically, quantifiably. They forget that Jesus was treated shamefully, dishonourably, despised, then killed on an instrument of torture.

Taking the shame is perhaps the hardest thing. Perhaps also the most important ... It is vital. It's as if, better have one Westerner shamed in Africa than 100 honoured. (That is of course – as long as they are honourably shamed ...) Failure is a prerequisite for success. Without failure, success is failure ...

### **Report on Children in my Home in Kenya (2018)**



*Attending a parents' day at a school for one of my children*

I currently have 11 children staying with me in my home in Kenya, as below:

Christine, aged 20, soon to finish school, already very helpful in keeping the home running and looking after the others.

Michael, aged 16, I'm thankful that things seem to be working out well for him as he seeks his identity in the wider community.

Laura, aged 15, it is amazing how responsible girls can become even at a young age

David, aged 21, has joined the National Youth Service – meaning he is on training that may well lead to a career in military, police, or prisons’ service.\*

Andrew, aged 16, enrolled into a polytechnic learning motor mechanics – with which he is mostly very happy.

Paul, aged 14, seems to be spending much time considering how to be a useful community member in the days ahead.

Alison, aged 15, out of her depth at school currently, but that may not be too big a problem.

Yvonne, aged 10, continues to be playful, but treating life with a little more gravity.

Dusty, aged 10, does well in school, and is adventurous.

Diana, aged 13, increasingly realising her circumstances and learning how to respond to people and situations.

Franciska, aged 10, growing up fast.

David, aged 12, dealing with issues honestly even if they are problematic – that’s good.

Toby, aged 6, Amazingly friendly and considerate as well as very playful. (Living with his mum.\*)

*False names used throughout.* \* indicates no longer living with me.

### **Why Africa doesn’t want Westerners?**

It seems in today's world, that everyone else wants to come and live in the West. Another part of the story, less well known, might be that everyone else might not want the West living with them.

It is not easy, it seems to me, for Westerners to get permanent-residency in African countries. Why? My theory is, because Westerners in Africa are all-too-often all-too-powerful. As much as Westerners might want to play down their own superiority, perhaps by acting as if they are humble, when living in the majority world they easily become very dominant. Especially in African countries that run using English who still build on the foundation left by the British Empire.

Acting with humility does not cancel Western superiority. Future generations of missionaries to the majority world need more than

humble self-depreciation. They need serious self-depowering. If Westerners do not learn to live closer to other people, who wants them? (This is ironic, considering how much Western technology, language and money is often wanted.) Not everyone appreciates Westerners’ efforts at divinising themselves into a kind of super-human who lives 100 years plus (or forever?) by means of science, and always knows better than everyone else. Not everyone understands as the West does because of its peculiar theology, that all people are equally valuable and need to be equally loved.

### **Be ready to pray – at any time!**

After church we, in African fashion, strolled around the village. Our destination was the home of the overseer. Such exercise, from a Western point of view lacks 'focus' - one appears to be meandering. Eventually we visit someone. We sit and chat and drink tea for ages. Then, when it is time to leave, we are told that the wife of the house is sick. The lady concerned sits looking at me. Her eyes hold a plea for help. What to do?



*With brethren missionaries in Tanzania - I was the speaker at their conference in Tanzania at the start of May*



*Devils being removed*



*Worshippers and leaders at my home church in Kenya, 2018*

For some reason I had been told to leave my Bible behind. My other problem was that, having just got back from Europe, I was not prepared for this kind of eventuality. When in Africa, I almost always have a few bible texts in mind, from which to share a message, on the basis of which to pray for people. For two months in Europe, no sick person had asked for my prayer. I wasn't ready.

In Europe, I had come across wonders of modern medical technology. 'European people don't really pray for healing', I thought (I am sure there are exceptions!). Would I not, by praying for the woman be a hypocrite? (She desired my prayer. As a European in Africa, my prayer would have been considered powerful. But as a European, I should have told her to see a doctor. Now what was I to do?)

In the seconds I had available to think on my feet, no bible passage came to mind. My mind met some turmoil – how could I 'just pray' for this woman, who according to my people's logic, needed bio-medical attention? My prayers were being valued because I was European, yet so many European people don't even believe in prayer! I had no Bible passage to expand on.

I prayed, but only briefly, with no new revelation or sharing from the Scripture. My conviction is that I should have carried my Bible. I should have been prayerfully considering a message to share. I should have left the lady with more hope in Christ. Things that I would normally do. Who cares if Europeans might have thought that my prayers would be a waste of time and the lady should have gone to hospital?

#### **'Please train our pastors'**

"We need training for our pastors," said my colleague. The way he was looking at me suggested that as far as he was concerned, I should be providing that training. This issue pierced my heart. I would love to help. Why shouldn't I help them with theological education?

Other thoughts rushed to mind! I realised that the suggestion was conditional. My colleague was in effect saying – "we will only value your education if it comes with money. We will listen to you, if you help us to solve our problems (mostly by providing finance)." Taking his appeal for theological education at face value (as if my colleague was thinking like a Westerner) – would have been misguided. Now – did I want to raise funds to transport and feed all my students, give gifts to help their sick relatives, and so on?

"You should be educating your own people," I said. It felt like an affront. Yet it was true. The man talking to me was a senior church leader. He knew a great deal. Why didn't he teach the younger men? The answer to this implicit question came from him: "Our people value what you can bring. They believe that only white people can give theological education properly," he said. "That is it!" I thought. "If I teach your pastors, I'll just be postponing the real need for locally grounded education for another generation," I said. Why can't they teach their own people? Are they planning to be dependent on me and white people forever?

I know also, that the education they really wanted was that to power. They needed education on how to do healing and how to become wealthy. That's what they wanted God for. Days before I was hearing Westerners complain that African people only knew the prosperity Gospel. That, it was clear to them, was wrong. It doesn't seem so clear cut to me. There doesn't seem to be another Gospel around here! My own people (Europeans) have a confused view of Africa. On the other hand, I also realised that I couldn't provide the prosperity kind of teaching that my colleagues were looking for. My mind runs analytically. It doesn't perceive spiritual roots to powerful healing as does that of my African colleagues. I couldn't teach people the way they wanted to be taught.

*I spoke at the youth conference of my home church in Kenya, April 2018*





*Conference in Germany, June 2018  
(Chris Wright speaking)*

Discussion I had led at a conference in Germany days before came back to mind. "Our subsidising foreign Western accredited theological education in European languages risked killing the church in Africa," I had said. Why? It has become almost impossible for African people to think for themselves about their own church-practice and beliefs. Everything official was only that which is from the White man. Even when Africans teach – they must teach what they get from Europe. The only way forward for me had to be to encourage African people to think for themselves. This even though I knew many dare not (they'd be condemned by the powerful West, and rejected by those of their own people who only desire what comes from the West) do it. In many ways, it

would be nice, understandable and acceptable to subsidise my own little theological education programme, or to help someone with theirs – in which the bills are paid (directly or indirectly) by the West. But, I knew ...

### **Africans should ignore who they are**

"The only language ever used at the university is English," my African colleague told me. (Yet, when talking amongst themselves the students most often used Swahili which was itself interesting.) "What is wrong with that?" he asked me, both implicitly and overtly!

My mind raced around that issue. Could I advocate that he stand up to a tidal wave? Foreign universities (using Western curricula and English to teach them in) were springing up everywhere, and were very much liked by everyone, or at least so it seemed. They are heavily subsidised by foreign money. They provide openings to careers and jobs and salaries. How could I discourage anyone from participating in that system?

Another part of me was horrified. The whole exercise seemed to be pure folly. It forced an ignoring of who African people actually are. It is all about assuming that they are just the same as us Europeans. I knew that they are not! That means that formal education always omits peoples' real issues and how they perceive them. It is always telling African people that, "it is better to copy someone else than think for yourself."

My words were something like this. "To be honest to my own conscience, I have to tell you that for you to get an education using English is terrible. It is perpetuating a system in Africa which enables more and more control from Europe. In the end it spells disaster." (I know that the system thrives on so called corruption.) "But – I can't tell you not to do it. That neo-colonial oppressive education that encourages African people not to think for themselves is, after all, all there is. Whoever rejects it is likely to go to the bottom of the economic pile, which is a pretty sad place to be." The only way forward seemed to be to copy, in a way that brought corruption.

### **English and a pack-of-lies?**

I am in Africa, just a few days out of Europe. I am visiting people who do not know me well. There seems to be a constant pressure for me just to use English – as most people around me seem to do much of the time. On TV – it's English. Formally it's English. Everything written – is in English.

When I see and hear that English – it grates with me. "Don't be silly Jim," I say to myself. "Just use English ..." Yet, the African people who tell me English is all they need, frequently revert to their own language(s) amongst themselves. They don't use English to discuss their own deep-issues. Maybe they think these issues aren't really relevant to anything? Maybe they just want to keep them secret? One outcome – the wool is constantly pulled over the



*With friends, three days after  
my arrival in Kenya*



*Conference, All Nations, 2018*

eyes of foreigners, yet the very foreigners ( Brit/American) are using their money to dictate, often in minute detail, everything that Africans should be.

British universities attract people from all over the world. These people pay high fees for the privilege of studying in the UK. In this African university, I was told all the students are Kenyan. No foreigners want to come. Certainly not to pay a lot of money to come. Why is that when the language is the same as that used in England and the curriculum is the same as the one used in UK?

I listened to a sermon at a university-student fellowship. English was used throughout (with just a few splatterings of Swahili). The preacher brought a message in English. It was to be about the importance for young people of getting married instead of just 'living together'. A very relevant topic, I thought to myself. He quoted statistics about America, showing that these days many Americans live-together without getting married. "What has that got to do with us in Kenya?" I asked myself. No one flinched at the fact that his message is a direct copy from America! That is the norm. The students are used to being taught everything as if they are Americans. All their history, background, context, culture, religion, ethnicity, you name it, is ignored! Examples kept coming from America. In English. It was crazy – we weren't in America and none of the students were Americans. But no one flinched. Everyone (appeared) happy. That, after all, is just normal. African people pretend to be American. Everything happens as if they are Americans.

"That's one constant pack of lies," I thought to myself reflecting on what must be being taught at that university. My African colleagues appeared to be numb to it – they know nothing else. They know to take what the white man says as being always right. And all that was being subsidised at government level by so called secular global intellectual, political, experts and funding bodies! "Surely that is immoral?" I thought. No one seemed to care ...

### **Need to respect people's languages and cultures**

While re-immersing myself into Africa, a particular discussion I had while in Europe, kept coming back to mind. In Genesis chapter 10 we are told that before the tower of Babel, different nations on the earth already had their own languages. Then, in order to build the tower of Babel, everyone used just one language. When God came down to look at the tower, he decided to confuse people again. God didn't like it when everyone used just one language! Maybe he realised that to do so required the oppression of the many by the few. God preferred to allow different peoples to do their own thing.



*Carrying water up a Kenyan Hill*

"Aren't we having a replay of the tower of Babel?" I asked myself. Nowadays increasingly around the globe, modern policies stay that everyone should be using just one language. They should all be taking the lead from one people – Brits and Americans (who own English). From that lead, they should be doing amazing things, without God's help!

We might think that contradicting the above scenario is being racist. It is not, I suggest. It is rather – recognising that there are different nations and peoples around the earth. To treat them as if they are the same is not to take pity on them. It is to assume that the UK and USA have got it sussed – but on what basis? Because the West has got more money, does that mean they have got everything right? In the process of treating everyone as if they are Westerners, one prevents people from responding to their own issues. It is almost making them into slaves ...

To recognise that people are different and to respect their languages and cultures, even if they stay poor, is not racist. It is just honestly realising that they are a people and should be respected as such. That which is universal and needs to be respected is not one language, or one educational system or one internet or one secularism. It is God who is universal. I can't help but think he'd prefer engaging with people to oppressing them.



*Visiting the Lake District in the UK  
while on furlough*

## **The Cock Cows**

I was looking forward to getting away from Europe's early morning sun. That is because it is hard for me to keep sleeping once dawn has broken at about 4am and the sun is shining. Here by contrast it gets light at 6 a.m. or 6.30 a.m. all year round. Wonderful, I thought, until on my third night, residing with a friend at his village home, at about 3 a.m., yards from my window, cock-a-doodle-doo!

## **Europe to look after all of Africa**

I allowed myself the luxury of a flight from Nairobi to Kisumu, thus saving 8 hours sitting in a bus. The air-hostess came to serve me. "What would you like to drink?" she asked. "*Tafadhali nipe chai,*" I said. She screwed up her face – she couldn't believe what she was hearing. "Did you just speak to me in Swahili?" she asked, incredulously. I didn't even answer. She turned sniggering to her colleague, telling her what I had done. They laughed at me!

I felt it was a bit unprofessional for air-hostesses to laugh at a customer like that. The same confirmed my impression that sophisticated sections of Kenya society despised everything but English. Travelling and spending time in the city and sometimes watching TV with people, that impression comes to be confirmed.

At the same time one hears that the prosperity Gospel is rampant. Does everyone realise what that means? It means that African people on the whole, (i.e. this does not only apply in the church) do not expect to thrive and prosper following their own understanding. Instead they have made a collective decision on the basis that Europeans are like God, that it is better to do what Europeans say than it is to think for yourself. Mis-quoting Psalm 84:10: "For better is one day in *the West* than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of *Europe* than to dwell in the tents of *Africa*." That is – they are throwing all their eggs into our (European people's) basket. We White people are the god they seek to benefit from!

The latter is a result of humanism. European people used to believe in God. In the West now, belief in humanism seems to have displaced belief in God. The West has shifted its faith from God to themselves. Well, many African people implicitly believe the same about us; we (Westerners) are their God.

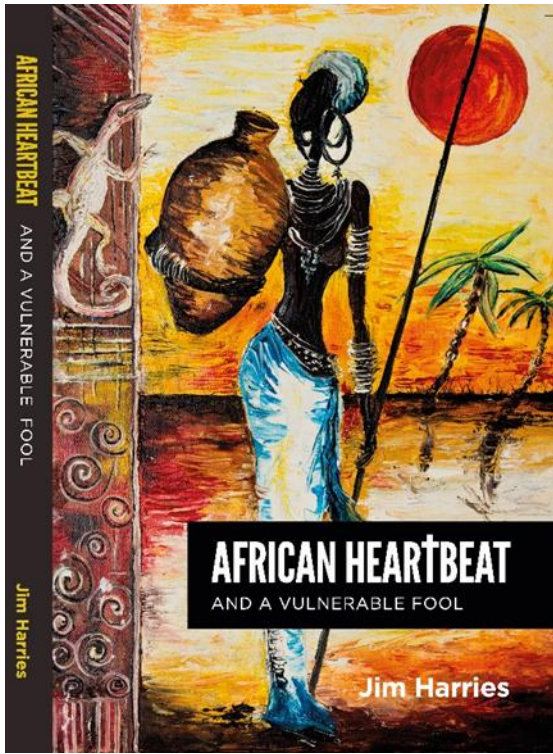


*Visiting one of my favourite uncles, Anthony Harries*

The West I fear, does not always realise the implications of being humanistic, believing in themselves, in terms of their relationship to other peoples. Other people are used to relying on God. We Western people can fit pretty snugly into that same space.

The latter sets up a responsibility. If the West says, as it does effectively, "we are God and we will look after you," that has implications. The West is implicitly taking responsibility on itself to look after Africa for ever. Are we in the West being true to ourselves – can we keep it up? Will we always be God for Africa?

Perhaps it is time for the West to recognise God, instead of claiming to be God. If the West is not ready to take on the responsibility of looking after Africa for ever, then at the very least they should stop using economics to force people all over to learn and use English.



So much that the West does today is a copy-cat of Christianity that it is amazing that more people not realise such. The relationship of the West with the majority world is a clear example of such. What the West extends to the majority world, is the grace of god that they learned about from the bible. That Christian foundation is the basis for supposedly secular Western generosity. But so many in the West, especially it seems according to the foundations of bodies like the EU, do not want the West to share what they know about God.

This novel, *African Heartbeat*, is an enjoyable and easy read. My one-time tutor at All Nations missionary training college commented: "I've finished your book now ... It is very well written indeed and engaging - and does a good job of raising so many of the issues you have wrestled with over many years now."

- Available over Amazon, or direct from the publisher (Apostolos Publishing). The publisher's price (including p and p) is £8.99. Also available from amazon as a kindle book.

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