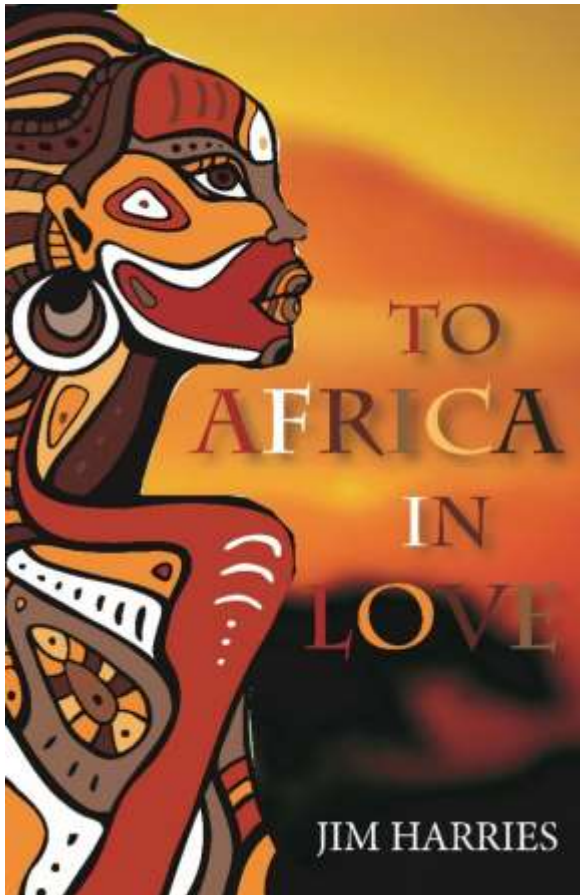


Jim's Journal, March 2019



Jim's latest novel, called '*To Africa in Love*' is a tale of romance, of sorts, that at the same time explains much about 'real' Africa. The novel should be out, and available either from the publishers, Apostolos Publishing, or over Amazon, some time in March.

"I thoroughly enjoyed my work on the manuscript. It is a fascinating and thought provoking read, as was the first novel. You have a real knack for conjuring a clear picture of the places your characters visit. I really hope that it gets a wide readership as I think you have a lot of important things to say and that need to be thought about. ... I look forward to reading book three." Laura Maisey (editor and author)

Dear Friends,

I hope you enjoy this Jim's Journal. It is full, as always, of a lot of fascinating insights garnered in the course of missionary work in Africa.

Getting on top of finance in an African church

I started visiting this denomination in Tanzania more than 20 years ago. In my visits, there was one cry that I constantly heard. That is: "we are not growing or getting anywhere, because we are so used to missionaries doing everything for us." In those days, there was a team of American (and later also one British) missionaries helping the church. In those days, I am now told, money was always short, churches weren't growing, people weren't faithful ...



In visits I made in the interim years, I detected a transformation. The church didn't used to have a bishop. Now they do have. The bishop made decisions – like no donor money for 'poor' churches.



Loud praying is allowed. An ex-student of mine, I guess he might have picked up some things from me on how it is best for African people to run their own churches for themselves. ... (A pat on the back for me!)

Nowadays, I am told, now the missionaries have left and no longer give the church money, there is plenty of money! All employed people are paid on time, the institutions are running, and booming (bible school, a large secondary school, etc.). New buildings are being put up, churches are growing, new churches are being planted far and wide, bible school graduates are being stretched and challenged. All seems well. !

Bible School Tanzanian Style

Young people in Africa wanting to serve God in the church often find themselves, as part of their training, having to learn about the strange habits of white people. What to people in Britain may seem like 'normal' training, in a 'normal' language like English, can contain many shocks for Africans unfamiliar with the West. These shocks are nothing to do with learning to be a pastor. The school that I taught at for 6 weeks in early 2019, was refreshingly different. "The bible school is very pleasing," I said to the bishop of the Church of God in Tanzania. After leaving him, I reflected on my own words! It is very true, that I have been impressed.

Partly, this is because I came to the school with my own child. An immediate cause of concern for me was; would she pick up anti-white sentiments? If so, that would be embarrassing, to say the least. Had Whites been involved there, things might have got difficult. I am guessing that they wouldn't know how to cope with my having my own 'daughter' here, yet she is African. (And my children really do remain very much within their African milieu.) I might have been forced to speak in English with her around. Maybe I'd be invited for a meal, and we would sit at the same table to eat Western food. That alone would be embarrassing for her. She has never eaten Western food. In the Africa that she knows, an old man does not sit at the same table as a young girl. I don't think the two of us have ever sat at the same table.



When I asked about the history of the school, I was reminded about the kinds of things that happen when Whites are around: "In those days ... people used to come to study because there were white people, and they hoped they might get money, or learn good English (which is also money)," I was told. "Because they weren't serious spiritually, they'd be found doing immoral things, and would be expelled." Would I, by bringing her to this school, be teaching my own African daughter, that white people are only valuable for their money? Thankfully that hasn't happened so far: the new church leadership has realised that donated charitable funds from the West can be unhelpful.



It certainly must be conceded that White Western missionaries set some good foundations for this school. They built the small campus, having no doubt before that put up the money for the land. It is a nice little campus, purpose-built, tidy with adequate space. Their work has left an ongoing investment that is being, I believe, effectively used for furthering the kingdom of God. Thankfully, renting-out land on the periphery of the campus for use by shops, because we are now in the middle of a booming town, is providing the school with the finance needed to survive. With God's guidance and protection and good careful and wise leadership, the school could continue autonomously for a long time.

Many of the things that were apparently 'banned' in the missionaries' day, are now permitted, I was told. Like, beating a table noisily like a drum during singing! Prayer being loud, raucous, and long. Time being taken to remove demons ... etc. This means that when I bring my own child here, I bring her onto familiar territory. I am not shocking her with the suggestion that what her people do is 'wrong' because it is not Western, as could otherwise easily have been her impression.



The vast gap between scholarly-practice here at this school, and what would be expected in the West, is cause for considerable thought! It is so different that it constantly blows the mind. I am sure I have not got to the bottom of the differences. I am glad that the differences are 'accepted' rather than being pushed underground, as often happens. At the same time, there is as a result evidently

much work to be done ...



All told, my experience has told me, that this bible school is like a model of good things that can be done by Africans when they take over from missionaries.

A Day in the Life of a Bible school teacher

I thought it might be of interest for people to hear about a day in the life of the Tanzanian Bible school where I recently taught.

We hear the first call to prayer from just one or two nearby mosques at 4.30 am. Then at 5.00 am, about 10 or 12 mosques can be heard, of different proximities, pretty much simultaneously announcing whatever they announce. For a while, at 5.04 am, one of the mosques said; 'it is now 5.04 am'!

Things are a bit quieter till 6.00 am, although there is a high rate of flow of motorcycles within yards of the house, I felt seemingly all night! At 6.00 am a bell rings. Two or so minutes later, a soloist, and then a group of about 20 students are heard singing, 30 yards from my door. A few minutes later the singing becomes noisy (full volume!) simultaneous prayer. Some while later, more noisy singing, while one or two students bang ferociously on a table in place of a drum, then a preacher shouting down a microphone (getting preaching-practice). By 7.00 am, when the students are done, I have 'escaped'



to have breakfast. For the students, breakfast is a cup of black tea with sugar. I escape to a cafe around the corner for two cups of white tea and a 'pancake'.



The daytime programme is more typical of a Western bible school. As classes progress, though, I remain busy trying to work out just where my students are 'coming from'. The much shouting going on in churches, reminds me of Kenya. Church is a power confrontation, through and through, I think to myself. The kind of complex theologies we have in the UK, don't seem to be on the scene at all.

I have just two classes to teach. In between times, I keep myself busy. I do not keep myself busy 'solving local people's problems', however. I don't understand them – how can I solve their problems, I think to myself? Instead, I do writing, editing, and administrative work on my computer during the day. In the afternoon I visit a church, if possible, up to 10 miles away by bicycle, for a fellowship or service. The evening service by the students runs from 7 to 8 pm. This time I join them. I don't dance as vigorously as they do, I don't shout as loudly as they do, I don't get caught up as completely as they do. In fact, from their point of view, if I wasn't a 'teacher' with a few degrees, and some greying hair, I might have been assessed as a 'very poor kind of Christian'.

On my final day, I invigilate as students write my exam. The first student to complete is also the one who performs the best. 'Thanks for challenging us by giving us some difficult questions to think about', he writes on the bottom of his paper.



There ain't no 'supernatural'.

Laws of nature were 'invented' in Europe in the last four hundred years. How can there then have been 'supernatural events' reported in the bible? That is, how can something be considered 'super-to-nature', if nature was not a 'thing' that had been conceptualised and defined, that something can be super to? That means that something being or not being 'supernatural' cannot have been an issue in Biblical times. If it was not an issue then, how can we nowadays make it a condition for God to be supernatural?

As in biblical times, so in Africa today, there is no concept of 'supernatural'. (Of course there is in the formal educational system that is borrowed from England. So, using English, African people can say 'supernatural' ... but when they think for themselves, using their own indigenous categories, then there is no super-natural.) Yet there are many Christians in Africa!

But, someone may ask, how does that work? If someone doesn't believe in supernatural, that must mean that they don't believe in God? God, after all, surely, is the 'supernatural'? But, I might reply, how can someone 'believe in' the supernatural, if their world-understanding has no such concept? Not believing in the supernatural is not to not-believe in God at all, it is simply to refuse to insist that God fit into 'the modern category' of 'supernatural'. That is, to say that you have to believe that God

is supernatural, is actually to say that you have to accept *modern* thinking. Maybe, though, some of what is modern is wrong?



Not having to 'believe in' the supernatural can be quite helpful. For example, it can make it easier to believe in God. God can make a lot more sense if he doesn't have to become the 'opposite of science', for example! To insist that God be the 'opposite of science' seems to be to want to make him into something that he never expected to be!

My students at the bible college in Tanzania, who have not learned English, probably have no clue that God is supernatural (that term doesn't translate into Swahili). They just worship God as he is! God comes to be, pretty much all the good things there are in life, that are virtuous and 'wholesome'. (I.e. not things like alcohol or fornication.) That includes dancing – dancing is of God. That includes shouting loudly when you pray. That includes feeling good! Feelings (emotions, if you will) cannot be 'just feelings.' In Africa we do not have feelings that are 'just feelings'. Rather, feelings are a part of getting to know God. In Africa, good feelings are simply part of a good Godly life.

It's quite funny ... We in the West have been trying to make sure that we identify God as he really is, by not mistaking him for things that are part of 'nature', like feelings, emotions, adrenaline, lightning flashing in the sky, healing, and childbirth. As a result we have been putting *miracles*, like the conception and birth of a child, on the side of 'nature'! In traditional Africa (i.e. when people aren't using English and trying to be British), that doesn't make sense at all. All those things, and many more, are simply due to God!



From here in Africa, it begins to look like the West has all sorts of complicated hang-ups. If they'd only listen, 'we' Africans could help them to make sense of what they are not understanding. I don't think Westerners are listening though. They more likely laugh at or gawp at Africa, because Africans are so 'poor' and dependent on them. Being rich or poor, though, surely, doesn't really have much to do with 'truth' (is truth that which makes you rich?)! Neither does wealth necessarily bring happiness.



Maybe though, just maybe, if people would listen, seriously, for a while ... they could learn something useful. I don't mean listen to African people speaking in English. That is already garbled – when African people use English then all the categories come out wrong! So, how do you listen in non-English? Well, someone from the West has to learn a

not-English (non-European) African language, which includes learning the categories that are used (e.g. in which, like in biblical times, there is no 'supernatural' and no 'natural'.) Then fellow European people have to be ready to listen to explanations from the person whose learned that non-European language, even if he doesn't always seem to be talking sense!

For the West to give credit to any wisdom that doesn't come from itself, is hard! By refusing, they may, though, be missing a great deal.

In Praise of a Frenchman

I had never heard of René Girard. He was a Frenchman. He died in 2015, in his 90s, having lived much of his life in the USA. He wrote a lot about the way human society is driven by people's desire for what other people have. When people can't get what they want, they blame a *scapegoat*. René claims that the bible is uniquely against scapegoating! According to René's research, whereas every other story in the world, pretty much, vindicates scapegoating (blaming someone else for your difficulties!) as a means to solving problems, the Bible openly and directly contradicts such.



One thing I really appreciate about Girard, is how he helps to 'vindicate' Africa! Many people realise that African people tend to be very concerned about witchcraft. Then, sometimes from the West we say 'witchcraft doesn't exist'. African people's minds boggle when you tell them that. Girard however says that scapegoating, finding someone to blame for your problems, and then trying to marginalise or even kill them, is normal to human communities. Only through the bible, and in so far as people follow the Bible, can that tendency be overcome. To me it is plain – Girard agrees with Africans, who of course nowadays are doing exactly what Girard would prescribe – and running to the bible!



Many African people, in their traditional way of life, definitely do what Girard describes; they find someone to blame for their troubles. Then, if possible, they will kill that person. That person is known (when you translate from African languages into English) as a witch. (Use of the term witch is a way of acknowledging that English speaking people are familiar with the same African practice. Use of the same term however also implies that African people are backward, because English-speaking people stopped practicing 'witchcraft' some years ago!) Girard, at least in so far as I have read him to date, does not openly refer to witches. But what he says, speaks poignantly about them!

Witchcraft in Africa often includes reference to things that seem incredible to the West. Like, people flying through the air at night, turning into animals, and so on. As Westerners, we ask ourselves 'how can people believe in that'? Sometimes we assume they must be stupid. Yet, even in England we say 'it is raining cats and dogs.' No one finds that particularly incredible. If someone were to tell you 'no it is not', then quite likely you'll reply 'yes it is!' We know that is use of metaphor. Well – are African people not allowed to use metaphor?

I think there is a difference when African people use metaphor, to say for example that someone turned into a cat. That difference is, that African people are not 'modern'. That is to say, they have not learned to see the world in terms of two categories, the real and the unreal. (This links in with our discussion above: they have not learned to perceive the world as being divided into 'natural' and 'supernatural'.) The latter two categories, though, are not in the bible either. (I've not come across

the question in the bible: 'is God real'? God just says; "I am who I am.") They are really very recent! This means, though, that if you want to ask in an African language 'did he really turn into a cat', you can't, as there is no term for 'really!' If you ask the same question in English, then the person listening will wonder what you mean when you say 'really'? Like, "is it really raining cats and dogs ...?" Or "are you really at the foot of the hill?" Both of these examples are clearly 'really' wrong, as dogs don't fall out of the sky, and hills don't have feet, yet they are right, because they represent very 'normal' ways of speaking. So the response may be either 'yes' or 'no.'

This means that for African people, things they describe that we might find amazing because we think 'that's not real', are neither real nor not-real! That is to say, in Africa, everything is real, or on the other hand, everything is not real!



At the beautiful Babati waterfall

I find this distinction, instinctively drawn by Western people, between the 'real' and the 'unreal', to be increasingly problematic. When I read books or other texts written by Westerners, that distinction always seems to be foundational to what they write. Recently I was looking for texts about Christian mission to help me to teach Africans. Some scholars recommended some books. I looked at the one that seemed most likely *not* to have the above problem. It was a book of missionary biographies, As soon as I started reading its missionary biographies – there it was! I might boldly proclaim, that when Westerners write, they always do so on the basis of an assumption that there is 'real' and 'unreal', an assumption that 'really' (!), to us in Africa, doesn't make any sense! So then, I thought, it will be silly to use a book to teach African people, if the foundations on which the book are written are so confusing. Rather than articulating the assumptions, the book just builds on them! (That is – the book doesn't explain why it distinguishes the 'real' and 'unreal' categories, it just assumes them.) That is typical again in Western writing; it just assumes things that may not be true at all! (The assumption that there is 'real' and 'unreal' is foundationally theological; it needs to be explained with reference to the nature of God and how he is understood. For centuries, however, much of Western academia has pretended to ignore God, when they actually presuppose much about him. What they presuppose is usually Christian, yet scholars doing the writing may claim to be not Christian!)



Walking back from waterfall

Please note I am not saying that it is wrong to presuppose that there is a difference between what is real and what is not. That, really (!), is for God to say. What I find problematic, is when people communicate on the basis of unacknowledged theological assumptions, yet they expect what they communicate to be

understood in other cultures. If they want to communicate on the basis of some in absolute-terms arbitrary assumptions, then they should make it clear that they are doing so, and justify their doing so. The failure of Westerners to do the above, makes the use of English extremely problematic in Africa. When African people, who do not assume the difference between 'real' and 'unreal' use English, they quickly end up confusing themselves and everyone else. Yet, and this is a catastrophe in the making, many African countries use English as their official language. Again, when African countries do this, the 'international community' often subsidises that choice by funding all sorts of things for them. That's like luring people to jump over a cliff: such subsidy should be illegal.

Unlike many Westerners, who find African fear of witchcraft very peculiar, Gerard gives us a basis for understanding it as very 'normal'. Gerard, the Frenchman, also tells us that the Bible is the necessary book that will enable people to escape from the human predilection to revenge and searching to scapegoats for our problems, including witchcraft, that is otherwise very destructive.

“The only group it's still OK to hate”

A journalist of the daily telegraph suggested that Christians are ‘the only group it’s still OK to hate’.



That’s quite incredible ... if that’s the case then people hate the truth! It’s also quite understandable ... We people think we are very clever. To give the credit for all that to God, and not to ourselves, requires a lot of humility. This is where Girard is amazing: Christianity “made possible an advance in knowledge that was until then unimaginable,” he tells us. It is ironic, that while many experts have been trying to keep

‘religion’ (i.e. faith in Christ) out of the way so as to bring development, we now realise that it is faith in Christ itself that enables development! Almost everywhere you look ... How to deal with that truth given the ‘secular’ world as it is, is a headache for big people.

Someone said this of insights made by Gerard: “it is rivalry that creates scarcity, not scarcity that creates rivalry.” Reading that, blew my mind! ‘Yes!’ I want to shout! That’s the problem Africa had. That’s the problem Africa still has: too much desire! The solution for many people in traditional Africa has been – don’t have things, and even what you do have, don’t be identified with it (for example, it’s very hard to see an African man walking with his wife). What is enabling ‘development’ in Africa today is suddenly clear as a bell – it’s not clever strategies, it’s not even foreign investment, or capitalism, or any other -ism or -logy, it’s the Word of God, that means that we value God more than we desire other things. Realising this – blows the mind.

Witnessing to Jesus through medical work

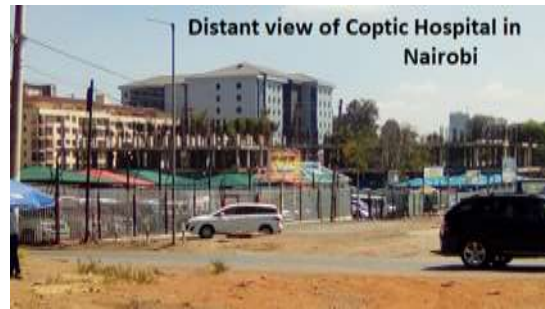
Various missionary colleagues at times tell me how their hospitals, enthusiastically started decades ago by Europeans and Americans, have gone to the dogs. Very few seem to thrive more than a year or two after the missionaries leave.



Yet what I observe with my Egyptian colleagues, is like a miracle! Salaries in Egypt are not so high, I am told. This means that Egyptians are willing to come to Africa to work for what to a westerner may seem a very modest amount, but which is more than they’d get at home. Meanwhile, the Egyptians’ light complexion identifies them as ‘Wazungu’ – for which read very clever, caring White people. The Egyptians who come are Christians – they have a profound love for people arising from their experience of the grace of God. My impression is, especially here in Nairobi, that the Kenyans are loving it. They are loving

having a functional hospital run by 'white' people in their city! They love being examined and treated by white people! The approach of Egyptians to African culture I observe as being very different to that of Westerners. They take it in their stride. The whole thing is just amazing to see.

I am not saying the Egyptians are perfect, although they are better than me. Many may be only here for a job. Their integration with African people can be minimal. I think that's one reason they like to have me around – as I have learned local languages, rear local children, devoted myself to celibacy, and so seek to encourage and even inspire them to lives of dedicated sacrificial service.



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