

Jim's Journal – November 2010

What to Believe (a UK experience)?

“Yes, you can respond in that way if you choose to believe that” said a youth to me. But what he couldn't convince himself of, was the need to believe ‘that’ (Christ). He chose instead to ‘believe in’ the priority of the critical mind. To him, criticism is of a more primary level than is ‘faith’ in anything. People like him can end up believing in nothing. Well, that's not true. He has to believe that there is some value in life, or there would be no point in living. So he puts together a medley of beliefs to guide his life, mostly unconsciously. These beliefs arise mostly from Western Christian history and from his own family's tradition. He chooses what to believe and what not to on the basis of no clear method.

This post-modern self-justification for believing ‘what you want’ is seductive, pernicious and widespread. Our young people are looking for guiding lights. If you say to them that they should ‘believe’ first, and then they will see the results of faith in Christ, they don't want to! Unfortunately or otherwise, that's the way the position is stated in the Scriptures.

Brothers and sisters in Christ – let's live exemplary lives; that can be lights shining to others. Our young people need such an example.

The AVM Bulletin

Please let myself or Angela Merridale know if you would like to receive the monthly Bulletin of the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission. This is free. It is compiled and edited by Jim Harries. It contains the latest information and links to articles and web contact of all sorts, that promotes vulnerable mission.

Pastoral ...

Our Siaya Theological Centre board meeting at the end of May provided opportunity for me to streamline our classes to be on one day (helped by the fact that I was using the bus instead of cycling to Siaya). That gave me an extra day free - Tuesday. My home-church pastor agreed that we could spend time visiting church members. I did this with him for about 6 weeks before the August vacation.

Please pray with me as to whether I ought to be putting more efforts into this kind of work. I have been thinking also of hospital visiting and other ways of taking an encouraging word to people where they are.

The Old

The wrinkled old lady's wizened face seemed to probe into nothingness in her dark room. The door to the bedroom in this small thatched hut had been blocked with piles of maize cobs. Eventually we got in, to find her alone perched on her bed covered by a mosquito net, shrunk to a mere fraction of her former stature. I reached out my hand. She caressed it warmly. We spoke, but she did not recognise my voice, until the lady who looks after her said (in *Dholuo*) "It is Jim; that white man." A broad smile of grateful recognition engulfed her features.

This old lady had been blind for many years. In her youth, I gather, she was less than caring for her children and family - preferring to go to town to look for men. As a result, her family were less than caring for her in her old age. I removed my hand from her grasp and read some Scriptures. We prayed. 'God be with you' I said to her. My colleague greeted her similarly. We left a soul encouraged by the hope that comes in Christ.

There are many, many such 'neglected' people, especially old people, in African villages. There is a massive opportunity for the church, just to visit them, encourage them, spend time, encourage their carers etc.

Real Thing

I was struck by the words of our local (Irish) catholic priest a few months ago. It had been a few years since my last visit so I sent to see him. We talked about the ministries we are engaged in and about celibate service. "You are doing the real thing" he told me! At a time when celibacy in the Catholic church seems to be heavy under attack, I am saying 'look - we need celibate missionaries!'

Not that I am advocating celibacy as such. It is only that it seems to be difficult to find a woman who can take on board the kind of demands that a man working as a 'vulnerable missionary' could make on her.

Yes, and yes, and yes and yes ...

It is a beautiful thing to be able to offer a haven, respite, love and care to a child. Tom's father married a young wife after being bereaved as a result of AIDS. Following his mother's death, Tom was left in the care of his father who seemed to be more concerned for drink than for his responsibility to three young children. His father visited me about a year ago. 'Please take in my children' he asked me. I could not at the time.

When we heard that Tom's father had died, we sent word that we had a vacancy. In due course an older (step) sister and a local pastor came with Tom. He stayed with us for a few days 'on trial' before going back to the pastor. We wanted to make sure he had opportunity to say that he didn't want to stay with us if he did not like us before we committed to taking him long term. He came back beaming from ear to ear. The pastor was incredulous. "Tom definitely wants to stay" she told us "he said yes; he has finally found a home in which he is loved". It was a fantastic feeling to be able to offer a child such a home. Pray for Tom (9) and our ongoing care for him and the other children who stay with me.

Visiting the Sick - yes very much so.

I continue to rejoice at the ministry carried out by my visitor from Tanzania back in August. This colleague from Tanzania, who has not married so as to be able to commit himself fully to God's service, spent almost a whole month with us, and was busy visiting people in the surrounding community almost all day every day!

Visits to Theological and Missionary Training Colleges in UK and Germany

As I write, I am half way through these visits. Here are pictures and reports of some of the visits that I have made in the UK and Germany. On 9th October I am to fly to N. America to begin my visits to 9 more colleges – listed below.



Fritzlar Bible School, Germany. I had the privilege to take the 'missions' course for about 20 undergraduate students at this small Church of God Bible College in central Germany.



Hilltop castle belonging to Christian community that I visited in Germany. AVM colleague and one-time 'vulnerable missionary' in Argentina Frank Paul stays in a Christian community in Reichelsheim that are adapting this ancient castle as a resource to teach Christian discipleship to people in the surrounding community.



Redcliffe Missionary Training College, Gloucester, UK. "I agreed with him" a Tanzanian student said as we sat at breakfast the morning following my presentation at this college. I had similar feedback from others. Redcliffe is one of the top missionary-training schools in the UK. Pray for more opportunities to link with them. Being here reminded me of my own 'missionary training' 18 years ago. I believe that many budding missionaries to poor nations could be greatly helped through learning to apply the principles of vulnerable mission that we are advocating.



Trinity Theological College, Bristol. Monodeep (pictured), a Dalit and Protestant monk based in Delhi (India), was my housemate during my time at Trinity Theological College. Brahmans dominate Indian society, he told us. His explanation as to how Brahman teachings result in the formation of the 'untouchable' class was extremely challenging. It emphasised the desperate need for Christian Scriptures to be more widely accepted around the world – including in India. Many Brits do not realise that by not supporting the church, they are boosting Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism etc.



Trinity Theological College, Bristol. A theological student at Trinity college asked me – 'should I go to Africa, or is it more important to be involved in mission at home'? These days many people only see a role for short-term mission in Africa. Some people seem to think that missionaries have created so many problems, that they are actually no longer needed ... ! 'Africa needs you' I told him. The problems in Africa are not caused by missionaries as such, I told the class I was teaching, but by the practice of Western missionaries insisting on boosting their ministries using foreign money, and on using Western languages. Missionaries who follow vulnerable mission principles can find a much closer fit with the African church, I suggested.



Oakhill Theological College, London. It is extremely difficult for British students to get hold of resources that can enable them to explore the implications of teaching theology in non-Western contexts. One student wants to

write an MA thesis on contextualisation. I was able to give him a text that I had translated from *Dholuo*. That should challenge him to consider how Christian teachings impact on ‘real’ local African contexts.

Ricardo

It has been fantastic to have found a young man called Ricardo who has expressed serious interest in committing his life to service to God in mission, and is looking towards coming to Kenya to assist in the ministry that I am involved in around the Yala area for at least a period. Pray for ongoing discussions with Ricardo who comes from Portugal but lives in Andover and attends Andover Baptist Church.

Visits to Theological and Bible Colleges in North America – October to December 2010.

University of Toronto, Canada.	Toronto, Canada	Canada		9th Oct to 16th October
Eastern University, St. Davids, PA	St. David's, PA	USA		16th to 23rd October
Ambridge, PA.	Ambridge, PA	USA		23rd to 30th October
Anderson University, Indiana	Anderson, Indiana	USA		30th Oct. - 6th Nov.
Wheaton, Chicago	Chicago	USA		6th -13th November
Abilene Christian University, Texas.	Abilene, Texas	USA		13th - 20th November
WCIU, Pasadena, California.	Pasadena, California	USA		22nd - 27th November
Mid Atlantic Christian University	Elizabeth City, NC	USA		27th Nov. - 1st Dec.
New York University	New York	USA		1st to 6th December.

Note: my visit in New York University is ‘unofficial’ and is to be to the school of development.

Introduction to AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission)

The AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) seeks to encourage wider use of mission and development strategies that depend on locally available resources and local languages.

These strategies are “vulnerable” in the sense that they do not have fringe benefits built into them, deliberately or otherwise. They will therefore fail unless or until there is strong local confidence in their spiritual or developmental value. The missionary or development worker will allow them to fail rather than prop them up with outside money.

“Vulnerable mission” may be seen as part of the movement toward contextualization of the Gospel of Jesus, which we regard as the theory of many and the practice of few. We would like to see more people take the risks of contextualization and vulnerability in order to reap the rewards that only come to those who value local resources and invest in local languages.

If local tools seem slow or weak by comparison with foreign money and English (Spanish etc. – European language), then we say with a wise missionary of long ago, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor. 12:10) While vulnerable mission may not be the only biblical approach to mission, it deserves much more attention than it has been getting. Let’s talk.

*Here is an early Merry Christmas
and best wishes for the new year
from me.*