

Jim's Journal - October 2012

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Day in Life of

Some lads were up making tea before I even got up. I got up at 5.10 a.m. At 6.15 a.m. I set off on the 9 mile ride to the office, arriving just over an hour later. Today I arranged for a small farewell-do as I am due to move away in about 2 weeks. I had tripe and rice for lunch - at the local university restaurant out under a tent. They know how to cook it well!

My preferred bus didn't come, so I squeezed into the back of a Nissan as the conductor tied my bike on top. This was for a 15 mile ride past Yala. Once arrived at a village called Muhanda, I wanted to buy some malaria medicine for the children. After the chemist had explained that there are some serious issues with malaria resistance, I got malaria! I was amazed; nowadays I know to recognise it very early when it comes. I excused myself from the chemist and took one of the tablets that I always carry with me. After greeting our one-time director of Yala Theological Centre who was repairing shoes in his workshop, I rushed off a little late for the secondary school where I was to speak to the CU (Christian Union).

On reaching the school, 4 miles cycling later, no one seemed to know I was coming. I found the headmaster eating chicken with the government auditor in his office. "Come into the staffroom" he said 20 minutes later. He proceeded to cane the buttocks of 2 boys in turn who lay cowering before him. Eventually all the children (100 or so?) except the few still writing an exam, were gathered in a class for me to address them. I shared with them from Matthew 5 and 7 as they crowded around. Fortunately I could use *Dholuo* and Swahili in my teaching, as I doubt they'd have understood much of my English.

We finished after the session was interrupted by noisy rain on the corrugated iron roof. One of the teachers, who'd just completed secondary school himself a few months before (all the teachers seemed to be under 30 years of age), showed me a short-cut home (even then it still took me an hour to get home). Once home, I heard more cases of malaria having got suddenly serious resulting in a young woman, a friend's daughter, being taken to hospital almost unconscious. As it was getting dark we noticed large fruit bats flocking around a tree in front of my house. We made some rather less-than-serious efforts to chase them away. Fruit bats can be noisy and dirty. They left! As I write I can't go to bed yet, as I still have to take another dose of medicine for malaria in half an hour ...

Jonathan the Hero

1 Samuel 14 tells us of an amazing single-handed attack by Jonathan, son of Saul, on VASTLY superior Philistine forces. This incident doesn't seem to be much commented on. It is certainly not as well known as David's killing of Goliath. Yet Jonathan is as heroic here as is David in 1 Samuel 17. Jonathan and his armour bearer kill 20 men! That is striking. It is amazing that they should simply be able to overcome that many men in one attack. Yet out of the thousands in the Philistine army, that is almost nothing. Twenty men down, thousands remaining. How could that possibly be a victory for Israel?

Well, a victory it was. The reason: what Jonathan did brought fear into the Philistine army (14:15). They panicked, and started running around and killing each other in total confusion! It was a great day of victory for Israel. What has this said to me? Campaigns for the Gospel do not have to be large-scale and highly visible for God to use them. He can use a few faithful people who demonstrate genuine trust in God's being with them to change masses ...

Eighteen years on

Eighteen years ago (in 1994) a church leader, who was then the treasurer to the Yala Theological Centre, made a point of coming to talk to me. He wanted to tell me clearly; "Jim. The only way this (Bible teaching programme) is going to work is if you bring in foreign money." He tried to convince me to do this. Between the lines he was saying "I am not going to work with your committee if you are not ready to bring in outside money." He did not manage to convince me to bring in money. He never attended another committee (board) meeting.

Last week I visited his home. (I do visit his home and church occasionally.) I had no intention of staying once they'd answered the query I had, but he insisted I stop for a cup of tea. There was a signal in that cup of tea: "Jim, you're not very good at bringing in money. But wow; thanks for your commitment to us (the local community as well as this church)," is how I read him. I attended a meeting of his church a few days later. "Jim hasn't set up anything [I don't have 'my own church' and our teaching programme has fizzled. I don't have any bricks and mortar to show for my efforts, etc.]" he told us all "but through his visiting and encouraging believers in

many churches through the whole area over so many years he has had an enormous impact in strengthening the Christian community” he told the congregation.

He’s Dead

I rode down the bumpy track, past the rough looking mud church, to the bishop’s house on this Sunday morning. The bishop’s 8-year-old daughter welcomed me warmly to go in. There was his wife, surrounded by children, sitting on the floor in the middle of the sitting room frying pieces of sweet potato. ‘There’s something wrong’, I thought, ‘for a wife to be occupying the sitting room in this way’. I prayed, and sat down, we talked. ‘Where’s my friend, the old man’ I asked her? She looked stunned. ‘You mean, you didn’t know ... incongruous looks ... he died in January’ she responded. I sat with a lurch. ‘No ...’.

The bishop was a great miracle worker/healer. When I was there before (about 12 months ago) he expressed puzzlement. ‘Jim. I was unwell (he had malaria), but I couldn’t get better without going to the hospital’. To him, that was wrong. He knew prayer always healed. That was his life! That’s how he made his money. He had to believe it. He was troubled to find that he had himself become dependent on a hospital.

At the time, I wanted to help my friend. To explain about science ... but I knew it would be to no avail. Anyway, I wasn’t there to tell people about better ways in the West, but about Jesus.

Now, I’m back, to find my miracle-working friend dead. ‘He had meningitis and TB’ the wife told me. ‘We put wet towels on his head, but even that didn’t bring his temperature down’ she explained. ‘He left us’.

Later ... the wife of the bishop was the main prophetess and person to be possessed in the church. She prophesied, grunted, dragged people out for them to repent at the flag outside the church ...

That’s why, in part at least, I am not looking for ‘signs and wonders’. I would rather people understood the Gospel, and the power of the great God, than that they be pre-occupied in seeking solutions for bewitchment and spirit possession.

The church service started late. The once crowded church was much depleted. I was given opportunity to share. I shared the Gospel.

Conspiracy?

A massive cover-up is going on. This is a serious deception. It has hoodwinked millions of people. Even worse – many of the millions who have been hoodwinked are some of the most powerful and some of the most educated the world has ever known. A few people have managed to control school curricula and dominate national agendas with a deceptive message. That deception is secularism. Those doing the deceiving are a small elite in Western nations. Those suffering from the deception are

especially those outside of the West in the 'poor world'. Amongst those benefitting from the deception are those whose religions use enormous peer pressure to hook masses of people into subjugation.

The above is just one of the issues addressed in the book that I have recently written for which I am currently seeking a publisher. It is an academic book. It points out that, contrary to secular deception, a relationship with God is essential to human society. (Secularists are running on the momentum built up by previous generations of believers.) The question is – what is the nature of that God? This is where the work of the missionary comes into play. Christian missionaries are desperately needed in many corners of the world today. Unfortunately even the missionary endeavour seems to be caught up in secular fervour. Many missionaries from the West seem these days to be keener to support 'secular' ministries than they are to engage in coalface spiritual activity. Christian teaching is left aside. The masses stand to suffer from such misapplication of 20th Century reason. (If all goes well the book that addresses these issues will be out by the middle of next year.)

Please Give Me ...

"The biggest problem in this [African] church is white people" a church leader announced to a congregation of hundreds in July 2012.

More and more of so-called Christian mission from the West is about the giving of things and money. What if giving of resources is not the solution but a problem?

There is a massive and stark difference between many African people and many Western people. Western people believe that there can be a free gift. Many of them are engaged in extending that 'free gift' to people around the world – as scholarships, subsidised medicine, shoe-boxes for orphans, food aid, free Bibles and you name it. At the same time what seems to define many Africans is that they don't believe that a gift can be free. It is not in their tradition to give a free gift, because they always see gifts as having a purpose for the giver. If they don't see what they'll get from the receiver then what's the point in giving? At the same time many believe that an offer of a gift should never be refused.

Pray for a resolution to this predicament. It really is serious. The whole aid industry is built on the assumption that to give a 'free gift' is possible and good. People do not always realise that such an assumption arises from Christianity. Some people who offer aid deny Christianity. By denying the origins of their own understanding they make it very difficult for the African people to learn about free gifts!

The practice of freely giving gifts to people who don't consider gifts to be free is threatening inter-cultural relationships. The power of money is such that when consulted on their preference; to receive a servant of God or money, people in the majority world will easily say 'give us the money'. As a result, Western churches can become more concerned with giving money than with spiritual sharing. This can become a kind of idolatry! It can harm mission work. What happens if there is a constant flow of free gifts to those who don't accept that gifts can be free?

I have a Motorbike

(This discussion is intended to illustrate the power and penetration of the prosperity gospel in this part of the world.)

This church leader from Siaya had told me months earlier that he needed and wanted a motorbike to help him in ministry.

"I've been asking for a motorbike but have not got one" he told us over breakfast recently. "Should I tell people that I have a motorbike even though I don't have one?" he asked a group of us very seriously. I could see his reasoning. Possession of a motorbike would demonstrate to others that he is a successful pastor. He'll get more respect where he goes if he has a motorbike. It will be easier to raise funds if people see that others have already invested the funds for a motorbike in him. Possession of a motorbike will make him into the kind of example that others will aspire to imitate – which is surely what as a church leader he should want to be? So, he reasoned, surely it would be good to tell people that he has a motorbike, even if he does not have one?

An example of another pastor was brought into this discussion. This pastor always told people that he had a car and a permanent house (one made of bricks and not just mud). When he died people who went to his funeral discovered that actually he did not have a house at all, but was living in rented accommodation. Also that he had no car. Now that was a bit of an embarrassment – if one can be embarrassed when one is already dead? Even if that was an embarrassment though, saying he had those things was surely worthwhile as it resulted in his having been greatly respected while he was still alive. Hence this is just one of the reasons the prosperity Gospel continues.

Various Updates

Office I am grateful to the Anglican church in Maseno for having allowed me to keep my things in a house on the compound of St. Phillips Theological College while I was in the UK (December to April 2012). We recently had interviews for a position as tutor at St. Phillips. I was ready to teach part-time. The Bishop decided that he wanted full-time teachers. On having been given notice to leave my house, I approached the father at the near-by Coptic Orthodox Church. He agreed to give me a one-room apartment within their compound. I moved my stuff into this apartment in the middle of August. I have discovered that the Copts are very hospitable. They have a cook here who prepares meals for single men and visitors. I am spending two or three days per week here to do office work. There are three Egyptian couples based here permanently, mostly working in the hospital. There is a steady flow of short-termers coming through.

The Coptic Orthodox church traces its history back to Mark, the author of Mark's Gospel, who founded their church in Alexandria in Egypt. In early centuries the church in Alexandria was considered equal in status to the church in Jerusalem, Rome, and Antioch etc. Since the 7th Century Islamic invasion the Coptic Church has been much persecuted by Muslims. In Egypt, Christians have to pay a tax that Muslims do not pay. This tax has resulted in some Christians becoming Muslim over

the centuries. It is a great privilege to be able to work with a church that has so valiantly survived persecution over many centuries.

My apartment is at one of the main mission centres that the Coptic Church has in sub-Saharan Africa, which happens to be just about 7 miles from my home in Yala. (See www.copticmission.org)

Bible Classes Our board of YTC (Yala Theological Centre) met in June. We decided at that meeting that instead of holding weekly classes, we would encourage local churches to arrange seminars and invite us to attend them. That has not yet happened to a significant degree. Our board is to meet again near the end of October. I am not optimistic about what we can do in YTC (actually now called Gem Bible Institute), given as we do not have a donor backing us. My being a part of this programme and being a White man makes it very difficult to attract either an African or Western donor. Africans would say; why should we support a programme run by a foreigner? Westerners would say; why should we support this programme, and there is already a Westerner there who should be supporting it? In the meantime a leader of a local church recently opened a class very similar to the ones we had in the past in YTC (he has the backing of some American donors). I have become a regular member of that class, occasionally being asked to teach it. Unfortunately attendance at this class has recently been very low.

KIST I keep up contact with KIST through occasional visits. I am to join the faculty of KIST and other local theological colleges for a symposium on October 13th, at which I am to be the speaker. I am looking for openings in various Christian universities and Bible colleges in the area.

Village Ministry Not having to teach at a Bible college on a weekly basis has opened many other doors to ministry. It has been wonderful to have had the time available to be able to become more involved in the activities of local churches. I am informally involved in many churches, especially through making periodic visits to some of the many fellowships going on in the community around me during the week. These fellowships being run by local churches alleviates me of the need to be 'in charge' but often offer very good opportunities to share from the Scriptures in contextually appropriate ways. In combination with these visits to many fellowships, I also visit many individuals and families in their homes, sometimes alone and sometimes with others; sharing and encouraging from the Scriptures.

Book Writing I have taken advantage of the time available so as to write another book, currently seeking a publisher. (See above.) The book that I wrote in 2011 that is on communication in mission has already been accepted by a publisher and should be in print before the end of 2012. I am grateful to Marilyn James for the work that she is doing on this book.

AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) We are finding a growing interest in the concepts that we are promoting in the AVM. I am planning a trip to Europe / USA for the purpose of promoting vulnerable mission and related concerns September to December 2013. Activities and publishing related to vulnerable mission have

contributed to my being awarded the status of Professor of Religion by the internationally renowned ‘Global University’ that is run by the Assemblies of God in North America. I am grateful to Chloe Houghton (originally from Wantage Baptist Church) for the help she was able to offer us in administering the AVM in the summer. Credit for improvements to the AVM website should go to Jonathon Thompson from Acomb Baptist Church, York, who is revamping it for us. Thanks to Kathleen Weyers (Andover Baptist Church) for continuing to look after finance for us. **We are looking for more volunteers who can help us on an ongoing basis.**

Council of Reference

Because I am not currently working closely under a Western mission’s agency, it seemed wise to ask some colleagues to make up a council of reference. This council is concerned with my life and ministry in Africa. I am keeping the council members closely informed regarding various aspects of the work that I am doing. This enables council members to pray for and advise over sensitive and confidential issues and means of engaging in ministry.

The following are on the council of reference to date. Please feel free to contact council members. One of their roles is to provide accountability.

Members of	the new Council of Reference	
Bill Gordon	A retired psychiatric nurse, Bill has wide interests in theology and philosophy. He lives in Birmingham.	billemail@mac.com
Mike Thompson	One-time traveller to Africa, Mike is prayer coordinator for Acomb Baptist Church in York.	gillthompson@ntlworld.com
Jean Johnson	Jean was closely involved in church planting amongst Cambodians for two decades. She is active in encouraging mission groups to work in such a way as not to create dependency on the West.	JeanJohnson@wmausa.org
Tim Reeves	Tim, member of Norwich Central Baptist Church, has wide interests in science and philosophy and more recently in vulnerable mission.	tvreeves@yahoo.co.uk
Rev. Dr. Steve Rennick	Senior pastor of a large church in Indianapolis, USA, Steve was the Principal of Kima International School of Theology (Kenya) from 1995 to 2002.	srennick@golove.org
Colin Morgan	Colin is in the process of retiring from a career in science. He was my pastoral coordinator in Norwich for many years.	colin.morgan@inbox.com