

Local languages only

Local resources only

AVM
ALLIANCE FOR VULNERABLE MISSION

Avoiding unhealthy dependency

**Avoiding DEPENDENCY in Global Christian mission
- VULNERABLE MISSION a potential answer**

AVM UK
day conferences

Acomb Baptist church, York
11th April 2015

Queens Road Baptist church Coventry
18th April 2015

AVM UK
residential conference

Redcliffe College, Gloucester
14th – 16th April 2015


also Mission executive consultation
by invitation only

Oxford, 22nd to 23rd April 2015

Sponsored by
Redcliffe College
TWR
World Mission Associates
Global Connections
MBS studienprogramm
AWM Akademie für Weltmission

Two conferences, Marburg and Stuttgart in Germany May 8 to 11 2015

Details of all these conferences at vulnerablemission.org



Jim Harries News and Prayer Letter from Kenya

Sent by: Andover Baptist Church, Charlton Road, Andover, Hants SP10 3JH
<http://www.andoverbaptist.org.uk/content/view/14/14/>

To: Western Kenya, working in the region of Yala/Maseno with some extended ministry to other parts of East Africa.

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Dear Reader,

Please find below various reports and comment on recent developments in my ministry to folks in Kenya, and various types of wider involvement in missionary training.

Difficulties in Fundraising

One day I attended a 'spiritual' church called African Israel Nineveh. I got there about 12.30. Their main day for worship is Fridays. As usual I was warmly welcomed. I took my bike in and parked it at the back of the church. One of the leaders came and told me I should come to sit at the front (on the stage facing the audience) but should leave my shoes there alongside my bicycle.



on the road by bicycle

Attendance was about twice the normal; 20 or 30 women and five men including myself. A visiting lady pastor was preaching. Periodically her preaching was interrupted by noisy singing accompanied by drums and cymbals. During that time one of the men, a young very big tall man, grunted loudly leaping up and down in rhythm with the music. The message by the lady preacher was essentially that members of the church should not be responding to taboo as laid down by the ancestors. They should follow the God of Israel (note the name of the church). It transpired that the church had stacks of taboos that should replace the traditional taboos. People should not go to the witchdoctor, it was repeatedly emphasised. We were also told that their church now has a branch in London, this implying that White people are following its lead.



After the lady pastor sat down I was given the opportunity to share I tried to be lively African style! Unfortunately people were a bit tired and were looking forward to finishing. (They had probably started at about 10.30 a.m.) The Lord knows who listened, heard, understood and who took things to heart. There was a little confusion, another song or two, the offering and then the service ended.

People were told not to leave as a fundraising began immediately afterwards. They needed to renovate the church floor. I wanted to just go but was encouraged to stay. Ladies were cooking a fellowship meal for us to share in after the fundraising. I was told to sit at the front in the middle. First the plate went around and everyone was to give 14p each. They gave an average of 8p each. The plate went round again and again. (It's hard to explain this if you don't know how fund raisings happen in Kenya.) I sat quietly and said nothing. The plate was not put under my nose.

It seemed this could go on a lot longer. After 1/2 hour of it, I said to the man that I was going. He objected, telling me about the food. I said I was going anyway. The visiting pastor (i.e. she doesn't know me) was observing all this with interest. She was also actively fund raising - e.g. she gave 55p and encouraged others to give in response to that. People at fundraisings like this 'talk with money'. That is - if you give you get a voice. As I stood to go the lady said 'isn't the visitor going to give something?' I didn't catch the response she was given, as I was walking off towards my bike at the back so as to put on my shoes (sandals) and leave.



In an indigenous church

As I sat, I thought about contributing. I had put 14p into the offering plate. I could have given another 14p. In a sense I was under intense pressure to give. Yet I am used to having to ignore such pressure. I walked away, the visiting pastor seeming to think that they'd lost their prize catch (the wealthy white man) for nothing! I bought myself a light lunch, then went home.

God willing, I will walk into that church again in a few weeks or a few months. I usually try to get there before 12.00 noon. At 12 noon they read three versions of the crucifixion of Jesus from the gospels. If the people don't want me it is easy. They simply don't give me the opportunity to speak. I don't want to buy my way into being able to speak. Neither do I want to put myself into a position whereby churches compete for me because I give a lot. Because there is no way of giving anonymously, therefore I must not give publically at fundraising events.

An experience with Water

Six days earlier I had an experience that was in some ways parallel. I had actually attended an SDA church. From there, I visited a small spiritual church on my way home. We were just about 6 adults and 6 children. The church was in danger of collapse because numbers were so low. After removing my shoes, I went in, Bible in hand.

That church has an even stronger orientation to spirits than the above, on my evaluation. (If that is possible!). My heart kind of jumped and said 'why are you here?' Yet I knew why I was there. To share the Gospel of Christ. Again the pastor was a lady. A widow, who is doing well for herself. An intelligent woman, I'd guess you'd say. But getting numbers up is defeating her. The young man who was there was hit by a truck on his bike and killed a month or so before, I discovered.

The church sings incredibly well. Their songs are Christian – often very Christian. Then the "attack" came. The one lady had had (she said) a vision of me and water. "Have you had an issue with water?" she asked me. I refused. She had seen me standing at the edge of a sea or lake. It was dangerous. I was in danger, she said. I did not 'play the game'. I (honestly) said that I had not had a recent confrontation like that with water. (What did come to mind was 2 days previously when I'd got absolutely soaked cycling home! I didn't mention it.) Had I conceded some confrontation with water, then I would have had to chase it away. Chasing it away was of course conceding that the devil had got one up on me. It's subtle stuff!

For a lonely white male to turn up at such a spiritual meeting I guess is inviting alternative interpretations. Particularly for people who do not know me. The course of time changes things when it simply becomes known that I do such things all the time! Someone who does not know me or is looking for a victim can see me as veritable prey I guess! Surely I'm in trouble and have come for the help of the ancestors??



Myself, a Kenyan leader, and Finnish speaker, at our annual church convention August 2014

Maybe those moments are the climax of the spiritual battles. I am on their territory. I am alone. I am a foreigner. There are women whose ears, eyes and hearts are sharp to the detection of witches and those who have inadvertently found themselves victim to some ancestral curse. Treatment is on offer - from rolling on the floor, to being splashed with water, beaten by a Bible, told to run around the church, being spun around till you get dizzy, being given a dramatically-acted mock funeral. I have seen all these happening. God loves these people - that's why I visit them to tell them of Christ. On route I walk the gauntlet. Prayers

needed.



Ice on the ground following a hailstorm in Maseno, 1 mile from the equator !

One thing that I think is confusing for British folks in all this is that the very people who 'love' dealing with witches and spirits, also love hearing from the Bible. We expect people who aren't 'proper Christians' to reject the Bible. Instead, people love it, plus at times reciting John 3:16 repeatedly, the Lord's prayer, wonderful Christian songs gustily sung etc. etc. While doing all this in their hearts they are looking for a witch.

Football Boots

For poor kids, a proper pair of football boots can seem a bit of a luxury. At the same time, if a lad is really keen and that's what he really likes to do having a good pair of boots can probably make all the difference for a player. With them, you get grip while your opponent wearing trainers slips and slides.



My visitor in July, Peter Staff, on a walk

Having football boots can bring a number of potential problems. One is that if you have them and no one else does, others could get jealous. "So what" I can perhaps hear someone thinking? Jealousy may not be a big deal in some contexts in the West. That doesn't mean however that it is not a problem for us here in Africa. For jealousy, read witchcraft, I could say. A young lad possessing a pair of football boots could result in others being jealous of him to the point at which he is bewitched. Witchcraft may not hurt someone who does not fear it. But what if someone does fear it?

in parts of Africa. He who has what others want and doesn't share can be thoroughly despised. Therefore you can't expect a lad who has a pair of football boots to resist the pressure to share them even with people with whom he should not be sharing them. In order to help him resist such pressure the dad concerned must have teeth behind his words. E.g. he might have to cane his lad if he shares his boots with others. But that is really bad!

The only solution for the young lad who is a football enthusiast may well be that his dad be in charge of his football boots. The mind boggles a little here. Refusing to share what you have can be considered a very serious social 'crime'

The same does not only apply to boots. It also applies to other things, like bicycles. I recall one time being with a friend of mine. He told me he was going to borrow a bicycle from a colleague of his. I expected him to go to request for it. Instead he took it from where it was leaning against a wall. "I will bring it back, hope you don't mind if I borrow it" he said as I walked off with the bicycle.

Fear of witchcraft then can easily prevent someone from having or keeping a pair of football boots. What else does it prevent people from doing? How then some people can say that witchcraft does not 'exist' I do not know!

Mud, heat and aching

I just read this on the internet, about 'discipleship': "Rice-planting week is integral to the "whole of life" discipleship vision It is as we get muddy and dirty, hot and tired, as our bodies ache and we don't want to do it anymore, that we see true character come out" Wow, I thought! Sometimes I feel "muddy and dirty, hot and tired, aching and ... not wanting to do it anymore". Is that when God begins to work? That's a paradox ...



Peter Stagg, myself, and a couple of Kenyan men on walking safari in a small game park about 30 miles from my home in Yala

Theoretical Issues

I find myself facing and dealing with many theoretical issues in the course of my research and writing. I cannot go into detail on them all here. Let me say though that researching and writing is opening many exciting doors of discovery into understanding ways that God is working in the contemporary world.

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NEW THINGS COMING TO FRUITION

Academia.edu

“Should I post my papers onto academia.edu” I asked some colleagues. “Definitely yes” came a response. “Doing so has helped me enormously. I highly recommend it as a way of getting the word out.” I now have 54 of my articles posted onto this internet site. It is a site apparently much loved by academics. I have already climbed into the top 0.5% globally of people looking at and reading my papers. Go to: <https://wciu.academia.edu/JimHarries>

2015 Events

We have been arranging public consultations on ‘vulnerable mission’ and related themes since 2005. These, and related activities, have already drawn enormous interest. Vulnerable mission is an increasingly well known theme for people teaching and involved in mission. We are using a new ‘strategy’ for reaching leaders in 2015. Instead of simply inviting everyone to attend, we have events in Oxford that are for mission leaders only, by invitation only. These promise to be high quality events that will enable us to consider mission issues at great depth. We have a similar day also planned in Germany, to be held at a mission training centre near Stuttgart. (We also have public conferences planned! For details see vulnerablemission.org)



Myself, trying to be big, Maseno Coptic compound at night

To Write in German?

The prospect of having our conferences at key missionary training centres in Germany has brought me another challenge: “Can I write articles in German of sufficient quality?” I think the answer is probably no. That does not mean that I am not going to try. As well as Greek (for understanding the Bible), Luo, and Swahili, I have of late also been trying to practice my German. Signs are very encouraging in terms of being able to encourage German speaking people to engage in Christian mission in a vulnerable way. (The events

in Germany are to be conducted in German language without translation.)



Anthropology in Crisis

Anthropology, the study of man, has often been an important part of the work of the church. Since the 19th Century, it has also been appropriated as a secular discipline and come to be known as ethnography, cultural anthropology, etc. An increasing number of scholars have recently realised that, if you remove anthropology from Christianity, it remains without roots. I think we very much need ‘anthropologists’ (people who study people and their circumstances etc.)

*Climbing the hill looking for wild animals
(Lake Victoria in the background)*

to be a part of the Christian mission endeavour. Some

colleagues are arranging a conference in the USA in May 2015 looking at themes related to theology, the church, and their relationship with anthropology. I have submitted a paper that draws on my experience here in Africa that looks at the importance of anthropology's building on its Christian foundations.

Language Encouragement Days

A group of missionaries from Kisumu recently came to visit me at my home in Yala. They were interested in knowing how they might get some of their people to integrate better with the African community around them. They were also very interested in learning the Luo language. As a result of their interest, and that of others, we instigated a 'be encouraged to learn the Swahili and Luo languages' day on 26th September in Kisumu. This went very well, with about nine western-missionaries in attendance. We hope to repeat the same on 22nd November. See pictures of our last event below! (Two of those on the pictures are my regular Swahili students, to whom I've been giving twice weekly classes for about two years now.)



Being privileged to teach the Luo language to a small group of very interested and motivated missionaries was a very 'invigorating' experience. It was somehow deeply encouraging to find others who are ready to interact with local people on THEIR terms. It was a great privilege to be able to share and kind of 'unburden' with them on aspects of life that have become very 'close and intimate' to my own thinking! Three of those missionaries already had a sufficiently deep grasp of Luo so that we could have very helpful discussions.



World Evangelical Alliance

Dr. Shirmacher, who has a string of doctorates, is heavily involved in evangelical churches leadership at a very high level internationally. He recently took an interest in an article that I wrote on 'sin'. Following that interest, he asked me to consider writing a book for a series produced by the WEA (World Evangelical Alliance). I have now drafted that book, about 33,000 words. It has received a provisional green light and is being examined by the leadership of the WEA. If they take it, then they will do the copy editing and publishing for me. (I have

year. Marilyn James is currently doing the copy-editing for me, for which I am very grateful. This book is to be published by Wipf and Stock. When it comes out, God willing, it will be my fifth book.)

Next Generation Serving God

I was not the one to say ‘wow’ regarding the ways in which some of the children who have stayed with me in my home in the past are nowadays devoting themselves in God’s service. I won’t say much more, except that it can be very encouraging to see them, some now already in their 30s, actively serving. Many local young people currently in their twenties and thirties have observed my various activities in the community over the last 20 plus years. That foundation of identifying with them and their parents is giving me a platform from which to speak into their lives. Sometimes this is in counselling on marriage issues. Sometimes it is leading people to Christ. Sometimes it is just being able to share from the Scriptures. This is not a very visible or glamorous work. Sometimes I believe it can be a way of being used by God to speak profoundly into people’s hearts and lives.

Micah Network

The Micah network seeks to encourage what they call ‘integral mission’ around the world. They are a very active networking organisation, headed by Joel Edwards, until recently the head of the UK evangelical alliance. The AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) has recently become a paid-up member of the Micah network. Pray for the fruit to come from the raised profile that this gives us, and the improved networking that it could bring about.

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My ex-student, now a father in the Coptic Church, talking to Peter

Furlough 2015

I am engaged in planning my next furlough, to be March to June 2015. If anyone who I do not usually visit would like me to visit them during that time in the UK or in Germany, please let me know! (jim@vulnerablemission.org). (I am not planning a trip to the USA until perhaps 2016.) My outline programme is as follows:

- March 14th to 18th Andover BC
- March 20th to 25th New Farm Chapel
- March 26th to 31st Wantage BC
- April 1st to 2nd Andover BC
- April 4th to 12th Acomb BC
- April 11th to 23rd - conferences in the UK
- April 24th to 26th Andover BC
- April 29th to May 5th – supporting churches in Germany (and family).
- May 5th to May 12th - conferences in Germany
- May 15th to May 25th Norwich Central BC
- May 30th Andover BC
- June 3rd to June 14th Andover BC