



ALLIANCE FOR VULNERABLE MISSION

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Editor: Jim Harries, PhD, Chairman of the AVM.

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- This edition of the Bulletin has few independent contributions. This is because I have received very little this month to include in it. Please do send me links to articles and other material that is of relevance to us in the AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission). Send to jim@vulnerablemission.org
- August has been an exciting month for me due to my seeming to have 'discovered' a critical missing link in our thinking and discussion of vulnerable mission. This missing link comes from a book written by French anthropologist Marcel Mauss.

Marcel Mauss' book 'The Gift' was first published in 1923. Mauss' research on gift giving in what were then known as 'primitive societies' is especially pertinent to the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission. Western mission tends to look at the use of resources on the basis of an understanding of Western economics. Mauss points out that a lot of 'economic' activity in ancient societies was carried out NOT on the basis of modern economic principles, but on the basis of exchanges of gifts. This applies to many parts of the world, certainly including Africa. I have been encouraged by my explorations so far of the implications of this for those engaged in donor activity from the West. Any help in this project by people knowledgeable in this area will be much appreciated. For a copy of Mauss' original work go here:

http://www.econ.uba.ar/www/institutos/economia/Ceplad/HPE_Bibliografia_digital/Mauss%20ingles.pdf

The AVM has taken a stand to say that some missionaries should NOT subsidise ministries they are engaged in. This stand has met some opposition from people who prefer to advocate generosity. Mauss' work begins to provide the missing cultural territory for why an apparent lack of generosity is a plus. Putting that 'missing cultural territory' into place

explains why and how subsidising one's ministry can easily be very problematic. It also explains how not-subsidising one's ministry is not to fail to be generous.

Mauss brings this greater depth of insights by articulating an ancient understanding of resources as part of a 'whole'. Mauss himself uses the term 'total'; to him the gift giving traditions he has found amongst ancient people is a 'total' system. That is; material resources and spiritual forces are all incorporated into a (for those concerned) comprehensible whole. The two are interchangeable and exchangeable. This is a monistic and not a dualistic system. The failure of Western missionaries in the modern era to grasp this dynamic going on around them has easily had them communicate at cross-purposes with the people they are reaching.

The practice of vulnerable mission as so far advocated by the AVM has the major advantage of protecting missionaries from putting their foot into things that they have not understood. Understanding Mauss' articulation of gift giving shows that this need not be the end of the story. Mauss brings us new depths of complexity waiting to be explored! I encourage AVMerS to look at Mauss' work. I hope we will soon have a discussion of this in pearl. (To join pearl, a list-serve computer discussion on vulnerable mission issues, go to; <http://lists.vulnerablemission.org/listinfo.cgi/pearl-vulnerablemission.org/>)

- **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.

See vulnerablemission.org