



ALLIANCE FOR VULNERABLE MISSION

www.vulnerablemission.org

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The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission encourages some missionaries from the West to engage in their ministries using local languages and resources.

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JIM'S TRAVEL SCHEDULE FOR JULY-AUGUST

This issue is guest edited because of Jim's travel schedule. He expected to go to Congo before Tanzania, but the Congo leg of his trip had to be cancelled because of a delay with the visa. Here is the plan for Tanzania and Kenya:

29th July to 3rd August, Dodoma, Tanzania, with Church of God people.

3rd to 8th August. Babati, Tanzania, with Church of God people.

8th to 13th August, at Mbulu, Tanzania, with Church of God people.

13th to 18th August, at Singida, Tanzania, with Church of God Fellowship people.

18th to 24th August, at Mwanza in Tanzania, with Mennonite people.

24th to 26th August, at Musoma in Tanzania, with Coptic Orthodox Church.

26th to 31st August, around Migori in Kenya, with Zion Harvest Church.

31st August – back home to Yala in Kenya.

IT'S OFFICIAL – VM IS NOT “MISSION”

A recent e-mail to Jim from “Franco” (pseudonym), an attendee at the UK VM conference, celebrates a visa just granted to him by a Muslim country. It is for a much longer period than the tourist visa he had previously. Franco got the new visa even though he is openly spending his time in VM activities. He describes them this way:

“My practicing of VM right now is learning [local language X] and drinking tea with neighbours to try to grasp the language and culture. No ministry (yet), even though what I do is also ministry beginnings.”

The interesting point is that in the eyes of the government, these VM activities are NOT “mission”. He is not bringing any projects. He is not hiring any assistants. He is not printing and distributing any literature or videos. In other words, he is pushing any of the buttons that often bring hostile government reactions.

The Global Corruption Index indicates that corruption is a problem everywhere and a way of life in many countries like the one where Franco is. In corrupt settings, it is completely natural for government officials and bureaucrats to assume that Western missionaries are “buying converts,” since money is the only force strong enough to motivate people to make a difficult change. In fact, many a corrupt official would consider his own corruption much less disgraceful than the corruption of a person who would betray his religious birth heritage to get some Western money.

As Franco says, “No ministry (yet).” But I wonder whether the government cares much about ministry that is done without money. According to the money-centered, power-centered perspective of the government, Franco’s ministry will never amount to anything. How could it? So the government can afford to leave Franco alone.

If Franco turns into a John the Baptist figure and starts criticizing the government, that would change the game very quickly, of course. But VM does not require that approach since we are following Jesus instead of John on this point.

As the months and years go by, it will be interesting to see how and when, if ever, Franco’s VM activities get him into government trouble. Meanwhile we can pray that his light will shine, and the darkness will not be able to handle it.

A VM STORY FROM BEFORE VM WAS KNOWN AS VM

This week a former missionary about my age told me the following sad story that goes back to the early 90s. How many VM issues can you spot in this true story? -- SN

An American organization hired my friend to direct a program that was a “partnership” between U.S. churches and some Mexican church leaders. Short-term mission teams were sent several times a year, doing work projects and passing out assorted goodies to the poor Mexicans.

The new director was the first one who spoke Spanish fluently, as he had previously lived and worked in two other Latin American countries. Because he could speak Spanish, he was not restricted to dealing with the three Mexican leaders who could speak English. He began to hear things they did not want him to hear.

He also began to notice that they were not quite as needy as he and his group had assumed. He would propose a date for the next mission trip and they would say, “Sorry, you can’t come that week because we have a group coming from El Paso.” Then the same for an alternate date he proposed, and a third. He asked them how many teams they actually hosted in a year. They were not happy with the question.

He began to raise questions with the sending church and organization about the wisdom of the program. They didn’t want to hear it. They trusted the Mexicans they had known for several years. They thought he was seeing things.

Eventually the three Mexicans protested to the sending body that he was not their friend. His probing questions indicated that he was racially prejudiced against Mexicans and not a suitable person for the position. The U.S. church bought that, and they removed my friend from the position. He had served about two years, and by this time he was not feeling too badly about leaving since nobody was listening to his warnings.

The program continued, but eventually it came to light that two of the three trusted Mexicans were not only milking the system as he was alleging. They were running drugs too!

FOLLOW-UP TO JUNE AVM BULLETIN – DIALOGUE OF VM AND GLOBAL SOUTH

The following was shared by Colin Smith in the June 2015 edition of the AVM Bulletin:

I found it, in many aspects, a helpful and challenging conversation, although I confess that on occasions I could not recognise current CMS [Church Missionary Society] praxis in some of the critique that was being offered in relation to western mission. I guess the two main issues that the day raised for me were:

1. Is the transfer of resources always a route towards dependency? Within the fellowship of a global church it seems to me that we should be in the business of giving and receiving. How do we do that in ways that are transparent and not naïve to power dynamics?

2. I think there needs to be voices in the conversation from the global south, from the nations within which vulnerable mission (in the form expressed here) takes place. I recognise the issues you raise about such a conversation taking place in English, but there is no shortage of people who could enter this conversation and perhaps challenge some of the presuppositions within it. Ironically, it seems to me that if we hold the conversation in the absence of those voices we risk making ourselves invulnerable.

Thank you again for the chance to participate. I do think this is an important conversation and will appreciate being able to follow it.

Here is a response to Colin Smith by Jim Harries:

Colin shared that: “I could not recognise current CMS [Church Missionary Society] praxis in some of the critique that was being offered in relation to western mission.” Although dependency was one of the targeted concerns at our 2015 conferences, the AVM gives a very specific challenge. That is, for some western missionaries to engage in ministry outside of the

West in places like Africa other than on the back of Western languages and resources. If CMS is meeting that challenge then they are engaging in vulnerable mission, as we would define it.

Colin asks whether the transfer of resources always leads to dependency. I think the answer is no, that it need not lead to dependency. Often of course, in human relationships, dependency (i.e. interdependency) is a good thing. Our concern is with the creation of unhealthy dependencies.

In the AVM we advocate that voices from the South be invited to contribute to our discussions on a *level playing field*. Very often discussions on mission, development, and dependency occur in Western languages with people from the South who are subsidised by the West. We would like to see Western people become sufficiently vulnerable so as to engage majority world people in a way that enables them to express themselves freely from their own worldview by using their own languages without fear that the rug may be pulled on their financial income. Vulnerability, as we define it, is the ability to listen to and respond to those voices.

(Editor's note: Jim's comment leaves open the issue whether "half a loaf is better than no bread at all," that is, should we have more Global South people in VM discussions in English even though this is not as desirable or effective as having the dialogue in the local language. Of course, using the local language limits the Western participants to those who can speak it, and using English limits the Global South participants to those who can speak it. In the Mexican story I reported above, the English-speaking Mexicans would have been exactly the wrong people to have in on the discussion with the foreigners. But is that universally the case? Is it the case half the time? If so, which half? Should we not do it at all because it will mislead us half the time? I find this an interesting unresolved set of questions—SN)

DOWNLOADS & BOOKS

Thanks to Jim for supplying most of this list. I have added to or edited the comments in some cases—SN

- VM PAPER. Frank Paul's article from the recent German conference is now posted here (in German language): <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/rundbrief/U-F-Paul-Von-der-Kolonisierung.pdf> Title: Von der Kolonisierung zur „geschwisterlichen Begleitung“
- PARTNERSHIP. Find this book on Amazon: Larsen, Knut Edvard & Jørgensen, Knud, (eds) 2014, *Power and Partnership*. Oxford: Regnum Books International. Its varied look at partnership, especially with respect to Christian development aid, is very helpful. It ends by advocating vulnerable mission. See here <http://www.amazon.com/review/R14JAUE4L0QQ4L> for **Jim Harries' review** of the same.
- POST-SECULAR ANTHROPOLOGY. See http://www.academia.edu/12735521/Secular_and_Religious_Symbiosis_Strengthening_Postsecular_Anthropology_through_Commitments_to_Faith for an article on anthropology by Johannes Merz, presented at a UK conference April 2015.

BLOGS & ON-LINE GROUPS

- WESTERN HEGEMONY IN MISSION (or, THE BLIND LEADING THE SIGHTED!) For a blog by Eddie Arthur on “who is driving” in mission work, see: <http://www.kouya.net/?p=7063> The focus is on Western agencies controlling (or trying to control) what is happening in other countries by exporting Western training in Western packages and/or by removing funding if certain Western theological or strategic preferences are not followed as they would be in the West.
From my perspective as a researcher, I would say Arthur’s point is that foreigners are prone to measure the wrong things and/or make the wrong inferences from what they measure. This is a very important issue with my agency, GMI Research Services, as we are increasingly trying to help mission organizations answer the questions that donors are asking. A big part of their struggle is to help donors see when they are asking the wrong questions.
- ACCOUNTABILITY OF DONORS. Accountability goes both ways says Eddie Arthur. Donors should be held accountable to recipients as well as the other way around: <http://www.kouya.net/?p=7078> Compare with Jim’s article here: <http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/10259#.VDyzctJmBjA>
- POST-COLONIAL THEOLOGY. Consider exploring the Post-Colonial Theology network on facebook. You might find a lot of fascinating stuff here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/23694574926/?fref=ts>
- GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY FOR VM? See the invitation below to join a new general forum on missiology. This is not a VM forum but it can be an opportunity to raise VM issues for discussion and to comment on other issues from a VM perspective. Both are important ways that VM advocates can broaden awareness of VM and engagement with it as a serious missiological option—SN

Dear friends,

Would you, your colleagues, or your students benefit from a listserv for professionals and scholars in Christian missions? This listserv can be used in the following ways:

- bounce ideas off other professionals and scholars in missions
- ask questions about research in missions
- network with other mission scholars
- announce book publications, job openings, internships, or upcoming conferences

A member of Fishnet has created a listserv for us - now it's your turn to participate, ask, announce, and network. To join the mission scholar listserv, send a blank email to: MissionScholar-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

To talk with the administrator of the listserv, contact Fishnet member Kenneth Nehrbass at kenneth.r.nehrbass@biola.edu<<mailto:kenneth.r.nehrbass@biola.edu>>

EVENTS

- SEPT. 2015, BANGKOK. An event advocating for **multilingual education** (i.e., education that includes the local language instead of only the “power” language) will be held 2nd to 5th September 2015 in Bangkok. <http://www.leadimpact.org/event-details/advocating-for-lead-lead-cop-event>. The umbrella group is SIL, and the main concern of the organizing team is to encourage genuine “development” by opposing the trend for the “power language” to obliterate the local one in education.
- APRIL 2016, COLORADO. For a Congress on **language learning** to be held in April 2016, see here: <https://www.mti.org/conferences/icll-international-congress-on-language-learning/> For videos from previous conference see here: <https://www.mti.org/conferences/icll-international-congress-on-language-learning/icll-content/> Under the auspices of Mission Training International.