



ALLIANCE FOR VULNERABLE MISSION

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**Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Bulletin**

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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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- UK conference planned for December 2019, title:

Title: **Missionaries: aliens, providers, or fellow travellers?**

Strapline: Should the majority world be the target of patronage from rich missionaries?

For more details, see call for papers below (and see this *Bulletin* as it comes month by month).

- To be held at All Nations Christian College, Ware, Herts, UK. Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2019 5 pm, to Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2019, 1 pm. (*see call for papers below*).





- In this edition of the AVM Bulletin, I focus on the life and work of **René Girard**. Girard was born in France in 1923. He passed on in 2015, after a long and fruitful academic life.

I am not aware that Girard ever travelled outside of the West. He was not, to my knowledge, familiar with the work of the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission. I am not sure he had a particular interest in mission at all. I had not come across him until a few weeks ago, when an anthropologists' discussion forum pointed me to him. Since then, I have been reading materials by and on him that are available freely over the web. I find him to be, in the scholarly position he

represents, an enormous advocate for vulnerable mission!

Because there is so much available on Girard over the web, there seems little point in writing much about him here in the Bulletin. Here are just a few pointers to his work, and that of the massive interested following that he has generated.

Peter Tijimes tells us that for Girard: **“it is rivalry that creates scarcity, not scarcity that creates rivalry.”** This is an enormously powerful observation, that I believe we in the AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) would agree with. Many have in recent decades seen aid to be the solution to majority world poverty. The AVM realises that poverty arises from people's way of life. The dominance of witchcraft fears in Africa prevents accumulation of wealth. Girard (as interpreted by Tijimes) is correct. The best sustainable approach to the overcoming of poverty in Africa must be to reduce rivalry, expressed in Africa through witchcraft. It is the intensity of rivalry, resulting in bewitching people who appear to prosper, that underlies much African poverty.

Girard is loved by some and hated by others for his defence of the Gospel. He puts 'religion' right at the centre of civilisation. He considers Christianity to be the only 'religion' to provide release from constant scapegoating that otherwise plagues human society. He considers the blame-game of scapegoating groups and individuals to be the insidious mechanism that keeps people 'down'. Amazingly, when he explored biblical accounts, he found them totally unlike other myths around the world. The bible shows us that God sides with the victim of scapegoating. Especially of course, Christ himself, blamed at the time for bringing troubles to Israel, was crucified as a scapegoat. His resurrection has provided demythification of the scapegoating mechanism. Jesus took the blame. There's no longer cause or justification for blaming each other.

Girard realises that human desire for things, is always at the same time for things in relation to other people. That is to say: I desire something, because someone else has it. Things are not so much desirable of themselves, but socially, as others desire them. Human beings then are not 'individuals' in the classic modern sense. Instead, we are always concerned for our position relative to others, in community. This basic re-drawing of the lines of 'desire' by

Girard has transforming effects on our understanding of human society, that put the need for Christ at the centre (see above), as well as questioning the foundations of modernity.

Possibly Girard's book that is of most interest to us in the AVM, is *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001). The book is, unfortunately, expensive. A helpful amount of it can be read by downloading a kindle sample or over amazon. As well as pointing to the urgent need for the Gospel in the majority world, Girard points to endless ways in which contemporary modernism and secularism are built on the teachings and example of Jesus. The implication is clear; the most urgent need in the majority world and elsewhere around the globe today, is a knowledge of and relationship with the trinitarian God who speaks to us through the pages of the Bible.



- I want to share briefly from my recent experience in Tanzania. (Picture left is of a choir in one of the churches I visited while there.)

My trip to Tanzania was to help to teach at a bible college for six weeks. Yet, it was much more than that. My time there gave me many pointers on how to do vulnerable mission, and on how a church can effectively become indigenous after missionaries have left it.

The church I worked with was planted by missionaries at the end of the 1950s. I have been closely associated with it since about 1998. At the time, when missionaries were still very influential, I constantly heard complaints that money was short, and the church was not growing. It appears that the church has been booming, since it was handed over to local bishops about eight years ago.

The bible school itself was of particular interest. It's operating almost entirely in Swahili, meant that the curriculum could begin to be locally owned. As a teacher, it meant I could explain Christian things with less reference to British and Western history and ways of life. Since the church has been handed over to local bishops, I am told, the 'rules' the missionaries used to impose to keep things the way they look good from the West, were removed. Students have been freed to express their spirituality in indigenous ways. These include (and I appreciate that some of my readers in the West may balk ...) long loud noisy prayer, loud preaching, noisy banging on tables to accompany praise, removal of demons, frequent power encounters ...

I have above only touched on a few issues, leaving many questions unanswered and stones unturned. For more information, see my recent Journal [here](#). I hope the short account above will inspire other missionaries to allow local leadership greater reign in the running of their own churches.

- Some may notice that I do not have many diverse contributions to this Bulletin from other sources. Please do keep sending me insights you find on vulnerable mission, so that I can make them more widely known.

# Call for papers

## 2019 Conference: Missionaries: aliens, providers, or fellow travellers?

Submit abstracts asap to

[jim@vulnerablemission.org](mailto:jim@vulnerablemission.org)

**Location:** All Nations Christian College, Ware, Herts, UK.

**Dates / times** Sunday 8th December 5 pm to Wednesday 11th December 1 pm.

Should the majority world be the target of patronage from rich missionaries?

**Outline paragraph:** Outside Christian workers who build on foreign presuppositions in work amongst indigenous communities can, especially when foreign funded and using outside languages, be interpreted as riding roughshod over indigenous sensibilities. True empowerment of local people requires getting alongside them. This necessitates vulnerability to their position and context. Such vulnerability can best be achieved if one shares the Gospel using indigenous languages utilising local resources.

### We will be discussing issues such as:

Practicalities and ramifications of use of **indigenous languages** by Western missionaries.

How does **translation** into an indigenous language (and from an indigenous language) affect the fronting of the gospel and of missionary work in general?

While **finances** are needed for mission work, how can one ensure that finances do not dominate one's mission work?

What are the **good practices** that ensure a missionary's vulnerability to local context(s)?

How to engage in mission without exuding (excessive) **power**.

**Organisation structures** that enable vulnerability on the side of Western missionaries on the ground.

Helping **Churches** who want to engage **directly** in mission cross culturally to avoid pitfalls of power.

Tentmaking and **business** as mission models that leave the Westerner vulnerable.: How can the **commercial world** be used to engage in mission without promoting 'evils' of capitalism?

When the uneven spread of wealth is itself an injustice, how can one use one's surplus to enact **global justice**.

How do we utilise all global **media channels** to promote vulnerability in our missionary endeavour?

Is vulnerability the key to **contextualisation**?

**Theology** traditionally draws strongly on metaphor. In the majority world, local metaphors are unfamiliar to the West. How can one then engage theology interculturally?

When **politics** and 'religion' are not separate categories, missionaries need to be careful not to get bogged down in unanticipated conflicts.

Is **miracle** a post-enlightenment category? Is '**magic**' simply a normal prerequisite of human social existence. What does this imply for cross cultural missionary engagement?

Is **introduction of outside technology** implicitly exploitative and enslaving? Or is it liberating? How does **technology** impact **vulnerable mission**; positive, negative, releasing, enslaving?

How can **Global-localisation** be a springboard for **vulnerable mission**?

When **short-term mission** has become **poverty-tourism** intended to adorn facebook with images of charity – what is the way forward?

Can Westerners relate to **non-Western missionaries** without dominating them?

While the bible is God's inspired book, are **Western curriculum**?

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