



Bridge over stream; bridging between Europe and Africa?

Jim Harries News and Prayer Letter from Kenya

NEW PLANS - **important**

We are trying to minimise the expensive production and distribution of hard copies of Jim's Journal. After this edition, therefore, we want to only send hard copies of Jim's Journal to those people who specifically request such. If you would like to continue to receive Jim's Journals by hard copy please write to Angela Merridale at this address: 8 Northbrook Ct. Northbrook Avenue Winchester

Hants, SO23 0JP, UK, or phone her at +44(0)1962 861231, or email her at <a.merridale@btinternet.com>. Please send Angela your email address so that we can send future copies to you by email. If you phone and get Angela's answer-phone then feel free just to say who you are and if you do or do not want to receive future copies of the Journal by post!

Some of you may have noticed that I did not produce a Jim's Journal at the end of last year. The main reason for this was that I already seemed to have too much work on my plate. Now at the start of 2014, I seem to have less time for writing of the nature of Jim's Journal than I used to have. The other reason is cost. The cost of postage has gone up a lot in the UK, from where my journal is sent out.

You will notice that this Jim's Journal is relatively short. I may in future only produce one Jim's Journal per year. Or, it may be good to include the content of the 2-weekly news into the Journal to send to people who do not have email. If you do not receive my 2-weekly news by email but would like

to please write to: <a.merridale@btinternet.com> or call +44(0)1962 861231 and talk to Angela Merridale who distributes the news.



Myself and a KIST graduate at Anderson University, USA (Church of God)

When I'm Relaxed and Feeling At Home in Africa, I'm worried , and justifiably so

I have had to realise that feeling at ease in the African milieu should give me cause for concern. When I might prefer African to European company, I have to think back to the days when I first came to Western Kenya. At the time the people's behaviour and manner seemed incredibly strange. There seemed to be a vast cultural gap between myself and them. Now, if I can just go along with them, enjoy people's company, laugh and joke and relax – where has the gap gone? More specifically – if I have now managed to bridge that gap and feel at ease at the place (amongst Africans) where I once felt so strange, will I come across just as strange to people from the West who come to visit, or when I am back in the UK?

The above can be frightening thoughts. It can feel as if I am losing my ability to talk. Yes, I can talk; words come out of my mouth. I have not forgotten the English language. But yet, when I talk to Westerners perhaps they don't 'get me' as I think they ought to.

A term that has at times been used is 'going native'. Yet, I have not 'gone native' entirely, as I am often reminded at the African end. "Let us handle this Jim" an African colleague said to me just recently. The reason he gave is "because half you still think like a white man, and that doesn't work" (my translation into English). Of course, for all my linguistic and cultural acumen (or its absence) I still look glaringly white and strange. This is the opposite to what applies in 'the West'. In the UK I guess I look pretty normal. Hence people expect me to behave 'normally', but I can't. Here in Kenya I look strange, so people expect me to behave strangely and are struck by the incongruity of any behaviour if it is not strange! I could add more examples to my 'half thinking like a white man' above. Someone recently assured me that my family in the UK had a problem to deal with; I am an eccentric. No matter how 'normal' I may try to be in the UK, I probably can't help but be 'abnormal'.



Walking doing ministry in Tanzania

Identifying closely with people of another culture or way of life, is putting one's home relationships at risk. It is no fun realising one's non-fit back in the UK. What applies in the UK or in the USA, also applies to the understanding of new missionaries who come to the field. Someone like myself who has been "too long" on the field can give a new missionary a difficult challenge! Some Africans are just strange to them, but they expect that so they can come to terms with it. Some Africans are more familiar and have learned to 'laugh with' the white man. New missionaries like that. A Westerner who behaves oddly however is an

incongruity that is hard to deal with. One way to deal with such incongruity, is to push it out of the way. Then I can end up being pushed out of the way by my own people.

I almost called this little piece "the string of love". This is how I have looked at this issued for a long time. Crossing cultural gulfs renders one 'strange' and less able to communicate back 'at home'. To some that means that one should not cross cultural barriers. Not crossing cultural barriers leaves different parts of our 'global village' disconnected from each other. There's a host of issues here! That is where a missionary who sets out to cross cultural chasms relies on 'the string of love'. That is, they rely on their own people being loving to them on an ongoing basis. Should a cross-cultural missionary's own people write him off as 'strange' then his cross-cultural purpose has been defeated and he has just been lost to one culture, so as to be *half-adopted* by another.



More on Race

Students at Church of God Bible college in Germany

From here in Kenya, it can seem that the more we in the West try not to be racist, the more people here have to be racist. That seems rarely to be considered by Western policy makers. 'Not being racist' back in the UK means treating everyone as if they are equally intelligent English people. Carried over to Africa, the same seems to mean treating all white people as if they are equally ignorant English people. Has becoming like English or American become the international standard for normality?

A few days ago I asked an African man for directions here in Kenya. "I don't understand that language" he responded in almost perfect English. I switched from Luo (tribal language) to Swahili (regional language). "I am not from here" he told me again, insisting on using English. He went on to ask me, as if very surprised "how do you know that (i.e. the Luo) language?" We were in the heart of Luoland. The question seemed incongruous. I pointed that out to him (using Swahili): "here we are in the middle of Luoland, and you are asking me how on earth I know Luo, that everyone else around here is using, yet you are using English with me, and English comes from thousands of miles away. It should be me asking you how on earth you know English". "I like that, that's funny" was his response, in English. Although he clearly understood Swahili he never deigned to use it.

Just one more of many examples of people in Africa who can appear to be proud to be what they are not, and (by implication) seem to be ashamed of who they are. ...



Suffering that Could be Avoided; or could it?

Bible Translation conference, Dallas, USA

We went from home to home visiting the sick. Truly, I don't know in detail what they were suffering from. Yet it is clear that the standard of medical service is not the same as it is in the West. Partly this is because people don't have the money. Partly this is also because people's understanding of poor health is vastly

different to what we know in the UK. The community's priority regarding what should be done for the sick is different.

An outsider like myself has, in outline, two choices. That is – either to fit with people's understandings, or to attempt to impose my own. If I attempt to impose my own, I have to always correct local people, tell them that I am better, and demonstrate where they are wrong. This puts me always into a position of apparently being superior. The alternative is to take people as they understand themselves. If I take them as they understand themselves, then I have to be ready to watch people suffer and die who I think could 'easily' have been saved.
Germany.



Seminar at Academy for Mission, Korntal, Germany.

While I might think such people could 'easily have been saved', perhaps it is not so easy? Many great minds were and are addressing global health issues, yet they are far from being resolved. Bringing health care to Africa often requires enormous outside subsidy. Hence it is rarely indigenously sustainable. Going into the heart of a complex family situation to change the way someone is being cared for is not easy or straightforward. There are many hazards associated – too many people who one can be upsetting and rubbing up against. Hence sometimes the best one can do as an outsider is to show one's love and concern through prayer.

Young man, older man, Christ.

When I was a lot younger, I sometimes listened to older men getting excited about biblical passages. I'll be honest, even though I was a believer, – often I didn't 'get it'. "This old man is getting it, I am not getting it" I would think to myself. Then I would ask myself "whose understanding is more to be trusted, that of this old man who has been around for 50 years or more, or mine aged 20?" "This old man is getting something I'm not. I'd better keep listening", I'd say to myself.

Some while later I heard a cleric in the Church of England say that the Church of England was a NECESSARY part of England's prosperity and stability. "Why", I asked myself? An answer wasn't forthcoming. I have kept pondering this question.



UK vulnerable missions conference

Although engaged in missionary service, I once had to concede to a colleague that I couldn't always be sure about the truths that I was proclaiming. "Then why should I believe" was his response. Why indeed should he believe, when I wasn't sure, I asked myself? I had to believe by faith, after all. It's not that I was SURE in that sense. Doubt, some say, is a part of the ebb and flow of the Christian life.

As a young man, I had to believe in faith. As an old(er) man, I guess the same still applies. But, there is a difference. As a young man, I really desired God to appear to me like in an amazing vision and say “here I am, follow me”. He didn’t. Nowadays in a way I’d have to concede – even if he did, that wouldn’t necessarily mean that I’d ‘believe’ for sure! After all, it could have been illusion, trickery, a memory lapse, mental illness coming on ... you name it!

I now realise; maybe I wasn’t looking in the right place! God might not come to me as a flash of light. Although, that doesn’t mean that my 20 year old brain had looked at all permutations of life. My time in Africa has and is contributing to my spiritual comprehension. “How can intelligent people be so different” I’ve been asking myself for many years. African people around here are evidently intelligent/bright/capable. Yet, they live such a different way of life to ‘us’ in the UK. Why?



scientific

Myself, uncle, and cousin in the USA

Although God still hasn’t given me an incredible vision, I see him more in the plain and simple. That is to say; I perceive that the secular diet that I was largely brought up on is a delusion. As a young man in the UK I was being brainwashed into not believing in God. Even though I have been a Christian since aged 12, the way I was educated and the way British society ran, was brainwashing me into accepting the inconsequentiality of my faith. Christian faith, seemed to be like a booster rocket or turbo system; not a basic necessity. Even when first coming to Africa; in many ways I valued my agricultural and

knowledge more than my faith in Christ. That gradually changed.

Faith in God is not an optional bolt-on feature, I now perceive. It’s a necessity for human existence. The questions revolve around; what kind of God? What is he like? How to I respond to him? Or, as for many atheists and agnostics in the West; how do I live so as not to have to overtly acknowledge his impact on my life? This is a feature of the life of people in Africa that sometimes throws Westerners. Even Western Christians, struggle to understand how some African people can be so constantly aware of the spiritual world around them: It is because they have not been brainwashed, I now want to say! Not that their understanding is therefore right. Perhaps they’ve understood God very wrongly. But, to discredit faith as a whole, seems to be strange!

God may not be evident using our five senses. But that is not all we have to perceive with. We can also perceive with our soul. Without God, there is nothing. That is, without God; no value, no vision, no future, no direction, no life. The material world alone, if it even exists, will never be able to satisfy the human soul, or to result in human contentment. That’s a level at which we can, and must, and should, and surely will, experience God our creator, who wants to be our Saviour.



Presenting at an Anglican Seminary in Pittsburgh, USA

We could ask ‘do you believe in Jesus’? And / or we could ask ‘do you believe in not-Jesus’. Both positions are faith positions. I see a lot more evidence for ‘in Jesus’ than for ‘in not-Jesus’.

It seems that Christian faith has to be seen outside of the ‘modern’ paradigm. Reason? The ‘modern’ paradigm is mis-founded

Harvard University Medical School and Massachussets General Hospital

Massachusetts’s General Hospital (in Boston - <http://www.massgeneral.org/>) was recently described to me as the premier hospital in the whole of the USA. Harvard University (<http://www.harvard.edu/>), whose medical school (<http://hms.harvard.edu/>) works closely with the above hospital, is arguably the premier university in the whole of the USA. Both of the above are now working closely together with Dr. Kharma Rogo, at Sagam Community Hospital which is just a mile from my home (http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/mobile/?articleID=2000096791&story_title=at-sagam-community-hospital-payment-is-voluntary-and-can-also-be-done-in-kind&pageNo=1)! There are often six or more medical doctors from Massachussets here at Sagam hospital. Give thanks for and pray for opportunities to share God’s Word with African and American folks at the hospital.

2013 Tour

My tour of seminaries and other educational and mission training institutes from September to December 2013 went very well. I was able to visit around 20 different seminaries, universities and other institutions. I was able to engage in missionary training at every location, in the USA, UK and Germany. For video recordings of our USA conference, see here:

Workshop – doing partnerships better:
vulnerable (intercultural) mission practice.

Workshop held in Pasadena, California, 24th Sep. 2013.

1. Stan Nussbaum's presentation.
Vulnerable Missions – Dependency
<http://vimeo.com/78033884>

2. Jean Johnson's presentation.
Avoiding being Source of Resources
<https://vimeo.com/79741526>

3. Jim Harries's presentation.
The bugbear of intercultural languages
<https://vimeo.com/81777640>

4. Panel Discussion
<https://vimeo.com/83715922>

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ALLIANCE FOR VULNERABLE MISSION

Ralph D. Winter Strategy and Innovation Center

I arrived back to Kenya from this 3-month trip on 10th December 2013. I have since then been continuing my on-the-ground ministry here in Kenya.

Orthodoxy and the Monastery

I am discovering a constant inter-relationship between the life of ‘ordinary’ Coptic Christians, and the orthodox monasteries. I must admit that I find discussion of the monasteries challenging and inspiring. Monks seem to come across much as do the disciples of Jesus as one reads the Gospels; constantly failing. The key for a monk is to keep going. It’s like, they don’t have ‘success’, except that ... you keep going in a

life of prayer. So, for example, we were told, that if a monk errs, then his colleague may be the one to be punished. Why? Two reasons: 1. So that the colleague put right the monk who erred. 2. Because Jesus was punished for our sins, it is seen as only right that monks be ready to suffer for the erring of their colleagues. I heard another story. A lady went to a monastery to find someone to whom she could confess her sins. When she sat next to the monk and began telling him about the failures in her life, the monk got very agitated, until he walked off. If she was to think that he was so upset at her sins, though, she would be wrong. The reason he got agitated and walked away, was through being convicted that this lady could be so open with God as to confess sins of a scale that the monk himself was harbouring but ashamed to mention.



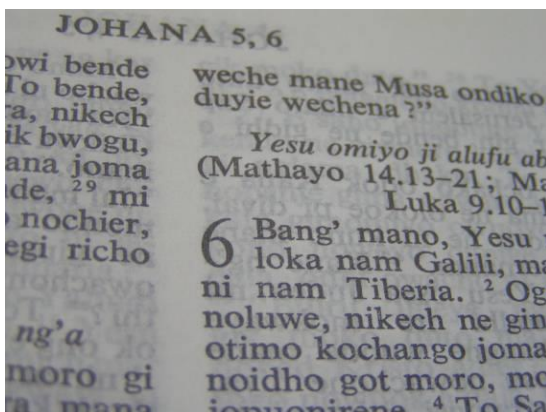
Myself and some Coptic colleagues

Perception and Bible Classes

For years now, I have been reporting on the opening and closing of Bible classes in my neck of rural Africa. More often, I announce the opening of classes, and then stay silent when they close. Otherwise, by now we might have had hundreds of classes running within just a 5 mile radius ...

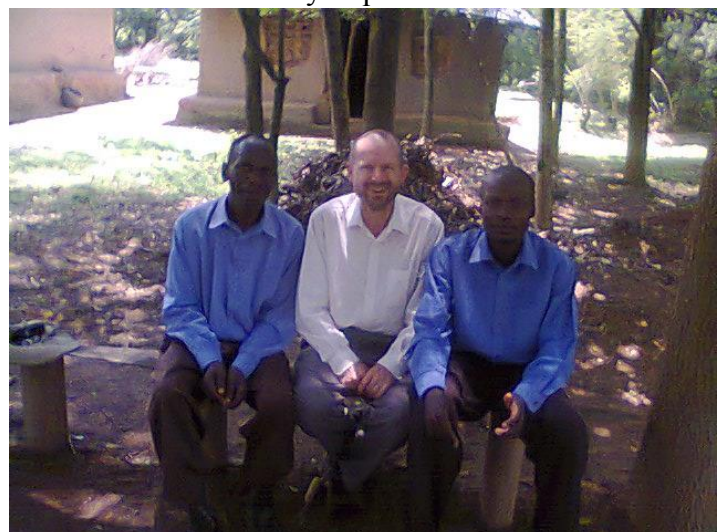
Now we are re-opening again. But, I don't know what to say. The issue is, it seems plain to me, in the language. My colleagues can and do indeed often express clear enthusiasm regarding their intentions re Bible study. Do I communicate those 'clear intentions' back to folks in the West, now that I know that I have learned again and again and again that they don't mean what 'we' might think they mean? That is;

people can express great enthusiasm for some projects, only for the same later to just fizzle out. So then; why express great enthusiasm for something that comes to have such a short life? I could make many conjectures in response to that question. In a sense though; I don't know. I only know that it happens. So what to report? Yes; we have a lot of people around interested in the anticipated opening of a bible class in my home village-area (and then hopefully other areas). It sometimes would seem; that for the bible classes to 'succeed' really requires a miracle of God!!



Luo Bible

Please let me know if you would like to receive more news from me over email. Or if you would like to receive a copy of our monthly free Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Bulletin. Or if you would like to join our very-active 'pearl' discussion group about vulnerable mission issues. Write to: jimoharries@gmail.com



With bible-class colleagues, Yala, Kenya