

Jim Harries News and Prayer Letter from Kenya

(Many of the pictures in this Journal are from my trip to Tanzania, that I made in July of this year)

You can't say this' n' that

One of my aims on coming to Africa, 29 years ago, was to be able to help the West to better understand African contexts. It seemed to me that there was a need for long-term workers who could get a good understanding, then to communicate. That seemed to be an important role. All I had to do, was to be careful that I was always honest, so that I not mislead people 'back at home', but tell them things as they are.

I have long wanted to write an autobiography, with the above aim in mind. But, I kept getting stuck! I kept getting stuck, because many of the things that were happening to me in my life, were things that one 'cannot say' in the West! What on earth should I do? Should someone just shut-up, only because people (in the West) don't want to hear the truth they are telling?

The above is a major reason why, instead of writing a biography, I decided to write a novel. In a novel, I can mix 'truth' with 'untruth', so give a message that is overall 'true' without having to say all the things that 'you can't say'. (The other plus with a novel – one can re-arrange things in a way that are exciting and keep the reader turning the pages!)

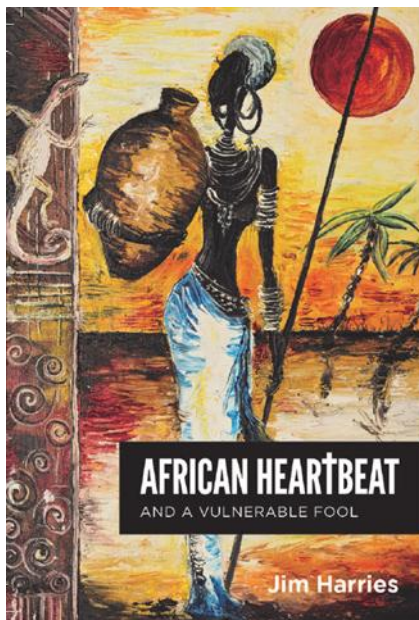
I wrote my first draft of the novel, being careful not to say things that one 'can't say'. That is – I was already aware that there are many things that are 'normal' in Africa, that one 'cannot say' in the West. I left them out. Still, having friends review my novel, and getting feedback from the publisher, I seem to be told again and again 'you can't say that, you can't say that, you can't say that ...'!

That does make me wonder. The West is VERY POWERFUL in Africa. Do they want to know the truth, or not? Are we in the West building such an effective screen around us, so that we only hear what we want to hear? What is the

point on being informed about another part of the world, if one only gets told what one wants to hear anyway? Are we in the West insisting on being blind ... ?

The same probably applies to us here in Kenya – there are things that here you ‘can’t say’ about the West. Isn’t life complicated! There are things that people don’t want to understand.

Here are details of the novel, soon to be released in the USA:



African Heartbeat and a Vulnerable Fool A Novel by Jim Harries

Can a white man thrive living as an African in an African village? Philo's adventure takes him to the fictional African country of Holima, where he is adopted by an African tribe. Should Philo follow Western wisdom, and cause problems by generous giving? Or can he convince Western people that a vulnerable approach is the best way to reach Africa? Jim Harries' Christian novel draws on his true-life experiences.

USA RELEASE 1 NOVEMBER 2017

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www.apostolos-publishing.com

REVIEW: "an eye-opener ... unlike anything I've read before ... an unusual story ... the social and cultural insights were full of interest and surprises."

Racism

I have recently been writing a lot about racism. This is because, I am realising more and more, how being against racism in the West (where ‘blacks’ are in a minority) is causing problems for us here (where blacks are in the majority). It is as if: the more the West tries to counter racism, by insisting that everyone is the same as a white person, the more they are making problems for us here!

I recently heard that a British MP was sacked for, once, using the word n..... That was, even though she said it as part of an idiom, ‘n..... in the woodpile’. Today, as I write, I have just cycled 10 miles, mostly along a main road. We have a word here, that is like n....., but refers to white people. It is *Mzungu*. I guesstimate that I have heard people call me that name 200 times over the 10 mile stretch that I cycled, that took me one hour. That is the times I have heard it. I saw other people’s lips say ‘*Mzungu*’ when they saw me, even though I couldn’t hear them. Children run back and fore shouting at me, people pointed, people laughed, grimaced, gave side-long glances at me – all because I am a white man.

One of the great ironies of the racism thing is – the norm that is assumed. In the UK, we try to treat foreigners as if they are ‘like us’, the white people whose

ancestors have lived in the UK way-back. You would have thought then, that to be ‘not-racist’ in Kenya, would be to treat everyone, including me the foreigner, ‘as-if’ I am a Kenyan. The reality though – it is not so! Instead, even here in Kenya, where Black people outnumber white people (in my area ...) probably 10,000 to 1 or more, officially to be ‘not-racist’ is still to take the norm as being a UK norm! Hence, legally, I must treat African people ‘as-if’ they are like British people. The government, education, and everything else runs ‘formally’ on that basis. It’s like the whole country is run for my benefit!!



Baptism on Lake Babati, Tanzania

on a bus in Tanzania



I hope people will excuse me for being concerned about racism, when I constantly find myself to be a victim of what the West is trying to do to counter racism. People in the West trying not to be 'racist' are, it seems to me, desperately trying to salvage secularism. For secularism to 'work', other people of other colours and from other parts of the world should become secular, and 'like us'. If they don't, well then we're in trouble! Jesus, however, didn't only say 'don't be racist,' but also 'love your enemy'. I interpret that as meaning 'be proactive'!



Signboard on my home church

The Best Missionaries are Slaves

I would not like to be a slave in my host community in Kenya. This especially - when I see how important is the link between money and human dignity. That is - if you don't have money - you'd better be ready to not be shown much dignity.



Outside the HQ of Church of God in Tanzania

That just begins to point to issues we face here. The flip-side to the above means - that if you are given respect, that is likely to be because you have money. But - what if you want to be respected for something that is not money, like for your faith in Christ?

When respect is very connected to money, one thing one can do is to refuse such respect. What do I mean by that? Not to manoeuvre for respectful positions. Even to try to avoid them. (As a foreign white person one has a pile of default-respect arising from the wealth of Europe and the reputation of white people for generosity. Thus one has a lot to live down.)

How to 'avoid respect'? Turn up (at a home, gathering, meeting, church) unexpectedly and without a vehicle. Don't give to fundraisings (in which givers are always known). Don't speak the global language. Live in poor housing in a place(s) where foreigners shouldn't live ...

If you are not respected, doesn't that mean though that the Gospel won't be respected? Well - that now depends on your life and your witness. Talk of the Gospel when you are rich and powerful, and you'll be heard telling people of ways to make money. Talk of love and hope in Christ when you are an abused slave - and people will think you are either mad, or truly inspired!



Diocesan Cathedral, Church of God, Mbulu, Tanzania

I am not slave to any African people. The support I get from the West keeps me free when here in Kenya. When I talk of the advisability for a missionary to be a slave, I do not talk from experience. I see it though - even if from a little distance. A missionary might really want to be a slave - if they have the guts. It's like an ideal to aspire to. A perfect position from which to talk about Jesus.

The Secular is Religious

On a shelf at the back of an African church, maths and other 'secular' books were on display. Why is this African church promoting secularism? Surely secularism threatens Christian belief?

The church can engage with secular society in various ways. I think in the UK, it accepts that secularism is 'out there', and most of our week, that's what we live by. Here in Kenya, secularism is more of an ideal that we aspire to, which often still seems a long way away. It seems to me that folks here don't see the clash between the secular and the Christian as we do.



Church of God, Fellowship, Singida, Tanzania.

Angela Merridale to Retire

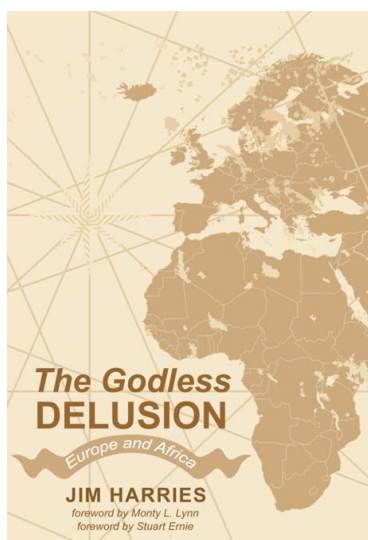


Angela Merridale volunteered to help me in typing and administrative matters, in response to an appeal made at Andover Baptist Church, twenty-odd years ago. She has ever since been incredibly helpful and incredibly faithful in helping me out in diverse ways! Especially, Angela has been collating and distributing news-shots, both for me personally and for the AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission). In addition she has been extremely helpful in typing my hand-written scrawl, thus facilitating its progression towards publication. She has been the first to see and read numerous of my articles and books through having faithfully typed first drafts!

Angela is now wanting to retire. Her retirement is contingent on our finding a replacement! Please volunteer to save her an ongoing grind when she's far too old to do this work! Volunteers please write to her for a job spec. (a.merridale@btinternet.com) and to Jim for an interview (jimoharries@gmail.com). Salary: negotiable, but out of this world. Seriously – please let me know if you would be willing and interested in picking up an administrative load.

Jim's latest book: *The Godless Delusion: Europe and Africa*

This book has just come out. It is available over [Amazon](https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1851967000) for as little as £7.68.



“What if the whole “God delusion” approach is a neo-colonial imposition at the linguistic and philosophical level? Could it lead to unmitigated disasters in intercultural communication and development work? This paradigm-challenging book points to the necessity, in light of contemporary impasse in intercultural understanding, of God’s involvement in the encounter between the West and the majority world, especially Africa. Failure to account for God, the cradle of imagination operative in human hearts and minds, has resulted in a black hole that deeply troubles intercultural engagement between the West and others. While drawing on his personal long-term field experience in Africa, the author cites contemporary scholarly western literature on philosophy, anthropology, ‘religion’, and beyond. Ironically the West, which values dualism, instead of seeking to share it with majority world people, wrongly presupposes its universality. A proactive compliance to the countering of ‘racism’, and to the demotion of impacts of human imagination to understanding, contribute to this. Effective education must be from

known to unknown, this text emphasizes. Enabling African people to build understanding on their own epistemological foundations might be more important than exporting of pre-packaged languages and educational systems from the West.”

“Jim Harries has some wonderfully illuminating stories to tell about how the Western world looks from Africa. Regardless of how far one may agree with Jim’s analyses of the issues at stake, we in the West need to hear these stories as we reflect on our own states of faith and disbelief.”

—RICHARD BRIGGS, St John’s College, Durham, United Kingdom

“Jim’s critique of anthropo-centric western theology is welcome, controversial, and born of deep personal insight. This may catalyze fruitful debate concerning the legitimacy of seeking to deny God’s existence by mere human belief. It is my prayer that his African insights, shaped by a sharp European academic mind, plus over two decades of living and serving as an African, might challenge us in the West to explore new realms in debates about God.”

—CLIVE G. BURNARD, Senior Pastor, Mutley Baptist Church, Plymouth, United Kingdom

“Harries never pulls punches. In this energetic work, he continues this tradition of taking on difficult issues in ways that may simultaneously please, surprise, and annoy you. He takes the reader on a dizzying journey through diverse issues including language, worldview, economics, racism, post-colonialism, perception and reality, and short-term missions. Intimate facility with African culture and language make the book especially helpful. Agree or disagree, Harries challenges us to thoughtful awareness of critical issues.”

—CHRISTOPHER FLANDERS, Abilene Christian University

Moving beyond post-colonial dependency: developing sustainability through vulnerability

sponsored by the **Alliance for Vulnerable Mission** (vulnerablemission.org)

Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, Pennsylvania, www.tsm.edu
 Wednesday 8th November 2017 registration at 5.00pm, finishing 12 noon on Saturday 11th November.
 Cost: \$270.00 conference and meals. Bed and breakfast separate. Discounts available for those attending part-time and/or students.

Speakers to include:

- Jean Johnson, Director, World Mission Associates.
- Dr. Stan Nussbaum, Global Mapping International.
- Rev. Canon Dr. John Macdonald, Trinity School for Ministry, PA.
- Dr. Jim Harries, Chair, Alliance for Vulnerable Mission.
- Fred and Carol Lewis, Worldview, Portland, OR.
- Peter Sholl, Director, MOCLAM, Monterrey, México.

'Emphasising the use of indigenous languages and resources as the norm for some intercultural workers.'
 We are looking for presenters of papers in other languages: Korean, Swahili, Spanish ...

Queries to: allyson@vulnerablemission.org or jmacdonald@tsm.edu (Details may still change. Registration open.)



Please tell your American friends about the above conference, to be held this November!

Vulnerable Mission Conference to be held at ANCC (All Nations Christian College), UK, in May-June 2018. Details still pending. Please keep the dates free in your diary: 31st May to 2nd June

Is it enough to be, or must one 'succeed'?

I am often reminded of Jesus' disciples' conversation after he had told them that he was about to be betrayed, and that his betrayal would lead to his death. While he was in his troubled agony, his disciples asked themselves 'which of us is the greatest?' (Luke 22:24).

Some things don't change. The above tendency, I think, continues to trouble many if not all of us, including many who are 'serving God'. "Am I worthy to serve God?" ... "Am I good enough to serve God?" ... "Is other people's use of their money justified to keep me in service?" ... These questions are not very different from the question; "am I the greatest?" When these questions come to me, then I want to shout out I AM NOT GOOD ENOUGH! That is something like the exclamation made by Moses (Exodus 4:10), and by Gideon (Judges 6:15), and by Paul (2 Cor. 12:9), ...



Couple I stayed with in 2015, outside their home

Things said at a recent fellowship I attended may be illustrative. We were about 20 folks in someone's sitting room. More were sat outside. This fellowship was of an indigenous church, that I frequently visit. I had cycled one and a half hours to get there. Was it 'worth it'?



Coptic Orthodox church up the hills of Mwanza, Tanzania.

Half way through our gathering, a lady who was leading our meeting stood up, and said something very telling: "I know you are all thrilled to be here, because we have a white man here," she exclaimed. I was startled out of my complacency. I often join that church in their fellowships. Hence I felt pretty 'normal'. To them though, I was not only 'not normal'. I also represented something very powerful, akin to god himself: white people. Many people were amazed, that there was a white man at their meeting! To them – it was as if I was 'great' ...

It so happens, that I do not believe that white people are any more like 'god' than are African people. I did not want to confirm their suspicions of how amazing I was, as if I had condescended in order to join their humble meeting. I wanted to point them from me, to Jesus. Were I to have had a super-articulate amazing life-changing message about Jesus to give them, that might have confirmed their suspicion that Jesus is 'one of us' white people, as if I was there to show them that I am 'great' (see Jesus' disciples above)!

How then to point people like those above to Jesus, and not to me, the white man?

1. Of course, I have to be genuine and honest.

2. I am not superman, and must not pretend to be so. Most of us preachers end up criticised. I need to be vulnerable to any criticism.

3. The key thing perhaps – I must keep going, even when the victim of criticism. That is; I must 'prove' that I am not there to prove that I am great! I am there because I love the people. That love comes from God. To show God's love is to fail, but carry on.

Jesus; who are you?

Jesus was having a meal. A woman walked in. She made a beeline for where Jesus was sitting. She sat at his feet. She was known to be a prostitute. She started wiping Jesus' feet with her hair! Any other man would have been thoroughly embarrassed. Jesus didn't flinch or discourage her.



Entrance to Coptic Mission, Nairobi



Jim's hedge, at his home in Kenya

Jesus' host, Simon, sniggered: "Now we know what kind of man Jesus is!" he was thinking. Jesus realised what he was thinking. Jesus however took a different tack. "Simon, two people have debts. Both are forgiven. Who will be the most thankful – the one who was forgiven a big debt or the one who was forgiven a small debt?" Simon thought, "what is this about?" Of course, we don't know just what Simon thought. It seems he made a connection: "what has forgiving debts got to do with this man Jesus? What has it to do with the prostitute? Why is he talking about forgiving people? Surely only God can forgive people! Who is this man called Jesus?"

Being the host, Simon politely answered: "the one who has been forgiven the biggest debt." Jesus nodded. Then he pointed at the women sitting at his feet. Before he had said anything else, I suspect, Simon couldn't believe it. After recounting someone being forgiven a big debt, Jesus pointed to the prostitute! "Does that mean," Simon asked himself, "that Jesus can forgive sins?" But Simon knew, "only God can forgive sins."¹ Moments later, Jesus spoke, "your sins are forgiven," he said to the woman. Simon almost fell over in shock. Jesus forgiving sins? "Jesus, who are you?" he asked himself, incredulously, (Luke 7:36-50).

Many people have ever since, been asking themselves that question: "Jesus who are you?" I seem to ask myself, or am I asking Jesus (?) all the time. What is amazing me – is that a growing throng of scientists in the Western world is asking really just that question!

It is quite funny, because one does not think that scientists will take interest in religion. This, though, is very serious: serious scientists are studying what Jesus is doing in people's lives! This study is growing, apparently exponentially! They are asking: "Jesus, who (or what) are you?" They are even starting to come up with answers. Amazing answers at that! These are exciting times!

¹ http://www.contemporarychristianity.net/resources/pdfs/Forgiveness_Paper_02.pdf

Western people have for centuries now been allowing scientists to "lead them by the nose." I don't mean that exactly negatively. Science has brought some wonderful insights. Science has revealed things that are scientific. What is new, is scientists using science to study the non-scientific part of people's lives.

(It might seem wrong to use science to study ways in which Jesus changes people's lives. I don't think it is though – if science is used to study everything else, then why not use it to study God? although – I do ask myself, is that still science, or is it science plus?)

Below are my planned dates and locations for my anticipated trip to the USA

Sep. 2017

- 15th Dallas, EMS (Evangelical Missiological Society) annual conference.
- 18th Vancouver, with friends, visiting seminaries / universities (?).
- 23rd Portland Oregon, with friends, visiting seminaries / universities.
- 30th Los Angeles, with friends and family, visiting seminaries / universities.

Oct. 2017

- 9th Oklahoma, visiting Christian University.
- 11th Abilene – Dallas, visiting Christian University.
- 16th Dallas – Bible Translation conference.
- 18th Dallas – Global Institute for Applied Linguistics.
- 21st Dallas, visiting family.
- 23rd Chicago, Moody Bible Institute.
- 27th Washington DC, visiting family.
- 30th Philadelphia, Eastern University.

Nov. 2017

- 3rd Visiting family.
- 7th Ambridge, PA, Anglican seminary, vulnerable mission conference.
- 12th Pennsylvania – visiting friends.
- 15th Indiana: Anderson University.

Furlough 2018

I am planning to have my regular 3-yearly furlough from May to July of 2018. I look forward to catching up with a lot of people in UK and Germany during that time.

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To: Western Kenya, working in the region of Yala/Maseno with some extended ministry to other parts of East Africa.
c/o Zion Harvest Mission, PO Box 932, Yala, 40610, Kenya
Chairman of AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission).
Professor of Religion, Global University
Email: jimoharries@gmail.com
www.jim-mission.org.uk
www.vulnerablemission.org

Council of Reference: Peter Stagg (Andover), Mike Thompson (York), Jean Johnson (Minnesota), Tim Reeves (Norwich), Rev. Dr. Steve Rennick (Indiana), Colin Morgan (Norwich).

Finance: Peter Stagg, 70 Turin Court, Roman Way, Andover SP10 5LD, UK
email: peterdavidstagg@yahoo.co.uk

Newsletter Distribution: Angela Merridale, 8 Northbrook Court, Northbrook Avenue, Winchester, Hants SO23 0JP, UK
Email: a.merridale@btinternet.com Tel: 01962 861231