

Urgent Need.

Due to the retirement of Angela Merridale, who has filled this role for 20 plus years, Jim is in need of a new administrative assistant to help him manage his communication and work with Europe, UK, USA and so on. Volunteers please get in touch with him at jim@vulnerablemission.org Needed before December 2018!

Dear Friends,

Please receive the latest Jim's Journal from me.

Jim

Going on a walk with my children and Philine and Raphael, and climbing rocks with them. (Many of my photos are over-exposed. That is, so that when I take a picture of African faces, they not be too dark)



Philine here at one of the indigenous churches that we visited.



We found a new style of eating oranges, so as to leave a beautiful star behind. Here's a challenge for you to do at home!



With Raphael and Philine in Mbulu in Tanzania
– in this picture the African faces did turn out too dark!



Near Mbulu in Tanzania, we were invited to a pre- wedding event. Here are a few pictures of the lively procession, accompanied by a very active choir, from the church to the home of the bride. This was the day before the actual wedding.



Raphael and Philine playing with children
Babati in Tanzania.



On safari, many of my animal pictures didn't turn out too great.



A few days later I was in Lebanon. I spent time there with Martin Bernhard, a long-term friend, who has worked there for the last 23 years. Some of these views extend to mount Hermon, the hill that Jesus is said to have climbed on which he experienced his transfiguration.



This is a draft of the front cover to my latest novel, that is due to come out in March next year. (The title may still change.)

This fast-paced, from the beginning, romance (of sorts) traces visits made by veteran missionary Philo in Holima, a fictional African country. Philo's accomplices, some actually his opponents, set out, motivated by a journalist who is determined to marry Philo, to discredit what he does. Despite set-backs, the intrepid team determine that they will follow Philo no-matter-what. Thus they encounter circumstances that would make any short-term mission team shudder ...

Revising the abused-woman thesis

It is often said in the West, that African women are some of the most abused and least powerful in the world. From my experience of parts of Africa in which I have lived, I sometimes think that thesis needs revising a little ...

Definitely, there are differences between the behaviour of African and Western women. One difference I notice, is that African women position themselves 'under men'. The resultant backing of men for what they do, empowers women, say in the churches. As a result, they end up enormous organisers and great leaders. I noticed on a visit to the UK recently, that not all UK women position themselves like this.

Are African women abused in their marriages? In the West, one hears of increasing numbers of men becoming disillusioned with marriage, and choosing instead to have relationships with other men. I don't think that leaves their wives (or ex-wives) very happy. One wonders – why are some men abandoning relationships with women? Perhaps Western women aren't so good at keeping men happy?

African women love men. Because an African woman likes to live with a man, she makes great efforts to keep her man with her, and to keep him happy. The same African woman wants to have children, which she can only have if she has a man, and she then wants that man to help her to rear those children! Even more reason to keep her man happy. African women also understand men pretty well. They know they don't like sitting in the kitchen and cooking, or washing clothes or dishes, so the women do that for them. This becomes the fortress from which women control the home. Men have delicate egos, so a wise African woman allows her husband his *prestige*.

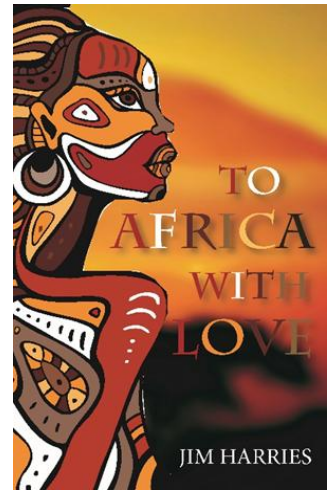
We certainly do not, in Africa, have many of the very close relationships that are idealised, and that some achieve, between a man and a woman in the West. I think there must be endless issues between men and women, husbands and wives, everywhere in the world. We have plenty of issues in the parts of Africa that I know of. But I don't know that we necessarily have a monopoly on oppression of women.

Many women realise that there must be a reason God has given them obstinate men to live with. If they can't live with a man and keep him happy, how can they claim to be Christians – to live with God and keep him happy? Their service to men overlaps with their service to God – rather a biblical precedent: "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man ..." (1 Cor. 11:3).

Some friends recently explained how they go about looking for wives for their sons and relatives. If they find that a girl's mother has too much to say in her home, then they will avoid that girl. They are looking for a girl who knows how to respect a man and leave him his space. I guess that's important for any girl to learn, if she wants a man to live with her to keep her happy, and then to give her and to help her to raise her children. ...

Lebanon Report

"Stop greeting Muslim women!" said my colleague. That was in Lebanon. He lived in a Christian village. A mile or so away was another village. That used to be a Christian village. Now it was a Muslim village. Emigration has shrunk the Christian population. That's how life seemed to be in Lebanon. Segregation according to religion was the norm. That seemed to make for quite distinct communities. That may not be entirely a bad thing – as Lebanon has remained peaceful, without civil war, despite the chaos in its immediate neighbour Syria.



As we walked around, the scene looked rather African; it was dry and bushy. “That’s Mount Hermon,” said my host. The top of that mountain is divided between Lebanon, Syria, and Israel. That sounds like a tinderbox. “That is believed to be the hill where Jesus’ transfiguration took place,” I was told. The hill was distant, but well in view – that was mind-blowing!

After visiting my friend, I went to attend a conference.

“Jim – this conference might not be for you,” a colleague had warned me months before. The reason – a major aim of the conference was how to understand patron/client cultures, so as to engage in mission while aware of one’s context. Most people there were missionaries to the Middle East or Asia. Out of 40 or so delegates, I was the only one from Africa! I think my contribution was appreciated though. “In Africa, the big patron controlling everything, is really the white man,” I said. I explained some of the negative implications of that.

While the conference itself was held in the Middle East, almost all the conference-goers were Westerners. It being in Lebanon made it relatively easy for me to get there – Lebanon isn’t so far from Kenya, so was relatively cheap to fly to. A big plus of conferences is of course always meeting people. I hope that some of the friendships I formed will boost our next UK conference – intended to be held in December of next year.

One of the most incredible experiences of my trip, was the realisation that, on the plane to Lebanon from Ethiopia, women seemed to outnumber men about 40 to 1! At first I didn’t understand. I thought it must be a large school-girls’ outing. Then someone explained – they were going to the Arab world to work as maids! Later my friend called that a kind of slavery. Once in an Arab person’s home, those girls would have had very little freedom. They would be paid well below the local rate in Lebanon. Walking around Lebanon later, I saw a number of them working outside their host-houses. Flying back to Ethiopia, tears of emotion filled my eyes. Again, a plane almost full of girls. Just before we touched down, they started clapping. Then they started singing, together, a few hundred girls, rejoicing at getting back home!

Cousin Visit

I am grateful for Philine and Raphael’s visit, spending over 2-weeks with me, back in September. When we were on safari, our guide apparently asked my cousin Philine if I was her dad. That gives you an idea of their ages! One of the big challenges for me was often to have four languages on the go simultaneously: German, English, Luo, Swahili. I guess because I am not used to mixing in German with those other languages, that overstretched my poor little brain! It was a first for me, to take visitors to a part of Tanzania in which I had often travelled and spent time, parts of Manyara Province. Hence I could introduce German relatives to some of my Tanzanian friends and ex-students. I think that Philine and Raphael had a memorable, as well as enjoyable, time.

Thai Language

A colleague (Dr. Chris Flanders) presenting his paper at the conference in Lebanon, about Thailand, caused me some thought. He has previously spent many years church-planting in Thailand. Now he had done further research, and was reflecting on that research.

An array of strangely written words he told us about that he pronounced in an even more funny way, were evidently Thai terms for this and that. His detailed knowledge of the words concerned enabled him to explain ways in which Thai people understood things like money, and how to get it. His explanations were intricate, with ‘*ahaa*’ moments scattered liberally. He caused us to realise complex things in Thai culture that I imagine most of us had never really thought of before!

Then my mind went to Africa. I realised that the people I live with had no contact with the West until just 100 or so years ago. Their way of understanding things is vastly different to that of modern English speakers. Probably, it is even more extra-ordinary than that of Thailand. But, in Africa, such things are usually totally concealed, and revealing them is close to *illegal*. They are concealed because almost no-one in the scholarly-world listens to African

people in their own languages. They listen to them in English. English terms are simply taken as accurate translations of African originals. To suggest to the contrary is considered to be racist, so few would dare ...

Making Money by Giving Money

Businesses in the West generally make money by ensuring that total income from sales is higher than money used achieving those sales. Then something called a 'profit margin' emerges.

This is not the basis for much business in Africa. Instead in parts of Africa, one endeavours to give things away, strategically. One can give, and give, and give, until one has nothing left – or even less than that ... ! That giving is putting a debt onto the recipient in the 'mystical world'. That debt exerts pressure on the 'mystical world', until one eventually gets payback. It is believed that investment into the 'mystical world' should result in more payback than one had extended.

The above 'mystical world' can be explained, somewhat. It is rooted in the fact that a gift always sets up some kind of obligation for return. "There's no such thing as a free lunch" says British English. "Somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good" said Julie Andrews (the Sound of Music, 1965). Everyone's folklore believes this. In Africa its like we take it to another level – give and you must receive! In Christian churches, the same is often articulated as 'plant a seed'. Then the 'mystical force' is God.

African people can be said to be 'always at work'. That is to say – that search for prosperity that operates by 'planting seeds' never ends. It means that giving is always in anticipation of return. All relationships are a part of the desire for gain. That is the 'mystical way'.

The Friends' Jam

The conference I recently attended sharpened my understanding of patriarchy. By that I mean, for purposes of this discussion, that all of life may involve means either of acquiring resources, or giving resources in exchange for praise. I had to realise that this is very dominant in African people's ways of life.

This is challenging in many ways. One is, because it runs at cross-purposes with Western ways of operating. We in the West confine communication for money to a professional sphere. We Christians consider relationship and 'spiritual' to be somehow better-than things people do for money or prestige only. That distinction can be hard to find in Africa.

The above makes it very hard to make friends, basically because in the light of the above, what we in the West know as 'friends' and 'friendship' does not really exist. Friendship can be pointless unless there's an agenda!

The above puts white people in Africa into a real pickle. Everyone wants to be your friend – except wealthy people who already have enough resources, who might not care. Whenever you as a white foreigner are seen with so-and-so, it is assumed that she/he is after your money.

It is really as simple as saying: because there is no category like 'friend' in much of Africa, one cannot make a friend. One can only enter into a relationship of 'someone-wants'. Even in a church – one doesn't always have 'friends,' but people either looking for prestige, or for help. This is the context into which a missionary to Africa seeks to share the love of Christ. (Except of course, there is no category 'love' in the language or culture of the people. Such a category has to be demonstrated to people before they can know it.)

A Terrifying Truth

Back in June, I visited a pastor friend. I found he had a few visitors at home. They were engaging in a conversation. There was a man, a neighbour, who was a family member. Sitting alongside him was a lady who I did not know. After a while, the lady carried on where she had evidently left off before I had arrived, telling about herself and her history. I was offered some food. That included chicken. "Oh!" I thought. "Whatever else is going on, this is some critical discussion that it was hoped would lead to some kind of covenant, hence the blood shed (of the chicken) for the occasion."

After I had eaten, my colleague encouraged me to walk with him from his home. We could not really talk in the house, as the other discussion was continuing. Hence the idea was that I could talk with him on whatever issue might have brought me on the visit. He explained what was going on in his house. His visiting neighbour was a widower. He had lived alone for many years. Now his house was in such a state of disrepair, that he needed to build a new one. According to custom though, a man should not build a new house, unless he has a wife. The lady was being interviewed re. her suitability for that 'wife' position.

The mind boggles – that one needs to get a wife as a necessary pre-cursor to building a house. Was the desire to build a new house an excuse for what he really wanted – a wife? What was the nature of the interview? These are Christian people – so why should they be bound to follow such ancient traditions? Did they follow them through fear of the consequences of not doing so, blindly, because they *liked* the old rule, or what? How did this fit in with their other Christian beliefs?

I have lived in this community for 25 years. In those years, I have frequently pleaded with people (or asked) local people to write about their lives, in their own language. They often *say* yes, but then never do it. If they write anything, it is in English, and it is an imitation of what white people write. Why? The reason is clear, and becoming clearer: they fear the embarrassment of writing the truth about themselves. Doing so brought the risk of being mocked all round. Perhaps worst of all: telling the truth might interfere with foreign funding. Better hide the truth.

Who is creating this destructive context for Africa, which condemns the truth? And supposedly the press is 'free'? While the above continues, reporting on and scholarship on Africa can be little more than a mockery ... Why then the occlusion of truth? Basically because foreign donors act from ignorance and give differentially according to who appears-to-be the most Western.

Closely related to this is, secular belief, that secularism is a kind of 'natural default' achieved by people who do not buy into any religion. Actually secularism is a sub-sect of Christianity. But, secularists don't want to admit that. Learning the truth about African tradition would upset their carefully loaded applecart, as it would imply that to be secular is something one has to learn 'religiously'.

An African Story

We have a dearth of Christian novels in Swahili, I think. There are a few around, that touch Christian themes. There's very little that engages seriously with the Gospel. Many novels are pretty much secular, surprisingly enough. Some slant towards Islam.

For many years, I've been encouraging local colleagues to write things in African languages. My success rate, in 25 years, is 1. That incredible text about dreams and visions was written by a man who's a member of a sect that is barely Christian. He had nothing to lose by writing the truth as he saw it. Others, it seems, fear that if they wrote honestly in African languages, then the international church might condemn them (should what they write ever be translated into English).

It seems, truth be told, that few self-respecting African people will write honestly about themselves. If they do write, they imitate what white people might have written. Hence the above novelists write what appear to be secular novels. The very few who are inclined to write in their own languages, imitate things already said and written in English.

So, should I write things in Swahili or Luo? I could write things, that would clearly be translations from English. They wouldn't of course be the best translations either – as I am a native speaker of neither Luo nor Swahili. When I try to write as an African, I get stuck, then I realise, that I don't know how my African colleagues think.

One could say that – how Africans think, is the world's best kept secret. Should one verge on discovering it, one meets a barrage of criticism. Those who criticise are those who do not want to allow even a tiny wedge to appear between Western and African thinking. To allow it would seem to be to inscribe 'racism' in stone.

Not being permitted to express the truth, what is actually going on in people's hearts, mean what is heard by the West about Africa, is always less than the truth, or untruth.

Future Months

November is school-exam month here in Kenya. I have two children doing final exams: one is to complete primary school, and the other is to complete secondary school. Please pray for them.

I have recently received an invitation to teach the Luo language to a group of German missionaries who are living and running various projects across the lake from my home. I could apparently have 10 or more students, for up to a week, in mid-November. It is amazing how knowing German is opening numerous doors to ministry.

God-willing, I will be travelling back to Tanzania at the start of January. Many of my one-time students are part of the Church of God there. I have been asked to do some teaching at the bible school. I hope to be there for up to 6 weeks, before heading back home to Kenya.

Please pray for a possible trip to Ethiopia come April or May. ...This is still an unformed plan.

Furlough 2019

I am planning, God willing, to be in Europe for up to seven weeks near the end of next year. That will include time visiting supporting churches, probably in Andover, Norwich, York. We also plan to have a conference in December 2019, to be held at All Nations College.

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<http://www.andoverbaptist.org.uk/content/view/14/14/>

To: Western Kenya, working in the region of Yala/Maseno with some extended ministry to other parts of East Africa.

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