

# Jim's Journal – July 2019

**Dear Friends,**

I hope you enjoy reading my July 2019 Jim's Journal.

This Jim's Journal is shorter than others have been. Some of the content is repeated. As usual, I have included less photographs than other missionaries might have done. Especially of my home, and friends from home. This is for various reasons, but especially as if one takes photos, people tend to think one will use them to prove how needy is the community one is working with, so as to raise more funds. I don't take many photos, as I do not want that reputation.

As I write, I am on my way from Nairobi to Lusaka. Tomorrow or Wednesday, I am to travel on to the region I lived in from 1988-1991. My hope is that I can recover the language (that I have not used for 28 years!), and make a contribution to the bible college I will be staying at, that teaches using that language.

I seem to be constantly writing other things ... so have put less effort into Jims Journal this time around!

Best wishes,

Jim

- **Church-Police**

I had not visited many branches of this denomination for a few years. That's because they're a pretty crazy bunch. Yet, it seemed wrong to respond to their scare-tactics by ignoring them. So, on Sunday I set out to visit their church.

Approaching the gate to the church, there were two heavily clad (in bright robes) people, a man and a woman, giving people their first-level clearance. A lady was on her knees being whisked with the tail of a cow, for purposes of demon removal. I move to the other side of the gate. "Remove your shoes!" I am ordered. Between me and the church is 50 yards of 'suspect' ground, perhaps with nails, glass, and who knows what hidden in the grass, that could do damage to my delicate soft (white) feet. "Can't I remove them and leave them at the door of the church?" I ask. "No. Shoes have to be left at the gate!" was the response.

I removed my shoes, leaving them in the grass, amongst the general mass of shoes left by others. I proceeded to move towards the church building, surveying the scene. A friend of mine had lived at the church for years. He had been sick, then he had been told that the only way to stop the demons getting

back to him, was not to leave the church compound. I'm not sure how many years he lived there. Certainly more than 10. As he lived there, he could help with compound maintenance. I asked if he is still around. "No", I was told. So, no friendly face to welcome me.

A few yards to my left a man in long robes with a Rastafarian-style head was busy cleansing other worshippers as they approached the church. I avoided looking at him, as eye contact was certain to result in his drawing me into his ritual. He approached me anyway. "You have to follow the procedure agreed upon by the leaders," he told me. Fortunately I was aware that *askaris* as we say here, church-police one could call them, tend to take the law into their own hands. Once I submitted ... I couldn't know how long he'd end up beating me with his cow's tail as I knelt in the mud. I objected to his suggestion. He persisted. "You must follow the procedure" he told me. "Are you going to grab me and force me?" I asked him. "No," he said (thankfully)! After some back-and-fore, he told me that if I wasn't ready for the procedure, then I was not to be allowed to enter the church building. I'd have to stand outside during the worship ...

His having told me he wouldn't actually grab me and force me to kneel and be cleansed, gave me the courage to walk past him nearer to the church. All around people were gawping; "what's a white man doing here ... ?" This church was established for black people. They don't say 'whites not welcome', as they don't expect whites to show up anyway. The fact that it was established especially for black Africans says something ... Standing alongside the doorway to the church, I saw that the service was about to start, which someone there confirmed. A lady came along, who did not know that I had received a black mark – 'unclean, not to enter the church building'. "Welcome in," she said. I followed her, and stood in my place. (There are no seats in this church.)

Apart from pictures of the church's (deceased) African founders, much that goes on faithfully follows Vatican I procedure. (So I am told. I am not an expert on Catholic liturgies.) We stand, kneel, sit, intermittently, as the priest and altar boys perform the mass. The priest knows me from when I last attended the church (I think well over 5 years ago), so he's not over-alarmed at my presence. The church-police, five or six robed young men with differently sized Rastafarian hair-does ranging from medium to enormous, sat behind me at the rear of the church, coming to the front in the end only to receive the mass. After the end of the liturgy, I am given opportunity to share with the congregation. I tell them from Luke 19, the story of Zacchaeus, how Jesus went out of his way to be hosted by a terrible sinner, spurning the 'good' people of the town, so that in the same way a church should welcome sinners.

After my teaching, a girl, apparently new, was given opportunity to share. I think the priest expected her to tell how glad she was to be at this church. Instead she castigated the church-police for harrying her because she wore socks and flip-flops! That is because she has a problem with her feet, she explained. The congregation laughed at her in embarrassment. This is a church at which 'rough young men' not only are welcome, but they are also given a 'role'.

I was privileged to speak to the congregation. I guess there were about 150 adults present. Attending a church for black people, I also consider an important gesture. Not bowing in fear of the church-police, I think is important. I put on my shoes, and went to sit with the priest in his hut. We chatted, and I even received a light lunch ...

- **Report on Children in my Home in Kenya (2019)**

I currently have 12 children staying with me in my home in Kenya, as below:

Christine, aged 21, recently attended Bible College in Tanzania for 3 months, now working full time in an office locally.

Michael, aged 17, over-much attacked by malaria, but has become a bit of a football star, as well as being a star at playing with younger children.

Laura, aged 16, now at secondary school, a quiet girl, the kind of person you really need around when there's a lot of house-work to be done.

Andrew, aged 17, meeting the kinds of conflicting objectives that young people do, and beginning to make wise decisions arising from experience in 'real life'.

Paul, aged 15, has grown a lot taller in the last year, which was good as he seemed to be delayed in doing so. Very concentrated in his desire to live an upright life.

Alison, aged 16, gentle and helpful, and of course as all girls, concerned for her appearance.

Yvonne, aged 11, has grown a lot physically, and her mind is gradually catching up to say she isn't so small any more.

Dusty, aged 11, declared intention to in the future join the army ... although not yet aware of that would entail.

Diana, aged 14, has become much more moderate in her behaviour; a good sign for an intelligent girl.

Franciska, aged 11, being the youngest amongst the girls perhaps privileges her to have less chores to do than would have otherwise been the case.

David, aged 13, has struggled in school, but is nowadays revealing he has a smart mind as well as a helpful character.

Simeon, aged 12, a serious boy, just joined us this year, and fitting in well with the rest of the family.

*False names used throughout.*

- **Ethiopia Report**

Because some people do not receive my twice-weekly news, I have included my Ethiopia report, written in March this year, here. I taught trainee missionaries in Ethiopia for 2 weeks near the end of March.



Thanks for your prayers for me as I minister in Ethiopia. I am due to return to Kenya on 2nd April. My thanks also

to SIMEthiopia who have opened the door for me to teach here for two weeks. I am very grateful for the opportunity.

I am at a missionary training school run by a denomination originally planted by SIM missionaries, called *K(h)ale Heywet (Word of Faith)*, about 8 hours south-west of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. The school has about 26 students in all. I have 13 in my class. They are doing an undergraduate degree in missions. Some of them already have experience of doing missionary work in various obscure parts of Ethiopia. Now they are doing their formal training to enable them to go further afield. They are to be sent outside of Ethiopia.



As to why I am teaching them . . . Instead of using their own languages, it is English that gets rising prominence in the Higher Education sector. I really am wondering . . . here in the middle of a place where English men have rarely trod, but the future seems to be about knowing English!! That's why they value having me here. I can speak English, like a native! When I talk to our students, they just look at me blankly . . . not understanding often it seems a word. That seems not to matter too much. They

hope they will learn.

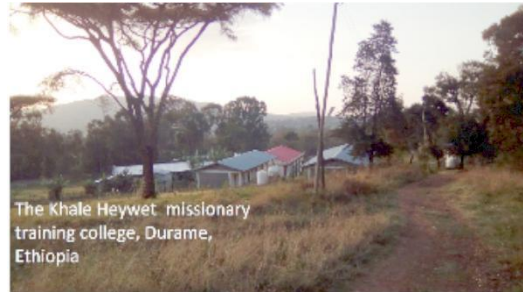
It is a great privilege to be a small part of this frontier missionary training college. It is very strange though, that deep in the heart of Ethiopia all that people now really want is English. Almost the first thing my host told me when he came to meet me at the airport in Addis Ababa was; "the trouble with Ethiopia is, that we were never colonised." Not much later – "do you know that Ethiopia is one of the very poorest countries in the world . . ."

Unfortunately, teaching being in English severely limits our cultural relevance. Our students won't pass exams using Ethiopian English, yet they won't be culturally relevant using American English! In a way, the students don't care. It is hard for anyone to accept you as an international missionary if you don't know English, they tell me!



To see a video of my class in action (with guest-speakers. I am the one taking a video. I invited the speakers to talk to my class.) see [here](#) (not particularly exciting).

The college is about 2 1/2 miles from the town of Durame. Most days so far I have either walked to Durame, or up the hill behind the college. We have dusty roads filled with all sorts of traffic, including endless donkey carts and horse carriages! Eventually on 23rd March I had a chance for a ride in a carriage. The 2 1/2 mile ride cost me 20p. Here are pictures of the horse and carriage concerned. (If anyone wants it for their wedding, I am sure there won't be a problem.)



Realising that there were so many horses and donkeys around, I asked my colleague whether they ate them. "No," was the response. So, "what do you do with dead donkeys?" I added. (I was aware that in many African contexts, one does not eat an animal that has helped one to do work and so in a sense become part of the family!) I couldn't imagine people taking the trouble to bury dead donkeys. "We throw them out for hyenas to eat," said my colleague, without batting an eyelid. So, in this part of Ethiopia, you hear donkeys and horses braying and neighing during the day, and hyenas laughing at night.

One of my plans in this trip to Ethiopia, was to further explore the *Ethiopian Orthodox Church* (EOC). (I had a brief period of research in 2001, then confined to the capital city.) This is a daughter church to the Coptic Orthodox of Egypt. Its prosperity, growth, and thriving over hundreds of years, pretty much cut off from other churches by Islam, has been an amazing story.



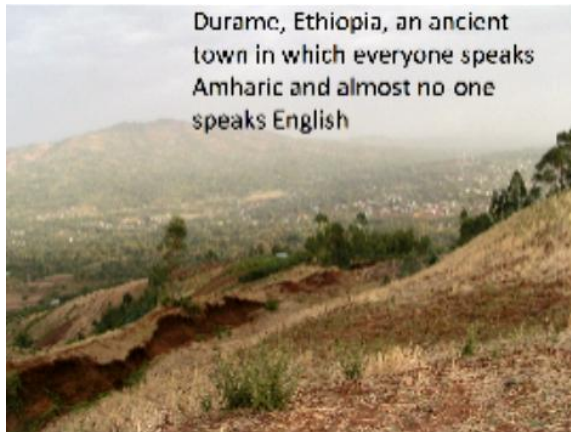
The EOC has made Ethiopia what it is today. At the same time, I am aware that many Protestants do not consider members of EOC to be Christian. Ironically, they can associate them more with Muslims! I heard in 2001: that EOC believers find they have more in common with Muslims than with Protestant Christians!



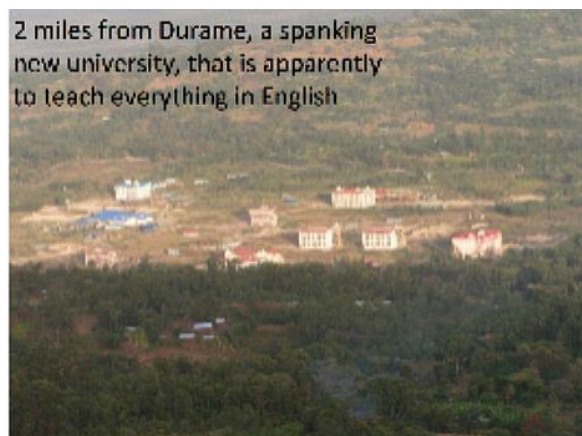
My influence over 2 weeks is obviously limited. I have encouraged students here who are training to be missionaries to try to build relationships with the EOC, rather than only to see them as a source of converts to Protestantism. Sunday 24th March I was joined by a student to visit the local EOC, just two miles away, his first time ever to attend EOC. There was a big throng attending the church. It is probably correct to say, that it

is a very 'pre-reformation' church. They proclaim the word, but are not pro-active in encouraging personal study of the Bible.

Very few church members actually entered the church. Most of the church service was broadcast from inside the church, as church goers stood outside listening and singing (chanting) along. Only at the end did the congregation sit outside the church. Then the fathers emerged and led us in announcements, singing, and a sermon. Almost everyone wore a white shawl, the women using it to cover their heads, while the men wore it around their shoulders.



This is where the world has gone mad! On the left is a view of Durame town in Ethiopia, where I was recently teaching missions. On the right is the site of a spanking new university, built no doubt by donor money, 2 miles or so from Durame. Everyone in Durame speaks Amharic. My experience tells me that almost no-one speaks English (even at a tourist hotel, none of the staff could speak to me even in broken English.) Now the language for teaching at the university is to be English! This is amazing! About 80 years ago the Italians invaded Ethiopia, and held it for five years, then they were routed. Now, without firing a gun, England is going to totally dominate Ethiopia, using global money. (I am not very knowledgeable about Ethiopia, but I am struck by the above contrast!)



Many thanks again to my hosts here in Ethiopia!

- I have here included a review by Eddie Arthur of my 2016 book, entitled ‘New Foundations for Appreciating Africa’, found [here](#).

### Books I Have Read: New Foundations for Appreciating Africa



Jim Harries is a prolific writer and thinker on mission issues. While I don't always agree with everything he writes, I believe that he makes valuable contribution in a number of areas and that his work should be more widely read than it is. [New Foundations for Appreciating Africa](#), Jim's latest book is possibly his least accessible work, but it is probably the most important thing he has put into print.

[New Foundations for Appreciating Africa](#) is a large format paperback, just over a hundred pages long with extensive footnotes and a good reference section. It costs a little over £12 if you buy it from Amazon or you can download a pdf for free [here](#).

At the heart of this book is one simple concept; the Western world has pushed religion and the supernatural so far to the margins of our society and thought, that our world view (even that of Christians) is essentially secular. However, Africans live in a world where secularism has not triumphed and they are very aware of a spiritual dimension to life. This means that Westerners, including missionaries are ill-equipped to discuss important issues in an African context. Even the language that missionaries use and fundamental concepts such as religion do not adequately describe the situation or communicate within the African world-view.

Jim develops this central idea carefully and in detail and goes on to explore how it impacts relations between the Africa and the West in some detail. As I mentioned above, this is not a particularly accessible book, it needs to be read closely and carefully and I found myself having to read some paragraphs a couple of times to make sure I was following. This is not a complaint; some books are by their nature complex and need to be read slowly.

This is an important book and deserves to be widely read. Among other things, it provides an academic underpinning to some of Jim's more popular works on vulnerable mission (see [here](#) and [here](#), for reviews). The book's argument is worked out against the background of Luo and Swahili speaking East Africa, however, I think that the implications are much broader. The Enlightenment settlement which marginalised the spiritual world in the West is breaking

down and the categories and language that worked well in modernism need to be rethought as we move into a post-modern, post-Christian, post-everything world. Evangelists working in British cities might benefit just as much from this book as its intended audience of cross-cultural mission workers and thinkers.

Who should read this book? It's relatively short, but it is dense and it does take a time to work through. If, for whatever reason, you are not up to having your thinking stretched, you should probably avoid it. That being said, anyone who has read Jim's other works, would be well advised to get hold of this as would anyone working in the field of mission anthropology. It certainly should be on the reading list for any undergraduate curriculum in cross-cultural communication and those with a more general interest in philosophy and apologetics would appreciate it, too.

A quote from the introduction, to close:

*African people are not "blank slates" waiting to be written on by Westerners. That is why for Westerners to begin to grasp the impact of what they say and do in Africa requires a profound knowledge of what is already there. The new will not simply displace the old. The new will engage the old. Recognition of the "African world" is a pressing necessity. Secularism, because it easily regards traditional african beliefs as bunkum, is totally incapable of it. Secularism cannot engage what it perfunctorily disregards. Because European languages are these days deeply secular, such recognition requires the use of distinct languages (a different language in Africa as against in the West) an so an introduction of a process of translation to adjudicate communication between the West and Africa.*

*Disclaimer; I was provided with a copy of this book free of charge by the author in exchange for this review. Nevertheless I have attempted to write a fair and unbiased way; if I thought it was a stinker, I'd have said so.*

**My new novels**, as below, plus other books, are available from Amazon [here](#).

