



Break time at the annual conference of my home church, Kenya, August 2019.

Welcome to this latest *Jim's Journal*. I hope you enjoy the read.

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The 'change agent'

While in Zambia, I found myself talking to a young man. Some-how we got to the topic of what he does. "I am a change agent" he told me. (In Zambia outside of my skeletal Kikaonde I do not have the privilege of talking to people in African languages, so apart from a few Kaonde phrases, I was talking to him in English.)

That statement really struck me. I didn't ask him for more details on just what kind of 'change agent' he was, what it was he was trying to change, or what to. In my experience, asking a lot of such questions is not necessarily helpful. What struck me though, was the contemporariness of the English term that he used; 'change agent'.

The general attitude of the West to Africa came to mind. Many Westerners, in my understanding, perceive of a lot of things in Africa that really should change. When Westerners are encouraging Africans to change, it goes without saying that they should change so as to be more like Westerners! The West had the same attitude to the Arab world when they had their crises a few years ago. The West considers itself as leading, and others as following.



Here now was this young man living amongst his own people in a very rural part of Zambia. He was employed as a 'change agent'. The title to his role being given to him in English implied that he was expected to make Zambian people more Western. The question then though is; how could he do that, and he himself is Zambian? How does he know what 'the West' is in the first place? How, and also why, is he expected to have become an 'outsider' to his own people (using English, inspired by the West) to Westernise (change) them?

The answer that I would get to that question in formal circles is clearly; education. In the bad-old colonial days, a British officer would himself address people on how they should change, perhaps even in their own language. Nowadays more likely the West trains trainers to train others on how to bring change. Actually, we could say now, that we are training people to train those who will train others on how to bring change. So let's count those: train someone to train someone to train someone to train someone to tell people how to change. Something like that. I guess my reader has heard of Chinese whispers. I ask: how do we know that Chinese whispers might not be happening in the above scenario?

Actually, to say 'Chinese whispers' is to understate. Chinese whispers can be played by people of their own culture. Say a circle of Brits, perhaps with one or two foreigners thrown in, whispering round in a ring. What about though, whispering something to people who have never set foot in Britain? How can we be at all sure that what we want gets to the end of the chain?

Perhaps getting what we say to the end of the chain is the wrong concern. Perhaps instead what is said needs to be 'contextualised'. On that basis the originators, us, needn't necessarily expect to comprehend what is being said at the end of the chain. Perhaps we should expect to not comprehend it!

In practice there are a few options. Keep checking on what's being taught to make sure it is still familiar, that's one option. Then to have to accept that one does not know how this content is being received by the people whose culture you don't understand. Alternatively, to not keep checking on what's being taught, in which case contextualisation has occurred, but then how do we know that what's being taught is the kind of thing that we even want to be taught? Maybe what are being taught are exactly, as far as we are concerned, the 'wrong' kinds of changes! Now actually it gets even more complicated. For example – what if the person who is teaching is telling us that he is saying or doing one thing, when it is something else that is actually happening? After all, even though the young man I spoke to went to school, he remains a member of his ethnic group. He may well value the way they have done things traditionally more than the Western way ... but why refuse to be paid to be a 'change agent'?

Ironically, the above two things, can in due course be considered to be the same. That is to say, that the idea that a Westerner has as to how Africans should change can become 'the same' as the ways in which African people themselves, presumably including my friend above, think that they should change. I don't mean that it *actually* becomes the same, as I have illustrated above that such is very unlikely, if not impossible. Yet, the two things can, as I wrote at the start of this paragraph, be *considered to be the same*. The two are often considered, after all, to be translations of one another.



The latter assumption, that things that are different are the same, is a puzzling component of cross-cultural work that many either don't see, or don't want to see, or don't want to acknowledge. I recently came across a college in Africa. In that college, I was told, that either an African language or English can be used in the teaching. Sometimes there is translation between the two. On other occasions, students are expected to understand without translation. On

hearing this, my mind went into a bit of a spin; how can that be? How can someone translate from English into that language (say it is called Amharic) or the other way around? In fact, implicit in the assumption that one can translate, is the foundational notion that what is going on is not actually inter-cultural. The assumption is of sameness. This means in effect, that for English to be translatable into Amharic requires the person teaching in English to be teaching as would an Amharic person. In this case, what an English person has in mind that should be happening may not be happening at all. Or, alternatively, the Amharic could be that of English, in which case students would, in order to understand, have to know a lot about England.

A further implication of this relates to the legitimacy of the practice of whatever teacher is there. An African person could legitimately use and be understood through English taught to Amharic students. This is because their English would follow Amharic (Ethiopian) logic. But what of an outsider, like a Brit? Their teaching in English would be totally different from the Ethiopian teaching using English! It would constantly be clashing with and indecipherable to the local African. In order to be able to make themselves understood in English, a Brit would have to first learn Amharic and how it is used in Ethiopia. But then, if he has gone to the trouble of learning Amharic, then why use English? In fact, use of English comes to be an unnecessary task bereft of benefit.

If use of English is unnecessary and bereft of benefit, then why is it so widely used in Africa today? I suggest an important reason for this is, because people in the powerful West do not know that it is

bereft! It is that their ignorance, and maybe only that their ignorance, that keeps English being taught and used.

So, what change exactly was my friend, the change agent, bringing to his people? I could say I don't have a clue. Yet, as a result of learning three African languages, I do have a clue. But maybe that is all.



Perhaps that's why, when given an assignment to teach African people in English, I desperately try to learn their language, because I want to know what it is that I am teaching.

Is Education a time-bomb?

People's faith in Western education is, it seems to me, in parts of Anglophone Africa with which I am familiar, high and rising. Time and time again people tell me about the great personal sacrifices they are making so as to get their children into university. They take it that by those means they are preparing their own future generations for the most prosperous way of life.

Sometimes this makes me jittery: what if people's hopes are not fulfilled? OK, in some individual cases they will clearly not be fulfilled. But, what if *generally* they come to be not-fulfilled? What if all that money invested into taking children into the university system, draws a blank, so to speak? Where will people turn next?

What makes this scenario particularly jittery for me, is my realisation that fulfilment of those hopes depends on subsidy from the West. The sector that employs people at graduate-skill-levels is in much of Africa not indigenously run. It has been initiated from, and is led by expertise, and powered by money, from outside of the continent. This means in effect that young people going to great lengths to go to university in Africa, is their going to great lengths to get a foothold on the Western ship.

Let me restate that using different terms: African people believe in YOU, where YOU is anyone reading this who is a White Westerner living in Europe or in America. People throughout the continent are investing in YOU. Often churches are involved in education. Even churches promoting advanced education in Africa are also investing in YOU.

Silence by people in the West regarding education in Africa today amounts to accepting responsibility for the future of the continent. African people are using our languages after all. That responsibility is not for a year or two, or even one hundred. Until things change, that implicit acceptance that the West will look after Africa, is ongoing.

Holding Out

I increasingly see the Gospel of Christ rather as a river increasingly in flood, and the secular West as desperate to put up defences to it. The West wants to save itself from the severe embarrassment of the destruction of what it has been trying to build for decades that would be necessitated should their people realise, again, the truth of the Gospel of Christ. The West's flood-defences increasingly depend on lies and distortions of truth.

The way the defences are being breached is most closely concealed to people within the West, who are subject to active hoodwinking by their own governments. I believe that as Christians and as churches, we need to be ready for the floodwaters to spill into our lands. They will be such that much practice in the churches will not be able to continue as it has been since our grandparents' time. The level of challenge to existing structures will be massive. Totally new approaches may be needed. These include focus on interdenominational cooperation, and a putting aside of conflicts that have arisen not from contrasting understandings of the bible as such, but from the application of modernist philosophy that are going out of the window, to the bible: the Gospel is greater both than our denominational histories and our ingrown conflicts!

What the West stands to lose when it realises the truth of the Gospel is enormous! In short; 100+ years' worth of scholarship, to be severely undermined. Books soon to be put into storage! Total disruption to the global educational system. Conflicts that have been put on ice re-opened. ...

Phenomenal

"Njoni, mtazame mtu aliyeniambia mambo yote niliyoyatenda" are the words of the Samaritan woman in John 4:29. (English; look, see the person who has told me everything I have ever done.) I have felt, recently, a bit, or maybe a lot, like that Samaritan woman.

I am speaking of the revelations made, about Jesus Christ's words, by a French scholar René Girard. Citing Psalm 40:7-8, he explains: "if you wish neither burnt offerings nor sacrifice, there is no longer any obstacle to violence; from now on, nothing can stop it."¹ That takes some getting your head around. The fact that people used to offer 'burnt offerings and sacrifices' to appease the gods, has in the past seemed to me to be, really, silly. How then does the absence of these things remove obstacles to violence?



I was reminded of Philo's plight in my first novel (*African Heartbeat*).² Philo had understood that the most appropriate way of doing Christian mission, was from a vulnerable foundation.³ Others contradicted him on this, telling him that he was wrong. (Even if they didn't tell him this as such, the fact that they advocated for not-vulnerable mission as the hegemonic default amounted to contradicting him.) Those who told him that he was wrong, he thought did not understand what he was

saying. Yet, if they weren't ready to listen, what was Philo to do? Should he not have gone ahead with being vulnerable, that would have demonstrated that he actually did not believe in it in the first place.

Arguing with the people concerned that they are wrong, would quite likely have prevented him from doing what he felt he should do: He could have been blacklisted as argumentative, and to present his

1 Girard, Rene, 2014, *The One by whom Scandal Comes*. (Translated by M.B. DeBevoise.) East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 72.

2 Harries, Jim, 2018, *African Heartbeat: and a vulnerable fool*. London: Apostolos Publishing Limited, 91-97.

3 Vulnerable mission is a means of reaching people with the Gospel that uses *their* languages and *their* resources in ministry.

case would have taken a lot of effort, given that the judgment that he was simply wrong had already been made. Arguing quite likely, unless it violently divided the college he was in, would have forced the authorities to expel him.

Philo had little choice. He had to see through the rest of his days in college, in silence. Then he had to go ahead and implement what he set out to do, and to accept any of the consequences that arose, including any suffering. Were he to 'suffer' his detractors would see him as having brought it onto himself, and thus to see him as having become the sacrificial victim to his own folly. This meant, he just had to go and, in the eyes of others, be a fool.

Everyone had ganged up on Jesus. They understood that what Jesus was doing was wrong, even though he had done no wrong (as plainly stated by Pilate⁴). The unanimity of Jesus' condemnation meant that argument in his case would have helped nothing. Had he blamed so-and-so, perhaps that a leading Pharisee like Gamaliel had misled him into doing what he was doing, that would have demonstrated that he himself did not know what he was doing, so his message would have been cancelled.

In the days of animal sacrifice, or child sacrifice, an alternative victim could have been brought to succumb in Jesus' place (or Philo's place). As God is not interested in sacrificial offerings, that option was closed. So he had to go on, alone, and to accept, silently, any ramifications of doing so, which in his case was not opening his mouth to defend himself even when condemned to crucifixion on the cross.

Acts 8 teaches us that the gift (*dorean*) of God cannot be acquired with money. Vulnerable mission reflects this, by advocating that Western missionaries not build their ministries on foreign funds. Those who want to contradict vulnerable mission practice Simony. The position of 'mission must be done with money' could therefore survive only for as long as no one had done it without money. This also follows on from Jesus' own actions, and perhaps expresses 'taking up your cross.' That is to say, no one innocent



had ever before voluntarily accepted a death sentence as did Jesus, that arose from being wrongly declared guilty by everyone. This latter caught the devil on the hop, undermining the very notion that the innocent can be guilty (i.e. of scapegoating, the blame game, witch hunts, and all that!). That the person concerned was God himself has opened the way to resurrection to eternal life for all who believe in him, and stop doing dastardly things like victimising people for nothing!

⁴ John 19:4.

You've denied me a wife!

We recently discussed issues of singleness in mission. One of my colleagues is trying to work through these issues; should he continue to do mission and remain single, or get married and leave the (African) mission field?

Many people, in response to the above dilemma, prefer to answer that 'he should get married, and continue doing mission in Africa'. That's the traditional answer. "That's vaguely possible," I told him. That answer wasn't very satisfying for him. "Look," I told him, "if you marry and have children, no grandparent will accept their grandchildren being brought up in African village style. You will have to find a Western-standard school to take them to. Doing that will take a lot of money. It will easily convert your identity, in the eyes of locals, into that of an advocate not of the Gospel of Jesus, but of Western financial largesse."

"So, what if I marry an African?" he asked? "Africans like money," I told him. "It will be very hard to find an African wife who will agree to live with you in poverty. If she doesn't insist on living in the West, then she'll certainly want the benefits of life in the West for herself and her children as they are raised in Africa. Your home language will be English. People seeing you will see that the Gospel you are sharing, is the prosperity Gospel."

"So, I'll marry an African, but stay here in the village," he told me. "I'll never introduce her to the West, or talk to her in English, so she'll never know what she is missing." "Your legal wife will have rights over your property when you die," I told him. "You'd better be careful, or she or her relatives might kill you."

Following the above logic, it's impossible for Westerners to be MARRIED and to do Christian mission in Africa, that doesn't turn into the prosperity Gospel. That means that serving God in Africa requires celibacy. This means in effect, that Western life contradicts international Christian fellowship. The latter delegitimising of non-Western Christianity, I suggest, cannot be right. This means that life in the West runs in the face of the truth of the Gospel. Hence, it is wrong. Hence, it must change. Unless or until it changes; no chance for Africa.

The Gap

When Westerners get university degrees, they become capable of great feats of engineering / medicine / research / education / you name it. African people can get higher degrees, yet continue to struggle in all these areas. Why?

There seems to be a 'gap'. That is a gap that I am researching. It doesn't only appear when it comes to higher education. Wherever one looks ... European people consistently do better at doing European things than do Africans. Well, there's part of the clue – when it is Europe that is being emulated, European natives know themselves better than foreigners can know them. Education may reduce the 'gap' between Europeans and Africans, but it doesn't close it! In some ways it does not even reduce it.



Whatever is 'the gap', it is not covered by today's educational system. That is – African people are very capable at getting degrees in European universities. Still the gap remains. What is the gap?

The 'gap' is that which Europeans have, which Africans generally do not have, which is extra to education. It is something cultural that they grow up with, that they do not learn in school. Identifying this gap, and how to assist African people either to fill it, or compensate for it, is vital in today's world where Africa is *supposed* to become another Europe or America. ...

Definitely, a part of the gap, is simply that education in Europe builds on what children already are before they go to school. Because African children are different from European children, simply transporting educational systems from the West to Africa results in education in Africa NOT building on what children already are. Linguistically, it does not (European and not African languages are used in education.) Culturally it does not (the culture assumed in education is European, even when education is practiced in Africa).

I want to simplify, and suggest, that the gap, is 'secularism'. European children are brought up secular. African children, generally, are not. That gap becomes impossible even for grown African thinkers ever to bridge. The gap, a gulf, remains. Hence Africans trained Westernly only thrive under the ongoing domination of the West. What is not taught today in African educational systems, is 'how to be secular', yet being secular is a prerequisite to understanding Western education!

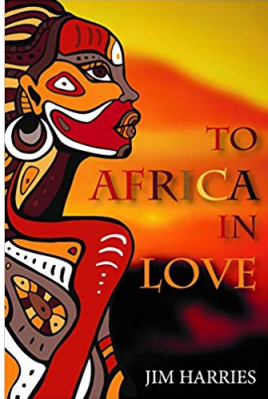
Why is 'how to be secular' not taught in Africa, yet it is 'normal' in the West? It is not on the curriculum in the educational system because Westerners do not need to be taught it, they just are it. Because others base their education on Western models, 'how to be secular' is not on the curriculum. This is because actually secularism, which denies Christianity, is a form of Christianity. That is, modern secularism as lived and practiced in the West, constantly denies itself. It lives a lie to itself. For the West to acknowledge that secularism is necessarily rooted in Christianity is, for the West as it understands itself, to deny secularism! A prerequisite for future global prosperity is for the West to acknowledge secularism's Christian roots, therefore to acknowledge its own debt to the Gospel, therefore to put the Gospel back to being the foundation and flagship of its own educational system. Anything⁵ less spells DISASTER for Africa.

UK Dates

Please pray for anticipated time in the UK later this year. 26th October to 16th November I hope to be in Andover, based at Andover Baptist Church. Saturday 2nd November we are to have a celebration thanking God for 31 years of missionary service in Africa. Then 16th November to 7th November, God willing, I will be in Norwich based at Norwich Central Baptist Church. There is to be another celebration of the same in Norwich at NCBC on Saturday 30th November. WELCOME ALL TO THOSE CELEBRATIONS.

⁵ While lying to yourself may be one thing, expecting everyone else to buy into your lie and take it as truth is another.

Books and articles



My latest novel, *To Africa in Love*, is now available. (Already available in the UK, it is shortly to be launched in the USA.) A review by Peter Stagg, from Andover Baptist Church: "This is the latest novel by Professor Jim Harries. It is semi biographical and I highly recommend it to those who want to understand Vulnerable Mission, but find the concepts difficult to get their head around."

A number of articles of mine have been published in recent months. Here are the titles of three of them. To download and read, go here:

<https://jimharries.academia.edu/research#papers>

These are the titles to three recent articles:

1. Christian Mission Conferences Enabling Communication across Linguistic and Economic Divides; Focusing on Africa
2. Essential Alternatives to Contemporary Missionary Training; for the sake of vulnerability to the majority world (Africa)
3. Africa's Metaphors Are Essential to Its Functioning and Identity: Ignore Them at Your Peril

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

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A message from Jim Harries.
It is my pleasure to invite you
to an afternoon:

**CELEBRATING 31 YEARS OF
MISSIONARY SERVICE IN AFRICA**

at Andover Baptist Church (Andover, Hants) on

2nd November 2019 to begin at 2.00 pm.

Tea and refreshments to be included.

Jim will be with us to answer questions, talk about his work, show pictures,
sign copies of his new novel *To Africa in Love* and more ... Also in Norwich, Norwich Central Baptist Church,
on 30th November 2019.