

## AVM Bulletin August 2009

Please get in touch with Jim Harries if you would like him to visit your missionary training institution in late 2010. He needs to hear from people as soon as possible as his schedule is filling fast ([jimoharries@gmail.com](mailto:jimoharries@gmail.com)).

**Ducking Missionary Conflict** is the title to a short article outlining VM published in the July 2009 edition of the EMQ (Evangelical Missionary Quarterly) – one of the most widely read missionary periodicals at the ‘popular’ level.

Titles and abstracts of further new articles written by Jim are listed below. These are not yet posted onto the web for copyright reasons. They are undergoing peer review with various journals. If you would like a personal copy, write to Jim at [jimoharries@gmail.com](mailto:jimoharries@gmail.com)

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### **The Perceived Nature of God in Europe and in Africa: dealing with ‘difference’ in theology, focusing on ‘altered states of consciousness’**

Context-dependence of meaning resulting in serious loss of content of theological language between the West and Africa, leads to the conclusion that genuine African theology must occur using African languages. Consideration of the use of distinct labels for reference to God arising from different ‘cultures’, followed by a study of altered states of consciousness and their impact on theology, especially in Africa, are shown to verify this. (6500 words)

### **God, the Christian Faith, and Social / Cultural Change in the Context of African ‘Poverty’**

Challenging the certainty of contemporary knowledge leads to a reconsideration of the understanding of role of the ‘divine’ in the history of society. Key questions about God are shown to pertain to his nature, and not his existence. ‘Superior religion’ debates are re-visited, leading to the suggestion that the key change agent in Sub-Saharan Africa is not Western technology, but a knowledge of the true God. The struggle to acknowledge the unity of the Godhead itself brings positive change in human society, whereas development aid to Africa joins hands with the pragmatism of indigenous religion resulting in the enhancement of magical beliefs. Western mission to Africa is shown to rely excessively on foreign languages and finance, having taken the role of serving tables to the exclusion of ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2-4). (7000 words)

### **Summary Report on Eight AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) Conferences held between January and March 2009 in the USA, Britain, and Germany**

Various concerns that arose at eight recent international conferences<sup>1</sup> arranged by the AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) in 2009 are here examined and summarised by way of a ‘report’, compiled by the chairman of the Alliance. This report is divided into two sections. The first draws specifically on the papers presented by key contributors to the conferences while the second addresses a number of major issues essentially from memory from having attended the conferences. The AVM wants to encourage more Western Christian missionaries

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<sup>1</sup> These were mostly small conferences. Attendance varied between five and forty per conference.

to do ‘vulnerable mission’ in their outreach to the non-West. That is, for them to use local languages and local resources in their key ministry. (5000 words)

### **Translation and the Language of Implementation of Third-World Development – an African Study**

Understanding of ‘development’ in the West (‘something we have done’) must be different from that in Africa (‘what we aspire to’). The West knows what Africa should be, but often not its starting position, whereas the reverse applies in Africa. How is this gap in understanding to be bridged? The widespread notion that Western education can bridge the gap is here shown to be faulty. Instead, the necessity for African development to be guided by an African language is clearly demonstrated. Development is most effectively encouraged by outsiders through attention to people’s beliefs, by operation using an African language, and without outside subsidy for ‘projects’. (5500 words)

### **An ‘Impact Model’ of Language, and Mission and Development in East Africa**

A re-examination of communication theory in this article reveals that coding / decoding models of understanding of language widespread in missiological literature have been misleading. Because they always meet and are affected by contexts, the author suggests that words are more helpfully understood as having ‘impacts’ than ‘meanings’. This is illustrated by comparison with ‘touching’ someone’s body. As ‘meaning’ is not found in the hand that touches, but in the meeting of a hand with a part of a body (a handshake as against a thump or a tickle for example) such is the impact of words on the mind. The problems of the use of English in East Africa are explored from colonial times up to today. Leaving power in English was an embarrassment to Britain. This has had a major impact on East African society. The prominence of English is not based on its indigenous usefulness, says the author. He presents clear arguments that demonstrate this. Rather, use of English internally to East Africa can encourage incompetence, and certainly produces dependence. English flourishes by drawing on powers outside of the region. The problems in the current linguistic situation in East Africa are illustrated using examples that draw on the discipline of pragmatics. Because English is not working in people’s long-term interests, and this is shown giving examples especially from Kenya, missionaries (especially native-English speakers) from outside of the region are strongly encouraged to minister using local languages, as well as by drawing on local resources. (7500 words)

### **Understandings of *Pneuma* in East Africa, that point to the Importance of ‘Vulnerable Mission’ Practices from the West**

Using terms for ‘Holy Spirit’ in different languages and contexts as synonyms is here shown to be an over-simplification. The way this apparently does away with the need for knowledge of local languages and contexts by theologians is shown as being misleading. This article explores the implicatures of indigenous terms used in East Africa and their implications for Christian theology, by paying close attention to indigenous cultures. ‘Vulnerable Mission’ is advocated as the means for achieving the above insights that are a prerequisite for effective discipleship in East Africa and elsewhere. That is, mission to be carried out by some Westerners who confine themselves to local languages and resources.