

## Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Bulletin – December 2010

### **Introduction to AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission)**

The AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) seeks to encourage wider use of mission and development strategies that depend on locally available resources and local languages.

These strategies are “vulnerable” in the sense that they do not have fringe benefits built into them, deliberately or otherwise. They will therefore fail unless or until there is strong local confidence in their spiritual or developmental value. The missionary or development worker will allow them to fail rather than prop them up with outside money.

“Vulnerable mission” may be seen as part of the movement toward contextualization of the Gospel of Jesus, which we regard as the theory of many and the practice of few. We would like to see more people take the risks of contextualization and vulnerability in order to reap the rewards that only come to those who value local resources and invest in local languages.

If local tools seem slow or weak by comparison with foreign money and English (Spanish etc. – European language), then we say with a wise missionary of long ago, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor. 12:10) While vulnerable mission may not be the only biblical approach to mission, it deserves much more attention than it has been getting. Let’s talk.

The AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) is very pleased to welcome Fiona Adams into the office of (voluntary) administrative assistant for a three month period. Trilingual Fiona (she speaks German and French as well as English) from Suffolk in England, is a competent organiser. She has a diploma in missions from All Nations Christian College and a post-graduate diploma in business and linguistics. Before getting a family, she had acquired missionary experience in Djibouti, Nigeria and Ghana. Fiona will work from home and we are all hoping will put AVM onto a professional footing. Please contact her at [fiona@vulnerablemission.com](mailto:fiona@vulnerablemission.com).

The very positive response that Jim has received at many of the universities and colleges that he has visited on his current trip is looking as if it will lead to further AVM activities – perhaps in early 2012. We will keep you posted of developments by means of this Bulletin. Jim returns to Kenya on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2010.

**Insignificant Is Beautiful** is the title of this piece in *Christianity Today*. Perhaps western missionaries’ efforts at making ‘significant impacts’ or at quickly multiplying their activities using outside resources and western languages, sometimes obscure the importance of giving God the opportunity to be glorified despite or through missionary ‘insignificance’?  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/octoberweb-only/52-41.0.html?start=1>

**Tim Reeves**, a member of NCBC (Norwich Central Baptist Church) in UK, has taken time out of his regular study of quantum physics to explore and promote vulnerable mission. Tim has done a phenomenal amount of careful work to isolate and organise materials written on vulnerable mission in the last two decades into digestible pieces designed to challenge and

absorb a contemporary audience. Tim gave a presentation at the above church last month. Some of the very-valuable materials he used can be found at: <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/discussion/jim-harries-and-vulnerable-mission.pdf>

**Robert Reese**, founding board member of the AVM (resigned subsequently when he took on a demanding teaching position) has had his book published by WCL (William Carey Library). Entitled *Roots and Remedies of the Dependency Syndrome in World Missions* (2010) this is available at the following site for \$14.30 per copy: <http://www.missionbooks.org/williamcareylibrary/product.php?productid=699&cat=0&page=6> Reese documents the tragic results of over-reliance on foreign ideas and personnel. He advocates remedies – one of which is vulnerable mission (p190).

While at Pasadena, I (Jim) was privileged to visit Fuller Theological Seminary, where I was able to meet up with **R. Daniel Shaw**. With long-term past-experience in Papua New-Guinea, Dan's ongoing grappling with mission issues, has him valuing the role of ritual in 'traditional' communities as a means of countering evil (bad) forces. See <http://www.fuller.edu/academics/faculty/daniel-shaw.aspx> for more information. Dan is focusing on ritual and ceremony (as does my PhD thesis) - while having a high regard for what we are trying to achieve in the AVM as part of the means to bring the importance of such ritual to light.

**Eastern University** specialises in offering course on 'faith and justice', were able to record Jim Harries in action introducing the topic of vulnerable mission. To see this video record (40 minutes of presentation followed by questions and answers from Eastern's graduate students) go to: <http://media.eastern.edu/v/1287512188/>

**An AVM board member** is looking for a native English speaker, a person (student in the US? missionary kid?) who could translate about 100 pages from a Spanish or German book (*Mision son conquista - Begleiten statt Erobern*) into good English. Volunteers please write to [fiona@vulnerablemission.com](mailto:fiona@vulnerablemission.com).

**Moyaert** explains that people's attachment to a religion is not only to its essence, but also to its outer forms. Today's pluralists say that it is the same divine essence that is expressing itself differently in different religious contexts, so 'religions' should learn from one another. But if religions are merely different ways of expression of the same 'divine', why do people feel uncomfortable with the outer forms of other people's practices? Outer forms being in reality an integral part of people's religious faith (according to Moyaert) helps explain why communication of truths about God requires translation. That is – communication is relative to context. If she is right, and communication requires a shared context, it is important for a missionary of the Gospel to enter into the context of the people being reached; something that we argue can best be achieved through following of the principles of vulnerable mission. (Moyaert, Marianne, 2010. Interreligious Dialogue and the Value of Openness: taking the vulnerability of religious attachments into account.' 730-740 In: *The Heythrop Journal: a bimonthly review of philosophy and theology*. 51/5 September 2010)

**Missiology** has published an article by Jim Harries entitled 'The Perceived Nature of God in Europe and in Africa: Dealing with "Difference" in Theology, Focusing on "Altered States of Consciousness."' Jim believes that this article makes a very clear case for the necessity of the use of indigenous languages for the development of the theology of a people.

A copy of the article can be found here: <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/articles/the-perceived-nature-of-god.pdf> .

Another video recording of Jim Harries talking about vulnerable mission can be found here: <http://vimeo.com/17172938> This is not a general introduction, but a look especially at the **linguistic aspects of that which the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission advocates**. In it Jim makes a case for the use of African languages in African church and society.

Jim asks people to send him links to articles that pertain to vulnerable mission for inclusion in the next edition of this monthly Bulletin.

Wishing all concerned with the AVM a happy Christmas and New Year.

Yours,

Jim Harries  
Chairman, Alliance for Vulnerable Mission