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Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Bulletin

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Volume 13, Number 4.

Guest Editor: John Macdonald, DMiss—Member,
AVM Executive Board



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The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission encourages some missionaries from the West to engage in their ministries using local languages and resources.

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The next UK-AVM conference is to be held at All Nations Christian College, Hertfordshire, 12th to 15th September 2021.

[Details here.](#)

[Registration here.](#)

General information at www.vulnerablemission.org

Potential speakers please tell Jim of your plans asap, so that we can include you in PR materials for the conference (jim@vulnerablemission.org).

Please suggest contributions to this Bulletin to jim@vulnerablemission.org

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Conference. 18th January 2021

All Nations Christian College, UK, 12th to 15th September 2021
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**Vulnerable Mission:
English and Dollars Powering
Ministry,
Good Idea?**

We urge some missionaries to practice their ministry using the languages and resources of the people they are reaching. This will honour the indigenous. It is a Christ-like starting point for sharing the Gospel in contextualized ways.

We will be discussing issues such as:

- Practicalities and ramifications of use of indigenous **languages** by Western missionaries.

- How does **translation** to and from an indigenous language affect missionary work?
- While **finances** are needed for mission work, how can one ensure that finances do not dominate?
- What **good practices** are there to ensure a missionary remains vulnerable in their local context?
- How to engage in mission without exuding (excessive) **power**.
- What **organisational structures** enable vulnerability on the side of Western missionaries on the ground.
- What help can we offer **churches who want to engage directly in cross cultural mission** to avoid pitfalls of power.
- **Tentmaking** and **business as mission** models that leave the Westerner vulnerable. (Can the **commercial** world engage in mission without promoting ‘ evils’ of capitalism?)
- When the uneven spread of wealth is itself an injustice, how can one use one’s surplus to enact global **justice**.
- How can mission agencies promote vulnerability, when dominant models of understanding presented by a vast **global media** are rooted in **positivism and liberalism**?
- Is vulnerability the key to **contextualisation**?
- Theology traditionally draws strongly on **metaphor**. However local metaphors from the majority world are unfamiliar to the Westerner, and vice versa. How can one then engage in theology interculturally?
- Where **politics and ‘religion’ are not separate categories**, missionaries need to be careful not to get bogged down in unanticipated conflicts.
- Is **miracle** a post-enlightenment category? Is ‘**magic**’ a normal aspect of life? What does this imply for cross cultural missionary engagement?
- Does the **introduction of outside technology** result in exploitation and enslavement? or liberation?
- **Globalisation** as a force that cripples the periphery. How can the voices of those at the periphery be heard, and their dignity guarded?
- When **short-term mission** has become **poverty-tourism** intended to adorn facebook pages with images of charity – what is the way forward?

- Can Westerners relate to **non-Western missionaries** without dominating them?
- The bible is God's inspired book, but theological training is dominated by **Western curricula**. Are there alternative paradigms for local-context training of Christian workers?

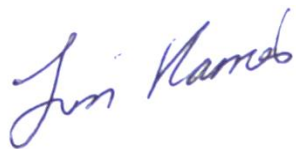
Conference Details

This will be a three-day residential conference. It will be held in the English country house at the attractive rural location of the UK's premier missionary training college, near Ware in Hertfordshire. Full cost will be £300, or early bird £260.



Conference sponsors:

<p><i>Alliance for Vulnerable Mission</i> vulnerablemission.org</p>	
<p>All Nations Christian College, Easneye Ware Hertfordshire SG12 8LX Tel: +44 (0) 1920 443500 Email: info@allnations.ac.uk</p>	



Jim Harries, PhD.
Board chair, Missionary in East Africa

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A note from John Macdonald, guest editor for the April 2021 Newsletter.



I am very grateful to have been asked to be the Guest Editor of the *Bulletin* for April 2021. I am also happy to introduce myself.

My first exposure to the need to be able to function and operate in the local language occurred when I was sixteen and had travelled abroad to Belgium and France. I struggled to use my schoolboy French and vowed that I would one day be fluent in the language. I did not like the idea that the people with whom I was interacting felt the obligation to switch to English, if they could. I vowed that I would not be the typical monolingual American and continued to study French in school and then in university. While earning my first degree, I was able to study at the Université de Rennes in Rennes, France, where I was able to achieve a comfortable fluency and was active in the Église Réformée de France.

Following university and in response to a call to ordained ministry, I read theology at Trinity College, Bristol, for one year. Returning to the US to work for a year to earn money to pay the following year's fees, I was hired by the South American Missionary Society (SAMS) to work in their office. That led me to serve in Honduras for two years as a missionary where I had to learn Spanish.

I finished my preparation for ordained ministry at an evangelical Anglican/Episcopal seminary, Trinity School for Ministry. After five years in parish ministry, I was asked to head up a church planting team in Honduras. We were there as missionaries for ten years. After the church was established, I was named Canon for Evangelism for the Diocese of Honduras and then Dean of Honduras.

We returned to the US when Trinity School for Ministry invited me to lecture in mission, evangelism and church planting. I was also asked to head up their Stanway Institute for Mission and Evangelism. While there, I earned the Doctor of Missiology degree at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

Half of my job was lecturing, and the other half was to represent Trinity at various international gatherings and to take students to various locations in Asia, Africa, South America, and Europe to expose them to Christian work that was happening in those regions. With the decline of the Christian faith in North America, I was convinced that our ordinands needed to see true Gospel ministry in places where there were many challenges—yet significant renewal. I “retired” in 2018 and was named Emeritus Professor of Mission. I am married to Gail, have three married, adult children and one grandson.

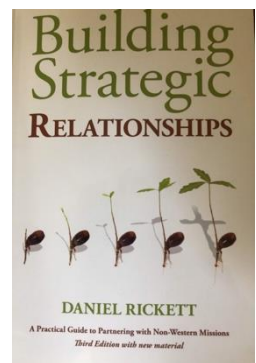
A Review of:

Building Strategic Relationships: A Practical Guide to Partnering with Non-Western Missions by Daniel Rickett (Stem Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2008)

By John A. Macdonald

This is not a new publication, but it is new to me. I was intrigued by the title of the book and wanted to see whether it embraced or at least pointed towards VM (vulnerable mission) principles.

Daniel Rickett has a PhD in Adult and Continuing Education from Michigan State University and an MA in Intercultural Communications from Wheaton College Graduate School through Daystar University in Nairobi. Rickett writes out of his extensive work with international partnerships and cross-cultural mission.



The reality is that there are large numbers of Western Christians who feel compelled to be engaged in various forms of cross-cultural mission. Sadly, many of them boldly set out and boldly do a lot of damage. They can be paternalistic and patronizing. They can be “occidento-centric”, blind to the cultural distinctives of the people they are hoping to serve. They can put unnecessary burdens and expectations on the nationals. Instead of mutual transparency, the relationship becomes opaque, resulting in unhealthy and unrealistic dependency, miscommunication, and broken relationships.

Building Strategic Relationships at least points the reader in the right direction. Rickett assumes that Christian international, cross-cultural partnerships will continue to exist, but that if handled properly they will lead to self-reliance and autonomy (as defined by majority world Christians and not by the Westerners using Western standards) with each partner benefitting from the other.

For him, partnership is the mutual sharing of resources for a common goal. He defines this as a developmental partnership, which is “a collaborative relationship between two autonomous bodies whereby each enables the other to grow in its capacity to initiate and carry out change for the sake of the gospel.” (p. 16) Low on the list is sending money. High on the list is what each partner can learn from the other and how they can be mutually supportive.

He makes a strong biblical argument, however, for mutual dependency citing Paul’s use of the metaphor, the Body of Christ, along with his desire to see the saints in Jerusalem supported by the other Christian congregations.

In conclusion, I would say that Rickett is attempting to move in the right direction and much of what he writes dances around the core values of vulnerable mission. If partnerships are to exist, I would rather see them guided by some of his principles—but with a strong dose of discernment tossed in.

A Review of:

Atido, Georges Pirwoth; “L’essor des Églises d’Initiative Africaine : tendances émergentes”; *Revue Théologique Shalom*, 8^e Année N^o: 07 2018.

By John A. Macdonald

The author, Georges Pirwoth Atido is with the Université Shalom de Bunia in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. His article, “The Soaring of African Initiated Churches” discusses the rapid growth of indigenous churches in Africa. Citing David Barrett’s study in 1970 that there were 760 indigenous, independent churches in Africa at that time, Atido counts over 10,000 in 2018, with 2,600 found in the DRC alone. He estimates that these churches have a total membership of over 110 million followers. These churches fall outside those churches that were specifically founded by Western missionary effort.

This growth is seen as an exclusively African reformation that hearkens back to Martin Luther and is characterized by spiritual renewal and the desire to go to the beginnings of the Christian faith. The European Reformation produced the mainline denominations that we have today ranging from Lutherans to Anglicans to Presbyterians and the various anabaptist churches. These

churches are distinctly European, but the African Initiative churches have been formed out of a contextualized Christianity and African culture. This has produced an evangelical (and evangelistic) revitalization.

Atido posits that the growth of these churches is antithetical to the decisions and conclusions that were made in Edinburgh in 1910 that did not anticipate such rapid growth. The indigenous dynamic of this spectacular growth was seen as the main reason why so many churches have been founded and so many sub-Saharan Africans have come to faith.

After giving some historical background on the Edinburgh conference, he argues that in addition to the mainline denominational missionary efforts, there were non-denominational missionary efforts such as the African Inland Mission, the Sudan Inland Mission, and others, but in spite of being “non-denominational”, they were photocopies of the established denominations because they reproduced Western ecclesiology and theology in their mission context.

Instead of being photocopies of Western churches, the African Initiative Churches were separated from Western culture and maintained more traditional attitudes such as the veneration of ancestors, non-traditional medicine since they did not have access to advanced medical resources, and even sorcery. They are, instead, produced by “photosynthesis”—that is, that they have contextualized the Gospel and have engendered churches that are typically African that meet the needs of African spirituality.

These expressions of Christianity are deeply embedded in the traditional African culture with a worldview that include not only the characteristics listed above, but also the interpretation of dreams, trances, and visions. Their response to the problems they face include various rituals, exorcism, prayer, fasting, and cleansing baths. Some include sacrifice as well.

Presumably at the centre, however, is biblical orthodoxy such as the place and importance of the Cross and Jesus’s bodily resurrection along with the conviction that the Bible is the infallible Word of God, and the need for personal conversion.

At times some of the churches have become derailed. Instead of making Christ the object and focus of faith, the Kimbanguist Church venerates their prophet founder, and the Aladura Church of Nigeria is characterized by the ostentatious enrichment of its leaders. Others have become syncretistic, integrating non-Christian spiritism into their worship practices.

Atido then concludes that the weaknesses of the movement actually need to conform more closely to the Protestant Reformation of the Sixteenth Century and also conform more closely to the incarnation of the Gospel found in the Holy Scriptures.

Atido has done a good job in outlining the history of the African Initiated Churches as well as their theological currents and tendencies. Much of the criticism of the movement comes from Western sources, yet Atido appears to recognize that as important as contextualization is, when it moves into syncretism great care needs to be taken.

Short Takes:

- 1) “The Contradiction in the White Church’s Approach to Unity in Diversity” posted by Benjamin Ker

<https://www.isiphambano.com/blog/the-contradiction-in-the-white-churchs-approach-to-unity-in-diversity>

Benjamin Ker in his post challenges the post-apartheid white churches of losing cultural distinctiveness as they attempt to have racially blended churches that require black South Africans who attend to worship in ways that are inconsistent with their own culture and context. It is not that Western culture is illegitimate, but “...rather that trying to achieve genuine inter-cultural reconciliation using Western culture as the standard for unity is contradictory and self-defeating.”

He says that incarnational love is necessary in order for white churches to recognize and affirm the cultural distinctives and to meet the black Christians on their own terms instead of requiring them to shift to the culture of the white churches.

Ker’s post challenges the existing practice and calls for healthy, cross-cultural exchanges that should enrich the lives and faith of both groups.

- 2) “Is the Media Giving White Saviourism More Attention Than It Deserves?” by Becca Morrison

<https://undeniablybecca.wordpress.com/2019/02/16/is-the-media-giving-white-saviorism-more-attention-than-it-deserves/>

In Becca Morrison’s blog post, she challenges the efficacy and usefulness of her participation in UKAid’s International Citizenship Service, a programme that sends volunteers around the world. In her case, she went to Malawi and has questioned whether her involvement was nothing more than “White Saviourism”—an activity that potentially promotes the idea of whites

rescuing the blacks. She also asks whether this type of involvement does more for the volunteer than it does for the people who are supposed to benefit from it. In addition, she observes that the media end up publicizing this idea.