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Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Bulletin

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Volume 13, Number 3.

Gest Editor: Peter Stagg, AVM board member.



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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 me 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

A note from Peter Stagg, guest editor for the March 2021 Bulletin.

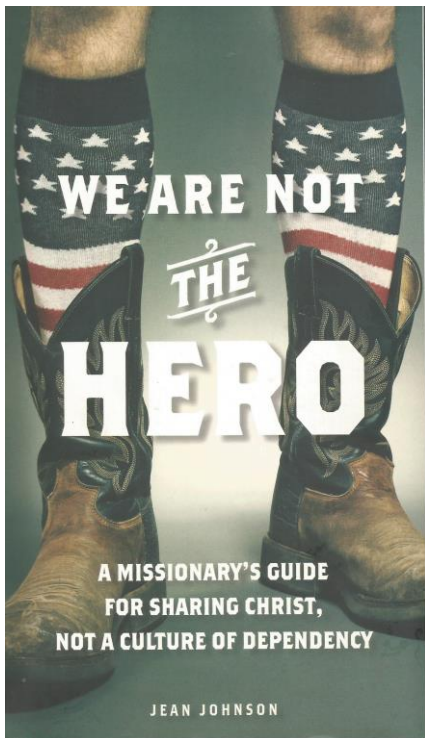
Allow me to introduce myself. I have been involved in supporting Vulnerable Mission (VM) in finance and administrative roles over the past 6 years. My initial involvement came in a request from my church to assist Jim with managing finances, however, over time my interest has grown to embrace and engage in the debate, as to what constitutes VM and how this impacts the wider issues of Church, Society and the World in which we live. I believe that VM has unearthed issues which require closer examination and are relevant to discussions, not only in Church circles, but also in wider areas of the geopolitical, social and economic environment.

By trade, I am an Internal Auditor, Trainer and Accountant. My professional background has taught me to think and learn in a systematic and objective manner, sometimes known as the Systems Based Approach. The starting point in any project is the question what? Then followed by why, how, when, where, and by whom? For me my starting point in theological research or debate is What is the Gospel? Then leading on from this, What is the Church? The answers to these basic questions builds the platform upon which to launch other deliberations.

Over the years I have read more than a few books on VM and the subjects impacting it. Some of the books, which I have read, have given me headaches, since these started from a more theological or missiological standpoint and assumed some prior knowledge on the part of the reader. Others have been very helpful in enabling me to navigate the complexities of VM and come to an understanding of its basic principles.

The benefit of having a guest editor is, hopefully, to bring some fresh perspective. In this Bulletin I would like to recommend some books I have read and which have helped my understanding of VM. I often get the feeling that the VM community is mainly preaching to itself, but I see more need to be able to get the buy-in from those not so closely associated with the science of the subject. I do not propose conclusive answers, but rather an encouragement to ask questions, which might lead to effective discussion and application of VM and a greater buy-in from the wider Church community. I commend these books, mainly to those who might appreciate an easier and painless introduction.





The first book, published by Deep River Books (ISBN 978-1927756451) is an autobiographical work by Jean Johnson, in which we join her on her journey of discovery from her early life and calling to ministry in Cambodia through her intentional preparation for ministry and her endeavours to build organic self-sustaining and reproducing faith communities in that country.

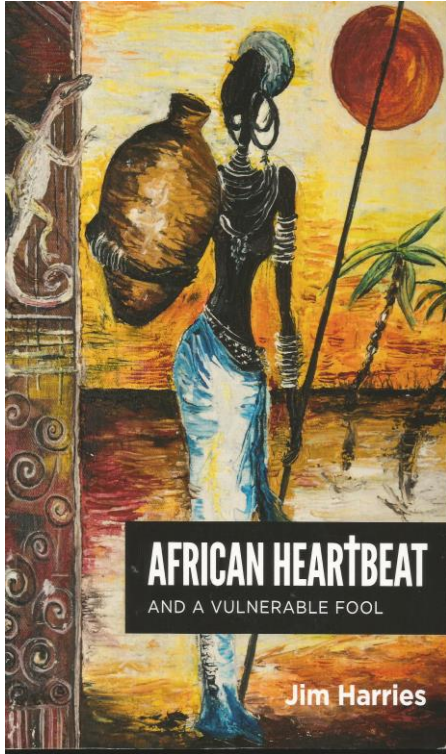
It is a very honest book, which considers the development of the Church against the background of the horrific trauma suffered by the population leading to the killing fields. It addresses the issue of how an indigenous movement grew, engaged with and was supported by outside agencies and thinned, consequent on a decision to reduce monetary aid.

Jean has style which is easy on the brain (at least mine!). I heartily recommend this book, for those who want an introduction to mission in the majority world, particularly for members of churches, who have yet to consider the issues.

I would also commend this book to those with a passion to reach out within their own localities. The observations and recommendations are often just as pertinent to large Churches in the US or Europe, as those in the majority world.

One observation that particularly struck me, was that if churches want to reach out -to communities where they live, then the members need to get un-Churched.

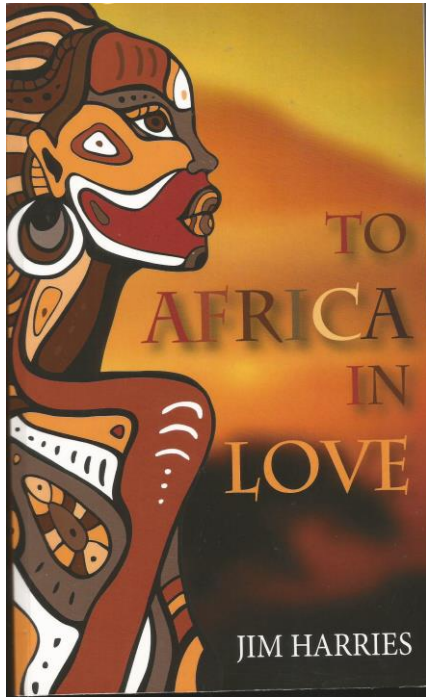
This book is a treasure store and well worth a careful read.



My second choice, also by order of reading, is Jim Harries' semi-autobiographical novel '*African Heartbeat*' published by Faith-builders Christian Books (ISBN9871912120543). This is the first of two books, with another on the way, where Jim uses a genre, which I like to call 'fraction', which was a term used to describe Alex Hayles's Bestseller, '*Roots*', as a fiction based on facts.

Jim describes it thus. "This is an account, based on a true story, of God's powerful acts shown through human weakness". It describes the progress of a missionary called Philo, set in the fictitious African country of Holima. On his journey Philo discovers some of the pitfalls and obstacles of being an English-speaking white man living in Africa. There are moments of enlightenment, when the switch in my brain was flicked, in regard to issues of cultural and resource dependency along with the need to operate in local languages. One particular moment for me was an incident Philo is sitting out of sight and overhears a conversation in the local language and realises what is really going on, yet uncommunicated in English.

Again I commend this book for those new to VM.



Unknown to Philo, he has a distant admirer, a woman from another land, who wants to get closer. Mel, the woman at the centre of this story, manages to drag others along with her to Holima on an adventure of discovery about the realities of mission in Africa.

'To Africa in Love' (ISBN 9781912120079) is of the same genre as '*African Heartbeat*' and builds on the foundations built in that book. My recommendation is to read *African Heartbeat* first, but this book does stand on its own.

The story addresses a number of the same issues, whilst confronting others, like the dependence on Western resources and theological training in English. In so doing, it also draws attention to vested interest in maintaining the status quo in this regard.

Jim's literary style is appropriate for those wishing to gain some understanding of the underlying issues in missions. Once picked up, it's hard to put down. To quote Philo's great friend, Dave "It would be a great read for people doing short-term mission".