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Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Bulletin
July 2023
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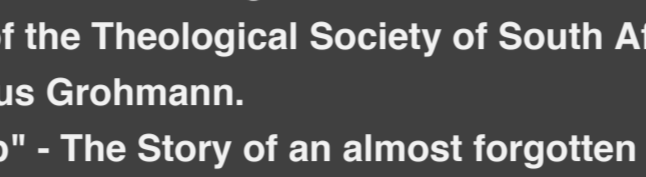
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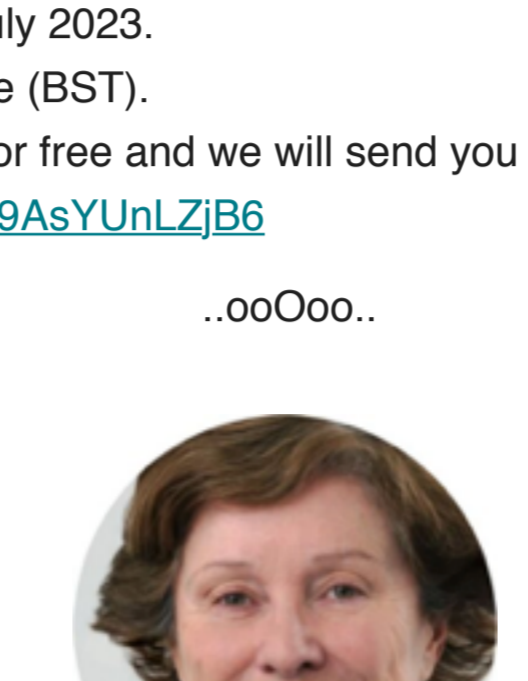
Editor: Jim Harries, PhD, Chairman of the AVM.

Table with 3 columns: AVM Board, Advisory Board. Members include Dr. Jim Harries, Dr. Marcus Grohmann, Dr. Chris Flanders, Peter Stagg, Frank Paul, Dr. Stan Chu Ilo, Dr. Nick Henwood, Deborah Bernhard, Dr. Jay Gary, Dr. Daniel Albert, Rev. Dr. John Macdonald, Jean Johnson.

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



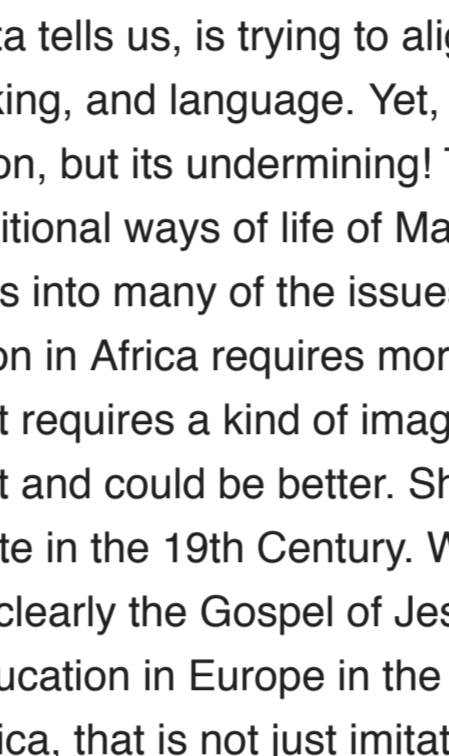
Please suggest contributions to this Bulletin to jim@vulnerablemission.org
This month's contents:
A framework for understanding your role as an outsider: Discover your Missional Type.
Review of a number of papers by Elizabeth Rata, New Zealand scholar.
Papers on AI.
How Western Social Scientists and Missionaries "Get it Wrong" in their Attempts to Understand Indigenous People Groups - From a Professional Psychologist.
Website Alert www.jim-mission.org.uk
Annual conference of the Theological Society of South Africa - presenter Dr. Marcus Grohmann.
"Der Herrnhuter Hiob" - The Story of an almost forgotten Native American who was instrumental in the Moravian Mission endeavours.
Would you like to volunteer as AVM's Communications' lead?



Come to our next webinar:
A framework for understanding your role as an outsider: Discover your Missional Type.

What does it look like to serve as "outsiders" in a world of need? Our posture and role must be different from that of "insiders". In this webinar Craig Greenfield will outline the fivefold framework he has developed in his latest book, Subversive Mission.
Speaker: Craig Greenfield.
When: Thursday, 20th July 2023.
Time: 14:00 London Time (BST).
Sign up using this form for free and we will send you a Zoom link.
https://forms.gle/1E58JE9AsYUnLZjB6

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This month's AVM Bulletin includes a review of a number of papers by Elizabeth Rata, New Zealand scholar. This is on the basis that her work speaks profoundly to vulnerable mission concerns.

1. Indigenisation threatens the university's very foundations, by Elizabeth Rata
https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20230529100657128&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=AFNL0409

New Zealand, Elizabeth Rata tells us, is trying to align their education system with Maori ways of life, thinking, and language. Yet, to her, this is not a contextualisation of education, but its undermining! Thus Rata highlights an incompatibility between traditional ways of life of Majority World people, and 'real' education. Rata speaks into many of the issues of concern to us in the AVM. To indigenise education in Africa requires more than an adoption of an African language. Actually, it requires a kind of imagination (using Rata's terms) that things could be different and could be better. She finds this underlying European education from late in the 19th Century. What she doesn't do is to identify the source of this - clearly the Gospel of Jesus through the work of the Church, that established education in Europe in the first place. Hence also, by implication, education in Africa, that is not just imitating things in English, pre-requires people to have an encounter with Christ.

2. An analysis of: 'Politics of Knowledge in Education: Elizabeth Rata'
https://www.theeducationist.info/politics-knowledge-education-elizabeth-rata/

Bowen tells us that education in Europe was secularised to wrench it away from church control. Rata tells us that the purpose of education must be to "enable us to move into a future that can only be imagined." Does that not sound church-like?

The future, that can only be imagined, is according to Rata, potentially universal to humankind. Yet to achieve it is to know the "unthinkable", "not tied to the world [students] already know," it is enabled by "thinking the not yet known."

Rata's concern is school education. Her arena of engagement centres on her home country of New Zealand. She is countering a contemporary tendency to try to build education on what is socially evident. Rata argues - that education must be a denial of, and not affirmation of what children (particularly of the poor and marginalised) are socialised to know before they come to school.

Although, from my research, Rata has no evident particular Christian affiliation, and she says nothing overtly pro-Jesus in her article, I find that she points squarely to Christ and his teachings. The other-knowledge she outlines, that denies the world we know for an alternative that is universal, is none-other than the Kingdom of God that people enter on accepting the Lordship of Christ, i.e., God himself, who is universal to mankind.

Largely, I agree with her modelling of desirable education. As a Christian missionary sharing the Good News of Jesus with people in Africa, I particularly value her telling us that we need to teach that academic knowledge [i.e., the new knowledge arising from 'thinking the not yet known', that Rata also calls epistemological knowledge,] in ways that make acquiring the knowledge possible for everyone.

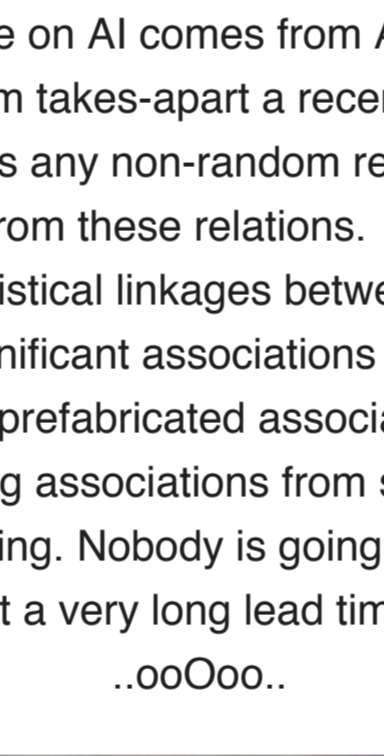
This is exactly what the AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) seeks to do. It does so by encouraging some Westerners to identify closely with Majority World cultures, and thus to help those westerners to realise just how the Gospel can enable people of those cultures to 'imagine their way' into something better, with which they were until recently unfamiliar!

3. Knowledge and Language, by Elizabeth Rata and Sophie Tamati
This is Chapter 2 in: Rata, Elizabeth, and Tamati, Sophie, 2021, Academic Achievement in Bilingual and Immersive Education. London: Routledge.

According to Rata, a researcher should use the indigenous languages of the people being researched, and fit within their cultural context. Rata generalises, not from empirically found data, but by "using theoretical [i.e.,] linguistic and epistemological concepts." As she advocates investigating, analysing and explaining "the social and natural worlds using abstract concepts that do not exist in [children's] experience," she expects children to draw from beyond what is 'natural', from their imagination. What she calls imagination has a remarkable affinity to the Kingdom of God as described in the New Testament. This has resulted in what Rata calls "academic knowledge" that she would like to see being "a universal right for all children."

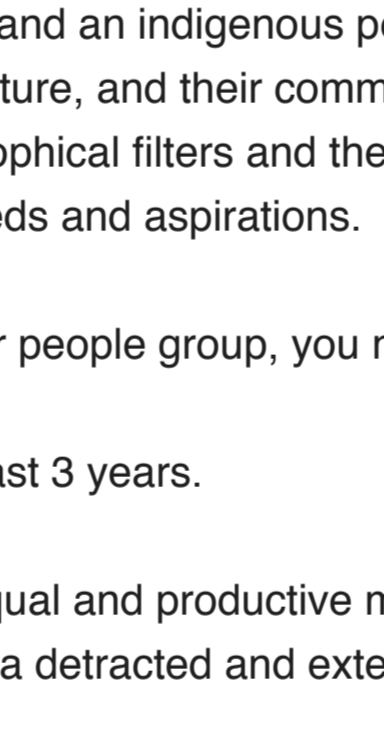
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We go on to three Papers on AI. One, by Jim Harries, is an ongoing live discussion on academia.edu. The second warns about AIs impact on the Majority World. Tim Reeves offers a critique of a BBC article looking at AI.



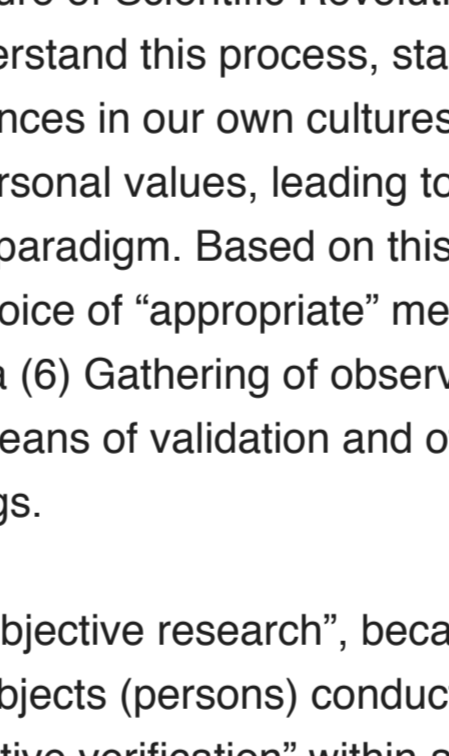
1. The Pending Disastrous Impact of AI human-like text generation, on the Majority World.
https://www.academia.edu/s/d9eb9fcef8?source=link

Discussion prompter:
As prelude to our examination of AI systems that can generate coherent meaningful text, we need to consider whether more Western domination of the MW (majority world) is appropriate, or not. Without long deep exposure to the MW, someone might not realise the enormous extent to which what goes on is guided by a Western wisdom that indigenous people just do not get at any depth. Advances in communication and related technologies are already enabling distant MW countries formal functions to be almost entirely based on Western reason, with an interface linking that with the indigenous being characterised by corruption. At least, if a living breathing person comes to say, Africa, one has some hope they may realise what is going on and how provincial their thinking actually is. Yet processes guided by text generating AI may be almost totally blind to Majority World contexts that do not happen to be reflected in dominant English-language literature.



2. Create critical awareness of AI apartheid - Experts
https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20230613133514412&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=AFNL0410

This University World article is concerned that Africa and the Majority World may be greatly disadvantaged by the use of AI that constitutes 'techno-racism'. For example, text-generating AI that draws from the north will automatically be applied to, but will not meet, African needs. The article falls short of suggesting what we advocate in the AVM - that to resolve the crisis Westerners must become informed about African contexts and conditions.



3. Do AI systems have a sense of self?
http://quantumnonlinearity.blogspot.com/2023/05/ai-godfather-retires-voices-fears-about.html

This contribution to the debate on AI comes from AVM advisory board member Tim Reeves. In this article, Tim takes apart a recent BBC report on AI. Tim shares: "Intelligence perceives any non-random relations between properties and then draws conclusions from these relations. These relations can be learnt either by a) recording the statistical linkages between properties and selecting out and remembering any significant associations from these statistics or b) by reading text files that contain prefabricated associations stated as Bayesian probabilities. Because learning associations from statistics is a very longwinded affair I opted for text-file learning. Nobody is going to learn, say quantum theory, from direct experience without a very long lead time."

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Jim asked a professional psychologist in North America to advise missionaries on how to engage with people interculturally. This is what he gave us:
How Western Social Scientists and Missionaries "Get it Wrong" in their Attempts to Understand Indigenous People Groups - From a Professional Psychologist.

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You will never deeply understand an indigenous people group by pulling your experiences of them, their culture, and their communities through your linguistic, cultural, and philosophical filters and then declaring you somehow deeply "know" them, their needs and aspirations.

To deeply understand another people group, you must:
1. Live among them for at least 3 years.
2. Live among them as an equal and productive member of their community, not as a donor/provider or as a detracted and externally supported "researcher", or "missionary."

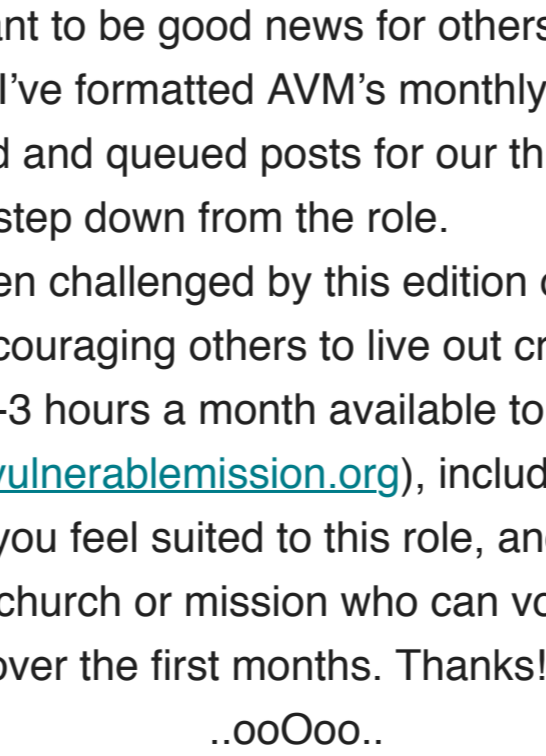
3. Learn and routinely use their language.
4. Learn the important concepts and categories in their culture.
5. Participate in life with them (celebrate at births, weddings, significant achievements, etc.), grieve with them at deaths, and other experiences of loss and separation. Share their emotions.
6. Help defend the community from attacks, pandemics, natural disasters, etc.

Then, over time, you may begin to understand the "soul", needs, and true aspirations of the people group, because in significant ways, you will have begun to become one with them.

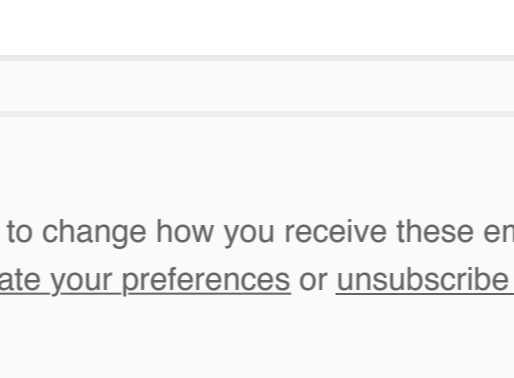
Thomas Kuhn in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962) gives us a grid whereby we can better understand this process, starting with an understanding of: (1) Our personal experiences in our own cultures, leading to a (2) Development of our own personal values, leading to a (3) Creation or choice of a research and operational paradigm. Based on this paradigm, then: (4) Choice of a domain of study, (5) Choice of "appropriate" methods of research within the chosen domain, leading to a (6) Gathering of observations and "findings", finally leading to (7) Choosing a means of validating and otherwise making sense of our observations and findings.

There is no such thing as "objective research", because "objects" don't (and can't) do research. Only subjects (persons) conduct research. The best we can hope for is "inter-subjective verification" within a framework of shared cultural values, expectations, and perspectives. We should evaluate indigenous people groups through a framework of their cultural values, expectations, and perspectives, not ours! Throughout the process, it is crucial to maintain attitudes of humility, vulnerability, and flexibility. Attitudes of arrogance, invulnerable detachment, and superiority on our part can only interfere with the process. We can do better than what we've offered in the past! We should want partners in the process, not vassal subjects!

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Website Alert www.jim-mission.org.uk
A good friend made a website for me over 20 years ago now. It has been very useful, and been a great help. More recently, unfortunately, it is a little out of date, and I have lost access to it. Hence I am planning to put up a new website on the same site. The site is jim-mission.org.uk I know that many people have accessed the site for my news and academic writings. This is a 'warning', telling you that a lot of the current content may soon disappear. Any complaints or suggestions to me. Otherwise, if there is something on there that is important to you then I suggest that you download it.
(Jim Harries - contact: jimoharries@gmail.com, or at +254721804282)
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Annual conference of the Theological Society of South Africa - presenter Dr. Marcus Grohmann.
The main theme of the gathering, held at Stellenbosch University, was 'Crossing the digital divide: Theological reflection on (in)justice and (in)equality in the South African society'. I was able to present a paper based on my recently completed PhD and subsequent engagement with the church I had carried out the field research in: 'From celebration to utilisation: Of linguistic diversity's potential to reduce epistemic inequalities - and what it might take to actualise it'. My highlighting of Western dominance through English in a multilingual church context (partly by pointing out differences in cultural conceptualisations between English and isiXhosa) was very well received by the seven people in attendance (3 other talks were given at the same time). Drawing attention to the fact that in academia and at this very conference we're complicit in the reproduction of this inequality, and offering to take questions in languages other than English, seemed to cause a little bewilderment - and people stuck to English. For fairness' sake it must be mentioned that Stellenbosch has an infamous history of actual and perceived racial exclusion and white/Afrikaans supremacy, so politically, English provides safe ground. There appears to be opportunities to contribute to a planned compendium around 'Decolonisation and Theology' within the next year; I think that from an AVM perspective we'll have something helpful to contribute.
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"Der Herrnhuter Hiob" - The Story of an almost forgotten Native American who was instrumental in the Moravian Mission endeavours.
This text in German speaks to the complexity of the early days of the Protestant mission movement as well as of our contemporary attempts to come to terms with perceived injustices back then and today. Moravian missionaries, probably unusually incarnational in their approach during the 18th century, were in other ways also implicated in imperialist conduct as well as paternalistic attitudes towards the people they tried to reach for Christ. Joshua Junior, a Native American who from an early age became a bridge builder between his own community and the Moravian Church, was instrumental in translating Christian worship into his culture. Only recently is the memory of him being revived. The text paints a nuanced picture that critically reflects on mission strategies that looked condescendingly on people's cultures. For this reason it raises the question of how much assimilation into European ways of life and Western value systems we implicitly expect today (be it in cross-cultural ministry, multinational organisations or increasingly multicultural Western societies), ignoring that for the gospel to take root in and transform cultural communities takes a long time and is the work of the Spirit.
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Would you like to volunteer as AVM's Communications' lead?
I'm Nick Henwood, previously a cross cultural mission partner in Nepal, presently a GP (Family doctor) in Leicester, UK, and soon to be an Ordained (trainee Church of England minister).
I have gradually come to see that taking a vulnerable stance is crucial if western missionaries want to be good news for others around the world. Over the past 2-3 years I've formatted AVM's monthly Bulletin (using Mailchimp) and prepared and queued posts for our three social media platforms. I now plan to step down from the role.
Have you enjoyed or been challenged by this edition of our Bulletin?
Are you interested in encouraging others to live out cross cultural work with humility? Do you have 2-3 hours a month available to volunteer with AVM? Please email Jim (jim@vulnerablemission.org), including a short paragraph about yourself and why you feel suited to this role, and the contact details of someone senior in your church or mission who can vouch for you. I'll gladly support you as needed over the first months. Thanks!
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