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Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Bulletin

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Editor: Jim Harries, PhD

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 bulletin@vulnerablemission.org

16th April 2026: Deborah Bernhard & Jim Harries



The Limits of Letting Go
Navigating the complexities of submitting to local leadership in Vulnerable Mission



**Webinar on
16 April 2026**

Register now!

Upcoming Webinar: The Complexities of Submitting to Local Leadership

How far should Western missionaries and practitioners go in relinquishing control and submitting to local leadership? What are the risks, tensions, and transformative possibilities when ministry is carried out in indigenous languages and with local resources alone?

In this interview-style webinar, **Deborah Bernhard** (former missionary in Thailand and co-editor of *Vulnerable Mission for Practitioners*) and **Jim Harries** (long-term missionary in Kenya and founder of the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) will explore the paradoxes of “letting go” in cross-cultural ministry.

More information and sign up for this webinar [here](#).



Religions, Contextualization, and the Hebrew Bible with Harley Talman

Reflections on "[The Missions Drop](#)" podcast by James Alongi: Harley Talman grew up believing in God and what the Bible taught. He later married and taught in an Arab theological seminary. During a humanitarian crisis he saw many Muslims come to Christ. After taking a seminary class where he was taught about theological arguments with Muslims, he read a book that informed him that social and cultural barriers were the much greater challenge in reaching Muslims. At the time there was debate about the appropriateness of contextualization. As he taught the Old Testament, he was increasingly surprised by how often God used cultural forms in which people were immersed to communicate with them. These days most people profess to be in favor of contextualization, but it is largely a matter of personal comfort level with other cultures rather than a model established by God for how to communicate with people. Missionaries' sharing in cultural forms of a people means that their testimony and teaching relate Christ to that with which people are familiar.

So what does a missionary need to know about the Old Testament before going to the mission field? In the OT, what was not originally of God was used to articulate God. A variety of elements, such as pagan titles and names of deities, were used to refer to Yahweh. Those elements came to articulate the concept of mankind made in God's image. Such elements and cultural forms are “disinfected” through association with Yahweh. Similar cultural background exists in many cultures today.

Does use of what was not of God to articulate God help overcome barriers? Harley recounted that as he learned Arabic, Muslims liked to talk to him about their beliefs; yet they almost always used different terms than Arab Christians did. Eventually he learned (by memorizing passages of the Quran) to share the gospel with Muslims using their own terms, i.e., through having learned to use the ‘local language’.

During a humanitarian crisis, he held Bible studies in the Old Testament with Muslims, using Islamic terms to harmonize with the Quran. (The West has many of their own traditions that have been transformed by the Bible – Christmas, for example.) According to Talman, failing to practice this approach may lead to unproductive conflict among Christian workers, like accusations of syncretism. Such failure also hinders communication and puts up unnecessary barriers to acceptance of the Gospel due to resistance to foreignness. The greater the foreignness, the greater the resistance and rejection.

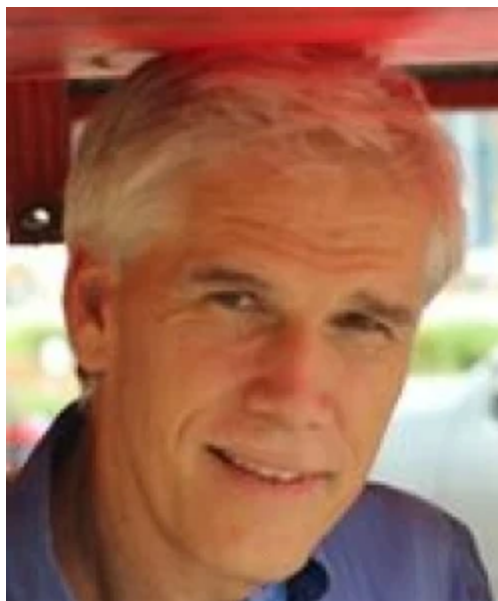


A person comes to another person (English) / Es kommt ein Mensch zum Menschen (German)

By Rev. Michael Weinmann (Gotha, Germany)

Read the text in [German](#) or in its [English](#) translation.
For a spoken version of the German text, please see [here](#).

Weinmann tells us of a way of doing mission, sharing what one holds as dear and valuable, without neo-colonial style confrontation and imposition. The gentle approach proposed is persuasive!



New Extensive Study on Scripture Non-Use for Progress.Bible

In this podcast, produced 2nd March 2026, [Andrew Case talks to Dr. David M. Eberhard](#). Eberhard was a Bible translator in Brazil, before changing direction, and questioning some of the value of translating the bible for people who are already accustomed to functioning in their churches using a regional language. Eberhard has been part of a large multi-year project looking at the uptake of Bible translations. His research extends from Brazil, to Indonesia, to Nigeria. He would travel to language areas, talk to and interview people, then attend their churches. While at the churches, he would ask people to show him their Bibles – which Bibles were they carrying? How well used were the Bibles? Which language was being used in the church? Eberhard raises the question: is it time to invest more into regional languages, and time to reduce emphasis on providing translations for relatively obscure tongues, that may end up getting very little use? One issue identified in this discussion, is that majority world people's vocally wanting Bible translations may be motivated by financial gain rather than serious theology. Eberhard does not address, and in fact seems not to consider, ways in which especially if languages of wider use are 'European', use of such languages will limit and confuse profound theological communication.

Review of: Klaus W. Müller, *Wahrheit oder Geld? Das Dilemma der Finanzierung von Mission*, Nürnberg: VTR, 2025. ISBN 9783957761545. Paperback, 374 pages, €29.80,

by Dr. Detlef Blöcher

The book, and [the review](#), are all in German. Non-German speakers are encouraged to get it translated themselves.

Müller puts finance in contemporary and recent Protestant mission, under the microscope. He asks questions, that many dare not ask: are missionary reports always honest? Given their dependence on funding from donors in the West, how honest can they afford to be? Few missionaries entirely tell the truth, Müller suggests. Their writing often comes across as hagiographic, and as depicting themselves as if they are the only missionary, or mission body, working on a particular field. Mueller goes on to look at alternative ways of funding mission, and encourages missionaries to share doubts and failures as well as success stories.

Bible translation forum, Germany

29-30 May 2026



Bible Translation Forum, Germany

The next Bible Translation Forum in Germany will be on 29–30 May 2026 at the International Conference Center Karimu (Wycliffe Germany).

Contact [Tianji Ma](#) for more information.

- **Language:** This forum occurs primarily in German though some presentations are in English.
- **Costs:** In addition to the Karimu accommodation costs, there is a **conference fee of approximately €30–50 per participant**.
- **Call for Papers:** Email [Tianji Ma](#) with your paper proposals. An annual yearbook is usually published after the Forum.
- **Plenary Speakers:** Each year, the program features around 5–7 speakers covering a wide spectrum of topics. For May 2026, **Dr. Jim Harries** and **Prof. Dr. Gerhard Taubers Schmidt**, will be speaking, amongst others.
- **Organization and Intended Audience:** The Forum was originally founded in 2005 by the translator Eberhard Werner. After his passing, Tianji Ma took over the coordination. Tianji serves as a missionary with OMF International and teaches at several Chinese theological seminaries. The Forum takes place annually in Germany and welcomes a broad range of contributions related to Bible translation—exegetical, translational, methodological, linguistic, and more. They especially encourage presentations that are accessible to participants from diverse backgrounds and stimulate discussion. Presentations typically last 50 minutes to one hour, followed by feedback and open dialogue. The intended audience includes anyone interested in Bible translation, both in theory and in practice.



Evangelical Missiological Society 2026

The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission encourages participation in this event. Various regional events also occur in April.

2026 CONFERENCE THEME:

Theological Anthropology for Missional Engagement

October 9-10 2026

In-person and virtual

Dallas Theological Seminary

[3909 Swiss Ave, Dallas, TX 75204](#)

<https://www.emsweb.org/conferences/annual/>

This year's theme "**Theological Anthropology for Missional Engagement**" is central to missiological reflection and practice, since acts of gospel witness, service, and cultural engagement all rest on assumptions about human identity, dignity, and destiny. In a rapidly changing world—marked by shifting views of spirituality, ethnicity, gender, technology, and ecology—the church must embrace a biblically faithful and missionally engaged understanding of the imago Dei.

At the heart of this year's theme is the exploration of *Imago Dei* in missional engagement—how human dignity, human rights, and gospel witness flow from being created in God's image. This perspective grounds reflection on the meaning of being human and how the imago Dei shapes evangelism, discipleship, community, and global mission

2026 Conference – Theme:

***From "the rest" to the "West:"
Global justice, de-coloniality,
and mutuality in Gospel witness***



asm
american society of missiology

June 19-21, 2026

St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana, USA

American Society of Missiology 2026

[American Society of Missiology - Annual Conference Call for Papers](#)

The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission encourages participation in this event.

The theme will be *From "the rest" to the "West:" Global justice, de-coloniality, and mutuality in Gospel witness*.

Join AVM
Webinars in
2026



22nd January 2026: George M.

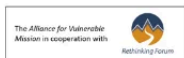
When the Change Begins in Us

Beyond new skills – a transformation of perspective



16th April 2026: Deborah Bernhard & Jim Harries

The Limits of Letting Go Navigating the complexities of submitting to local leadership in Vulnerable Mission



9th July 2026: Aanand A.

Following Jesus as Yesu Bhakta in the Hindu context



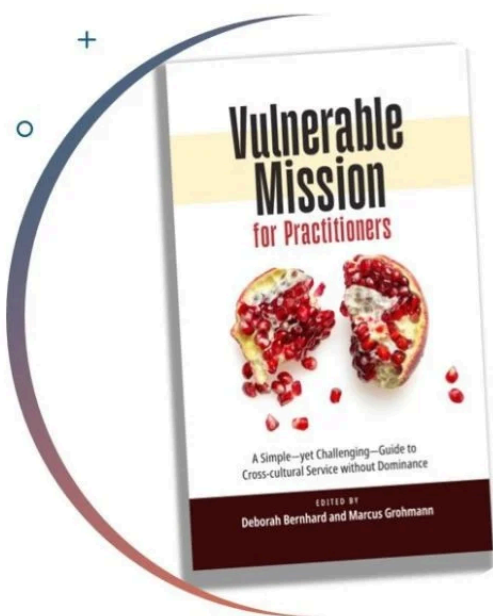
15th October 2026: Anna T.

Serving as alongsiders in the Muslim world



Join the AVM Webinars in 2026

The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission (AVM) invites you to its **2026 webinar series**, a space for humble dialogue on mission, language, and culture. Themes include *transformation of self*, *the complexities of submitting to local leadership*, and *humbly walking with Christ-followers in different cultural-religious contexts*. These online gatherings bring together a range of voices for shared learning and reflection. To join, please register [here](#).



A compact book for practitioners that explains ...

- what vulnerable mission is
- what it can look like in a variety of cultural contexts
- how vulnerable mission differs from other mission approaches
- why vulnerable mission is so important
- what serving according to the principles of vulnerable mission may require

Explore *Vulnerable Mission for Practitioners*—A Resource for the Year Ahead

After its publication in 2025, *Vulnerable Mission for Practitioners* remains available to those interested in exploring the principles and practices of vulnerable mission. The book can be ordered through [Amazon](#) or via the [AVM website](#) in both paperback and PDF ebook formats. A 5-minute AI-generated [podcast summary](#) is also available for a quick introduction.

Since the book is offered on a donation basis through our website, it may be a helpful option if you'd like to request multiple copies—for example, for your organisation, missionary colleagues, or ministry partners.

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- Relating to people through their languages and local resources -



The AVM Bulletin is published by Allianz für Verletzliche Mission e. V. / Alliance for Vulnerable Mission (AVM), registered under Association Register Number 14892 by the local court in Dresden. The AVM is represented by executive board members Marcus Grohmann, Deborah Bernhard, and Maria Richter. Contact via phone (+27 81 586 1484) or email (info@vulnerablemission.org).

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