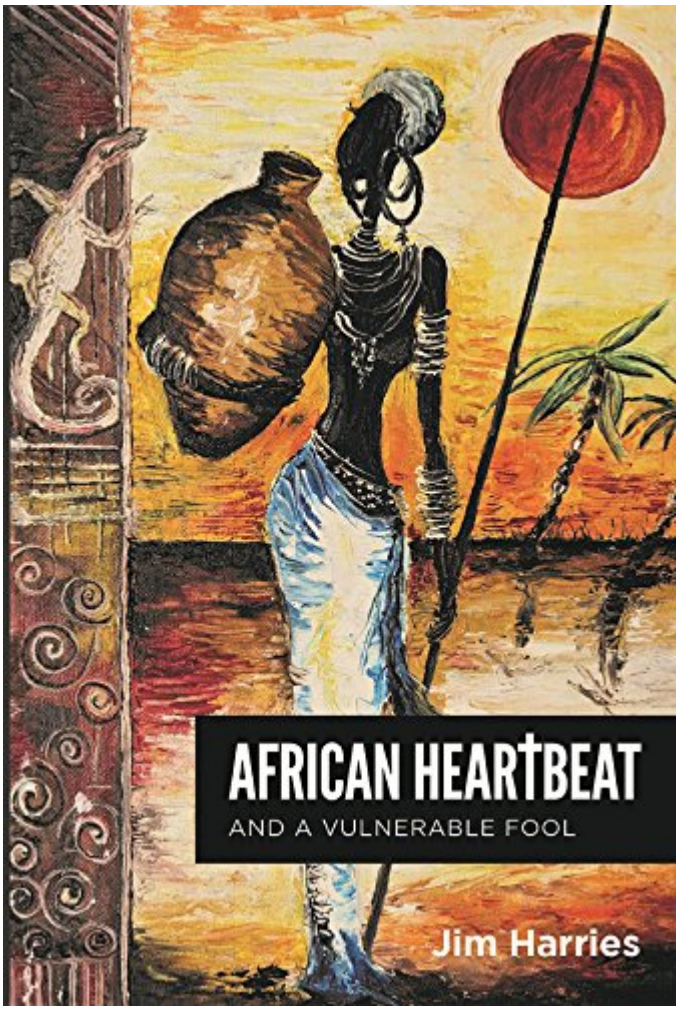
BOOKS I. HAVE READ: AFRICAN HEARTBEAT AND A VULNERABLE FOOL

Posted on November 21, 2019 by Eddie

If you want to understand changes in mission,
but you don't want to read a technical book;
why not try and novel.
Category: Observations

African Heartbeat: And A Vulnerable FoolÂ is another book by the prolific author and promoter of Vulnerable Mission, Jim Harries. The book is a novel of a little over 300 pages and is aimed at the general reader. The Kindle edition will set you back Â£6, the paperback about Â£9 and if you want the paperback, you will need to be prepared to give up at least half of your limbs.



In terms of plot and feel, the book is not disimlar to Jim's other novel To Africa in Love. The story concerns a missionary called Philo who sets off to work in Agriculture in Zambia, before ending up teaching the Bible in the imaginary country of Holima. On the way, Philo has to deal with missionaries who don't understand him, a training college that frustrates him, a seemingly incomprehensible African culture and a whole load of other obstacles. Eventually Phil comes to terms with his situation and settles into an approach to missionary work which revolves around using local languages and not bringing in resources (especially finance) from the outside world. To be honest, the plot is rather slow moving and there is a lot of expository dialogue. However, as a way of introducing some of the complexities of mission work in a friendly format this book has a lot to recommend it.

That being said, I do have a couple of reservations. Firstly, it could really do with some rigorous editing. It is wordy and repetative and if it were sharpened up a little it would make a much better read. Secondly, to anyone who knows Jim Harries (or who has read his Amazon biography) the story of someone starting in Agricultural work in Zambia and teaching the Bible in another will be very

familiar. The book feels like a thinly veiled autobiography and that makes it a rather uncomfortable read. The switch from a real country (Zambia) to a fictitious one (Holima) is just plain strange. I'm sure there are good reasons why the author hasn't simply written an autobiography, but this half-way house doesn't altogether strike me as a success.

Who should read this book? Despite my reservations, I would not hesitate to recommend this to someone who wanted to understand some of the complexities of Christian mission, but who is unlikely to read a mission text book. It is engaging enough to keep the casual reader involved and it is informative enough to help anyone gain a deeper understanding of mission. Buy it for your pastor or a member of your church mission committee.

If you would like to know more about Vunerable Mission, you should check out some of the books listed below or consider attending this conference.

The author generously provided me with a copy of this novel in return for this review. I have not allowed this kind provision to influence what I have written.