



Churches' Commission on
Mission

CONNECTIONS

Resourcing ecumenism and mission

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Editorial

In this issue of *CONNECTIONS* Mark Ellis (p.40) reflects that he won't be able to celebrate this year's Passover like he did in the past – as a remembrance of the freedom from bondage God gave to his chosen people. He encourages reflection on liberation that leads to new oppression as a result. The implicit land issue is important not only in Israel but in many areas where British/Irish churches have partner links. Some make it to the headlines (Zimbabwe, p.44), others (West Papua) hardly ever.

Martin Conway sends a response to Chris Wigglesworth's article in the last issue (p.53) and we hope that this may encourage other



readers to join in the controversial discussion of theological questions presented in this publication. Ecumenism is too practically important to manage it pragmatically under the pressures of everyday challenges. Pragmatism without honest argument over theological foundations won't take us very far. Kai Funkschmidt's paper (p. 42) is a reflection on current trends in theological reflection, calling for a certain caution with some of them.

As I write these lines, the shocking news from the terrorist attacks in the USA slowly come through. Looking through the pages of this issue again I realise that a lot of it is about suffering and bloodshed. If the world sets the ecumenical agenda, one cannot be surprised that suffering figures high on our agenda. However, we are called to see the signs of hope in new interfaith encounter, in attempts to bring the churches in history's most warring continent closer (p.44ff).

The questions that Marc Ellis raises are in fact wider and touch upon the heart of biblical theology, the concept of God's chosen people. "An old Jewish woman was questioned by two young Poles who researched the last traces of Jewish Poland: 'I am angry with our God.' 'Why?', I asked amazed. The old woman nodded. 'Yes. Yes! ... Are we not – they say – the chosen people? And what did we gain from this? Blood and blood again. Hatred and murder. I thought and sometimes still think, He had better not have chosen us. He had better let us live like all others.'¹ If we still believe in God's love, his people chosen to be a blessing in this world – where do we find our mission today?

Kai M. Funkschmidt, editor

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¹ Malgorzata Niezabitowska, Tomasz Tomaszewski, Die letzten Juden in Polen, Schaffhausen usw. 1987 p.55, transl. KMF.

Feature

Marc H. Ellis

The Last Passover

The following reflections by Marc Ellis were written almost 6 months ago and yet they are terrifyingly up to date. Any news from Israel/Palestine seem to consist of mutual acts of barbarism that make members of both communities entrench themselves in a one-way sense of belonging that offers no outlook towards peace beyond solidarity with "my own folk". Marc Ellis, himself an American Jew tries to overcome the "Laager" mentality and is critical of the emergence of a new "Constantinian form of Judaism. This text was sent to CCOM after Marc Ellis spoke to the Middle East Forum earlier this year. Please see also a book announcement on the Book Reviews page.

April 2001

This week Jews all over the world celebrate Passover, the ancient festival commemorating the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. The narrative of liberation is read within the context of food and fellowship. As Jews we are commanded to place ourselves in the original struggle to be free, to experience the suffering and hope of the ancient Israelites as they did, to see this ancient liberation as our own. Despite the plagues and death, the wanderings in the desert and admonishments of God, Passover is a festive holiday. Food and wine is plentiful. Family and friends come together.

How we celebrate our freedom in the past with the complexities of the present is always a challenge. Over time as Jews became free, struggles of other peoples were mentioned in the Seder meal. As a child being raised in the 1950s and 60s, at Passover we incorporated the civil rights struggle into our narrative. In the 1980s and 90s there were specific Passover narratives featuring the struggle of women, freedom movements in Central America and elsewhere. And in some Jewish homes and synagogues, Palestinians were featured as a people struggling for liberation.

There is hope in remembrance applied to the present. If we are in Egypt demanding our freedom, the Passover story accompanies us as we demand freedom now. Freedom is interdependent, across time and community boundaries. No one is truly free if others are not also free.

Today with Israeli helicopter gunships daily firing rockets into defenceless Palestinian towns, cities and refugee camps, it is difficult to accept the Passover narrative in its deepest implications. We as Jews are free but is that freedom at the expense of others? If Palestinians are being taught the "lesson" of opposing Israeli power and standing up for their rights and dignity, if the message from the Israeli government to the Palestinian people is surrender or die - a message not unfamiliar to Jews - do we repeat this story at the Passover table?

Most Jews will be silent about the helicopter gunships at Passover. Since the beginning of the most recent Palestinian uprising in November, Jewish organizations have placed full-page paid statements in newspapers around the country. They trumpet Israel's desire for peace, call for Jewish unity and castigate Palestinian terrorism and the deficiencies of Palestinian leadership. These statements will continue to be published during the Passover season.

The call for Jewish unity is a caution against Jewish dissent and the dissent of others who see the Passover story as embodying their own struggle today. Should we as Jews celebrate our own liberation while being silent about or even denigrating the Palestinian struggle? Are the helicopter gunships guarding Jews in Israel and Jews around the world on these Passover nights? Or are these helicopter gunships a symbol of our own need to reconsider the road we as Jews are traveling?

War is war, and in the midst of war few rules of civility are left unbroken. But is the expansion of Israel through settlements, land confiscations, assassination squads and the terror of exploding rockets, a war Jews want to fight, should fight or can be silent about under the guise of unity?

Can we recall the ancient struggle for freedom as our own and praise the violence of Israel as justified? As our own? Or are we, while speaking of our liberation struggle, undermining its essential meaning, that we and all peoples should be free?

During these days of celebration I will remember my first Palestinian friend, Nyaela Ayed, who was murdered in Jerusalem in 1999. A health advocate and planner who studied in the United States and was known by all as a gentle and principled person, I last saw Nyaela in Jerusalem in 1998 and spent many hours speaking to her about her life and the future of her people. I also visited the land her family owned in Jerusalem that Jewish settlers coveted. These settlers were willing to pay large sums of money for a small piece of land that would then forever be removed from Nyaela's family and from her people. The

Ayed's refused to sell the land. A short time later, Nyaela was murdered, a single stab wound to the heart, a professional execution.

It was during Passover last year that I learned of her death and visited her mother and sisters one morning in the same home where I had previously visited with Nyaela. In the afternoon, I went to Nyaela's grave just outside of the walls of the old city. In ancient understandings of Islam, those buried there are to be among the first resurrected in the last days. In contemporary Palestinian life Nyaela was designated a martyr, her grave sealed with the love of a grateful people.

This Passover I remember Nyaela and all those Palestinians known and unknown to me. As helicopter gunships rain terror on a defenceless people, I remember the faces and cries of a people whose freedom is integral to my own and to that of my people.

Is this the last Passover that I will celebrate? My heart is not in the celebration this year. And it can never be again until freedom for Jews is also freedom for Palestinians.

What do I answer my children when they ask the simple and difficult questions they are commanded to ask as we gather to tell the story of our origins thousands of years ago? That helicopter gunships are like the parting of the sea? That Ariel Sharon is like Moses leading us through the difficult times of the desert and rebellion?

I no longer have the answers to their questions. But I will respond as a Jew in the only way possible today. That the Palestinians are part of our story of liberation and until they are free, we are not.

Marc H. Ellis is University Professor of American and Jewish Studies and Director of the Center for American and Jewish Studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

More information on the author can be found at www.baylor.edu/American_Jewish/ellis.html For further articles by him check out <http://www.mediamonitors.net/marcellis3.html> (e.g. "On Ending the Era of Auschwitz" and "Helicopter Gunships and the Golden Calf").

Middle East Forum Report

The Middle East Forum meeting in June was largely devoted to meeting with members of the CTBI delegation which visited the Middle East in March and whose report is now available (cf. P. Renshaw's article in *CONNECTIONS* 2/2001). The delegation made valuable contacts with churches and with political leaders and those of other religious communities in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan and gained important insight into the pressures, hopes and fears experienced by Christians. One strong theme expressed by the delegation was the importance of fostering the links between our churches and those of the Middle East to enable our understanding and support to grow.

Half of the delegation's time was spent in Israel and Palestine. There the bad gets worse. Palestinians have been offered through negotiation no prospect of achieving a life free of Israeli domination. Israel seems set on achieving its security aims through repression and military means. Suicide bombing, assassination, indiscriminate killing of civilians and children, torture and collective punishment gain support on their own side, but only fuel further fear,

hatred and the desire for revenge. The diplomatic community seems paralysed and international law abandoned. The unacceptable becomes hopelessly accepted. There is further Christian emigration, but many show extraordinary endurance and faith. We look forward to being with some of these remarkable people during our residential conference in Dublin in November as we search to hear and respond to God's will.

Other notable events in the region have been the election of a new Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem and the Armenian Church's celebration of the 1700th anniversary of Armenia's conversion to Christianity.

The Forum is preparing a conference on "Being a Peace-Making Church in Situation of Conflict" which will take place in Dublin from 26-28 November 2001. Speakers include Jean Zaru (Ramallah Friends Meeting) and Rev Dr Mitri Raheb (Director International Cultural Centre Bethlehem). For further information contact colin.morton@fish.co.uk.

Colin Morton, Focal Person

Kai M. Funkschmidt

On Poetry and Theology and Why They Are Not the Same

The following article is based on a paper presented to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches' (WARC) consultants' group that was asked to design a study process in preparation for the next General Council in 2004 on the theme 'That All May Have Life in Fullness'. The reflections were further influenced by papers and discussions at the recent BIAMS conference in Cardiff about a theology of the Holy Spirit and its usefulness for current challenges.

The recent BIAMS Conference on 'Spirituality in Mission' opened with a paper by Bishop Saunders Davies. It consisted mainly of the reciting of poems in Welsh and English. The reciting was moving and the poems were beautiful. As Bishop Davies said: "Poetry is life distilled." However after the talk I felt that something had been missing. It took me a while to realise that I had come to *understand* more about 'spirituality in mission' not just to experience examples of it. Reciting is not the same as literary criticism. It seems to me that this little scene is typical of a certain trend in theology.

'Life in Fullness' or 'Le vent se lève – il faut tenter de vivre'

In May 1968 Paris was full of graffiti. Some are still for sale as postcards today. "Le vent se lève – il faut tenter de vivre" (the wind is rising, one must try and live...) and "Plutôt la vie..." are two which use the term 'life' in a particular sense. These invitations to all who wanted a major change in the present order presume that it goes without saying what 'life' means. In all struggles what mattered was not ideologies, doctrines and theories but life's essentials – and did not everyone know what these were? No doubt – life is seen as something inherently positive *per se*. And rightly so: in many situations humans will know instinctively what is good and helpful for their own life and for others' lives.

'Life' is in itself a symbol of something worth striving for, so convincing that it is still marketable today. It is a forceful message of so few words that is easily understood after decades. In Western churches we often wished our hymns and prayers were generally understood the day we wrote them.

The term 'life' (theology of life, fullness of life...) is in full swing in current theology, competing for No 1 with 'spirit' and 'spirituality' which move in the same realm of broad religious terminology.² WARC's preparatory reflections on their future Council Theme identify "the interest of God – which is life". The recent 11th CCA Assembly chose the "Fullness of Life For All" as their theme for the beginning of the new millennium. Generally theological 'life'-language often goes together with a renewed attention to the Holy Spirit who likewise encompasses notions of wholeness and holiness and ecology issues, justice as equality and prophetic



Graffiti Paris, mai 1968
("Life, rather...")

witness as well as generally the experience of God in the contemporary world. Explicitly in this context the Spirit is freed from centuries of its ('his?', 'her?') 'Christocentric' reduction (→ filioque) and thought of more in connection with the ruach's role in creation.

The 'life'-terminology is appealing because it can be taken as a signpost in addressing very broadly so many different current challenges to humankind and the Church (ecology, other religions, economic inequality).

Also, like 'Spirit' and unlike more traditional Christian terms (grace, salvation, redemption...) it is a less weighty Christian term acceptable to the average secularised non-Christian in the West.

Certainly this very *vagueness* is an important part of the appeal of the term 'life' – and some authors explicitly say so. Much current theologising around the term 'life' is consciously trying to celebrate the vagueness of poetical theology over against the narrowness of classical terminological definitions which seem less appropriate for an understanding of God's will and working in the world.³

So what precisely is the distinctive and valuable contribution of 'life'-terminology?

1. 'Life' is a **relational term**. It relates humans to the whole of creation better than the prevalent technocratic models of control of the world. Necessarily the holistic side makes the term imprecise, like any term wanting to include non-scientific aspects of the world (emotions, fantasy, symbolic production like liturgy etc.)
2. 'Life' is often used **critically** towards current forms of **rationalism and science**. We need to value myth more in comparison to logos.
3. 'Life' is a term encouraging **struggle** because life on the earth is threatened. "In fact, it is the *threats* to life, rather than the celebration of it, that stimulated the ecumenical theology and culture of life initiative in the first place."⁴ Occasionally this leads to dualistic or even apocalyptic theology, when for instance "biology of life" is recruited to combat a "biology of death" (de

² There are scores of examples, here are just a few: Hyun Kyung Chung: "Culture of life", Raiser: "Household of life", L.Boff: "New evangelisation for a culture of life and freedom", EATWOT 1992 titled "Third World Spirituality – Cry for Life".

³ Typical e.g. J.Moltmann's: *Der Geist des Lebens* (The Spirit of Life) or: *Ökumenische Sozialethik* by M.Robra (head of WCC 'Theology of Life'-Programme), both indulging in poetical language, poems, in stories and hymns when doing theology.

⁴ L.Rasmussen: *Theology of Life and Ecumenical Ethics*, Geneva, WCC/Unit III, 1993 p.8.

Santa Ana), or when the current “culture of death” is opposed to a “culture of life” (Chung Hyun Kyung).

4. The consequence is a reverse variance of human omnipotence fantasies. **Preserving** the planet is our task. All depends on us. “Typical sign of our time is a highly endangered planet in our hands.” (Section I in Canberra 1991).
5. Preservation is not for its own sake only. The aim is ‘life in fullness’ – not in eternity but here on earth (Moltmann). Thus the ‘life’-language has a **revolutionary** aspect, demanding further development of creation and the present order. This aspect of ‘life’ particularly encourages the liberating aspects of human behaviour.

The Grazing Wolf

A lot of ‘life’-language has a romanticising tendency. Poetry, nature’s beauty, harmony of humans and nature are the images chosen to illustrate ‘life’. But why choose the sunset and the jungle waterfall rather than the leopard preying on the young gazelle as illustration for ‘life’? ‘Life’ is *not* really a huge realm of ordered relations giving space to each creature if only the human species does not disturb it, as German poet Gottfried Benn observes:

“Life goes not a single step /
without striking the other.
Not the life of others without striking me;
not my life without striking others:
vulnerant omnes, ultima necat [all injure, the last
one kills]
I read the inscription on a sundial.”⁵

There are humans trying to overcome this life-death link by all means. Buddhist and Jaina monks go to extremes and yet never achieve a life that does not cost other life.

So what about the Christian approach? A typical expression exemplifying current theological use of life terminology is: “‘Life in fullness’ suggests defeating the forces of death and beyond”⁶. Despite the undoubted contradiction between life and death, phrases like this seem unrealistic and maybe triumphalistic from a pragmatic point of view⁷ and one-sided from a theological and ecological point of view. Natural life is not and cannot be without (causing) death. While the aim to strive for a world of more justice and peace is certainly in accordance with the fundamentals of Christian faith there is a danger of over-simplistic and triumphalist approach to the negative sides of ‘life’, that need to be ‘overcome’. These are particularly inappropriate when natural life is taken as illustration of the harmony in God’s creation in an attempt to tackle ecological issues.

Steve Finamore in an interesting recent lecture pointed out that the description of certain forms of violence as ‘bestly’ is inaccurate. They are not at all bestly – they do not occur

in animal life – but profoundly human.⁸ ‘Life’ is a positive notion only in a very limited sense unless it is complemented by ‘grace’ and ‘reconciliation’ (in the traditional sense of reconciliation between God and human).

A lot of ‘life’-theology claims to have a wider remit than traditional anthropocentric theology. However, returning to the image of the wolf and the sheep, we discover that life involving death is not an ethical problem within the natural world at all. It only becomes an ethical problem when applied to the human involvement, either as victim of life-denying violence (direct or indirect) or as perpetrator and origin of life’s destruction (e.g. in ecological exploitation of creation). It is the humans’ world that needs reconciliation – with God, each other and creation.

Or is it really God’s reconciliation, yes, is it even desirable that wolf and sheep graze peacefully alongside each other? Certainly not, but it seems that much current pneumatology is inclined to take such metaphors too literally and thus deny reality of a violent and sinful world. Too one-sided theology will have difficulties making meaningful rational contributions to the discussions in the public arena.

This is not just an issue of being pragmatically realistic. It is also an issue of sidelining the basic insight into the fallen nature of creation and (wo)man’s sinfulness. If humankind sees itself as responsible for the entire world and the healing of its brokenness then theology’s task is to remind ourselves of the dangers of a new self-deification

As Finamore points out the Bible itself is a guard against too romantic notions of ‘overcoming’, ‘defeating’ the forces of death. The OT obviously has strands of a very violent God (and sometimes the Spirit itself is the origin of such violence). Even the NT is not consistently life-friendly in a non-violent sense, at least not in its imagery (and Acts 5:9 even directly links violence and the Spirit).

WARC’s Council theme for 2004 is taken from John 10:10. ‘Life in fullness’ is a consciously chosen translation, trying to avoid the reduction of ‘life’ to its materialistic aspects (compared to “life in abundance”). However the very term ‘life’ which in most languages does not distinguish between *zwh* and *bios* may easily lead to misunderstandings. The *zwh* that John is talking about is not the life that we struggle for within this world. What is the relationship between the spiritual concept of *zwh* and the physical *bios*? If the one is dissolved into the other the concept of *zwh* threatens to be surrendered to human control and effort and losing its eschatological momentum. If however *zwh* had nothing to do with *bios* we would be rightly accused of spiritualising the challenge and religion could again be seen as being a means to keep the poor quiet.

I shall below suggest a possibility of relating the two with the help of the concept of Eucharistic communion.

The end of this essay will be printed in the next issue. The full text will shortly also be available for download on www.ccom.org.uk.

⁵ Über die Rolle des Schriftstellers in dieser Zeit, Ges. Werke Bd.7, Wiesbaden 1968 p.1667. Translation KMF.

⁶ WARC’s preparatory papers, unpublished Ms.

⁷ For this reason WCC’s DOVe (‘Decade to Overcome Violence’) is seen critically in some British churches. The alternative less triumphalist suggestion ‘Following Jesus in a Violent World’ was suggested by British Baptists at Harare.

⁸ Steve Finamore: Violence, the Bible and the End of the World, Whitley Lectures 2001, Oxford 2001.

Update...Update...Update...

ZCC rejects criticism for receiving funds from abroad

Harare, 5 September (ENI)--The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) believes itself to be the target of a smear campaign after its publication last week of a pastoral letter strongly critical of state-sanctioned violence in the country.

A report in the government-controlled Sunday Mail on 2 September said that the ZCC had received US\$150,000 from the International Republican Institution (IRI), a foundation in the United States.

The report, quoting unnamed government sources, described the IRI as an anti-government organisation and suggested that IRI funding was behind the ZCC's pastoral letter. In its pastoral letter, the ZCC accused political leaders of instigating violent actions against their perceived opponents and criticised President Robert Mugabe's government for allowing "war veterans to take the law into their own hands".

A senior ZCC official said that the ZCC had received funds from abroad but denied that there was anything "sinister" about the funding, intended for voter education and training election monitors for presidential elections scheduled for next year.

A government source questioned how the ZCC could get involved in dealings with the IRI, an organisation whose directors it described as representing the military, oil, gambling, corporate and foreign interests of America.

Densen Mafinyane, the ZCC's general secretary, said that the ZCC was "taking the issue seriously". The general secretary hinted that the council might be the target of a campaign by government officials and President Mugabe's ruling Zanu PF party. "The ZCC has been in existence for a long time. Before independence in 1980, the ZCC assisted Zanu PF officials, who are in government today, during the liberation struggle. We supplied them with food, scholarships and other things. And all that was sponsored mainly through foreign funds raised by the ZCC.

While some organisations might be receiving money for sinister motives, the ZCC was not one of them, Mafinyane said. "Our mission is to help Zimbabweans like we have done in the past," he said. "We will issue a statement soon like we did with the pastoral letter." The ZCC has conducted voter education campaigns since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980.

However, the government announced recently that it would introduce laws banning churches and civic organisations from conducting such campaigns.

The Churches and the Situation in North Belfast

Pictures of terrified Catholic children going to Holy Cross Primary School in North Belfast have gone around the world. Protestant Church leaders have condemned the action against the children and called for dialogue and accommodation between the two communities.

The background is that North Belfast is a patchwork quilt of deprived Catholic and Protestant enclaves which has seen much violence over the last 30 years. There have been significant population movements going on with Protestants having moved out. There is anger and pain in both Protestant and Catholic communities.

Ardoyne is predominantly Catholic but the school is in the Protestant enclave of Glenbryn. Protestants in Glenbryn feel under siege and feel intimidated when they go to the local shops and post office. The wider picture is of growing sense of alienation in the working class Protestant community in Northern Ireland, and in North Belfast in particular. It feels that it is losing and the other community is gaining.

None of this, of course, justifies what has happened to children going to school, as Protestant church leaders have made clear.

The local Presbyterian minister, the Rev Norman Hamilton, has been actively involved in mediation efforts. He has been in contact with the local Catholic priest, the Rev Aidan Troy, who is chairman of the Board of Governors of the school. He has taken part in a joint act of worship with Father Troy. The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church has visited both the Holy Cross school and the adjacent Protestant school. He was in the area when the blast bomb was thrown.

David Stevens, General Secretary Irish Council of Churches

Inter-Faith Issue Courses

The United College of the Ascension (run by USPG and the Methodist Church) offers day or weekend courses on inter-faith issues, some of which form

part of a Certificate in Inter-Faith-Relations. The courses are open to any who wish to come, not necessarily as part of the certificate. They include: *Women and Faith*, *Life after Survival* (Jewish-Christian issues), *Life and death – medical issues of ethics among the religions*. Details at UCA, Weoley Park Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6RD, 0121 4156810, jmarks.uca@sellyoak.ac.uk.

Building Bridges of Hope – A Living Laboratory of Changing Churches

Building Bridges of Hope (BBH) is moving into a new and exciting stage. We have already been involved with local churches of every shape, location and hue in finding out where the opportunities and blockages are in local mission.

The aim now is to move towards implementing those findings in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Over the next eighteen months and beyond, **BBH will be supporting, accompanying and networking together around 18 groundbreaking initiatives** ('Pilot' situations). These are places of hopeful change, where creative ways of being church in a changing world are being put into practice.

Significantly, many of these pilots are about moving up from the local to discover in practical terms how wider church structures and resources can be mobilised more effectively. Others are about new or emergent forms of church. All are engaged in creative conversation and cooperation with people in their community.

In this new phase of work, BBH will test how skilled accompaniment can support some of the 'living laboratories' of tomorrow's church. Lessons, stories, examples and insights will be shared and swapped along the way.

Through prayer, and in partnership with other parallel initiatives, the BBH partners believe this process can play a small but significant role in helping to re-equip churches in Britain and Ireland for witness and service. We hope to be able to reveal the identity of the first 'tranche' of pilots soon.

Details about the BBH 'pilots' – together with associated materials and ventures, contacts and avenues for practical support – are included in a new booklet, **Summarising Building Bridges of Hope**, which is about to be published as Connections goes to press. This will be available for £3 inc. postage from CTBI (address at the back) or will be downloadable from the BBH website (www.ctbi.org.uk/bbh).

Ecumenical representatives of **the churches in the Four Nations have appointed a consultant to**

galvanise BBH Stage C (as it is known in the managing group of national and local church workers) up until the end of 2002. He is the Rev Terry Tennens, a local Baptist minister with significant experience of development work in and outside the churches. Terry has been working with Donald Elliott over the last seven months building up an extensive range of contacts and potential pilots on the ground. He can be contacted by email on: terry.tennens@tesco.net.

The churches in Scotland are now working through a coordinator, Brian Burden of the Church of Scotland – who chairs the ACTS mission committee (gis72@dial.pipex.com) – and two volunteer consultants, San Salvensen and Fr Bob Bradley. Patricia Lockhart (Roman Catholic) is the new ecumenical representative on the BBH managing group. She takes over from Norma Henderson, who has put in a great deal of valued work over the past year and more.

In Wales a Welsh language version of the text of the BBH video workbook, **Bridges to Build**, is being made available. Sion Owen of Cytûn is the key ecumenical contact: saocyun@prifardd.fsnet.fsr.snet.co.uk. The video/workbook are available for £13.99 plus £2 p&p from Church House bookshop: www.chbookshop.co.uk – look for Bridges to Build in the search function.

Meanwhile the **Association of Building Bridges Churches** (ABC) held its annual meeting in July and is about to publish a training guide for local churches wanting to employ the BBH method, together with an information leaflet. Contact the Rev J. Summers: JohnFelicity@summersbox.freereserve.co.uk.

Last, but not least, Jeanne Hinton is working on a book, **Changing Churches**, which is based on her journey round a number of local places in Britain and Ireland, following up the story of their involvement in the congregational accompaniment that took place in the last phase of BBH. This will be published in February 2002 in time for the CTBI Assembly.

Simon Barrow

CCOM website

Some new features have been added and the site has been considerably extended. Some of the CCOM Forums have put up information material on their region or area of work, for example the second edition of the Sri Lanka booklet, first published in 1999 or the report of the Africa Forum's residential conference on HIV/Aids. Some further articles which are of relevance in the context of Forums are available for download (e.g. a reflection by Uwe Gräbe on the theology of land in the conflict

between post-Auschwitz Western theology, Marquardt and van Buren, and Palestinian theologians Raheb and Ateek.). Some new features are being introduced, e.g. an ecumenical resources section that starts with an ecumenical diary 2001 to 2005 where shortly the major ecumenical events should be visible at a glance.

The site is encountering occasional technical difficulties since we started with our server and network but these are teething problems and if you repeatedly encounter a certain problem try again a week later (and you may wish to tell us about it).



CCOM Forum Reports

For some Forums you will also find up-to-date information on the website www.ccom.org.uk.

MTAG

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Our May meeting this time was filled with wine and presents. After all, Professor David Ford says we should look forward to heaven as a feast and a celebration - so there was a little foretaste of heaven (can it be true??) in the Salisbury Room of Inter-Church House as we celebrated and said farewell to Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali as MTAG's chairman.

There was thanks and appreciation, but as ever in MTAG, there was also challenge. First, in our time of prayer and reflection, Bishop Michael challenged us to think about our status as an *ecumenical* group. Too often, he suggested, we content ourselves with a John 17 agenda, but what would it mean, what would it *really* mean, if we were to work to an Ephesians 1 agenda, with a vision of nothing less than the unity of the whole created order? How would this relativise the questions and problems about how we work together, if we could set our sights on working for the much larger vision and plan?

As if prophetically, we also had some new material on the table in the end stage of our work on Mission in Theological Education which itself invoked this bigger question. This was a series of challenges to the way that mission specialists themselves teach mission as a focused subject. So, we ourselves had to respond to these challenges in the light of the bigger vision. We asked ourselves whether we rely too heavily on notions of *missio dei* - do we use this as an excuse for everything that we do in the name of mission and is this right? We were challenged by the perspectives of Bert Hoedemaker on mission in relation to eschatology. We asked ourselves questions about Gospel and

culture and re-readings of mission history in ways which make us think afresh about the praxis of mission in the 21st century. We asked hard questions about what difference relations with people of other faiths makes to the way we understand what we are about and how these dialogues make a difference to our agenda for justice and peace. We asked what difference all that then makes to our preconceptions about evangelism and then placed all our deliberations with the context of today's society. How practical is all our thinking, when it comes to the basic question of *how* we share faith, the faith that makes possible the overarching vision of Ephesians 1?

It feels right then, that a group finishing its current project should be challenged and changed by the conclusions it draws. Only by this restless questioning, and feeling of disturbance, can we be clear that, far from having wrapped up issues of mission in theological education, we have only just started out on the larger and longer journey. Wherever we go next, it will be exciting.

Anne Richards, MTAG Secretary

Middle East

Please see the report on p.41.

Asia

Rev Dr **George Mathews Chunakara** (WCC Asia Desk) spoke to the Forum on 13 June on increase of inter-religious tensions in Asia. He developed certain issues that arose partly from a pre-distributed paper by Klaus Schäfer (EMW, Germany). Chunakara demonstrated how Asia, that had been seen as the land of tolerance and freedom, had now changed partly on account of national aspirations, religious tensions and conflicts which were leading to serious divisions having social, cultural ethnic as well as religious connotations. He noted five areas of conflict:

- i) Muslim/Christian in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, India, Nepal and Indonesia.
- ii) Hindu/Christian in India and Nepal.
- iii) Hindu/Muslim in India.

- iii) Buddhist/Christian in Sri Lanka, Burma and Cambodia
- iv) Religions/Government in China, Vietnam and other socialist countries.

Religious fundamentalism was growing particularly in Islamic countries, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan but also in India and Malaysia. Dr Chunakara gave a detailed analysis of the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in areas such as Afghanistan over the past 25 years and how it affects neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan, and has been linked to the military and its training of people, not only in the use of arms. Military people have become political leaders in various regimes. By today, the network of fundamentalist Islamic influence is penetrating south east Asia to include areas like Burma, Bangladesh, Indonesia and even China. Some specific examples show the reasons for the growth of Islamic conservatism:

- i) The highly military role of General Zia in Pakistan, certain aspects of the political and social reforms in his country.
- ii) The Islamic revolution in Iran.
- iii) The emergent Islamic state in Afghanistan.
- iv) The rise of Hindu nationalism in India.

Chunakara referred to the growth and development of Islam in the Philippines, particularly with the Morrow group which forms 5% of the population in the Moluccas where there are 22 million Muslims. Open conflict developed particularly over the Christian use of the word 'Allah' for God in Indonesia where 87% of the population are Muslim and where new active Muslim groups have developed in the post-Suharto period, some being progressive and thus more open towards Christians, and others more conservative. In Bangladesh Islam for years exercised tolerance towards the Christians, but more recently has become more conservative, particularly in response to aggressive evangelism in the northern parts.

Chunakara in the second part of his presentation outlined the Christian approach to the development of Islam. He found little to report by way of efforts by Asian churches or National Councils of Churches or even the CCA. Many had been vocal in favour of inter-faith dialogue, but no systematic effort had been attempted. In certain areas of India belated efforts at dialogue and co-operation have emerged following conflicts and disruption. However, aggressive and intolerant evangelical groups acting independently of local churches even to the point of splitting mainline churches (52 denominations in Bangladesh today) are creating problems and danger for everybody else. Some of the younger ones have direct links with Korea (training and funding) and others with the USA. In the Katmandu Valley

(Nepal), a traditionally Hindu area, 32 seminaries are preparing people for this kind of evangelism. It is known that there are 200 missionaries from Korea in Vietnam. In 1974-75 there were 65,000 Protestants, by 1996 after a purge of Christians in the intervening period there were one million. By today foreign missionaries working with the Vietnam Evangelical Church are causing divisions.

For a long time the churches in Asia sought to establish their own identity through contributions of people like D. T. Niles and others. In the past the strongest links have been with Western Europe and Christianity is still seen in parts as being an alien religion. It is important to remember that Christianity had been part of Asian life long before the period of colonisation and in fact was centuries older than Christianity in Central and Western Europe.

The following points emerged in the discussion:

- i) Double role of the Church, particularly in India, of organising the unorganised and giving power to the powerless, as well as the social and economic impact of developmental work of the churches as a contribution to the religious conflicts and divisions.
- ii) To what extent are the mainline churches involved in social activities but with a hidden agenda and to what extent are they scapegoats for the more aggressive style of evangelism?
- iii) It is important to note that the aggressive style evangelism comes to a large extent from within Asia, e.g. Korea or India, not just from the USA. Constantly referring to it as "American style mission" is unfair.
- iv) How important is the role of foreign money in enabling aggressive evangelism? (The Methodist work in Cambodia is supported by Korean, Singaporean and Malaysian as well as American churches).
- v) With the development of post-modernism and the decline of institutions, is not religion also becoming an open market with a flow of missionaries and local congregations etc. across boundaries and borders?
- vi) How should we in Britain respond to people of other living faiths actively witnessing in this land? How do our answers here and our reaction to inter-religious tension overseas relate?

Leo Bashyam (Christian Aid Asia Desk) introduced a draft of **CA's Asia Directions Paper** requesting the Forum members to comment on it. It will be discussed at the next meeting on 31 October.

The Asia Forum is planning to hold a **residential meeting** for 14-16 May 2002. Venue and theme are being discussed by a preparatory group consisting of Jill Hughes (Church of Scotland), Ramani Leathard

(Christian Aid), Dafydd Andrew Jones (Presbyterian Church of Wales), Kai Funkschmidt (CCOM).

Dafydd Andrew Jones (Focal Person) and KMF

Africa

Dilemmas when supporting orphans and their families affected by HIV/AIDS

There are 12 million children in sub-Saharan Africa orphaned because of HIV/AIDS and the figure is rising. Caring for orphans and their families burdened by **HIV/AIDS** results in difficult choices. In July the Africa Forum considered such dilemmas as:

- Should orphanages be encouraged, as is often suggested from outside Africa, or is it better to support extended families in their care of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS?
- Should guardians of orphans be expected to keep paying rent in order to keep the foothold of the family on the land when, because of lack of resources, they may not benefit from its use?
- Recognised good work may mean delegations/visitors go to see successful programmes, but what should the reaction be when no financial recognition is given to the time and energy that such visits involve?

Agencies and mission societies face dilemmas as they seek to support their partner organisations across Africa. Decisions have to be made, for instance, about project requests which do not recognise the existence of the pandemic. The need to break the silence about HIV/AIDS is paramount, but how is that best done?

A summary of the dilemmas discussed at the meeting, which was attended by representative of over 20 organisations, is on the CCOM website: www.ccom.org.uk.

Speakers included Bishop Ntahoturi (Church of Burundi, Anglican Communion), Carol Finlay (Ekwendeni Hospital, Malawi & Church of Scotland), Walter Dunlop (Church of Scotland), Monica Dolan (CAFOD) and Carole Collins (Christian Aid).

This focus on orphans and their families followed the residential meeting in April that was devoted to a more general overview of HIV/AIDS in Africa, including insights from the All Africa Conference of Churches. It was agreed that there is a need for the church bodies in these islands with links to Africa to share more with each other about what they are doing. Success can then be celebrated and gaps identified. The Forum will return to the subject at its next meeting in November, although the main topic will be the oil rich, war torn Sudan. Prior to that

there is a meeting on 25 October of the Sudan Church Support Group, which meets under the auspices of CCOM. At the July meeting consideration was also given to the deteriorating economic and political situation in Zimbabwe.

As a policy the Forum reflects on the views expressed by African churches and their leaders, and sharing these is a function of the Forum. In this, and other respects, attendance by Africa desk staff of member bodies makes the work of the Forum more effective.

PROCMURA has a fresh Newsletter

The **Project for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa** (PROCMURA) is now publishing an attractive illustrated bi-annual newsletter about its work, which particularly includes the development of understanding among Christians of Islam. In the first edition, in June 2001, there are articles on the role of women in Christian-Muslim Relations, and on PROCMURA's activities in Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Togo. The Focal Person of the Africa Forum, from whom more information is available, represents CCOM on the European Liaison Committee of PROCMURA.

Copies may be obtained from Rev Dr Johnson Mbillah, General Adviser, PROCMURA, Mimosa Road (off Mvuli Road), PO Box 66099, Nairobi, Kenya. E-mail: procmura@insightkenya.com

Subscription: US\$12 per year, incl. postage.

Gordon Holmes, Focal Person

Church of North India and Church of South India Relationship Committees

A review of the India work has been planned for a long time due to the forthcoming retirement of Gordon Shaw as the Group's Secretary after many years of serving in this position. The group was set up after the last meeting of the India Relationships Committees and will consist of Baroness Kathleen Richardson (Chair), Julie Lipp-Nathaniel (USPG), Jill Hughes (Church of Scotland), Surya Prakash (EMW, Stuttgart), Adrian Watkins (CMS) and Kai Funkschmidt (CCOM). The first meeting will be on 5 October in Edinburgh. The task of the review is to check how the remits of the Relations Committees can best be adapted to a situation that has considerably changed since the committees were set up decades ago. The Review Group is asked to suggest the new structures in the summer of 2002.

Let's Go Surfin'

dad@hvn, ur spshl. we want wot u want & urth 2b like hvn. giv us food & Agiv r sins lyk we Agiv uvaz. dont test us! save us! bcos we no ur boss, ur tuf & ur cool 4eva! ok? Not ok? Well, then you are obviously not using your mobile phone for text messaging enough. This text is the Our Father (<http://www.wtamu.edu/academic/fah/eng/wc/lingrec.htm>) in the typical shortened mobile phone SMS language. In fact it is the winning entry of a competition organised by the Christian website Ship of Fools (<http://ship-of-fools.com>). They had asked people to try and squeeze the original 372-character prayer into 160 characters - the maximum which can fit on a mobile phone message. Hundreds answered and many of them were ministers. In the light of this, one may not accuse the modern church of technophobia. However the missionary potential of this communication method will have to be carefully assessed. If God in Christ revealed his love then maybe the test for the appropriate means to communicate this is to ask yourself if you would make a personal declaration of love by the same means. In general experience a letter or an eye to eye talk are unbeaten in this field. Well, incidentally these are the main means used in the Bible's mission model (http://www.geocities.com/simon_barrowuk/article20.html).

The shortest entry by the way was from Wales, not exactly a place known for its short-word language: *Hi Fr., Mat 6:9-13 again pls. Cheers. cu in ch. So if you are ever again short of time for a quick rosary, here you go. ok 4u? yo!*

If you think all this is too exotic you may wish to check <http://www.wtamu.edu/academic/fah/eng/wc/lingrec.htm>, where you can here the Our Father said in Old English. Well, not everybody will be happy with what can be seen as playing around with a prayer. Presumably any means of communication can be the cause of worries. The Bible became history's best-selling book because one man invented a new technique of producing communication means, i.e. a faster way to print books. Just like the first translations in vernacular languages Johannes Gutenberg's (<http://www.gutenberg.de/english/index.htm>) invention was not well received by everybody in the Church of the time - because it



meant that anyone could provide themselves with a Bible and think about what they read. Johannes Gutenberg recently was voted 'Man of the Millennium' by a group of publicists. The No 3 on the 1000 people strong list shows the tremendous effect which the print as new means of communication had: this No 3 is Martin Luther (http://pirate.shu.edu/~gottlitr/mil_site/introb.html). Gutenberg's Bibles can today be seen by even more people than during his lifetime: view the British library's (www.bl.uk) copy at <http://prodigi.bl.uk/gutenbg/search.asp>.

The list was drawn up by Americans and it comes as no surprise that there are only three non-Westerners among the first 50 people on it. A man like Toyohiko Kagawa (<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/143.html>), whose birthday we remembered on 10 July (1888), would have no chance of making it there despite his great influence on Japanese Christianity and beyond. You can directly read his book "The Religion of Jesus" on <http://www.abccog.org/kagawa1.htm>

This year saw the centenary of Queen Victoria's death, a woman who lent her name to an entire era. While she personally was rather more moderate in her religion than many of her contemporaries, her age is often seen as a kind of golden past, good old days when churches were full and faith was strong in the public arena. As always the reality is more complex, or rather, more sobering (<http://landow.stg.brown.edu/victorian/religion/relov.html>). It certainly was a time of great religious movement: John Newman's conversion to Catholicism, the emergence of the evangelical movement, Thomas Huxley coining the term "Agnosticism" (<http://landow.stg.brown.edu/victorian/religion/agnos.html>). Foreign Missions thrived, Britain becoming world No 1 not only in the colonies she controlled but also in the number of missionaries she sent abroad. However the combination of the two - apart from creating headaches and embarrassment for today's churches - occasionally led to curious incidents as with the elderly African chief who asked a new governor: "How am Queen Victoria? How am 'postle Paul?" (www.pbs.org/empires/victoria/history/moral.html).

News, Resources and Events

5th Leuenberg Assembly in Belfast

Do you see yourself as a *European* Christian? Do those of us who are not Roman Catholic or Orthodox think of ourselves as *European Protestants*?

The church life we inherit was drastically re-shaped by the European Reformation of the 16th and 17th centuries. Two of the largest families of European protestants, Reformed and the Lutherans, 'buried the hatchet' on past schisms in 1973 at Leuenberg (Switzerland) and with Methodist Churches constitute the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. Some are tempted to see their assembly, held

every seven years, as the nearest thing to a European Protestant Synod. Others present resist the Synod idea but nevertheless feel the solidarity, recognize the shared inheritance and value the contacts, friendships and enrichment the Fellowship brings. You may find the word 'protestant' ill-fitting but the June 2001 Leuenberg Assembly was held in Belfast where even Anglicans are protestant. How about 'evangelical'? That is the most used name for these churches in the forms 'evangelisch', 'evangelique' etc.

It is practically impossible to maintain living contact with over a hundred national denominational bodies on the continent especially if working with churches on other continents more important to you. So most member churches are selective. During the cold war decades Leuenberg was a useful life-line to churches under communism. Now benefits come through meeting churches somewhat like our own, with similar theological starting points but often different social settings, facing questions of secularization, postmodernism, 'New Age' competition and all the varieties of relation to state institutions that it is possible to imagine.

And other church families re-shaped by the Reformation? Bishop Michael Doe (Swindon) brought the greetings of the Archbishop of Canterbury who might be seen as leader of just one national church in part of one European state or representing a world communion and related to various Leuenberg churches through the Porvoo, Meissen and Reuilly common statements. Theodor Angelov represented

the European Baptist Federation, towards which the Assembly made an approach suggesting talks.

Assembly members were well immersed in the Northern Ireland situation. Archbishop Sean Brady and Bishop Farquhar of the RC Church were present at the opening service with the PCI moderator

presiding and representatives of other religious bodies (synagogues, non-subscribing presbyterians, Methodists, Quakers, and Lutherans) present. We were addressed on the Northern Ireland situation by two professors and visited reconciliation projects midweek and congregations on Sunday.

Geoffrey Roper

Cf. also the Review of the Leuenberg Assembly's book on European churches p. 55.

Belfast: IMU/ICC Conference on Culture and Christian Faith

The Irish Missionary Union (IMU) and the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) are jointly organising a study day on 23 November 2001 in Belfast with speakers Rev Drew Gibson (Belfast Bible College) and Dr. Bernadette Flanagan (Milltown Institute, Dublin). Further information and registration forms are available from the two organisers (Phone IMU in Dublin 00353 (0)1 4965433/4971770, ICC in Belfast 028 90663145).

Guidelines for Twinings

Although not always encouraged by mission organisations, the wish of local churches for direct relationships leads to twinings and direct partnerships. Rewarding as they can be, past experience has shown that there are certain standard pitfalls which need to be avoided if the effect is not to be contrary to intentions. The Irish Council of Churches (ICC) has produced a leaflet to help congregations in the task: "Partnership and Twinning; some guidelines for local



churches". Obtainable from ICC at icpep@email.com. (This information is from 'Missionfo', a new information sheet on mission from the World Mission Committee of the ICC).

Preparation for WARC's 2004

General Council

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) is preparing its 23rd General Council, due to take place in July 2004 in Accra/Ghana under the theme "That All May Have Life in Fullness". Focus will be on the missionary challenge which the worldwide economic inequality poses to the churches. A "process for reflection and development of a mission statement and other strategies that might lead to a renewal of mission in the churches" was designed at a meeting in Geneva 4-8 July 2001. Among the twelve participants (no two of them from the same country!) were Setri Nyomi (WARC General Secretary), Carlos Ham (WCC's new CWME Secretary and guest at CCOM's next Annual Commission Meeting), Philip Wickeri (Presbyterian Seminary, San Francisco). Discussions centred on current developments in inter-church relations (tendency to return to bilateral relationships) and the ambivalent effects of globalisation. The entire reflection process was termed as '*processus confessionis*' and the intentional implicit allusion to WARC's 1982 Ottawa declaration against apartheid (*status confessionis*) raised expectations that the current *processus confessionis* might lead to a similarly unequivocal and prophetic statement condemning the present economic system. It soon became clear, however, that such a declaration would find it much harder to draw the essential line of distinction between beneficial and destructive or even sinful elements of this system than was the case with apartheid. This instance must probably be seen as part of a postmodern environment in which Christian ethical judgments become ever more complicated and ambivalent. At the same time it seemed to show that there is a longing in ecumenical circles to recover old clarities in telling black from white (meaning, in the case of apartheid quite literally: good from bad) which in many cases the present challenges do not allow.

See also p. 42.

KMF

Church Growth and Spirituality

The latest issue of *Church Growth Digest* (vol.22 issue 3. A publication of the British Church Growth Association: www.bcga.org.uk) is another facet in the current intensive interest in the 'free-floating'

spirituality of everyday life. It approaches the topic from various angles ranging from a reflection on the implications of the David Hay/Kate Hunt study on the 'Spirituality of People Who Don't Go to Church' (due to be discussed at the forthcoming CCOM Annual Meeting) to the Living Spirituality Network's attempt to relate to the people's unorganised spirituality 'out there' and to evangelical reflection on the concepts of 'spiritual conflict' or even 'spiritual warfare'. More practical than academic, the magazine incites reflection rather than offers in-depth analysis but is worth a read. (For availability contact: info@bcga.org.uk).

"Lies, damned lies and statistics"

The Archbishop of York uses this Mark Twain quote to introduce an interesting little brochure (16 pp.) on statistics: the English Church Attendance Survey. Maybe an ironic hint to the fact that we all are particularly suspicious of statistics when we dislike their results but happily rely on those which seem to confirm our views. But seriously: these pages contain a very interesting extract of the findings of a tremendous amount of work carried out in 1998. One third of all English mainline congregations answered a questionnaire about their church attendance. The findings are broken down by regions, age groups, ethnic groups and by denominations. A few "questions about your congregation" are suggested. Some findings: overall average Sunday attendance has fallen from 11.7% in 1979 to 7.5% today, 27% of all churchgoers are Roman Catholic (the biggest group), London had the lowest church attendance of all regions in 1979, now it has the highest (albeit on a lower absolute level).

12 things ... about where you minister! Key regional findings from the 1998 English Church Attendance Survey. Available for £1 from admin@christian-research.org.uk

A similar project, but even more in-depth is the Church Life Profile 2001, run by CIM (Churches' Information for Mission). In April 2001 they carried out a survey of local churches all over England by asking everyone attending church in one particular week to answer a questionnaire. This involved ca. 250,000 people. The results are given for every single congregation and the idea is not so much to gain statistical information generally but to evaluate the data in a way which make them usable to identify a church's particular mission challenges. Further information from CIM (Church Information Service), Ms Alison Gelder SEA 9470 New Malden KT3 3BR Fax: 020 82410847. www.cim.org.uk

Focus... Focus... Focus... Focus...

Martin Conway: Response to Chris Wigglesworth

In CONNECTIONS 2/2001 p.33f CCOM Moderator Chris Wigglesworth wrote about the need for the ecumenical movement to accept religious, cultural and denominational pluralism as the lasting framework of Christian mission rather than as a deplorable situation to be overcome. The most important task at present, he claimed, was working for peaceful inter-religious communication and understanding rather than, for example, for church union or the winning over of the whole world for Christ.

This article provoked a reaction from Martin Conway which we print here. The two articles will soon be published on the CCOM website and readers are invited to continue the discussion by sending in their views (mail to: kai.funkschmidt@ctbi.org.uk) which can then be published on the net along with these two articles.

Chris Wigglesworth is always worth reading, but I was both surprised and dismayed by his 'Note on the Relevance of Globalisation to Christian Unity and Mission' in the last issue of *CONNECTIONS*. Thinking it through, I discover myself wanting to agree with him on three of his main points, yet needing to raise three sharp questions about some of the confusions I see him stray into.

1. I warmly agree that Christians should engage in the debate and exploration about the meaning and implications of 'globalisation' in a large, holistic frame of mind, insisting always that God's purpose and love is never intended for less than the whole of humanity, the whole creation. Whatever more particular, specific aspects of what is happening may be engaging our attention, it is a **key** part of our task to re-set those in the total horizon of God's action and care.

2. So also I warmly agree with him that there are few things more important for the Christian obedience in mission in the 21st century than the discovery of neighbourly and friendly relationships with our fellow-human beings of other religious traditions and communities. I have often found myself saying that this is the 'great new challenge' God is giving us all in this new century. With Chris, I also gladly agree that the stereotypical attitudes of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism' that were so widely used to classify the range of Christian approaches some years ago have by now been shown to be too limited to be genuinely serviceable for anything beyond the most elementary stage of the exploration. In this same context I am surprised he finds it appropriate to object to those who reject pluralism by linking it with the "desire to defend our Christian [...] heritage". No doubt there are people who talk in that sort of way, but hardly among the members of CCOM, let alone the readers of *CONNECTIONS*.

3. No less important, I gladly agree with him that the actor who matters more than any other in and for Christian mission is the Holy Spirit. All missionary obedience is nothing else than our fallible human

attempts to follow through what we believe the Holy Spirit, once known in Jesus of Nazareth, to be doing, to be opening up, to be creating among human beings in our time. That this will lead us and any others involved into processes of new discovery and change is of course undoubted – precisely what those discoveries and changes turn out to be will prove either the best confirmation that it has been the Holy Spirit we have been following, or that we have been trapped by a very different spirit !

But, but, but ... Here are my three objections:

4. The fact of 'plural' societies, in which more and more of us, and all around the world, are finding ourselves learning the necessity of recognising those of 'other' religious traditions as no less children of God than we who try to follow Jesus, is one thing. By no means the same as some ideology of 'pluralism' which insists that, to give one possible and frequent instance, whatever any of us say about God is of equal truth (or untruth) and worth (or un-worth) as what anyone else says! No attitude of so-called 'pluralism' is to be preferred to the sort of sober, realistic, carefully researched exploration of what life means to those around us, of which Christopher Lamb gave such a vivid and compelling taste in his epoch-making book back in 1985 *Belief in a Mixed Society* (Lion Paperback). How best can we help one another, let alone the young men in Oldham or Bradford who have let themselves get sucked into throwing rocks and petrol bombs, to find the patience, the curiosity and indeed the love to give time to listening to our neighbours and fellow-citizens of different backgrounds ?

5. I disagree with Chris' attempt to set the need for greater understanding and collaboration between the religious traditions over against the need for closer mutual understanding and acceptance between Christians. There is no reason why these two adventures should be seen as contradictory or pulling against one another – just the contrary! Has it not been the greatest missionaries of the last two centuries (Timothy Richards, C.F. Andrews, Kenneth

Cragg – to mention some British ones) who have shown us how these two strands in Christian obedience need to belong together, indeed can effectively free and enrich each other? Don't let Kenneth Cracknell's great book *Justice, Courtesy and Love* (Epworth Press, 1995) moulder unread!

The specific demands and outcomes of the two explorations – the inner-Christian striving to overcome the tragic inheritance of the murderous quarrels of previous ages when our forebears split apart from and condemned each other as heretics, and the inter-religious striving to understand one another across the vast barriers of history, language, culture, let alone very varied faith traditions – are quite distinct, separate and usually different, each with its own demands and opportunities and learnings. But they are entirely compatible with one another. Indeed, the experience of meeting people of another faith tradition will often reinforce the conviction and commitment that Christians need to be working far better together for any of us to be able to convince our Muslim or Buddhist neighbours that we really mean what we say about God's love and concern for peace! A Christian community divided against itself can never be an appropriate or genuine partner in the name of Jesus, let alone of the Creator God.



6. Finally, what is the purpose of criticising a 'centralised ecclesiastical system'? This sounds to me like the sort of bad-wording of one another that had disappeared at latest 50 years ago with the foundation of the World Council of Churches. No such phrase has ever been among the recognised goals of the ecumenical movement that Chris and I have been involved in throughout our lives! Even Pope John Paul II has officially asked fellow Christians in other churches to help him see how his papal office of world-wide jurisdiction can be better structured and exercised! Nowhere in the entire panoply of councils of churches in these islands, local, national and UK – let alone world-wide – can you find people seriously trying to imagine or inaugurate a 'centralised system'. No, in those – and countless other examples of ecumenical explorations – Christians are seeking mutual understanding, mutual support and mutual enrichment, so that from out of our many diversities we may finally – in the Spirit's good time – move beyond the tragic inheritance of our history into patterns of mutual service and accepted common decision-making that will make yet more of all that is good in our inheritances and histories than we possibly can from out of our mutually distrusting denominations!



Book Reviews

Luibl/Müller/Zeddies (eds): En route towards Europe

Hans Jürgen Luibl/Christine-Ruth Müller/Helmut Zeddies (eds for the Leuenberg Church Fellowship): En route towards Europe. Perspectives of Protestant Churches, Otto Lembeck (Frankfurt) 2001, [ISBN: 3 87476 374 9] (approx. € 10).

This is an invaluable account of the European Protestant Churches' varied responses to the present fact and the future hope of Europe. Its very format celebrates the diversity of Protestant Europe – forty-odd essays, mainly in German and English parallel texts, with four in French only. They are drawn from a hundred odd European churches in around 30 European countries. These churches are the signatories of the Agreement between the Reformation Churches in Europe, made in 1973, and who are known collectively as the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. The overview in the first 40 pages gives an indispensable perspective on the nature and future of these churches, as they seek God's will for them, separately and together.

British and Irish readers will be particularly interested in the four essays from our islands – and the implied fact that the Church of England is not a member of the Leuenberg Fellowship.

Of great importance is the essay on the Conference of European Churches, (CEC) based in Geneva. CEC has been transformed by the collapse of the Soviet empire, and the consequent reassertion of the multifarious Orthodox Churches of Europe. That new situation has created extraordinary tensions, some of them creative; recent frank exchanges in Moscow and Crete have revealed the diversity of views on fundamental issues that exists between Orthodoxy and liberal Protestantism of the Leuenberg sort. The essay is not quite able to speak plainly on this crucial issue.

The Church and Society commission of CEC also features in one essay. It describes the important and largely unsung work that has taken place in the European institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg. It also describes vividly the consequences of the enlargement of Europe that followed the collapse of Communism, as our horizons moved beyond Vienna to Vladivostok. Again, Orthodox participation in that process poses particular challenges.

From all this, naturally but incredibly, the Catholic Church is missing. The absence of the Church of England, which partly feels itself to be partly Catholic, is silent testimony to this void at the centre

of Europe. A further volume should explore the apparent differences between Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox in Europe, and ask if this matters any longer. It would also celebrate the conclusion of the Charta Ecumenica at Pentecost in 2001. Such a volume might also ask why European Christianity is exceptional in its almost universal decline. In the meantime, this is a very useful testimony to the dazzling diversity of Protestantism in our common European home.

John Kennedy

See also the report from the last Leuenberg Assembly p. 51.

William D. Taylor (ed.): Global Missiology for the 21st Century

'Global Missiology for the 21st Century – The Iguassu Dialogue', edited by William D Taylor, World Evangelical Fellowship, [Baker Book House Co, 2000, 564 pages]

The Iguassu Falls were the scene of the movie 'The Mission' in which Jeremy Irons starred as a Jesuit missionary encountering, living and suffering with the indigenous river people as they came head to head with European power and its church in their colonial expansion. It was near these Falls that last year the World Evangelical Fellowship convened a 'dialogue' for 'lower-profile servant-leaders' of mission (p.9). This book provides some account, most of the papers delivered and – of course – the 'Iguassu Affirmation'.

William Taylor is a perceptive and honest editor. Accordingly, he draws attention to the controversy stirred up by what Samuel Escobar of Peru had to say about 'managerial missiology' (pp.109-112). Escobar was referring to that whole strand of thinking and strategising associated with Donald McGavran in which winning souls for the numerical growth of the church is set above and before feeding, healing and freeing the poor and dispossessed. As William Taylor himself says, 'We still do not understand how modernity has mis-shaped our church' (p.3).

Reading the Iguassu Affirmation, you can see why Escobar upset so many. For the most part, it is a curiously disembodied statement. 'The church is central to God's plan for the world', it says. But the church as an everyday living reality seems a long way away. It is addressed in the Affirmation as though it were somewhere or someone else. As for the

'kingdom of God', this appears twice only and here again as an abstract, far from the favelas of Brazil.

Another important controversy is barely mentioned. Chris Wright, Director of All-Nations College, delivered a magisterial paper on 'Christ and the mosaic of pluralisms'. Apparently there was, in the original text, a 'pregnant footnote' on *eternal destinies* which led to 'discussion... in small groups and hallways' (p.24). We are not allowed to see this footnote or 'the options that godly Evangelicals have taken on this theme'. We are told only that it is 'a future agenda item'. Quite so!

Controversy means there was real dialogue at Iguassu. There were also serious attempts to be comprehensive. Richard Tiplady (of Global Connections), for example, has a lively piece on Generation X (pp.463ff.) He also contributes to an interesting section on "Listening to mission that rises from community and spirituality": his chapter is on the Moravians (pp. 503ff). A pity, then, that the Iguassu gathering attempted its listening through informed observers rather than with those actually involved. Why, for example, could not the Jesuits, who had painfully learned so much at Iguassu of old, not been present to tell their own current story?

Historically, Iguassu was a site of missionary suffering, caught between religious and secular powers. Taylor points out in his reflection on Matthew 11:1-12 that most Christians today "do not have an adequate theology of suffering, much less of persecution and martyrdom" (p.9). Ominously, he says we must develop one soon. But it is not clear from the documentation what concrete omens of conflict for Christian mission the Iguassu constituency is seeing today.

Donald Elliott

Walter Brueggemann: Texts Under Negotiation

Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination, by Walter Brueggemann [Fortress Press USA, 1993 rep 2001, ISBN 0 8006 2736 9]. £8.99.

Walter Brueggemann, OT Professor at Columbia Theological Seminary, Georgia, is without doubt one of the most creative biblical theologians in the Western world. In this important book, first published in 1993, he examines how central biblical themes – God, world, community, self – can be interpreted and imagined fruitfully in a world of flux and change.

Drawing substantially, but not uncritically, on narrative thinking and George Lindbeck's post-liberal, cultural-linguistic school of interpretation

(which sees the biblical texts as articulating a characteristic 'grammar of faith'), the writer suggests that the task of theology today is to nourish a Gospel-derived counter-imagination of the world.

Brueggemann affirms Stephen Toumlin's insight that whereas modernism sees 'real knowledge' as written, universal, general and timeless, in the condition of postmodernity such solidities are undermined by a growing emphasis on orality, particularity, locality and time-specificity. Image, spectacle, commerce and technology interpenetrate the distinct worlds ('life cultures') we now inhabit, but a sense of fragmentation is still palpable.

Rather than perpetuating the modern mistake of welding Christian experience to yet another dominant paradigm, however, Brueggemann suggests a twofold interpretative strategy in relation to the Bible: making critical use of the tools around us, certainly, but above all allowing ourselves and our world to be challenged by the 'counter-drama' of the text itself. This is how we can 'fund' post-modern imagination with the fragments of a Gospel which bursts open new possibilities – instead of merely buying into a new ideology, or trying to create another citadel within which everyone is supposed to submit.

In this 're-reading' process, imagination – the capacity to portray, receive and practice the world in ways different from the 'common sense' view generated by dominant orthodoxies – is the vital ingredient. For Brueggemann what lies behind the text is a God who both reveals the basis of life and invites us to join in the redemption (re-construction) of the world. In the final third of the book he helps us to re-enter the biblical counter-drama by sketching, with the aid of specific biblical passages, the shape of a 'Gospel infrastructure' for living – in direct contrast to 'the infrastructure of commodity consumerism'.

There is immense insight in this book. Brueggemann declares with boldness that his approach requires us, in a knowing way, to 'take' the Bible, in all its problematic character, 'as' the Word of God. He is not unaware of the enormous difficulty of this 'taking as', both for biblical traditionalists and revisionists, but he believes that it is unavoidable for good scriptural performance in the present.

For this reason he accepts, and does not argue, that "the stuff of evangelical [Gospel] infrastructure is the text of the Bible." The proof of the pudding, he suggests, is in the eating. But that leaves unanswered the challenge to the privilege accorded to *this* text in a multi-textual world. It ignores the texts of other world faiths. It sidesteps the syncretism of living inter-textually (which is the dominant experience for most in the West, including Christians). And it makes insufficient allowance for the huge variety of

'imaginative construals' that Christian interpretation has generated.

In other words, Brueggemann's thesis, vital as it is, is articulated within limited terms of engagement. Somehow a further missionary encounter of both learning and contending is needed between those who live by different texts (or the same texts differently) – people who draw, in Brueggemann's words, on both new materials and old materials freshly voiced. This is the only way to avoid imagination shrinking back into mere assertion, and to maintain a relationship between fidelity to what we have received and openness to what we may yet receive.

Simon Barrow

Just briefly...

Marc H. Ellis: On the Future of Judaism and Jewish Life. Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Next Fifty Years, talk at a day conference in Birmingham 11/12/2000, publ. by Friends of Sabeel and available from Rev Tony Graham, 48 Springfield Rd, Crawley Sussex RH 11 8AH tonygraham@satyagraha.fsnet.co.uk

Religious Discrimination. A discussion document from the The Churches' Commission for Inter Faith Relations (CCIFR), CTBI Publications, London 2001 (ISBN 085169 259 1, £5.95, available from Church House publishing: orders@ctbi.org.uk, www.chbookshop.co.uk). The understanding of Human Rights and its consequences among other things for employment law becomes more and more based on a common European understanding. The questions what actually constitutes religious discrimination and how the

churches can contribute to combat it is at the heart of the book that focusses on the European situation.

Elements of Creation. The Earth and Its Gifts (Thinking Mission Series No 1, ed. Clare Amos for USPG, London 2001, 16 pp., free) This is the beginning of a new series by USPG. In Issue No 1 Norman C. Habel (Flinders University, Australia) introduces 'Earth Theology', an appeal to re-read the Bible "from the perspective of Earth", opening new insights into the ecological challenge to Christian thinking and action. Sebastian Bakare (Bishop of Manicaland, Zimbabwe), tackles the issue of 'land', centring his short reflection on the Zimbabwean situation. Though squeezing two topics into one brochure seems a bit too much, it is still laudable that with the new Thinking Mission series USPG gives missiology a platform where it started: in a mission agency. After the publication of No 2 on "Water" in June 2001, the next issue (on "Fire") is currently being prepared.

Free samples obtainable from Clare Amos at USPG www.uspg.org.uk, e-mail enquiries@uspg.org.uk or (in Ireland) uspg@compuserve.com.

Received for Review

These books may be reviewed in later issues. But inclusion in this section does not necessarily imply that a book will be reviewed.

Werner Ustorf: Sailing on the Next Tide. Missions, Missiology and the Third Reich, Peter Lang/Frankfurt 2000 [ISBN 3-631-37060-1], 275 pp, £25

Brojendra Nath Banerjee: My Great India. Economic Development and Glaring Disparities, CBS New Delhi, 2001 [ISBN 81-239-0746-X]



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Responsible editor: Kai M. Funkschmidt

Phone: +44 (0)20-7523 2125
Fax: +44 (0)20 7928 0010
Internet: www.ccom.org.uk
E-Mail: kai.funkschmidt@ctbi.org.uk

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For reflection

The student Zi-Lu spoke to Confucius: "If the king of Wei would entrust you with the government – what you do first?"

The teacher answered: "Definitely put the names right."

Thereupon Zi-Lu: "This is what you would begin with?! But this is absurd. Why such putting right of names?"

The teacher answered: "How ignorant you are, Zi-Lu! The noble is careful and restrained concerning things he does not know about.

If the names and terms and concepts are not right, then language gets confused. If language is confused it leads to disorder and failure. In case of disorder and failure a decay of decency and good habits will ensue. If decency and good habits have become questionable there won't be just judgment and punishment any more. Without just judgment and punishment the people won't know what to do any more. Therefore the noble must strive to use names and terms and concepts with conciseness and also be able to act accordingly. Never will he treat his words lightly."

Confucius, Analects

Contributors to this issue:

Barrow, Simon (Anglican, London): CCOM Commission Secretary.

Conway, Rev Dr Martin (Anglican, Oxford): Former President of Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham (retired).

Elliott, Rev Donald (United Reformed Church, London): Former Commission Secretary of CCOM (retired).

Ellis, Prof Dr Marc H. (Jewish, USA): University Professor of American and Jewish Studies and Director of the Center for American and Jewish Studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

Funkschmidt, Rev Dr Kai (=KMF) (United Lutheran-Reformed (EKD), London): CCOM Mission Relations Secretary.

Holmes, Rev Gordon (Baptist, Bristol): Baptist minister, Focal Person CCOM Africa Forum.

Jones, Rev Dafydd Andrew (Presbyterian, Cardiff): Mission and Unity Secretary. Focal Person CCOM Asia Forum.

Kennedy, Rev John (Methodist, London): CTBI Church and Society Secretary.

Richards, Dr Anne (Anglican, London): Secretary to the CCOM-CofE Mission Theology Advisory Group (MTAG)

Roper, Rev Geoffrey (United Reformed Church, London): Associate General Secretary of Churches Together in England.

Stevens, Dr David (Presbyterian, Belfast): General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches.

The last word

