



Churches' Commission on  
Mission

# CONNECTIONS

Resourcing ecumenism and mission

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Issue 1

## Editorial

Rarely, if ever, since 14<sup>th</sup> July 1789, has a simple date acquired such a loaded meaning as 'September 11<sup>th</sup>'. Explicitly or implicitly it will also be detected behind many of the contributions to this issue of *CONNECTIONS*. The first major terrorist event broadcast live on television may not really have changed the world – it highlighted problems rather than created them and the number of dead is not new for people who are aware of all the wars and famines going on without the surrounding media attention – but it created a symbol for many of the ongoing conflicts in our world. It put back high on the agenda the issue of religions (not just one religion) as cause of fanaticism and violence, the questions raised by those losing out in world capitalism, the issue of war as a means of attaining political aims and the relationship between religion and culture. And, whether we like it or not, it also raised inter-religious questions. One could define mission as the inter-cultural, inter-



religious, inter-national and inter-social encounter centred on a dialogue about the roots and the source of human life. Thus, from a Christian perspective concerned with discerning God's purpose for the Church in the world, it is only adequate to ask what 11 September means for mission. Simon Barrow offers a reflection on the issue (p.2)

Another glance at inter-religious issues: At the last meeting of CCOM's Asia Forum, Mano Ramulshah, bishop of the Church of Pakistan and currently director of USPG spoke about the perceived lack of solidarity that Christians in minority situations like Pakistan and other countries get from their Western brothers and sisters who in other contexts were only too aware of human rights issues. This was in

contrast to the solidarity that Jewish and Muslim communities express and live out across national borders and in fact makes the fate of Christian minorities worse than that of others because they find it harder to get their case heard in the West. Is there not a link to an atmosphere dominated by a kind of interfaith dialogue that in its liberal openness and striving for tolerance fails to see the need to confront and address unpleasant truths? In this issue you will find a similar resonance in Andrew Wheeler's knowledgeable and balanced article on Muslim-Christian encounter in Sudan (p.14). The question will be how these voices can be heard and their call heeded without falling into the trap of adhering to an international Christian (or for that matter "Western") tribalism which would support the notion that violent inter-religious and inter-civilisational conflict is inevitable in the present world situation.

Simplistic views are en vogue in times of war. But any Christian living in the West will be aware how erroneous it would be to equate Western civilisation with Christianity. The relationship is complicated, often tense and gets increasingly difficult as the decreasing relevance of most churches to most people's lives manifests itself. Andrew Brookes with a Roman Catholic and ecumenical perspective on the Alpha Course (p.18) and Myra Blyth writing about the theme of the forthcoming CTBI Assembly "In Search of Holy Ground" (p.3) address the permanent challenge of making the Gospel relevant to Western societies.

The regular columns on CCOM Forum work, the Book Reviews, Ecumenical Events etc. will follow up on some of the themes from around the world that featured in recent issues.

Remember that as usual, this entire issue and all the individual topical articles are available for download from our website on [www.ccom.org.uk](http://www.ccom.org.uk).

**Kai Funkschmidt, Editor**

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# Feature

Simon Barrow

## Disturbing the Faith: Mission after 11 September

On a clear morning a small band of missionaries embarked upon a task they believed had been given to them by God. They prayed fervently for its success. They were backed by the prayers of many others. They saw their mission as an assault on the heart and head of the Beast. Its cost was martyrdom: they laid down their lives. But it shook the world and was believed to be, despite the loss of 4,000 lives, a victory for God against apostasy. Multitudes gave thanks.

This description of the appalling events at the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 is bound to be offensive to most people. Yet the idea that these attacks were deeply religious acts cannot be easily dismissed in favour of the comforting notion that they had 'nothing to do with religion', as many Western political and faith leaders claim.

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### No national religious authority adopting Just War as its doctrine has ever formally condemned, let alone stopped, a war.

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Of course we can say that those who committed the atrocities were unrepresentative fanatics, that true religionists do not commit mass violence, that 'at least Christians do not behave like this.' But we are faced with powerful counter-evidence: the countless thousands who have supported these attacks, the millions who believe religion can justify violence to prosecute their cause, the recent ghastly history of genocide in Rwanda -- possibly the most Christian nation on earth.

After 11 September faith requires not just pastoral wisdom but deep mental rigour and self-criticism in the face of incalculable suffering. In particular, we need to confront three huge missionary challenges.

The first is the reality of **toxic religion**. Especially when fuelled by a sense of injustice and combined with powerful national, racial, ethnic or political aspirations, religion can be an incredibly dangerous thing.

The anthropologist and literary critic René Girard has long argued (1) that doctrine and ritual may be both positive and negative factors in channelling the mimetic tendency of human beings to project pain and anger onto others. Sacrificial systems are designed to absorb the potency of the scapegoat mechanism by which we expunge fear and hate. But at the same time, they can also project (and sanctify) scapegoating by attributing it to God.

Girard has, interestingly, explored these issues through detailed study of the Gospels, especially the passion narratives. Jesus, he says, overwhelmingly rejected the scapegoat system. Indeed he often turned the tables on prime scapegoaters -- those who used religion to exclude people they deemed unworthy or unclean. Prostitutes were entering

God's realm ahead of them, he once said. For this reason Jesus had to be killed. He became a scapegoat precisely to break the scapegoating cycle, which we call sin. For this reason he was vindicated by God.

Ironically, says Girard, the essentially anti-sacrificial nature of the Gospel narratives has been turned by some versions of Christianity into the story of a vengeful God who punishes an innocent for the wrong of others. In this subtle distortion lies one seed of the mutation of the Gospel into toxic religion. But Jesus, the Way, calls us back by asking us who and what really saves. It is this call that must be shared and explored with those of all faiths and none if we are, together, to redeem the path to God.

Second, there is the challenge of **missionary violence**. I am not just talking of violence in the name of religion here. In a sense all violence is missionary. It proclaims its ability to achieve positive aims, to bring change, to redeem. But *redemptive* violence is the most dangerous myth of all. It is the one that motivated those who bombed the Twin Towers, and also those who unleashed bombs on Afghanistan to kill more innocent civilians than died in New York. It is the 'logic' that will justify continuing cycles of retribution and revenge across the world. It claims rightness, but it deals death.

What Christianity has mostly offered in the face of violence is the historic Just War theory. To my knowledge no national religious authority adopting Just War as its doctrine has ever formally condemned, let alone stopped, a war. The theory remains largely unadapted to the realities of nuclear, chemical, biological, 'virtual' and non-territorial terrorist warfare. Let us accept, however, that it is a valid Christian equivalent to the Jewish *Lex Talionis* -- the law of measured retribution ('an eye for an eye') that aims at restricting cycles of violence. Neither theory, however, is about embracing heaven. They are about avoiding hell. An important start, but far from what we could call Gospel.

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### The central theological issue is not about pacifism versus non-pacifism (a well rehearsed, irresolvable argument on its own terms) but about *how effective witness can be made*.

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The Jesus of the Gospels, by contrast, says to his followers that we are to love our enemies, to do good to those that hate us, to pray for those who persecute us. He rejects missionary violence wholesale. Of course this will not do. It is not 'realistic' (whereas the cycle of violence apparently is). So only minority traditions such as Mennonites embrace it. They do so not only because they sense that God's foolishness is wiser than the strength of the world, but also because they

believe that active, costly, justice-bearing non-violence is the only way to witness to the final Victory of the Lamb.

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## Who is God and how is God justified in the face of atrocities in God's name?

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So the central theological issue is not about pacifism versus non-pacifism (a well rehearsed, irresolvable argument on its own terms) but about *how effective witness can be made*. In pursuing its contribution to the UN / WCC Decades to Overcome Violence and Build a Culture of Peace under the rubric of 'Following Jesus in a Violent World', the Baptist Union of Great Britain may have provided us with the basis for perhaps *the* ecumenical missionary question post-11 September. Who or what really gives life?

Third, there is the connected temptation of **illusory power**. This takes two forms. One is the kind unleashed by a wounded political dragon: the superpower that lashes out in denial because it has finally realised that it is not invulnerable, but is unable to cope with this reality. The other is the type perpetuated by deluded religious leaders who preach impregnability to their own, but only by putting down, damning and excluding everyone else.

To the former, the Jesus of the Gospels offers the saving hope of a communion of equals rather than a false system of

domination. To the latter he offers a Lordship that undoes all lordliness, a kingdom that brings down the mighty, a divine order where the last usurp the first at top table, a feast of fellowship for the excluded. This is power at the service of love. It is also a message of free grace which does not produce submission -- but requires repentance (first among those who announce it) of our many attempts to manipulate God. Jesus asks all people what kind of truth will really set us free, and what distortions of truth will enslave us.

These are necessary disturbances to faith after 11 September. None are new. All are more urgent than ever. And behind them is a core theological question: Who is God and how is God justified in the face of atrocities in God's name? This question can only be faced if we are able (as those of different faith communities and none) to advocate and promote ways forward in a spirit of openness to truth for the purposes of love. This is mission through testimony. It is not an alternative to dialogue, but an essential part of it. What is it an alternative to? War, actually. It is talk that seeks to redeem rather than provoke or justify.(3)

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 (1) See, for example, René Girard, tr. Yvonne Freccero, *The Scapegoat* (Athlone Press, 1986).

(2) I am grateful to Canon Tim Dakin of CMS and Dr Kai Funkschmidt of CCOM for raising these issues.

(3) This talk was first given to the Partnership for World Mission committee of the Church of England on 29 January 2002.



Myra Blyth

## In Search of Holy Ground

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*In Search of Holy Ground is the topic of the forthcoming CTBI Assembly in Swanwick (26 February to 1 March). Myra Blyth takes a look at it from the perspective of a postmodern society where people have less stability and relationship to 'places' than in the past. In a missionary sense this seems to be possibly a more adequate situation for Christian faith than the stable and static concept of Christendom.*

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The theme for the 2002 CTBI Assembly: *In Search of Holy Ground*, is not chosen with a view to encouraging participants to retreat from the world but rather to engage more intently with the world, earthing and grounding our conversations and reflections in the real, existing, complex, ambiguous reality of everyday life.

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**Celtic Christianity stands as a permanent reminder that those who brought the faith to these islands were in no doubt that our calling and destiny is to be in perpetual pilgrimage.**

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The specific attention to 'place' which this theme invites is very deliberate. It is highly evocative of moments like

Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush, where special places or sacred spaces provide authentic points for diverse worlds to meet: the sacred with the secular, the heavenly with the earthly, the mysterious with the mundane. This theme invites us to enter the places where our different worlds can meet, (intellectual, cultural, spiritual and confessional) and thereby to experience together the gift of Holy Ground.

Philip Sheldrake in his book *Spaces for the Sacred*<sup>1</sup> offers us a number of clues as to the potential of this theme. He notes how the notion of 'space' and having a sense of place is a dominant theme for historians, philosophers and anthropologists today as much as for geographers, architects and town planners. Place has spiritual and intellectual properties as well as physical and social. Our interest as churches therefore in the significance of place is not a

<sup>1</sup> This article has drawn its inspiration from the writings of Philip Sheldrake. Other references are secondary quotes from his book *Spaces for the Sacred*, SCM Press 2001.

unique or primary concern but must be seen alongside interests of many other faiths and perspectives. Hopefully we can gain from and contribute to this wide-ranging contemporary discussion.

### **Pilgrims of permanent departure**

In academic and popular debate today there is a common assumption that the importance of place and of everyone having a sense of place is being eroded. This 'crisis of place' is manifested in the growing signs of people being rootless, displaced and disorientated and is articulated in typically post-modern comments like "we live in an unspecific intellectual location, that leads precisely nowhere".<sup>2</sup> The critical question this analysis begs is whether this 'unspecific location' is permanent or is a 'place of transition', and that sooner rather than later we will arrive at or recover some kind of collective meaning. To this question Sheldrake argues that rootlessness, dislocation and displacement are not abnormal but real and permanent. It is the appropriate spiritual response to a true appreciation of place.

Celtic Christianity stands as a permanent reminder that those who brought the faith to these islands were in no doubt that our calling and destiny is to be in *perpetual pilgrimage*. By definition, Christians are people who are driven ever onwards in a movement of perpetual departure.<sup>3</sup> If dissatisfaction and perpetual departure are not our experience then perhaps it is a sign of just how important this theme is for such a time as this.

The Inter-Church Process began twelve years ago, and had as its point of departure, a meeting at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick - the same place as we shall gather for the 2002 Assembly. It is timely in this place to reflect together on the journey we have made. Are we really 'driven ever onwards in a movement of perpetual departure' or has complacency and self-congratulation about our so-called 'advanced state of ecumenism' within these islands simply dulled our vision and numbed our expectations for the mission of the churches?

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### **What pilgrims need most for their journey are places and times of encounter and refreshment**

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Institutional and representational expressions of unity are not the goal or destination towards which we strive, but for a variety of reasons these things can easily take on an importance that hampers the momentum of the journey we are on. What pilgrims need most for their journey are places and times of encounter and refreshment where the synergy and energy experienced will in turn release new courage and determination for risky forms of ecumenical life.

#### **Contested place**

From a Christian perspective then, place is a distinctly transitional notion, it is not so much about fixed points and permanent structures as it is about moments and places of

meeting and encounter which carry extraordinary depth, meaning and significance.

This very depth of meanings however forbids us to remain with a too spiritual, too harmonious definition of place. The fact is that places have many meanings and memories, and because of this, sacred places in particular are often "contested places".<sup>4</sup> The common experience of being uprooted and of space being contested requires us to acknowledge that place is not neutral but politically and ethically complex.

In medieval philosophy empty space was regarded as the fundamental reality, or the natural state, and place was a secondary interpretative category by which natural space was compartmentalised and measured. This notion of empty space as natural reality was then mirrored in the world of ideas by the notion of a morally neutral reality on to which one could impose whatever interpretative narrative one chooses. By this means the particular stories of marginalised people were erased by colonial powers who took space from others believing it was theirs for the having. The idea that space is some kind of neutral natural state gave moral legitimation to their actions.

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### **The unity of the church and of the world is not about sameness and homogeneity but about diversity.**

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Clearly place is not simply a philosophical construct, it is a political, ethical and spiritual reality, which in many cases today is highly contested. Jerusalem is a prime example of this. It is the Holy Place for three of the world's religions, and that is arguably the most contested geographical space on planet earth. At the time of writing this article there is a small glimmer of good news from this war-torn city. The press release from Lambeth Palace reads: "Religious leaders reach unprecedented accord on the Holy Land. More than a dozen Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders from the Holy Land have pledged themselves to use their religious and moral authority to work for an end to violence and the resumption of the peace process". By their joint statement the religious leaders signalled their commitment to engage in the essential ecumenical task of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, namely ensuring together as world faiths that the moral authority of religions is not co-opted or hijacked by those who wish to receive moral legitimation for their violent projects.

The VIIth WCC assembly held in Canberra, Australia offers another less high profile but no less important example of holy ground becoming contested ground. The Aboriginal Christian community invited the WCC officials to enter the land at the start of the Assembly, and this invitation was accepted and sealed by the participants entering the worship tent through the purifying smoke of an aboriginal ceremony. Many of the participants were feeling confused and out of place in this ceremony, and the British papers carried headlines about the scandal of syncretism. The reality was simply that some people, who gained the ear of the British tabloid press, felt out of place in a worship event in which significant place was given to re-stating the Gospel through

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<sup>2</sup> *Shadow of the Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion* by Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick, Routledge 1992, p.1f.

<sup>3</sup> *The Mystic Fable* by Michel de Certeau, University of Chicago Press, 1992 p.229.

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<sup>4</sup> *Spaces for the Sacred* p.5.

the particular stories and cultural expressions of a marginalized people. The opening ritual of purification offended to the core those whose understanding of the faith is that of as a single overarching narrative which stands above culture and context. While for some this was a unique experience of Holy Ground, its place in the ecumenical memory is that it was another sad episode in the struggle for 'contested ground' which has been the lot of the Australian Aboriginal.

### Ecumenical space

In recent years some have developed the idea of ecumenical space as a symbolic way of expressing the ecumenical vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The unity of the church and of the world is not about sameness and homogeneity but about diversity. It is about learning with integrity to live with difference and for justice across confessional and religious divides. The ecumenical vision of open inclusive space is not

a luxury we can afford to live without, not only because the credibility of the churches are at stake, but also because the future of human community is at stake. We need to embrace a vision, which will offer a viable alternative to the language, logic and culture of violence that inspired the September 11<sup>th</sup> carnage and that is spiralling our world out of existence.

The space once occupied by the twin towers of the World Trade Centre has been described as Ground Zero. Our theme invites us with others to make sense of Ground Zero. Is this not Holy Ground -a place where people seek through the rubble to make sense of some the deepest questions of human existence? Is this not Contested Ground – a place where ideologies lock together in violent combat yielding neither dignity nor space to anything that is other? Is this not a place of 'permanent departure'- for things can never be the same? From this point we journey but without a clear sense of where to or how.



Kai Funkschmidt

## On Poetry and Theology and Why They Are Not the Same (part 2)

*This is the second part of an article begun in the last issue (p.42f). The full text is downloadable from [www.ccom.org.uk](http://www.ccom.org.uk)*

There will, however, be no one in need among you. (Dt 15:4)  
There will never cease to be some in need on the earth.  
(Dt 15:11)

### Koinonia as Mission

WARC's study process is strongly focussed on the issue of economic inequality and injustice, thus placing it within a strong tradition of reformed thinking over the past decades. I shall reflect this in the context of the biblical concept of koinonia, as also do, occasionally, the preparatory papers. It may be noted that in the English NIV translation, koinonia is rendered as 'partnership', a term that in global context is used to express the need for more justice in North-South relationships. 'That all may have life in fullness' is the short expression of this longing for justice. It cannot be spelled out here in full but the preparatory papers make it clear that this implies not only material well-being for the disempowered southern part of the globe.

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**Partnership is almost always among unequals. The problem is not inequality in partnership.**

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Koinonia is the term used for the NT church, the gathering of believers, implying a completely new way of relating to each other that transforms former relationships (Gal 3:28). It is obvious that this kind of equal relationship has always found a strong incentive in texts like Acts 2:42-45 and 4:32-

35 (communion of goods). This is a revolutionary notion and has been perceived as such, as an idea that threatens to undermine the 'normal' social relationships of inequality, thus putting the foundations of society's structure in danger – even if only symbolically. Hence, to mention but one example, the heavy persecution that early anabaptists living out this ideal in the 16th century had to face. All throughout church history there have been groups who tried to live up to this challenge. In the context of a more global view it questions the present economic relationships between North and South and denounces them as against the will of God.

But how precisely do inequality and koinonia or partnership between the Church in North and South relate to each other? There are different answers:

"There is no partnership between unequal partners."  
(Theo Sundermeier)(1)

"But, then, partnership is almost always among unequals. The problem is not inequality in partnership."  
(D. Preman Niles)(2)

"At length there can be no real partnership in the presence of a continuing structural imbalance of power, e.g. between rich and poor, givers and recipients. Material dependency generally destroys human relationships, however much we strive for partnership."  
(Konrad Raiser)(3)

These apparently contradictory messages must be seen as expressions of different aspects of the biblical message. Three observations before moving on:

1. If koinonia depended on first achieving at least some degree of material equality, one would have to deny the

possibility and existence of koinonia between Christians in North and South at the present time. And realistically this would have to remain so for a long time to come, if maybe not on the present scale. Tying koinonia to conditions would detract from its foundation in God's grace, not human achievements.

2. Almost all exegetics agree that Luke's description of the communitarian congregation is an idealisation of historic reality. It is not a historical account but the description of an eschatological fulfilment of something that has already begun. As Paul's letters show there was in fact great inequality in the congregation.

3. Koinonia is a Christian concept, i.e. it relates to the churches, but inequality exists within the entirety of humankind, tearing apart the whole of God's creation. What now does this mean for the notion of 'all having life in fullness' and the need to live in koinonia?

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## **We must look for ways to express togetherness in the presence of immense inequality.**

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It seems that koinonia stands in a dialectical relationship to the need for all to have 'life in fullness'. The Gospel is about the possibility to have koinonia within a context of inequality, as togetherness of those who are diverse - locally and globally. Can this actually even include a lack of 'fullness of life' for some?

a) Locally this means that congregations must not be culturally and economically more or less uniform and coherent, as they usually are. In the NT the Church assembled people of great diversity both in economic and social standing and in culture, ethnic background etc.

b) Globally it means that we must look for ways to express togetherness in the presence of immense inequality. Koinonia must not be restricted to a time when at least some degree of worldwide economic equality is achieved.

The key to understand both these facets is the Eucharistic Community (Margot Käbmann) - as spelt out explicitly in Acts 2 and implicitly behind Acts 4. In our world of denominational and economic division in the Church universal the Eucharist is almost the only element linking all Christians. In the Eucharist as God's gift the divisions are symbolically overcome even if factually they continue (scandalous as it may seem to our human sense of justice, as shown for example in Paul's recommendations relating to the Holy Communion in 1 Cor 11).

Now a misinterpretation has to be strictly avoided. This reasoning may easily be read to plead for spiritualisation of equality while leaving the harsh reality of inequality untouched. This would be a gross distortion of the Gospel. It therefore needs to be stressed that the Eucharistic communion is not a means to keep the poor quiet and justify the status quo. Quite the contrary it has to be seen as a present sign of God's will of how the future will be, or should be. It questions the basics of an order that produces the inequality by showing a different order of things.

As a consequence the actions of those in the koinonia must show sincere willingness to shape present reality according to the future as signified in the Eucharistic community.

And this is how the Church relates to the division that goes beyond her own body, tearing apart the whole of creation (see above, point 3). It is the Church's mission to symbolically live a reality that rests on very different fundamentals from the economic and political world order.

If this is meant seriously the Church will look at how to realise at least certain aspects of a different relationship between rich and poor, North and South, material givers and recipients. It seems to me that reformed theology, always having stressed church order as part of the confession of faith, is particularly inclined to avoid the dualistic mistake ('two realms' / *Zwei Regimenter Lehre*) that will not take seriously the need to shape reality according to eschatological promises. This is more difficult in regard to global inequality than in regard to local inequality. The search for new structures of North-South church relationships as exemplified in structural reform of several mission agencies of reformed background (CEVAA, CWM, UEM) is past its heyday (of public attention at least). But it seems that the models still have great validity and significance. They keep the challenge on the agenda, the challenge of how we can not only transcend inequality in the Eucharist but move on from transcending to transformation.

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(1) T.Sundermeier: *Die zehn Gebote der Partnerschaft*, in: ibd., *Aus einer Quelle schöpfen wir. Von Afrikanern lernen*, Gütersloh 1992, 113-33, here p.117.

(2) Niles, CWM General Secretary's Report 1993 (93 CNL 3 App.A) p.2. "The metaphor of the body carries the tacit understanding that partnership is not among equals. We are all equal and unequal in different ways." (Niles, *The Mission Thinking and Partnership Journey of CWM* (1995) p.3).

(3) K.Raiser, *Wie gehören Partnerschaft und Einheit zum Zeugnis der Kirche?* in: *JB Ev. Mission* 1984, Hamburg 1984, 39-53, here p.43..

# Update...Update...Update...Update...

## Introducing Caroline Fielder

CCOM is delighted to welcome Caroline Fielder to our staff team as China Coordinator. Caroline Fielder, who is 30, studied Modern Chinese and Management Studies at Durham University. She spent the second year of her course studying at the People's University in Beijing and working on an internship with a Sino-British joint venture. In the third year of her studies she gained a scholarship to Taiwan.

Upon graduation she returned to rural China for 3 years to work as a teacher with the Amity Foundation. During this time she became involved in the local community acting as a volunteer at the city orphanage and old people's home and regularly attending the local church.

Caroline did postgraduate studies in Human Resource Management and has spent the last 4 years working as a generalist HR Consultant for a software consultancy firm, focusing on change management, personal development and performance management.

Caroline is an active member of her local Church of England parish where she is a member of the PCC and helps in the running of a youth group of 11-14 year olds.

## CCOM Commission Meeting

The Annual Commission Meeting took place on 14-16 September 2001 in Glasgow under the theme "**Christian Witness and the Search for Faith**".

New forms of worship and liturgy introduced by the Iona Community on the first evening proved particularly peaceful to both heart and mind at an event that came just three days after the new phenomenon of widely televised terrorism. The Bible studies were conducted by JOHN RICHES (professor at Glasgow University).

The main speaker of the conference was Carlos HAM, new Secretary of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) 'Commission on World Mission and Evangelisation' (CWME). Carlos Ham was formerly General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Cuba and came into his new job a year ago. He spoke on the necessity for the church to engage in mission with the Bible in the one hand and a newspaper in the other. He exemplified his understanding of the Church's mission when he spoke about the experience of the Cuban church.

The local input was particularly strong at this Commission meeting. Howard HUDSON and Catriona MILLIGAN introduced their projects of Church work in Glasgow. Howard Hudson works in a community project called "Church House" (founded in 1942) in a deprived neighbourhood in Glasgow. Catriona MILLIGAN's "The Well" is an inter-religious project, a sort of advice centre mostly frequented by Muslims. Both stressed that the offer of unconditional relationship as a central aspect of mission and honest interest in the Other are vital to their understanding of the Christian calling to missionary presence in the world.

Along the same lines Peter NIELSEN (Church of Scotland) stressed that his 'Urban Soul' project, involving outreach to Edinburgh's nightclub culture, had been taken on board by St Cuthbert's church in Edinburgh with the explicit assumption that none of this work will ever lead to a swelling of membership figures of this congregation. Mission is about more than just 'bums on seats'. Explorations of spirituality of people who don't go to church was of course the underlying theme of this talk.

While all three projects strongly stressed the exploratory nature of this new understanding of Church and took a somewhat critical stance on the traditional church structures ('formal' vs 'relational', 'static' vs 'innovative' etc.) several of the small group discussions pointed out that all these initiatives could only function because they were financed by the very same traditional structures they stood as an alternative against. The question in what ways such fascinating experiments could be the future of the church (or in which ways the church might have to change) if they had to take exclusive care of their own resources (human and financial) remained open.

What Peter Nielsen had explored in practical terms on the following day came to be explored theoretically by Kate HUNT who is the co-author (with David Hay) of the important study "Spirituality of People Who Don't Go to Church" (University of Nottingham). One spontaneous observation was that most of the spirituality of people who don't go to church coincides to a large extent not with the Church's classical doctrine but with the actual spirituality of people who *do* go to Church.

The papers of this meeting are downloadable on: [http://www.geocities.com/ccom\\_ctbi/ccom\\_agm\\_portal](http://www.geocities.com/ccom_ctbi/ccom_agm_portal)

## A New Era for Building Bridges of Hope

*BBH is an ecumenical learning process in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. It aims to discover what different ways of relating to local communities are most effective for mission – God's purposes for human community declared in Jesus Christ.*

Along with BBH participant Teresa Kirk, a Roman Catholic involved in community development, the new consultant Terry Tennens (see last issue of Connections) will publicly announce details of the new 'pilots' – places of innovation and experiment in renewed ways of being church – at Inter-Church House, London, on 11 February. Jeanne Hinton's new book *Changing Churches* (see below) will also be launched.

"The 'pilots' do not belong to BBH or CCOM," says Terry. "They are existing, locally-based initiatives. Our role is to help them find an experienced accompanier, someone who can provide reflective skills and resources for immediate practical issues and long-term development. We are also linking the pilot situations together, and in the autumn we will organise a Future Church event to open up what is being learned to church leaders and others."

The fifteen 'pilots' cover everything from mission-enabling, community service and life-based bible study – right through

to an ambitious city-wide ecumenical project aimed at getting Christians to work beyond existing church structures to engage with a majority Muslim community. The work is being coordinated across Britain and Ireland, but carried out in a developed way.

These are the initial 'pilots': Bradford Inner Ring Group, Brentwood: Sion Catholic Community for Evangelism, Colchester: Dynamic Anglian Networks, Down & Dromore 'Think Again', Eden Bridge 'Bridges' Community Centre, London: Methodist & URC mission enablement, London: pastoral mission accompaniment of Central & N London District URC Council, New Town CYTUN, Northumbria Community, Glasgow: Pennylee-Hillington ecumenical project, Glasgow contextual bible study network, Wanersh: St John's Catholic Seminary, West Ham Archdeaconry Leadership Ministry, and nationally the Baptist Union of Great Britain, New Frontiers International (UK) More will be recruited as resources allow.

Terry Tennens stresses that the value of accompaniment was a major finding of the congregational research in the previous phase of BBH. "We are now testing how this works in places where there is a challenge to the wider structures of the churches to invest practically in mission. Piloting is about transforming traditional churches, and also tapping the energy of 'emergent' church. BBH is a resource for changing churches – but it works cooperatively and by making connections"

#### **BBH Publications – A story of open encouragement**

CCOM announces the publication of an important new book by Jeanne Hinton, *Changing Churches: Building Bridges in Local Mission* (CTBI, £7.95). Written from and for local churches – as well as mission enablers and church leaders – *Changing Churches* is a down-to-earth account of Jeanne's journey across Britain and Ireland. The stories she tells are vivid, touching, realistic and surprising.

The book also contains a summary of the Building Bridges of Hope process. It would be ideal for group study.

"Jeanne's book is a real encouragement for local churches," says CCOM Commission Secretary Simon Barrow. "It shows that although traditional church structures are under great pressure, there is huge life and energy at the grassroots. But the re-visioning of the church is not about quick-fix solutions, it is about long-term commitment. *Changing Churches* gives lively glimpses of how this is possible."

Says former Bishop of Coventry and past CMS General Secretary Simon-Barrington Ward, who is an accompanier in the latest phase of BBH: "So many in the churches often feel cut off from the mainsprings of the culture all round us. In city centres or villages, and especially in areas of stress or conflict, Christian groups need to break free from their little enclosures, shake off old patterns, and plunge deep into the heart of the society that surrounds them.

"This book describes how in practice a few enterprising pioneers, often starting from a very small base, have done just this - have reached out to create new meeting places.

"An ecumenical project, aptly named Building Bridges of Hope, is assisting this gradual process by putting churches in touch with 'accompaniers' to them on their journey. Here they have given us a movingly convincing book: one that tells stories to inspire many of us to begin to take some bold and imaginative steps into ventures that will surprise and enrich us all. It simply *must* be as widely read and used as possible! A breath of God's Kingdom blows through these pages which could carry us all far."

#### **BBH Resources**

Material from BBH churches forms part of the best-selling 2002 Lent Course, *Called to Be Saints* (CTBI, £2.50). One of the co-authors, Martin Johnstone, is a Church of Scotland minister advising on urban mission who worked for many years in Bellshill, a BBH parish.

A Welsh translation of material from the workbook accompanying the *Bridges to Build* video (*Pontydd i'w Codi: Sesiynau Dysgu i Grwpiau*) is now available for £3. The English workbook is also £3. The video and workbook cost £13.99 all-inclusive.

*Summarising Building Bridges of Hope* in booklet form costs £2.50. *Bridges for Local Mission* is a CD-ROM containing PDF and Word files of findings from the 1996-2000 learning process in 40 locations across Britain and Ireland.

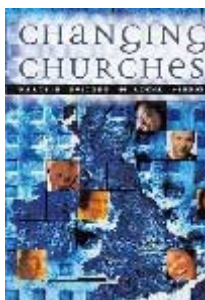
The BBH website ([www.ctbi.org.uk/bbh](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/bbh)) is being reconstructed and will be re-launched in February 2002.

**To order any of these materials:** ring CTBI Publications, 020 7898 1300, fax 020 7898 1305. Order securely online from: [www.chbookshop.co.uk](http://www.chbookshop.co.uk)

Simon Barrow

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### **Changing Churches (by Jeanne Hinton)**



Published February 2002 Price: £8.95 ISBN: 0851692648

At a time when traditional church institutions are eroding, how are Christians at the grassroots responding to the challenge of change? How can local churches re-engage with their neighbourhoods in a plural society? What is effective Christian witness today?

*Changing Churches* is an opportunity to meet some of the 40 Christian communities from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales that took part in a three-year ecumenical learning experiment called 'Building Bridges of Hope'. Through encouragement and accompaniment they discovered that their gifts and vulnerabilities were very much part of God's purposes.

This book is a story of real encouragement for local churches. You do not have to be big, glamorous or special to see the Gospel of love come alive in everyday situations - but you do have to be prepared to persist. 'Changing Churches' means long-term commitment, not quick-fix solutions.



# CCOM Forum Reports

## MTAG

The old MTAG is drawing to a close. At our last meeting we spent the time discussing what few last things need to be done before our work on mission in theological education can go to the publishers.

Unsurprisingly, we spent some time discussing the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and what we could say about it in terms of the current global context in which mission takes place. For example:

We discussed the processes of executing war among people who are powerless. It is perhaps ironic that rich powerful nations are going to war against poor and weak peoples with scarcely a national structure or identity eg Palestine (not a state) Afghanistan (a nation of tribal federations). Perhaps Christians should inaugurate a Century of healing starting now, in counter-testimony to a century that starts with terror and war? We need to look at a predominant discourse which labels others as 'evil'. Who are the evil ones, who is it doing the evil? Is evil being done by only one side? The media says 'they' are evil. The media tend to pronounce on Muslims and refuse the contribution Islam has made to our own culture. Yet we would have no western philosophy but for Islam.

We must also remember that there are questions about Christian fundamentalism in the current context. Some people are seeing the current situation as signs of an end-time. Against this there are images of great martyrs and some representations of Osama bin Laden as Che Guevara. Current events certainly highlight prominent aspects of our culture, about which we as Christians must ask hard questions. However, we must decide whether it is to do with issues of the poor and those who make them poor, or other issues of fundamentalism. Who are the 'others'? Where are the problems on both sides?

We must think carefully about other faiths and their contribution to our understanding of the current context for ministry. Some American re-readings of the Vietnam conflict make it exceptionally difficult to separate our reality from propaganda. This was especially true in, for example, films.

Notwithstanding, the rest of the world might know very little of what was actually going on at the present time. The majority of people do not, for example, watch Sky or CNN. In this respect, current discourse reinforces those who participate in the predominant discourse. What we refuse to listen to is the voices from those who do not use this predominant discourse. In the United States we could particularly see acts of denial. What has happened is that American power, and enormous capacity, could not stop the particular atrocity. People are finding this hard to understand and therefore turn to analysis of the Arab mind as the propagation of a kind of racist anthropology.

We also discussed our way of doing theology as being like a family bound together by relationship and working through a long discussion. This has been nourished and sustained by our eating, praying and reflecting together. Our

conversation is open-ended and therefore can include others, which is how we have now come to look at our book. It is not just a piece of text, but a conversation between us, as family, to which we are inviting others to contribute. So, MTAG will come to an end, but the conversation will continue, just as talking about God can never come to an end.

The new MTAG will begin in May under the chairmanship of Bishop David Atkinson and begin to ask what Christian apologetics mean in today's society. So a new conversation will begin, but it will be one which already has its beginnings in what MTAG has done in the last ten years.

Anne Richards, MTAG Secretary

## Middle East

A Letter from Jerusalem, 3 Jan 2002

This is written at the end of a three-week visit, just as the American envoy General Anthony Zinni is returning and Israel is reported as easing restrictions on Palestinians and withdrawing tanks from Palestinian areas. Yesterday Simon Peres, Israel's Foreign Minister, said, "Relaxations only ever take place on radio". So we shall see -certainly no easing has been visible on the ground before now, and any withdrawal has been matched by its reinvasion within hours.

I thought I had been certain from 1989 that the occupation was bad for Palestinians, bad for Israelis, that there was no good future for either until the occupation was ended, and that that certainty had become fully reinforced over time. On this visit it has hit me with new and extraordinary power how destructive the occupation has been and continues to be. Not just the deaths and injuries on both sides, not just the countable economic effects, though basic nutrition has now become a very real issue and the vast majority of Gazans are now dependant on relief, but the destruction of society and of personality.

It has been a deliberate Israeli policy to destroy Palestinian society; the humiliations heaped on fathers and the older generation brought the break-down between generations in the first intifada. Then the closures and cantonisation divided the areas from each other; the Israeli funding of Hamas was aimed to divide Palestinians politically; the recruitment of collaborators through unsavoury means has destroyed a lot of mutual trust within generations; the lack of any humane family reunification schemes has divided families; the destruction of people's sense of self-worth has brought a large increase in domestic violence. No wonder the Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan says, "Occupation is a sin against God and against humanity."

The constant working to divide Christian from Muslim and Christian foreigners from Christian Palestinians is another assault on the society, as of course are all the confiscations of land, destruction of jobs, of infrastructure, of development, of trade. And yet, despite all this and the reality of the effects, I feel more positive about the survival of Palestinian society than of Israeli society. Many good

Palestinians have left, but just as many good Israelis have left. If Palestinians are not sure where things are leading, Israelis are probably less sure. A snippet from today's paper, "there is more violence among young teenagers in Israel than in any other developed country." The gap between rich and poor is greater than in any developed country, except perhaps the USA. Another snippet from today's paper, "Jews and Bedouin in the Negev have united to protest against the discrimination that they feel they share living in a disadvantaged area". I could go on almost endlessly. And all for what? For these two or three hundred thousand settlers, for all the new settlement housing being built which no-one wants to live in, for which huge tempting subsidies are being offered, for these divisive roads, for the destruction of a landscape, for a drain on Israel's resources which cannot be counted because it is hidden away in so many budgets, for a loss in security as the IDF has to devote so much of its resources to guarding the settlers and being prison warders to the Palestinians.

This second intifada was a spontaneous, disorganised and emotional outburst. Yasser Arafat's failure was his failure to get a grip on it and organise it, his failure to unify the factions (which he could have done) rather than his failure to put them all in gaol or assassinate them. But the message of the intifada was and is pretty clear. "There is no point in going on sitting at a negotiating table while Israel goes on confiscating land and building settlements." The terms of reference of the Madrid conference (1991) included a halt on all settlement building. How innocent people were!

There has been endless appeasement, not so much of "terrorist" violence, but of the violence of occupation. How many things have been protested once or twice even by the US, but now they have become accepted? Settlement building, of course (Har Homa, look at it now!) – incursions into Palestinian areas – assassinations – closures – removal of IDs – customs fraud – torture – house demolitions – collective punishment – excessive force. The cause of all these is the occupation. Unless the occupation ends, these things will not end.

So, yes, it is what we know. The one combined message that has to be said is "**End the occupation and open Jerusalem**". "Back to the negotiating table", "Mitchell" and "Tenet" and all that means virtually nothing to Palestinians except perhaps to Arafat.

Palestinians need to hear it from the USA and Europe most of all. So does Israel. Unless there is that message I do not see how Israel can get out of the hole it is in. If the US and Europe do not say it, then everyone else has to say it as loud as they can. The question for the churches of the West is whether their voices can form part of what must be a growing clamour for justice for Palestinians as well as peace for Israelis. Within their own lives some large questions still need to be addressed – Zionism, terrorism and the right to resist among them. The World Council of Churches is facilitating a stronger international ecumenical response to the Israel-Palestine crisis, focusing on 2002 as a year to "end the occupation". That needs support at all levels of its member churches.

The Latin Patriarch, HB Michael Sabbah, is hosting a major international Catholic meeting in Jerusalem at the end of January. In his Christmas Homily he referred to the Pope's invitation to the Catholic Bishops of Jerusalem and some from elsewhere to be in Rome on 13 December 2001 in order "to think together on the peace in Holy Land and on

the future of the Christians in it." "The invitation", said Patriarch Sabbah, "was a sign of the love and solicitude of Holy Father for us. The peace? It is conditioned by the end of the occupation." That's the key.

Colin Morton

## Pacific

CCOM invited Rev Neles Tebay, a Roman Catholic Priest from West Papua, currently studying in Rome, to a visit in the UK. He met with human rights activists, mission agencies and MPs. He also addressed a meeting of the Pacific Forum, speaking about the plight of his people in the continually tense situation in West Papua under Indonesian military rule. Arbitrary killings, rapes, incitement to religious hatred (native West Papuans are predominantly Christian, the migrants brought in by the government from other Indonesian islands are mostly Muslim) are common.

A fuller report will follow in the next issue. Articles by Neles Tabey will soon be available online on [www.ccom.org.uk](http://www.ccom.org.uk). (go to 'Pacific Forum').

## Africa

Lessons to be learnt from the Sudan, with particular reference both to Islam and to the exploitation of new mineral wealth, was the theme of the November Africa Forum. Members of London's Sudanese community joined with CCOM members and other guests in frank discussion. Main speaker was Andrew Wheeler, formerly the Archbishop of Canterbury's Officer for the Anglican Communion and with many years experience with CMS in Sudan and East Africa (see his paper on p.14ff).

In his requested contribution Andrew Murray, of Tear Fund and the CCOM related Sudan Support Group, spoke of conflict being the underlying cause of poverty in the Sudan. A big issue in that is the oil situation. In an illustrated talk, he included reference to two reports which are available if required: "The scorched earth - Oil and War in Sudan" by Christian Aid, and a Canadian "Report of an investigation into Oil Development, Conflict and Displacement in Western Upper Nile, Sudan October 2001. [Links to both reports are on the Africa Forum website [www.geocities.com/ccom\\_ctbi/Africa\\_Forum](http://www.geocities.com/ccom_ctbi/Africa_Forum)].

[Cf. Andrew Wheeler's paper on p.14 in this issue].

At the meeting it was agreed that the 2002 Africa Forum Consultation, 16-18 April should be in Dunblane in Scotland when theological education in Africa will be considered with particular reference to HIV/AIDS and Islam.

Gordon Holmes

## PROCMURA: Africans speak on Muslim-Christian Relations Today

Respect for Islam and greater knowledge by Christians of different expressions of that faith (such as Sufism) were suggested by a prominent Egyptian Islamicist at a meeting in Utrecht in the Netherlands, 25-26 January 2002, of the

European Liaison Committee of the Programme for Christian Muslim Relations (PROCMURA).

Reading the Qur'an in context, with special reference to the issue of religious minorities, was the subject of the lecture by Dr Nasr Abu Said, professor in Islamic Studies at Leiden University. Quietly persuasive, he also urged Christians to join with Muslims in shared concern for issues of justice and for both to engage in self-criticism. For those wishing to act politically in support of Christians suffering from particular interpretations of the Islamic code, Sharia, he argued that such help should be for all those who are so oppressed, including Muslims. Partial support could reap a backlash by extremists.

The chairman of PROCMURA, the Rev Iteffa Gobena, head of the Mekane Yesu Church in Ethiopia, said that "despite September 11<sup>th</sup> being a painful experience it should not be a reason for creating a wall that would further divide two peoples. It can be a path that creates an opportunity for relationships that could change the present world in general". PROCMURA, he said, is working with churches in Africa in building the relationships that the two faiths desire. He referred to the training opportunities for PROCMURA Area Advisers who support churches in understanding Islam in countries across Africa, such as in Gambia and Nigeria in the West to Rwanda and Tanzania in the East.

Dr Johnson Mbilla, the Ghanaian Nairobi-based leader of the PROCMURA staff, said that in Northern Nigeria America is seen as a Christian country and therefore the attack on Afghanistan was seen as a Christian attack on Osama bin Laden and the Taliban. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, he said, have woken moderate Muslims and Christians interested in building bridges of understanding to come together to work towards peaceful co-existence. Church leaders in Africa need to come together to discuss the future of Christian-Muslim relations and to meet similarly with Muslim leaders, regionally and locally.

Reflections on the diverse faith situations in Africa and, relevant for today, theological and practical analysis of what needs to be done to reduce tension are provided in 'Christianity and peoples of other faith communities'. This report, of value to mission bodies in these islands, is on a consultation held in Togo in December 2000 is just published by PROCMURA and the All Africa Conference of Churches (ISBN 9966-886-3).

Gordon Holmes

## China

Two underground bishops died just before the end of last year, again pointing to the urgency of reconciliation in the churches in China. Although the Pope made an open apology in October for "perceived mistakes" of the Catholic Church in hurting the sensitivities of the Chinese people, we have yet to see a return to a more serious dialogue between the Vatican and China. The latter has

actually moved the goalpost and added extra conditions to any future rapprochement.

The situation on the ground, if anything, has become more worrying. Perhaps as a fall-out from the anti-Falung Gong campaign, non-registered churches have come under intense pressure. The last quarter of 2001 has seen more arrests and trials, including all the clergy of one Catholic diocese who had always operated with tacit approval for many years.

Nevertheless, more positive changes are in the air, with China joining the World Trade Organisation and winning the bid for Olympics 2008. It is in this longer-term and more optimistic atmosphere that the China Forum continues to promote exchanges and cooperation with China.

A strong commitment is made by the Forum to support theological education in China. In October a visit was made to the Guizhou Seminary, one of the projects the China Forum is presently focusing on. The Seminary has been working from a base in Panxian, rural Guizhou for the past 9 years. Funded predominantly by the revenue from a clinic run by its leader Pastor Tang, the seminary is the only source of theological training in the Province. Over the past 9 years it has trained 200 pastors and church workers and has a further 80 students currently studying there. The plans now are to move from the overcrowded accommodation, which is presently stretched to its limits, to a larger, more modern building in the provincial capital Guiyang. On behalf of the Forum, CMS Asia Secretary, Revd Soh Chye Ann, will be coordinating an international consortium in this new partnership.

September and the start of a new academic year saw the arrival of a new batch of Chinese theological student to the UK. A small community is formed in Birmingham, with others in Durham and Nottingham. It also heralded further development of academic links with Christians and institutions sympathetic to Christianity in China. In October, the China Secretary was invited to attend an internal, domestic conference held in Beijing. The theme of the conference was "The Concept of the Human and Christianity". One month earlier the University of Birmingham hosted the first academic conference on Asian Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity (see separate report). Further conferences were held in Moscow and Berlin which helped continue to foster international links in the China work.

In November a Round Table meeting was organised by the China Issues Group, a sub-group of the China Forum, to discuss "China's Accession to the World Trade Organisation and its implications on civil society". The session was attended by over 50 people and focused on a number of different areas including the implications on women, the labour force, the poor, the law and also on the importance of networks within Chinese society.

Caroline Fielder

# News, Resources and Events

## Asian Pentecostalism

"The Significance of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements for Asian Christianity" – A conference at Fircroft College, Selly Oak, Birmingham, 17-20 September 2001

This groundbreaking conference was the first time a comprehensive attempt had been made to discuss what in recent years has become a prominent form of Asian Christianity. Scholars write of the 'Pentecostalisation' of Asian Christianity, and Harvey Cox speaks of 'the rapid spread of the Spirit-oriented forms of Christianity in Asia'.<sup>5</sup> To focus on this phenomenon, Edmond Tang and myself at two research units at the Graduate Institute for Theology and Religion of the University of Birmingham, Selly Oak planned the conference. This was the second conference on Pentecostalism held at Selly Oak, the first in 1996 published in the collection *Pentecostals After a Century*,<sup>6</sup> but Asian Pentecostalism has not previously come under the academic spotlight in the western world. Much has been written on the growth and development of Pentecostalism in the continents of North America, Latin America and Africa, and European Pentecostalism has been well researched. But Asia, the world's largest continent with the greatest religio-cultural diversity, including a significant Christian population, has had comparatively scant attention, especially in the western world. Just as Pentecostalism in Latin America and Africa has had profound effects, so Asian Christianity's significant Charismatic character has implications for global Christianity that are far-reaching—but so little is known about it.

Over twenty Asian scholars from eight nations as well as several from Europe and one from North America converged in Selly Oak for the four-day event. Some of these were emerging scholars who were Pentecostals themselves, but the ecumenical character of the conference was reflected by speakers from Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran and Reformed perspectives. Walter J. Hollenweger, Emeritus Professor of Mission at the University of Birmingham, gave the opening address. The Conference papers were divided into ten plenary papers and six case studies from different Asian countries. The plenaries addressed major themes: Asian Pentecostalism's contribution to ecumenism (Hollenweger), sociological issues in studying the movements (David Martin), Pentecostalism's relevance for a theology of religions in Asia (Amos Yong), historiographical challenges (Anderson) and methodological issues (Michael Bergunder) issues, the latter looking at the South Indian context. Three plenary sessions dealt with the significant contributions of Pentecostalism to Christianity in South Korea (Bae Hyeon Sung and Jeong Chong Hee), China (Gotthard Oblau) and the Catholic Charismatic movement in the Philippines (Lode Wostyn). A further plenary

concentrated on theological perspectives on Pentecostalism and the Asian church (Hwa Yung and Wonsuk Ma). The final plenary session was a summation and conference report (Simon Chan and Edmond Tang). Except for those sessions where there were two plenary speakers, there were formal responses given to each paper followed by questions and general discussion. The six case studies were held at two venues simultaneously and were intended to provide contemporary information and reflection on Pentecostalism in particular Asian countries: India (Paulson Pulikottil), Indonesia (Gani Wiyono), the Philippines (Joseph Suico), Malaysia (Tan Jin Huat), China (Deng Zhaoming) and Korea (Lee Young Hoon). These too were followed by a time of questions and open discussion.

One delegate remarked that the particular mix of scholars across denominational and national divides might not have been possible in Asia. It was a unique occasion, and we were aware of the 'significance' of it. The conference papers are presently being gathered into a collection edited by Edmond Tang and myself, to be submitted to publishers in 2002 and entitled *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*. We are including a paper on Asian Pentecostal women in this collection, and two further case studies on North India and Japan. This unique and valuable publication will make the information and theological reflection achieved at the conference on Asian Pentecostalism across the continent known to the wider world.

Allan Anderson

## Faith in a Plural World –World Mission

### Conference Swanwick 2002

A weekend of worship, music, art and dance, with a variety of workshops led by people with special experience in inter faith relations will tackle among other things the following questions: Are we involved in a struggle between civilizations? How do we find an understanding of mission which has biblical integrity but also recognises the spiritual insights of different faiths? How can we build community with those of different faiths and cultures? Speakers are: Wesley Ariarajah (formerly interfaith adviser to the WCC, now Professor at Drew University, USA) and Jyoti Sahi (an Indian artist living in an art ashram).

Organised by the Methodists, Christians Aware, Grass Roots, the United College of the Ascension and USPG this conference will take place from 24-26 May 2002 in the The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick. Further information is available from Meg Bailey, [meg@baileymm.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:meg@baileymm.fsnet.co.uk) or Tel 0161 4323854.

## Konrad Raiser visited Britain

The WCC General Secretary Konrad Raiser visited Britain from 17-23 January upon an invitation from the Baptist Union of Great Britain. On 19 January he spoke on the theme "Problem or Opportunity? The role of religions in a violent

<sup>5</sup> H.Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century*, London: Cassell, 1996, 214.

<sup>6</sup> A.H. Anderson & W.J. Hollenweger (eds), *Pentecostals After a Century: Global Perspectives on a Movement in Transition*, JPTS 15, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

world" at an event organised by CTBI for church, faith community and political leaders, hosted by the Archbishop of Westminster.

He said that simply talking about 'overcoming violence' in the aftermath of the events of 11 September may seem impossible. However those events have sharpened the awareness of the potential for violence on society, culture and economies, and have made it even more necessary to understand the forces that lie behind such violence.

In the twentieth century, he said, the world became a more violent place. Since the end of the Cold War people seemed more often to be looking to solve conflicts violently. The WCC had felt there had been a qualitative change in the expectations of the WCC from within and beyond its own membership. It is out of this sense of responsibility on the one hand and desperation on the other that the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) for 2001 to 2010 was born. It runs parallel to the United Nations' decade for building a culture of peace, demonstrating that the quest for peace is not a uniquely Christian concern.

What now is the role of religion in all of this? Raiser set off by analysing Samuel Huntington's 1996 bestseller 'Clash of Civilizations', whose theses unsurprisingly have in the past had considerable influence on American policy, since he was an adviser to the U.S. Defence Department. While agreeing that Huntington's analysis of increased worldwide violence and the potential role of religiously founded civilizations as causes of tension was accurate he disagreed with the conclusions that the book draws. Although Huntington tried to overcome the notion of Western world dominance (a dawning of a 'world civilization') by showing that worldwide Western cultural influence was rapidly receding at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he personally had a very conflict-oriented understanding of intercultural encounter.

One of the main problems, as Raiser saw it, was the idea of seven integrated, religiously orientated civilisations, who fare best when left to exist as autonomously as possible. This is not only unrealistic, given the factual and irreversible pluralism of Western societies today. but Raiser argued this was too static an interpretation of culture, too limited in its ability to deal with religion in its own terms and too imbued with an understanding of security limited to that of 'defending interests'.

The events of 11 September showed how the U.S. were in reality vulnerable, that age-old secular analyses of security were inadequate and that the world was faced with the urgency of creating a new 'mobilisation for peace'. And it is into this need that the DOV hopes to contribute in a small way. Raiser described the DOV which succeeds the (1994 to 2000) Programme to Overcome Violence as a 'space for discernment' in an ever more complex world where churches are invited to engage together and with others to address the question of how violence can be overcome at any level, in their own context and to contribute in the light of 11 September to reshaping the interpretative framework for just and peaceful living.

Asked if it was realistic to suppose the churches could make a difference in a decade, Raiser said that the churches did not embark upon the decade in a triumphalist understanding but out of the recognition that they very often were part of or even the source of the problem. Nonetheless churches could make a difference if the whole issue of creating a culture of

peace was brought in from the edge. They do have an opportunity to bring to the attention of policymakers their own understanding of the positive contributions of religion in conflicting situations.

He concluded: "We cannot expect violence to be over at the end of the decade but we can trust that the spirit of reconciliation will transform the churches and help them create a culture of peace for all."

## Theology and Politics Study Course

A course of study in "Christian Theology, Politics and Public Policy" has been offered since 1998 by Sarum College in Salisbury ([www.sarum.ac.uk](http://www.sarum.ac.uk)). It was last year largely reshaped to offer more flexible schedules. This is a distance learning course (leading to a Certificate in 'Faith, Politics and Policy') for Christians interested in participating in politics, and covers topics such as *Christians, the Churches and British Politics 1850-2000*, *Contemporary Christian Political Thought*, and *Medical Ethics and Public Policy*. "Those people who say Christianity and politics don't mix are not reading the same Bible as me" said Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Further information from the Sarum College website or [fpp@sarum.ac.uk](mailto:fpp@sarum.ac.uk)

## Conference: "Mission Impossible?"

CIPA – The Christian Inter-Faith Practitioners' Association – organise an annual consultation for the benefit of anyone involved in work within an interfaith context. The next consultation will be held at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire from **Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> to Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2002**, and will explore the relationship between mission and inter-faith dialogue, past, present and future. Further details and booking forms are available from CIPA, Tel. 020 7604 3053 or [125.salisbury@london.anglican.org](mailto:125.salisbury@london.anglican.org).

## Inferfaith Newsletter

A new newsletter is being published on interfaith issues by the Churches' Commission on Interfaith Relations and the London Interfaith Centre. It contains topical articles, lists of forthcoming events, book reviews and other useful information. It can be ordered from [125.salisbury@london.anglican.org](mailto:125.salisbury@london.anglican.org).

## Women's World Day of Prayer Material

It has sometimes been claimed that the Women's World Day of Prayer (WWDP) had done more for ecumenical understanding than all Ecumenical Conferences put together. An Orthodox liturgy is the basis for the next WWDP (1 March 2002) which was put together by women from Romania. The title is "Challenged to Reconcile" and the booklet with liturgy and hymns is now out. It can be obtained for £1.25 (incl. p&p) from the National Office of WWDP in Tunbridge Wells (Tel. 01892 541411 or [office@wwdp-natcomm.couk](mailto:office@wwdp-natcomm.couk)). In coming years the WWDP will be prepared in Lebanon (2003), Panama (2004), Poland (2005) and South Africa (2006).

# FOCUS... FOCUS... FOCUS... FOCUS...

Andrew Wheeler

## Christianity and Islam: Lessons from Sudan

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*This paper was given by Andrew Wheeler at the CCOM Africa Forum meeting on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2001 at Inter-Church House, London. He was a CMS missionary in Southern Sudan for 9 years. The document can be downloaded from [http://www.geocities.com/com\\_cbi/Africa\\_Forum](http://www.geocities.com/com_cbi/Africa_Forum)*

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In the shadow of September 11<sup>th</sup>, our lives can never be the same again.

I realise, in the various invitations I have received recently, that many discussions take place in the context of September 11<sup>th</sup> and all that has followed from that. An invitation to speak about what we might learn or reflect upon, out of the relationships between Christians and Muslims in Sudan, can only be done realistically in the context of what we have all shared and wrestled with over the past couple of months.

My background is that for 23 years my wife and I were CMS mission partners. For nine years we lived in Southern Sudan and I was on the staff of Bishop Gwynne theological college, for much of that time involved in TEE work, [Theological Education by Extension], Distance Learning programmes. After that we lived in Cairo and worked with the Sudanese Refugee Programme at the Anglican Cathedral in Cairo. Then I moved to Nairobi where the new Sudan Council of Churches had its headquarters and for four years I was the NSCC co-ordinator for theological training. It involved travelling in and out of Sudan and trying to support and encourage theological training, leadership training of many kinds in whatever way was possible. Those four years were extremely valuable in that I was required to travel to many parts of Southern Sudan. In 1996 I was asked by the Episcopal Church to return to something which went back to my earliest days in southern Sudan. I had been involved in teaching Sudanese Church History and had realised that almost nothing existed in a written form to teach from and to use. I was asked, with a retired American Presbyterian called Bill Anderson, to conduct a research and writing project on the history and contemporary experience of the Sudanese Church. From this came several books, including one on the history of the church in Sudan.

However, with regard to the recent situation it occurs to me that it is such a complex situation that nobody is an "expert". Many have a piece of the jigsaw. There is an immense variety of threads, disciplines, perspectives from which the current crisis has to be wrestled with, including politics, economics, geography, colonialism, development, issues of military strategy, issues of ideology, history, culture, religion. If I bring anything to this, it is just a specific view of a westerner who has been involved with Sudan over many years and struggled to understand it as best he can.

What I think is interesting is that for the first time in decades issues of religion are essential to people's day by day discussions.

Questions that are current in the world around us:

- Is this a war against terrorism and not against Islam, as Tony Blair insists - even though many Muslims seem to disagree?
- Is Islam an inherently violent religion? What actually does it teach?
- Do all Muslims think the same?
- Is religion itself a source of division and conflict in our world?
- What responsibility do we in the West have for the maelstrom that is the Middle East?
- Why is the West (and the USA in particular) hated so much?
- What critique do we need to make of our own society? Its secularism, its godlessness, its consumerism, its sensualism?
- What is the future of inter-faith communal relations in Britain. When important sizeable sections of our community in Britain can say we are Muslims first and British second.
- What does Christian faith say about the issues of politics, justice and compassion that face us at the present time? What is our response to the current situation?

There are more questions and our newspapers throw them up every day. I should now like to reflect on my experience in Sudan, against those kind of questions. In the days after September 11<sup>th</sup> a number of complex and conflicting memories went through my mind. Together they suggest the many ambiguities and complexities that we have to engage with.

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**I wonder whether I have anything like the same hunger for the presence of God that I witnessed among Muslims.**

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When I first went to work in Mundri, I was taken to Lui, which is about 15 miles away. It was a major Anglican church centre, and as a matter of importance, as a new arrival in the area, I was taken to see Laro, a huge fig tree in Lui under which the very first Christian service in that area

took place on Christmas Day 1921. Laro's importance was that it was the "slave tree" under which for decades Arab slave traders from the north had gathered their slaves in the south before taking them north. So right at the beginning of the Christian presence in Lui it was identified with the overthrowing of that history. What had been a symbol of slavery and imprisonment was quite deliberately from the very first act of the first Christian missionary in the area, made a symbol of the Christian gospel and the gospel of Christian freedom. Laro stands to this day and is a source of irritation and friction between communities in Sudan. It is used by Christians to say this is the slave tree and the place of slavery has become the place of freedom. It is known widely in northern Muslim communities as the way in which missionaries in the South kept alive the memory of slavery and therefore ensure that the memory remained vivid and a source of hostility to the present day.

Another experience I had took place in the days when this was not CTBI but the British Council of Churches. I was invited to a meeting where we were going to hear two prominent African speakers, one Bishop Marcos from the Coptic Church in Egypt and another a pastor from northern Nigeria. Our two visitors were late, so the meeting started without them. There was a sharing session for an hour or so between people involved in inter-faith relations in Britain, and it was a meeting of great warmth, sharing experiences of exploring deep personal relationships and in its way was quite moving. Then our two friends arrived. They were wound up, they were late and they were in a hurry. They came pounding into the meeting and sat down expecting to do their thing, with no awareness of what had happened before, and went straight into stories of churches being burnt down, and Christians being imprisoned in Egypt. They were right into the heavy stuff that was coming out of Africa at that time. The dynamics of the meeting after that were extremely painful. It was like a bath of cold water and the whole discussion and the whole framework of discussion, which had taken place before, was completely at odds with what these two men had brought with them as the experience of their communities.

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### **The British, who thought they knew exactly what the Muslims needed, built most of the mosques in Khartoum and Omdurman.**

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Another memory, which came back to me, is again from my very first days in Sudan. I was wandering through the backstreets of Khartoum and came across a group of members of one of the different Muslim sects conducting the dhikr, the names of God. I remember standing there, watching, profoundly humbled and moved by the sight of these men reciting the names of God with what seemed to me deep intensity and hunger, seeking the presence of God. I wonder to this day, whether in all my busy Christianity I have anything like the same hunger and attentiveness for the presence of God that I witnessed on that day.

I also remember innumerable occasions of quite outstanding and generous hospitality in Arab and Muslim

homes in Omdurman and Khartoum, and in the south. A generosity that really knew no bounds at all.

My final memory goes back about three years to sitting in a slit trench in Maridi. I was with about 30 pastors of the Episcopal Church whilst a government bomber that quite clearly knew just where and who we were, because it came in without any warning right over Maridi Cathedral, spent an hour and a half trying to locate us and to bomb us. Something like 20 shrapnel bombs were dropped around us, killing a young girl from the church community.

In addressing my own reflections on the nature of Islam in Sudan and what we might need to reflect upon in the light of it, I want to talk about two general observations and three key ideas.

General observations:

1. The first general observation is the role and power of history and historical memory. We are aware of this as an issue in Northern Ireland. The Battle of the Boyne is not something that happened 300 years ago, but is something that is as yesterday for many people. Again in the Middle East the Israeli/Palestinian issue rehearses history on a daily basis. Sudan and Christian/Muslim relations in many other contexts have to grapple with the fact that historical memory is extremely powerful and still has enormous power over relationships now. If any change is to take place in the situation now, the power of history and the loosening of its shackles needs to be encountered in some way.

One of the features in the public teaching of history in Sudan is that history starts with the arrival of the Arabs and with the planting of Islam. I think I am right in saying that every school history syllabus that Sudan has known since Independence has taken that paradigm, that history begins, not with Sudan's ancient history, and not with the Christian Kingdoms that existed in Sudan for a thousand years, but with the arrival of Islam.

Those of you who are more involved in education in Sudan may confirm that or refine it in some way, but these are the ways in which history is manipulated and massaged for ideological ends. I am not sure if it is still used, but a few years ago there was a history textbook that was used in primary schools in Juba, that had the title "Our Grandfathers the Arabs". It was trying quite deliberately to replace peoples' history with another history, and to root them in a tradition and history that was not their own.

I have referred to the Lui slave tree. It is not only on the Muslim side that history is used and misused, we all do that. I don't think there is any doubt that other elements in Sudanese history like Laro have been used in distorting and imprisoning ways as Sudan tries to find a way out of its trap.

One of the reasons that I and others were involved in the writing of a church history book, whatever its deficiencies, was that it seemed important that if any way forward is to be found out of Sudan's conflict, history has to be approached with honesty, integrity, and depth. The use of stereotypes, conventions and popular wisdom about history really has to be confronted. Sudan, like Northern Ireland, the Middle East and many other places, will continue to repeat its saga until people are confronting and struggling with history in an honest way, which has integrity.

2. The second observation concerns Islamic diversity in Sudan's Muslim scene.

Islam is not a united monolithic religion. That is something that really has to be engaged with, and explored. Many Muslims would wish us to understand it as such, and this goes far beyond the great divide between Sunni and Shi'ite Islam, important though that is.

**Sufism:** The Sudanese reality for example is that Sudan was proselytised by a great variety of Sufi sects. The great majority of Northern Sudanese belong to one or other of a huge number of these pietistic devotional sects, which are often regarded by mainstream Suni Muslims as quite heterodox. The characteristic expression of Islam in Northern Sudan is not the mosque, but the qubba, the grave, the tomb of the sheikh who was the founder of a particular religious order and who taught his disciples various traditions of prayer and personal devotion. Many of these men were healers, or seers of one kind or another, and after their death their tombs become the focus of religious devotion. This is handed on from father to son, from generation to generation. Some of these are very large, some, like the Khatmiyya, have become political movements in their own right. So the Democratic Unionist Party is the political expression of this particular Sufi movement. The great majority of them are completely non-political but are enormously important as the spiritual and devotional focus of individual families. That provides a surprisingly open and flexible, and even tolerant, foundation to Sudanese Islam. It is a strange mixture and this kind of great diversity and fluidity needs to be held in view in our understanding of the total picture.

a) **Folk Islam:** Alongside that and closely related to it is the reality of folk Islam which is described in the writings of Bill Musk. Popular Islam, the Islam of families and people as they actually live it, is focussed on the search for power, healing, and protection. Charms and amulets are important, and in Egypt, for example, many Muslims visit Christian churches where there is known to be prayer for healing. So these have resulted in an enormously diverse popular practice of Islam which is quite outside the mainstream and approved practice of the mosques. The British, who thought they knew exactly what the Muslims needed, built most of the mosques in Khartoum and Omdurman. They needed mosques and so they were built, even though Sudanese Islam mainly focussed around the tombs of the saints and sheikhs.

b) **Mahdism:** Latent in Islam, all around the world, is a kind of messianism, which is looking for the arrival of the Mahdi, the expected one, the one who is going to bring in the age of true Islam, and various movements through history have attempted to bring that to reality. The most renowned in the history of Islam, is the Mahdi of Sudan, who famously killed Gordon at Khartoum. That movement failed to spread outside Sudan and so lost its universal character but has been transformed into a kind of Islamic nationalism. One of the most powerful religious and political movements in Sudan is the Mahdist Movement which finds its political expression in the UMMA party and in the Ansar, the followers of the Mahdi. It is a very complex social and religious and political movement.

c) **The Muslim Brotherhood:** This is another important strand. This has Egyptian roots, goes back to the 20s and 30s in Egypt, and was a consciously anti-Sufi movement. It was an attempt to sweep aside these rather heterodox and irregular expressions of Islam and to restore a true Quranic and mosque centred vision. It was one that sought the

renewal and reformation of Islam as a framework for the whole of society. It was about the revitalisation of Islam. Now in Sudan the leading figure in this has been Hasaan el Turabi who returned from studies in Europe in 1964, took over the leadership of the Brotherhood and its various successors have each been dominated and led by him. The NIF is the most longstanding expression of that. I have no competence to disagree with Michael Nazir Ali when he is talking about matters of this kind. His experience and wisdom is far beyond mine, but Bishop Michael makes a distinction between ideology and religion in this regard. He regards the activities of the Brotherhood as ideological, and not authentic in some sense. I am unpersuaded by this. It seems to me that a driving force out of the Quran and the whole Islamic history is that the faith must have a political expression. The faith must give birth to a social form and Islam in the end is about power. It is about the control and reshaping of society. If that is ideology then it seems to me that Islam has an inescapable ideological dimension. Kenneth Cragg speaks about Christianity and Islam being characteristically about two journeys. The defining journey of Christianity is the journey of Jesus, from Galilee to Jerusalem and the Cross, and the whole inner rationale of the Christian faith is about that journey to the cross. That is what shapes our understanding of God and God's purpose. The characteristic journey of Islam, and from it Islam dates its very history, is the Hijra; the journey from Mecca to Medina where Mohammad deliberately left the place of rejection and sought a community which he could control and build into an Islamic/Muslim society, one that lived under submission to God. Those two journeys are radically different. One is the journey to power, and one is the journey to rejection. They define what the two faiths are about. This seems to me to be the really crucial issue here.

I would also have touched on Mahmoud Mohammad Taha, who was executed as an apostate. Some Christian writers, I think of Gerhard Lichteuthaler, who wrote in one of our books, who sees Taha as a real way forward for Christian/Muslim understanding, but it would seem to me that Taha has no ongoing circle of support in the Sudanese situation. Taha emphasised the earlier, more spiritual and transcendent revelations to Mohammad as superior to the later more legal and social revelations. This enabled him to propose a more modern and flexible approach to social and political issues.

The three key ideas:

a) "Sharia". The Search for Unity?

The *hijra*, the move to Medina and political power, the need for statehood. The Muslim vision has always been for an entire society structured around Islamic law. Muslims have no understanding of being a minority. Islam can only be practised in a majority, in a dominant position. I think this is something we have to consider when thinking about the situation in this country. How does Islam understand being a minority? It has no theology of failure or obscurity. So in Sudan it is a deep question. How can Islam face the reality of pluralism and, in other contexts, the reality of being a minority. I find it difficult to detect within Islam a theology of failure, or of obscurity. That really has been Sudan's tragedy, because Sudan is inescapably a plural and diverse society. The tragedy of Sudan since Independence is that the only way in which successive regimes in Khartoum have been able to perceive national unity is through a



process of Arabisation and Islamisation. It doesn't matter whether we are talking about the current regime, or earlier regimes, they vary in their repressive severity and the amount of violence they are prepared to use. It seems that we have not had a regime in Sudan since Independence, which has been able to think outside that box. Somewhere down the line there has to be some real engagement with the issue of pluralism in Sudan and what that means about political power.

A very important issue is "What do Christians say in this context is the alternative?" The stand of the SPLA over all the years that I have been in Sudan is that they do not wish to live under Sharia. The alternative to Sharia is a democratic secular state. But the problem is that all over Africa we see the decline and collapse of the democratic secular state. Nigeria is the same, the church in Nigeria is arguing passionately against those who propose Sharia in the North, saying that they wish to see a democratic secular state. It seems to me to be patently evident right across the African continent that that alternative is already bankrupt. It has already revealed itself to be morally corrupt and to hold no kind of system of values, or to hold out any appeal to the population at large. What I think is needed is for Christians to really grapple with a Christian vision of society and political life, that sees the necessity for a spiritual and moral vision at the core of society, but constructed in a way that is inclusive rather than exclusive. What is offensive about Sharia Law is not that it seeks to put religious and spiritual values at the core, but that it is exclusive. The biggest task for theological education across Africa is to begin to grapple with that question. Unless we are able to begin to articulate a vision of society that places God at the heart and inspires people with a moral vision to serve society, and does so in a way that embraces people of different conviction, then Africa's spiral into corruption and chaos may well continue.

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## How does Islam understand being a minority? It has no theology of failure or obscurity.

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The second subject I was going to touch on was Jihad and its meaning, and its dangers in our modern world, and the third was the issue of Dhimmi, which is not a word I hear used much used in Sudan, but is part of Islam's self understanding.

b) "*Jihad*". The victory of ideology?

The meaning of *jihad*. Struggle in the cause of God, its moral and its military aspects. From the beginning jihad could be called for the defence of the Faith. But control was provided by the recognition of proper authority. What has happened today is that there is no consensus of who bears proper authority. Therefore, it is proclaimed by many inappropriate authorities for their own power or ideological purposes. (Bashir or Osama Bin Laden) such as in the Nuba Mountains, where it was actually declared against

Muslims (1993) or in Southern Sudan where it was used as a ploy to force Northern Muslim families to sacrifice their sons. The concept is closely allied with martyrdom and the promise of paradise. In Sudan this has led to the cynical political manipulation of the desire of young men for the glory of martyrdom, as well as the enforced enlistment of many who had no desire for martyrdom. We see this manipulation of religious aspiration in the current use by Al Qaeda and other extremist Muslim groups of suicide bombers. One of the most offensive features of this in Sudan is the way that the authorities have forced families grieving the loss of a son in the war in Southern Sudan to hold mock weddings to celebrate his entry into the delights of Paradise.

c) "Dhimmi" A Place for Christians?

Christians see Sudan as a diverse and plural society, an essentially African country, with a growing Christian minority. They want to see a non-religious democratic and federal state that reflects that (or Southern independence).

Most Muslims, on the other hand, see Sudan as an Afro-Arab country with an overwhelming majority of Muslims who are entitled to mould the country along Islamic lines. This involves a secondary and subsidiary role for Africans and Christians. This draws its energy from the troubled history of race and slavery, and from the established Islamic concept of *dhimmi*, by which those who are not Muslim, and therefore not part of the reconstructed State, are given protected, but subsidiary status within society. And that is the background to restriction on evangelism and the construction of churches in Sudan.

- Severe penalties for apostasy
- The Arabisation of education
- The suppression of African culture
- The exclusion of Southerners and Christians from real political power
- Discrimination in employment
- Social discrimination

We may or may not say this amounts to persecution. That is another debate, but it is the profound assumption of a dominant Muslim culture, that Christian and non-Islamic communities need to be held in a subsidiary position. That is essentially why *Sharia* and *Jihad* and these other issues need to be confronted face on, and alternatives found for Sudan that honour the identity and calling of each community.

It is all rather disheartening in some ways. I do think that one of the key ways forward, which really needs to be grasped and promoted in a major way, is a theological response. We need to work on a social vision, a theology of society, a way of placing God and spiritual values and an ethical vision of service at the heart of society. This must be done in ways, which are not exclusive, and we must address the central question of "how can we live together?"

That involves the dismantling of history and long-established assumptions with integrity, honesty and thoroughness addressing the assumptions that lock us into a culture of confrontation.

## Alpha: A Course of Surprises

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*Andrew Brookes assesses the Alpha Course and its huge success in less than a decade from a Roman Catholic perspective, stressing the ecumenical character of the course as main element of its success story. He pleads for this ecumenical element to be translated into even more local ecumenical co-operation.*

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In 1992 the Anglican church of Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) in central London decided to make an introductory course to Christianity that they had developed over 15 years or so and called the "Alpha Course" available to other churches to use. That year 5 churches were running it; the next year saw 200. 2,500 churches had taken it up in 1995 and over 16,000 by 2000. There are currently over 7,000 different local courses registered as running it in the U.K. (This amounts to approximately 25% of British churches!) It is running in over 120 countries and the course materials have been translated into over 40 languages.

This spread and its speed are staggering by any standards. The extent to which it has jumped cultural and class boundaries – and the variety of settings in which it is being used – makes its appeal even more impressive. This feature can be highlighted well by the fact that a course devised in well-heeled central London is now running in over 80% of British prisons. The breadth of denominational uptake, too, has been quite remarkable. Nicky Gumbel himself has commented on his surprise at the extent of this cross-denominational appeal. Ambrose Griffiths, Catholic Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, has written: "This is the first time ever that the very same course is being used by every Christian church in pretty well every country in the world. That is an incredible achievement." All this has brought considerable evangelistic, but also ecumenical, fruit.

However, without any impact on people's lives this would be of quite limited significance. This feature, though, is brought home most sharply when you hear – and I and other course organisers have also repeatedly – lives transformed: first-time conversions, people returning to faith and church participation after long absences, deep renewal, healings and church growth. It is not surprising that George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, can write: "I believe Alpha is one of the most important initiatives in recent years."

Why is all this happening? No matter what human analysis and other factors are considered significant, I find it impossible not to assert the hand of God at work here. It is both humbling and exciting to have been involved in various Alpha courses and events. I am not going to attempt to be prescriptive about God and his free and gracious action in a few words, and space does not permit a full reflection on Alpha, but I would like, as far as space permits, to reflect on and examine the cross-denominational appeal of Alpha and look at its implications for ecumenical co-operation in mission.

Firstly, a very brief summary of the course is needed! Alpha is a ten week practical introduction to Christianity, presented in a lively and engaging way. It is designed principally for non-Christians or new Christians – though it also serves well as a refresher course. Each session begins with a meal and throughout runs on a host-guest model of relationships between "Christian team" and attending "non-Christians". This is followed by a talk, which combines biblical teaching, well illustrated, and accompanied by a

good deal of testimony and peppered with humour. Participation in a small "sharing" group rounds off the evening. Here the emphasis is on respect and openness within a setting of trust and confidentiality; guests are encouraged, though not pressurised, to say exactly what they think and feel and to ask anything! Approximately half way through the course is a day or preferably a weekend away together, with extended opportunity for teaching, prayer, fellowship and recreation together.

One can say that Alpha came from an Anglican church and even try and specify it as an evangelical and/or charismatic church, but even these qualifications do not really do justice to the nature of the course. It does not fit easily within our most typical and conventional categories for describing Christians and churches. It straddles and even combines denominational stereotypes, as I shall attempt to illustrate by a slightly more detailed anatomy of the course. This provides substantial common ground for all denominations and even streams within Christianity. Further common ground is provided by the fact that the point of departure is focused very much on the condition of contemporary people whom all churches are trying to reach.

The entire course is put together and run very much with the non-Christian in mind. The model that describes the attitude between participants and organisers is host-guest. Firstly the course is to be scheduled, located and presented so that non-Christians can come – both practically and at a more "psychological" level. They are very much to be put at their ease, helped to feel welcome and at home, respected, their opinions valued. They are invited to do things, – not obliged or pressurised, at any stage. This may sound obvious or just subtle but for many congregations of "churchy mind sets" the thorough application of this principle can bring about a major paradigm shift in their thinking and pastoral planning. Clearly denominations generally all face this challenge and the responses tend to be similar and provide opportunities for mutual learning and even co-operation. The content of the talks too is based around what experience and research have shown are the questions that non-Christians most frequently ask about Christianity and faith.

How these topics are dealt with provides further common ground for Christians. The presentations have substantial teaching content – "the appeal to the head. Doctrinally the course accepts the supernatural and historic Revelation in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and (although I do not recall hearing it put thus) the content of the Nicene Creed – very much part of the common Christian tradition. The divine inspiration of the Scriptures is accepted and their powerful potential in teaching and preaching is well utilised. This results in truths being presented and explained very biblically: the course thus has a biblical spirituality and theology pervading it. This is a traditional strength of Protestant churches and something that Pentecostal and Catholic churches have re-affirmed strongly in recent times.

As the course has been taken up by more and more denominations, HTB have engaged in wide consultation and close scrutiny of the content and language used to make it as unproblematic and inoffensive to all denominations as possible. However, it needs to be remembered that “Questions of Life” does not set out to be principally a theological document or a formally “agreed statement”. Nor is it intended as a complete course in Christianity. It does not claim to be a definitive or exhaustive treatment on the topics covered – quite the opposite is stated. Evangelistic concerns and the style guide the contents and presentations and tone is kerygmatic. The intention is to be robust enough to answer questions amply, sharp enough to challenge, and charitable and sensitive enough not to unnecessarily offend or alienate. To do all this and be ecumenically sensitive is a difficult juggling act. It is often remarked that Nicky Gumbel quotes the Pope more often than most Catholic priests!

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**...robust enough to answer questions,  
sharp enough to challenge, sensitive  
enough not to unnecessarily alienate.**

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Anecdotes, illustrations and also testimonies are wisely drawn from across the Christian spectrum. This use of and appeal to experience – the “appeal to the heart” – balances the intellectual content and gives the course more universal relevance. It also happens – fruitfully – to bear testimony to the common life of faith found within different Christian traditions. The “straight-talking” presentations in the talks / videos are complemented by the open approach of the small groups where typically guests are simply asked: “What do you think? What do you feel?” The right to ask anything and to be respected are an important feature. It is amazing how many people comment that they are rarely really given a real chance to open up and to share on spiritual matters. For all these reasons, I consider that suggestions that the course is fundamentalist do not stand up.

Alpha is intended only as an introduction to Christian faith. An introduction implies quite clearly that other things can follow! This actually increases the ecumenical usefulness of Alpha. HTB use it as part of a two-year course for new church members. “Catholic Evangelisation Services” (who are responsible for much of the propagation of Alpha in Catholic circles in Britain and Ireland) have devised and produced an extensive set of video courses to follow Alpha looking at, amongst other topics, the nature of the church and sacraments. Alpha can be seen and used within the process of Christian formation the Catholic Church officially recognises in the “Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A.)”. The instruction for this quite explicitly envisages a process and period for a person to come to personal conversion to the Lord Jesus, begin a life of grace and develop a desire to join the Christian community before the formal Catechumenate begins. Alpha can fulfil this purpose and has been used like this. Such use of Alpha to announce the basic kerygma and bring people to personal faith in Jesus sits well with Catholic Church teaching – as expressed in Vatican II – on the hierarchy of

truths. It is also in line with the content of the “General Directory for Catechesis” (1997), not least in its teaching on the “Divine pedagogy”. Alpha can thus be fitted within more extensive Catholic programmes of teaching and formation.

Other churches have done similarly. Apparently (some) Baptists were tempted to include their own teaching on baptism during the course but realised that they could appropriately be added at the end, thus allowing the value of ecumenical solidarity and the powerful witness of the shared testimony of using a common introduction with other denominations to be maintained. Equally Pentecostals have been happy to leave further amplification of the work of the Holy Spirit to after people have finished the Alpha Courses. It is the nature of Alpha as only a tool, the sensibilities that have accompanied its development and its identity as only an introduction that can be fitted into different local and denominational settings that have made it possible this uptake and affirmation by so many different churches. Such attitudes have allowed many different churches to use the same evangelistic tool of basic proclamation and to give a powerful united witness to the world (often showed in shared publicity) whilst doing so. This in itself has been a reason for some to come on Alpha Courses.

The cross-denominational nature and appeal of the Alpha Course is further attested to and deepened when one examines its evangelistic method(s). It uses a multi-track approach, incorporating “word, work and wonder”. There is a clear proclamation of the basic gospel kerygma (“word”). There is also a lot of attention given to pastoral care (“works”). Running Alpha is hard work! It is labour intensive, and has to be accompanied by real and even costly and sacrificial service and love and also much ongoing prayer. However, there is no attempt made to reduce evangelistic effectiveness to human activity, very important though is! There is a clear sense of the primacy of God’s grace and our dependence on this to see lives transformed – often dramatically (“wonders”). This action of grace is identified particularly with the Holy Spirit but it should be noted that the course is strongly and well-balanced Trinitarian theology. Here it again in its method Alpha crosses denominational stereotypes and indeed combines their relative strengths to good effect.

The course also combines several other sets of elements that have often separated Christians and sometimes tended to reduce their effectiveness. Present is the clear “evangelical” conviction about the distinctiveness and decisiveness of Christian conversion. However, this is combined with an awareness of the process that accompanies a person’s conversion and journey into faith. This impacts quite clearly on the method of the course – and the fact it is a course, not a brief event – and also in the sensibilities and attitudes and values that accompany it. Respect, patience, a willingness to move at the pace of the (slowest) guests are clearly advocated.

There is also a healthy understanding of the balance between grace and nature as it is to be lived out. Sandy Millar talks of team members being “naturally supernatural and supernaturally natural”. Naturalness is important. It also helps put guests at their ease. God’s grace makes us more truly ourselves. It is encouraged that all eccentricity,

intensity is to be avoided. Things are kept relaxed and homely and humour is generously used to lighten things up. At the same time there is a clear awareness that grace is not nature. God's action in people's lives goes beyond "ordinary" human experience and the impact of his action can be clearly seen and named as supernatural. This goes too for some of the Spiritual gifts put at Christians' disposal by God. Such supernatural living and acting are, though, a normal, and to be naturally borne, part of Christian living! This dimension does raise fear and apprehension in some people but just the other day somebody remarked to me how gentle Alpha is in introducing people to a life of grace; a life lived in the power of the Spirit. Exactly how this aspect of the course is handled is important – but its effective use often crucial to its success.

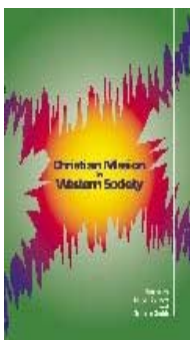
It also balances the fact of conversion as having both personal and communal dimensions. There is clear teaching on the personal nature of conversion and indeed the personal nature of faith in God and repeated invitations to take a step of personal conversion are offered. However, the whole setting for hearing about the Gospel and making the spiritual journey and process is a very communal one. It has even been remarked that guests do not properly "hear" the talks until they have settled in. Believing, belonging and behaving are all stressed but there is a clear practical recognition that "belonging" often accompanies, and sometimes precedes "believing". Becoming part of a church community is "caught" even before it is "taught" to use educational distinctions! Participants frequently remark that participation in a small group was a major highlight of the course – even if something they were most apprehensive about at the beginning. It highlights the crucial role that such smaller units of "church community" are increasingly playing in churches experiencing contemporary growth and perhaps points the way to future church development. Care for the wider community, including Christian social action, is also warmly affirmed and encouraged on the course – and often practised afterwards. All of this strongly suggests to me that criticisms made of Alpha promoting excessive individualism are hard to sustain.

I hope this analysis indicates the very broad make-up of the Alpha Course and some of the reason for its broad

ecumenical appeal. What is especially interesting, in regard to these ingredients, is that "the whole is much greater than the sum of the bits". Rather than being eclectic the elements cohere and give the course internal integrity and coherence. The best advice on using the course is to "follow the recipe" – and not miss anything out!

The ecumenical nature and appeal of Alpha has had good evangelistic results but has also produced many ecumenical benefits. Some of these have already been referred to. There has been increased contact between Christians of different groups, resulting in less suspicion and often friendship and even collaboration. This happens both at Alpha Conferences and at the local level. Here people from different churches running Alpha often come together to pray, talk and work together. Courses have shared and swapped personnel and other resources. Groups of churches co-operate to do training, appetiser events, share publicity and even to organise local conferences. There is an accompanying spirit emerging of blessing each other and assisting each other's growth. Some quite remarkable, strong links are being established between some seemingly "disparate" churches. All of this is only possible with real charity and has often been accompanied by changed attitudes, even repentance - as even HTB's leadership has acknowledged and admitted to. It needs ecumenical conversion: a willingness to recognise the presence of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit in groups of Christians we do not entirely agree with on everything. This has proven to be healing and certainly to attract attention from wider society.

I am of the view that there is still more scope for such local co-operation. How much this happens depends on how much we are willing to work together when it is possible. At the recent Scottish Ecumenical Assembly it was remarked how little we yet apply the Lund Principle that we (as Churches) shouldn't do separately what we can genuinely do together". The Alpha course has provided an opportunity and means for us to do this in mission and it is certainly my hope that take it up still more earnestly. There is certainly a real need but also a rich potential.



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**Christian Mission in Western Society (ed. by Simon Barrow and Graeme Smith)**

Price: £11.50 085169246x

A stimulating collection of essays from a variety of church traditions and theological stances. Together they explore creatively and provocatively the past, present and future of Christian mission in the West. All contributors reflect a positive desire to inculturate the gospel authentically and to open up a productive dialogue between mission theology and culture. The legacies of Augustine and Columba and the recent interest in Celtic spirituality are considered.

Contributors include: Anton Wessels, Adrian Hastings, Michael McGraith, Lynne Price, Duncan B. Forrester, Hong Jung Lee, Werner Ustorf, William Eggen, Jay Kothare, Joe D. Aldred, Allan Anderson, Ann Loades, Bert Hoedemaker.

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## Book Reviews

### Tosolini: To Speak of God in the Twilight

*Tiziano Tosolini: To Speak of God in the Twilight: Towards a Theology of Mission in the Postmodern World, Gracewing USA, [ISBN 0 85244 467 2] £7.99.*

In this short, thought-provoking set of meditations on Christian presence and witness in a fragmented world, the 'twilight' of Tosolini's title is the shadowy horizon we often call postmodernity - echoing back to Heidegger's 'land of the sunset'.

The author, a Xaverian missionary who teaches philosophy at the Mill Hill Institute in London, is careful to distinguish between the massive changes of perception that have occurred in Western society and the new ideologies sometimes built on them.

He describes a world in which people have become disillusioned with 'progress', confused by the breakdown in received traditions, abandoned by history in a mesmerising present, caught in a maze of multiple ethics, and re-enchanted by consumer consciousness, body aesthetics and new [age] ecologies of the mind.

This 'return to the surface', away from the presumed profundities of past 'big stories', involves both loss and gain. Tosolini is aware of the threat of chaos and nihilism, but unlike many Christian writers does not seem afraid or defensive. For him dis-illusion can be just that: the loss of illusion, and therefore the possibility of a new enlightenment.

God *can* be spoken of in this age of fragments, he says. But only out of experience, encounter, imagination, memory and hope. These are what Tosolini describes as the missionary paths along the periphery of Christian doctrine. They require a community that embodies such virtues, which can point to them in the past (as signs of faithfulness) and generate them for the future (as signs of possibility). In this way he seeks, with St Matthew's Jesus, to claim both old and new from the storehouse.

The Christian understanding of God that emerges is of a transcendently vulnerable divinity, making space for a world of becoming out of freedom. God is the Other who is discovered incarnationally, who endures suffering and who redeems transitoriness with love. Tosolini's veil of meditation is therefore not so much 'a theology' of mission, but a series of living insights to be gathered and sown in an unpredictable world.

At one point the author quotes Italo Mancini on Bonhoeffer: "Religion is a private matter and propped up by my metaphysical speculation. Christianity, on the other hand, far from being a mutilation of human power, manifests the fecundity of the earth and the disempowerment of God." For this reason, religion cannot make much difference in an adult world, but Christianity rediscovered can generate new possibilities of mature and liberated humanity.

While affirming the truth in this, Tosolini acknowledges a much more complex relationship between 'religion' and 'Christianity'. The announcement of the Gospel is indeed a religious act he says, but not one which exactly coincides with the proclamation of a religion. Rather it is about a new way of seeing and relating to the world.

Mission is therefore about rediscovering Christianity, he concludes. "Following Paul, one could claim that, in a postmodern and western context which exalts fracture and non-belonging, what mission is called to pass on is undoubtedly faith in a crucified and risen God, a faith which understands itself in understanding God's freedom and love.. [which appeals to] mature humanity.. and [helps to] re-define religion as 'the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a [totalisation]'."

Simon Barrow

### Werner Ustorf: Missions, Missiology and the Third Reich

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

'Yet another study adding a tiny detail to what we already knew long ago, i.e. the Christian involvement in Nazism' I was tempted to think looking at the title. Inappropriately, however. Not only has there not yet been a comprehensive study on missiology's and missions' involvement in the Third Reich so that this is more than a mere detail, but also Ustorf uses his topic to study typical features of missiology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in its reflection on 'culture and gospel'. So the research is meant to be paradigmatic for the much wider question of how missiology reacted (reacts) to the emergence of modern pluralist society. The theological point in question reaches far beyond the 1933-45 period and in fact is a variation on the permanent missiological discussion on inculturation.

The author proves his point in historical analysis, which testifies to the use of a stupendous amount of previously unexplored archive material (although some sections draw heavily on his own previous publications). The book yet again contains examples of his ability to dig up interesting little side glimpses in recent mission history, such as the story of Jacob Wilhelm Hauer, first Basle missionary, later professor of Indology, eventually leader in the neo-pagan Germanic religious movement. It is Ustorf's gift that such findings are not just excitingly readable historical detective stories but that he can show their wider exemplary relevance to his topic.

Ustorf starts by showing how German missiologists, even before 1933, were strongly influenced by a romantic and, later, *völkisch* reaction to Enlightenment (part 1).

An analysis of Hitler's missiology (sic!) in *Mein Kampf* concludes that Nazism is not simply a distortion of Euro-

pean civilization but rather one inherent possibility of this very civilization. Thus, both European civilization and Christian mission (not just missiology) contain seeds that can lead to wrong developments. According to Ustorf Nazism has to be understood as a political religion itself not just as a movement which made use of certain elements of religion in its propaganda and appeal. In fact the theological paradigm of religion as based on absolute truth claims in revelational terms was shared by Nazism, neopagan Germanic religions and Christianity, just as was their hostility to pluralistic rationalist modernity. So epistemologically the basic choice was not among these three but between them all on the one hand and a liberal non-absolutist, non-revelational starting point as it was being discussed in Anglosaxon missiology (part 2) on the other.

This is another facet of the old European-Anglosaxon debate of the relation between Gospel and culture and the contrast between German "Volkskirche" and Anglo-Saxon conversion of the individual soul. Ustorf shows how after 1933 missiologists like Siegfried Knak and Martin Schlunk overemphasised the traditional divide to the point of endorsing nazism.

Rather than just repeating Hoekendijk's post-war analysis that the German (European?) missiological concept *ipso facto* necessarily had to lead to the more than intense flirtation of church and mission with Nazism, Ustorf shows how the German approach is basically the same that is being discussed later as inculturation and contextualisation of the Gospel. (He also shows that the Nazi *Deutsche Christen* propagated full integration of a) church and mission, and b) of home and overseas mission, concepts which some 30 years later, for different reasons, carried the ecumenical day). German missions were not at all alone in their inability to deal with modernity appropriately. Their attitude was largely repeated in the International Missionary and Ecumenical Structures who also tended to responded to the modern and liberal challenges by thinking along conservative and authoritarian lines – thus not offering an alternative but simply reproducing a Christian version of the successful Nazi religion. Ustorf exemplifies this with Joseph Oldham of all people, who in the context of a discussion about Christian message in the Western world was prepared to think along lines of a totalitarian state which brought his thoughts close to some trends in Nazi Germany, in structure at least, if not in content (p.118ff). One may ask, of course, if such a trait is not inherent to the Christian message itself, like to all religions with absolute truth claims.

Part 3 proceeds with a more detailed study of German mission agencies in those days. This and other parts of the book read like a Who's Who of the ecumenical and mission movements of the time and one can safely assume that those sections which thoroughly demythologise a few German mission biographies will lead to some controversy. It is interesting to note that all throughout the 1930s and even the war German missions relied on the support of the International Missionary Council where notably Joseph Oldham was wrongly convinced that all German missions were part of the Confessing Church – an early indication of some German mission leaders' ability of providing their own pre-1945-hagiography in later years.

Anyone aware of Lutheran theology will not really be surprised that the *simul iustus and peccator* is not just a theological topos but a life reality which shows itself for example in the lives of individuals and the development of German

missions and missiology in the Third Reich. The dialectical relationship of accommodation, opportunism and rejection/resistance vis-à-vis Nazism often in the same personalities is the most natural finding to be expected. Most historical research on specific groups in Nazism shows this.

Interestingly the *Berliner Gesellschaft für Missionsgeschichte* will apparently make "Mission and the Third Reich" the topic of its next International Conference in 2003.

The book will fully satisfy the mission historian in search of critical analysis. But one is left with a feeling of "Now what?" Given that the book deals with theological questions no less burning today than they were 70 years ago one would expect more of a conclusion or at least the author's stance on the critical analysis of pitfalls in theology and missiology. The mission theologian is left with a detailed analysis of problems and questions none of which will be entirely new to him. He will however not find much more than an assertion that his predecessors often failed in answering them as well.

Kai Funkschmidt

Dahling, Funkschmidt, Mielke (edd.):

### Pfingstkirchen und Ökumene in Bewegung

*(Pentecostal Churches and the universal church on the move) edd. C. Dahling-Sander, K. Funkschmidt and V. Mielke. Frankfurt/M: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2001, pp.220, ISBN 3-87476-383-8. £14 (special offer for CONNECTIONS readers: £12 at com@ctbi.org.uk).*

Has it ever struck you how the 'great words' our different - and tragically divided - church families and parties claim as their own, whether Orthodox, Catholic, Evangelical, Charismatic or Pentecostal, are all words any Christian ought to want to be part of. It's only when we add national or otherwise partial qualifiers (Russian, Roman, Anglican, Lutheran, Conservative, Oneness ...) that the underlying reasons for the divisions peep through !

In this book, a most useful collection of articles by different authors discussing both the histories of the relationships around various Pentecostal churches, and the theological issues that need clarifying in the friendship, mutual learning and deeper exploration of ecumenical dialogues, it is the word 'Bewegung' (= 'on the move') that matters most. Of all the large confessional 'families' of churches, it is surely the Pentecostals who most strongly and centrally know themselves 'on the move' (if not necessarily in an ecumenical direction), because so many new things are constantly happening among them, under the influence (they would say) of the Holy Spirit, the Prime Mover if ever there was one, alike in creation as at Pentecost !

Five of the essays are descriptions of the history and present situations of various Pentecostal churches: in France, where the Gypsy Church is the biggest; in Germany, where one major church withdrew from membership in the National Council of Churches after ten years; in the Americas, an informative and self-critical account by the leading Pentecostal figure linked to the WCC, Cecil Robeck; of an African church establishing relations in Europe and on the world scene; of the attempts in the UK to involve 'The Black Church' in wider fellowships. Both this last, by Bishop Joe Aldred, and the German one by L.D.Eisenlöffel, are particularly revealing for being written by fair-minded,

indeed humorous insiders who can point to the hypocrisies and power-games in inter-church diplomacy!

Other essays explore several key theological issues that have featured, e.g. in the now 30-year old dialogue between Pentecostals and the Roman Catholic Church. The conference from which this volume arises - the November 2000 gathering of the Ecumenical Studies Association - was so arranged as to allow discussion *with* Pentecostals, not only *about* them, so over half the articles are written by Pentecostals.

Characteristically, it is the 'keynote' address by Professor Walter Hollenweger (University of Birmingham and Selly Oak Colleges, 1971-89) which most provocatively sets fire to the debate. The publication of an English version of this should be a high priority for CCOM. With his unrivalled, profound empathy with a vast range of Pentecostal communities, and his ability to put his finger precisely on the sensitive, even sore points, he ends with an urgent appeal to all churches to be honest about the 'atheism of the heart' of middle-class Europeans, and to get out and experience the actual sufferings of those at present being marginalised by the powers-that-be, in order to discover among them what the Holy Spirit is pioneering by way of fresh opportunities to learn the good news of God's Kingdom.

The only problem with the book is that half the contributions are in German, half in English. While this is no great problem in today's Germany, I fear we English-speakers will hardly be able to benefit as much as we need to! Take this as stimulus to (re-)visit the English language versions of Hollenweger's two full studies a generation apart, *The Pentecostals* (SCM Press, 1972) and *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, USA, 1997), and the double issue of the *IRM* of July 2000 on *Open Space: the African Christian Diaspora in Europe and the Quest for Human Community*.

Martin Conway

## Werner Hoerschelmann: Christian Gurus

*Werner Hoerschelmann: Christian Gurus: A Study on the Life and Work of Christian Charismatic Leaders in South India. Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College Research Institute, 1998, pp. xix + 522 price: approx. Rs. 120/-*

*Christian Gurus* is a key book to better understand Indian Spirituality and how the Christian gospel works in this cultural context. Originally published in German (1977) this English translation, which Bishop Newbegin then desired, has come to fruition and is reasonably priced for India. Heroes or superstars may be born, but as is obvious from South Indian films, sports and politics they are craved after and created by the populace. This book demonstrates how religion, Christianity in particular, is neither exempt nor very different in this aspect. In spite of Western influences education and social structure, the guru-shishya (teacher-student) relationship is a "dominant structural element of

Indian society" indelibly ingrained and vital to the Indian psyche.

Hoerschelmann's seminal work and in-depth study of a phenomenon he terms "Christian Gurus" addresses and assesses the bedrock and force of South Indian religiosity. Indian gurus/Godmen as spiritual teachers and divine guides are as old as religion itself. However, this work explores its formation, role and influence particularly in the 1960's and 1970's among Christian communities in Tamilnadu, South India. It draws on pertinent literature and is replete with the author's personal interviews, numerous testimonials, reports, pamphlets, journal articles (consequently, the endnotes tend to be cumbersome making the sources difficult to identify), yet all compiled to substantiate and point out how charismatic leaders impact and shape the Indian Church.

The material is invaluable for its biographical and statistical data and is set forth in four parts: First, the socio-religious context in which the "guru" concept is historically developed. Then, there is an empirical enquiry into the function of 20 gurus: 4 historical, 8 urban and 8 from rural areas. The third part is an attempt to systematize the Christian Guru phenomenon comparing and evaluating it against Hindu charismatic personalities. The fourth part discusses its impact on the South Indian Church and Society as a whole. His argument which is convincing, is that the Christian Guru in working principle is an incarnational representative and witness of the Holy Spirit's power to the Lordship of Christ and needs to be taken seriously for effective indigenous mission in India.

The heart issue discussed is Christian Leadership upon which everything seems to rise or fall. The reviewer readily sees its potential yet cannot miss warnings of its misuse and abuse both morally and materially. In discussing the Christian Guru's teachings, life-style and miraculous powers the book reveals something about the religious character of the followers as well. The material is presented in a descriptive way and analyzed in its socio-anthropological matrix raising theological issues. Hoerschelmann has evaluated several independent, indigenous, charismatic mass movements which on one hand have contributed much to the growth of Indian Christianity and on the other hand, become problematic even schismatic for the established Church in South India.

The author, though a westerner, has spent time in India, is sensitive to caste issues and has grasped fairly well the Indian ethos. Nevertheless, some labels ascribed to pentecostal piety and leaders could appear to be cynical. His interview format and case study outlines are helpful for field research. The appendixes on popular Hinduism, the Indian Pentecostals and Faith Healing are insightful. Hoerschelmann's work is useful for studies in popular or folk religion, revivalism, charismatic Christianity, personality cults, prosperity theology, and new religious and indigenous movements. It will remain a classic reference and a challenge to Indian Christian Theology.

Christopher Gnanakan



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## For reflection

'I love humanity, but I wonder at myself. The more I love humanity in general, the less I love man in particular. In my dreams, I have often come to making enthusiastic schemes for the service of humanity, and perhaps I might actually have faced crucifixion if it had been suddenly necessary; and yet I am incapable of living in the same room with anyone for two days together, as I know by experience. As soon as anyone is near me, his personality disturbs my self-complacency and restricts my freedom. In twenty-four hours I begin to hate the best of men: one because he's too long over his dinner; another because he has a cold and keeps on blowing his nose. I become hostile to people the moment they come close to me. But it has always happened that the more I detest men individually the more ardent becomes my love for humanity.'

Fyodor M. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamasov*

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### The last word



"So what did he do this time?"

French paper *Le Monde* comments on the German Supreme Constitutional Court's decision that a Bavarian law requiring crucifixes in classrooms is anti-constitutional. They must be removed if a parent objects.