



Churches' Commission on Mission

CONNECTIONS

Resourcing ecumenism and mission

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Editorial

'I am dreaming of a new Great Britain, come to execute all the Pakis' Shocked? What about 'Niggerman be dead! / Please mark me word / Gimme that tech-nine [gun] / Shoot them like bird'? Illegal? Yes. Try: 'Bun a fire pon a kuh mister paki-shit fi drown.' Repulsive? If music like this was distributed by Virgin and HMV, the UK's biggest record labels, broadcast on BBC and the artists nominated for reputable music awards, one would expect the churches and society as a whole to have a word to say about it.

And yet, but for a detail, everything quoted above actually does happen. The detail concerns the targeted group: it is not black and Asian but gay people who are thus attacked. While racist music would be quickly spotted and withdrawn due to omnipresent public attention, the churches in this field echoing mainstream vigilance, it is acceptable if directed against gay people. Rap and Reggae stars like Beenie Man, Elephant Man and Bounty Killer, quoted above, are part of a broad music culture that routinely dreams of shooting, burning, drowning 'poofs', 'faggots', 'chichi men' and 'batty men'. When the music industry is challenged on this, such outpourings are defended as being part of Jamaican-British minority culture. 'You are never going to stop this because Jamaica is a very religious society,' comments the Editor of the black music magazine *Echoes*, as a matter of course identifying religion and homophobia.



Looking beyond lifestyle magazines, which give an unduly liberal picture of society, one cannot fail to notice that homophobia is the norm rather than the exception in mainstream society. In 2002 two thirds of lesbian and gay people in these islands reported they had been the victim of a homophobic incident in the last two years, yet only 18% reported it to the police. For black and Asian gay and lesbians the figure is 88% victimized and 12% reporting it to the police. Almost needless to say that the majority felt the response from the police was very poor.

If one heard with an unbiased ear that several churches in Britain recently made homophobia a primary topic of their discussions, surely one would expect that it was in order to denounce the matter-of-course identification of religion with hatred for gay people and the severe legal discrimination and often persecution to which they are exposed throughout the world, including to a certain extent in these islands. Alas, we know that this is not the context in which the issue is discussed. 'Of course' there is no discussion about the need for a Churches' Commission on Justice for People in Same-Sex Relationships or about intervening for the abolition of discriminating legislation. Quite to the contrary the churches are largely joining the majority homophobic chorus. Far from being 'the voice of the marginalized', as we claim, could it be that we all too often only mirror mainstream engagement: concerns and prejudices alike? 'A church that only tries to imitate society will not only be ridiculous but also vulnerable' the doyen of German missiology Theo Sundermeier recently said on the occasion of the 275th anniversary of the Rhenish Mission. Such a church will not be faithful to its mission of being salt of the earth, but rather the feel-good cream topping for the comfy mainstream.

This must be a concern not just for those, tagged 'liberals', who think that all discrimination is un-Christian, but even more so for those, tagged 'traditionalists', who dispute this. The critics of gay clergy or bishops deny homophobia and claim that theirs is a purely theological conviction. Their claim to rely purely on their reading of the Bible would be more credible if they acted like Jesus, who, before admonishing the adulterous woman (John 8): 'Sin no more', had boldly defended her against her persecutors at considerable risk for his reputation and possibly health. Irrespective of whether one shares their understanding of 'sin', the traditionalists' claim that they abhor the sin but not the sinner needs to find expression in visible action of Christian love and solidarity. Or as Bonhoeffer famously said in an admittedly even more serious situation: 'Only he who shouts for the Jews may sing Gregorian Chants.' Currently it seems many churches are only singing along with society as a whole – both in where they show vigilance and where they do not care.

Kai Funkschmidt, Editor

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Angela O'Donoghue

Ecumenical Accompaniers' Programme for Israel and Palestine (EAPPI)

The EAPPI is a programme originally initiated by the Quakers and today endorsed and supported by the CCOM Middle East Forum. Volunteers of various backgrounds and ages go for several months into crisis areas to be with the people. The following is a report from Angela O'Donoghue (Journal Letter No.3, September 2003). Accompaniers can be invited as speakers for peace groups, churches etc. Further reports from accompaniers and a list of events with returned accompaniers are available from the Quakers' website www.quaker.org.uk/eappi. Accompaniers can be invited to speak at UK locations. For this get in touch with the Quaker Peace and Social Witness Office via their website. Angela O'Donoghue was an Accompanier from , June to Sept 2003.

Dear Friends

'Happy the peacemakers; they shall be called sons and daughters of God.' (Matthew 5: 9)

What can it mean to be an Israeli peacemaker when your own country is perpetrating an oppressive military occupation of Palestinian land? Is there a particular identikit which can be drawn up which characterizes a typical Israeli peace activist? In recent weeks I have been seeking out the company of such peace activists, trying to hear from them in a more personal way about their hopes and fears.

Israeli society today is subject to a deliberate cultivation of fear and mistrust by the Sharon government

During this time I have met with a variety of individual Israelis whose common aspiration is to end their government's military occupation of the Palestinian territories by undertaking a variety of non-violent activities and demonstrating their solidarity with Palestinians. Most of the people whom I met would regard themselves as left-wing in their political views and aspirations. However that is not true for all; others wear different political colours, whilst some people do not claim any interest in politics but have felt compelled to become involved in peace activism because of their abhorrence of the Occupation. There is a great variety of ages, backgrounds and lifestyles represented amongst them.

However it seems that the peace camp within Israel today is still a minority group. One member suggested that only about 15% of the population are real peace activists. The Oslo Peace Accord (1993) was greeted with great optimism by many Israeli peace activists and some people consequently ceased their involvement, but as is evident in recent years there is an even more urgent need for a significant peace camp within Israel.

All the Israeli peace people to whom I spoke suggested to me that Israeli society today is subject to a deliberate cultivation of fear and mistrust by the Sharon government. The explicit and implicit message put about is that the Israelis are a peace-loving people who have acted in good faith towards the Palestinians, but that in return they have received suicide bombs – and so the only solution now is to wipe out these 'terrorists' before they succeed in wiping out the Israelis. Of course, 11 September is cited as a complete vindication of

such a policy. Yasser Arafat is demonized and scapegoated to great effect. All this is fuelled by an extraordinarily divided society: It is worth noting that practically speaking there is virtually no human interaction between Israeli citizens and Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories other than as soldier and subjugated.

Despite his continuing popularity with 'ordinary' Israelis, Ariel Sharon is viewed by the peace camp as a right-wing, military man who is doggedly pursuing his Zionist ideals to reclaim Palestine for the Jewish people. Even though at present his government is embroiled in accusations of corruption, the political parties in opposition are weak and lack credibility and therefore Sharon and the Likud Party seem safely in power for at least the short term. The Israeli media tends to be a mouthpiece for the military and it expends much of its energy in scaremongering. There is restricted and censored reporting of news and political affairs. The Christian leaders are hardly given a platform in the press or media. The Israeli peace camp is deliberately marginalized. As a result Israeli peace activists experience isolation and are viewed with suspicion by Israeli society. It is thus of enormous importance to them to receive support and encouragement from international peace activists, like those of us from EAPPI, and indeed from all those who regard the Israeli occupation as immoral and unethical.

Gila expressed her great disappointment with the liberal Christian churches in Europe and the US

There is a great feeling of discouragement amongst the Israeli peace camp. They have no hopes for peace under Sharon while he presides over an Israeli society which has become much more entrenched in a right-wing, hostile position of fear and suspicion. There is no doubt that the suicide bombs add to this, carrying a devastating psychological impact as well as a physical and emotional one. At a human level, peace activists have to engage with many family and friends who are suspicious of their activities. Often they will try to be honest and open about their convictions but there are those times when, for example, for the sake of preserving family relationships they will remain silent or call a truce. They work in a society where people are increasingly exhausted from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Whether people are exhausted from their efforts to deny certain realities or whether they are truly ignorant about the military occupation and its

devastating effects is a key question which the peace camp are trying to address.

Gila Svirsky, a founding member of 'Women in Black', remarked upon the great support which Sharon is now receiving from George Bush and the power of the right-wing Christian lobby who either knowingly or unknowingly are supporting the Christian Zionist vision. Gila expressed her great disappointment with the liberal Christian churches in Europe and the US for their seeming lack of support and their silence with regard to the anti-occupation campaign.

The Israeli peace activists seem to walk a lonely and difficult road, and because of their moral sensitivity and ethical stance they are often burdened by the sins/evils of a military occupation which is perpetrated in their name. I have been inspired and heartened by my encounters with members of the Israeli peace camp - their creativity and resolute energy impresses me greatly. May all of these peacemakers be blessed with happiness and may all of their important and courageous efforts 'to act justly and to love tenderly' (Micah 6: 8-9) bear rich fruit.

Note: If you would like to find out more about the Israeli peace network, this is just a short list of some of the groups and their website addresses:

- Women in Black: www.womeninblack.org

- The Coalition of Women for Peace: www.coalitionofwomen4peace.org
- Rabbis for Human Rights: www.rhr.israel.net
- Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions: www.icahd.org
- Physicians for Human Rights: www.phr.org.il
- Ta'ayush (who participate in acts of solidarity with Palestinians): www.taayush.org
- Yesh Gvul (support for Israeli army refuseniks): www.yesh-gvul.org
- Israel-Palestine Centre for Research and Information: www.ipcri.org

Members of Women in Black demonstrate every Friday in West Jerusalem, using their silent protest to convince their government to stop the illegal occupation of the Palestinian occupied territories.

More information is also available on the EAPPI website: www.eappi.org or the British Quakers' website www.quaker.org.uk/eappi or from Quaker Peace and Social Witness Eappi@quaker.org.uk, Tel +44 (0)20 7663 1144.

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Uta Blohm

Women Working as Priests, Ministers and Rabbis. A Comparison

I still remember an encounter in 1996 in an Anglican Cathedral in this country with a woman who told me how difficult her situation had become in the congregation she had belonged to for years since she had been ordained as a priest. The account left me helpless and I have no idea what I answered and how we parted. But the encounter may have had an impact on my choice of PhD research topic. The roots of my personal interest probably go back even further. I am myself a woman working as a minister ordained in a Protestant church in Germany with Lutheran and Calvinistic roots. The thesis gave me the opportunity to consider questions I was dealing with as a minister within an ecumenical and inter-faith framework. As a minister I spent one year in an Anglican congregation in South London. During that time I came across the first book published by women rabbis¹ and was fascinated how similar many of the issues discussed were to those I was struggling with. The book contains accounts of personal journeys and essays dealing with different religious issues from women in the Bible and Jewish tradition to questions of inclusive language.

A rabbi describes issues that can arise for women in roles of religious leadership as such:

'Women's ministry in the community soon showed that things still were not right. There may have been many women rabbis, but they were teaching a patriarchal history, preaching a patriarchal theology, praying in a language that addressed both God and the worshipper as He. In order to retain integrity as religious leaders, it became necessary for each rabbi to bring more of a 'woman' into this exclusively male world'².

Regina Jonas was the first woman to be ordained rabbi in 1935 in Germany

In Germany the Protestant minister Ulrike Wagner-Rau indicates a similar conflict in the title of her book: *Between Father World and Feminism. A Study of Women's Pastoral*

¹ Sybil Sheridan (ed.): *Hear Our Voice. Women Rabbis tell their Stories*, SCM Press London 1994.

² Sheridan, Sybil (ed.): *Hear Our Voice...* p. VIII.

*Identity*³. She describes how the debate within feminist circles shifted from the campaign for ordination to a critical assessment of Christian tradition. The problematic aspect of her thesis lies in the fact that she does not distinguish between individual differences among women and their relationship with tradition.

In the UK the Free Churches were the first to ordain women (for example Baptists in 1918).

In 1974 Methodists in the UK ordained the first women. The Church of England ordained the first women priests in 1994. Other Anglican churches have ordained women before that. In 1976 the first woman was ordained rabbi in the UK. The Reform movement in the United States ordained the first woman as rabbi in 1972; the Reconstructionist movement in 1974. The Conservative movement in the United States has ordained women since 1984 and at least one woman has been ordained in the orthodox Jewish world. Regina Jonas was the first woman to be ordained rabbi in 1935 in Germany. She was murdered in Theresienstadt and her memory had been lost until the 1990s.

Rabbis fulfil functions which are in principle open to every Jew but traditionally to men only

My project initially started with the question how women in roles of religious leadership are dealing with the different traditions they are working in while taking individual stories into account. In the course of the research the question became more complex, also including how women are defining themselves positively:

- Why do women become priests/ministers or rabbis? (Why are they doing what they are doing?)
- In their perspective: did being a woman influence their journey into the priesthood/ministry/rabbinate?
- How do women define their role as religious leaders?
- What is their connection with their religious tradition? (What keeps them going?)
- In their perspective: how does being a woman influence their work?
- How do they deal with patriarchal/misogynist traditions within their religious traditions? How does that perspective influence their daily work?

Between 1998 and 2000 I interviewed fifty women in the UK from different backgrounds: seventeen rabbis, sixteen Anglican priests, ten Methodist, three Baptist ministers and four women from Calvinist backgrounds.

The research revealed interesting differences and similarities between the different groups involved due to differences in tradition. Questions of gender identity are partly influenced by religious traditions but more often women from different backgrounds are dealing with similar issues and individual differences are more important.

Rabbis chose to go into the rabbinate mainly out of commitment to Jewish tradition, love for Jewish learning and positive experiences of community life. Christian interviewees told their stories as experiences of vocation involving a God-given element. These results came as a surprise to me since an emphasis on a personal calling is not something that is viewed as particularly important in my own circles and was something I associated solely with an evangelical tradition.

For some women individual journeys have been difficult through a lack of encouragement or role models, sometimes leading to a considerable religious crisis. Some Christian interviewees for example described a sense of vocation that clashed with accepted teaching in their circles that women cannot fulfil the role of a priest or minister. On the whole interviewees did not choose to become religious leaders out of a feminist but out of a religious commitment.

Differences exist between the roles of rabbis and priests or ministers. Rabbis saw themselves predominantly as teachers charged with responsibility for tradition, being one link in a chain of tradition. Several interviewees stressed that the rabbinic role has only recently become more similar to that of Christian clergy. Traditionally a rabbi fulfilled functions of a judge and a teacher within the Jewish community, basing his legal decisions on the virtue of his learning. The rabbi may have given a sermon but a cantor (chasan) led the service. Today a rabbi is expected to lead services, teach and to be involved with pastoral work.

When congregations have experienced several women they are less inclined to identify individual abilities and shortcomings with a person's gender

Traditionally Christian ministry has been predominantly defined in terms of the liturgical role with varying emphasis on word or sacrament while at the same priests were also fulfilling other legal functions. The traditional emphasis is reflected in the self-description of the interviewees. Anglicans for example showed a tendency to emphasize their sacramental role.

The differences between the Jewish and Christian traditions have also different implications for women. Within the Christian world most women who take on roles of religious leadership are to some extent fulfilling an exclusive role particularly in regard to communion.

Rabbis fulfil functions which are in principle open to every Jew but traditionally to men only. Subsequently female rabbis are determined to encourage women to get involve with practises they have been excluded from, like wearing of a Tallit (prayer shawl) during services or the reading from the Torah scroll.

With respect to other aspects of gender, interviewees are negotiating their identity along similar lines irrespective of their religious background.

Views whether women work differently are varied with some interviewees claiming that women are essentially different to men or different for sociological reasons. Others felt that these assumptions are fundamentally flawed and do not do

³ Ulrike Wagner-Rau: Zwischen Vaterwelt und Feminismus. Eine Studie zur pastoralen Identität von Frauen, Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn Gütersloh 1992.

justice to them as persons, and other differences, for example cultural ones. 'Positive forms of stereotyping' were experienced as patronizing, like the statement women might be more suited to pastoral work since that statement may disregard other contributions women make.

A clear majority of interviewees saw themselves as enablers sometimes connecting that commitment with their gender but not always. Christians sometimes based their commitment to empower congregants on the protestant idea of 'priesthood of all believers'. Others saw it as their obligation as women to work towards a more collaborative style in ministry. Several interviewees made an active decision to see their gender as an important aspect they can bring to their role, for example out of a feminist commitment, but not solely. Some also felt it would compromise a decisive aspect of their personality if they aimed at being 'honorary men' whereas others aimed at being just that in order to be accepted. The situation for women becomes easier when congregations have experienced several women and are less inclined to identify individual abilities and shortcomings with a person's gender.

... female rabbis, priests and ministers have a lot to share and have supported each other individually and in groups

On the whole the interviewees identified positively with their tradition and their role despite existing feminist criticism. Their involvement with feminism and feminist theology varied. Several interviewees had found feminist theology helpful on their own personal journey in order to achieve a positive relationship with their faith and tradition. Questions raised through feminism can also be experienced as challenging to one's religious identity. Some interviewees (Jewish and Christian) experienced a permanent struggle between their love and commitment to their faith or tradition and the patriarchal nature of both. One Christian interviewee felt threatened by feminist theology and chose therefore not to involve herself with feminist thought.

Despite their overall positive identification with their role and tradition interviewees identified areas which required further development within the traditional framework, for example with respect to liturgical language. With respect to questions of inclusive language, interviewees from different backgrounds employed similar arguments. Most interviewees were in favour of inclusive language with respect to people and did not feel included in a statement like 'your fellow men'. They aimed at changing the liturgies they use accordingly. A priest and a rabbi both made a similar argument for a wide range of metaphors used with respect to God in order to avoid idolatry. But generally opinions towards inclusive language with respect to God were more varied. The debate among Christians sometimes focuses, in my view narrowly, on the question whether it is legitimate or helpful to use the metaphor 'mother' in addition to 'father'. Several interviewees were conscious that it requires sensitivity to raise these questions in a congregational context. On the other hand some also reported that occasionally congregants wanted them to show a stronger feminist commitment, asking to change liturgies more radically. A few women (but clearly a minority) from different backgrounds are involved in creating rituals which often reflect the experiences of women but not solely. Some of these rituals address pastoral needs like a ritual to mourn the loss of a baby through a miscarriage. Others cannot be introduced in a congregational context, such as the celebration of a girl's first period.

The starting point of my research was gender-focussed and led to many relevant findings, yet it is obviously not the main, let alone only perspective of self-perception of people role for those interviewed. Sometimes gender may not be enough to build meaningful relationships since religious differences and ethical differences (for example with respect to sexual ethics) may be impossible to bridge within a community and across the religious divide. However, gender is a relevant factor in the professional role and female rabbis, priests and ministers have a lot to share and have supported each other individually and in groups to their mutual benefit.

This article is a summary of a PhD thesis: Religious Tradition and Personal Stories. Women Working as Priests, Ministers and Rabbis, due to be published in 2004.



Caroline Fielder

A Visit to China

In February the true horror of SARS in China was yet to be realized. Even so, panic surrounded the then little-known disease that was thought to have started in Guangdong province. Not much was known about it, but as migrant workers flocked back home to share the traditional Chinese new year festival with loved ones, tales of the strange disease were already beginning to circulate.

Although details of how the mystery disease spread were scarce, remedies and cures for it abounded. In numerous

places I was given packets of herbal remedies by well-intentioned church goers to be brewed and then drunk, to keep me healthy on my travels. White vinegar was hailed by many as a miraculous cure-it-all. As such bottles of the every day commodity were selling at a premium – on occasions at prices inflated by 20 times or more. In many places stocks were empty and customers scrambled for bottles when deliveries arrived. One evening a news reporter tried to calm TV viewers and stop the panic

buying. One man had reportedly drunk too much vinegar as a safeguard against the disease and had died of an 'overdose'. Moderation was needed, said the presenter.

SARS was not the only thing that people were fearful about when I travelled through the countryside. For many, unemployment was a big issue. Church dynamics were changing in the countryside. Outside of Chinese New Year pews were not as full as they used to be and villages were emptying, leaving behind the retired and young children in their care. The closure of many state factories and enterprises and the lure of the city lights had meant that many had left the villages in search not just of prosperity but of a basic living.

From the outside many of these villages looked relatively well-off. Many houses had large satellite dishes on their roofs and big TVs in their windows. Expensive gifts from their loving relatives, I was told. What was less obvious to the casual passer-by was the lack of food on the tables, a direct result of fewer hands in the fields. Many of the church evangelists did their church work around the tilling of the fields and drew analogies from the harvest of their village crop to their teaching in the church. They knew only too well the meaning of the words 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few' (Mat 38:9).

... evangelists did their church work around the tilling of the fields and drew analogies from the harvest of their village crop to their teaching

Health issues beyond SARS were also an area that the church was grappling with. The closure of state run enterprises means much more than just loss of income. Housing, education and medical provision often formed part of the 'iron rice bowl' that the state provided. One woman I met told me how she became a Christian as a result of a friend of hers in the church asking the rest of the church family to pray for her. In addition to praying for her they offered to pay for her medical care. Unable to walk, she was overcome by the commitment virtual strangers were showing to her. She was even more overcome when a few days before her treatment was due to start she awoke and felt completely better. Subsequent medical tests baffled the medics who proclaimed her completely cured. A miracle, she quietly claimed. She continued by saying that she did not know why God had cured her but in the next breath she matter-of-factly shrugged her shoulders and said it wasn't for her to question. She saw her role now as quite simply serving the local church wherever it was needed.

Other churches are embracing this change as an opportunity to open clinics, small medical supply stores and even old

people's homes to meet the needs of those left with nowhere to turn. In January a meeting was held between the Christian-initiated Amity Foundation and representatives of the new social services wing of the CCC, the Protestant Church in China. A vision for social outreach is starting to be formed. Enthusiasm abounds in many areas. Wisely, however, it has been recognized that blind enthusiasm alone will not be enough to meet the growing needs of society. To ensure the social vision can become a reality, hard skills such as project management need to be acquired, embedded and rolled out.

Another issue churches are facing is the growing emergence of 'cults', particularly in the rural areas. Falun Gong is probably the best known most widespread and most highly organized of these groups, but there are many, many more in existence. Thirteen 'cults' have been officially named and outlawed by the Chinese Government. Different areas I visited talked of the presence of a variety of these groups. They ranged from well run networks with followers in several provinces and consistent teaching, such as the Eastern Lightning Sect, to other much smaller groups which revolved around the strong persona of a local individual. The elimination of these 'cults' is a priority for both government and the church. Church published newspapers regularly include articles on how to discern a cult, but with many rural church members still illiterate the burden of teaching discernment to the congregation remains firmly with evangelists and ministers.

The elimination of these 'cults' is a priority for both government and the church ...

The graduates from the Guizhou Bible Class (a major project supported by the CCOM China Forum) are amongst those given this task. Many of them have received just one year's theological education and the pressure on them is great. Once working, most of them survive on a small stipend given by the Bible Class of RMB 150 a month (approximately £10). They have little or no access to resources which will keep them up to date on new and emerging cults, or indeed on further theological education. According to staff from Nanjing Seminary the correspondence course which provided the much needed support and on-going education of such people has itself fallen foul of the threat of the cults. They claim that rural post offices refuse to deliver the courses for fear that they are spreading cultic teaching. This is a severe blow to those who are already struggling on their own. In another way it underlines the importance too of the Guizhou project, which, more than just a building project, aims to provide a support to theological education in rural Guizhou.

CCOM Forum Reports

General

The functioning of Forums was discussed at CCOM's latest Members' Meeting in early October in Glasgow. Apart from the positive sides of the work done in Forums, Mission Relations Secretary Kai Funkschmidt also presented some of the downsides of current Forums' functioning. One of the main problems is the difficulty in finding Forum Officers (Chair and Focal Person) who are, however, central not only for the technical running of the Forum but who, experience shows, have a large influence on the success of a Forum. The Churches-Together philosophy expressed in the post-1990 structure of CCOM had envisaged this task to be taken in charge by desk officers in turn. In recent years the practice proved less and less viable, mostly due to work pressure, so that the desk officers who represented a member body on a Forum were unable to serve the Forum as officers. In fact, most churches and agencies failed to provide their employees with the time required to do ecumenical tasks besides their main job, with some of the largest members never providing any Forum officers at all, while smaller member bodies carried a disproportionately large share of the burden. This led to an increased involvement of volunteers doing the job. They generally have more time to do it and often make excellent Focal Persons. Over time this solution, which started as an exception, has become almost norm, more than half of Forum officers now being volunteers rather than desk officers.

But this change has two disadvantages: a) volunteers hide the fact that the churches and agencies largely fail to meet the ecumenical commitment they made in 1990 by keeping a structure running that relied on the members' co-operation for its viability. Volunteers are also a return to a pre-'Churches Together' philosophy insofar as they are not accountable to or representative of any member body but only to the central CCOM office.

b) Volunteers are not financially and logistically supported by a member body (admin support, travel to the region, office space). Most of the cost incurred, including overseas trips are met by CCOM instead – expenses which the budget of the slimmed body that was created in 1990 to succeed the old Conference for World Mission was never designed to meet.

The Members' Meeting approved a motion that in future volunteers should be more clearly owned and supported by their member body, including making them part of the information networks, inviting them to internal meetings, providing some administrative support and possibly offering office space. This model was in fact already being practised in varying degrees by some member bodies. Overseas travel costs of Focal Persons were to be met by Forum members together with CCOM.

Kai Funkschmidt

Mission Theological Advisory Group

At the last meeting of MTAG we were joined by the Revd Peter Privett who is the *Godly Play* co-ordinator for the UK. *Godly Play* is a worship resource for children which encourages them to make a creative, prayerful space for themselves and to wonder and dream about liturgical and biblical resources.

Peter shared with us the powerful story of his journey, making four garments in liturgical colours, each about eight foot high and representing in purple, green, gold and white the elements of the Lent and Easter season.

The garments are made of different fabrics, some torn and ragged, others soft and majestic. On the garments, Peter has painted or sewn words from scripture, some comforting, but others angry and despairing. The garments incorporate objects as well, including a set of nails set into a scarf for the white resurrection garment. Yet these garments do not look to the world of fashion and consumerism for their imagery; rather they call on all the richness of the Christian faith, on its symbolism and liturgical traditions.

What was interesting for us was to look at these major installations as an apologetic resource which engages the senses powerfully. The garments cannot be told, but must be experienced. The garments are beacon-like, sending out powerful visual messages. They can be touched, experienced, inhabited, indwelt. What does it mean to put on the word of God? What was interesting was that some onlookers' reactions were that they were amazed that the painted words could have come from scripture. A box containing copies of the fuller text from which the words came kept having to be refilled as people took away the scriptures for themselves after seeing the garments.

Peter is currently working on another project - a tabernacle also made of different fabrics and painted with texts. It is possible to sit inside it and contemplate the textures, colours and words. Another project in the pipeline of Peter's creativity is a boat with sails with texts about journeying and the church.

Scripture is full of references to fabric and its use. How does a fascination with holy cloth, as in the tradition of Veronica's veil and the Turin shroud, filter down into our fascination with fashions, textiles, the things we wear on our sleeve, next to our heart and which touch us every day? There is an apologetic task here, which refers us back to Jesus. He who was wrapped in swaddling clothes, whose garment hem held out healing and relief, had them torn from him in his torment and finally burst from his earthly shroud leaving it behind as testimony to his real physical resurrection from the dead. These are powerful images which can speak to people of the work of God. We must explore further.

Anne Richards

Middle East

It is not one nation or group or another, but it can look as if all parties in the Middle East believe that problems must be solved by force, and security and advantage can be won by recourse to arms, the possession of more and more deadly weapons and the willingness to use them. War machines are greedy gods, swallowing up so much that little is left for rebuilding. In Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Israel and Palestine the innocent suffer and go on suffering. The wounds fester, injustices are not forgotten and hatred only increases. International law and the UN are weakened. The vast majority of people want peace and some dignity, but the world seems powerless to foster them.

The indigenous Christian communities in the Middle East suffer along with others there. But they are vulnerable and are particularly at risk if there is a perception that the world is engaged in a clash of civilizations and that Christianity is involved in a military conflict with Islam. We have heard from many sources in the Middle East of how important it was that in the widely reported protests against the war the churches and Christian voices were prominent. But the risks are still present, and the churches there appeal for our continued prayers, understanding and support. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January will use material from the Church in Syria with its history of good ecumenical and inter-faith relations. This will provide an opportunity for many to hear their voice and share in their hopes.

The Forum has been hearing reports of much suffering and of the difficulties faced by agencies seeking to work in support with of local people without being compromised by losing their independence. It has found time to discuss the Church of Scotland report on the 'Theology of Land and Covenant, which is a useful resource in clarifying the theological issues involved in the competing claims on the Holy Land. The Forum is also joining with Heythrop College in organizing a conference on 'Christianity in the Contemporary Middle East' to be held at Heythrop College in Kensington Square on 11 December this year. This will survey the Christian communities in many of the Middle East countries and deal with the themes of ecumenical relations and Christian/Muslim relations.

Colin Morton

Personnel Officers

The June residential meeting of the Personnel Officers Forum (jointly owned by CCOM and Global Connections) discussed the Evangelical Alliance's document 'A Christian Ethos'. It offers a reflection on what constitutes Christian distinctiveness in various types of work done by churches and organizations (including in areas which are not immediately religious in the narrow sense) and how this affects personnel policy. This document was mainly targeted at smaller Christian bodies working within the UK, and the POF decided that thought should be given which aspects of this document could be adapted to give specific guidance on similar questions arising in regard to personnel sent to work abroad.

The next meeting will be on 3 December in London. The theme is 'Training for Life in Mission – Continuing

Mission Development'. It will look into and discuss experiences with new forms of lifelong mission training and learning. Old models placed several years of mission training before overseas work. These were then more or less left as a foundation to be supplemented by life-long experiences. These models are more and more being replaced by approaches through 'modular learning' whereby times before, during and after mission work are being seen as part of as much a professional as a spiritual journey and formation.

On 16-17 March 2004 a joint meeting will be held with the Evangelical Alliance's Human Resources Network.

Kai Funkschmidt

Africa

Zimbabwe

Members of the Africa Forum are listening in various ways to what the churches and their leaders are saying about Zimbabwe, now increasingly in crisis. Discovering to whom we should listen and what can be done are challenges being addressed by the CCOM Africa Forum's Southern Africa Group. Currently critical church voices in Zimbabwe are becoming stronger and more outspoken. Papers are available for the following:

In July the Zimbabwe Council of Churches apologized for the churches not doing enough to stop political violence, hunger and the economic collapse of the nation. The church leaders, who released the statement after their annual meeting, said they planned to pressure the government for economic reforms and the resumption of talks between the ruling party and the opposition.

In August a number of Zimbabwean civic leaders, including church people, convened a symposium in Johannesburg to enable civic society leaders to have a forum at which to discuss issues of human rights and justice in Zimbabwe. In the understanding that there was, or might be, dialogue between the major political parties in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwean participants resolved to make representations to the negotiating political parties with recommendations on the issues of human rights and justice that should form part of any political settlement.

At the beginning of September a message from a spokesperson the Zimbabwe Church Media Initiative closes with these words:

'Please ask the churches ...to pray for us. At the moment I really cannot think of anything more substantive because we don't know what will happen next. Thank you for keeping Zimbabwe in mind.'

Later in September, in Kadoma, Zimbabwe, 109 clergy, pastors and lay people from 59 Christian denominations produced a strong State of the Nation declaration. They saw Zimbabwe 'locked in a crisis of governance that is characterized by the undermining of the rule of law, the use of political violence as a tool of intimidation, coercion and suppression of any form of opposition and the selective use of law.' They also acknowledged 'the historical imbalance in respect of land distribution, but did not approve of 'irresponsible, inhuman, violent, partisan and non-transparent methods of addressing the problem.' They intend to set up a task force to investigate the

National Youth Service, widely accused of being used as a ruling party militia engaged in the violent intimidation of Mugabe's opponents.

Again in September, the Solidarity Peace Trust, Zimbabwe and South Africa, published a 76 page overview of youth militia training and activities in Zimbabwe: 'October 2000 – August 2003, National Youth Service Training – shaping youths in a truly Zimbabwean manner'. It was launched by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo, Pius Ncube and endorsed nationally by the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, Zimbabwe National Pastors Conference, Ecumenical Support Services, Harare Ecumenical Working Group and Christians Together for Justice and Peace. The introduction includes this: 'It takes great wickedness for those in power to be prepared to sacrifice a whole generation, the youth of the nation, in order to maintain their own hold on power. But that is precisely the wickedness revealed in this report. The youth of Zimbabwe are being used, and abused, in a most cynical and calculating way by the very people entrusted with responsibility for their welfare. Behind the mask of a programme bearing the innocuous title "national youth service training" lurks a pernicious evil that threatens not only to destroy the nation's youth but also to subvert many of the core Christian values upon which the nation was built. It is the great merit of this report that it tears off this mask and exposes to full view the inner workings of this scheme. With the publication of this report no longer will there be any possible justification for the old excuse "I didn't know", whether coming from a Zimbabwean or the international community.'

However, the churches in Zimbabwe have not been of one mind, within themselves or between them. It has been for that reason that representatives of CCOM member bodies on the Africa Forum have, by invitation, travelled to Zimbabwe specifically to listen to a wide range of opinion about current issues, and have shared in the Forum perspectives and suggestions for action.

Speaking prophetically and acting judiciously need to go together. The recall of colonial period and its aftermath, and the views of it now being expressed, add to the dilemmas facing the Africa desk staff of the mission society/development agencies with partners in Zimbabwe. Given that it is their policy, in solidarity, to take a lead from the churches in Africa, the challenge now is to determine afresh what should be said and done.

Gordon Holmes

Sri Lanka

'We are walking on eggshells.' That was the message that Steve Alston, Chair of the Sri Lanka Relationships Committee, heard from partners in Sri Lanka on a recent visit. The ceasefire holds. There is greater security for the people. But the current peace process is fragile, tossed by political divisions and ongoing human rights abuses. Much peace work is being done. Hopeful signs exist. Yet, so also do fears that the benefits of almost two years of ceasefire may collapse.

The Sri Lanka Relationships Committee met at the beginning of October at St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, after a gap of eight months. It welcomed Mr Iruthayanatham Arulappu, Visiting Fellow at St Ethelburga's, as a guest. In addition to the situation update given by Steve Alston, two major issues emerged: the Anti-Conversion Bill that was passing through the Sri Lankan legislature; the situation of asylum seekers in Britain following the adding of Sri Lanka to a 'white' list of 'generally secure' countries. The Anti-Conversion legislation, members were told, had considerable support from the Hindu and Buddhist communities and would probably gain the necessary two thirds majority in Parliament. The driving force behind it was not only fear of Christian proselytization, but also the fact that much development and emergency aid was controlled by Christian groups. A close watch will be kept by Committee members on developments.

In connection with the second issue, it was agreed that Sri Lanka could not be described as a 'safe' country either for returned asylum seekers or for those who were internally displaced within Sri Lanka's borders (IDPs). A recent report by the British Refugee Council on IDPs was welcomed. Members were urged to consult with their partners in Sri Lanka about whether representation on this issue by British churches would be welcomed.

The Committee is linked together through an e-mail group - a medium that will be most important in the next few months especially if peace negotiations re-start.

Elizabeth J Harris

Let's Go Surfin'

Here is an overview of some of the material published on the CCOM website. Apart from all issues of Connections since 1/2001, the website contains many resource articles for free download. They result mainly from CCOM Annual General Meetings and Forums, most are originals produced for this occasion and not published elsewhere. Files are in Word, PDF or html. More documents are to be found on the web-pages of each Forum also accessible via www.ccom.org.uk.

CCOM Annual Reviews

2000: Witness and Service in the World Today

2001: Hope in a Time of Change

2002: Mission in Transition

Theology and History of Mission and Ecumenism

Africa Forum: Dilemmas when supporting orphans and their families affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa (2001)

Africa Forum: HIV/AIDS in Africa - Report on the **Africa Forum** Residential Meeting in April 2001

André **Karamaga:** 'Fair Trade' for Africa or a 'Continent Bound to Fail'? (Residential, Hamburg 2003)

Andrew **Brookes:** Alpha: A Course of Surprises. A Roman Catholic perspective

Andrew **Clayton:** Minority Faiths, Human Rights and the Role of Mission in Asia Today from a Christian Aid perspective (2003)

Andrew **Wheeler:** Christianity and Islam - Lessons from Sudan

Anton **Wessels:** Faith after September 11th

Bernard **Coyault:** Protestantism in Egypt (2003)

Building Bridges of Hope : A Digest of Findings

Building Bridges of Hope: A Challenge and an Invitation

Colin **Morton:** Christmas Visit to Palestine and Israel (2001)

Daleep **Mukarji:** Mission and Development (2003)

David **Hay** / Kate **Hunt:** Understanding the Spirituality of People who don't go to Church (2001)

David **Pickering:** What on earth has environment got to do with the church? (2002)

Dominic **Moghal:** Working Alongside Muslims In Pakistan (2003)

Donald **Elliott:** Re-engineering Mission (2000)

Elizabeth **Harris:** Sri Lanka: Making Peace Possible (1999) CTBI visit to Sri Lanka in 1999

Elizabeth **Harris:** Sri Lanka: Making Peace Possible (2001 update)

Erhard **Kamphausen:** The Function of Pentecostalism in the Context of Socio-Economic Transformation Processes. A Ghanaian Case Study (2003)

Gordon **Holmes:** Listening to Africa - a reflection on Christian and Muslims relations in Nigeria

John **Clark:** Reflection On An Ecumenical Visit to the Church in China. Report on the ecumenical delegation visiting China in the spring 2001

Kai **Funkschmidt:** We Need Africa - What For? (2001)

Kai **Funkschmidt:** New Models of Mission Relationship and Partnership (2002)

Kai **Funkschmidt:** On Poetry and Theology and Why They Are Not the Same (2002)

Kai **Funkschmidt:** Partnership Between Unequals - Mission Impossible? (2002)

Kai **Funkschmidt:** The Future of Religion. Mission after September 11 (January 2002)

Karin **Ulmer:** The EU, Africa and the Churches: European Partnership Agreements (2003)

Kirsteen **Kim:** Football and Christianity in Korea (2002)

Kirsteen **Kim:** Holy Spirit in Mission (2000)

Klaus **Schäfer:** Christians in Asia (2000)

Klaus **Schäfer:** Minority Faiths, Human Rights and the Role of Mission in Asia Today - Lessons from India (2003)

Mano **Rumalshah:** Being a Christian in Pakistan (1998)

Mano **Rumalshah:** Challenge to Religions. Beyond 11 September (2002)

Marc **Ellis:** The Last Passover (A critical Jewish-American voice on the Middle East) (2001)

Martin **Conway** and Chris **Wigglesworth:** Debate on Globalisation (2001)

Michael **Ippgrave:** Football and Christianity in Japan (2002)

Michael **Ippgrave:** Images of Islam in the British Media (2002)

Middle East Forum: The Alexandria Declaration of the Religious Leaders of the Holy Land (January 2002)

Myra **Blyth:** In Search of Holy Ground (2002) A reflection on the theme of the CTBI Assembly

Paul **Lederach:** 'The Challenge of Terror: A Traveling Essay' September 16, 2001

Paul **Renshaw:** CTBI Middle East Visit 2001

Peter **Neilson:** Young People and the City - Reflections on Exploring Church for Club Culture (2001)

Philip **Lewis:** Muslims and British society: da'wa as dialogue or diatribe? (2002)

Richard **Sewell:** Mission in the Context of Inter-Religious Tension (2002)

Richard **Tiplady:** Trends in evangelical missiology - the Iguassu process (2001)

Simon **Barrow:** Disturbing the Faith - Mission after 11 September (2002)

Simon **Barrow:** Mission as an Ecumenical Challenge (2002)

Simon **Barrow:** Peaceful Mission (2002)

Simon **Barrow:** Reflections from the WCC Consultation on Mission and Ecclesiology (2000)

Tim **Webb:** Un-Christian Colonialism and Christian Anti-colonialism in Cymru/Wales (2002)

Uwe **Gräbe:** The Significance of the Land for a 'Theology after Auschwitz' in the European/North-American Context - and the Response of Palestinian Christians (2002)

Events Resources News

AACC General Assembly

Rev Dr Kasonga wa Kasonga, Coordinator of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) 8th Assembly writes:

The AACC 8th General Assembly is just around the corner. It is planned to be held from 22 to 27 November 2003, in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The AACC General Assembly is held every five years, the last having been held in October 1997 in Addis Ababa/Ethiopia under the theme 'Troubled but not destroyed'.

The theme chosen for the 8th Assembly is 'Come, let us rebuild' (Neh 2:17-18). This Assembly will provide an opportunity to Africans, African churches, Africans in the Diaspora, African-Americans, and ecumenical partners and friends of Africa to come together and objectively review the path that the continent has taken since the end of colonialism. The situation pertaining today in Africa can be summed by one word 'destruction', hence the call to come and rebuild.

The end of colonialism and cold war has not offered any reprieve to Africans. The advent of globalization and the new threat of international terrorism have ushered new threats to the continent. Despite these trends an encouraging new social order is emerging. Peace is being restored to some war-torn countries – even though we still experience ongoing troubles in some parts of the continent – as the aspiration towards creation of a united Africa is gaining momentum. Indeed, the need for a new vision for African nations and African churches to lead their people through the 21st century is more felt today than it was at the dawn of independence era which witnessed the birth of the AACC as well as of the former Organization of African Unity (OAU).

The focus of the reflections at this Assembly will be *inter alia* on the following sub-themes: Health and healing, Conflicts and wars, Our personhood, Selfhood of the African church, and Challenges of globalization.

British and Irish churches and agencies will be represented at this event by the CCOM Africa Forum's Focal Person Revd Gordon Holmes. The Methodist Church and Christian Aid, among others, will also send their own representatives.

In-Service-Mission-Studies

The second course of the In-Service-Mission-Studies, jointly organised by CCOM and the United College of the Ascension, took place in UCA/Birmingham on 4 and 5 November. All participants in the first course returned and were joined by two newcomers. The number of participants grew. A fuller report on this event by participant Michael King, leader of the World Church Office in the Methodist Church, will be published in the next issue of Connections.

After the success of the first run the course will be continued next year. Dates for next year's two-part course will be 31 March to 1 April and 4-5 November 2004. The two courses can be taken in either order. Further details will soon be available on the CCOM website.

Christians Aware annual conference: responding to conflict

The Christians Aware Annual Conference will be held on 9-11 January on the theme 'Responding to Conflict'. The venue is All Saints Pastoral Centre in St Albans, London-Colney. Speakers include Elias Chacour, a Melkite priest, writer and director of Ilbillin School, Kate Allen, director of Amnesty International, and Garth Hewitt, Director of the Amos Trust. Participation is £102 (£124 en suite) for adults and £65 for youths. For further information contact Christians Aware barbarabutler@christiansaware.co.uk or visit www.christiansaware.co.uk, phone 0116-2540770.

Middle Eastern spirituality conference

From Friday 27 February - Sunday 7 March 2004 a series of events will be held on the subject of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace. These events are being organized and coordinated by the Edinburgh International Centre for World Spiritualities, EICWS, and the Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Learning, EIAL, in association with the Society of Friends, and other associated organizations which will be hosting events.

This series of events will be developed around three major public events on the evenings of Wednesday 3, Thursday 4, and Friday 5, a conference on the subject of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace on Thursday 4, a day of Workshops on Friday 5, an Interfaith Spiritual Retreat from Friday 5 – Sunday 7, and a Middle Eastern themed One World Peace and Justice Concert on Saturday 6. Discussions are on-going about potential associated events. Further information obtainable from: Neill Walker, EICWS, 0131 3314469, jwalk1300@hotmail.com or Dr Neil Douglas-Klotz, EIAL 0131 4661506, ndk@eial.org, www.abwoon.com, www.genesismeditations.com/schedule.html

Churches in European civil society

Ecumenical Academy Prague together with *Plädoyer für eine Ökumenische Zukunft* ('Campaign for an Ecumenical Future') from Germany is organizing a workshop 'On the Way to a European Civil Society. Participation in the European Social Politics' in Prague 20-23 November 2003. The programme focuses on the social situation in EU-accession countries and the connected possible demands towards the engagement of churches and politicians.

Further information: Jiri Silny Ekumenicka akademie 00420 272737077 (phone and fax) cejenya@mbox.vol.cz.

Adelheid Project Comes to Wales 2004

The Adelheid Project is a two-year training programme supported by the Ecumenical Forum of European Women

(represented in Wales by Merched yn Cydgerdded/Women Walking Together), the Czech YWCA and ENYA, a European youth network. A summer school was held in Prague in August 2003 and the second part is scheduled to be at Christ College, Brecon, South Wales, from 3-17 August 2004

The participants :

- 14 women will attend the summer school : 8 students are aged between 18-30 and the remaining 6 over 30.
- The countries represented are Bulgaria, Belarus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Georgia and Ukraine.
- Denominations include Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox, Reformed and Catholic.
- All of them are already involved in projects in their own church and communities such as work with street children and young offenders, helping families with drug and alcohol problems, etc.

At Brecon the women will be taught

- English
- project management and organization
- finances and fundraising
- computers

and share in Bible study and worship.

They will visit community projects in South Wales to observe work in progress and share ideas.

Between now and next August the women are continuing their studies through distance learning and email. Each woman contributes £100 towards costs. Many of them are either students or have salaries of between £10 and £30 per week. It is hoped that we in Wales can make a substantial contribution towards the projected costs. The Adelheid Project empowers and connects women who are concerned about regenerating their communities; it will build increased understanding and close links between women in Europe and women in Wales by sharing ideas and expertise.

A previous participant wrote:

"The Adelheid Project called us from different European countries to create a community of women who are free, independent and ready to share with others. The piece of news is that we will be able to change the hard situation in the world only if we, together, as women from different countries and different denominations, rise against violence, injustice and the suffering of others. But in order to fulfil this we must develop our skills of leadership, management, study the English language and computers and share our experiences. This is the Adelheid Project!"

Further information is obtainable from Carol Pirie Wales, National Coordinator of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women , carol@pirie.info.

First tranche of ECMF grants made

The CCOM Executive Committee allocated the first grants from the Edinburgh Centenary Mission Fund (ECMF) at their first two meetings on 3 September and on 10 November

2003. The following projects received between £500 and £5,000, a total sum of £19,000 for 2003.

Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI): Mission networking throughout Britain and Ireland on reconciliation

'Diversity and Diaspora', training for theological colleges and lay schemes on displaced peoples and refugees as a challenge to and for our mission

Evangelizing Contemporary Spiritualities, a project of Churches Together in England's Group for Evangelization – Dynamic New Anglican Networks (DNA): support for Christians from China and Taiwan

'Towards 2010': A conference in preparation for the anniversary of Edinburgh 1910

The Evangelical Coalition on Urban Mission (ECUM): support for Mission Development Adviser

COSMAC (Catholic Missional Communities) in Scotland and beyond

Bethnal Green Theology Project: working on urban, ecumenical worship-based mission education

Grass Roots: Plural Christian communities.

The next meetings of the grant-making body will be on 29 March, 7 June and 8 November 2004. Information on criteria and how to apply are obtainable from the CCOM office and will shortly be on our website.

Farewell to Mano Rumalshah

The former director of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Rt Revd Mano Rumalshaw was given a warm farewell in Partnership House, London last October. Bishop Mano had earlier this summer surprisingly announced his decision to return to his former post as Bishop of Peshawar in Pakistan from 1 November. During his many years in Britain Bishop Mano was committed to the furtherance of inter-religious dialogue and mission as an integral part of the Church's being. The plight of Christians in his native Pakistan had always been a prime concern for Bishop Mano, who a few years ago initiated the Christian Forum on Persecuted Religious Minorities Worldwide, an ecumenical group in which various churches and groups, *inter alia* CCOM cooperate to monitor the plight of people persecuted on grounds of their faith.

Bishop Mano throughout his time was very committed to ecumenical cooperation and strong in his support to CCOM, who profited from his analytical and constructively critical questions. We wish [him-*remove*] that his new role will be blessed and fruitful for the life of the Church in Pakistan.

CEC Mission Consultant appointed

Revd Darrell Jackson was recently appointed to work as researcher in European mission and evangelism for the Conference of European Churches (CEC). He and his wife Beth will be based in Budapest where they will be working together on the project, their shared goal being to gain an overview of European initiatives in mission and evangelism with the twin aims of encouraging greater co-operation in mission and evangelism among the churches of Europe and

of developing a deeper understanding of how to express common witness within Europe. The Research Office will be based at the Protestant Institute for Mission Studies, an institution of the Hungarian Reformed Church. The post was created as a cooperation of CEC and the Church Mission Society (CMS) who function as official employers and without whose funds this important project would not have been possible.

Darrell grew up on the Isle of Man and studied Commercial Horticulture in Essex. After a year working for the Baptist Church in the Isle of Man, Darrell graduated from London Bible College in 1989. He is currently pursuing part-time studies towards a Doctor of Theology in Missiology through the Centre for Mission and World Christianity, Birmingham.

Beth grew up in Glasgow, Kentucky, USA and studied for a Degree in Human Development, Family Studies and Congregational Studies at Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama. Prior to the current appointment she had been pursuing theological study at Oxford and intends to begin a Master's degree in Missiology as part of her training for ordination as a Baptist Minister.

Darrell is a Baptist Minister, having served five years as the pastor of a church in Devon, three years working for the Devon & Cornwall Baptist Association as a Youth Officer, and has, most recently, served seven and a half years working as a Mission Adviser to the Baptist Union of Great Britain. With primary responsibility for researching national mission and evangelism, Darrell's work has offered many opportunities for representation, consultation, networking, training, and travel, mainly within the UK but also throughout the rest of Europe. Darrell has served on the Board of Christian Research and Churches Information for Mission.

After University, Beth was sent by the International Mission Board to work for two years as a youth and children's worker in a Baptist church in Scotland. Her second assignment was to the post of Research Assistant in the Department for Research and Training in Mission of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. Beth's calling to Baptist ministry has recently been tested by her local Baptist Association and she has now been accepted for ministerial training leading to ordination within the Baptist Union.

In his free time, Darrell escapes to the wilds of the UK for rock and ice climbing and winter mountaineering. In addition he has a keen interest in gardening and the obsessive pursuit of books! In her spare time, Beth worries about Darrell climbing mountains, enjoys spending time with friends, and is a keen visitor to National Trust properties.

It is hoped that this new initiative hails a strengthening interest of CEC in issues of mission in a Western context, a topic which was until recently only of marginal importance to the body which still seeks new orientation after the 1989 changes in Europe. One of the first tasks will be a 'mapping exercise' re the existence of new ventures and initiatives in mission throughout Europe, allowing for more effective sharing of ideas and networking between those on the edge of God's mission in this part of the world.

Global Connections' new director

The evangelical mission network Global Connections (formerly the Evangelical Missionary Alliance) have announced that Martin Lee will be their new director from 1 April 2004. Martin is to succeed Revd Stanley Davies who retires on 31 August 2004 after being 21 years in the post. Martin Lee has been on the staff of CORD (Christian Outreach - Relief and Development) for 24 years and its Director since 1984. In those 24 years he has seen CORD grow from an organization with one paid employee to an international agency with 17 staff in the UK and offices in Africa, Asia and Europe. Martin also has other interests in Christian work in the UK, being Chairman of the Penhurst Retreat Centre, a Board Member of ECHO International Health Services, and joint owner with his wife of a local Christian bookshop.

CCOM have longstanding good relations with Global Connections (formerly EMA), sharing some of our areas of work (eg Personnel Officers' and Mission Finance Officers' Forums) and look forward to working with Martin Lee from next year.

Makhulu condemns new church apartheid

The Most Revd Walter Makhulu, former Archbishop of Central Africa, president of the All Africa Conference of Churches and President of the World Council of Churches, described the exclusion of gays as a 'heresy' comparable with apartheid, at the start of a crisis summit of Anglican leaders over homosexuality. Makhulu said his experiences under apartheid had led him to oppose an 'exclusive church'.

'The notion of an exclusive church is utterly abhorrent to me. It denies the very character and nature of God, God who loves us so fully, God who invites us to the heavenly banquet, God whose wisdom is boundless, God who transforms his people into his likeness,' he said.

'The notion of exclusivity is abhorrent. It is a heresy in the same way as apartheid was described as heresy.' The Archbishop was preaching at a service run by the Inclusive Church, an equal rights group, who organized three services today around Lambeth Palace as the meeting began.

The crisis meeting of 37 primates at Lambeth Palace was called by Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams following the election of Canon Gene Robinson, who is openly gay, as Bishop of New Hampshire. The summit also follows the approval of same sex blessings in the diocese of New Westminster, Canada, and the bitter row in the UK over the nomination of Canon Jeffrey John, an openly gay man, as Bishop of Reading.

NCCI welcomes conviction of missionary's murderers

The National Council of Churches in India through its General Secretary Revd Dr Ipe Joseph welcomed the conviction of Graham Staines' murderer in the following statement.

The National Council of Churches in India hails the verdict on the case of Graham Staines as the Court has pronounced death sentence to the prime accused Dara Singh and life imprisonment to twelve others who carried out the gory cold-blooded murder of the Australian Missionary Graham Staines and his two minor sons on the chilly night of 22 January, 1999 at Manoharpur in Orissa. They were burnt alive while they were sleeping inside their vehicle. Though the verdict has come much delayed, amidst topsy-turvy twists in the case, the culprits have been brought to book at last!

We appreciate the judiciary of our nation for its prophetic and challenging role in the recent past. The timely intervention of the Supreme Court by re-opening the Best Bakery case, where all twenty-one accused were acquitted, allegedly due to lack of witnesses, by the Lower Court is

another instance of the responsible action of judiciary. The verdict by the Rae Bareilly Court in the case of the demolition of Babri Masjid at Ayodhya is also a case in point.

Though in the Christian spirit, Ms Gladys Staines, wife of the late Graham Staines, had sought God's forgiveness for all those who had killed her husband, the judiciary system has honoured her broadmindedness and forgiving heart by punishing the culprits. This judgement has definitely got its innate long range implications in curbing the growing religious fanaticism, as Dara Singh is in fact a creation of the hate campaign in this country by the fundamentalist forces. We appeal to all such forces to desist from this sort of communal activities that perpetuate disharmony and violence in the nation. We continue to uphold our trust and faith in the judiciary of our nation.

United College of the Ascension (UCA)

Churches' Commission on Mission

In-Service Mission Studies 2004

A course for professionals in mission and development who wish to extend their knowledge and reflection about current thinking in the theology, history and practice of mission.

Registration open for the new course 2004

Module 1: 29 March to 1 April

Module 2: 4 to 5 November

Location: UCA in Birmingham Selly Oak

Themes include:

The mission of the Spirit in creation – Where in the world is God at work? – How does life experience colour understanding? – 'Do justice': Global affairs and local realities – In whose interests development? – 'Love kindness': Fundamentalism and secularism – What does it mean to share faith today? – 'Walk humbly': Diversity and partnership ...

Courses are taught by an international staff of different cultural backgrounds and from varying theological traditions.

For further information contact:

Kirsteen Kim, UCA, k.kim@bham.ac.uk

or

Kai Funkschmidt, kai.funkschmidt@ctbi.org.uk

A report on the last In-Service Mission Studies course will be published in the next issue of CONNECTIONS.

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

In the last two issues Daleep Mukarji and Mark Oxbrow explored the relationship of Mission and Development from the perspective of a mission and a development agency respectively. In the final part of this debate Kenneth Ross, General Secretary of the Church of Scotland's Board for World Mission, widens the discussion by taking as his starting point the profound change in our current context that the HIV/Aids pandemic presents.

Kenneth R. Ross

HIV/AIDS – Changing the Way We Think about Mission

Ronald Nicolson has observed that 'every now and then something comes along which changes the way we think about everything' and has suggested that the AIDS pandemic is in this category. (*God in AIDS*, p.1) If that is true, then it changes the way we think about mission. In particular, it brings a new angle and poses new challenges to the kind of discussion of mission and development which has been conducted by Daleep Mukarji and Mark Oxbrow in the last two issues of *Connections*.

The statistics indicating the scale of the pandemic have become hauntingly familiar. At the end of 2002, the United Nations AIDS Programme and the World Health Organisation estimated that 5 million people had been infected during the year, bringing the total number of people living with HIV/AIDS to 42 million. 3.1 million died of AIDS in 2002. On present trends it is expected that a further 45 million will be infected between 2002 and 2010. The number of fatalities demonstrates at once the scale and seriousness of the pandemic. In terms of cost in human lives, it has overtaken the black death as the most devastating plague in human history. No other generation has had to face anything like this. Even the loss of life incurred in the two World Wars is small by comparison. In any attempt to come to terms with our contemporary reality as human beings, HIV/AIDS must surely be a significant point of reference.

Besides the sheer numerical scale of the casualties, the impact of AIDS on the societies where it is most prevalent is quite devastating. Stephen Lewis, the United Nations Secretary General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, remarked, following his visit to southern Africa in late 2002:

... we were witnessing the grinding down of a society. We've all imagined the catastrophe but no one wanted to believe that it could happen. The fact that the agricultural sector is beginning to decay could simply be a harbinger of worse to come. My own sense is that education is on the brink.... Teachers were dead, teachers were dying, teachers were ill and away from school, children, especially girls, were being taken out of school to tend to sick and dying parents, children who had lost their parents to AIDS weren't in school because they couldn't afford the school fees.... In Zambia, they lost 1,967 teachers in 2001, over two thousand teachers in 2002; the Teachers' Colleges are graduating fewer than one thousand a year. (press briefing, January 2003)

Infrastructure collapses, economies decline, governance crumbles. The continuation of an organis[ed] society is jeopardis[ed]. All of this takes its toll on the individuals

affected. As Tinyiko Maluleke remarks: 'HIV/AIDS is not just a virus that afflicts individual human bodies. It is a condition of life – a condition in which millions of Africans find themselves whether their individual bodies are HIV positive or not. In this condition, people live in fear, suspicion and great insecurity' (*Missionalia*, Vol. 29/2, p. 138).

As has been frequently acknowledged, any effective response to AIDS has to be multi-sectoral. The crisis caused by the pandemic is political, economic, medical, educational, agricultural, social, cultural and religious. When, therefore, one addresses the issue of AIDS from a church or a mission perspective, one needs to be aware that one is joining a conversation in which there is a very wide range of participants. If there are elements of mission engagement which form a specialized field occupied exclusively by Christian mission practitioners, then AIDS is not one of them. At the level of practice, anyone engaging with the issues from a Christian perspective will find themselves alongside others who may be operating from quite different perspectives. It is a field which lends itself to the forging of alliances, to the making of coalitions – in some cases with surprising and unexpected partners. Mission engagement in this field requires the humility which is ready to listen to others and to join with them when shared action is indicated as the most fruitful way forward.

It is clear that any approach to HIV positive people which is based on concern for their spiritual welfare in isolation from the wider issues raised by the pandemic is going to founder. Nigel Pounce, Coordinator of the Church of Scotland HIV/AIDS Project, recalls: 'I remember when I first went to work with an HIV/AIDS voluntary organization in Coventry, I had to overcome suspicion among some colleagues and clients. They assumed that a minister coming to work in the field of HIV care meant I would have a particular agenda. As one client challenged me: "Do you want to convert us all?" In the face of the immense human suffering which the virus causes, any suggestion that the church's chief concern is to "scalp hunt" seems immoral.' (*Insight* No. 17, Sept-Nov 2003) Where is the integrity in attempting proselytization when faced by the suffering caused by HIV and AIDS? There is need for an engagement which embraces every dimension of life and which offers a profound and costly care.

Since it is predominantly the poor and powerless who are directly affected by the HIV/AIDS crisis, it is often passed over in silence. The church therefore has a responsibility to speak often and forcefully about the effects of the epidemic.

It has to confront the rich countries which enforce unjust debt repayment and unfair trade rules so that poor countries lack the basic resources needed to tackle the spread of the virus. Poverty is such a significant factor underlying the spread of HIV/AIDS that nothing less than a fundamental re-shaping of the global economy will suffice to turn back the swelling tide. There is need to engage with the pharmaceutical industry to ensure that the needed drugs are made available to those who need them at affordable prices. There is need for immediate, practical action – to offer home-based care to the sick, to provide for orphans, to offer education to the youth. Only a comprehensive approach, taking account of every aspect of the spread of the disease, will adequately express the Christian compassion which is called for.

It is precisely this required comprehensiveness which makes it clear that the personal and the spiritual cannot be omitted in an authentic Christian mission praxis. When I was pastor of an African congregation ten years ago, one of our elders died a slow and lonely death as he succumbed to the onset of AIDS. In the final stages there was a limit to what could be done to help but how meaningful it was to be able to offer 'home communion' and speak of death and resurrection from the depths of Christian tradition. For me in that situation there was a theological journey to be made to reassert the Christian conviction that every human being, without exception, is created in the image of God and is loved by God so much that he sent the Son into the world. I discovered that there is a need to address those who are stigmatized on account of their HIV-positive status with the good news of a Saviour who has taken away our stigma by taking it on himself. There is need to hold out the strong hope that none of the ravages of AIDS can ever cancel out the image of God in those who are suffering nor do they ever go beyond the reach of God's love. In the last stages of their illness AIDS patients may be paralysed, incontinent and demented yet the love of God, Creator and Redeemer, is strong enough to be with them in that dark valley. Even in torment and abandonment we can find comfort and hope through the crucified Christ who 'loved us and gave himself for us'.

Some Malawian Christians, reflecting on the painful challenge of HIV/AIDS, have responded in this way: 'Jesus, the incarnate son of God encourages us to lift up our eyes and to look forward to the embracing arms of the merciful Father. He himself died on the cross. Even in the darkest hour of his life he did not lose confidence and trust in his father. His death on the cross and his open arms are a symbol of the trust that we can have in the face of the mystery of death' (Episcopal Conference of Malawi and Malawi Council of Churches 2001). The assurance that in death, as in life, we belong to Jesus Christ liberates us to live every minute to the full and with a sense that the victory of Easter Day will be ours even if there are times when the darkness of Easter Saturday falls upon us. Without such theological affirmation and spiritual engagement, the Christian response to HIV/AIDS would be short-changing those to whom it is addressed.

Hence, while there is a need to reach out and make alliances with all who share a passionate concern to combat the spread

of the disease, there is a particular role for the church to play. As has been pointed out by Christian Aid: 'The church is in a unique position to provide spiritual, moral and practical leadership; challenge social stigma; extend compassion; and provide spiritual and practical support and guidance to those infected and affected' ('Towards a Christian Aid Policy on HIV/AIDS', July 2001). It may be that the single most important thing the church can do to resist the spread of HIV/AIDS is simply to talk about it – in its worship and its prayer, its teaching and its preaching.

It has to be acknowledged, however, that the church has usually found it very difficult to name the issues raised by HIV/AIDS. In particular, the whole area of sexual health and fulfilment is one which has tended to be excluded from the worship and teaching of the church. As such concerns register themselves, new concepts, new vocabulary and new emphases are to be expected in Christian worship, teaching and mission outreach. In particular, the sexual dimension of life requires to be given consideration with an unprecedented degree of openness. Unless such issues as stigmatization, gender and sex education are realistically opened up in the context of worship, the church is never going to be able to offer effective ministry amidst the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Worship and spirituality are at the heart of what the church distinctively has to bring to the struggle with HIV/AIDS. But it needs to be a church which has taken the issues raised by the epidemic to its heart. As Ronald Nicolson aptly remarks: 'We cannot deal with AIDS without taking the spiritual dimension of life into account, and we cannot continue in a spirituality which leaves AIDS off the agenda' (*God in AIDS*, p. 21).

For Christian mission to have integrity in the age of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, it needs to demonstrate that its various aspects belong together and are closely integrated. The raising of a prophetic voice and the offering of practical care must be complemented by a spiritual ministry which speaks words of hope even in the valley of the shadow of death. The challenge of worshipping with integrity in contexts where all participants are either infected or affected by HIV/AIDS brings this into focus. There is need for the content and language of Christian worship to be widened in order to engage the whole range of concerns in the minds of those whose lives are being blighted by the disease. At the same time, there is need for worship to be deepened in order to mine from the gospel the words of hope which can light up the lives of the millions whose lives are being cut short by AIDS. The one without the other will be manifestly incomplete and inadequate. Regarding people who face the devastation of HIV/AIDS as nothing other than souls to be saved would be to betray the holistic understanding of human life for which Christian mission has been distinguished. Combating the epidemic with a wide-ranging social and political engagement which omits ministry at the personal and spiritual level would be to abandon people at the deepest point of the inner crisis which they must face. Both dimensions of Christian mission are sorely needed. Has it ever been clearer that the missionary imperative reaches both to the widest social challenges and to the deepest spiritual questions? The HIV/AIDS pandemic calls us to travel further along both axes.

Book Reviews

John Atherton: Marginalization

John Atherton: Marginalization, Society and Church Series, SCM Press, 2003, ISBN 0-334-02919-8, 210 pp. £14.99

John Atherton's latest work is the fruit of a long ministry in which a constant theme has been reflection on poverty and marginalization and attempts to redress them. Readers of his previous books can trace the evolution of his thought. As he puts it, he has been enmeshed with urban realities for several decades through the William Temple Foundation, through the Diocese of Manchester – more active than some in trying to understand what is happening to urban churches – and through his position as Canon Theologian at Manchester Cathedral.

This book is one of the *Society and Church* series which brings together different approaches to the issue 'how the churches may claim public space, as *Christian* churches, in a legitimate and effective way in a society that has become as secular as British society now is'. John Atherton's exploratory journey starts with the question: 'Can the urban church survive?' In his quest for an answer, he examines marginalization as a local, national and international issue, as a social and economic phenomenon and as a condition of life for certain neighbourhoods and groups in society. He looks at it alongside the marginalization of the churches from public life.

This is not an easy read and I wonder who is his intended audience. The book comprises essays that draw on many disciplines and originated in lectures and seminars given when he was Visiting Professor to the University of Uppsala Theology Faculty. They may have benefited from more drastic reworking for readers rather than listeners and especially for a broader range of readers. Here is a compelling mix of intellectual and personal wrestling to reach and articulate new understandings. However, the reader has also to wrestle not just with the complexity of the subject matter, but also the difficult and technical language in which it is often expressed. It would be a shame if this narrows down the readership because the book contains important messages and identifies the issues that deserve consideration by people in all parts of the church.

In some ways, I would recommend that people start with chapter 4 in which John Atherton illustrates the 'great double whammy' of marginalized churches in marginalized communities. This case study of churches and communities in Manchester whets the appetite for the examination of the dynamics of marginalization earlier in the book and sets the scene for the later discussion of how the churches can reconnect with communities and public life. The Manchester vignette also prompts further questions. The author notes that two thirds of those churches facing acute difficulties in the Manchester Diocese – in terms of their weekly attendance or electoral rolls – are in the most deprived wards. His almost parenthetical comment that this does not detract from there being many churches in such areas that are well attended made me want to know if there are any factors

either in the neighbourhood characteristics or the pattern of local ministry that might explain the differences.

The two essays in the final section look at ways of reinterpreting the church. John Atherton talks about a 'bias for inclusivity' that encompasses a recognition of structural inequalities whilst also recognizing the possibilities of economic growth. He discusses reworking public theology to give it currency in post-Christian public arenas. It must be 'inevitably ecclesial, rooted in the Church primarily, yet with essential roots also in the academy' and work with other disciplines and interests. These two essays contain abundant food for thought and discussion about their application. Being church, he says, is about 'an identity which includes dialogue and outreach through worship and service as its distinctive heart'. It is about more effective churches in more effective communities – recognizing that we in the churches need to work with geographical and non-geographical communities and that empowerment is critical for church and community as is reconnecting churchgoing and the wider community. It is over to us now to think through the implications for our local congregations and our ecumenical and interfaith relationships. Read the book. It *is* worth the effort. It presents us with a formidable agenda, opens out the questions and gives some pointers to the way ahead. The very clear message is that 'unless the church has some clarity about what it means to be Church as against what it means to be other institutions, then it is likely to be overwhelmed by other participants in the global marketplace'.

Hilary Russell

Jeffrey/Chalke: Connect!

Tim Jeffery and Steve Chalke: *Connect!*, Spring Harvest Publishing Division and Authentic Lifestyle, 2003, ISBN 1-85078-482-5, 159pp. £7.99

DIY global mission is what *Connect!* is about. Tim Jeffery and Steve Chalke of Oasis Trust advocate hands on global mission by congregations of a different order to that offered by mission agencies. It's an attractive idea. They anticipate that it will become more common, indeed they see a paradigm shift in outlook and a sign for the future.

The trend is apparent in the two parish churches nearest to my home in Bristol. Both have delighted in their ongoing 'Partnership in World Mission' contacts through their deaneries and diocese with dioceses in Uganda. These include exchange visits. A year or so back a lively local mission in Bristol was led by Bishop Henri Orombi and colleagues from north-west Uganda. Imagine the thrill at the recent news that he is now the incoming Archbishop of Uganda. They now have a personal friend in a pivotal place for the Church in Africa. The other parish has had a recent visit from Bishop Ben Ojwang, from northern Uganda. Brought to this country by CMS, he told of harrowing, seemingly mindless, killings and child abductions associated with incursions by the so called

Lord's Resistance Army. He spoke too of standing up for kingdom values. There have been visits to Uganda but neither local church has sent contract personnel nor large sums of money. The policy is to see the links as primarily prayerful ones based this end on solidarity and friendship.

Connect! includes many examples of local churches doing DIY global mission in a more determined manner, free of mission agency constraints. They choose the missionaries, where they go and how projects are funded.

The authors' contention is placed in the context of globalization – defined as the process that is making us more interconnected and interdependent. Post modernity is then considered with its emphasis on openness to a variety of different options and ways of thinking. The third chapter is devoted to 'The Global Church', with figures, maps and charts in support. They emphasize that the days of mission being 'from the West to the rest' are gone and that there are now fresh possibilities for the local church in the 'emerging era'. The ease of internet communication, cheaper air travel, gap year and holiday travelling, including visits to missionaries, the increasing acceptability of short term contracts and availability of early retirement volunteers do increase choice. The authors are excited by the prospect. Their core message to every local church is:

'You can do it! Global mission is your bag – it is a core part of the role of the local church. Explore it and get involved!'

Such views present challenges to the societies and agencies. Both sides, say the authors, need to find constructive ways of working together to make the most of new opportunities.

CMS and other mission agencies' charitable status limits the power they can give away. There is also a different trend with some of their UK desk staff being re-located closer to overseas partners and their needs. Tim Jeffery and Steve Chalke recognize mission agencies' expertise and professionalism but see three models with respect to their relationships with local churches – that of the contractor, the partner or the consultant, the most distant one. In each there is power shift to the local church. Even with the contractor model local churches are seen to be more involved than previously in thinking about strategy and the placing of resources. To whom the societies and agencies are responsible is not as clear to their supporters as in DIY global mission.

Towards the end Connect! becomes a starter handbook beginning with the developing of a local church global mission strategy. Included are guidelines on how to do global mission well and information about a related web site: www.connect.nu

There is something significantly creative in what Tim Jeffery and Steve Chalke advocate. Local enthusiasm certainly blossoms. Larger richer congregations may have the potential and the resources to do it well, particularly with respect to advocacy. However, great care, indeed caution, is vital in carrying it through. There is a need locally for an adequate knowledge of culture and language, the history of mission endeavours and of others in the field. Discretion is essential in the choice of partners and in the sifting of ideas, and skills may be needed in personnel management. An overall global awareness needs to be maintained. Sharing up-to-date thinking with a congregation about the role of the church, near and far,

and about what is now appropriate in evangelism, relief and development is demanding for any local church.

This book makes a challenging read for those urging local churches to engage more in any form of global mission. But one of the questions included for discussion is: 'What roles do you think mission agencies should have in global mission in the twenty-first century?'

Gordon Holmes

Kenneth Cragg: Am I not your Lord?

Kenneth Cragg, *Am I Not Your Lord? Human Meaning in Divine Question*, London Melisende, 2002, ISBN 1 901764 21 4, hardback, pp. 255, £18

In terms of engaged observers originating from the West, there is perhaps no one in the world today who is better qualified to comment on the role of religion in local and global societies than Kenneth Cragg. Now in his 91st year, and still as acute, analytical and witty as ever, Cragg presently serves as Honorary Assistant Bishop in the Anglican Diocese of Oxford. But it as a student of, and interlocutor with, Islam that he is perhaps best known. His contribution to the field of religious studies and cross-cultural theology is incalculable. He has served as both a scholar and a bishop in the Middle East and has also held academic posts in Britain, Lebanon, Nigeria and the USA. He is the author of a considerable number of studies in contemporary relations between the Semitic faiths.

Given both Cragg's unassailable track record and the depressing superficiality of much modern commentary on religion, it is a great relief to turn to *Am I Not Your Lord?* The title, of course, has profound Christian resonance. But in this case it is drawn directly from the all-embracing interrogation of Allah in the Qur'an (7.172). The full Arabic quotation and an English translation by the author is included in a series of citations at the beginning of the book (pp. 6-7) which indicate some of the literary, biblical and historical sources informing Cragg's perspective. His viewpoint throughout is thoroughly ecumenical, in that it takes seriously both the actual and potential convergences within and beyond the Semitic faiths and civilisations. But it is also honest and realistic. Cragg is no sentimentalist, and his rigorous honesty about the capacity of belief to serve evil as well as good puts him well beyond the comforting solipsisms of religious apologia that can sometimes consume the critical faculties of those whose lives have been dedicated to inter-faith understanding.

In spite of its hard-headedness, however, *Am I Not Your Lord?* is a redemptive work. The final chapter, 'Satan Under Our Feet', contains a clear-sighted repudiation of religiously sanctioned nationalisms, a call to discernment and discrimination (in the technical, non-pejorative sense of the word) among faith communities, and a redrawing of the virtue of secularity away from irreligion and anti-religion. Both the character of the transcendent God and the unity of human beings in a world divided by ideological manipulations are at stake in the confessions we make. Rigorous self-examination is implied in the divine question, says Cragg. If society is not to be overcome by cancer, faith is needed. But if faith is not to turn bad, despair, despotism and false hopes must be overcome. This is the religious quest.

How far is this insight from the destructive religious pride that sanctioned the destruction of the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001, for example. Cragg exhumes the dark side of faith through a paradoxical exploration of purity in religious thought, relating cleansing rituals to core questions of human and communal identity, to the 'laundering' of global finance, and to the concomitant soiling of politics by the unconstrained passion to control. No one, 'religious' or 'secular', comes away with clean hands. The book takes us on a journey that involves discovering how the human situation is 'minded' and 'resolved' in Islam; how servanthood, covenant, division and unity are narrated in Hebraic experience and in the transformative pedagogy of Jesus; how the legacies of history and theological difference might be handled in relation; how loyalties and meanings may be redeemable; and how we might together learn more about how we are formed (and by whom). The task, says the author, is to move from aversion to embrace within an unfolding vision of the good, that is God.

As ever, it is almost impossible to summarize and recapitulate Kenneth Cragg's thought. His treatment of what we think of as commonplace themes is by turns sinuous, counter-intuitive, imaginative, multivalent and polysemic. This is not the conclusion of thought and relationship but an invitation to participate in their continuous shaping. An impatient, headline-oriented culture will struggle with his words, but struggle very profitably if it dares.

Among the many potential pitfalls in Kenneth Cragg's perspective, one arises directly in the text and another lurks in the sub-title. The first (see especially pp. 165-170) is a Christian one. The author is, without doubt, deeply immersed in Islam and in respect for its great traditions. His is no distanced 'dialogue'; it is an offering (as exposition, appraisal, affirmation and critique) from the heart – one that beats with intensity for what it knows and experiences of 'the other'. Cragg is in no doubt that the God he worships in and through Jesus Christ also moves among those he meets beyond his own household of faith. Yet he is also committed to the distinguishing features of the Christian account of God, the difference made by Jesus' extraordinary embracing of suffering and by his being raised in glory. No cosy pluralist, Cragg knows that difference matters, and that if its value is to be realized it has to be lived through relationship, not wished away by theory. For Christians tempted either to demonize Islam

or to mitigate the singularity of their own faith this will be a tough pill to swallow. But it perhaps shows a way beyond the paths of exclusion, inclusion and mutual relativization which have dominated inter-religious traffic for too long.

The second pitfall is secularization, which Cragg importantly distinguishes from secularity in civics and statehood. Just as he illustrates so tellingly how ideological secularity is (quite literally) incomprehensible from the perspective of Islam, so some avid secularists will want simply to reverse his sub-title so as to render it 'divine meaning in human question'. The author is well aware of this challenge. What we do with the divine Name is crucial for him. His response, however, is not some unfeasible pan-religious apologetic. It is exposition, on the one hand, and the allocation of different (but shared) responsibilities, on the other. Just as Cragg has entered other religions and cultures in order to discover both hope and difference, so he invites those to whom faith is anathema to reconsider how human beings and the world might be positively reconstrued by what they reject. My only fear, given the particular and learned nature of the discourse, is that the effort will be too much for those who would benefit from it most.

The publishers, Melisende [www.melisende.com], are to be congratulated for a first-rate book, well produced. Their other Middle East related titles are well worth exploring, too – not least a fine collection of essays in tribute to Kenneth Cragg himself. *A Faithful Presence*, edited by David Thomas and Clare Amos, was published in March 2003.

The last word should be Cragg's final flourish, in which he explains so cogently and daringly just why his title is about something that matters deeply: "The voice that spoke out of transcendence did not say: "Am I not your tyrant?" Such a question would have no meaning. Tyrannies do not consult. Neither do they interrogate either themselves or their victims. The enquiring voice did not say: "Am I not your Shari'ah?" Nor: "Am I not your *Dawlah*?" Nor again: "Am I not your *Ummah*?" All these, at best, could only be in a serving, not a usurping role, contributory within our entrusted vocation to divine obedience. Nor, yet again, did it say: "Am I not your Pentagon?" The divine question was – and is – "Am I not your Lord?" Of all claimants to our fealty we have in all good faith to say: "Exalted be He above all that ye associate."

Simon Barrow



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Phone: +44 (0)20 7654 7232

Fax: +44 (0)20 7654 7222

Internet: www.ccom.org.uk

Editor: Kai M. Funkschmidt
connections@ctbi.org.uk

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For reflection

Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will America's heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. Once embroiled in foreign wars of interest and intrigue, the fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force. She might become the dictatress of the world: she would no longer be the ruler of her own spirit.

John Quincy Adams, US President, 4 July 1821

Contributors

Barrow, Mr Simon (Anglican, Exeter): CCOM Commission Secretary

Blohm, Revd Uta, (United Lutheran-Reformed, EKD, London), Former lecturer in Ecumenism and Mission at Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal

Fielder, Miss Caroline (Anglican, London) CCOM China Coordinator and China Forum Focal Person

Funkschmidt, Revd Dr Kai (United Lutheran-Reformed (EKD), Dunblane): CCOM Mission Relations Secretary

Holmes, Revd Gordon (Baptist, Bristol): Baptist minister; Focal Person CCOM Africa Forum

Knights, Mrs Dorothy (Anglican, Worcestershire): Focal Person CCOM Europe Mission Forum

Morton, Revd Colin (Presbyterian, Edinburgh): Church of Scotland minister; Focal Person CCOM Middle East Forum

O'Donoghue BSc MA, Mrs Angela (Roman Catholic, Sheffield & Ireland), RC Chaplain at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals

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

Ross, Revd Prof Dr Kenneth (Presbyterian, Edinburgh): General Secretary, Board of World Mission (Church of Scotland)

Russell, Prof Dr Hilary (Anglican, Liverpool): Professor of Urban Policy, Liverpool John Moores University

The last word

The path to heaven

