



# 54 CURRENT DIALOGUE

July 2013

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## Editorial

In the last issue of *Current Dialogue*, I mentioned the then forthcoming arrival of our new colleague Rev. Dr Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar with responsibility for interreligious relations especially with Hinduism and Buddhism. It has been a joy to work with and alongside Peniel in the six months since he began work here at the World Council of Churches – both of us of course getting very busy with preparations for the forthcoming WCC Assembly taking place in Busan, South Korea from 30 October – 8 November 2013. Interreligious concerns will have a significant and visible presence at the Assembly, including a dedicated physical space for interreligious welcome and encounter called *Inn-Spire*.

It has been agreed between Peniel and myself that we will share the editorship of *Current Dialogue* with each of us taking responsibility for one issue of the journal each year. You won't have to wait very long for Peniel's first issue, because we have decided to bring forward its publication date from December 2013, to coincide with the opening of the Assembly. There will be an appropriate focus on East Asia and East Asian religions in that issue of the journal.

The present issue of *Current Dialogue* is a bit of a mixed bag – though I hope an interesting one. Because of the four-year gap in publication of the journal (from February 2008 until December 2011), the first three issues for which I was responsible had to play “catch up”, publishing reports of conferences held in the years between 2008 and my own arrival at the World Council of Churches. Finally, with this issue, much of the content relates more directly to activities that have taken place since my arrival at the WCC. This includes a consultation on Christian self-understanding in the context of Hinduism, and another, smaller one, which explored the topic in relation to indigenous religions. The Christian self-understanding process is drawing to a conclusion and there will be an overall document published in time for the Assembly. We also include this time two papers which (partly for reasons of length) had to be held over from the issues that looked at Christian self-understanding in the context of Buddhism and Islam respectively.

This issue opens with a brief reflection given by Dr Rowan Williams, when Archbishop of Canterbury, to the Christian-Muslim Forum of Britain. Typically it marries profundity and simplicity and offers a refreshing insight into what dialogue can and should mean – a willingness to continue the conversation. I am also very grateful to Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, formerly President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and then Papal Nuncio in Egypt, for his article which explores some aspects of Roman Catholic and Anglican interaction and mutual influence in the field of interreligious dialogue. It was initially given as a paper at a conference held in December 2011 at Lambeth Palace to mark 100 years of Anglican interreligious engagement, coinciding with the lifespan of Kenneth Cragg.

Over the last year a number of key Christian figures who were influential in terms of interreligious dialogue sadly died. These included John Hick and Kenneth Cragg himself. We pay tribute to both these great men through articles in this issue. However, there were also two major figures from the Christian Orthodox world whose role as Christian leaders in the Middle East led them also to play a significant part in Christian-Muslim relations over past decades. These were Pope Shenouda III of Alexandria (died 17 March 2012) and Patriarch Ignatius Hazim of the Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch (5 December 2012). We have not been able to offer full-scale reflections on these two leading churchmen. However, brief notes of appreciation for these two figures follow directly on from this editorial.

I want to offer thanks to various colleagues, whose support of the work of interreligious dialogue in the World Council of Churches is invaluable. In particular, I want to thank Carrie Diaz-Littauer for her work in typesetting and copyediting this issue of *Current Dialogue*.

**Clare Amos**, Programme Coordinator, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation

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## Tributes

### His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

As well as his extensive efforts in ecumenism, His Holiness was well respected for his interreligious work. Pope Shenouda often met with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, the Grand Mufti of Egypt and other Muslim clerics and leaders from Egypt, and the wider Middle East. He also advocated on behalf of Arab causes in international fora, and took steps towards encouraging tolerance and mutual respect. For over 20 years, he invited prominent Muslim members of the political and wider Egyptian community to an annual Iftar banquet during the month of Ramadan, with the aim of presenting Christian hospitality and fostering greater relations between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. In 2000, he was awarded UNESCO's Madanjeet Singh prize for tolerance and nonviolence. The award was for "promoting exchange and understanding between Christianity and Islam in today's Middle East and his [Pope Shenouda's] deep concern to pursue dialogue with all the great religious faiths and his major role in forging ecumenical links with all other members of the Christian family throughout the planet."<sup>1</sup> (*Bishop Angaelos, the Coptic bishop of the United Kingdom*)

### His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazim

Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazim believed that the chief concern of Arab Christians lies in translating Christianity to the Arab world, a Christianity that speaks to the Arab mind and Arab culture, that strives to convey its dogmas in a clear Arabic language that reaches the Arab mind and heart. By this, he did not mean the translation of texts into Arabic. Rather, he meant, "that we arrive at there being a Christianity whose addressee is the Arab person." Starting out from his view of the concern that Arab Christians have toward the Muslims of their countries, Patriarch Hazim did not neglect the negative side of the history of Muslim-Christian relations. He believed that the most important controversial issue between Muslims and Christians is "*Ahl al-Dhimma*" – it ensures protection, but is also marginalizing. However, in his view, this issue and many others "Should not prevent Muslims and Christians from cooperating on a grass root level because they consciously realise that they are one before God, that they have the same trust in God's care – humility and submission are the same before God."

Thus, the patriarch believed that Muslims and Christians worship one God and that what gathers them together is this one, unique God who has revealed God's self in history in Christianity and Islam. In his address to Muslim leaders in Taef, Saudi Arabia, during the Islamic Summit in 1981, he emphasized the faith of Christians and Muslims in the one God. He opened his address by saying, "Like you, Middle Eastern Christians aim for the face of God ... Like you, we long for the Creator of heaven and earth and seek to please God at all times."

He did not hesitate when he mentioned Lebanon and Jerusalem – "where all the servants of God raise up worship to the one, unique, God" – to remind his listeners that mutual respect between Muslims and Christians is based on diversity: "The religions are called in principle to gather human forces to aim at sanctification and purification by divine grace. In Jerusalem, there is an important core for diverse worship and diverse presence, while in Lebanon, there is a deeply-rooted, wide, and profound space for practicing this diversity. In Jerusalem, we seek the face of God, and in Lebanon we seek Him also."

In reality, Patriarch Hazim called for revealing the presence of Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit, "where it appears to be absent or even rejected." With his affirmation of the

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO Madanjeet Singh Prize, 2009. See [unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001858/185859e.pdf](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001858/185859e.pdf)

presence of Christ in non-Christian religions, the patriarch emphasized the agreement between Christians and Muslims about God's transcendence. This "divine transcendence" may be the most exemplary point of contact between believers of the two religions, since God remains a mystery that cannot be delved or comprehended and drawing near to Him is not realized except through acts of worship and humility.

In this context, Patriarch Hazim warned against falling into various types of "relativism and dissimulation", into which some theologians who deny the distinctions that belong to each of the world's religions, can slip. They judge the externals of things without going into their meanings and purposes. If some religious practices intersect or overlap here and there, one cannot negate the differences between religions – both those that may be accidental and those that are essential.

What may best express the thinking of Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazim is this declaration:

*"We call for diversity and openness and this is from the heart of our dogma."* Here the patriarch combined two things that outwardly appear to be contradictory – dogma and openness – in order to make them complete each other without conflict. Thus, his intellectual slogan, and also the slogan of the Arab Orthodox Church, was: openness without compromising the faith (*Georges Massouh, adapted from the original Arabic*).

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## Dialogue Is a Means of “God-Given Discovery”

**Rt Rev. Dr Rowan D. Williams**

*The Christian Muslim Forum of England was inaugurated by Dr Rowan Williams, in January 2006, during his tenure as Archbishop of Canterbury. It brings together Christian and Muslim religious leaders and specialists in the United Kingdom to discuss and work on matters of mutual concern. The establishment of the Forum came about as the result of a considerable process of consultation between Muslims and Christians initiated both by Dr Williams, and his predecessor as archbishop, Dr George Carey. In 1997 Dr Carey commented: “For the sake of the health of this country, we need to find ways in which members of our two communities can meet regularly together in a more structured way than has been possible up to now.”<sup>1</sup>*

*On 22 March 2010, Dr Williams, as founding patron, gave the following address to the Forum, exploring whether dialogue can deal with religious differences without avoidance or compromise. It is reprinted with permission.*

Rather more than 10 years ago I found myself in a taxi in Oxford, driven by a Muslim taxi-driver. He noticed how I was dressed, assumed quite rightly that I was a Christian priest, and set about converting me. It was an experience of dialogue at grass-roots level. He was very clear indeed about the arguments he had to advance and he wanted to have some simple answers. He wanted to know for example, why, since Jesus had lived before Muhammad, I should regard Jesus as the seal of prophecy rather than Muhammad. And so forth. We had a very lively taxi journey, but I have to tell you that at the end of it neither of us had moved very far from when we had started.

But what I wanted to pick up from that experience was the sense that we can

sometimes have, even in a rather confrontational approach to dialogue, of questions being asked that we wouldn't have thought of for ourselves. And in the process of trying to tackle these unexpected questions we discover ourselves in a fresh way. What I experienced in the taxi wasn't exactly dialogue and I'm afraid that probably all too many of us have had experiences of encounters which have not quite been dialogue, when somebody has been so very persuaded of where they have started that they simply can't see why anyone should ever start anywhere else. But what's distinctive about dialogue I'd say, is the notion it embodies of a conversation that continues.

A lot of the engagement between Christians and Muslims across the centuries has certainly been engagement – sometimes conciliatory, sometimes confrontational – but it's not all that often moved towards dialogue. Sometimes it's been polemic: that is, a dialogue which is set up in order to show you that someone else is wrong. In our traditions, there are pieces of “dialogue” between a Christian and a Muslim which are in fact set up to move towards a particular conclusion. Dialogue isn't even a matter of simple debate: that is, propositions advanced, contested, argued for and against. It's in awareness of this that I use the term dialogue in connection with the notion of discovery.

Let me speak as a Christian for a moment. (There will be echoes, I know, in Muslim lives but I'll begin from where I stand.) A very significant part of the Christian tradition, especially the Christian mystical tradition, is the conviction that you will never have said enough about God. If God is infinite then you will never run out of things to say. And you'll never come to a place where you can say, “all that has to be said about God has now been said.”

Our speech about God brings us constantly to the edge of a mystery which is at one and the same time dark and even alarming, because it throws out all our preconceptions, and yet is also inviting, because we know it is a mystery of endless love and invitation and welcome. So the process of talking about faith, for Christians who've inherited that particular strand of Christian reflection, is always a process of coming to the point where you look into a mystery. Your words, you believe, are true, and yet they are not a truth that allows you to say there's no more to discover. So the Christian is engaged constantly in moving into the endless mystery, moving out from a complacent and self-defensive security in faith, in trust that the mystery that lies ahead is the mystery of welcome and love. In that pilgrimage, every single human life has something to contribute to our awareness because in every single human life we see something of how the infinity of God's mystery winds itself into the mystery of a human life and personality. Every human face made in the image of God – so we believe as Christians – reflects something of that mystery. Every human face is worth attending to. Every human voice is worth hearing. How much more so when you see another human face and hear another human voice directed towards God. The language that the other person uses about God may not be the language you use; you may disagree and find areas of enormous strangeness between you. And yet you will still want to say, "In that attention to the other, I will discover something of God." The image I've repeatedly used in speaking about dialogue at its best is that it is a process where I try and "look at another person's face turned towards God": not a face turned towards me in a rapid, perhaps adversarial, relationship, but to look at their face as they pray and absorb the reality of God, and then to speak and listen with them.

That's the first and, I believe, the most fundamental aspect of dialogue for me as a Christian. I don't enter into dialogue with any primary intention of persuading or changing, but with the hope of growing.

And that perhaps is a crucial distinction. I suspect that in my conversation with the taxi-driver both of us would simply have liked the other one to change or at least shut up! There might have been a longer conversation had we had a longer journey, in which we both accepted that we had some growing to do.

Now I grow as I attend to and absorb what somebody else sees and hears as they turn towards God; above all in a person of conscious faith. But I grow also as I learn more about myself and my own convictions; and that I suppose is one of the areas where dialogue becomes difficult and challenging. A great deal of supposed inter-faith dialogue – not to mention a great deal of what once used to be called "comparative religion" as a subject of study – in fact misses its target completely because it doesn't begin by seeing that people are asking different questions. When I see some of the great classics of comparative religion of a certain kind, whether it's the work of Professor John Hick, or Father Hans Küng, my worry is that these are people who are eager to persuade everybody that their differences don't really matter in the way they thought they did, that everyone is really asking the same questions, and that it ought to be possible to find the same answers.

But of course they're not asking the same questions, and one of the most revealing moments in the dialogues I have been involved in over the last few years, was sitting across a table from Mona Siddiqui at a Building Bridges seminar. She fixed me with her gaze and asked "So what do you mean by salvation?" It's a moment when you realize that the categories that slip off the tongue for a Christian are not the questions a partner in dialogue may be asking. "What must I do to be saved?" may be a Christian question, but I doubt very much whether it's a natural Muslim question or even a Hindu question – or a Buddhist question where the question might be "What could I do to be released?" (which is a slightly different category). My point is that in dialogue I start questioning my own questions. I look at myself and

say "Is that the obvious or only way of asking the question?" "How do I listen to someone else's questions and see how mine relate to them?" In other words, in dialogue I discover the things that are not necessarily at the forefront of my mind. I discover something beyond what suits my "comfort zone". I may discover resources within my own language that I didn't suspect and I may discover tensions in my own language that I didn't suspect, as I listen and absorb from another. So the worthwhile-ness of dialogue is for me not only a matter of learning more about God, but learning more about what I understand of God and where I stand in relation to God. I discover something of God: I discover something of myself. I discover that I have not yet mastered all that could be said about God and never shall. I discover that the ways in which I have been talking about God need more probing, more querying and more deepening.

I suspect that at the very simplest level for most Christians who first encounter a real discussion with Muslims, the sort of question that the taxi-driver put to me about chronology is not something that would have occurred to me. For a Muslim it is very clear that the fact of the succession of prophets settles the matter. Here is the end of the story; here is the climax not in Jesus, but in Muhammad. That's not how the Christian sees it. So the Christian is forced to say, "How do the resources in what I say begin to address that question as a real question?" I may find things in my own tradition which may help me with that. The ongoing conversation may bring more to light: listen, react, explore, discover.

Both our faiths of course are missionary faiths. We believe that the truth we have been given by God is a truth that can transform any and every human life in any and every human situation. Precisely because we have that in common, it's not always easy to find a space that we can inhabit together. And yet it's just that passion for a universal truth, and for the human equality and inter-connectedness that goes with it, which makes us

recognize in one another the same impulse, and the same seriousness. That too is part of what grounds and makes sense of the dialogue we want to pursue. Each of us, in proportion to how serious we are about our faith, longs for others to share it. But the point about the dialogue is that we are (so to speak) bracketing for a moment the desire that someone else should share and fully identify with us, and taking the time necessary to explore and discover one another in the hope that something of God and our selves is discovered in that moment.

So, dialogue is a very specialized kind of talk: a conversation without too many 'tight' definitions of what a good outcome would be. And that's not easy to defend sometimes in our world. You've probably noticed this. People ask, what is the point of dialogue if it isn't to convert your dialogue partner? why are you wasting your time? And because we live in a culture which is impatient, short-term-ist and very much focused on measureable outcomes, you will always find people who will say to you, in respect of Muslim-Christian dialogue, "How do you measure its success?" And if you say that you're not going to measure its success by how many people change from one side to the other, some people may want to say it's not worthwhile. I believe that those of us who are engaging in dialogue need to say very clearly that the worthwhile-ness of it is in that deepening of discovery that occurs within it. It's one of the many means that God gives us to sink more deeply into the infinity of God's work, presence and purpose. It needs no justification other than that. If it becomes primarily an argument somebody has to win, or primarily a negotiation about something on which we all agree; then it's much less than it can be.

I want to suggest that, understood as a means of God-given discovery, dialogue actually brings us up against a greater and fuller awareness of the sheer mystery of the God with whom we all have to do. It instills in us a deeper gratitude that the mysterious, infinite God who surrounds and pervades everything that is has

nonetheless spoken a word to us which changes us. Now, the change that was wrought in us by the gift and revelation of the infinite God is what we begin from in gratitude and acknowledgement. And in recognizing that gift, that mystery, we find our appetite kindled, our taste for truth awakened; and so we turn to one another, looking, listening and confidently praying that in that encounter we grow.

I don't know whether I shall ever again meet my Oxford taxi-driver, but I pray that however much that conversation felt like an exchange of misunderstandings, we may both have grown just a tiny bit during that encounter. And the very fact that I am telling you the story of that encounter now, is partly to illustrate my own experience of being brought up against what I didn't know I didn't know, in a conversation. And

that surely is a very significant aspect of dialogue: the discovery that we don't know even what we don't know. And we must, in attention and listening find that out if God is to do what God wants with us.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Christian-Muslim Forum visit the website at [www.christianmuslimforum.org](http://www.christianmuslimforum.org).

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***Rt Rev. Dr Rowan Williams, Lord Williams of Oystermouth, served as Archbishop of Canterbury from December 2002 to December 2012. He is now Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and President of Christian Aid.***

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# Anglicans Appreciated: Reflections of Anglican Interfaith Engagement in a Catholic Journal

Rt Rev. Dr Michael L. Fitzgerald

## Introduction

The aim of this paper is quite limited.<sup>1</sup> It examines a Catholic journal on Christian-Muslim relations to see how far Anglican interfaith endeavours, at least with respect to Islam and Muslims, have been noticed and appreciated. The journal in question is *Islamochristiana* (hereafter abbreviated as *ISCH*), founded in 1975 and published by the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome, and appearing as an annual volume.

## Some Prominent Personalities

There are some Anglicans who have clearly caught the attention of *ISCH*. I would like to mention just three. The first is Bishop David Brown (d.1982) whose obituary was published in *ISCH* 8 (1982) p. 248, probably because he was well-known in Britain, and indeed in Europe, for his open attitude towards Islam. His approach was shaped both by studies and experience. He held degrees in theology and Arabic, and he served for a time in Sudan, and also more briefly in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In 1973, on his return to England after a few years of parish work, he was appointed Bishop of Guildford.

Bishop Brown became the chairperson of the Advisory Group on the Presence of Islam in Britain, for the British Council of Churches and the Conference of Missionary Societies of Britain and Ireland. This group, under his direction, produced valuable guidelines for Christian-Muslim relations, published as a booklet entitled: *A New Threshold*. He excelled as a chairperson. I had personal experience of this at a consultation on relations with Muslims held in Salzburg in the mid-seventies. The assembly was divided into working groups, each with a specific task.

The group chaired by Bishop Brown, in which I found myself, was asked to outline the theological underpinning for relations with Muslims. As it turned out, no agreement could be reached, since some members of the group insisted that the only way to approach Muslims was to invite them to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Bishop Brown pleaded for a broader view. He said that Jesus is not necessarily the only topic of conversation. One can go into the garden with a Muslim friend and admire the flowers, and give praise to God together for such beauty. Finding that there was not even the willingness to agree to disagree, the chairman had the courage to present as a report from the group a blank sheet of paper.

David Brown also had a gift for explaining Christianity in a manner comprehensible to Muslims. This led him to produce a series of booklets, *Christianity and Islam*, which were analyzed and acclaimed in a double issue of *Encounter: Documents for Muslim-Christian Understanding* (28/29 (1976)), another publication of the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI).

Bishop Brown thus typifies, to my mind, the best of Anglican partners in dialogue. His own spiritual outlook was perhaps typically inclusive, for he combined a welcoming openness of spirit and an appreciation of differences with a solid commitment to Jesus Christ. The following passage from his own writings is quoted in the obituary notice in *ISCH*:

*Jesus is the strong but gentle leader whom I desire to follow. He is for me the one person in the whole life of the world whose friendship I most covet, and the person in whom I see most clearly the marks of God's presence. I hear in his*

words and see in the stories which are told about him the truth by which I need to live. And I discover as I try to live by it, that it corresponds to the pattern of things as they exist in the universe ... There are ... particular aspects of the Christian faith which are for me cogent reasons why I believe the Good News of Christ provides the means by which the diverse religions of mankind may be reconciled with one another.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the Anglican figure that has most caught the attention of *ISCH* is Bishop Kenneth Cragg. He contributed an article to one of the first issues of the journal, "Legacies and Hopes in Muslim/Christian Theology", the text of a lecture he gave at the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies in December 1976.<sup>3</sup> A sermon, delivered in the University Church of Cambridge in February 1982, on the perhaps unusual topic of Iran and Revolutionary Islam, is also reproduced in full.<sup>4</sup> A good number of Kenneth Cragg's books have been reviewed, from a re-edition of his first book, *The Call of the Minaret*, to *The Iron in the Soul: Joseph and the Undoing of Violence*, published in 2009. It is worth quoting the views of the reviewer of *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration*, published in 1985. The reviewer states that Cragg, "has done for Protestants what Louis Massignon (d.1962) did for countless Roman Catholics, involved with Muslims, that is, he makes them aware of the relevance of Islam for Christian theology (not only missiology)." The reviewer adds:

*Cragg also published in Roman-Catholic periodicals and was often invited to address Roman Catholic audiences. I notice that his works are read by Muslim scholars ... The book about Jesus is both a work of creative literature and a composition of deep theology (p.245). This is how Cragg characterises the work of John the evangelist (chapter 9). It might aptly be applied to this magnum opus as well.*<sup>5</sup>

It may be better, however, to approach Cragg not directly but through the review of a study about him: Christopher Lamb's

*The Call to Retrieval: Kenneth Cragg's Christian Vocation to Islam* (reviewed in *ISCH* 26 (2000) p. 281). The biographical details given in this study are not irrelevant: Anglican clergyman, qualified in theology, brought by circumstances to the study of Arabic and Islam, lecturer at Hartford Seminary and editor of *The Muslim World*, but returning to the Middle East and becoming Assistant Bishop of Jerusalem with residence in Cairo, yet resigning quickly to give way to an Arab Christian and returning to lecturing and writing in the UK. Cragg therefore writes not as a detached academic, but as a passionately committed person. His underlying concern is the Christian mission to Islam. This induces him to propose specifically Christian interpretations for quranic texts; not by forcing these texts, but by suggesting their hidden implications. This method has not always been appreciated by Muslims. Yet if Cragg challenges Muslims, he also challenges Christians, inviting them to retrieve Islamic values for Christianity. He could be taken as an example of an Anglican reverse missionary.

The final person to be mentioned is a non-British Episcopalian, the Canadian Stuart Brown, who for some years held responsibility for relations with Muslims within the World Council of Churches' Office for Dialogue with Living Faiths and Ideologies. Though the Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC, it maintains a close relationship with this body. Relations between the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Office for Dialogue with Living Faiths and Ideologies have been particularly close and fruitful.<sup>6</sup> Various initiatives have been reported in *ISCH*. Brown's edited volume *Meeting in Faith: Twenty Years of Christian Muslim Conversations Sponsored by the World Council of Churches* (WCC, Geneva, 1989) is reviewed in *ISCH* 15 ((1989) pp. 296-297).

When finally leaving his position at the WCC, Brown also left a legacy in the form of a short book entitled, *The Nearest in Affection: Towards a Christian Understanding of Islam* (reviewed in *ISCH*

21 (1995) pp. 232-233). The book was published appropriately in the series of Risk Books, for there is always a risk in writing about a religion which is not one's own. Stuart Brown, however, was well prepared for this task, on account not only of his qualifications in Islamic studies, but also of his experience in Tunisia and Senegal prior to his work at the WCC. The information imparted on Islam in his book is standard: the basic beliefs, the pillars of Islam, the different schools of law, and the variety of non-Sunni groups. A cautionary remark from the author is, however, worth noting:

*Systematic classifications tend to represent theoretical models ... (yet) authentic dialogue must stem from the living faith of the participants, which will sometimes diverge from the strict orthodoxy of the texts.*

The book aims at stimulating dialogue, and its final chapter considers different modes of relationship: confrontation and conflict (conquests, Crusades, colonialism and more recent violent extremism); agreement and alliance (political compromises); protection and propriety (the situation of Christian minorities); respect and partnership (inter-communal cooperation), syncretism and supersession (the attempts of some to overcome differences by ignoring or suppressing them by force or persuasion); and pluralism and peace (a plea for an openness to different systems existing side by side). Most Catholics engaged in Christian-Muslim relations would probably find themselves on the same wavelength as Stuart Brown.

### **Archbishops of Canterbury**

*ISCH* pays attention to the activities of the archbishops of Canterbury in the interfaith field, and in particular where relations with Muslims are concerned. Accordingly, the journal takes note of the Sir Francis Younghusband Memorial Lecture, which Archbishop Robert Runcie delivered in the great hall of the library of Lambeth Palace on 28 May 1986. Speaking on "Christianity and World Religions", he addressed the

question: How is a conviction of the uniqueness of Christian revelation to be reconciled with openness to the works of the Spirit in other faiths? He said that there was no easy answer, but he shared his own experience of the impact of a recent visit to India. He concluded, "a rich diversity of religious experiences and forms is one of God's greatest gifts to his world."<sup>7</sup>

Dr Runcie's successor, Archbishop George Carey, is given more attention. *ISCH* 25 ((1999), p. 223) reproduces a report on the Archbishop's visit to Syria in January 1999. He met with President Assad and also with other dignitaries. The Holy City of Jerusalem and its future status was a recurrent topic in his exchanges with both Muslim and Christian religious leaders. The report quotes the words of the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, Dr Riah Abu Al-Assal, who affirmed:

*"Dr Carey was the first to speak up for the rights of the Palestinian people at the Lambeth Conference," inclusive of "Palestinian statehood with Jerusalem as its capital rendering it, thus, a real key to peace in the region."*

Archbishop Carey was invited to speak at the Abu al-Nur mosque in Damascus by the Grand Mufti, Sheikh Kaftaro, and he used the occasion to encourage dialogue between Christians and Muslims, an endeavour to which he gave his unqualified support. The full text of his address is given in this issue of *ISCH*.

*ISCH* 26, in its section Notes and Documents ((2000) p. 177), gives extracts from a speech delivered by Archbishop Carey at the University of al-Azhar on 24 November 1999. At the beginning there is a reference to a previous talk, delivered four years before, which was apparently not brought to the notice of the compiler of Notes and Documents. In that speech, the Archbishop had spoken about the need to transcend bitterness, to promote understanding and friendship, and to encourage reciprocity and cooperation. The topic he chose to address in 1999, on

the eve of the new millennium, was the world as we would wish to bequeath it to our children. Archbishop Carey was careful to point to common values: the dignity of marriage and the role of the family, “the importance of community and charity as the heart of neighbourliness.” He emphasized the centrality of faith, for Christians and Muslims “cannot conceive of a world that is perceived as God-forsaken ... cannot conceive of a world without faith.” Yet, he adds, “faith cannot be imposed. It has to be lived and taught in believing, caring relationships.”

The Archbishop went on to speak of differences which are to be respected. He called for greater courage on the part of both Christian and Muslim thinkers in expressing their faith. He confessed that the “particularity” of Christianity is “Jesus Christ whom we worship and to whom we bear witness.” He stated that he was aware of the difficulty this poses for Muslims, but insisted that “the journey we must make together is to go more deeply into one another’s faith: to study the other faith, to see its strengths and weaknesses, to understand what it means to believers and why they give their all to it.”

George Carey finally proposed an Agenda for Action: a moral agenda in conjunction with all people of good will; a peace-making agenda, where religions have a role in bringing about reconciliation; an economic agenda, cooperating to alleviate poverty in the world; and finally a community agenda, where local communities strive to deal with differences in a positive way.

The contribution of the following Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, will be referred to later when speaking of ongoing dialogues between Christians and Muslims.

### Articles and Books Reviewed

Though *ISCH* is open to receiving articles from any provenance, there would seem in fact to have been very few by Anglican authors. Apart from the article by Kenneth Cragg already mentioned, there would

appear to be only two contributions. The first, by Dr David Thomas of Birmingham University, is a study of a medieval text, Abu Mansur al-Maturidi’s discussion on the divinity of Christ (23 (1997) pp. 43-64). This article has no particular Anglican bent, but rather illustrates that the interest in medieval polemics between Christians and Muslims is not confined to Catholics. In fact Selly Oak, where Dr Thomas is based, has the important Mingana collection of manuscripts relevant to this field. The second article, by Dr Douglas Pratt, of the University of Waikato, New Zealand (26 (2000) pp. 79-93), is more reflective and concerned with contemporary dialogue. It examines the concepts of identity and ideology, and presents some considerations for Christian-Muslim dialogue from an Australasian perspective. Here again, since the question of identity is studied only as regards Muslims, there is nothing which would mark this article as specifically Anglican.

With regard to books by Anglicans, about twenty-five have been reviewed in *ISCH*. This is not a very high number, since at least that number of books is reviewed in each issue of the journal which has now reached volume 36. One possible reason for the low incidence of Anglican literature on themes pertaining to Christian-Muslim dialogue is the greater attention paid by the journal to publications in French.

The authors who receive the most attention are Kenneth Cragg and Michael Ipgrave. Bishop Cragg has already been mentioned and I shall soon turn to Michael Ipgrave’s editing of the results of a formal dialogue series. I should like here to evoke two other authors.

Andrew Wingate, an Anglican priest who was at the time working in Birmingham, describes his experience in *Encounter in the Spirit. Muslim-Christian Meetings in Birmingham* (reviewed in *ISCH* 15 (1989) pp. 294-295). One of the features of this short book is its insistence on the importance of prayer – personal prayer – but also shared prayer for different needs, for loved ones, for healing and for peace.

A key moment in the development of a real friendship between Wingate and a local imam was when the latter asked if he could pray for Wingate's sick father. The Christian had to ask himself whether he believed in the value of the Muslim's prayer. Wingate concludes, "praying together has been central to the friendship." I wonder whether Anglicans (and I think here of the encouragement given by Kenneth Cragg in his *Alive to God*) have not often shown more courage than Catholics in engaging in prayer with people of other religions.

The other author I wish to refer to is Hugh Goddard. The two books of his, which are reviewed in *ISCH*, could be taken as an appeal for greater rigour in intellectual dialogue. In *Christians and Muslims: From Double Standards to Mutual Understanding* (reviewed in *ISCH* 22 (1996) pp. 285-286), Goddard, recognizing that judgements of the other religion are often based on abysmal ignorance, attempts to overcome prejudices by submitting the two religions and their traditions to the same criteria. His second work, *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity* (cf. *ISCH* 25 (1999) pp. 268-269), will help Christians to become aware of how Christianity has been understood, or misunderstood, by Muslims down the ages, from the quranic origins to the contemporary scene. Here it would seem to me that the Anglican author is at one with his Catholic colleagues in decrying a naïve approach to dialogue in which everything is seen to be beautiful.

### Formal Dialogue

Much dialogue – or perhaps it would be better to say *encounter* – is carried out at the local level and is very often of an informal kind. In pluralistic societies this dialogue is most frequently of a multilateral nature, bringing together representatives of all different religions present in a given area. Yet the Anglican Communion, as the Roman Catholic Church, has also been engaged in various formal dialogues.

### Ahl Albait

After Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan had set up the Ahl Albait Institute, he wished to facilitate dialogue with Christians. As a prince, he perhaps naturally turned to another royal household, and the first consultation took place at Windsor Castle in November 1984. Later, the Ahl Albait Foundation would engage in dialogue with Orthodox Christians through the Orthodox Centre in Chambésy, Geneva, and subsequently with Catholics, having the Secretariat for Non Christians (SNC) (later Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID)) as partner.

*ISCH*, in its Notes and Documents section, took notice of the Windsor consultations in which the Christian participants were mainly Anglicans but not exclusively so. In fact, Archbishop Francis Arinze, the newly appointed head of the SNC, was invited to take part in the first meeting, and it is his contribution that is reproduced in *ISCH* 11 ((1985) pp. 211-212). A second meeting, held in Amman the following year, was concerned with contemporary issues of the family and youth. *ISCH* 12 ((1986) pp. 212-213) gives the full final statement. The third dialogue took place in May 1987 at Windsor Castle. The theme addressed this time was business ethics. This meeting was distinctive in that it included three Jewish participants, along with thirteen Muslims from six different countries, and thirteen Christians of whom only seven were Anglicans, one Orthodox, and five Catholics.<sup>8</sup> The number of Catholic participants is significant, indicating a spirit of openness on the part of Anglicans. In the parallel meetings organized by Catholics and the Ahl Albait Foundation, there would seem to have been only one occasion when an Anglican was invited to take part: Canon Howard Root, who was at that time the Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome. To be complete, I will mention the recording of a further meeting at St George's House, Windsor Castle, in December 1989, again on business ethics, and again with Jewish participation.<sup>9</sup>

## Building Bridges

Building Bridges, an Anglican initiative taken by Archbishop (Lord) Carey, and continued under Archbishop Rowan Williams, can be considered a response to the events of 11 September 2001. It arose out of the concerns of both the Prime Minister of the UK and of Lord Carey who had visited a number of predominantly Muslim countries, showing his respect for Islam, while at the same time standing up for the rights of Christians. The first meeting was held at Lambeth Palace, where the opening session included addresses by Prime Minister Tony Blair, Archbishop Carey and Prince Hassan of Jordan. The participants were invited to a reception at 10 Downing Street which was also attended by representatives of the different faith communities in the UK.<sup>10</sup>

Government influence, which perhaps determined the choice of the established church as the main organizer of the first programme, did not appear to play any part in subsequent meetings. These have been held in different parts of the world: in Doha, in Sarajevo and at Georgetown University, Washington DC (twice). The developing Building Bridges programme has been fortunate in having a very able chronicler in the person of then Canon, now Bishop, Michael Ipgrave. *ISCH* has taken due note of his edited proceedings of each meeting: *The Road Ahead: A Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (2002), *Scriptures in Dialogue: Christians and Muslims Studying the Qur'an Together* (2004), *Bearing the Word: Prophecy in Biblical and Quranic Perspective* (2005), *Building a Better Bridge: Muslims, Christians and the Common Good* (2008) and *Justice and Rights: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (2009).

From the second meeting in Doha and onwards, these meetings have included a particular feature; namely, small groups reading the Scriptures together. Having had the privilege to attend the Doha meeting, I found this exercise very powerful. Almost all of the participants were frequent partners in dialogue, but perhaps they had not often had the

opportunity to hear the Qur'an expounded by a Muslim or the Bible presented by a Christian. The introduction of this form of sharing may have been due to the influence of one of the Anglican participants, Professor David Ford of Cambridge University, who has been promoting "Scriptural Reasoning", a method of approaching the Scriptures among Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The Building Bridges programme aims to bring about change for the better in the relations between Christians and Muslims. Difficult issues are not avoided, even when there is no apparent hope of reaching an agreement. At the Sarajevo meeting, Dr Mustafa Cerić, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia, declared that the meeting "has raised all the right questions about Muslim-Christian relations, and offered some useful and provocative answers."<sup>11</sup>

Archbishop Williams, taking over from Lord Carey, has not been content to stand on the touchline. He has always played an active role in the meetings. In Doha, each evening he shared his own personal reactions to what he had heard during the day. In Sarajevo, he presented a paper on Christianity, Islam and the Challenge of Poverty. In the more recent Georgetown meeting, where it was decided to add to the scriptural material texts from Christian and Islamic tradition, the Archbishop presented a letter of St Augustine. I am sure that his active participation has been an encouragement to all.

## Dialogue with al-Azhar

Reference has already been made to the lecture that Archbishop George Carey gave at al-Azhar in November 1999. He had previously visited Cairo, in 1995, to visit the Grand Imam, Dr Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, who paid a return visit to Lambeth Palace the following year. These preliminary contacts paved the way for a more stable relationship between al-Azhar and the Anglican Communion, through an Agreement that was signed by the Archbishop and the Grand Imam at Lambeth Palace in January, 2002.

Already by September of the same year, the Agreement was put into practice through a meeting of the joint Commission in Cairo. It is interesting to note that the meeting was not confined to reading and discussing prepared papers, but included exchanges on crisis situations in various parts of the world: Iraq, Sudan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Kashmir, Indonesia, Chechnya and the Philippines. The situation in the Holy Land was also discussed.<sup>12</sup>

Following this meeting, further Anglican – al-Azhar encounters seemed to have slipped under the *ISCH* radar. It is appropriate, however, to refer to the meeting that took place in Cairo in September 2004, in which Archbishop Rowan Williams took part. The Archbishop was asked to deliver an address at al-Azhar, and he did so, choosing for his topic the concept of God – which of course for Christians means the Trinity. He stated:

*I am here as a Christian, to speak to you of some of those matters which both unite and divide us ... In these few remarks, I want to meditate a little on the greatest theme of both Muslim and Christian faith, the doctrine of God; and I want to suggest how, despite some of our differences, we can, in the light of our belief about Almighty God, together make certain affirmations to the world about the way to peace and justice for human beings.*<sup>13</sup>

The Holy See, through its Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, had established in 1998 a Joint Committee with the Permanent Committee of al-Azhar al-Sharif for Dialogue with Monotheistic Religions. Annual meetings have been held, alternatively in Cairo and in Rome, and since the year 2000 they have always been held around the date of 24 February, the anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit to al-Azhar. Can one point to any differences in the way of proceeding?

It is noticeable in the first place that the dialogue is with the Anglican Communion and not simply with Lambeth Palace or the Church of England. Anglicans from different countries have been invited to

take part in the dialogue meetings. The Holy See's delegations are also composed of people of different nationalities, but for the most part they are persons working within the Roman Curia. There is also a greater local commitment on the part of the Anglicans. The Holy See does always include one or two people from Egypt in its delegation, just as Dr Mouneer Anis, the Bishop of the Episcopal Anglican Church in Egypt, together with other people of his diocese, take part in the Anglican – al-Azhar meetings. Yet, in addition to this, the Anglican – al-Azhar agreement includes joint action at the local level, such as the opening of a health centre in Sadat City. A further feature is a willingness to tackle difficult questions. Here, for example, are the topics touched on in the 2004 meeting: Jihad in Islam; Christianity and the Crusades; the position of women in Islam; human rights in Islam; is the West Christian? and Christianity as a religion of weakness. Such matters can only be discussed where there is a climate of openness and mutual confidence. A final point of difference would be the active role of the Archbishop of Canterbury. In the Catholic dialogue, the Pope tends to remain above the debate, leaving the leading role to the Cardinal President of the PCID. Though a Pope has been received at al-Azhar, it has so far proved more problematical for Sheikh al-Azhar to be received by the Pope in the Vatican.

### Common Word

In October 2007, a group of Muslim scholars belonging to different schools of thought addressed an invitation to dialogue to Christian leaders of all denominations: A Common Word between Us and You. It is no secret that Archbishop Williams would have wished for an ecumenical response to this invitation. Catholic authorities did not go along with this, and so a specific Catholic-Muslim forum was held in Rome in November 2008.<sup>14</sup> In June of that same year, Archbishop Williams convened an ecumenical consultation to discuss ways in which Christian-Muslim engagement might be strengthened and deepened. The majority of the Christian leaders who had

received the call to a Common Word sent representatives and a number of scholars were at hand to assist them in their deliberations.<sup>15</sup>

Later in the year, on 15 October 2008, a Common Word Conference was held partly at Lambeth Palace, and partly in Cambridge, UK, under the joint leadership of Archbishop Williams and Dr Ali Gomaa, the Chief Mufti of Egypt. The final communiqué notes that the meeting “represented the most significant gathering of international Muslim leaders ever to take place in the United Kingdom, matched by a similarly wide diversity of traditions and geographical backgrounds amongst the Christian participants.” Of the 19 Christian participants, four were Catholics, including His Beatitude Gregorios III Laham, the Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch. This inclusion of Catholics is much appreciated. The communiqué shows that the conference had borrowed something from the Building Bridges programme. It states:

*One of the most moving elements of our encounter has been the opportunity to study together passages from our scriptures. We have felt ourselves to have been together before God and this has given us each a greater appreciation for the richness of the other’s heritage as well as an awareness of the potential value in being joined by Jewish believers in a journey of mutual discovery and attentiveness to the texts we hold sacred. We wish to repeat the experience of a shared study of scriptural texts as one of the ways in which we can come, concretely, to develop our understanding of how the other understands and lives their own faith. We recommend this experience to others.<sup>16</sup>*

#### **Christian Reflections on Dialogue: “Les Journées Romaines”**

Before the Second Vatican Council had given official approval to interreligious dialogue, Catholics who were engaged in relations with Muslims, particularly in North Africa and in the Middle East, often felt somewhat isolated. Accordingly, some

of them, mostly belonging to religious congregations, decided to gather together to reflect on their experiences. A first meeting was held in Rome in 1956. This meeting having been judged most useful, the decision was taken to gather every two years under the anodyne title of Journées Romaines (JR), thus prudently avoiding any reference to Islam.

In the beginning, participation (by invitation only, with no publicity) was restricted to male religious and priests. After 1965 women religious were also invited, and from 1967 onwards invitations were extended to some lay people and also to representatives of other Churches. Naturally, Anglicans were included, even if their numbers remained small.

To provide the right atmosphere for the exchanges, the programme included prayer: lauds, vespers and the Eucharist. In some sessions meditations were introduced. So, in 1979, at the beginning of each day’s work, Bishop Kenneth Cragg gave a spiritual reflection which was highly appreciated (though perhaps giving some headaches to the interpreters). Papers were read on the topic chosen for the respective sessions, workshops were held and information sessions (*carrefours libres*) were offered in the evenings where people could talk about particular situations. To guarantee freedom of expression, tradition held that nothing that was said would be made public. Perhaps this prudence reflects a particularly Catholic attitude.

Over the years, the participants started advocating the presence of a Muslim speaker, and this was applied in the later sessions. Yet the scope of the meetings remained a Christian reflection on dialogue with Muslims, rather than an exercise in dialogue in which nearly all the participants were involved in their own areas.

Since 1999, the JR have not been held, partly for practical reasons (notably financial), but perhaps also because other structures for dialogue and reflection have sprung up in the meantime. Yet

periodically there is talk of reviving the meetings.<sup>17</sup>

### Les “Journées d’Arras”

As the numbers of participants in the JR increased, reaching the hundred mark and coming from all parts of the world, the need was felt for some regional gatherings of a similar kind. So were born the Journées d’Arras for Christians in Europe engaged in relations with Muslims. The first meeting took place in May 1980, in Arras, precisely, since the bishop of that town was responsible for Christian-Muslim relations for the French hierarchy. Right from the outset, participation was open to people of different Christian communities, nearly always including Anglicans.

For the first six years the meetings were held in Arras, but then they started moving from city to city and country to country, though always keeping the original name. The gatherings are smaller than the JR, varying from 15 participants coming from 6 countries, to 38 participants from 17 countries at the 2010 meeting in Madrid. The pattern followed is similar to the JR: a main topic is chosen, often prepared by an enquiry at national level, for which expert speakers are invited, but at the same time much attention is given to reports on the dialogue situation in each country. The programme of the Journées d’Arras also includes reaching out to the Muslim community of the venue through a visit to a mosque or an Islamic centre.

*ISCH* has been generally faithful in reporting on these meetings in the Notes and Documents section, though not all details are recorded and the complete picture of Anglican involvement is not given. At the 13<sup>th</sup> meeting, held in Rixensart, near Brussels, in May 1992, where the topic was “Consequences of Marriages between Christians and Muslims”, it is mentioned that “the first speaker was Rev. Andrew Wingate, head of the College of the Ascension, Selly Oak, an Anglican priest formerly working in Madurai, India.”<sup>18</sup> In a later report it is noted that Dr David Thomas (from Selly Oak and Birmingham University) was

remaining in the organizing committee, which shows that he was already involved, thus marking the Journées d’Arras as a truly ecumenical initiative. In point of fact, Dr Thomas must have been the chief organizer of the meeting that took place in Selly Oak in June 1998, though unfortunately it went unreported in *ISCH*.<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusion

The results of opinion polls can often be called into question since the base of the enquiry is judged to be too narrow. Similarly, any conclusions that can be drawn from the present study, which concentrates on one single journal, will necessarily be very tentative. Moreover, as has been observed, a number of Anglican initiatives have escaped the notice of *Islamochristiana*, and even when cooperating with Catholics the contribution of Anglicans is not always given the attention it would deserve. Nevertheless, some general remarks can be made.

It would appear that Anglicans and Catholics who promote and encourage dialogue with Muslims share a similar theological outlook. According to the oft-used, though not entirely satisfactory, categorization “exclusivist/inclusivist/pluralist”, they would be generally considered inclusivists. They exhibit a strong faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, while at the same time they are open to the values to which Muslims give witness.

Anglicans are more inclusivist in another sense. In formal dialogues with Muslims they show a greater readiness to call on the expertise of Christians belonging to other denominations, including Catholics.

As with Catholics, so also in the case of Anglicans, formal dialogues with Muslims have generally not been theological in content. More frequently, the topics chosen for discussion have touched on religion and society, the importance of the family and the common good – though, as has been noted, Anglicans have not been afraid to tackle thorny issues such as jihad and the Crusades. Anglicans, through

recourse to scriptural reasoning, have succeeded in bringing a more spiritual note to formal dialogues. This is surely an example to be followed.

Finally, both Anglicans and Catholics are well aware that certain members of their respective communities are not at all favourable to dialogue, especially with Muslims. They know that they need to cooperate in resisting adverse pressures, and to back one another up in maintaining an attitude of openness, based on the dual commandment, which is in fact one: love of God and love of neighbour.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally given at "The Presence of Faith" Conference held at Lambeth Palace in December 2011, by kind permission of Dr Rowan Williams, then Archbishop of Canterbury. The conference was held to mark 100 years of Anglican interfaith engagement and to honour the life and work of Bishop Kenneth Cragg.

<sup>2</sup> David Brown. (1982) *All Their Splendour: World Faiths, the Way to Community*. Collins Fount, London, p. 213-214.

<sup>3</sup> cf. *ISCH* 3 (1977), p. 1-10.

<sup>4</sup> cf. *ISCH* 8 (1982), p. 244-248.

<sup>5</sup> cf. *ISCH* 12 (1986), p. 239.

<sup>6</sup> The WCC's Office for Dialogue with Living Faiths and Ideologies has more recently become known as the office for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation. It continues to maintain good relations with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

<sup>7</sup> cf. *ISCH* 12 (1986), p.203.

<sup>8</sup> cf. *ISCH* 13 (1987), p. 196-197.

<sup>9</sup> cf. *ISCH* 16 (1990), p. 280-281.

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<sup>10</sup> cf. *ISCH* 28 (2002), p.237.

<sup>11</sup> *ISCH* 35 (2009), p. 357.

<sup>12</sup> cf. *ISCH* 29 (2003), p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> Raja Benny Zabaneh, Adel Farag (eds.) *Restoring Distorted Images: Papers of Dialogue between al-Azhar al-Sharif and the Anglican Episcopal Communion*, 2006, Episcopal Publishing House, Cairo, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> cf. *ISCH* 34 (2008), p. 261.

<sup>15</sup> cf. *ISCH* 34 (2008), p. 202-203.

<sup>16</sup> *ISCH* 34 (2008), p. 203-206.

<sup>17</sup> cf. Maurice Borrmans, Les "Journées Romaines" et le dialogue islamo-chrétien. *ISCH* 30 (2004), pp. 111-122.

<sup>18</sup> *ISCH* 18 (1992), p. 246.

<sup>19</sup> However, cf. Penelope Johnstone. (2004) The "Journées d'Arras" and Christian-Muslim Relations. *ISCH* 30, p. 123-129, especially p. 125.

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## Cooperation, Conversion and Christian Witness: The Continuing Conversation

**Dr Clare Amos**

Readers of *Current Dialogue* 50, published in February 2008, may remember that the issue included papers linked to two consultations which had been held shortly before that date and which were linked to work to develop an ethical code of conduct for religious conversion. The first consultation took place at Lariano, Italy, 12-16 May 2006, and the second meeting was at Toulouse in France, held 8-12 August 2007. *Current Dialogue* included a full report and linked documents from Lariano, as well as the papers presented at the meeting in Toulouse.

But where did the story and the work on this “code” go after that? What was not foreseen when *Current Dialogue* 50 was published was that there would be an unintended almost four-year hiatus before the next issue of *Current Dialogue* could be published, in December 2011.

Of course, many readers will be aware that the work did in fact reach a successful conclusion. What was done at Lariano, and Toulouse, and a later meeting held in Bangkok in January 2011, paved the way for the publication on 28 June 2011 of the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct”, which harvested and presented the fruits of the discussions in a very accessible format. Signed and authorized as it was by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and the

World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), as well as the World Council of Churches, it was a landmark document, not simply for what it said about the nature of Christian witness, but because these three bodies, representing between them a very wide spectrum of the Christian world, were willing to act jointly in the publication of the document.

The popularity of the document is made clear not least by the number of languages into which it has been translated by one or other of the partners. It can be read online at [www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world).

At the initiative and invitation of the WCC Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation programme staff, a small gathering was held which included representatives of the PCID and WEA in December 2012, to discuss “*Quo vadimus*” – “Where should we go from here?” Several suggestions were made which will be explored over the coming year. It was also as a result of the discussions at that meeting last December that the suggestion arose of publishing, in English, what is essentially a précis of an important book addressing the topic of conversion published originally in German and edited by Christine Lienemann, which follows on the next page.

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## Conversion and Religious Belonging: The Story of a Resource Book

**Dr Christine Lienemann-Perrin**

Never in the history of Christianity have there been – in terms of absolute numbers – so many religious conversions as there are today. At no other time have first-generation Christians been as numerous as at the present day. No other age has seen so many Christian missionaries as our own. That comes as a surprise if you are looking exclusively at the countries of the Western world in which lack of religious belief, secularization and criticism of missionary activity are widespread. But it is a very different picture in many parts of Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania, which have for several decades now become the focal point for Christianity in numerical terms. At the same time, it is noticeable how in every continent the long-established examples of religious reorientation are being reproduced in different ways, becoming fluid and complex. On the other hand, conflicts of all kinds linger on: those between converts and their families; between churches who are losing members and those who are gaining new ones; and between religious communities, society and the state. But above all, in the course of the globalization of religious strategies for expansion, the context-related distinctions of religious reorientation and the reactions to this have become bewilderingly numerous. This situation is sufficient reason in itself for undertaking a project over the period of several years that has dealt with three aspects of religious conversion: conversion in the sense of an inner reorientation (vertical conversion), a change of confessional allegiance within the Christian tradition, and a change between different religious communities (horizontal conversion).

At the end of 2012, the results of the research project were published in a 956-page book bearing the joint German and English title: *Religiöse Grenzüber-*

*schreitungen. Studien zu Bekehrung, Konfessions- und Religionswechsel – Crossing Religious Borders. Studies in Conversion and Religious Belonging.* Edited by Christine Lienemann-Perrin and Wolfgang Lienemann, the work appeared as the 20th volume in the series “Studies in the History of non-European Christianity (Asia, Africa, Latin America)” published by Harrassowitz in Wiesbaden, Germany (EUR 98).

The research project was sponsored by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Between 2009 and 2011, three conferences were held in Basel, at which the 36 authors discussed their various contributions with one another. The end result of this led to numerous suggestions and cross-connections between the individual contributions. The authors, who come from Europe, Asia, Africa and America, discuss the problem of conversion from the perceptions of various disciplines, among them the studies of mission, religion, bible, history and law, systematic theology, practical theology, psychology of religion, canon law and ethnology. The focus is primarily on the multi-faceted variants of world Christianity. But reference is also made to dealing with conversions in predominantly Muslim societies and states, in the Hinduism of South-East Asia and in the religious traditions of China.

The 43 contributions to the volume are divided into six sections. The volume starts by dealing with the smallest unit, the converting individual, followed by the significance of the issue of conversion for churches and other religious communities. Finally, the topic is discussed at the broader societal level (the state, the legal system, and the international community). Each section closes with a comparison and conclusion, followed by a summary in

English. The last section includes various evaluations and suggests options for action.

At the invitation of the editor of *Current Dialogue*, who felt it helpful that this major book, published primarily in German, should also be known about and used by English-speaking audiences, I offer below a précis of the contents of each section of the book.

The **Introduction** presents the leading presuppositions and questions of the book, explains the terminology and various concepts of conversion and proposes a theory of the “religious field of conversion” (Wolfgang Lienemann).

### **Section I (Identity and Conversion in a Biographical Context)**

At the beginning and end of Section I, the main focus is on aspects of the psychology of religion in relation to conversion (Christoph Morgenthaler).

In between there are six contributions analyzing very different case studies of conversion. With one exception, which concerns conversion biographies in the mission history of Asia (Christine Lienemann-Perrin), they deal with conversion in the lives of people in Central Europe, whether it be that – without changing their confessional allegiance – they have experienced a deepening of their faith (David Plüss), or whether it be that they have made an actual change in their church membership or their religion – e.g., from Hinduism to Christianity (Sabine Jaggi). The case study on a conversion from Christianity to Islam in Switzerland analyzes the unspectacular religious reorientation of a young woman. This puts into perspective the widespread image of Swiss converts turning into Muslim fundamentalists (Susanne Leuenberger). A new phenomenon in Western societies is people with multiple religious identities (e.g., Christian-Buddhist; Christian-Hindu), without a change of religion having actually taken place in the formal sense. (Anand Nayak; Reinhold Bernhardt). They

characterise the individual's search for identity in religiously and culturally plural societies. The conclusion of Section I affirms that research into conversion needs to follow interdisciplinary paths in order to do justice to the multifaceted motives and forms of expression of conversion in today's society.

### **Section II (Historical Premises of Conversion and Change of Religious Adherence in Christianity)**

forms the transition from individual conversion to the significance of conversion for the faith communities from which people take their leave in order to join a new community – whilst still an ongoing process. The contributions are all arranged historically and the common factor is that they deal with the question of conversion in three key periods of importance for world Christianity: i.e., the first two centuries of Christian history, the Reformation era in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century and the period of colonial missionary activity at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In ancient Christianity (or: church), an individual's change of faith community was a novelty in the history of religion. So long as the early Christian groups had their existence within the Jewish religious community, it was not a case of a change of *religion* as such. It took well into the 4<sup>th</sup> century before the churches developed their own distinctive pattern as a religious community in the legal sense (Ulrich Luz, Moisés Majordomo).

At the time of the division of the church into different denominations in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, conversion in the sense of a change between the Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation reached a new level of intensity. In many cases, the boundaries and crossovers between those holding to the old faith and the followers of the Reformation remained fluid. As a result, changes of denomination were also fluid (Kim Siebenhüner; Barbara Mahlmann-Bauer). The 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a key period for colonial mission, brought about new perceptions of religious reorientation: instead of just advocating the radical renunciation of local religions in Asia, Africa and the New World, the idea

also developed of the gradual adaptation over time of Christianity into non-Western cultures: fusions or hybridization between local religions and Christianity were tried out by indigenous converts and, along with the European missionaries, reflected in theory (Guy Thomas).

From the very start, the increasingly pluralized confessional development of world Christianity in such times of transformation can already be recognized. From these contributions it follows that:

*There is no evidence for a trans-historic, trans-contextual, and transdenominational understanding of the term "conversion" ... Nonetheless, as a generic term, "conversion" remains a useful instrument, in order to distinguish different types of changing religious orientation and adherence (Wolfgang Lienemann, 369).*

In **Section III (How Churches Deal with Changes of Adherence – Societal and Ecumenical Contexts and Challenges)**, the eight contributions delve deeper into aspects of the potential for conflict that the topic involves within world Christianity. Faith communities are very directly affected by conversions, either by losing their own members to other communities, or by gaining adherents from other communities. The spectrum of positions could hardly be more diverse. On the one end, the Vatican proclaims right up to the present day that the means of eternal salvation is to be found solely through the Roman Catholic Church. Thus the official teaching of the Church only recognizes religious reorientation in one direction: turning towards the Roman Catholic Church. Whoever, on the contrary, turns away from the Church will incur ecclesiastical punishment such as excommunication (René Löffler). The Russian Orthodox Church prohibits the missionary activities of other churches as proselytizing and as encroachment upon its own canonical territory (Erich Bryner). For understanding and dealing with changes of church, denominational or religious allegiance in one part of the Protestant churches, it is important to distinguish between spiritual membership,

social affiliation and legal membership. Leaving the church or moving to a different one is recognized in terms of religious law, without calling into question the *character indelebilis* bestowed by baptism (Wolfgang Lienemann). In the USA, religious "switching" is widespread; a simple transferring from one denomination to another and then on to another (Darrell Guder). At the other end of the spectrum, some transfers between different churches are totally fluid: in Ghana (Cephas Omenyo) they are just as much the order of the day as in Brazil (Rudolf von Sinner), where religious mobility has frequently caused the churches themselves to change considerably, when in sponge-like fashion they soak up elements from totally different religious communities.

A further difference in internal Christian dealings with the issue of conversion is expressed in the following seven contributions in **Section IV (The Problem of Conversion between Christian Minorities and other Religions Representing a Dominant Majority)**. This is where other religious communities come predominantly into play, above all Islam, Hinduism and various indigenous religions in China. Apart from a few exceptions, Christianity exists as a minority religion among majority religions in the whole Asiatic region and has to make appropriate arrangements to come to terms with their respective demands for dealing with mission and conversion. In the "House of Islam", Orthodox Christianity has for centuries adjusted to the idea of not engaging in missionary work within Muslim society (see the conclusion of Christine Lienemann-Perrin). In Palestine, the volatile political situation sets different parameters for religious changes communicated in public, "so that the spiritual dimension of any possible conversion is undermined and the act of conversion itself gets politicised and the converts ostracised" (Mitri Raheb, 558). In Turkey, secularization has led neither to religious freedom for minorities nor to state neutrality in religious affairs (Hüseyin Aguiçenoglu). In India, religious conversions to Christianity trigger ever

more heated controversy. Mission and conversion are perceived in society at large as an attack on Hinduism and on Indian culture, which has to do not least with the encounter between mission-oriented religions (Christianity, Islam) and religions that renounce the recruitment of members from outside (Hinduism, Parseeism) (Anantanand Rambachan). Non-caste Hindus who become Christians find themselves accused of having converted purely on material grounds, which does not do justice to their complex and varied motivations – such as human rights, liberation, equality and spiritual reorientation (Sathianathan Clarke). In China, change of religion has for centuries only been known within most limited boundaries (Stephan Peter Bumbacher). In the context of being a sign of Christian self-awareness it is still today regarded as the intrusion of a foreign body (heterotopia) (Roman Malek). Christianity certainly offers great attractiveness in China today, giving birth to quite new variants of Christianity, such as the cultural Christians who deliberately distance themselves from the institutional churches and, even further away, the “Boss Christians” striving for economic success, and the innumerable house-churches, especially in rural areas.

Last and not least, a crucial factor in reaching an understanding of and dealing with the topic of conversion is state religious legislation. This is the subject of **Section V (Change of Religious Adherence, Proselytism, and Religious Freedom in State Constitutions, Political and Societal Reality)**. A series of case studies and an evaluation chapter give an analysis of state religious legislation in India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Algeria, Uganda, Nigeria and Switzerland (Sebastian C.H. Kim; Wilson S. Rehmat Suter und Kathrin Suter-Rehmat; Matti Justus Schindehütte; Roger Juillerat; Rosalind I.J. Hackett; Christoph Winzeler; Fazit: René Pahud de Mortanges). The legal positions in these countries have highly differing effects on the way they deal with change of religion. Particularly striking is the lack of synchronized action between countries

which enforced consideration of basic human rights following the Second World War, and the legal realities in other countries where religious freedom is only partially protected.

In Islamic countries, political elites frequently tend to exploit religion for the purposes of holding on to power. Not least in Islam and Hinduism it is the case that the understanding of human nature affects the way they deal with change of religion. Correspondingly, the rights of individual persons are significantly restricted, because they are not perceived as an autonomous individual but first and foremost as a member of their family and of their religious community. The legal differences between men and women in questions of religion also result in unequal treatment in relation to changing one’s religion.

**Section VI (Evaluation and Future Prospects)** compares, analyzes and pools together all the contributions contained in the book, once again noting the different perspectives and variety of disciplines. In a discussion of the contributions on conversion in the Indian context, Origen V. Jathanna emphasizes the connection between the deepening of faith and a change of religion. In a conversation with R. Bernhardt he considers “multiple religious *borrowing*” to be a more appropriate description of multiple religious identity than talking of “multiple religious *belonging*”. With regard to possible options for action in the formation of laws relating to religion, a distinction is made according to the specific contexts between five different groups of states (Wolfgang Lienemann; Rifa’at Lenzin).

Thus, different recommendations are formulated with regard to authoritarian non-religious states compared to those for authoritarian states with limited religious freedoms under state control; for states with a religiously-based constitution or a privileged religion; for states with a traditionally dominant religious community; or for states with a separation between state and religious communities. Likewise,

different recommendations are directed at missionary communities compared with those for state government bodies. At the same time, the considerable variations in understanding of what is meant by conversion illustrate how multi-layered world Christianity has become, and this is specifically discussed in its own right (M.Thomas Thangaraj). Proceeding from this, and in the light of biblical testimonies, consequences are drawn in relation to missionary activity (Christine Lienemann-Perrin). In the last contribution, the editors place a normative question at the centre: "What can and should a way of dealing with converts and conversion in today's global society look like, which is at the same time responsible, personally reflective and regulated in law?" (924). Following a typological distinction between conversions, three challenges are illustrated by examples of conversions and converts (conversion as a "happening", as a threat and as liberation). The editors' recommendations are derived from the insights of this volume as a whole. However, they do not necessarily and in every aspect reflect the opinions of all the authors of this volume. These recommendations are based on three premises (943-946): I quote extracts from these premises here:

(1) **Empirical premise:** It is a fact that there exist both large and small religious communities whose adherents are publically advocating for their convictions, creeds, dogmas, rites, and ethos. Such forms of activities are an expression of human communication that could not be totally suppressed in any time period.

(2) **Legal normative premise:** In terms of religion in our present pluralistic society, it is no longer acceptable if a legally constituted society privileges unilaterally one single religious community.

(3) **Religious normative premise:** Under the same conditions every religious community unavoidably has to perceive and to recognise the existence and activities of other religious communities, to

respect them and to explore opportunities and boundaries of a peaceful conviviality [...].

Furthermore, the following recommendations are based on a concept of "mission" not bound and limited to one single and specific religious tradition:

'Mission' is the self-reflection, reformulation and expression of a religious faith and its perspectives on the world and human beings as well as the inviting communication of such faith by its adherents to others (strangers and non-adherents).

1. Every religious community claiming for itself – and making use of – religious freedom (including the right to convert) should be ready to insist that the same forms of religious freedom are provided, within the bounds of rule of law, to all other religious communities as well. In analogy to what Immanuel Kant has formulated, the categorical imperative of religious freedom reads: *In all aspects concerning the religion act only according to the maxim by which you can at the same time want that it should become a general law.* This implies, vice versa, to abstain from missionary activities towards 'non-missionary religious communities' if they express that they do not want to be addressed in a missionary way.
2. If freedom of religion implies basically and without limitation the right to free religious commitment and self-binding, then it is also self-evident that every forced adherence to a religious community is, without exception, incompatible with religious freedom [...].
3. Religious freedom includes the right to communicate with others not belonging to one's own community and to invite them to share their convictions and conduct of life. Therefore, it is neither wise nor a convincing strategy and not even feasible if in interreligious dialogues the mutual witnessing of faith is treated as a taboo out of fear that the partners in dialogue may perceive faith

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- witness as an offence, or – even worse – that it could stimulate conversions. It is more realistic to take the risk of anger as well as of conversions and be ready to cope with such situations if they occur in a discursive way independently of the direction in which conversions may take place.
4. As far as religious conversions in relation to mission and interreligious dialogues are concerned, we recommend the following rules:
- a. General rules
- The right of a person to practise his or her own faith and to adhere to the religious community of his or her choice is to be respected without restraint.
  - Discrimination based on a specific religious adherence is to be ostracised and forbidden. [...]
  - Missionary activities of a religious community may not deprecate, abuse or distort the truths, convictions, creeds, dogmas, practices and customs of other religious communities.
  - The freedom of expression and public critique may not be suppressed. Interreligious critique may be based on an adequate and sufficient knowledge of what is criticised and has to be argued with good reasons carefully. Such criticism should go along with a strong capability to listen to others and in a spirit of empathy.
  - It is unavoidable that religious communities will make strong claims of validity regarding their dogmas, teachings and options for action. Thereby, they should endeavour not to denigrate other opinions and at the same time not to renounce well argued positions, convictions and statements.
  - Religious communities should not impose on anybody their public statements, convictions, actions and institutions; they have to respect every person's right to set boundaries for being influenced.
- b. Recommendations in regard to missionary communities
- If religious communication transgressing territorial or ethnic boundaries is planned, the protagonists should make efforts to gain an excellent knowledge of the local languages, customs and rules.
  - Despite the difficulties of distinguishing between legitimate missionary activities and unacceptable proselytism, the following criteria should be observed:
    - Religious invitation and advertising must be clearly non-violent at all times.
    - The transparency and the inviting character of missionary activities may not be linked with material gratifications (rewards, promises, remuneration).
    - A religious community accepting and receiving converts should be concerned that the converts don't denigrate the religion from which they opted out; rather it should try to communicate in an open and fair way with the former community of the convert.
    - Educational facilities (kindergartens, schools, universities etc.) founded and run by missionary religious communities should make transparent their aims at all times. Students should be accepted and get fees independent of their faith and religious background, and they should be able to practise their faith without discrimination. The teachings in religion provided by the religious institution running a school may not be declared compulsory for students of other faiths and non-religious students.
    - Religious communities practising mission may offer their diaconal activities to all people in need without regard to their religious adherence. Diaconal activities may not be used as means to aim at religious conversions. In the case that a person expresses the wish to convert, he or she should be informed that conversion is not

- necessary to profit from continuing diaconal services.
- In the case that missionary activities are provided for underage and people with disabilities it is essential to respect carefully the rights of these persons; the will of parents or legal guardians may neither be disregarded nor ignored.
- c. Recommendations in regard to organs of the state, mainly the state laws (judicial system)
- All efforts trying to establish a constitutional court with a comprehensive jurisdiction concerning human rights in states lacking such an institution thus far should be supported.
  - The free access of every person to the judicial institutions and courts in all cases of human rights violations, including religious rights, has to be provided.
  - Since religious discriminations and limitations of the religious freedom to join another religious community are taking place outside of the competence of state law, and since these discriminations and limitations are not forbidden, hindered and punished, it is necessary to establish and extend advocacy to deal with such cases.
  - To make use of religious freedom – including the change of religious adherence – often is difficult or even impossible due to family rights with religious implications or under the competence of religious authorities. All states should be recommended to develop a family law and rights independent from religious implications and authorities ('secular' family rights); such rights are important
- at least for persons not belonging to the dominant religious community within a given society.
- Religious law may guarantee that nobody is reclaimed and enlisted by and for a religious community against his or her will – neither concerning legal adherence nor financial contributions (fees or taxes).
5. It does not make much sense – although it may be well intended – if one tries to avoid prophylactically all possible misunderstandings and misinterpretations of verbal expressions and practical actions related to missionary activities. Likewise, to make demands in a vague way so as not to hurt religious sensibilities does not solve any problems. Of course, insults and defamations in interreligious relations have to be avoided and defeated, but this concern should not be at the expense of the free expression of opinion or of clear-cut positions. In interreligious communications differences should be expressed openly rather than be covered; otherwise a discourse including well-reasoned critique and self-critique would be made impossible. For taking interreligious dialogues seriously it is necessary to some degree to develop an intellectual and emotional stability of the participants on all sides.
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# A Report of the Consultation on Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Hindu Religion

**Dr Gana Nath Dash**

## **Introduction**

### **Consultation: background**

The World Council of Churches organized a consultation on “Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Hindu Religion” on 12 - 15 October 2011 at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey. The consultation brought together church leaders, theologians, scholars and practitioners of interreligious dialogue representing a variety of church traditions.

This particular consultation on “Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Hindu Religion” is part of the continuing reflection on the key issues of Christian self-understanding and witness in a religiously plural world being undertaken by the World Council of Churches.

Among concerns addressed in recent times, the question of the theological approach to religious pluralism has been an important part of the WCC agenda. At the suggestion of the 2002 Central Committee, some earlier study documents formed the backdrop for further exploration of this subject and included a number of religion-specific consultations such as this one in relation to Hinduism.

### **Consultation: framework**

The consultation on Christian self-understanding in the context of Hinduism sought to:

- Emphasize the importance of self-understanding in relation to the other.
- Encourage ecumenical reflection on Christian self-understanding in the context of Hinduism.
- Strengthen cooperation between Christians and Hindus in solving conflicts, peace-building, protecting human dignity and rights of the minorities.

- Call for in-depth mutual understanding and consensus about the permitted parameters of religious practices.
- Consider and recognize underlying religious differences and strive for a better understanding instead of creating barriers and antagonism.
- Reflect on complex contextual issues and seek collaboration to address those issues. Identify the root causes of violence in multi-religious societies, in order to promote non-violent conflict resolutions, justice, tolerance, gender equality and the elimination of all forms of religious and ideologically related injustice, violence and discrimination.
- Promote right relations with the Hindu community and strengthen trust and respect.
- Identify, deepen and share theological, spiritual and ethical resources and develop a concrete way of interreligious cooperation and bilateral dialogue.

### **Consultation: principles**

The consultation programme was governed by a set of principles established by the WCC, which sought to:

- Ensure participation from countries where Christians live among their Hindu neighbours. The participants represented India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, UK, Denmark and U.S.A.
- Ensure Dalit participation from India recognizing the fact that they constitute a large majority of Indian Christians.
- Invite participation from local, regional and national Christian bodies, WCC central committee members, theologians, missiologists and professors of religions, Indologists and scholars.

- Encourage the involvement of female participants.
- Solicit inputs from a wide range of local, regional and national churches so that their inputs can help shape the consultation project on Christian self-understanding in the context of Hinduism.
- Work with regional and national bodies to identify overarching areas of potential interests, needs and concerns.
- Foster a sense of community interest in and support for the need for Christian-Hindu dialogue for better and meaningful Christian self-understanding in the context of Hinduism.
- Help WCC member churches reflect more clearly and deeply on their own self-understanding in the context of Hinduism.
- Reflect on the complex issues that arose in this context of self-understanding in relation to Hindu religion.
- Identify issues and seek collaboration to address those issues which were relevant to the specific contexts.
- Emphasize the importance of sustainable dialogue, which needs to be based on respect, mutual understanding, tolerance and trust.
- Identify the root causes of violence in multi-religious societies in order to promote nonviolence, justice and tolerance.
- The consultation opening address was delivered by WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit who emphasized the need to come to terms with pluralism, to foster harmonious relationships with various religious traditions as well as explore new self-understanding and to develop theological hermeneutics and practice in the context of religious pluralism.
- The thematic focus was on “Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Hindu Religion”. Selected speakers addressed the theme through planned presentations. The papers were discussed with the participants at the consultation. The overall objective was to continue and enhance dialogue between Christians and Hindus as the best way to understand the other as well as one’s own self.
- The consultation aimed at fostering reflection on what it means to be a Christian in a world of many religions, and particularly what it means to be a Christian in a Hindu context.
- The consultation was part of a wider evidence-gathering exercise which greatly increased the understanding of the issues involved, such as dalit-adhivasi-tribal issues, conversion, religious fundamentalism, Hindutva etc.
- The consultation tried to establish a global framework for Christian-Hindu dialogue by providing an opportunity for the WCC to better understand and incorporate the priorities and issues of the member churches.

### **Overview of the Proceedings of the Consultation**

#### **Consultation: an overview**

- The consultation brought together 30 participants from eleven different countries. Participants were church leaders, theologians, professors, scholars, WCC central committee members and academics in a forum for consultation.
- The participants were from India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, United Kingdom, Denmark and North America.

The consultation included both presentation and group discussion.

Eight papers were presented. They were:

- Some Ecumenical Perspectives on Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Hinduism
- Christian Self-Understanding of World Religions in the Context of Religious Pluralism, with special reference to: Indian Situation: Insights and Impulsion from the Bible

- Living as a Community with Hindus: Hindu-Christian Relations in the Emerging Geopolitical Context
- Reflections on Approaches to Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Hindu Religion: A Dalit Perspective
- Human Liberation: Praxis for Interreligious Dialogue
- Politicisation of Religion and Hindu Fundamentalism
- Christian Mission and Ecclesiology in India: An Encounter with Hinduism in the Context of Conversion Debate
- Towards a Better Understanding on Christian-Hindu Relations and Identity in the Community

### **Summary of the Papers Presented at the Consultation**

#### **Paper 1: “Some Ecumenical Perspectives on Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Hinduism”**

*Rev. Dr Wesley Ariarajah*

Dr Wesley Ariarajah’s paper “served as an excellent introduction to the consultation. He not only shed light on the divergence of Christian and Hindu self-understanding, but also emphasized the perceptible difference between the two religions. Before going into details in his exposition, Dr Ariarajah wanted to clarify “Which Hinduism”, “Which Christianity” and “What do we hope to explore?”

The asymmetry between the Christian and the Hindu traditions has to be taken into serious consideration. He further emphasized that the Christian self-understanding had in the past been influenced by three factors:

1. Western colonial rule
2. Ignorance of other religious traditions by the international mission groups
3. The theological emphasis on uniqueness of Christianity and Christian faith, linked to figures such as Hendrik Kraemer

However, in ecumenical circles there had arisen a dialogue paradigm and a paradigmatic shift in the Christian

approach to other religions. As far as Hinduism was concerned, collaboration with it was necessary at the insistence of leaders like P. D. Devanandan, M. M. Thomas and many others.

The failure of missionary theology and the cultural revival of Hindu society after independence drove Indian Christians to the reality that they were a minority community. This created a sense of awakening in them, encouraging them to live in a relationship of dialogue and harmony with the Hindu community. There were theological, sociological and political issues with which the Christians as a minority community were confronted. Dalit issues, Hindu nationalism and the rise of Hindutva ideology, Christian conversion from Hinduism etc., have complicated the process of harmonious living and meaningful self-understanding of both groups. The Christian self-understanding of what it means to be a human and its challenges to the caste system has given rise to a liberative self-understanding of the Dalit Christians in the Indian context.

Emphasizing the radical difference between the two religions, Dr Wesley Ariarajah pointed out that this in no way should put a halt to Christian-Hindu dialogue but the differences between them should be identified, discussed and realistically bridged.

Dr Ariarajah explored three basic questions that are pertinent to ongoing Christian relationships with Hindu neighbours and to Hinduism as a religious tradition:

1. How have understandings of our own faith and that of Hindu neighbours influenced and affected our mutual relationships?
2. What are some of the specific beliefs and practices in both our religious traditions that promote or hinder our relationship?
3. What are some of the ways in which we as a Christian community can explore our understanding of ourselves and the Hindus that would help us address some of the problems

we face in our relationship today, and would enable us to live in greater harmony?

**Paper 2: “Christian Self-Understanding of World Religions in the Context of Religious Pluralism with Special Reference to Indian Situations: Insights and Impulsion from the Bible”**

*Professor Dr Joseph Pathrapankal*

There is a rich variety of pluralism – ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious. Basic to pluralistic thinking is the need and urgency of accepting and respecting others with all their uniqueness, not as entities opposed to oneself or as an extension of oneself, but as entities with their own inalienable qualities and characteristics. Pluralism means difference and also distinction, but it is not decisiveness and opposition.

Once pluralism is accepted as a basic reality of the world and its historical processes at all levels, it becomes easier for all to see the legitimacy of “the other” existing and operating at various levels of life, and also the positive role pluralism can play in enriching the world.

But a historical analysis of the church’s attitude towards religious pluralism reveals that the attitude of tolerance was replaced by an attitude of Christian exclusivism which marked the history of mission in India during 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century colonialism. The missionary propaganda of the colonial era – its dominant nature and an aggressive attitude of superiority – reduced other religions to nothingness.

But now the time has come for a different kind of relationship and attitude towards religious pluralism; a relationship of dialogue so as to develop a proper self-understanding of ourselves. Through dialogue, a new kind of relationship can be established with Hindus so all can live in harmony, with dignity and healthy relationships.

Emphasizing the importance of dialogue, Fr Pathrapankal offered the challenge of complementary thinking in interreligious dialogue. There is a dimension in which

people can maintain their own religious identity and authenticity and at the same time open themselves to relate to other religions and thereby experience a new vitality and dynamism in the realm of their own religious experience.

Any real religious identity has to be marked by authenticity and openness, through which every religion articulates its inner meaning and flourishes in an atmosphere of mutuality and cooperation. One of the important signs of our times is that religions as a whole are showing healthy features in this area. In the context of interreligious dialogue, religious authenticity marked by a particular religious identity, and a complemented religious experience of the other religion marked by openness to other avenues of thoughts in widening the horizon, are vital.

The future of interfaith dialogue in India has to move from theory to practice. It has to develop a new action plan. This new action plan has to take into account the changing geopolitical context marked by technology, urbanization, globalization, widespread poverty, population expansion and many other human problems. Interreligious engagement has to take into consideration the human predicaments, environmental problems and many other related issues.

The new culture of interreligious dialogue will remain a myth and merely a sophisticated idea, as well as an intellectual recreation, unless it prepares all religions to be prepared to engage themselves in a common programme of global involvement for a better human society and social order.

**Paper 3: Living as a Community with Hindus: Hindu-Christian Relations in the Emerging Geopolitical Context Today**

*Professor Dr K. P. Aleaz*

Living as a community with Hindus in the emerging geopolitical context has not been harmonious. It has been marked by certain incidents of violence that have scarred the relationship. This strained relationship has been caused by different

factors for which both sides are responsible. Professor Aleaz analyzes the patterns of such violence. In so doing, he talks about Christian violence against the gospel and Hindu violence against the Christians. But the positive note lies in the fact that there is an emergence of creative understanding on the parts of both.

The first factor is forced conversion to Christianity through the use of force, fraud, inducement and allurements. This is now widely considered as Christian violence against the gospel. A second factor, Professor Aleaz adds, is related to the projection of Christianity as a foreign religion. Against such backdrops Hindu violence against Christians has erupted in different pockets of India.

Revival of Indian consciousness of the greatness of its philosophical past has tended in recent years to develop a nationalistic tone in philosophy as well as in politics. The resulting tendency of extremism in the religions of India has not been a healthy sign. Hindu nationalist groups under various names have staged opposition to non-Hindu religious existence. The same opposition to Christianity and Christian mission was voiced in a different way by English-educated Indians from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

Response from the neo-Hindus starting from Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Mahatma Gandhi towards Christianity and Christian mission has been negative. Like many Western-educated Indians, they were influenced and confronted by Christianity. They were influenced by the person of Christ and confronted with the superior attitudes of arrogance of the Christians. This contact and confrontation with Western Christianity no doubt helped the neo-Hindus to reconstruct and reform Hinduism. This in turn created a sense of nationalistic awareness which severely criticized the foreignness, imperialism and materialism associated with Christianity.

Mahatma Gandhi typified the Hindu attitude towards Christianity – an attraction towards Christ and repulsion of

ecclesial structures and missionary propaganda. The traditional approach of Hinduism towards Christianity and its truth claims has been seen as a challenge and a threat rather than a source of illumination to Hinduism.

It is necessary that Indian Christians look forward to a future when instead of committing violence against the gospel, they can enable the gospel to emerge from within the hermeneutical context of India. The gospel of God in Jesus emerging from within India would thereby be India's own gospel with new insights and meanings, and not something foreign. Also, such a gospel experience would entail one's own conversion and not be the result of proselytizing through the use of force, fraud or allurements.

Hindu-Christian relations in the emerging geopolitical context in India would depend on an emerging gospel of God in Jesus from the context of Hindu faith-experience. If this happens, we can rightly say that Indian Christians are in a process of converting to an Indian religio-cultural context. The Indian religio-cultural context would determine the content of the gospel of God in Jesus for India. The gospel is not pre-formulated, but is in the process of formulation. The faith-experience of the Indian Christian is not pre-formulated, but is in the process of formulation through the guidance of Hindu and other religious experiences. Living as a community with Hindus becomes a reality in terms of such a vision and its practice.

Hindu-Christian existence in India is not just a matter of course or a fact of history, but a reason d'être in its own right for the possibility of a mutual convergence, mutual enrichment, cross-fertilization and mutual interaction.

#### **Paper 4: Reflections on Approaches to Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Hinduism: A Dalit Perspective**

*Dr James Massey*

The multi-faith context in India provides a unique opportunity for adherents of any faith. It helps one explore one's own

identity and self-understanding in the multi-religious milieu. The author's identity is shaped by the contexts such as India (Hindu), Panjabi (Sikh), Dalit and Christian. The author tries to explore his understanding of his faith in the larger context of Hinduism.

The problematic of the "caste" in the framework of Hinduism calls for better scrutiny of its religious backing, be it Vedic or non-Vedic. Views vary and affirmations are ambiguous, but the fact remains that the caste system is still in existence, though due to various factors it is losing its grip considerably.

Christian self-understanding in the context of Hinduism from a Dalit perspective, focuses from the outset on the vicious oppression of caste. This myth of caste – a reality that has been perpetuated and sustained for three millennia – has to be analyzed using dharmic and karmic hermeneutical tools. The *Varnasramadharma* of *Rid-Veda*, caste rules and duties re-emphasized by *Manusmriti*, and further affirmation of Varna purity and duties in *Bhagawad Gita* etc., sustained caste ideology and reinforced it to become the vital element in canons of Hindu Dharma.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, social reformers who were caste Hindus, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Mahatma Gandhi made efforts to reinterpret Dharma. But their efforts were limited to the sphere of religious equality only. Social equality was not a part of their emphasis. The Hindu reformers, including Gandhi, emphasized equal respect for all but strongly maintained the *Varnasramadharma*.

Ambedkar was highly critical of the *Varnasramadharma* and pointed out its weaknesses, rigidity and harmfulness to the society of human beings. He further stressed that such a harmful rigid system could not be reformed. The real change, he believed, would come only after destroying the entire system. As far as the Christian Dalits were concerned, there has

been no escape from the tyranny of the caste even after changing their religion from Hinduism to Christianity.

There have been various Christian approaches to Hinduism in the past and in recent years. In reaction to the missionary exclusivist approach there was an early Christian inclusivist approach, and the recent interreligious solidarity approach rejects the melting-pot approach. In conclusion, the author calls for a paradigm shift taking into account the Dalit Christian's self-understanding in the multi-religious context where Hinduism stands as the all-consuming giant. The Dalit world-views, Dalit spirituality, Dalit plight for social justice etc. have to be taken into consideration. The author concluded his remarks saying, "Anyone who enters into dialogue or tries to build solidarity with another faith has to take into account the concerns of Dalits and other oppressed communities more radically."

#### **Paper 5: Human Liberation: Praxis for Interreligious Dialogue**

*Dr L. Jayachitra*

Liberation is the core concept of interfaith dialogue. Orthopraxis is preferred to orthodoxy in this context. A history of interfaith dialogue shows us a lesser success record when it has focused on doctrines rather than on demands for coming together to share common aspirations and hopes for liberation.

The author of the paper quoted Aloysius Pieris qualifying the liberative force of religions:

*The core of any religion is the liberative experience that gave birth to that religion and continues to be available to successive generations of human kind. It is this primordial experience that functions as the core of a religion, at any time, in any given place, in the sense that it continuously recreates the psycho-spiritual mood proper to that particular religion, imparting at the same time its own peculiar characters to the socio-cultural manifestation of that religion. It is precisely through this primordial experience that a religion resolves its*

*recurrent crises and regenerates itself in the face of new challenges. In fact, the vitality of any religion depends on its capacity to put each successive generation in touch with the core-experience of liberation.*

In the present scenario of Asian religious pluralism in general and of India in particular, solidarity could be extended to one another to engage in common problems. The intersectionality of caste, class and gender issues relating to human liberation has to be taken as a praxis for interfaith dialogue. Here the author has tried to do a contrapuntal reading of two liberationists in history who continuously conversed in and with their own religious spheres to challenge the hegemonies caused by the various dividing factors. The first is the historical Jesus, and the other is Ambedkar, an Indian icon of liberation.

The author has made a comparison between Jesus and Ambedkar, keeping liberation as the primary concern. Ambedkar's passion to liberate Indian subalterns from the hierarchical clutches of caste-ism, classism and patriarchy resonates with Jesus' approach to redeem the poor peasants in rural Galilee from the religious authority of the Jerusalem high priests and the political tyranny of the Roman imperial government.

Dalit liberation in an Indian context should be backed by political, economic and religious freedom to break the hegemony of the predominant Hindu fundamentalists. Subaltern liberation should be the motif of interfaith dialogue.

As far as the subalterns are concerned, interfaith interactions are political and moral acts of praxis, which help them to reverse the asymmetry of socio-cultural and political relations and make an ethical judgement on dominant social structures, push them to the peripheries and erase their cognitive agency. Interfaith interactions enable people to dream and design a new world together.

The interreligious cooperation in the praxis of the liberation of the whole cosmos,

including humanity, makes a call to move from "dialogue" to "diapraxis". This diapraxis aims to alleviate the unjustifiable suffering of humans and nature for which all religions need to take responsibility.

### **Paper 6: "Hindutva" and Politicization of Religion**

*Dr Mathews George Chunakara*

The history of the systematic practice of the politicization of religion in India is as old as the pre-independence era. Colonial forces that came to India at various periods employed the tactic of using one community against the other for their convenience. The British who ruled India for more than hundred years were no exception. They pitched one community against the other for their own economic gain as well as for their survival, thus weakening the freedom movement and people's struggle against colonialism. The infusion of a feeling of anxiety among the Muslim community, creation of separate electorates for the Muslims and special reserved seats for the Muslims were the handiwork of the British who sowed seeds of communal hatred and disharmony.

*Hindutva* or Hindu-ness was developed by Vinayak Damodarr Sarvakar in the 1920s. He was the one who first attempted to describe *Hindutva*. According to him Hinduism and *Hindutva* are not the same. Hinduism is only one aspect of Hindu identity, whereas *Hindutva* embraces all aspects of thought and activity of the whole being of the Hindu race. Sarvakar's elaboration of *Hindutva* provided the ideological foundations of Hindu Nationalism marked by fidelity to three things: *Pitrabhumi* (fatherland), *Matrubhumi* (motherland) and *Punyabhumi* (holyland).

Subsequently, M.S. Golwalker shaped the social and political dimensions of *Hindutva* by emphasizing one nation (Hindu), one language (Sanskrit) and one religion (Hinduism). Both Sarvakar and Golwalker defined the contours of *Hindutva* and Hindu Nationalism which, in a way, became the framework for many Hindu

nationalistic organizations who advocate *Hindutva*.

In the post-modern India of today, many Hindu nationalist groups promote the *Hindutva* ideology as a way of promoting Hindu cultural nationalism to wield political strength in an aggressive way. The ascendancy of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power, following its impressive performance in the March 1998 national election, was a triumph for *Hindutva*. There are various factors that contributed to the increasing strength of the BJP and the politicization of Hindu religion. One of the reasons is the practice of secularism in India, which in turn produces religious identity, and another could be the way that Hinduism has been made more relevant to capitalistic modernity thus arousing a cultural-national pride.

Christian self-understanding in the context of *Hindutva* needs to be articulated. A distinction has to be made between Hinduism and *Hindutva*. Indian Christians should try to understand the genuine concerns of the advocates of *Hindutva*. In order to do so, a historical study of the impact of foreign invasions on Hindus has to be undertaken which will throw light on the atrocities committed by foreign religious invaders and colonizers, both Muslims and Christians. Dr Mathews George Chunakara has emphatically said, "We should bear in mind that *Hindutva* ideology and the essence of Hindu religion are not the same." The adherents of *Hindutva* ideology manifestly advocate a monolithic culture and one religion which goes against the very spirit of pluralism of Indian culture. In this context, an ideology that calls for a nationalism that does not respect, acknowledge and foster the identities of India's diverse peoples, cultures and religions – especially those of the subaltern groups and minorities – would not succeed as an ideology and could never be an Indian ethos.

It is of paramount importance for us to make an objective analysis to distinguish between *Hindutva* and the Hindu religion. We need to be aware that current trends in today's society are leading to the

politicization not only of the Hindu religion but of all major religions of the world in different contexts.

### **Paper 7: Christian Mission and Ecclesiology in India: Encounter with Hinduism in the Context of the Conversion Debate**

*Professor Sebastian Kim*

Conversion from Hinduism to Christianity has been widely debated as it leads to serious problems. Missionary activities in relation to conversion have been vigorously criticized by many Indian leaders of the pre- and post-independent eras as they have led to serious problems in society as well as contravening Hindu religious ethos. In order to stop this practice, several pieces of legislation have come into force. Conversion has been one of the most controversial issues in the Hindu-Christian relationship.

In response to the Hindu objection to conversion, the author has proposed six distinct models for dealing with the problem of conversion in post-independence India: the counter-culture model, the authentic Indian church model, the secular model, the inculturation model, the liberation model, and the Spirit movement model. These models also represent six theological strands: redefining conversion as *metanoia* (turning to God); indigenising the church; creating a Christ-centred secular fellowship; synthesizing Hinduism and Catholicism; liberation theology; and emphasizing the works of the Holy Spirit, respectively. According to the author, these models are not intended as comprehensive models for Indian ecclesiology but they should be regarded as theological models for the Christian Indian community in response to the problem of conversion.

The six theological models of the Indian attempt to solve the problem of conversion have made significant contributions toward answering the question in India. Although the terms and concepts of theological interpretations may be specific to India, they could also be applied to

other contexts as well. The issue of conversion is not unique to India, nor are the theological premises of counter-culture, authentic, secular, inculturation, liberation and spirituality models. But in order that these theologies may engage wider contexts, they need to be examined and sharpened in their own contexts first, so there can be a hermeneutical circle of reflection and evaluation of these models and openness toward the possibilities of new models of church applicable to our own situations.

### **Paper 8: Christian Self-Understanding of Hinduism: Some Random Reflections**

*Fr Dr K. M. George*

Christianity, especially in its predominant Western stream and as has been represented in Asian-African countries since the colonial-missionary period, seems to have a linear, singularistic vision of reality with an emphasis on dogmatic definitions and defined borders. Bitter controversies and conflicts arose from the conviction that truth is one and single and it should be interpreted and understood only in a single way.

This Western-Christian, singularistic approach – inherited by most Christians in India – lies in marked contrast with the pluralistic Indian perception that truth is one but is interpreted and understood by learned sages in many different ways (*Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti*).

Sadly, the Christian search for identity has never been without the inquisitorial search for the enemy, the heretic and the dissident in large parts of its history. In Christian history, the singularistic approach was greatly reinforced during the colonial-missionary era in the last millennium. It made truth claims with a self-confidence verging on absolute authority and total intolerance of other perspectives. This exclusivism, buttressed by political, economic and cultural hegemony, shaped its singular vision. The Western mindset considered this singular, linear vision as the enlightened, rational and only true understanding of reality.

The plurality of perspectives is the hallmark of Indian religions, be they Sanskritic or Dravidic. The term “Hinduism” is an umbrella word – a Western levelling during the colonial period which does not do justice to describe this Indic culture as a religion on the same terms as Semitic religions such as Judaism, Christianity or Islam. The Indian religious tradition in its totality could be considered as a way of life, with beliefs and practices, mythologies and philosophies, sacred texts and folk tales, popular religion and cultic patterns, abstruse logical, philosophical discussions, art and architecture, science and sublime literature, mystical labyrinths and spiritual techniques, brutally oppressive caste and gender discrimination and so on and so forth, that arose mainly in the Indian subcontinent over four millennia.

Looking at Christianity from the holistic vantage point of this universe of many systems, the former would appear to be a straight and simplistic concept of human destiny and salvation. The doctrinal definitionism and the neat border of conscious and rational faith in Christianity appears to be alien to a world view that encompasses theistic, atheistic and transtheistic streams of the human religious quest.

We human beings have established our identities over the names and concepts and knowledge of God. This has kept us overconfident and divided. But we should know rather that we have plunged into the ignorance and darkness of the knowledge of God which should serve as a counterpoint to our overconfidence. Whatever religion to which one may belong, if one considers oneself as a fellow pilgrim then the mantles of their separate identities are shed off.

### **Consultation Discussions and Outcomes**

The consultation document set out a series of specific questions and also invited general comments.

A number of issues were raised and the following common themes emerged from the consultation:

- Overall need for guidance in Christian self-understanding in the context of Hinduism was recognized and the papers presented were widely debated.
- The participants defined several critical areas of concern regarding Christian-Hindu relations. Those critical areas of concern needed further analytical work.
- Communalism in the contemporary Indian context is a deep form of antagonism and antipathy between communities with different cultural and religious identities.
- Based on fear and ignorance of the other, communalism has given rise to conflicts and violence between communities.
- Regional reviews and appraisals (certain matters were exclusively related to India) and analytical work on specific issues were undertaken for further reflection.
- Fundamentalism is a threat to communal harmony. It has been manifested as a militant form of religious separatism.
- A substantial number of participants clearly felt the need for dialogue with the advocates of Hindutva philosophy.
- Critical areas of concern included issues relating to Dalits, women, caste, religious conversion, mission and religious fundamentalism etc.

The participants of the consultation prioritized the following actions and inputs in their discussions:

- Self-understanding is influenced by religious socialization.
- Religious identity and religious complementarity are two sides of the same coin.
- Hindus and Christians have mutually influenced each other down the centuries in different ways.
- There have been many points of tension and contrast leading to misunderstanding and antagonism,

which have probably been conditioned by narrow self-understanding on the part of the two traditions.

- Hindu-Christian relations in contemporary India have not been harmonious.
- The rise of religious fundamentalism has marred the relationship.
- There is a need for Hindu-Christian collaboration in the struggle for justice, peace and harmonious living in the context of religious pluralism.
- Ecumenical solidarity among Hindus and Christians is important; solidarity not in spite of but because of the differences.
- The rediscovery and appropriation of "spiritual" dimensions of both traditions is important.
- The rigid customs regulating social behaviour and depriving men and women of individual liberty were focused upon. Dominant power structures of caste, patriarchy and hierarchy were discussed.
- Social issues related to women, caste, Dalits, Tribals, Adivasis, conversion from Hinduism to Christianity and vice versa were highlighted.
- The current geo-political environment, both national and international, has provided both new challenges and new opportunities for the understanding of religious pluralism and the advancement of collaboration between religions.
- Prioritization of issues of gender-caste-based violence and recommendations of measures to eliminate violence on national and international levels were discussed.
- Harmful traditional and customary practices of caste can be eradicated only when there is a fundamental social change, which will occur with attitude changes at all levels.
- Religious bigotry and fanaticism are at the heart of many crises confronting both Hindus and Christians. Investigation, recognition, understanding and application of the true fundamentals of Hinduism and Christianity could provide a way forward.

- Multi-religious belonging offers opportunities for more cultural exchanges, enrichment and interpenetration. Multi-religious belonging should not be divorced from spirituality.
- Greater emphasis should be given to a dialogue of life where men and women should come together to fight injustice, discrimination, exploitation, social injustice and violation of human rights.
- The current state of Hindu-Christian dialogue should be re-examined.
- The elitist nature of Hindu-Christian dialogue has excluded non-elitist participation for certain reasons. But the future of Hindu-Christian dialogue is dependent on efforts at better understanding of each other.

### Conclusion

The input received from the participants of the consultation clearly showed that there has been a positive move towards meaningful Christian self-understanding in the context of Hindu religion. The majority of the participants, if not all, expressed their absolute commitment to dialogue. There should be openness, mutual understanding, reciprocal witnessing and critical questioning which would lead to better self-understanding of one's religion in relation to the other. Religious traditions are hermeneutical processes: they do develop, change and sometimes improve in response to circumstances and in dialogue with their contexts. The consultation process has generated a substantial volume of information and insights that could certainly be used to help evaluate the Christian self-understanding process in the context of Hindu religion. The participants expressed their desire for further consultative discussions on Christian self-understanding. The consultation was committed to creating an atmosphere in which the pragmatic reflection on contemporary issues went hand in hand with responsiveness to the subject of Christian self-understanding in the context of Hindu religion.

*The above is an edited and slightly abbreviated version of the report of the consultation prepared by Dr Gana Nath Dash who organized and administered the consultation in his role as Programme Consultant for Interreligious dialogue and cooperation, WCC.*

*The communiqué issued at the close of the meeting in October 2011 follows:*

### **Communiqué**

#### **Christian Self-Understanding in Relation to Hindu Religion**

A consultation with the participation of thirty persons from most of the major traditions of the Christian church met at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, from the 12 - 15 October 2011, under the auspices of the World Council of Churches, to explore the issues of Christian self-understanding in relation to their Hindu neighbours and to Hinduism as a religious tradition. The participants, who were scholars and practitioners of interfaith dialogue in local contexts, included church leaders and specialists in religions, theology, missiology, Indology as well as social and political scientists. They were drawn from different parts of India and from other South and South-East Asian countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Indonesia, where Christians and Hindus live together in significant numbers. The consultation was part of a series of consultations that the WCC has organized to explore Christian self-understanding in relation to other world religions – Islam, Judaism and Buddhism.

In his opening address at the consultation, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit emphasized the challenges the churches are facing in our day to respond creatively to religious plurality, to foster harmonious relations between religious traditions and to explore in greater depth the significance of religious plurality for Christian theology, practice and self-understanding.

The consultation began with the recognition that, on the whole, Hindu-Christian relationships have been a positive experience in history. India's attitude to plurality in general, and the Hindu approach to religious diversity in particular, had enabled many religious traditions to live together in harmony with Hinduism for most of its history. Hindu-Christian dialogue has been part of the WCC programme on Interfaith dialogue from the time it was initiated in 1971. The programme has had the advantage of building on the ongoing Hindu-Christian relations and dialogue from the time Christianity first arrived in India in the first century. The consultation also noted the issues and problems that arose in this relationship with the subsequent arrival of Christianity in company with Western colonization of Asia and the missionary expansion that went with colonialism. This history of nexus between the missionaries and colonialists has been the cause of mutual misunderstandings and misconceptions of each religion in regard to the other. Christians, in particular, need to remove some of the misconceptions about Hindu religion that were promoted in the course of the missionary effort. Christian self-understanding in relation to other religious traditions has grown and changed over the centuries, and mapping these changes and the historical circumstances that brought them about was part of the task of the consultation. Today, the rise of religious fundamentalism and religious extremism in many parts of the world, and the recent tensions in India over the issue of conversions and the rise of Hindu nationalism, calls for an urgent review of Hindu-Christian relationships.

Based on the sharing of experiences on Hindu-Christian relations from many contexts, scholarly expositions on the issues involved, and on the basis of discussions that followed, the consultation highlighted the following:

#### **Dialogue of life**

To many, the concept of dialogue conjures the image of scholars and teachers of religion coming together to explore their

respective doctrines. While these formal dialogues have their place, the consultation emphasized the importance of recognizing, affirming and enhancing the ongoing "dialogue of life" that had been prevalent and continues to be the bedrock of Hindu-Christian relations over many centuries. Also to be affirmed is "dialogue of action", where the adherents of Hindu and Christian religions come together to join forces in their struggle for justice, peace, human rights and other issues of common concern to the community. The consultation was also conscious of the common issues faced by women in the context of patriarchy that run across all religious traditions, and it underlined the need to strengthen the women to women relationship in interfaith dialogue. It also spoke of the deep spiritual dimensions that Hindus bring to the "dialogue of spirituality" that individuals and ashrams have promoted in many parts of India. It noted that developing a new theological, spiritual and practical approach to religious plurality is one of the important challenges to the churches in our day.

#### **Mission and conversion**

While recognizing the long history of positive relationship, it is also important to acknowledge the difficulties that have marked Hindu-Christian relationships, partly because of the different self-understandings they carry as religious traditions. Christian missions in India and other parts of Asia have been among the contentious issues in Hindu-Christian relations. It is part of Christian self-understanding that they bear witness to their faith and be in service to the people among whom they live. Many Hindus readily admit to the beneficial effects of Christian missions in bringing education, health care, social justice and liberation. However, Hindus have also had considerable problems with some Christians' exclusive claims, the creation of culturally alternate communities, and the negative presentation of Hindu religion and its values as part of the preaching of the gospel. This reality calls on the churches to re-think the assumptions,

presuppositions and goals of mission that were formulated during the colonial period.

The conversion debate in India, especially since it has also led to a number of instances of violence and laws against conversion, has raised a number of issues related to religious freedom, the rights of individuals and communities to change, practice and propagate their faith, and the use of unethical methods in search of converts or to prevent persons moving from one faith to another. The consultation delved into the complex realities of the development and the current manifestations of the *Hindutva* ideology. While recognizing the fact that the proponents of *Hindutva* represent only a small sector within the Hindu community, the trend of politicization of religion affects the long tradition of religious tolerance and communal harmony in India. The participants acknowledged the rich traditions of spirituality and tolerance of Hindu religion and also underscored that they do not equate *Hindutva* ideology with that of the Hindu religion. The consultation called on Christians to pay attention to some of the issues that tend to promote extremist reactions from within the Hindu fold. It reaffirmed rejection of all forms of aggressive and unethical methods of witnessing to one's faith, from wherever these may come. It also affirmed the need to make the Hindus more aware of the internal diversities within Christianity on this issue. While welcoming the recent ecumenical document, "Recommendations for Conduct: Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World", the consultation recommends that Christians continue the work further to explore some of the specific theological issues on missions and conversions raised in the Hindu-Christian context. The consultation also affirmed the need for building up a cordial relation and strengthening of dialogue and collaboration between the adherents of Christian and Hindu religions. It also emphasized the need for engaging in dialogue with those who take hard-line positions.

### **Social justice**

One of the areas that called for the special attention of the consultation was the way Hindu and Christian religious self-understandings have worked out in the organization of society. The Hindu social organization on the basis of caste hierarchy, which was established and given religious legitimacy by a stream within the Indian religious heritage, marginalized a significant segment of the population as "outcastes". This social reality has been a bone of contention in Hindu-Christian relationships. While many Dalits, Tribals and Adivasis, who have endured social oppression for centuries, have embraced Christianity as a way to find their dignity and to escape the clutches of the caste structure, sections of Hindu society see this as a disruption of their social fabric. In this area, Christians are often put into the predicament of having to choose between maintaining good relationships and standing for justice and human rights; many recognize this as an issue that calls for advocacy, solidarity or dialogue, as the situation demands. It also calls for alliances across the religious and secular divides in search for greater justice for all.

### **Growing together**

The consultation was mindful that Hinduism and Christianity, as religious traditions that have initially evolved and developed in geographic isolation and in very different cultural and social contexts, are significantly different from one another and bring very distinct gifts to the religious quest of humankind. Each of these traditions holds dimensions of spiritual life that can lead to mutual enrichment and correction.

The consultation is convinced that a genuine encounter with the spiritual dimensions of Hinduism can enlighten and enrich Christian experience and theology. In this regard, recovering the spiritual dimensions and the interiority of Christian life as a community of Jesus, and a renewed emphasis on the Reign of God, were seen as important to the life of the church in the Hindu context.

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**List of Participants at the Consultation**

**Dr Kalarikkal Poulous Aleaz**, Professor of Religion Bishop's College, India

**Prof. Dr S. Wesley Ariarajah**, Professor, Drew University School of Theology, USA

**Acharya Dr John R. Biswas**, Satal Ashram, Methodist Church in India, India

**Rt. Rev. Duleep Kamil De Chickera**, Church of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Sri Lanka

**Bishop Bachu Devamani**, Moderator of Dalit Commission, NCCI / Bishop, Church of South India, India

**Rev. Dn Priscilla Papiya Durairaj**, Church of North India, India

**Rt Rev. Dr Govada Dyvasirvadham**, Bishop Krishna Godavari, Church of South India, India

**Rev. Dr Roger Gaikwad**, General Secretary, National Council of Churches in India, India

**Rev. Dr Prof. Kondothra M. George**, Professor, Orthodox Theological Seminary, India

**Dr Aswathy John**, Professor, Serampore College, Theology Dept., India

**Dr Sebastian Kim**, Professor, York St John University, United Kingdom

**Ms Sanchita Kisku**, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, United States of America

**Rev. Dr Jayachitra Lalitha**, Professor, Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, Church of South India, India

**Rev. Dr Paulraj Mohan Larbeer**, Secretary, Board of Theological Education of Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC), India

**Bishop Dr Isaac Mar Philoxenos**, President, Senate of Serampore Colleges, Bishop of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, India

**Bishop Dr Mathews Mar Thimothios**, Bishop, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, India

**Rev. Dr (habil.) James Massey**, Director, Centre for Dalit Subaltern Studies, India

**Dr (Sr) Evelyn Monteiro**, Professor, Vidyajoti, Pune, Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod, India

**Fr Joseph Pathrapankal**, C.M.I., Former Rector, Dharmaram Pontifical Institute and Director, Anugraha Renewal Centre, India

**Dr Kali Bahadur Rokaya**, President of CCA and General Secretary of National Council of Churches of Nepal, Nepal

**Rt Rev. Paul Shishir Sarker**, Moderator, Church of Bangladesh, Bangladesh

**Rev. Dr Martin Sinaga**, Secretary, Inter-religious dialogue, Lutheran World Federation, Switzerland

**Rev. Dr Kurapati David Udayakumar**, Principal, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, India

**Rev. Dr Albert Sundararaj Walters**, Professor of Religions, Anglican Church (Diocese of West Malaysia), Malaysia

**Prof. Kenneth Zysk**, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

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## Christian Self-Understanding in the

### Context of Indigenous Religions

*As part of the World Council of Churches project of reflecting on Christian self-understanding in the context of religious plurality, a number of “religion specific” consultations were held during the period 2008-2012. The reports and linked papers from the earlier consultations on Buddhism, Islam and Judaism have been published in previous issues of Current Dialogue. This issue also contains a slightly abbreviated report from the consultation on Christian self-understanding in the context of Hinduism (the full report and the linked papers will appear in a book to be published jointly by ISPCK and the WCC).*

*Shortly after my arrival at the WCC in September 2011, it was agreed to hold a consultation on Christian self-understanding in the context of indigenous religions. This duly happened in February 2012. Due to logistical and other reasons there was a particular regional focus on Latin America. For a number of reasons, the methodology for this consultation was rather different. This was partly due to the size of the group and the speed with which the consultation had to be put together. Rather than asking participants to write individual papers on specific topics, we asked them to come prepared to contribute to a discussion on how Christian self-understanding in relation to a number of key themes was, or might be, reshaped by the insights of indigenous*

*religions; for example, the indigenous understanding of God, Creation, Land, Christ, Church and Justice. This led to several days of very fruitful discussions. The “essence” of these is captured in the communiqué given below which also functions as an interim report of the meeting. Below we also give the list of those present.*

*It is important to say that the original vision for the consultation was that of Maria Chavez Quispe, who was responsible for the desk for indigenous peoples at the World Council of Churches. The staff of the office for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation had been looking forward to working with Maria not only in the planning but also in the running of the consultation. Very sadly, the recurrence of Maria’s cancer in autumn 2011, which was to lead to her untimely death in July 2012, meant that Maria was not able to be physically with us at the consultation in February 2012 – though she was certainly there in spirit. It seems appropriate to dedicate this report to the memory of Maria Chavez Quispe in gratitude for all that she gave to the interests and concerns of indigenous peoples throughout her life. It is hoped to publish more detailed reflections during 2014.*

**Clare Amos**

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Between 6-9 February 2012, a consultation exploring “Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Indigenous Religions” was convened at the Evangelical High School of Theological Studies (ISEDET), Buenos Aires, Argentina. The consultation was organized by the World Council of Churches programme for Interreligious dialogue and cooperation, working in partnership with CLAI (Latin American

Council of Churches), and with valued assistance from FAIE (Fellowship of Evangelical Churches in Argentina) and the Anglican Diocese of Argentina. The consultation was one of a series that the WCC has organized in recent years, exploring Christian self-understanding in the context of a specific other religion or religious tradition.<sup>1</sup>

Participants at the meeting came from Aotearoa/New Zealand (Maori); Argentina; Brazil (Comin/ECLCB); Bolivia (Nacion Aymarade); Canada (Indigenous Anglicans); Colombia; Ecuador (Pueblo Kichwa); Guatemala (Indigena Maya K'iche); Philippines (Igoizots of northern Philippines). It had been hoped also to have participation from Greenland, India and Nigeria, but last minute visa problems or illness prevented those invited from these countries from joining the group.

As members of this consultation we express gratitude for the significant role that the World Council of Churches has played in recent years in giving space to indigenous peoples from different parts of the world to meet and share their experiences and to develop common strategies. We are particularly appreciative of the role played by the coordinator of the WCC's Indigenous Peoples' Programme.

It was important for us that the meeting was framed each day in the context of powerful expressions of worship, drawing on symbols and rituals from indigenous spirituality. Our worship emphasized both the "four directional thinking" (east, west, north, south) of many indigenous people, and also the close links between the spiritual and material dimensions of life.

During the consultation we explored a number of key Christian themes. These included the Christian understanding of God; Land/Creation; Christology; Scripture; Justice; Church; Mission; Prayer and Spirituality. Through a mixture of sharing of experiences, presentation of short papers and discussion, we offered a number of insights and challenges for Christian self-understanding in relation to each of these themes. In some cases our challenge to Christianity was to recover an important element of Christian or biblical heritage which had become obscured by later developments. The following comments give some brief examples of contributions to Christian self-understanding which were offered.

- It was noted that the biblical name for God, YHWH, as presented in Exodus 3:14, emphasizes both the presence and the mystery of God. The later understanding of God primarily as "Lord" affected both human understanding of the nature of God, and justified particular political and social developments which downplayed the vision of God as a God of freedom.
- The intimate interrelationship between God and creation/land/nature<sup>2</sup> was emphasized throughout our meeting. The whole earth is God's temple, and without the earth we are nothing. In many communities of indigenous people, when people want to get close to God they sit on the ground. Our overall moral and spiritual development cannot be separated from our attitude to land. It is essential for human beings to be in harmony with the land.
- In relation to scripture, the importance of the Christian Bible containing four gospels was noted, and this can be linked to the "four directional thinking" (east, west, north and south) of many indigenous peoples. Jesus Christ is too great to be spoken of in only one direction.
- The oral tradition of many of our indigenous communities challenges us to reflect on how a fixed written scripture can or should be interpreted in the churches. Sometimes writing in a book can lead to us forgetting God's word is also written in creation.
- The holistic world view and spiritual traditions of many indigenous peoples offer an important contribution and corrective to tendencies in some strands of Christianity to present life and faith simply in terms of polarities; e.g., light/darkness or man/woman.
- We emphasized that the figure of Jesus Christ is extremely important for many indigenous peoples, even those who would not formally describe themselves as Christians. Many indigenous people

had dreamed about Jesus and his coming even before the period of oppressive colonization. Jesus is a figure who suffered at the hands of oppressors, and is someone who can empathize with the plight of indigenous people.

- The experience of indigenous peoples demonstrates that in our understanding of the role of Jesus Christ as Saviour we must not separate the physical, material and spiritual aspects of salvation.
- The acute injustices perpetrated on many indigenous people over the centuries by political and religious authorities, and by economic overlords, challenge the Christian churches to re-examine understandings of justice. If human beings are not just, then according to the understanding of indigenous traditions, we will discover that God has written justice into the fabric of creation.
- The communitarian form of life and restorative practices of justice in many indigenous communities provide insights that others throughout the world are now beginning to learn from and we hope can become an important resource for the churches as they think about the relationship between justice and reconciliation.
- The issue of language is a vital one which is also connected to concerns about justice. The loss of language leads to the loss of a culture. The refusal of colonial or religious authorities to take seriously the languages of indigenous peoples and to impose upon them the use of tongues such as Spanish or English raises questions and challenges for the churches about how they use language, and whether they are really willing to respect and honour diversity.
- We acknowledged the variety of ways in which mission is understood in our churches today. For Christians from indigenous cultures, a particularly

important understanding of mission is its relationship to healing and reconciliation based on justice, and to facilitating the wholeness of individuals within their communities.

We conclude by expressing the hope and expectation that the insights gained at this meeting will be appropriately shared by the World Council of Churches with its wider constituency and will feed into the major report of “Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Religious Plurality”, to be drafted during the coming year.

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<sup>1</sup> The other consultations have explored Christian self-understanding in the context of Islam (2008), Buddhism (2009), Judaism (2009) and Hinduism (2011).

<sup>2</sup> Creation/land/nature is written thus because no single English or Spanish word can fully reflect the breadth and richness of what a key concept it is for indigenous peoples.

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# Minjung Theology and Minjung Buddhism in the Context of Korea

Rev. Dr Eunkyoo Micah Kim

## Religious Dialogue in the Context of the Global Empire

We are living in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the beginning of the new millennium was a significant turning point in the history of civilization. Even today, such terminology as “the new millennium” suggests that ancient civilizations and cultures impact upon our lives. We talk about 21<sup>st</sup> century civilization as “post-modern” times, suggesting that this is an era in which authoritarianism has been challenged and in which we are escaping from the authority of feudal culture, imperialism and the divisions of the Second World War. Religious conflicts are rising to the surface of the water. Christianity and Islam and Judaism, three religions which emerged from the same roots in the desert of the Middle East, have become the world's major progenitors of religious conflicts. Nevertheless, religions still reflect an authoritarian era, and are trapped in the confines of the doctrinal and ideological constraints from which they have not yet escaped. For at the same time as religion has become institutionalized and vested with interests or benefits, it has become more hardline internally as well as aggressively and exclusively expanding externally. Paradoxically, religion has controlled human beings and exhibited dysfunctionality rather than offering freedom and liberation. Of course, the scriptures of each religion speak of eternal love and forgiveness and of mercy to humans, but this was possible only within the religious sphere; outside it is a rather different story.

The history of Christianity shows how European Christian countries ruled Africa, Asia and Latin America by imperialism, and deprived them of their spirit; indigenous religions, their resources and precious cultural inheritances. We can see many concrete examples of this in the British Museum in London and the Louvre

Museum in Paris. European Christianity expanded its global mission with “the Bible and imperialism” for almost 1500 years, ignoring and destroying indigenous cultures and religions. The Bible supplied the exclusive and aggressive ideology for dominating colonial continents. After the Roman Empire legalized the formerly persecuted Christian religion in 312 AD, both national power and church power made use of biblical verses and words, such as “do not believe in other gods”, “the prohibition and abolition of idolatry”, and “God's kingdom”. The Christian countries in Europe used such theology and ideology to justify the waging of war and violence, and expanded their territories, exploiting their massive resources through the Crusades and colonial wars up till the present day in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The worst result was that the church power of Europe helped to expand imperialism and Western cultural superiority. Exclusive and conservative Christianity also cut off dialogue between the religions, exposing the dormant conflicts between religions.

The German theologian Hans Küng has contributed much to interfaith dialogue, coining the slogan, “No Peace Among Nations until Peace Among the Religions” as a way of focusing on the need for reconciliation and peace in religious conflicts. His ideas have helped religious groups prioritize peace and interfaith dialogue. However, I think that there is a limit to Hans Küng's claim. For conversely, I would like to ask, “If there is religious peace, is there world peace?” We have also to see and resolve the religious conflicts which are linked with capitalism and imperialism, because we can evade or conceal the nature of the problem if we see only the religious issues.

Today, we all have to live in a capitalist world and a world of capitalist thought. As world capitalism in Europe and the United

States progresses further, the gap with Asian, African and Latin American countries also widens even further. The forces of world capitalism are spreading totally across the globe. Capitalism digs itself deeply inside rural seclusion, and the countryside has become part of the structure of the food chain of the world economy. The United States has emerged as the economic superpower of the world and requires powerless countries to open the doors of their economy to the USA. In addition, since all matters of substantial and high technology in military strength and the economic, scientific, medical, cultural, and aerospace industries of the USA are based on the dominant world empire model, there are no other forces to divert this. In human history, one single nation has never before ruled the entire world in this way.

While America's world domination would bring economic benefits to America, the economic results generated by other economies, such as those of Asia, Africa and Latin America are dependent on the United States. The United States makes a stand of "peace", however, at the same time her military power is enormous. In fact, the United States possesses more nuclear bombs and a larger manufacturing capability than other countries. That the United States so dominates the world clearly shows the nature of empire. Religions need to recognize these problems and present the wisdom and ideas by which global society can live in peace and equality.

The damage caused by global capitalism and the empire eventually affects the people of Asian, African and Latin American countries including the lower classes of Europe and North America. It is reported that three quarters of the world's population suffers such damage because the world capitalist system and global empire policies make a victim of the *minjung* (the "oppressed") and contribute to spreading AIDS, prostitution, hunger, illiteracy and racism. It is particularly women and children who are the victims of this. Local disputes and religious conflicts are also a serious factor.

Religious dialogue has to focus on the realities of the world. If not, interfaith dialogue will turn into being merely scholarly discussions in a rarefied atmosphere of comparing differences and similarities. How can these common challenges be resolved by developing an awareness of the global situation? Religion starts with the personal dimension, but also participates in society and history, and further is able to generate a vision for the future.

This paper will treat Buddhism and Christianity in Korea in the context of minjung.

### **The Minjung Understanding of Buddhism in Korea**

Interfaith dialogue with Christianity and Buddhism in Korea began through the democratic movement and human rights movement in the 1970s-90s. Minjung theology had an effect on Buddhism. The minjung theologians, Suh Nam-dong, Ahn Byeong-mu, Hyun Young-hak, Suh Kwang-sun, Kim Chan-kook and Kim Young-bok were the originators of minjung theology, and Noh Jung-sun, Kwon Jin-kwan, Kim Hiheon followed in their steps. According to Suh Kwang-sun, "Minjung is a Korean word, but it is a combination of two Chinese characters 'min' and 'jung.' 'Min' may be translated as 'people' and 'jung' as 'the mass'. Thus 'minjung' means the mass of the people. Minjung is a term which grew out of Christian experiences in the political struggle for justice against the dictatorship which oppressed the people. Minjung theology is an accumulation and articulation of theological reflections on the political experiences of Christian students, laborers, the press, professors, farmers, writers and intellectuals. It is a theology of the oppressed in the Korean political situation, a theological response to the oppressors.<sup>1</sup>

Minjung theology was born out of movements struggling for democratic and human rights against the military regime of Korea in the 1970s. It started with theological, faithful reflections of the progressive theologians and Christian

students resisting the oppression and persecution who were arrested, detained and subjected to violence by the military regime. Labourers, farmers, poor city people also engaged in political struggles to improve their low income, long working hours and bad factory conditions. Minjung theologians focused on interpreting the prophetic message, social justice, the social gospel and participated in street demonstrations, and in supporting the urban and rural working poor. They saw Jesus as a liberator accompanying those who were poor and oppressed and offering them a social understanding of what salvation means. Their slogan was: “minjung is Jesus.” Minjung theology sought to displace Western theology. Today minjung theology focuses on the global empire, new liberalism, ecological concerns, migrant workers, feminism, religious dialogue, and the peace movement for the reunification of the divided Korea etc.

### **Theoretical Background of Minjung Buddhism**

A founder of minjung Buddhism in Korea is the poet Ko Eun who presented the paper, “Maitreyañātha (the Buddha of the future), Belief and Minjung” (1970). He said, “The Buddhist should practice for the minjung’s liberation and reform Buddhism through actions of the bodhisattvas<sup>2</sup>.”<sup>3</sup>

He mentioned that the minjung movement of Buddhism has to make clear that Buddhists participate in real life – in pain, in the fields, in the streets – to achieve democracy, and that they will live in a spirit of humility.<sup>4</sup> Yeo Ik-gu contributed to supporting the ideas and philosophies for making minjung Buddhism. The minjung theologian, Suh Nam-dong founded Buddhist Messianism, related to the hope of the suffering minjung's expectations.<sup>5</sup> Now I turn to examining the origins and history of minjung Buddhism in Korea.

Buddhism is a religion which takes seriously the heart of humanity and teaches the restoration of peace and the search for peace of mind. Buddhism is human-centered and focuses on humans.

True happiness is not only in satisfying an individual's mental and physical condition, but also relates to the social, political, economic, cultural and ecological environment – which should be obtained to reach this ideal.<sup>6</sup>

### **Law (Dharma)**

Buddha means “realization”, or “I have seen the light”. After the Buddha realized enlightenment, he put it into practice through the rest of his life. A pilgrim can achieve the peak of enlightenment by saving people as an act of kindness and compassion (maitrī-karunā).<sup>7</sup>

Enlightenment is of the individual's consciousness, but can never be private. Conscious awareness is truly holistic. This holistic awareness has to include both society and history. The awakening human needs to reflect his/her enlightenment in society.<sup>8</sup> Contemporary social practice itself comes from the anguish of sympathy and gentle affection for those who suffer.<sup>9</sup>

The core idea of Buddhism is that of Dharma (Law). Dharma cannot be expressed in ideology or -ism.<sup>10</sup> Buddha realized Sūnyatā (emptiness, void), anātman (non-self), madhyamā-pratipad (the Middle way), and pratītya-samutpāda (interdependent arising). In short, all the changes and movements linked to presence and commitment are related to each other. Emptiness and non-self are not fixed. Decisions are not made based on one side only with the insistence there be no flexibility. Changes in activity and exercise are freely made through progress and development. What gets caught up in a fixed way of thinking makes for a bias, from which conflict and hatred occur. Buddhism's ultimate purpose is harmony and a desire to build world peace on the basis of emptiness and non-self.<sup>11</sup>

### **Enlightenment (Bodhisattva)**

“Bodhisattva” is combined from “bodhi” of awakening, and “sattva” of living beings, history, the reality. Bodhisattva means individual wisdom and the will to add historicity. Namely, it is in Mahāyāna Buddhism that one vows to attain

Buddhahood for oneself and to assist all others in doing so. Buddhism is going from the level of enlightenment to the world of history, time and space, to the world, and the realities of today.<sup>12</sup> “Bodhi” is a logical understanding of existence, and “sattva” speaks of concrete reality and corresponding action. So Mahāyāna Buddhism exhibits a positive and warm heart in relation to history and society. Bodhisattva meets the practical spirit, the humanities, sociology and philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

### **Human-centered idea**

Buddhism is a “human” religion. The most fundamental human-centered idea is respect for private life and personality. Respect for human life extends to all creatures. The concept of respectful life prevents racism, ethnicity and division by social classes or exploitation. In the era of the Buddha, because of the caste system of India, mixed marriage, eating, working or education was prohibited.<sup>14</sup> He opposed and denied this irrational caste system, and desired India to become a peaceful country.

### **Personal and social liberation**

A human goes to the source of his/her human nature, and finds not his/her own greed and lies, but the real human being. That is human salvation.<sup>15</sup> Thus a human being awakes the nature of the human itself. The non-self spirit of Buddhism requires a human being’s serious concern for living beings (sattva). These are the actions of the Bodhisattvas. These Bodhisattvas should be implemented in social and historical realities. This behaviour exhibits the reality of “enlightenment”. Only the actions identify and represent the truth, and then you can save anyone or anything from anguish.<sup>16</sup>

“Salvation” is not given, it is to be taken, and it is not a notion but an action. This is the action of the bodhisattvas as the remedy for the minjung. Humans themselves in this behavior are completely free and liberated. Salvation of the self and the minjung’s liberation can be completed simultaneously. This is the goal of minjung Buddhism.<sup>17</sup>

### **Interrelated idea**

One of the key ideas of Buddhism is “interrelatedness”. It is generally defined as follows: “All things rely on each other and are tied to each other.” Thus, nothing in the universe can stand by itself, but everything needs necessarily to be in combination with cause and effect. This applies to all the phenomena of the universe, the reality of any existence, the human spirit and substance, even awareness etc. So a blade of grass could affect the whole planet. This presents a challenge to contemporary materialism, capitalism and the contexts of global empire.

This idea of interrelatedness is closely connected with the individual and with society. Minjung Buddhism spoke of social participation. Social participation in Buddhism requires the transformation of social structure and social environment, because the suffering of all human beings is related to society and the nation. Enlightenment shows that mental salvation is liberation from all fetters. And “compassion consciousness” is the key of Buddhist practice. The goal of a Buddhist nirvana or enlightenment (Bodhi) will be socialized.

### **Social suffering**

The Old Testament prophets criticized the corrupt high-class society, and Jesus was opposed to the high priests, upper classes, Roman Empire, and finally was victimized by them. The Buddha also did not collude with the social order of his day, but went on the ascetic way to discover the truth.

One of the fundamental ideas of Buddhism is “everything is a state of mind.” Buddha struggled through his life to resolve the “mind” of suffering. So the scriptures of Buddhism explore comprehensively the subject of “suffering”, and systematically analyze and overcome some of the obstacles.<sup>18</sup>

When regarding “mind and suffering” in the Christian Bible we can find it to be a common denominator expressed in many Old Testament stories and ideas, and also

highlighted through the cross of Christ in the New Testament. The Old Testament does not simply show the colourful and elegant private life or the history of the nation of Israel, but its myths, prose, legends, heroes, dynastic history, epics, proverbs, poetry, wisdom, prophecy and prayer, and entire literary genres show how anyone can sin. This “mind and suffering” of the Old Testament is one of the key themes. The Old Testament uses the word *בצע* (*etsev*) to mean “suffering”, expressing suffering caused by war, the nation’s destruction, disease, early death, physical pain, rejection, loneliness, and spiritual suffering, sorrow, oppression, harassment, agony, and a wide range of meaning. It is said that human greed and selfishness cause suffering which is against God’s good will, and all human beings, through their desires, competition and instincts, have experienced “suffering” regardless of religion.

### **The Pure Land**

The purpose of Buddhism is to gain the insight of “enlightenment” about the truth of life. When all human beings become Buddha, the Pure Land will be achieved, similar to the social vision of the kingdom of God.

Individual completion means complete liberation from individual human suffering. Here the concept of liberation or freedom (*vimutta*) represents the escape from bondage, and a bound, locked state.<sup>19</sup> However, an individual’s awareness and completion are reached not as just an individual, but as a part of society and country.

Therefore, the individual is not satisfied with the self-completion of enlightenment, and works towards the reform of society. Without progressing or reforming society, individual enlightenment cannot be completed.<sup>20</sup> The construction of the Pure Land is accomplished from a standpoint of difficulty and suffering. There are lies and deceptions, spite, jealousy, malice, greed, domination and exploitation, oppression and violence. Even though the war does not cease, love and mercy and compassion enrich the human place and

mind. When a society is filled with individuals on the way to this recognition, then people are going to create an equal, peaceful and free society.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, as we are living, this society can make balance and harmony for its restoration.

### **Minjung Buddhism in Korea**

#### **Mahāyāna Buddhism**

Several hundred years after Buddhism was established, it became a lifestyle of the Indian minjung. But the Buddhist community then got much richer and with its prosperity received extensive political and economic assistance from kings and nobility.<sup>22</sup> Buddhism changed into a conservative and formal entity. The life of monks became higher than ordinary people and came to form one of the social upper classes.<sup>23</sup>

Mahāyāna Buddhism then developed in opposition to these attitudes which had arisen in Buddhism. It was a movement of coming back to the original meaning of freeing all beings from suffering.<sup>24</sup> Mahāyāna Buddhism developed first of all in opposition to the economic prosperity and corruption of Buddhism, and second, in reaction to the disappointment of Buddhism’s helplessness in the context of political persecution.<sup>25</sup>

Because humans cannot live alone, all people are social animals. Everyone will have the possibility of becoming Buddha.<sup>26</sup> Then the Bodhisattva person will use their body for the ultimate salvation of others, even holding back their own enlightenment.

Buddhism and most of the Korean temples remained isolated for around 600 years because of the suppression policy of the Choseon Dynasty (1392-1910 AD) and Japanese colonialism (1910-1945). It is only in recent days that Korean Buddhism has turned to the minjung and commitment to social concerns. In the 1980s, minjung Buddhism was instrumental in struggling against the political oppression of the military dictatorship and external unequal economic structures, and promoted the reform of some corrupt administrative

systems inside Buddhism. Minjung Buddhism is a democratic movement and progressively recognizes the history, society and reunification of Korea.<sup>27</sup>

The features of minjung Buddhism are as follows<sup>28</sup>:

1. It is a minjung-centered idea. Minjung means the concept of going one step further from the current suffering and alienation of social, political, economic and cultural life.<sup>29</sup> Buddhism should emphasize the importance of the minjung, and be involved and resolute at the forefront of social issues. So the Pure Land and Buddhist community speak of the resolved society of all the minjung's suffering. The Buddhist doctrine of the concept that "living beings are Buddha", in minjung Buddhism comes to be "minjung is Buddha."

2. There is a strong desire for a social reformation. Minjung Buddhism is different from traditional Buddhism, which looks passively toward society and history. As Minjung Buddhism participates in ensuring social change for the oppressed life of the minjung, it builds a new society through social action; for example, street demonstrations for democracy.

3. The Pure Land and Buddha's world will be achieved in this world and not beyond in a transcendental world. Pure Land means that all minjung will have equality, happiness, peace and freedom on this earth.

4. The practical arenas are not only temples in the mountains, but also in society, particularly in poor areas where labourers and peasants live. Minjung Buddhism seeks to overcome the demerits of capitalist exploitation and strive to approach an equal society.

### **History of Minjung Buddhism in Korea**

Korean Buddhism was imported from China, 4-5 AD. At that time, the Korean peninsula was divided into three kingdoms, established in 1 BC. Before Buddhism, there existed ancestor worship, shamanism, slaves, class and tribal

leagues, and wars of conquest. These kingdoms made use of Buddhism for the new ruling ideology in contrast to the past tribal leagues' systems and philosophies. The royal groups, nobility and ruling classes who had built the kingdoms made use of shamanism and Buddhism as a national religion for maintaining their political power and economic wealth. From the beginning of time, Korean Buddhism had become a dominant power in order to defend the nation rather than bring enlightenment.<sup>30</sup>

The early Buddhism of Korea was subordinated to the power and order of the ruling class, not taking account of the minjung's realities. It emphasized only the afterlife or spiritual peace of salvation.

Originally, Buddhism pursued the independence and equality of human nature and the sacred. However, Korean Buddhism, on the side of the ruling class, came to evade the oppression of the minjung and their suffering. Buddhism took hold of power, and enforced stability and order, which it used to defend the dominant ideology.<sup>31</sup>

The Buddhism of the three kingdoms expanded the Pure Land so that it came under the active support of the royal and noble faith. Buddhism persisted in maintaining the paradise of the afterlife, while distorting the minjung and paralyzing their ability to resist and revolt, and hiding the oppression and exploitation of the ruling class.<sup>32</sup>

### **Minjung Maitreya Buddhism (Future Buddha)**

Minjung Buddhism – the Maitreya faith – appeared against the ruling Buddhism. Maitreya Buddhism opposed the oppression of the feudal ruling class, and it gave hope to minjung who had lost their land and were deprived of their possessions.

The ruling class changed Maitreya faiths so that they became a way of supporting the nation and rulers, and not for developing the minjung religion. Then the Maitreya faiths came to be responsible for the interests of the ruling classes and

contributed to helping the brave young warriors who fought the national enemy in the era of the united Silla dynasty (57 BC-935 AD).

Maitreya was originally the faith that emphasized the minjung's practical role rather than Armitābha (Infinite Light) faith. The Maitreya Buddha comes down into in the immanent reality of traditional society and selfish people, and he lives together comforting the minjung and seeking their new lives.<sup>33</sup> But the Maitreya faith in the Three Kingdoms period came to serve the feudal rulers. One hundred years after the Baekje Dynasty (18 BC-660 AD) was destroyed by the Silla Dynasty, the old monk Jin Pyo appeared as a minjung hero of Maitreya in the Baekje area.<sup>34</sup> The Baekje Minjung who were persecuted and discriminated against under the feudal rule of Silla accepted him coming down as a Maitreya Buddha. It meant that a new world had opened, and that regional, class discrimination and exploitation had disappeared.<sup>35</sup> The Maitreya faith of Jin Pyo was never for individual salvation, but for social salvation. He raised a collective movement in the marginalized area of Baekje.<sup>36</sup>

### **Wonhyo: Minjung Buddhist**

Wonhyo (617-686) played a large role in popularizing the Pure Land faith. He was the highest priest in the history of Korean Buddhism. He entered into the minjung class, shedding his noble status as a scholar in a temple.<sup>37</sup> He was of the aristocratic class, yet he boldly broke the ties with Buddhism, and lived together with the minjung going down to the bottom of society. He preached peace and freedom to the suffering minjung.

He was criticized and blamed by the rulers and nobles.<sup>38</sup> In turn, he criticized theorists who followed the idealism of Chinese Buddhism, and he was said to take care of the suffering minjung with concrete action.<sup>39</sup> Wonhyo was considered to get through life by putting forward Pure Land faiths rather than strict precepts and metaphysical theories. This was a kind of reformation. Buddhism changed from the exclusive possession of

the royal ruling class and aristocracy to minjung Buddhism.

The minjung, including slaves, could never dream of becoming a Buddha, however, the thoughts and actions of the humble monk, Wonhyo, spread in the minjung and they came to know that they too could become a Buddha.

Wonhyo's unified and harmonious philosophy influenced and became integrated into the ideology of the united dynasty. He criticized both positivity and negativity, and analyzed the convergence of the two values, and found a new higher level. What he called "One Mind" was the combination of contradiction and conflict in a system. This "One Mind philosophy", which was a unified, harmonious, clean and comprehensive peace philosophy, came from his beliefs.<sup>40</sup>

His One Mind philosophy is that all things in the universe happen to raise the cause of conflict with each other together in endless time and space.<sup>41</sup> It represented the order of the universe, but at the same time was a symbol of national unification. Wonhyo's teachings contributed to a unified generosity that avoided the conflict between the ruling classes and the minjung.<sup>42</sup>

Then what is the place of the concrete "Pure Land"?

The Pure Land will bring about the disappearance of social oppression, discrimination, violence, hunger, poverty, exploitation and slavery and will ultimately achieve equality.<sup>43</sup> Literally, it is a "clean" (pure) society.

Wonhyo succeeded in doing away with the authority of the noble and ruling Buddhists and Buddhism and also influenced Buddhism in China and Japan.

### **Goryeo Dynasty**

The Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392 AD) expressed Buddhism as the national religion. According to this, Buddhism was developed into the national faith.<sup>44</sup> When the Mongol Empire or Japanese troops frequently intruded into the Korean

peninsula, the national faith was further developed. The economy of Goryeo was under the power of the temple and Buddhism. As the Goryeo Dynasty had a capitalistic characteristic, being based on commercial trade, temples increased their wealth and were protected by the royal family and nobles.<sup>45</sup>

The temples and Buddhism itself had strong power economically, politically and religiously, but at the same time were corrupt, and lazy in religious training, and first of all they ignored the minjung.<sup>46</sup>

### **Chosun Dynasty**

As Buddhism in the Goryeo Dynasty had become corrupt, and had acquired enormous temple possessions, the minjung turned back with disappointment. The Chosun Dynasty (1392-1910 AD), which succeeded it, adopted a policy of suppressing Buddhism, and adopted Confucianism because of the enormous corruption in Buddhism. The new Chosun Dynasty, through the policies of its political, economic and administrative base, was propelled to freeze the property of temples and confiscate temple land.<sup>47</sup> However, there were large-scale Japanese invasions in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, the minjung had to endure double sufferings caused by the aggressions of foreign powers outwardly and the oppression of the feudal rulers internally. Buddhist monks and the minjung actively participated in and defended Korea in the wars, and resisted oppression by revolt against the feudal rulers.<sup>48</sup>

### **Uprising of Minjung Maitreya Faith in the 17<sup>th</sup> century**

Two Japanese invasions had brought big changes in the social order. The ruling class was helpless in front of the invasions and its authority had failed, leading to anger among the minjung who became motivated and stronger to liberate themselves from their oppressed status. The minjung acquired aspirations for freedom in the contexts of the exploitation of feudal loyalty, natural disasters, epidemics and famine.<sup>49</sup> The ruling class exploited the people by denuding more

taxes from the minjung from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, ruining the lives of many minjung and farmers and driving a large number of them from their homes.<sup>50</sup>

At this time, the minjung widely expected the emergence of the Maitreya Buddha. In spite of this, the Buddhist rulers oppressed and destroyed Maitreya Buddha faith and statues. The minjung constantly expected the Maitreya Buddha to come like a messiah and make a new world.

Maitreya Buddhism enabled the minjung to endure these social sufferings through legends, festivals etc. At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Maitreya faith led to a nationwide peasant uprising. "If Maitreya Buddha comes, the world will be changed to replace the old world."<sup>51</sup>

Because minjung thought that Buddha was for the ruling class and had become a source of oppression for the minjung, the minjung expected the end of the world and predicted the coming of a new world with Maitreya Buddha.<sup>52</sup> The minjung looked exactly at the structure of the conflict between Buddha and Maitreya Buddha, and tried to change history. It is a rare thing in Buddhist history that the Maitreya Buddha appeared to be in conflict with Buddha. It is similar to the emergence of a prophet, and the eschatology and expectation of the Messiah are also the expectations for a new world of the minjung in Old Testament times. If Christianity was corrupt, and represented the ruling class, then the minjung would be disappointed and frustrated, and expect an eschatological messiah.

### **Minjung Theology and Minjung Buddhism in the Context of Globalization and Global Empire**

Global capitalism is very powerful in encouraging the process of globalization. There is only one country now which dominates the world and that is the United States. The power of the global empire is trying to monopolize all areas of economy, education, science, space, technology, agriculture, and culture etc. The World Trade Organization, centered on the

United States' interests, is achieving the legal removal of international barriers. This is based on the US military presence around the world. Religious dialogue will reflect on these themes for world peace.

Ancient Israel was damaged by the empires of ancient Egypt and ancient Assyria, Babylon and the Roman Empire, but since the Roman Empire (312 AD) until today, Christianity has been the dominant ruling ideology in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Here, I would like to ask whether Western European theology has contributed to the ruling ideology and its historical imperial expansions. Has European and American theology come to have supremacy in Asia, Africa and South America? Christianity has to respect these continents' long histories, traditions, religions and cultures. It is also urgent that Asian, African and South American theologians become independent of Western Christianity and colonial consciousness.

In the Korean context, most of the conservative missionaries who came from Europe and the United States to Korea 150 years ago have had a large influence even upon today's church. But the conservative church in Korea is losing its social conscience because of its emphasis on individual, selfish faiths, lack of social consciousness, mega-churches, having a lot of real estate and riches, corruption, an exclusive attitude toward neighbour religions, and theological toadyism to Europe and the USA. We need to learn to look back to the history of Korean Buddhism which had secular power, wealthy temples, conservatism, and which disregarded the life of the minjung. The Korean church attracts people with a cheap slogan of salvation, "If you believe in Jesus, you go to heaven, otherwise you go to hell." At the same time, these churches are growing so fast.

In addition, many Korean churches interpret the Bible through a fundamentalist doctrinal approach, and have aggressive and exclusive attitudes toward neighbour religions. Korean churches have sent some thirty to fifty

thousand conservative and fundamentalist missionaries to Asia, Africa, Latin America, Russia and China for the "Kingdom of God", in the same way as the Western imperialistic mission in the past. They spread conservative and fundamentalist faiths worldwide. Because some Korean missionaries encourage religious and cultural collisions, this results in conflicts with the native people of those countries to which they travel. It is increasingly the case that Korean missionaries are excluded and isolated from these native people because of their materialism and fundamentalist attitudes, stressing only conversion to Christianity and their very narrow prejudices.

This is the result of the Korean church having accepted and become dependent on the conservative churches of the USA, and then of Korea sending missionaries in the same way. They focus on spiritual warfare, combating mission and playing a role at the forefront of imperialism for the purpose of the conversion of all religions.

Finally, Christianity is no longer limited to Deuteronomy's idea which presents an exclusive attitude based on the prohibition of idolatry, but has to be open and in exchange with Buddhism, Eastern philosophies, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism etc. for world peace and reconciliation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Minjung Christianity and Minjung Buddhism have to focus on global peace and religious conflicts, and furthermore on the new liberalism, ecological and environmental concerns, women, poverty, the global empire war and other issues. People of different religions can work together to address these kinds of concerns. Many religious scholars and leaders seek to create a new theological paradigm from the perspective of the minjung, the oppressed. First of all, Christianity has to overcome the dualist (the good and the evil) thought of Western Europe which sets up oppositions. It is time to stop looking at life through the gaze of Western theology, and instead to look through the gaze of the minjung in Asia, Africa and South America.

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<sup>1</sup> Kwangsun Suh. (1981) A Biographical Sketch of an Asian Theological Consultation. In: Yongbok Kim (ed.), *Minjung Theology*, CTC-CCA publication, Singapore, p. 15-37, 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> Bodhisattva means a being of enlightenment, and refers to the one who makes vows to attain enlightenment and to save suffering beings, and thus sets out on a long course of practice. (2002) *The Korean-English Buddhist Dictionary*. Bulkwang Press, Seoul, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> Eun Ko. (2009) Mahāyāna Buddhism Belief. *Literary and Intelligence* (Korean), Spring.

<sup>4</sup> Seonhwan Byeon. (1996) *Interfaith Dialogue and Theology in Asia* (Korean), Korea Institute of Theology, Byeongcheon, p. 333-334.

<sup>5</sup> Namdong Suh. (1983) *Search of Minjung Theology* (Korean), Hangilsa, Seoul, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> Ikgu Yeo. (1985) *Introduction to Minjung Buddhism* (Korean), Pulbit, Seoul, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Uihaeng Jeong. (1992) *The History of Korea Buddhism* (Korean), Hanmadang, Seoul, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Ikgu Yeo. (1989) The Faith of Minjung Buddhism: Philosophical Religion and Religious Philosophy. In: *National Buddhism* (Korean), Dongkwang Press, Seoul, p. 110-119.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>10</sup> Ikgu Yeo, *Introduction to Minjung Buddhism*, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Eung Hyun. The Practice Idea of Mahāyāna Buddhism. *National Buddhism*, p. 120-132.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ikgu Yeo, *Introduction to Minjung Buddhism*, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Joonho Cho. (2002) Social Practice Movement in the Early Buddhism. *The Idea and History of Practice Buddhism* (Korean), Hangwon Press, Seoul, p. 13-60, 34-50.

<sup>19</sup> Ikgu Yeo, *Introduction to Minjung Buddhism*, p. 30.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 124-125.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Uihaeng Jeong, *The History of Korea Buddhism*, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>33</sup> Uihaeng Jeong, *The History of Korea Buddhism*, p. 157.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>35</sup> Jongman Han. (1998) *The Thought of Korea Buddhism*. Minjoksa, Seoul, p. 74-76.

<sup>36</sup> Uihaeng Jeong, *The History of Korea Buddhism*, p. 160.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>39</sup> Youngsup Ko. (2001) *Search of Wonhyo*. Yongisa, Seoul.

<sup>40</sup> Dongshin Nam. (1999) *Wonhyo*. Saenuri, Seoul.

<sup>41</sup> Uihaeng Jeong, *The History of Korea Buddhism*, p. 136.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>43</sup> Jongman Han, *The Thought of Korea Buddhism*, p. 84-94.

<sup>44</sup> Byungwook Lee. (2002) *The Thought of Goryeo* (Korean). Hyeon, Seoul, p. 33-38.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>46</sup> Ikgu Yeo, *Introduction*, p. 248.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 315-336, 334.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 340.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 342.

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## The Roman Catholic Church and the Letter of the 138 Muslim Religious Leaders

Fr Maurice Borrmans

*The French original of this article was originally given as a paper at the October 2008 conference organized by the World Council of Churches on Christian-Muslim relations and the document A Common Word. Due partly to its length and partly to the need to translate it into English, it was not possible to include it in Current Dialogue 52 (July 2012) when the other papers from this conference were published. Although “dated” by the passage of five years since the paper was first delivered, the paper contains such a comprehensive overview of the Roman Catholic position on interreligious dialogue and the initiatives linked to A Common Word that it is an invaluable resource which is good to make available. Throughout his paper, Father Borrmans regularly refers to what is now usually called A Common Word as the Letter of the 138. We have deliberately kept this terminology, as part of the argument offered by the paper is the comparison and contrast with an earlier Letter of the 138.*

In relation to the issue of Muslim-Christian dialogue, the Roman Catholic Church has at its disposal both a number of fundamental texts and a regular practice which seeks to be the expression of such texts, even if in an undoubtedly limited and imperfect fashion. The Church received the *Letter of the 138* in a very positive way. This forms the basis for my report, which first takes a look at the key Catholic reference texts; then gives a detailed presentation on the *Letter* itself; and finally, what is now following on from it – letters, meetings and projects.

### 1. Key Catholic Reference Texts

We must start with the Second Vatican Council, notably in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, which speaks of the bonds with

non-Christians who “are related in various ways to the people of God.” In the first place, says this text:

*We must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues.*

But then straightaway afterwards we read:

*But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. (Section 16)*

It is well known that this is restated in a more detailed and precise way in the *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)* in Section 3:

*The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honour Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.*

*Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.*

We must also refer to the texts which include the “Solemn or Ordinary Teaching” of Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI: the Encyclicals *Ecclesiam Suam* (6 August 1964) and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975) of Paul VI in which he speaks of the “dialogue of salvation” in the former and of “the evangelization of cultures” in the latter; the Encyclicals *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990) and *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1992) of John Paul II in which he speaks of the “mystery of Christ” in the first, of “interreligious dialogue, an aspect of the mission of evangelization” in the second, and the “seeds of the Word, the Wisdom of God” in the third. There were also John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortations, especially the one described as “post-synodal”, addressed to Lebanon on “Islamic-Christian dialogue” (May 1997). And if we reflect on the Encyclical of Benedict XVI *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love) we can look at it again in the light of the *Letter of the 138*.

As regards the “ordinary teaching”, we can particularly cite the speech of John Paul II to 100,000 young Moroccan Muslims in Casablanca (19 August 1985), of which the sub-themes offer good examples: “God: the ultimate issue of existence; Obedience to the will of God; the concern of the Church for the Muslims; Respect for human beings because of their humanity; Reciprocity in all things; God does not want human beings to remain passive; Citizens of a ‘brotherly’ world; Ensuring appropriate conditions of life for human dignity; Searching for the truth; the Church recognises the spiritual richness of Muslims; to Rediscover a new dynamism; Prayer in common.” But we really need to

re-read *all* the teaching of John Paul II in detail, because it constantly revisits the texts of Vatican II, commenting on them and adapting them. In the book *Le dialogue interreligieux dans l’enseignement officiel de l’Eglise catholique, du Concile Vatican II à Jean-Paul II* (1963-2005), édition de Solesmes (2006) 1700 pages, Mgr Francesco Gioia has collected all the relevant documents together.

This same collection also furnishes us with the two essential texts suggested to Catholics by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID). The first, dating from 10 May 1984, is titled, *The Attitude of the (Catholic) Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions*, brings together “Reflections and orientations on dialogue and mission.” The introduction suggests that “the ideal of dialogue is a new landmark in a world of change. The Vatican Secretariat, after 20 years of experience, offers a document for Christian communities in an ecumenical spirit.” In the section on Mission, the text states:

*The love of God gives the Church a mission, often reiterated, and expressing itself in many ways. It is the duty of all, according to the example of Jesus, as expressed in the early Church and in the lives of saints, respect for freedom of conscience of the human person.*

The section on Dialogue notes that sincere dialogue “based on personal and social needs, and rooted in faith in God, the Father, in the Son who is united to every person, and in the Spirit who is at work for bringing about the Kingdom, developing the seeds of the Word” is expressed in four forms: “the dialogue of life; the dialogue of common works; the dialogue of specialists; the dialogue of religious experience.” The relationship between the two aspects, Mission and Dialogue, is connected in two ways, “the call to conversion (to God) in respect for people’s conscience, and in the life-giving Spirit” and “the building of God’s Reign (which is) a collaboration in God’s plan for

the promotion of universal peace and hope, in conformity with the patience of God.”<sup>1</sup>

The second text, of 19 May 1991, titled *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, tries to be even more elaborate and without doubt inspired the section of the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, which relates to dialogue. In the introduction of *Dialogue and Proclamation* it is recalled that:

*The theme is relevant in a pluralistic world where there is hesitation about dialogue and questions are raised. The Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi and the encouragement given by Pope John Paul II are further stimuli in addressing the topic. A clarification of the terminology is therefore proposed (such as the terms) evangelization; dialogue; proclamation; religions and religious traditions.*

*Interreligious dialogue*<sup>2</sup> requires first of all *A Christian approach to religious traditions:*

*A positive approach such as adopted by Vatican II which discovers in them the effects of God's grace and the action of the Holy Spirit, yet stresses (also) the role of the Church's activity. The history of God's saving deeds extends beyond the chosen people to include all nations. The universal mission of Jesus announced God's Reign reaching out to all peoples. The early Fathers offered a theology of history developed anew by the Magisterium. Pope John Paul II teaches the mystery of the unity of humanity and the unity of salvation. Discernment is needed and in dialogue all are challenged.*

It is also necessary that one should know *The place of interreligious dialogue in the evangelising mission of the Church.* This means that:

*The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, the seed and beginning of the Kingdom, and to her all (human beings) are related. The pilgrim Church advances towards the plenitude of divine truth in a*

*dialogue of salvation with people of other religions, leading to a deeper commitment and conversion to God.*

And, “The forms of dialogue are interconnected, touching human liberation and culture”, but always “Dialogue requires balance, religious convictions and openness to truth, but promises rich rewards.” Undoubtedly, “Difficulties in dialogue can arise from various human factors, which are never insurmountable.” As for *The mandate from the Risen Lord*, the “Lord Jesus sent his disciples to proclaim the Gospel which he himself had proclaimed and to which he had borne witness by his life.” “The Church’s work of proclamation continues that of Jesus” from which comes *The role of the Church*, for *The content of proclamation* is as follows: “Peter preached the risen Christ; Paul announced the mystery kept hidden through all the ages; John bore witness to the Word of Life; [and] the word, proclaimed by the Church is full of power.” Moreover, “The Church relies on The presence and power of the Holy Spirit, ...” If there is *The urgency of proclamation*, the manner of it is that: “The Church follows the lead of the Spirit in learning how to proclaim with qualities derived from the Gospel in close union with Christ.” It is committed to this, “even if the proclamation meets with difficulties on the part of Christians and from outside the Christian community”, for “Within the evangelizing mission of the Church, proclamation is a sacred duty.” In conclusion, it notes that “Interreligious dialogue and proclamation are interrelated yet not interchangeable”, for:

*The Church's mission must be sensitive to circumstances. The Church's mission extends to all, in dialogue and proclamation, as two ways of the same mission, [for] Love wishes to share under the guidance of the Spirit and according to the example of Jesus who gave himself for all humankind.*

And this is why “special attention to each religion demands study and prayer” which takes account of its specificities.<sup>3</sup>

We must also add to these texts the synthesis made by the Catholic experts of the International Theological Commission (October 1996, published 1997), then approved by the Commission's then President, Cardinal Ratzinger. Entitled *Christianity and the World Religions*, the document explores in its first section *theology of religions* and discusses the salvific value (of non-Christian religions) according to various theological stances which may be adopted:

*Exclusivist ecclesiocentrism – the fruit of a specific theological system or of a mistaken understanding of the phrase extra ecclesiam nulla salus – is no longer defended by Catholic theologians after the clear statements of Pius XII and Vatican II ... Christocentrism accepts that salvation may occur in religions, but it denies them any autonomy in salvation on account of the uniqueness and universality of the salvation that comes from Jesus Christ. This position is undoubtedly the one most commonly held by Catholic theologians ... Theocentrism claims to be a way of going beyond Christocentrism ... We can distinguish a theocentrism in which Jesus Christ, without being constitutive of, is considered normative for salvation, and another theocentrism in which not even this normative value is recognized in Jesus Christ.*

The document discusses these at length and concludes that "Interreligious dialogue is based theologically either on the common origin of all human beings created in God's image, or on their common destiny which is the fullness of life in God, or on the single divine plan of salvation through Jesus Christ, or on the active presence of the divine Spirit among the followers of other religious traditions." In its second section the document recalls the fundamental theological presuppositions for a coherent Christian view on this subject: the Father's initiative in salvation; the unique mediation of Jesus; the universality of the Holy Spirit; the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. This permits in the third section

to draw out the consequences of these for a theology of religions:

*Given this explicit recognition of the presence of the Spirit of Christ in the religions, one cannot exclude the possibility that they exercise as such a certain salvific function; that is, despite their ambiguity, they help men achieve their ultimate end ... The religions can also help the human response, insofar as they impel man to seek God, to act in accord with his conscience, to live a good life ... The religions can be carriers of saving truth only insofar as they raise men to true love.*

And that is why the document signals some justified reservations vis-à-vis the "pluralist theology of religions", reservations which have been confirmed by the document *Dominus Jesus* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (6 August 2000): "Therefore, the pluralist theology, as a strategy of dialogue among the religions, not only is not justified in consideration of the truth claim of one's own religion, but simultaneously destroys the truth claim of the other side." We can find in the document some useful considerations for dialogues between Christians and Muslims:

*To the extent that these dialogues take place among specialists and are effected in everyday life in words and actions, they not only engage the persons who carry on the dialogue but also and in first place the God whom they profess. The interreligious dialogue as such implies three participants. Therefore in it the Christian [and the Muslim as well] is faced with two fundamental questions on which the meaning of the dialogue depends: the understanding of God and the understanding of man ... each participant in fact expresses himself according to a definite understanding of God; implicitly he poses to the other the question, Who is your God? The Christian cannot hear and understand the other without posing this question to himself ... what is the God one is dealing with, and in the final analysis, what is the man with whom one is*

concerned? An implicit anthropology is also involved in the interreligious dialogue for the relationship of each person to the true and living God is implied.

The document concludes by insisting on the importance of prayer, "There is a close relationship between prayer and dialogue ... If on the one hand, dialogue depends on prayer, so, in another sense, prayer also becomes the ever more mature fruit of dialogue."

These are the principal reference texts which Catholics have at their disposal today to engage in the dialogue of life and the dialogue of salvation with their Muslim friends. A Finnish Lutheran theologian, Risto Jukko, who is a friend of mine, has explored these theological elements in a very interesting thesis which he has called, *Trinity in Unity in Christian-Muslim Relations: The Work of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The Letter of the 138 seeking "A Common Word between Us and You"

It is with this title that the 138 representatives of contemporary Islam, assembled under the auspices of the Royal Jordanian Academy for Research on Islamic Civilization, addressed an open letter on 13 October 2007 to the religious heads of various Christian communities throughout the world on the occasion of 'Īd al-Fitr, and on the one year anniversary of the [Open] Letter of the 38 [Muslim scholars] to His Holiness Benedict XVI. The title is eminently quranic, because they are invited by their sacred book to say, "O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you" (Sura 3:64). The Letter of the 138 is seeking to suggest that, compared with the Letter of the 38, the consensus reflects both an enlarged number of signatories but also offers a "reprise" of some of the essential passages of the earlier Letter. The new feature of the Letter of the 138 lies in its redefinition of monotheism, in which it affirms that in various ways that Muslims, Jews and Christians have at their heart the same confession of the one and unique living God, and sets it in the

framework of the two-fold commandment to love God and one's neighbour, dear to the Jewish-Christian tradition.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the "spirit of openness" which this Letter represents for Muslim-Christian dialogue, and that is why it is right to understand its tenor as being positive to give positive appreciation to its affirmations, without asking questions about its silence in respect of certain quranic verses which are still problematic for Christians. Can we say that the Letter is representative of contemporary Islam? What is its exact structure? How far is it innovative, while seeking at the same time to be faithful to tradition? How can we discern in it an initiative which promises a renewed dialogue? Such are the questions which it is good to pose about it and to which a careful analysis of the text can offer some appropriate answers.

## It is the expression of an enlarged consensus (*ijmā'*)

The signatories of the Letter number 138, representing 43 nations, both from the Muslim world, and from the Western context. They include 'ulamā', muftī-s, theologians, jurists, intellectuals; they belong mainly to the Sunni world, but they also include representatives of the Shi'ite tradition as well as other minority groups. We are aware of the importance for Muslims of the expression of "consensus" (*ijmā'*) – it is the third source for orthodox Muslims, following on after the Qur'an itself and the *Sunna* or tradition of the Prophet. All the scholars have been gathered by the Jordanian Academy *Āl al-Bayt* (The family of the Household of the Prophet) to take part in "research on Islamic civilization", in which the Academy has been engaged for almost 20 years, due to the interest which the previous King Hussain, as well as his brother Prince Hassan, had in this subject – witnessed to by numerous Muslim-Christian consultations with Anglicans, Orthodox, Catholics and Lutherans. All the scholars had the opportunity to scrutinise the text and to bring their observations, suggestions and proposed changes to it.

Among the signatories we can particularly note the following:

- Mustafa Cherif, a former minister and ambassador of Algeria who had the honour of being invited, on 11 November 2006, to have a very frank meeting and discussion with Benedict XVI
- Bu Abd Allah Ghulam Allah, Minister of Religious Affairs of Algeria
- Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Turkey, Secretary-General, Organization of the Islamic Conference
- Abd Al-Aziz bi 'Uthman Al-Tweijiri, Saudi Arabia, Director of ISESCO (the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – the Islamic UNESCO)
- Muhammad Al-Sammak, Lebanon, Secretary-General of the National Council for Islamic-Christian Dialogue
- Hisham Nashabeh, Lebanon, Dean of Education at the Makassed Association, Lebanon
- Shakir Al-Fahham, Syria, Head of the Arabic Academy, Damascus
- Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan Al-But, Syria, Dean, Department of Religion, University of Damascus
- Ali Jum'a, Grand Mufti of the Republic of Egypt
- Ahmad Muhammad Al-Tayeb, Egypt, President of Al-Azhar University (now Sheikh Al Azhar)
- Hasan Hanafi, Egypt, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Cairo
- 'Izz Al-Din Ibrahim, Adviser for Cultural Affairs to the Prime Minister of the UAE
- Aref Ali Nayed, Libya, former Professor at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI), Rome, and at the University of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and adviser to Prince Ghazi
- Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Iranian-American, Professor at George Washington University, Washington, USA
- Mustafa Ceric, Bosnia, Grand Mufti of Sarajevo
- Abdel-Kabeer Al-Alawi Al-Madghari, Morocco, former minister of Religious Affairs

- Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, Jordan, President of the aforementioned Academy of Amman

**The structure of the document is based on the double commandment – Love of God and of the Neighbour**

Two pages of introduction to the document recall Muslims, Christians and Jews to their common monotheism. To Muslims, the Qur'an instructs: "Say: He is God, the One! God the self-sufficient besought of all" (112:1-2) and "Invoke the Name of thy Lord and devote thyself (*tabattal*) to him with a complete devotion" (73:9). To Christians, Jesus teaches:

*"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment, and the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these (Mark 12:29-31)."*

This double commandment is, according to the *Letter*, related to the quranic verse already cited, but then developed: "O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him)" (3:64). Then recalling that the Qur'an invites Muhammad and the Muslims to dialogue as follows: "Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and contend with them in the fairest way. Lo! thy Lord is Best Aware of him who strayeth from His way, and He is Best Aware of those who go aright," (16:125) the *Letter* then develops its argument in three sections.

The first section explores "Love of God" (*hubb Allâh*) first of all in Islam (five pages) and then in the Bible (two pages). Beginning from the *shahâda* (confession

of faith), and focusing only on the first part, the great *shahâda*, “*There is no god but God*”, the text then develops monotheism (*tawhîd*) out of it, based on a “saying” (*hadîth*) of Muhammad which affirms that “The best that I have said – myself, and the prophets that came before me – is: ‘There is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty (*mulk*) and His is the praise (*hamd*) and He hath power over all things”, illustrating each of the affirmations of this *hadîth* by numerous citations from the Qur’an (33:4; 2:165; 39:23; 67:1; 29:61-63; 14:32-34; 1:1-7; 19:96; 2:194-196; 9:38-39; 64:1; 64:4; 64:16; 6:162-164; 3:31; 73:8), sometimes corroborated by other *hadîth*-s. We should note that the only quranic verse where there is a mention of “Love of God” is not actually a commandment, but rather in a polemical context: “Yet there are men who take rivals unto God: they love them as they should love God. But those of faith are more intense in their love for God” (2:165). The *Letter* does not mention, and for good reason, the verse where it is said, “God will bring a people whom He will love and they will love Him” (5:54); for it also speaks there of the apostasy of some, then of a community “humble towards the believers, stern towards the disbelievers”! The two pages which deal with the Love of God in the Bible reiterate the “*Hear O Israel!*” of Deuteronomy (6:4) since Jesus Christ repeats it in his teaching of the two commandments which turn into one (Matt. 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31), which are Gospel echoes of Deut. 4:29; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 26:26; 30:2; 30:6; 30:10; and of Joshua 22:5, taken up by Mark 12:32-33 and Luke 10:27-28. The *Letter* explicates what are the respective meanings of the Greek words for “heart”, “soul”, “mind” and “strength”. These are all citations or references which will in the final analysis confirm the teaching of the prophetic *hadîth* cited above.

The second section discusses the “Love of fellow-man (or of neighbour)” (*hubb al-jâr*) in less than two pages. In Islam, according to a prophetic *hadîth*, “*None of you has faith until you love for your brother (or your neighbour) what you love*

*for yourself.*” From this comes the insistence on “piety” (*birr*), which means that one:

*Giveth wealth, in spite of love for it, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere. Such are the pious. (2:177).*

God is always the first and the last witness of such piety (3:92).

Referring to the Bible, the text revisits Matthew 22:38-40 and Mark 12:31, which pick up from the more detailed statement of Leviticus 19:17-18. In conclusion, it is stated: “*On these two commandments hang all the Law (Nâmûs) and the Prophets*” (Matt. 22:40).

The third section comments, in four pages, on the sentence “*Come to a common word between us and you*” (3:64). The “Common Word” consists of the two-fold commandment of love of the only God and of our fellow-man, repeating some of the citations mentioned previously, (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29; Matt. 22:40; Qur’an 112:1-2). This is taken as proof that Muhammad did not bring anything new (Qur’an 41:43; 46:9). Based on this is the condemnation of idols and the demand for justice (16:36; 57:25). And the “*Come*”, which invites its listeners not to “ascribe a partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords besides God” (3:64), is held to signify, according the great commentator Tabarî, that “Muslims, Christians and Jews should be free to each follow what God commanded them, and not have ‘to prostrate before kings and the like’”; for God says elsewhere in the Holy Qur’an: “*Let there be no compulsion in religion ...*” (2:256), which in turn guarantees religious liberty “unconditionally” (60:8):

*As Muslims, we say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not against them—so long as they do not*

*wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes.*

The *Letter* then asks Christians to take another look at the passage in their Bible (Matt. 12:30; Mark 9:40; Luke 9:50) where Jesus declares, "He who is not against us is on our side" (Mark 9:4). Now, affirms the *Letter*, Muslims believe in Jesus as being "a Messenger of God and His Word which he cast unto Mary and a Spirit from Him" (4:171). There is therefore in this a "common belief", even if the faith of Christians in relation to Jesus is very different: is he not *Yasû'* (God saves) for Christians, but *Îsâ* for Muslims? The *Letter* recognizes that among the People of the Scripture there is "a staunch community who recite the revelations of God" (3:113-115) and affirms that Muslims also believe in all the historical prophets (2:136-137). The words "*Between us and you*" is ultimately an appeal to unite the witness of believers ("Together they make up more than 55% of the world's population") confronted with the dangers of the present, because the three monotheistic religions have to guarantee peace to humankind today. References are made to the Qur'an (16:90) and the Gospel (Matthew 5:9; 16:26). And the *Letter* cites as its conclusion the verse that is considered to speak about "religious pluralism":

*Had God willed He could have made you one community (umma). But that He may try you by that which He has given you (He has made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works (fa-stabiqû l-khayrât): Unto God ye will all return (5:48).*

**The Letter presents itself as a text which is both innovative and traditional at the same time**

The signatories of the *Letter* therefore wished to re-read the key texts of the Qur'an and the Sunna in the light of the double commandment to love God and love the neighbour which lies at the heart of Jewish belief and the Christian faith. Focusing only on the first part of the *shahâda* they are seeking to define

monotheism by this double love of God and of the neighbour, thus giving to their reading of the Qur'an this note of "spiritual internalisation" which the *Letter of the 38* had already revealed – given that that earlier *Letter* had insisted on the nearness of God to every believer. Does not a *hadîth* reported by Al-Ghazali state, "Whoever says, 'There is no god but God' has the right to enter paradise"? The conventional attitudes of obedience, submission and adoration are replaced by a vocabulary which seems common to Muslims, Jews and Christians: it becomes a question of love, and it is true that the Qur'an affirms that God loves "the pious" (376; 9:4; 9:7), "the beneficent" (3:134; 3:148; 5:13; 5:93), "the patient" (3:146), "the just" (5:42; 49:9; 60:8), "the pure" (9:108) and "those who put their trust in him" (3:159), even if the 99 Beautiful Names do not say that he is "loving" (*muhibb*). And now that the love of God and the love of the neighbour are so closely bound together in the *Letter* that they seem inseparable from each other, no one can claim to love God if he or she does not love their neighbour! This is an affirmation which comes very naturally to Christians, because it forms part of the essential principles of their faith and practice, but it is an affirmation strangely new to many Muslims who most readily associate Islam with respectful adoration and trustful submission. Moreover, biblical texts are often cited by the *Letter* without the least hint of "falsification" (*tahrîf*) against them, and one of the 23 commentary notes even refers to a text from St Paul (note 4). These notes are also in themselves, honest efforts to find values common to the three monotheistic religions.

What are the unexpected elements in this *Letter*? What constitutes the master text? Is it the one published in Arabic or rather that transmitted in English? It seems likely to be the latter. Indeed, when the text speaks of "the love of God in the Bible", the Arabic text here says "in the Gospel" (and gives to it an Old Testament!) and when it cites "Jesus Christ", the Arabic version speaks of *Îsâ l-Masîh*, an

expression which is neither quranic (the Qur'an has either simply *al-Masîh* or *Îsâ ibn Maryam*), nor Christian (where Jesus is called *Yasû' al-Masîh*), but which exactly translates the words "Jesus Christ" in the English version. However, other details seem to give a certain priority to the Arabic text. And that leaves the reader wanting more! It is also surprising that an excellent *hadîth* in the Arabic text has not been translated into the English, French and Italian versions: "Human beings are the family of God (*'lyâl Allâh*): he or she who is most useful to their family is the most loved by God." In any case, the *Letter* does not depart from a traditional style of presentation by accumulating quranic quotes and prophetic *hadîth*-s, although it isolates them from their contexts, which allows them to be given a wider and dialogical interpretation. The question of proper vocabulary is also taken seriously, because although there is still mention of the "People of the Book" (Jews and Christians), the text also speaks of Jews and Christians as such, with the latter being translated as *Mas'hiyyûn* and not as *Nasârâ*. What is more, the English, French and Italian versions never translate the quranic term *muslim* by Muslim/Moslem (unlike many Islamic translations), but rather by the phrases "soumis à Dieu", "surrendering unto God", "sottomesso a Dio", which can apply to every monotheistic believer whether they be Muslim, Jew or Christian. These are all aspects which indicate a serious effort to adapt to the intended interlocutors of the *Letter*, in spite of the fact that the *Letter* begins with the classic formula "In the name of God, the all merciful, the compassionate", and concludes with the blessing of peace (*wa-l-salâmu 'alay-kum*).

### **Promising aspects revealed by careful and unbiased scrutiny**

We definitely have to take the *Letter of the 38* of October 2006 as the starting point for understanding the intentions and the contents of this *Letter* (A Common Word). The *Letter* of 2006 was unfortunately not unpolemical, drafted quickly it seems, as a response to the Regensburg lecture. That *Letter* focused on the historical context of

the injunction "No compulsion in religion"; it tempered the understanding of the absolute transcendence of God affirming that God is also near to his creatures, it affirmed the harmony between faith and reason in Islam, it made clear that there are different forms of *jihâd*, it recalled that the Muslim conquests had respected the religion of the conquered populations by granting them "protected status" (*dhimma*), it stated that Muhammad had never claimed to bring anything new, it challenged the choice of experts made by Pope Benedict XVI, and it lastly called for dialogue and collaboration citing extensively from texts of Vatican II and the declaration of Pope John Paul II. That earlier *Letter* of the 38 was addressed only to Pope Benedict XVI, whereas the present *Letter* is sent to all the leaders of Christian communities, respecting carefully their hierarchy of precedence and titles, asking them to make, in some way, an ecumenical response to the contents of the *Letter* (A Common Word). Its tone is more irenic even if some quranic quotations need to be specified more precisely, while others, not mentioned, are asking for clarification as Abdelwahab Meddeb had already suggested in his commentary on the *Letter of the 38*, published in *La conférence de Ratisbonne: enjeux et controverses*.

So we have a text which brings together a large number of Muslim leaders of all schools and traditions and which is addressed to the leadership of the Christian communities throughout the entire world, reminding both groups of their common responsibility towards a humanity which never ceases to unearth misunderstandings, conflicts and divisions of all sorts. Paradoxically, the invitation made here to all is in line with that desired by the Vatican II Declaration of the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*): "To promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom." It's a question, then, of modern forms of the love of the neighbour that the present *Letter* wishes to link closely to the love of God, in turn

the perfect expression of that “loving” or “delicious” monotheism, envisaged by Ibn Khaldun in his era (*tawhîd dhawqî*). Haven’t the quranic texts drawn on in the *Letter* been constantly recalled and meditated upon in numerous Christian-Muslim gatherings that we have had during these last four decades? All the partners in the dialogue know only them too well, while there are other texts (which speak with warlike accents or in discriminatory terms) which are still waiting for a re-reading to contextualize their content. It is therefore to be welcomed that this contemporary *ijmâ’* seeks to privilege such texts in the context of a renewed dialogue in which the two-fold love of God and of the neighbour appears as the perfect expression of the faith in the one God, Creator and Merciful. Was not the first encyclical of Benedict XVI titled, “*God is Love*”? Hasn’t Muslim tradition always maintained that faith without works will not suffice for the success of a believer? The invitation to “*vie with one another in good works*” seems to correspond well to the urgency of the hour in a world which is threatened by the “clash of civilizations” and the vagaries of globalization.

Without the need to stick closely to all the concrete proposals of a political or strategic nature made at the conclusion of the third section, and while regretting that the *Letter* nowhere denounces in its pages the acts of violence or terrorism that certain groups of Muslims are committing today “in the name of God” for whatever reason, should we still welcome with interest the suggestions that the *Letter* makes for a future dialogue? For, “If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace.” Their “common word” must therefore embrace all current forms of the two-fold love of God and the neighbour: their dialogues must provide an opportunity for sharing and exchanging their spiritual experiences and theological renewal, just as “the neighbour” cannot be restricted to only the horizons of their co-religionists, for the scope is no more or less than all men and women: it’s the question of “our eternal

souls” whose fate is at stake. Doesn’t the *Letter* state that “the same eternal truths of the Unity of God, of the necessity for total love and devotion to God (and thus shunning false gods), and of the necessity for love of fellow human beings (and thus justice), underlie all true religion”?

This is indeed what Christians have claimed for nearly twenty centuries, picking up on and spelling out the message of witness given formerly to Israel, the people of the First Testament: to believe in the One God requires knowing him and loving him, and recognizing also that all human beings, created in his image and after his likeness, and worthy to be loved with the same love with which God is loved. It is appropriate therefore to welcome this *Letter* as the dawn of a new stage in Muslim-Christian dialogue, which allows the dialogue partners to discuss at last the most fundamental problems which distinguish them, divide them or lead them to oppose each other, in order to work together in a concrete way to apply those human rights, defined in 1948, which correspond to the demands of the natural law, dear to Christians, as well as to the principles of *Sharî’a* to which Muslims give importance – working together on this basis even if the anthropologies and theologies which they respectively use as justification are different. The experience acquired over forty years and through many Muslim-Christian meetings allows us to understand better the positive response made to this *Letter* by many Christian figures and institutions. As mentioned previously, “all human beings are of the family of God: the one who is most loved by God is he or she who is most useful to his or her family.” The fact that the *Letter of the 138* has prompted numerous initiatives as “follow up” is beneficial, both on the Christian and on the Muslim side. We can only give some examples, which enable us to see how it offers the promise of the renewal of Muslim-Christian dialogue.

### **3. Following on from the *Letter of the 138 Muslim Scholars***

Having just explored the *Letter of the 138* and given an initial appreciation, now provides an opportunity to look at what followed. What were actually the various reactions and responses that this *Letter* provoked? There has been the response of the Holy See, the declaration of PISAI, the letter of Prince Ghazi in the name of the 138, the actions, the gestures, the misunderstandings which followed, and the renewed possibilities for true dialogue. It is that which we now need to speak about.

### **The initial response of Pope Benedict XVI**

How, therefore, has this *Letter* been received and what are the reactions which it had provoked from each side? Much has happened since October 2007. The Pope immediately welcomed with interest this *Letter of the 138* and was quick to make this known, through Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, to His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, President of the *Âl al-Bayt* Institute for Islamic Thought. In his letter addressed to the Prince, dated 19 November 2007, the Cardinal expressed the Pope's thoughts in these terms:

*The Pope has asked me to convey his gratitude to Your Royal Highness and to all who signed the letter. He also wishes to express his deep appreciation for this gesture, for the positive spirit which inspired the text and for the call for a common commitment to promoting peace in the world. Without ignoring or downplaying our differences as Christians and Muslims, we can and therefore should look to what unites us, namely, belief in the one God, the provident Creator and universal Judge who at the end of time will deal with each person according to his or her actions.*

And the papal response added, "His Holiness was particularly impressed by the attention given in the letter to the twofold commandment to love God and one's neighbour." Then there followed a comment about the possibilities of dialogue:

*Such common ground allows us to base dialogue on effective respect for the dignity of every human person, on objective knowledge of the religion of the other, on the sharing of religious experience and, finally, on common commitment to promoting mutual respect and acceptance among the younger generation.*

And it is in order to better define desirable cooperation in "the areas of culture and society, and for the promotion of justice and peace in society and throughout the world" that the Pope proposed to Prince Ghazi "to receive Your Royal Highness and a restricted group of signatories of the open letter, chosen by you" at Rome itself, for a "working meeting" with the PCID, with the cooperation of some specialized Pontifical Institutes.

As can be seen, this attitude of Benedict XVI is in line with the spirit of openness and of dialogue of the Holy See, which it has always continued to maintain after the misunderstandings of autumn 2006. The message of Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of PCID, addressed to all Muslims for the end of the fast of Ramadan 1428/2007, 28 September 2007, was the official expression of this:

*It matters that all of us witness to our religious beliefs with a life increasingly integrated and in conformity with the Creator's plan, a life concerned with serving our brothers and sisters in ever increasing solidarity and fraternity with members of other religions and all men of good will.*

More precisely, Cardinal Tauran's message insisted on the necessity of dialogue:

*In this spirit, the pursuit and intensification of dialogue between Christians and Muslims must be considered important, in both educational and cultural dimensions ... Dialogue is the tool which can help us to escape from the endless spiral of conflict and multiple tensions which mark our societies, so that all peoples can live in serenity and peace.*

And Benedict XVI had stressed the urgency of this during his speech of 21 October 2007 at the International Encounter of Religions for Peace, organized at Naples by the Community of St Egidio, on the theme of "A World without Violence: Faiths and Cultures in Dialogue". After having evoked "the spirit of Assisi" dear to John Paul II, he explained:

*While respecting the differences of the various religions, we are all called to work for peace and to be effectively committed to furthering reconciliation among peoples ... In the face of a world torn apart by conflicts, where violence in God's Name is at times justified, it is important to reaffirm that religions can never become vehicles of hatred; it is never possible, invoking God's Name, to succeed in justifying evil and violence.*

It was during this encounter at Naples that he had the opportunity to engage in dialogue with a number of representatives of the Jewish world and Muslim countries. It was in that situation that the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Yona Metzger, and the founder of the University of the United Arab Emirates, Ezzedin Ibrahim, expressed the wish that a "United Nations of Religions" might be created under the auspices of the Community of St Egidio!

Around the same time, the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI) made clear, in an official declaration by its staff, dated 25 October 2007, how it appreciated this "highly significant event that we cannot fail to notice and must accentuate its importance." The directors and professors went on to say,

*Our long and diligent association with the cultural and religious patrimony of Islam, as well as our regular contacts with members of the Muslim community enable us to take note of the originality of this gesture and entitle us to draw the attention of non-Muslims to its qualities.*

The PISAI document sought to emphasize the full importance of the Letter:

*We were impressed by the broad scope of this text; its breadth at the level of the signatories, one hundred and thirty-eight Muslim personalities from numerous countries of every continent, whose religious affiliations demonstrate a great variety. There was breadth also at the level of the addressees, all leaders of different Christian Churches, including the twenty-eight named explicitly. In the same line of observation, we highlight the extent of the area under consideration: Muslims, Christians, Jews and people worldwide. The authors of the letter do not seek refuge in a convenient one-sided protest on behalf of the umma, but on the contrary, place themselves as partners within humanity. For it, they offer their way of perceiving its foundations and principles, accepted also by other communities, in view of its survival in an effectual and general peace.*

In effect,

*... Its authors are interested in the fate of the present world, at stake here and now, but also in that of the "eternal souls", a destiny determined elsewhere and in the future.*

The directors and professors of PISAI added,

*We are also keenly aware of the special treatment that the signatories of this letter give to the supreme point of reference that undergirds 'the other' as Jew or Christian, namely, the dual commandment of love of God and neighbour in Deuteronomy and in Matthew's Gospel. This willingness to acknowledge another person in the deepest desire of what he or she wants to be seems to us one of the key points of this document ... At the same time, we appreciate the way the authors of this text, as Muslims, see the proper definition of their own identity in these two commandments. They do so not by compliance or by politicking, but truly, solely on the basis of their proclamation of divine uniqueness, (al-tawhîd), the pivot of Muslim belief. Indeed, we acknowledge that the radical acceptance of divine uniqueness is one of the most authentic*

expressions of love owed to God alone. In addition, as faith always goes together with good works, as the Koran never fails to repeat, (alladhîna âmanû wa-‘amilû l-sâlihât: al-Baqara 2:25), love of God is inseparable from love of neighbour.

Congratulating the authors of the Letter on their realism and their courage, the writers of the PISAI document recognize that:

*They do not erase the differentiation of our Christological options and, on the other hand, they do not disregard the problem of religious freedom which they consider a crucial issue. This realism does not prevent them from having a positive view concerning obstacles and differences that remain between us. This means that faithful to the Koranic tradition that inspires them, they only see in it an opportunity for competition in the pursuit of the common good, (fa-stabiqû l-khayrât: al-Mâ'ida 5:48). Undoubtedly, this positive view of problems enabled them to avoid controversy, to surpass themselves, to shoulder and ignore their disappointment to a response that did not rise to their expectations in the outcome of their letter of 2006 addressed to His Holiness. Pope Benedict XVI.*

The importance of this well documented declaration by the PISAI staff also rests in the fact that it acknowledges the emergence of “a new and creative [Muslim] attitude relative to the Koranic text and that of the Prophetic tradition. This is in reference to certain historical interpretations, marked by particular situations that made access relatively restricted as far as the consideration of non-Muslims was concerned.” What is more,

*We are pleased to see that the biblical and Gospel quotations used in this document come from the sources and that explanations given are on occasion based on the original languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. This is evidence of deep respect and genuine attentiveness to others, while at the same time of a true scientific spirit ... In conclusion, we wish to insist on the a priori positive attitude of the*

*writers of this text in their interpretation of the three parallel passages in the Synoptic Gospels. They could have chosen a much more restrictive and minimalist exegesis with which the Christian tradition would have provided them without difficulty and of which they were surely aware. Inspired by their attitude, we also would only hold to the maximum interpretation according to which the texts of the Koran and the Prophetic tradition do not only restrict to members of the umma the benefits that any good Muslim may lavish on his neighbour, for the sake of his faith in God and in his exclusive love for him.*

### **The response of Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal and plans for meeting**

On 12 December 2007, Prince Ghazi replied to Cardinal Bertone, asking him to convey to the Holy Father the contents of his letter: first of all his thanks to Benedict XVI, then the desire to meet with him as had done His Majesty Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz, King of Saudi Arabia on 6 November 2007, and lastly his intention to send three representatives to Rome to prepare for a gathering for dialogue. He recognized that the letter of the Pope had suggested that at the heart of their exchanges (their “intrinsic” aspect) they should place the common monotheistic values and the two-fold commandment of love of God and of the neighbour, even while accepting that, in respect of the different interpretations specific to Islam and Christianity, there would be a reciprocal sharing of the “otherness”. As regards the “extrinsic aspect”, this would be, as was suggested by the Pope, a reflection on the Ten Commandments of Sinai as a charter of “values common to Jews, Christians and Muslims.” Based on this, the following three themes were suggested:

1. “Effective respect for the dignity of every human person
2. Objective knowledge of the religion of the other
3. A common commitment to promoting mutual respect and acceptance among the younger generation”

in the spirit of the *Letter* about “A Common Word”.

Following on this, the Prince quoted from a joint statement of the Muslims who were present at the Naples (Sant Egidio) meeting of 21-23 October:

*Dialogue is by definition between people of different views, not people of the same view. Dialogue is not about imposing one’s views on the other side, nor deciding oneself what the other side is and is not capable of, nor even of what the other side believes. Dialogue starts with an open hand and an open heart. It proposes but does not set an agenda unilaterally. It is about listening to the other side as it speaks freely for itself, as well as about expressing one’s own self. Its purpose is to see where there is common ground in order to meet there and thereby make the world better, more peaceful, more harmonious and more loving.*

Then the Prince’s letter recalls that Muslims are required to practice mercy (*rahma*) in order to benefit themselves from the *rahma* of God and to enter into “cordial discussion with the People of the Book” (29:46). The letter supposes that the Pope, for his part, is inspired by St Paul’s hymn to love which is “longsuffering, desires to be of service and rejoices in the truth”, citing at length in relation to this 1 Corinthians 13:1-6. Lastly, alluding to some pronouncements emanating from “certain Vatican advisors” regarding a possible “theological dialogue”, Prince Ghazi set things out clearly in his conclusion: “

*We, like you, also consider complete theological agreement between Christians and Muslims inherently not possible by definition, but still wish to seek and promote a common stance and co-operation based upon what we do agree on (as mentioned above) - whether we wish to call this kind of dialogue “theological” or “spiritual” or something else.*

What developed from this is that a delegation of five members of the Amman group was received at Rome on 4-5 March 2008, in order to work with the staff of the PCID to organize such a gathering desired at the highest level by each of the two parties. The idea of a Christian-Muslim Forum was therefore made a concrete project and plans were made to assemble the following November, with twelve Muslim and twelve Christian representatives discussing the themes suggested in the earlier correspondence. Shaykh Dr Abdal Hakim Murad Winter from the University of Cambridge had the task of expressing official “reflections” at the end of the two days work in April, in which, it seems, the Libyan intellectual Aref Ali Nayed played an important role, as he had also done with the editing of the *Letter of the 138*. Shaykh Hakim’s comments recalled the importance of the letter *A Common Word* as well as the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate*, as well as the spirit of openness and understanding associated with Louis Massignon and the professors of PISAI in Rome. Alluding to the suffering and tragedies of contemporary humanity and ignorance and misunderstanding in religious matters, the Shaykh referred to the common responsibility of believers to reject extremism and exclusivism, and condemn all forms of terrorism. From each side it was necessary to reject the distorted images of the other and rather strive for accurate and unbiased information about who each is and what each wants to be. He stated that as far as the Muslim group was concerned, since they came from different regions and schools of thought the primary consensus which had brought them together were the topics covered in the *Letter*. It was on these topics that the Forum would need to focus. In conclusion, the Shaykh reported the positive response to the *Letter of the 138* from various Christian communities, witnessing to its importance for the future of Christian-Muslim relations. As far as Reformed Christians were concerned, a conference was scheduled for July at Yale; as regards the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, and

theologians of the Anglican Communion, a meeting would be held during the year at Cambridge. At Georgetown University, a conference would be held in January 2009. Expressions of interest had also been made by the Orthodox churches of Moscow and Istanbul.

### **The risk of mutual misunderstanding of each other's gestures and actions**

It is true that on both sides, many of the gestures and actions seem to have engendered new misunderstandings about which it was necessary to explain the distinction to be made between "Dialogue and Proclamation". Indeed, in Rome with its *"Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization"* published on 14 December 2007 and approved by Pope Benedict XVI, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith insisted on raising the question of an "increasing confusion" around the notion of "evangelization" which could be perceived as an obstacle to the liberty of the other and an "attitude of intolerance." Every believer has "the right and the duty" to witness to his or her faith, to render an account of it, and even to offer it while respectful of the freedom of conscience of others. And the *Note* rightly sets out the anthropological, ecclesiological and ecumenical implications. And Benedict XVI often said, following in the path of his predecessors, "The proclamation of and witness to the Gospel are the first service that Christians can render to every person and the entire human race": "the contemporary relativism and irenicism in the religious world is not a valid reason for failing in this onerous but costly commitment, which belongs to the very nature of the Church." Had he not planned to explain it once more at the University of Rome, La Sapienza, where the Rector had invited him to speak at the beginning of the academic year on 17 January 2008 on the relationship between faith and reason, saying among other things, "I do not come to impose faith but to stir up courage for truth"? In November 2007, Mgr Pierre-Marie Carré, President of the Doctrinal Commission of the Bishops' Conference of France, and the Archbishop of Albi had also published a text of the same sort, titled *"How can*

### *Christians and Muslims speak of God?"*

Commenting on the texts of Vatican II which suggested possible common values, he spelt out that "beyond an apparent convergence, underlined by the choice of adjectives" we cannot "ignore the differences and even radical disagreement" which make real difficulties for all theological dialogue, but there is a place for a "spiritual dialogue" such as John Paul II wished for in his address at Casablanca on 19 August 1985 to young Moroccan Muslims. This double call from each side based on the demands which form the identity of faith has not always been well understood by a number of people. Yet, it was this very authentic and demanding attitude of both witness and dialogue which Mgr Francis Deniau, Bishop of Nevers, had illustrated on 27 May 2007, when he had been invited in the context of an "Open Doors" day of a Training Center for Imâms: "Without difference there can be no dialogue."

It is clear that the baptism of an Italian journalist of Egyptian origin, Magdi Allam, who regularly denounced the excesses of "Muslim terrorism" on Easter night 2008 by Benedict XVI himself, was interpreted in a negative light by a number of the Muslims who formed part of the group linked to the *Letter of the 138*. As a journalist of the daily paper, *La Croix*, said on 25 March,

*It is normal for the Pope, during the Easter vigil, to baptize a small number of catechumens. But by choosing this year to baptize among the seven catechumens, Magdi Allam, an Italian man of Muslim origin, Benedict XVI had without doubt wanted to send a significant message to the Islamic world. 'For the Catholic Church, each person who asks to receive baptism after deep personal searching, a choice made with freely and after appropriate preparation, has the right to receive it,' Father Federico Lombardi, the spokesman of the Pope, stated just before the ceremony, to avoid any controversy from the outset. In fact we do not see why Catholics should keep silent about the conversion of Muslims. The reverse is also true: in Italy is not the Imam Yahya*

*Pallavicini a member of a family of Christians who have converted to Islam?*

Benedict XVI has never ceased, in all his comments, to make clear how important proper and effective religious liberty are for him. Additionally, Father Lombardi clarified that such a baptism did not signify that the Pope was agreeing with all the polemical viewpoints of the newly baptized man, who was Associate Editor in Chief of *Corriere della Sera*. In an article which he published titled "Benedict XVI tells us to overcome our fear", Magdi Allam explained his spiritual journey and his reasons for joining the Catholic faith, wishing also to call, by his action, the "converts of the catacombs" to let their voices be heard and to seek respect from their ex-co-religionists. The Imam Yahya Pallavicini said that he "was embarrassed by the lack of sensitivity" of those who organized the baptism of Magdi Allam, "on the day after the feast of the Birth of the Prophet" of Islam, and the Libyan intellectual Aref Ali Nayed was harshly critical of the actions of missionaries in Islamic countries and reproached Benedict XVI for "an unhappy episode which reaffirms the infamous Regensburg address", exploiting the symbolism of a conflict between light and darkness. Neither side thought it useful to speak of the demands of religious liberty, but Father Lombardi, in his official response, decided to "show our displeasure with what Professor Nayed said about education in Christian schools in Muslim majority countries, with his worries about proselytism."

The difficult situation which Christian communities in some countries, such as Pakistan and Iraq, currently experience seems therefore to have escaped the attention of the authors of the *Letter*. Moreover, we now strangely have to add Algeria to the list. Pursuant to the Presidential decree of 28 February 2006, which came into force in June 2007, all forms of proselytism is forbidden and every act of non-Muslim worship is strictly controlled, so much so that the courts have recently condemned a Catholic

priest and a Muslim doctor for offering religious help to sub-Saharan migrants. Algerian Protestant Bible sellers have also suffered, as well as Pastor Johnstone, who lived in Algeria, completely legally, for almost 40 years. The Algerian intellectual Mustafa Cherif and the President of the High Islamic Committee Shaykh Bouamrane did not really intervene to defend the right of their fellow citizens to religious liberty, but rather justified the law and its application in the name of the "National Islamic Cohesion" of Algerian society. The four Catholic bishops of the country have tried in vain to get an explanation and amelioration in relation to the aforementioned anti-proselytism law. And then, given that Mgr Henri Teissier, the Archbishop of Algiers, retiring for reason of age, the naming of a Jordanian priest Mgr Ghaleb Mousa Abdallah Bader as his successor, without doubt signifies that the Church was deliberately making clear that one can be Arab and Christian. Can we hope that some notable French Muslims of Algerian origin would have the courage to intervene in the name of the equality of rights and freedoms which they enjoy in France? Some of them indeed have begun to do so.

In any case, gatherings, congresses and colloquia have at least continued in 2008, to provide occasions for Christians and Muslims to meet here and there. This was the case in Tunisia, where the Muslim university of al-Zaytuna organized study days at Tunis (20-22 February) on "Translation: a factor of enrichment for cultures and for the dialogue of civilizations", then at Kairouan (10-12 April) on "The past and the present of Muslim theology." The Groupe de Recherches Islamo-Chrétien (GRIC – The Group for Muslim-Christian Research) celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary at Rabat-Casablanca on 25-26 April for its groups from the Maghreb, from France and from Lebanon. In Rome, a group of Christians gathered by the PCID and a group of Muslims who had come from the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue (Tehran) reflected on "Faith and Reason in Christianity and Islam" from 28-30 April.

While on 22-24 May a gathering of 200 people from all religions, coming from all European countries, found themselves at Rovereto (Italy) to discuss the “common values which religions bring to a Europe in transition.” Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders made very clear their willingness to engage in dialogue for truth and to cooperate for peace. The Orthodox Bishop of Vienna, Mgr Hilarion Alfeyev, commented on the response of the Patriarch of Moscow, Alexis II, to the *Letter of the 138*. Alongside thanking the signatories of the *Letter* for their desire for dialogue and their insistence on the two-fold commandment of love of God and of the neighbour, His Holiness invited them to proclaim a common witness of the values of faith and morals in a world which was losing sight of its religious foundations and ethical demands. This approach allowed him also to insist on the mystery of love of the Trinitarian God, internally and externally, and on the necessity of respecting the profound theological divergence between Christianity and Islam. And since all believers must work together for peace and justice, he asked the signatories to intervene in their respective countries so that all, and especially Christians, might see their religious liberty at last respected and guaranteed (Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Indonesia, Kosovo, Turkish Cyprus, Turkey).

### **Prospects for a truthful dialogue**

It is good to contextualize the interpretation of these actions and gestures, as well as the intentions behind them. It is certain that the dramatic and unjustifiable happenings of 11 September 2001 at New York and Washington, which were then repeated on a smaller scale in Madrid and London, have bestowed upon contemporary Islam, due to unwarranted generalization, the image of “an ideology which legitimates violent death leading to murder and suicide” according to Magdi Allam, which is ready to kill innocent people in the name of a harsh fundamentalism which lays claim to Allah himself. It is equally certain that the military interventions, unilateral in Iraq and international in Afghanistan, as well as the

endemic conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, have only reinforced the anti-Western views of the Muslim public, while in the West a pervasive islamophobia increases in parallel to this. Is the “clash of civilizations” envisaged by Samuel Huntington in the process of being realized? Faced with this very serious situation, it is vital that finally all believers who are bearers of the message of peace from their religious traditions should speak together. The *Letter of the 138* therefore courageously joins a group of interventions which we can hope will translate eventually into effective collaboration in all fields.

From the Muslim side, have we not already noted that the King of Saudi Arabia, Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz, paid a visit to the Pope in Rome on 6 November 2007? Now when he received in Riyadh, on 24 March 2008, the Sixth Dialogue among Civilizations between Japan and the Islamic World, he confided to them his concern to make an intervention in favour of world peace and safeguarding the institution of the family. “This idea is one that has preoccupied me for two years”, he told them:

*The disintegration of the family and the spread of atheism throughout the world are frightening phenomena which religions need to confront and conquer ... I have therefore invited the religious authorities to give their advice on this question and we are going to begin to organise meetings with brothers who belong to the monotheistic religions, the faithful who follow the Qur'an, the Gospel and the Torah.*

The King had been in contact with the Pope himself, and that is why he had even requested that there should be in his Kingdom “courses to improve the training of imams in order to promote a moderate interpretation of Islam.” Following on from this, and under his patronage, the Muslim World League organized a “major conference of preparation for dialogue with others” in Mecca from 4-6 June, at which a number of those responsible for worldwide Muslim leadership participated,

including the Shaykh al-Azhar, Al-Tantawi, and the former President of the Iranian Republic, Rafsanjani. The meeting defined what was dialogue, what were its goals, its principles, its methodology and its limits. We also need to remember that in Yogyakarta, Indonesia (8-9 March 2008), the leadership of all the religions gathered together for two days; while on the 25 March, 35 *'ulamâ* demanded in their "call of Jakarta" that children should have a proper religious education without the glorification of violence. On 18 April in Dhaka, Bangladesh, a colloquium for dialogue gathered together a number of Muslim and Christian leaders, at the initiative of Professor Kazi Nurul Islam, in order to study the *Letter of the 138* after some preliminary meetings on the same subject (the Muslims involved were 35 in number).

The responses from the Christian side to the *Letter of the 138* have been very varied. We have already mentioned those of the Holy See and the Patriarchate of Moscow, as well as those of the PISAI in Rome. The World Council of Churches in Geneva, which brings together 349 churches from 110 countries, offered a positive welcome to the *Letter* in its document titled "*Learning to Explore Love Together*", and suggested the formation of a mixed group to organize a series of consultations on the theological and ethical themes suggested by the *Letter*. The Joint Committee of the CCEE (Council of the European Bishops Conferences) and CEC (The Council of European Churches) met with Muslim leaders at Esztergom in Hungary 17-20 April in order to prepare a Muslim-Christian conference to take place at Malines-Brussels 20-23 October, which would focus on "*Being Believers and European Citizens: Christians and Muslims as Partners in European Society*." The participants at the meeting at Esztergom also discussed the phenomenon of violence linked to religion and the need for interreligious experience in the formation of future religious leaders.

Benedict XVI himself also took care to meet on 17 April, during his visit to the United States, 200 representatives of the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religious communities and to say to them that "the world and peace itself have need of our common witness." Recognizing that "the task of upholding religious freedom is never completed", he affirmed:

*"Religion and freedom are intimately linked in contributing to a stable democracy" ... "the transmission of religious traditions to succeeding generations not only helps to preserve a heritage; it also sustains and nourishes the surrounding culture in the present day".*

It is also necessary to "aim at something more than a consensus" and to "listen attentively to the voice of truth", while at the same time taking into account dialogue as "a way of serving society at large." What is more,

*"The higher goal of interreligious dialogue requires a clear exposition of our respective religious tenets ... May the followers of all religions stand together in defending and promoting life and religious freedom everywhere".*

It is as collaborators of the Pope that the members and experts of the PCID reflected during the tenth plenary meeting of the PCID on the current situation regarding Muslim-Christian relations in the world, and on the possibilities offered by the *Letter of the 138*, for which, by now, numerous Muslim representatives in many countries had signed up. The President of the PCID, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, was able to declare that a Catholic draft "*Guidelines for Dialogue*" was under consideration and would give substantial weight to the Ten Commandments of Sinai "the universal grammar which any believer can use in his or her relations with God and neighbour." All believers must know, he added, that they have "a common patrimony: faith in one God, in the sacredness of life, the necessity of fraternity and the experience of prayer", while at the same time having the courage

to “seek truth, to defend it and to transmit it.”

### Conclusion

These are recent examples of Muslim-Christian dialogue which political events over the last years and the misunderstandings caused by certain actions and gestures have given a rough ride to! Therefore, it is in such a context that the *Letter of the 138* wanted to express the Muslim desire to further a dialogue which perhaps had previously been content simply to rest on the platform of “human rights”. Without intending it, the Regensburg papal lecture has led both sides to revisit their positions, to renew their thinking and to encourage new initiatives. Foreshadowed by the unfortunately polemic *Letter of the 38*, the *Letter of the 138* was able to get a favourable reception from all Christian partners because it met them in the essential elements of their faith and witnessed to Muslim efforts to interpret their monotheism more precisely. Does not the twofold and unique love of God and of the neighbour deserve to be meditated upon in all its theological, ethical and mystical implications? This is indeed the desire that seems to nourish many people presently involved in interreligious dialogue, of which it has been said that dialogue shows itself more necessary than ever in order to bring peace between peoples and justice between human beings. As the Tunisian theologian Hmida Ennaifer said, after the Regensburg lecture:

*The fraternal dialogue between Islam and Christianity has had the merit of making us both inspect more carefully our own history ... let us not mummify interreligious*

*dialogue. Anchored in the present such dialogue invites us to re-explore our faith, this faith according to which Muslims and Christians believe that God has revealed himself by his word, which the former recognise in the Qur'an and the latter in Jesus Christ. So perfect is the founding word of our faith that we are far from thinking that the knowledge we possess of it can exhaust the riches and the mystery of God.*

Such is the spirit of dialogue which must completely fill those people whom God wishes today to be witnesses both of his marvellous greatness and his fatherly love towards a searching, suffering and hoping humanity.

*(Translated from the original French by Clare Amos.)*

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<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin [of the PCID], No. 56, XIX/2 (1984).* The English version is on p. 126-141.

<sup>2</sup> The phrases given in italics in the following paragraph are sectional headings in the document *Dialogue and Proclamation*.

<sup>3</sup> The text is found in the *Bulletin [of the PCID] No. 77 XXVI/2 (1991)*. The English version is on p. 201-259.

<sup>4</sup> Risto Jukko. (2007) Brill, Leiden-Boston.

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# A Quest for Just Peace in a Multi-Religious Context: Nigeria in Focus

**Lesmore Gibson Ezekiel**

## **Introduction**

The increasing spate of violent conflicts being experienced on a continuous basis globally, particularly in Nigeria, remains worrisome and mind-boggling. Worsening the situation further is the religious colouration and dimension that the violence has taken. Even though a socio-economic and political agenda undergirds the insurrections and insurgency, religious platforms have often been used to instigate and exacerbate hatred and disdain for adherents of other religions in order to satisfy the whims and caprices of political masters and lords. Because of both religious and cultural biases, it is unfortunate that other factors which have the propensity to fuel and trigger violent actions by citizens are often de-emphasized during conflict mediation processes and conversations in the northern region of Nigeria. Some of these factors include, but are not limited to: bad governance, poverty, hunger, employment, illiteracy, internal migration, land use/resources and other ethical dilemmas.

It is against the foregoing background that I intentionally engaged with the emerging Just Peace paradigm. I did so with a view of advancing strategic and usable proposals towards the realization of a vibrant, multi-religious society that upholds the principles and philosophy of authentic peace and inclusive justice embodied in the vision of just humanity to be enjoyed by all people, regardless of their religious affiliation, cultural attachment, political association and philosophical bias.

## **A Brief Historical Chronicle of Nigeria**

Nigeria is located in West Africa. It is bordered in the West by the Republic of Benin, in the East by the Republic of Cameroon, and in the North by the Republics of Niger and Chad. Nigeria

covers a land mass of 923,768 square kilometres. Nigeria has a current population of 170,003,542<sup>1</sup> as of 2012, making it the most populous country in Africa.

English is the official language, and there are no less than 450 ethno-linguistic groups. Nigeria has three major ethnic groupings; Hausa (mainly in the North), Igbo (in the East) and Yoruba (in the Southwest). These groups incidentally double as the three predominant languages in the country even though spoken regionally. The country has two major religions being practised, Islam and Christianity. These two dominant religions in the country are sometimes considered imported or foreign.<sup>2</sup> However, historians of Christian faith no longer view the two religions as foreign but see them as having been externally implanted and having taken firm root in Nigeria, and by extension the African continent.

Nigeria obtained its independence from Britain on 1 October 1960. Between this time and the election of a democratically elected government in 1999, the country was largely governed by a military junta, with only brief intervals in which civilian governments held power.<sup>3</sup> Of this period, the report of the African Peer Review Mechanism observed:

*These years of despotic and debilitating military misrule rendered Nigeria vulnerable to arbitrary and often poor governance, lack of transparency and accountability, lawlessness, underdevelopment, economic instability and human rights violation of a severe magnitude.*<sup>4</sup>

It is pertinent to mention here that there is a considerable and long-standing presence of Christianity and Christians in all 19 states that constitute the Northern block or region of Nigeria. The region is

subdivided into 3 geo-political zones: the North Central Zone, the North East Zone and the North West Zone. It has often been stated that the northern region of Nigeria is exclusively an Islamic region. However, although the Muslim population is greater in number than the Christian population in this region, this is not to the extent that Christians can be viewed as an insignificant presence in the population. It is possible that such an erroneous representation is one of the causal factors for the religious tension that has taken root in the region for decades. It was both fortunate, but helpful, that during the 2006 national census exercise religion was not included in the data-capturing system. But even without clear and authentic data, Christians cannot be said to be simply a minority religious group in the northern region of Nigeria.

### **Critical Overview of the Just Peace Paradigm**

The World Council of Churches began conversations which led to the use of the term and concept “Just Peace” as far back as the 1948 General Assembly. Even though it may not be as dominant a voice as it is at present, documented evidence traced to the first assembly showed that “Just Peace” has always been a desired culture that the World Council of Churches has committed itself to seek to realize. Therefore, it is no surprise to discover that Dwain C. Epps, then coordinator of CCIA in the publication of the WCC’s *Programme to Overcome Violence: An Introduction*, argues strongly:

*In view of the need to confront and overcome the “spirit, logic and practice of war” and to develop new theological approaches consonant with the teachings of Christ, which start not with war and move to peace, but with the need for justice, ... the churches, together, should face the challenge to give up any theological or other justification of the use of military power, and to become a koinonia dedicated to the pursuit of a Just Peace.*<sup>5</sup>

The Just Peace concept and process emerged out of the ecumenical experiences and lessons of the Decade to Overcome Violence. In its bid to publicize the emerging concept, a publication titled *Just Peace Companion* asserts that the concept “builds on insights gained in the course of the Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence, 2001-2010: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace.”<sup>6</sup> The overarching objective of the Just Peace concept affirms that, “Just Peace embodies a fundamental shift in ethical practice. It implies a different framework of analysis and criteria for action. This call signals the shift and indicates some of the implications for the life and witness of the churches.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it is worth noting that the Just Peace concept was popularized during the WCC’s International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Jamaica 2011, to commemorate the Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence.<sup>8</sup> The concept of Just Peace was used to connote the experience of peace at a qualitatively deeper level in human communities, in a way that also involved justice. This was meant to counter the dominant socio-political and military use of the term that declares the realization of peace in contexts of violence that are bereft of the experience of justice. It is this contradiction in the understanding and practice of the concept that motivates this study. The documents sometimes use the term in an idealistic way that may not be able to effectively address the religiously plural context of northern Nigeria, which has been plagued by communally and religiously motivated violence.

Interestingly, and in sharp contrast to the notion of Just Peace as projected by the ecumenical movement, Pierre Allan and Alexis Keller, both professors at the University of Geneva, contributed and edited a book that wrestled with the socio-political and philosophical question of Just Peace. The book is entitled, “*What is a Just Peace*”. The five other contributors to the book deal with various nuances of the phrase and examine how concepts of justice and peace have been reduced to “Just Peace” as a singular ideological

concept that embodies authentic justice and genuine peace achievable through legalistic mechanisms and international regulatory frameworks. The nuances discussed in the text include: Peace and Justice: A Prologue; Justice, Peace and History: A Reappraisal; Just Peace: A Cause Worth Fighting For; Measuring International Ethics: A Moral Scale of War, Peace, Justice, and Global Care; Just Peace: A Dangerous Objective; Peace, Justice, and Religion; A Method for Thinking about Just Peace; and The Concept of a Just Peace, or Achieving Peace through Recognition, Renouncement, and Rule.

In their efforts to define the concept of Just Peace in concrete terms, religion was left out but still viewed as both significant and complicating in dealing with notions of justice and peace. David Little, one of the contributors, argues:

*The bearing of religion on the subject is at once important and complicated. Important because, for better or worse, and, religion is very much a fact of contemporary international life, and, consequently, will have to be accounted for. Complicated it is, because religious traditions say different and sometimes conflicting things about justice and peace. The diversity of doctrine within and among religions requires sensitive analysis.*<sup>9</sup>

Religion can be accused of either exaggerating or falsifying authentic notions of justice and peace, which sometimes negate the struggle for one's rights through the instrumentality of the law. Little therefore proposes four strands of achieving peace; namely, "peace enforcing, peacekeeping, peace-making, and peace-building."<sup>10</sup> In as much as David Little tried to demonstrate the secular framework for the notion of Just Peace, he thereby maintains fear that Just Peace may not be realized or experienced in a world characterized by all forms of injustice, wherein violent action has become the popular mechanism of revolt and the expression of discontentment. However, in the midst of such fears and confusion, religion and religious notions

and strategies of Just Peace should be taken seriously.

### **Journey towards a Just Humanity, Anchored by a Just Peace Paradigm in Nigeria – A Way Forward**

Evidently, the Just Peace paradigm is not commonly used by local organizations. It is a new ideological concept that requires that it be embraced and widely publicized. When I looked at three local organizations, I found that none of them applied the concept, as justice is not really mentioned in their intervention approaches. They are majorly concerned with peace concepts linked to the absence of violent conflicts, insurrections and insurgency. However, this is not the case with the ecumenical movement. Therefore, local initiatives that embark on peace-building projects should intentionally embrace the notion of justice as an axiom that guarantees flourishing peace. By so doing, the local organizations will engage with agencies of government that are failing to provide social amenities and durable infrastructures for their citizens. They will also motivate the private sector to be involved in genuine nation-building instead of focusing only on profit-making ventures to the detriment of society.

This article has attempted to provoke a constructive conversation on justice and peace as both an ecumenical and socio-political imperative, in order to realize a just, global community that employs nonviolent approaches to resolving grievances and all forms of injustice. Evidence abounds that our world today is ravaged and enmeshed in structural violence and crisis. Peace is not simply the absence of war; such a kind of peace is fake and will fizzle away very quickly. Wolfgang Huber, in Barkat, asserts: "Peace is not merely the absence of war and collective acts of violence; rather, the concept of peace implies the concept of justice, freedom and development."<sup>11</sup> He goes on to argue, "For if peace were merely defined as the absence of war and collective acts of violence, it would be quite compatible with unjust social

conditions, political dictatorship and economic exploitation.”<sup>12</sup> Wolfgang affirms:

*Action promoting peace would thus not aim at eliminating the causes leading to conflicts; it would merely try to eliminate their after-effects. Thus, a concept of peace which looks deeper than the symptoms must take due account of justice, freedom and development.*<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, it is an indispensable imperative to state that peace and justice are inseparable. Each gives current to the other and in so doing the world will be better for it.

The Just Peace paradigm, being an expression of peace anchored on justice, is a necessity to be embraced. As Mary Elsbernd wrote:

*Recognizing that peace is more than the absence of war ... a strong rejection of oppressive regimes, even those which may be able to prevent conflict and violence. Order maintained without freedom and justice, they proclaim, is preparation for inevitable revolution.*<sup>14</sup>

Advocating for peace without justice is like postponing the evil day. It is against this background that this research invites all grassroots initiatives or local organizations committed to peace-building efforts to be fully guided by the Just Peace concept and principles. All forms of injustice must be rejected for sustainable peace to be enjoyed.

Most, if not all, the violent conflicts experienced and still being experienced in northern Nigeria can be glibly reported as religious crises, but a careful look makes it clear that is not the whole story. A careful evaluation of the causes of most of the violent insurrections in northern Nigeria show that they are deeply rooted in socio-political, economic and cultural factors which often use a religious platform to inflate crisis. However, religion cannot be totally exonerated from the violent conflict being experienced in northern Nigeria. In particular, we need to be aware of the inciting, provocative sermons delivered by

preachers. Such provocative sermons inflame hatred and anger against neighbours of other religions. Thus, hatred and anger accumulates and later erupts into violent reactions at the slightest provocation. Interestingly, religion is hardly disconnected from public life in Nigeria. Religion and religious institutions are dragged into the political arena of the Nigerian states. Unfortunately, politicians are identified by both their political party and their religious association. One can speculate that this scenario may account for the religious colouration connected to the violence, especially when places of religious worship are destroyed and victims interrogated about their religious affiliation.

Therefore, it is an urgent imperative that all structures which increase the poverty index, deprive some citizens of formal education and tolerate religious extremism be confronted and demolished to pave the way for a just humanity defined by Just Peace. Then the people will enjoy peace in the community, peace with the earth, peace in the market place and peace among the people regardless of their religious persuasion, cultural affiliation and political association. We must remember that:

*There can be no security in a situation of utter deprivation; that economic development at the expense of the recognition human rights, in particular the rights of the marginalised ... does not serve the cause of social justice; and that without basic human security and the satisfaction of human needs the affirmation of human rights loses its meaning.*<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, all players and actors must deliberately take to heart the guaranteeing of basic human security and provision of human needs for all peoples, to diffuse the planning of acts linked to insecurity, forestall insurgency and curb violent conflicts.

The notion of Just Peace invites peoples of the various world religions to engage in continuing constructive dialogue that is life

affirming that enriches and nourishes good neighbourliness. Let humanity embrace authentic peace, advocate for inclusive justice, uphold human dignity, respect the sanctity of life and protect the environment.

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<sup>1</sup> National Bureau of Statistics. See [www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/](http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/), accessed 16 January 2013.

<sup>2</sup> [www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/3/7.htm](http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/3/7.htm), accessed 16 January 2013.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/plaintexthistories.asp?historyid=ad41](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/plaintexthistories.asp?historyid=ad41), accessed 16 January 2013.

<sup>4</sup> African Union. (2009) *Annual Report 2008 of African Peer Review Mechanism*. AU, Addis Ababa, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> World Council of Churches. (1995) *Programme to Overcome Violence: An Introduction*. WCC Publications, Geneva, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> World Council of Churches. (2012) *Just Peace Companion*. WCC Publications, Geneva, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> IEPC was a convocation convened by the World Council of Churches to harmonize and solidify the experiences and new insights gained during the period of the "Ecumenical

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Decade to Overcome Violence." The convocation took place in Kingston, Jamaica from 17-25 May 2011, with participants drawn from all the regions of the world and from different Christian and faith traditions.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Allan, Alexis Keller (eds.), *What is a Just Peace?* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 149.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang Huber. (1970) In: Anwar Barkat (ed.) *Conflict, Violence and Peace*. WCC Publications, Geneva, p. 141.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-2.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Elsbernd. (1989) *A Theology of Peacemaking: A Vision, a Road, a Task*. University Press of America, New York, p. 207.

<sup>15</sup> World Council of Churches. (2011) *Just Peace Companion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. WCC Publications, Geneva, p. 110-11.

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# The Lasting Legacy of John Harwood Hick (1922 – 2012)

Perry Schmidt-Leukel

It would be commonplace, almost trivial, to praise John Hick as someone to whom all of us committed to inter-faith dialogue are deeply indebted. Hick pointed out to the world – and by no means just to the Christian world – the need to develop a religiously coherent understanding of the diversity of faiths that does full justice to our contemporary experience of it. He challenged, more than most philosophers of religion and theologians, traditional ideas of the exclusive validity or single superiority of just one religion above all others, sparking and fuelling ongoing debates around the globe.<sup>1</sup> No one will deny this – no one can deny this. It is, however, something quite different to hold that his solution to the problem, his own “Interpretation of Religion”<sup>2</sup>, points in the right direction, or even provides the key structure for an intellectually satisfying and religiously fruitful solution, so that it will continue to lead the way into the future. Yet this is precisely what I suggest.

## **1. John Hick’s interpretation offers a convincing alternative to an atheist/naturalist understanding of religious diversity.**

It is often ignored that Hick developed his interpretation of religion over and against the atheist or better naturalist view (distinguishing a naturalist denial of any transcendent reality from its non-theistic affirmation), which sees – to quote Bertrand Russell – “all the great religions of the world ... both untrue and harmful.”

A naturalist interpretation of religious diversity is in a significant sense the outcome of religious exclusivism. If it is claimed that only one’s own religion is true, while the testimonies and experiences in all other religions are false and the product of illusion and deceit, it is only a small step to assume that this might be the case with all religions. Why should

one arbitrarily assume that one religion is more credible than another? The situation, as David Hume already wrote, resembles a trial in court where each witness accuses all others of being liars. Whom, then, should the judge trust? The naturalist challenge concerns religion as such, not merely one of them, and it is in this context that Hick developed a religious – as distinct from a merely confessional – interpretation of religions.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. John Hick’s interpretation is not a meta-theory above, beyond or in opposition to the religions but is rooted in central motives within each of the major traditions.**

Every interpretation of religious diversity is in some sense a meta-theory. The question is to what extent these theories are in conflict with the religions’ traditional self-understanding. The naturalist interpretation is in conflict with the self-understanding of all religions; exclusivist and inclusivist interpretations are in conflict with the self-understanding of all other religions. Hick’s pluralist interpretation is in conflict with those features of the religions’ self-understanding that imply their exclusive or uniquely superior validity.<sup>4</sup> It claims, however, that it can be adapted by each of the major faiths on the basis of their common belief in an ultimate reality which exceeds all its doctrinal representations (including one’s own) and of a common structure in their understanding of salvation/liberation. Hick therefore suggests – and I think rightly so – that a pluralist view can be arrived at “inductively”, that is, by expanding the hermeneutical circle of faith<sup>5</sup> underlying one’s own tradition as to include the other.<sup>6</sup>

### **3. John Hick's interpretation is neither dependent on Kant nor on postmodern relativism.**

In order to explain the epistemological implications of the ontological difference between the ultimate reality and its limited, penultimate representations by religious narratives and doctrines, Hick made use of Kant's distinction between the "thing in itself (*Ding an sich*)" (*noumenon*) and its representation in the human mind (*phenomenon*) as a "thought-model" or analogy.<sup>7</sup> That is, the traditional distinction, found in all major faiths, can analogously be rendered as a distinction between ultimate reality, "the Real *in itself* (*an sich*)", and "the Real as humanly thought of and experienced." Given the different interpretations of Kant, Hick clarified that in his use of the Kantian analogy "the noumenal world exists independently of our perception of it and the phenomenal world is that same world as it appears to our human consciousness."<sup>8</sup> When Hick says that we are never experiencing the Real *in itself*, he is not saying – as so many of his critics misrepresent him – that no religion is based on a genuine or real experiential contact with ultimate reality, the Real. What he says is that all experience of the Real is always from a specific and limited human perspective which does not encompass the unlimited or transcendent nature of the Real. Claiming that one's own religion's representation of the Absolute is itself the Absolute is false and idolatrous – this is what Hick says. And this is a very traditional religious insight, quite independent of Kant. Although this insight relativizes all human representations of the ultimate in deconstructing them as penultimate, Hick does not subscribe to post-modernist forms of relativism. Josef Ratzinger's famous condemnation of religious pluralism as relativism is misleading, as Hick made clear in his reply to Ratzinger, which never received more than a formal response.<sup>9</sup> Hick's suggestion that various religious traditions can and should accept some other traditions as incorporating equally valid experiences of and equally salvific ways to the Real is not founded on

the relativist denial of universally valid norms but, on the contrary, on the use of universalizable criteria as they can be discerned within the religious traditions themselves.<sup>10</sup>

### **4. John Hick's interpretation does full justice to the change of religious concepts identified by contemporary historical consciousness.**

As we all know, religious diversity exists also within each of the major religious traditions, and reflects the often complicated and intertwined ways of their historical development. Usually, religious traditions are not hospitable to the idea of change. Historical research, however, has made it undeniable that even their key notions and images of ultimate reality have undergone considerable changes across the centuries. While a naïve realism taking these concepts as one to one descriptions of the ultimate is hardly able to cope with this fact, their interpretation as expressive of different experiences naturally involves that the concepts of the ultimate and the corresponding experiences are historically conditioned.

### **5. John Hick's interpretation does not deny, neglect or downplay religious differences but understands some of the differences as compatible.**

Critics claiming that Hick does not do full justice to the differences between religions often ignore that differences can be of two kinds: compatible and incompatible. In comparing religions we find, according to Hick, both. Far from neglecting differences, Hick raises two questions<sup>11</sup>: First, what soteriological weight do the religions accord to genuinely incompatible differences? Do they really want to declare that human salvation or liberation depends on having the correct view in all religiously disputed issues? The second question is, whether some differences that appear to be incompatible can also be interpreted as in fact compatible. Presumably, the most natural religious answer to the first question will be that some issues are soteriologically more

crucial than others. And among the more crucial issues is obviously the question of whether different religions relate to the same ultimate reality. If there is only one ultimate reality, not relating to the same one implies not relating to ultimate reality at all but to some fiction. It is in response to this issue that Hick reminds the religions of their traditional insight that ultimate reality, because of its transcendent nature, inevitably transcends all its representations in human thought and word. If that is so, different images of the ultimate can never be expected to render an accurate description of the ultimate. But this entails that those images which would be incompatible, if taken as immediate descriptions, can be interpreted as relating not directly to the same ultimate but to different human experiences of the same ultimate, in which case they are no longer necessarily contradictory: "They're not mutually conflicting beliefs, because they're beliefs about different phenomenal realities."<sup>12</sup> But does Hick claim to "know" that this is really true? No, infallible knowledge is not available in that sphere. What he suggests is that his model is possibly true. It shows how religions can interpret their manifoldness in a plausible way that differs from the naturalist or exclusivist and inclusivist understandings.

### **6. John Hick's interpretation paves the way for constructive interreligious theology.**

Because Hick is not denying or ignoring religious differences but suggesting an understanding of some of them as compatible differences, his interpretation provides a sound basis for constructive inter-faith dialogue: Not for dialogue of a pragmatic kind, seeing it as a kind of permanent crisis management, but of a truly religious dialogue which studies the other in order to learn from the other about the manifold ways of the presence of the ultimate within the diverse experience of humankind. This kind of dialogue is now pursued under various labels as "global", "planetary", "universal", "interreligious" or "comparative theology". Such labels can express different concepts and

approaches. But what they have in common is the idea that religions may learn from each other in a way that expands and deepens their own understanding of the ultimate.

### **7. John Hick's interpretation counteracts the tendency of confessionalist or particularist ghettoization and is well integrated with several other crucial issues of a contemporary and intellectually satisfying interpretation of religion.**

In some of its forms, post-modern thinking has fostered a new sense of confessionalism declaring one's own denomination as an independent language game, incommensurable with other forms of being religious, and hence as autonomous and free in interpreting the world solely to the rules of one's own tradition and confined only by some presently dominant ways of reading this tradition without being responsible to any external or general standards and hence immune to any critique based upon them. If Hick is criticized from the background of such thinking as an European Enlightenment imperialist, this is so because he has not been willing to sacrifice the traditional ideal of ontological and epistemological realism and of universally valid ethical and rational standards on the altar of post-modern particularism or arbitrariness.<sup>13</sup> This is why he was keen to respond to any serious objection raised against his views<sup>14</sup>, and to keep his interpretation of religious diversity consistent with answers developed in relation to other important issues in a religious understanding of our world; issues such as the problem of evil<sup>15</sup>, life after death<sup>16</sup>, religious experience and the findings of neuroscience<sup>17</sup> and – as the master issue behind all of these – the relation between faith and reason.<sup>18</sup> He not only wrote masterful studies in all of these areas, but over the last decades persistently tried to integrate these with his pluralist interpretation of religious diversity.<sup>19</sup>

## 8. John Hick's interpretation is not politically naïve or blind but highly significant.

Hick's suggestion that the different notions of salvation/liberation across the various religions display the common structure of "a transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness – a transformation which shows itself, within the conditions of this world, in compassion (*karuṇā*) or love (*agape*)"<sup>20</sup> must not be misunderstood as individualistically constrained. For Hick, liberation theology is evidence of a new and adequate way of how to foster this transformation on the social and political plain.<sup>21</sup> John Hick himself was a political person, more than one usually finds with a professional philosopher of religion actively committed to anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigns in South-Africa and the United Kingdom.<sup>22</sup> However, what is perhaps most important is the political implication of his pluralist interpretation itself: exclusivism considers other faiths as false, because they differ from one's own, and inclusivism considers them as inferior to the extent they differ from one's own. In both cases, religious difference is assessed negatively, which implies a negative assessment of religious diversity as such. Only religious pluralism seeks to combine religious difference with equal validity and hence aims at a positive evaluation of diversity in the religious field – which has tremendous implications for the political question of whether and how religions can make their peace with their diversity. For the sociologist Thomas McFaul, this is the main reason why, in the long run, religions will, as he hopes, move beyond their traditionally exclusivist and inclusivist positions.<sup>23</sup> If one day it should turn out that McFaul was right, the legacy of John Hick will be seen as one of most constructive factors in this process.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Sharada Sugirtharajah (ed.) *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick*, Palgrave, Basingstoke – New York, 2012; Kenneth Rose. (2013) *Pluralism: The Future of Religion*, Continuum, New York.

<sup>2</sup> John Hick. (1989) *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. Macmillan, Basingstoke.

<sup>3</sup> See Hick, *An Interpretation*, p. 1-3, 210-230. See also his early remarks on the need for a pluralist interpretation of religions at the end of his 1967 Inaugural Lecture at the University of Birmingham, reprinted in John Hick. (1988) *God and the Universe of Faiths*. Macmillan, Basingstoke, (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1973), p. 1-17, 16f.

<sup>4</sup> For his critical discussion of those Christologies, which trigger Christian superiority claims, see: John Hick. (2005) *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*. SCM, London, (1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Hick speaks of his pluralist interpretation explicitly as an "expanded circle of faith". See John Hick. (1995) *The Rainbow of Faiths: Critical Dialogues on Religious Pluralism*. SCM, London, p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> John Hick. (1985) *Problems of Religious Pluralism*. Macmillan, Basingstoke, p. 37. Here Hick explicitly rejects the idea of a "vantage-point" or "cosmic vision" above all religions, of which he himself is so often accused by his critics.

<sup>7</sup> Hick, *An Interpretation*, p. 246f; see also John Hick. (1982) *God Has Many Names*. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, p. 104f (note that this edition is very different from the British work of 1980 with the same title).

<sup>8</sup> Hick, *An Interpretation*, p. 241.

<sup>9</sup> For excerpts from Ratzinger's 1996 address, together with Hick's reply and the Vatican's response, see: John Hick. (2010) *Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion*. Palgrave, Basingstoke, p. 149-160 (1<sup>st</sup> edn. 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Hick, *An Interpretation*, p. 299-376.

<sup>11</sup> See his extensive treatment of the question of competing truth claims in Hick, *An Interpretation*, p. 343-376.

<sup>12</sup> Hick, *The Rainbow*, p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> He once remarked that being accused as a post-modernist would perhaps be "even worse than being attacked by the post-modernists." Hick, *The Rainbow*, p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, H. Hewitt (ed.) *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion: Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick*. Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1991 (containing replies by Hick to all the "critical studies"); John Hick, *Dialogues* (see above fn 10); John Hick, *The Rainbow* (see above fn. 6) (containing his most comprehensive engagement with critical objections).

<sup>15</sup> John Hick. (1985) *Evil and the God of Love*, Macmillan, Basingstoke (1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1966).

<sup>16</sup> John Hick. (1985) *Death and Eternal Life*. Macmillan, Basingstoke (1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1976).

<sup>17</sup> John Hick. (2006) *The New Frontier of Religion and Science: Religious Experience, Neuroscience and the Transcendent*. Palgrave, Basingstoke – New York.

<sup>18</sup> John Hick. (1988) *Faith and Knowledge*. Macmillan, Basingstoke (1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1957); John Hick. (1979) *Arguments for the Existence of God*. Macmillan, Basingstoke; John Hick (1990) *Philosophy of Religion*. Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs (1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1963).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, John Hick. (1999) *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm*. Oneworld, Oxford; John Hick. (2008) *Who or What is God?* SCM Press, London; John Hick. (2010) *Between Faith and Doubt: Dialogues on Religion and Reason*. Palgrave, Basingstoke – New York.

<sup>20</sup> Hick, *An Interpretation*, p. 164.

<sup>21</sup> Hick, *An Interpretation*, p. 303-306.

<sup>22</sup> See John Hick. (2002) *An Autobiography*. Oneworld, Oxford, p. 143-192, 238-249.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas R. McFaul. (2011) *The Future of God in the Global Village: Spirituality in an Age of Terrorism and Beyond*. Author House, Bloomington, p. 159-174.

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## Kenneth Cragg: An Appreciation (1913 – 2012)

Kenneth Cragg died on 13 November 2012. He had been born on 8 March 1913, so at the time of his death he was 99 – indeed on the closing straight to reach his century.

He was a colossus as a Christian scholar in the field of Christian-Muslim relations, and his influence in this field during the second half of the twentieth century was enormous. His first book *The Call of the Minaret*, originally published in 1956, and which has since had two further editions, quickly became the classic English language text which encouraged several generations of Christians to open the door of the mosque a chink and take their first peek into the world of Islam. From this beginning one could catch something of Kenneth's vision, in which by speaking to each other, both Christians and Muslims might be led more deeply into their own faith, as well as having a better understanding of the other. The book also introduced his readership to something that would become increasingly characteristic of Kenneth's writings over the years; namely, his delight in words and sense of poetry. He mastered Arabic to an extent that impressed and challenged even native speakers of the language and both in English and Arabic he loved to tease his audience with puns, which both had serious intent, yet also offered scope for his sense of fun and the twinkle that would appear in his eye. Indeed, a key theme of Kenneth's theology – and one which is of course close to the heart of both the relationship and the divergence of Islam and Christianity – was that of the meaning of the "Word". Like a number of Kenneth's friends, I treasure a small book he gave my husband and myself a few years ago which collected together the Christmas poems he used to send as part of his Christmas cards. The book is called *Poetry of the Word at Christmas* and is a good reminder of Kenneth's interweaving of the themes of "incarnation" and "Word".

Kenneth Cragg was, however, not only a scholar. He was a bishop in the Anglican Communion which gave him both responsibility but also influence among Anglican congregations in many parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East. His particular appointment was as Bishop in Egypt for a number of years in the 1960s and 1970s. He also was a committed friend of the Anglican Church in Iran. He was loved and respected by many Christians in the Middle East, and in turn he had a special care for their situation. He longed for them to bring their specific experience to the dialogue with Islam. It is surely partly due to his lived experience of Christian engagement with Islam in Middle Eastern contexts that the motif of hospitality became so prominent in his reflection on interreligious relations – and has certainly influenced Anglican thinking in this area.

I myself first met Kenneth Cragg in the early 1970s. I was an undergraduate at Cambridge University, and in those years Kenneth, as well as acting as Bishop in Egypt would spend a term each year at Caius College Cambridge and offer a course in the theology faculty. Although that period was far before the theology degree at Cambridge took seriously "other faiths", that optional course opened my eyes – and those of others – to a wider and different world, which captivated me in turn.

Later working at St George's College Jerusalem and then living in Beirut I got to know Kenneth more personally on his regular visits to the Middle East. I still remember taking him and a group of others on an arduous seven-hour walk through the Judean wilderness, ending up at Mar Saba monastery. Kenneth was about 20 years older than anyone else on that walk and I was worried at times whether he was going to make it. I did not wish to be responsible for his demise in the desert. In the apartment I later lived in in Beirut (the chaplaincy flat, since my

husband was the Anglican chaplain) there was a desk carved with the letters K.C. That had been Kenneth's own desk when 35 years earlier he had been one of the predecessors of my husband as Anglican chaplain in the city. Since those years in the Middle East, my husband and myself stayed in contact with him – as well as his wife Melita, until her death more than 20 years ago. It was a privilege and a joy in 2003 to be able to work with Rev. Dr David Thomas to edit the Festschrift *A Faithful Presence*, which was presented to Kenneth by Archbishop Rowan Williams to mark his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. The title "Faithful Presence" summed up our understanding both of Kenneth as a person and his theology.

In recent years, Kenneth's vision of Christian-Muslim engagement had become slightly unfashionable – perhaps such is the fate of those who live, as he did, to be very old. In some politically correct interreligious circles, Kenneth's implicit refusal to make a complete separation between "mission" and "interreligious engagement" was seen as out of date. That is not to say that Kenneth's reaching out to Islam was a surreptitious sort of proselytism. Far from it. He honoured and respected Muslims and wanted to encourage them to dig deeper into the treasures of their own religious heritage. But his own wholeness of theological and spiritual vision and life did not allow for easy compartmentalization. Conversely, a theme of Kenneth's writings which has been much discussed in recent years has been the distinction he suggested between the Meccan and Medinan strands of Islam. He argued that the recovery of the Meccan strand – representing the time before Muhammad and his followers assumed political power in Medina – needed to be given more weight, as opposed to the Medinan vision in which religion and state were far more closely interlocked. Such a distinction has been critiqued by many Muslims, and perhaps seems also an unrealistic aspiration in the current geopolitical climate.

Until I started working at the World Council of Churches in September 2011 I had not been fully aware of Kenneth Cragg's significant contribution to international ecumenical interreligious engagement. I had known of course about his influence in the Anglican world, and indeed about his regional ecumenical involvement when he worked for the Near East Council of Churches in the 1950s. But shortly after I came to Geneva I happened upon a brief – almost throwaway – remark made by Rev. Dr Wesley Ariarajah in his article on "Interfaith Dialogue" for the 2002 edition of the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*. Discussing the history of interfaith dialogue in the WCC Ariarajah commented:

*A WCC conference in Kandy, Sri Lanka, in 1967, proved to be a landmark both as the beginning of serious interest in interfaith dialogue as such in the WCC, and as the first involvement in the ecumenical discussion of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians. In Kandy Kenneth Cragg challenged in a fundamental way the Barth-Kraemer attitude to religions that had so dominated Protestant thinking during the previous decades.*

Since it was of course due at least in part to the change in thinking which came about at Kandy that, a few years later, the Sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies was set up at the WCC, I thought that it would be interesting to unearth Kenneth Cragg's contribution to that meeting. A trawl through the WCC archives led me down some interesting pathways. It would seem that Cragg wasn't actually physically present at the Kandy meeting which took place in February 1967, but he sent a paper, dated 14 January 1967 which must have been read at the gathering and, it would seem, deeply influenced its thinking. Reading through the paper, one can see the foretaste of themes that would recur in his writings for the next 40 years. It seems appropriate therefore as a tribute to Kenneth Cragg and as a mark of his importance in the development of interreligious dialogue in the ecumenical

movement to reprint this paper. It was first printed in the in-house WCC journal *Study Encounter* in 1967, but has not, I believe, had a wide circulation. As it was originally published over 45 years ago, it bears, of course, some of the marks of its time – particularly in relation to questions such as gender inclusive language and use of capitals etc. As a token of respect for Kenneth Cragg, I have deliberately decided not to edit the text. Like many of Kenneth Cragg's writings, it is not an "easy read" (At the recent memorial service for him, Dr Rowan Williams spoke of needing to read a piece by Cragg 17 times before being completely sure of its meaning!), but it is a powerful exploration of why the Doctrine of the Incarnation, rather than excluding Christian relations with other faiths, cannot be fully grasped unless we are willing to take seriously the whole of human experience.

**Clare Amos**

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**The Credibility of Christianity:  
Reflections on the Christian  
"Temper" in the World**

**Kenneth Cragg**

"No one" says the Ashanti proverb "tests the depth of a river with both feet." But with one of them he may, and must. The stranger will keep some reservation of himself in the very purpose of his acquaintance with the river: and the half-self he reserves will be for the sake, if proven, of his whole commitment. A piece of proverbial African wisdom leads us right into our theme – the readiness for the reservations of the outsider in the very presentation to him of the faith that offers its invitation to his entire experience and discipleship.

These paragraphs make no attempt at a complete theology of the Christian missionary relationship in its address of word and symbol and service towards other faiths and the secular world. They are simply a limited plea from the heart. Is

there not a sense in which much missionary theology is drifting or steering towards a view of the Christian task in the world that insufficiently cares for the scruples, the reservations, the doubts, of the other party, that does not satisfactorily reckon with the credibility of Christianity? Are we really abreast of the sheer difficulty the outsider finds in believing us? Some of the sources of the incredulousness we will consider below. For the moment our concern is with the degree to which the problem in some quarters is hardly known to exist, or else ignored and dismissed.

Missionary theology, in its proper awareness of the "givenness" of the faith and a concern for its "uniqueness", has tended to high-handed and distant attitudes in presenting it. "The Gospel" writes Barth in *Romans* "Does not expound or recommend itself. It does not negotiate, or plead, threaten, or make promises. It withdraws itself always when it is not listened to for its own sake." While there is a limited, discernible truth in these words, they are manifestly at odds with the Biblical truth of the vast "promise" of God in Christ. A Gospel that "promises" nothing is not echoing the invitation: "Come unto Me all ye that are weary and I will give you rest." One that does not recommend itself is hardly in tune with its own theme of the Divine love-commendation in that "Christ died for us". How can anything be "listened to solely for its own sake"? The demand is not only oddly one sided but also impossible. For the capacity to attend to anything must originate, if at all, in the context and, initially "for the sake", of existing ideas. The more revolutionary the intention, the more concrete and immediate the point of departure.

"So new, so unheard of, so unexpected in this world is the power of God unto salvation", Barth observes in the same passage, "that it can appear among us, be received and understood by us, only as a contradiction." His concern can be approved as a salutary reminder of the Gospel as a counter-force to our self-centredness and as a statement of the quite disconcerting quality of Messianic

fulfilment in Jesus, with its sharp contrast over against sanguine, nationalist, complacent hopes and notions of the natural man. Yet it cannot be wholly a contradiction if it rightly addresses itself to hunger and thirst, or describes itself as “good news”.

Indeed, this clue of “newsworthiness” may be of great relevance to our whole problem. “News quality” is necessarily constituted by *where* it is heard, as well as by *what* it declares. It is always related to the hearer’s situation. If it is “good” as news, it is good for some context and the sense of the latter will be part of its recognition as “good”. We cannot isolate the goodness of the Gospel from men’s needs as antecedently felt, interpreted and borne by men themselves. We cannot bear “news” in studied conviction of irrelevance to its hearer’s world as *the hearer knows it*. No “Gospel” therefore can exist in one-sided assertion that it is “news” and “good news”. It has also to be constituted in recognisability reciprocal to its promises and claims. “Faith comes by hearing” and so in this sense does “the faith”. It is not unilaterally authenticated: it needs its “hearer” for its confirmation.

We are no doubt over-simplifying Barth’s intention in this passage and failing crudely to allow for the element of necessary reaction as a source of distortion. Brevity, however, justifies the isolation of the quotation here. For it symbolises a widespread temper among us. The Gospel is uttered: it does not mediate with unbelief: it stands on “thus saith the Lord” and needs no corroborative support outside itself.

This mood is seen on reflection to sit uneasily with the characteristic emphases of Biblical mission. “A faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance” writes 1 Tim. 1:15 – the double element of faith-worth, inherent and yet also attendant on acceptance. The entire Biblical picture has to do, in sum, with the persuasiveness of God. Torah itself, in definition, means the Divine invitation to human co-operation. Forgiveness is an enterprise of appeal and response: “Come now let us reason

together”. How shall the servant be said not to “fail or be discouraged” if he has no vocation to persuasion and “withdraws” in the face of non-acceptance? The Incarnation may be defined as truth undertaking whatever its comprehensibility requires. “The Word is made flesh”: that to which God speaks is that in which He speaks. Ministry must follow the same pattern. For “as He is, so are we in this world” “Behold I stand at the door and knock”: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” These are the postures of the New Testament – a willingness to be credibly pondered and credibly related to men where they are, so as to enlist and elicit, not their capitulation, but their embrace: to stir and invite them to inward recognition and obedience. “Reach hither thy hand and behold...”

The essential persuasiveness of the Gospel is not rightly dismissed by considerations of “uniqueness” or “distinctiveness”. Rather it is the sense of these that makes it so urgent. For they cannot feasibly or finally be matters of assertion and claim. Nor can they be in forefront of the Christian relation to the world. They are only discoverable in the wake of recognition. The incomparability of Christ is not an independent conviction, a belief in a claim that can or should exist arbitrarily or dictatorially. It only enters into credence with the entry of Christ: it is a *post facto* experience of faith and not a sanction of it. Thus its validity is not imperilled by a persuasive evangelism. Paul’s metaphor of the ambassador suffices to embody the double stance of inward obligation and outward deference. He knows indeed “whom he has believed” but he knows too those among whom his believing must be understood. His embassy is to a people, with a “cause”. It is, therefore, a false theology which supposes that faith is insincere unless it is assertive, or compromised unless it speaks *ex cathedra dogmatica*. Such a faith in fact has no external relations but is insulated even while it preaches. Evangelism is nothing if it is not willingness for relationship.

It begins, surely, in an awareness of common humanity with all men. Such commonness, however, is precisely the realm that a great deal of current theology chooses rather to ignore in the general neglect of, or retreat from, the whole significance of nature. We have had too much depreciation of natural theology. Neo-orthodoxy has fostered it in the belief that it could the better exalt the "historical" as the definitive arena of Divine self-disclosure. Secularisers, like Harvey Cox and Van Leeuwen, have adopted a similar stance for their own reasons. History, we are told, is the Biblical realm of God's activity and "nature" is too often dismissed as simply a sphere of disenchanting, empirical phenomena, desacralized and deconsecrated. The emphasis can then fall unilaterally on the Divine activism in Exodus and Exile, in Jesus and the Church, on human history, including its present technocratic climax, as the veritable theme of God's revelation and God's purpose.

A balanced theology has no quarrel with the essential emphasis here but only with its one-sidedness. Any sound study of psalms and prophets and the Gospel is bound to dispute this magisterial unconcern about natural theology, to resist the curious conclusions which, for example, Von Rad attempts to substantiate, that creation is "inferior to election", in the economy of God.

*This preface (i.e. Genesis 1) has only an ancillary function. It points the course that God took with the world until He called Abraham and formed the community ... Faith in creation is neither the position nor the goal of the declarations in Genesis 1 and 2.*

Admittedly, the patriarchal narratives soon supervene on the primeval. But election, indeed any nation's "electability", turns on the reality of man in nature. The concern for "salvation-history" is not an end or pursuit in itself: It has to do with the meaning and fulfilment of the creative purpose. "Election" has nowhere to occur, nothing to serve or exemplify, aside from creation's significance.

Again, as with Barth, the example is random. But the point is fair. We need a much more patient theology of nature. For nature is, after all, the ground of culture, the habitat of history. There is no significant Exodus where there is no significant "ecology". God is not in the Exile, if He is not evermore in the harvest and the seasons. God is not in the Incarnation if He is not within the mystery of the natural order. The Scriptures are quite unanimous about this. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills ... my help cometh from the Lord" are not phrases in a sequence from aberration to correction, from Baal to God, as some have implied. They are a sequence in a single blessed and poetic faith. "The heavens declare the glory of God." We have had more than enough of this empty and vulgar theme of "disenchantment". It is quite a travesty to suppose that science cannot proceed until the earth is drained of wonder, or that awe and the will to worship are the enemies of man's dominion. On the contrary: the enlargement of the powers of mastery and the themes of mystery proceed together.

This is urgent, theologically in that whereas "the sacred history" – God in Israel, God in Christ – initially divides, alienates and distinguishes, nature mediates and makes for solidarity. As creatures of time, the Buddhist and the Christian, the pagan and the Muslim, are one: the Jew, the atheist, the Confucian, are all akin in their ties with "the good earth". "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin" says the proverb confidently. It is hardly so. The Eskimo and the Hottentot have little unity in "the touch of nature". In fact, the natural, by its very diversity of mood or measure, irretrievably diversifies the human family. The fact, nevertheless, remains, that living, dying, marrying, bearing, grieving, hoping, fearing, yearning, loving, suffering – mankind has a common "natural" circumstance all too feebly "negotiated" in theologies or acknowledged in togetherness. We cannot obviate the instinct to sense otherness both in taking and in hearing the Gospel of a particular grace of God. But we need not intensify those proper liabilities by neglecting, or

repudiating, the kinships of sheer humanity and of nature as “the world of all of us”. We must beware, as Louis Bouyer has finely said, “lest we miss those stepping-stones without which man would never become one with the faith proposed to him.”

Such loyalty to nature is in fact a deep loyalty also to the Incarnation. The revelatory feasibility of Incarnation presupposes the revelatory quality, in part, of all experience. Unless everything is in its own sense revelatory of God nothing can be. A world into which we believe God has been born is nowhere irrelevant either to Him or for Him. The “new” or special sacredness which greets us in the Incarnate Lord employs the channels of natural sacredness. Thus “the Word made flesh” is the supreme and inclusive climax of a principle of their inter-relatedness which runs through all experiences in a relative sense. “The mistake” wrote Donald Baillie, “is not to assert paradox in the doctrine of the Incarnation but to miss the paradox everywhere else.”

Theology has too often concentrated only on the exclusifying implications of God in Christ. It is important to remember that the dimensions of the humanity in which the Christ is delineated belong in their general measure to all human experience. “And was made man” the Creed declares: not “made Jew, made Greek, made white”. But if our evangel is to interpret that “manness” in which all are already participant, as it is illuminated by the Christ Who has indwelt it, and in the knowledge that He came into what, essentially, is nowhere alien and everywhere identical, we must fashion our theology according to the same mind.

That common humanity, hallowed by the Incarnation and “meant” Divinely, in the creation, is a deeply unifying reality which Christian doctrine has all too little explored with other men. It is true that mission has strenuously “involved itself in mankind”, in Donne’s classic phrase. Yet we have often excluded our theology where we have invested our compassion: we have not sufficiently hearkened to what other men

make of being human. We have urgent need to do so, just at the time when external circumstances are giving further, outward, force to the interdependence of all mankind. What has been a natural truth of man, namely his oneness, increasingly becoming a technological fact also, with a growing similarity of external conditions in our existence. Doctrinal expression, however, still too readily acquiesces in a sort of “externality” to other men’s worlds, failing to enter into genuine human community.

If we come to others in terms only of our “contrastedness”, we normally provoke aloofness or assertiveness in them. How frequently has Jewish particularism bred resentful antipathy. Even anti-Semitism, however guiltily, owes something to Jewish insistent distinction. To move only in terms of the distinction, Christianly, between belief and unbelief, between “savedness” and “lostness”, between “inside” and “outside” is to arouse an imperviousness to what we would say. Some would argue that this is unavoidable, that it is part of “the offence of the Cross”, that conversion must be a sort of capitulation to what beforetimes you resisted or despised. In a measure, they are right: nothing here is meant to evaporate the uncongeniality of Christ to sinful man, nor to disintegrate the disconcerting identity of the Christian community over against “the world”. On the contrary: precisely because we care for that radical confrontation of men, we must beware that it is not sharpened and exaggerated by *our* failures in mediation and gentleness. “The offence of the Cross” is not a studied offensiveness: fidelity to truth *per se* has always a ring of sweet kindliness. We are not preaching Christ if we are proceeding on a sort of take-it-or-leave-it presentation that thrusts the whole onus of comprehension on the other party and fails to take creative, patient and ardent care for the “translation” of the “mystery” of Christ into universally accessible terms, fails, that is, to preach as those who are already one with their hearers in the humanity Christ embraces. We are not town-criers of the

grace of God, but would be guests at every man's home for its sake.

These, and many more, are the theological reasons for a lively, loving concern for our credibility. There are no less compelling historical reasons. There is so much in the history of mission that acutely strains its authenticity. "Who hath believed our report?" asks the prophet (and we shall return to the inner burden of his question). There is now a pathetic significance in that possessive pronoun. It is just the fact that it is "our" Gospel which makes it so profoundly suspect and suspected. That "we" are its messengers is its deepest discredit. For the white and western world, with which most of men Christianity is closely, even irretrievably, associated, has given most of men so much cause to distrust both it and what it bears. Imperialism, race, apartheid, exploitation, sheer insensitivity, "the dark eye" as Van Der Post has it, the frequent failure to respond to the unqualified desire of mankind to love and to be loved – all these grimly overshadow the loving-kindness of what we announce about God.

It all stems, in the end, from a disloyalty within our western selves: writing of the race problem in the preface to William Plomer's powerful novel *Turbott Wolfe*, Van Der Post observes:

*It was a product of the European himself, of the hypocrisy, narrowness and blindness with which he led his own life, and that somewhere in the depths of his nature this terrible denial of his own self had been projected on to the despairing and rejected coloured peoples of this land.*

It was, and is, at its core, a turning in fear from the call of a greater love. And so is much else in our record of culture-domination, and in our presence in Asia and Africa.

It is customary in the west to anticipate gratitude for the "benefits" of empire and, more recently, to assume that secularization and technology are a boon conferred, of such magnitude as to bring to climax both our world-relevance and all

men's emancipation. It would be more honest to read the history of one and a half centuries, in spite of a rich outpouring of missionary devotion, as a record in the relationship of power to need, and of advantage to deprivation, that spells a deep failure of the spirit. The west in general has failed to relate itself to the rest of the world in anything like the full range of spiritual obligation or even in external loyalty to its own deepest resources of the soul. It is of course impossible to draw a balance-sheet of western impact on the peoples of the world. But there is more than enough in the story and in our attitudes seriously to make us wellnigh incredible in the preaching of Christ.

At all events, as and when we couch the Gospel in terms that do not mediate or "listen" (Barth's word), but rather dogmatise and declaim, that makes "uniqueness" and "utter otherness" their posture and their ground, then, whatever we intend, we sound like the religious counterparts of the assumed superiority of all our other relationships. And in this field it is as much what "seems" that matters, however distortedly seen, as what in fact is meant. There is, surely, a theological counterpart to Kenneth Kaunda's words:

*The advent of independence spells the end of a European oriented society. Europeans will be increasingly exposed to African psychology. They are now part of a society in which the initiatives are no longer exclusively theirs and where, in many fields, they will cease to be doers and become acceptors ... I honestly believe that we have all the time been much nearer to the heart of things that really matter than our western teachers ... I am often conscious of an extra dimension to the problem which a European 'advisor' would not detect ...*  
(A Humanist in Africa)

Yet much in our current temper in inter-religious fields is neither sensing nor attaining this teachability. And to that extent it is making our incredibility almost total.

We need to keep penitently close to such observations as that of Ezekiel Mphahlele:

*While it fixed its gaze on Calvary or kept us an aloofness from political realities, the Church (in South Africa) ... has become to us a symbol of the dishonesty of the west. The road has been slipping back under its feet ...*

(Down Second Avenue)

Do we realise, further, how many “sanctions” we have enjoyed in much of our converting? – the prudence that needed to keep in with the white “power”; the desirability of the English tongue as a key to education; the ministries of education and healing themselves; the Prospero’s wand that some aspects of mission wielded in bringing Caliban and his uncouthness to heel; the attitudes of wariness men in threatened cultures had to take up in studious self-defence and wise retreat: (“The white man has learned to shoot without missing, so we must learn to fly without perching”). Again, there needs to be a balance in our assessments. But it is easier to remember benediction than compromise in our history, harder to sense the mixed motives in the convertibility of men than to take humble and due pride in its spiritual validity.

All the foregoing is a poor sketch, a “Galatians” rather than a “Romans” on its topic, a manifesto of the heart rather than a treatise from the head. It is a plea for the

closer attention to the theology of nature and of the Incarnation, to human experience as all men know, question and interpret it, for a Christian care to think co-operatively with other creeds and their wistfulness and thus to serve the Gospel of Christ in the sort of commitment to men’s ideas and needs which the Incarnation itself exemplifies. It was not, after all, by a Word reverberating from high heaven that God redeemed us, but by the Word made flesh, housing its glory in the common world and freely awaiting recognition as its only pledge of truth.

In the end the “credibility” is by the Spirit. “Who will believe the kind of thing that has come to our ears?” asked the prophet in Isaiah 53. We love and serve the incredible creed of a Babe in a manger and a Man on the Cross as the point and the power of the Lord of the universe.

*... That heaven’s high majesty his court should keep in a clay cottage ... And free eternity submit to years ...*

Let us not cloud that sublime mystery with assertive, belligerent or insensitive postures of our own. For then we fail to serve it in its own temper of patience, exposure, risk and unreservedness. We cannot hope to be credible with the Gospel save as we are credible in it. “God, be merciful unto us ... that thy truth may be known among all nations.”

14 January 1967

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## Book Reviews

***Faithing the Native Soil: Dilemmas and Aspirations of Post-Colonial Buddhists and Christians in Sri Lanka.* By Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi. (Colombo: Centre for Society and Religion, 2012.)**

The metamorphosis of identities in identity-based conflict situations has always been a fecund area of research. A post-colonial layering of the situation, combined with a religious hue, renders it a potential minefield. In *Faithing the Native Soil: Dilemmas and Aspirations of Post-Colonial Buddhists and Christians in Sri Lanka*, Hettiarachchi lays bare the complexities of religiously validated claims which have shaped Christian and Sinhala Buddhist understandings of self-identity so far vis-à-vis categories like *majority* and *minority*, *native* and *other* in a deeply insightful and perceptive manner.

In a comprehensive manner he provides the reader with exhaustive overviews of Sri Lankan religious and ecclesial historiography, delving into areas such as: the forging of a post-colonial Sinhalese Buddhist self-hood in a manner which was contingent upon “majoritarian” and “nativistic” claims; the development of the missiological positions of the Roman Catholic as well as the Protestant churches and their ongoing impact on the churches; the emergence of and responses to Evangelical Christian presence in Sri Lanka; the reconstruction of the “native status” for Christianity through de-colonisation; the transformation of traditional roles for both Christians and Buddhists; and the call to redefine Christian identity. Adopting an inter-disciplinary approach which combines interreligious theology, a history of Christian mission and post-colonial political analysis, Hettiarachchi skilfully derives significant nuances that bring to the fore the contestable nature of contemporary identity-forging categories.

What characterizes an appropriate missional praxis for the churches, according to the book, is cultivating an “ecclesiastical willingness and the

theological readiness to recast the churches’ function (mission) and praxis so that it becomes a faith of the land and gains the respect of their religious neighbours” (209). The book breaks fresh ground in proposing an intra-religious roadmap as the way forward in mission for Christian churches. The call to engage in intra-religious dialogue on the contentious issue of conversions and for common recognition of the civic responsibility seems appropriate in a context of divisions between churches. The importance of intra-religious dialogue is increasingly being recognized, and touching upon this dimension adds value to the book.

However, what strikes me about the book is the omission of any reference to the Sri Lankan Tamils in the discourse on Christian mission where the main religious partner of Christianity is portrayed as an ethnically identified form of Buddhism, i.e., Sinhala Buddhism. Rendering the Sinhala Buddhists as a monolithic category does not help. In my opinion, the integrity of Christian mission in Sri Lanka cannot only be tested in terms of Christianity’s attempts to assuage the fears of the Sinhala Buddhist majority, but also in critically recognizing the concomitant results of such a posture on Sri Lankan Tamils (both Buddhists and Christians). To resort exclusively to the former would render mission susceptible to the vagaries of majoritarian politics and lend itself to be interpreted as intentional indifference to the ethnic minorities. Therefore, though the author emphasizes the need “to look beyond the popular and dominant discourse of the ‘Sinhala Tamil conflict’ which has been elevated during the last twenty five years” (236), this also seems to be the book’s undoing. Conceiving the missional accountability of Sri Lankan Christianity in isolation from the Tamils divests Christian “hospitality” of its prophetic dimension and the new road map could lead Sri Lankan mission to new alignments, the political dividends of which may be contentious. This aside, the book

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remains informative, timely and engaging. Born out of experience and expertise it bears testimony to an author who, while being passionate about interreligious relations, is nevertheless provocative in

style and daring in deciphering the signs of his times.

*Reviewed by Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar*

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***Christian Lives Given to the Study of Islam.* By C.T.R. Hewer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.)**

There is something evocative in the phrase “Christian lives given ...”, which suggests the sense of vocation, and perhaps also the cost, that engagement with Islam can require of Christians who seriously choose to take – or are drawn into – this quest. I think that is what the editors wanted to convey through the 28 autobiographical essays that make up this volume, which are then book-ended by a brief and reflective introduction and conclusion written by the editors themselves. The need for such sacrificial offering, for intellectual rigour, commitment to serious language study and a willingness to grapple with theological mysteries undergirded by a lived spirituality is made clear, particularly in the concluding chapter.

As with all such books, a reader such as myself is interested and intrigued by the selection of those whose lives are described. Because the chapters are autobiographical, this of course limited the selection to those who were alive at the time the contributions were solicited – though Kenneth Cragg, who wrote the first autobiographical reflection, has, of course, since died. Although it is not explicitly stated, a comparison of the order of the chapters with the brief biographical data given in the list of contributors, suggests that the contributions were organized on the basis of the date of birth of each writer. I was glad to realize therefore that I personally knew both the grandfather (Kenneth Cragg) and the baby (David Marshall) among the contributors, and would consider both worthy figures for inclusion in such a volume. There are

other scholars not present who I would perhaps have expected to see included – it would be invidious to name them – although I suspect that in at least some cases they may have been invited by the editors to contribute, but for one reason or another, declined. There is quite a high preponderance of Roman Catholic scholars included among the writers. This may be partly due to the fact that both of the editors are themselves Roman Catholics, but also reflects the reality that the sense of “lives given” is perhaps in some ways more possible these days in Roman Catholic structures, particularly among the religious orders (There is a somewhat barbed reference in the editors’ conclusion to the current inadequacy of Christian theological education in some parts of the Western churches!).

The content of each of the autobiographical chapters is inevitably varied: some are more descriptive, and others more reflective. I found all enjoyable – particularly those written by people with whom I was personally acquainted – though in one or two cases I felt they concealed as much as they revealed. But it is good that this collection of the experiences of a number of significant men – and a few women – in this field are gathered together in this way. Many are now quite elderly, so such a record of their story and achievements becomes more pressing and the editors are to be congratulated on putting together this volume. As they themselves put it, “When a new generation sees the need, they will have a mine of information, approaches, and reflections on which to draw.”

*Reviewed by Clare Amos*





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