Churches' Commission on Mission

CONNECTIONS

Resourcing ecumenism and mission

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Editorial

Almost a nation at prayer! Typically in a situation of national catastrophe. David Beckham's broken metatarsal bone a few weeks before the start of the football World Cup made the *Sun* run a headline: "Beck us pray!" And many did. This naive instrumentalisation of God is as much as hint of the "infantilisation of society" (Thomas Rothschild) as it is the context for God's mission in our society today. As the media hype gets hotter and hotter; as England's and Ireland's streets fill with national flags, as some cherish the opportunity to display fervent and sometimes exaggerated nationalism, as others point out triumphantly that the defending champions France owed their 1998 and 2000 triumphs to the multi-culturality of their team, CONNECTIONS takes the opportunity to introduce the host nations Korea and Japan from a slightly different angle in articles by Kirsteen Kim and Michael Ipgrave. Both countries are more impressive in terms of their contribution to church life and theology than to football, and in different ways are relevant for the reflection on theology and mission far beyond their own immediate contexts.

These contributions will also mention an aspect not much taken up in the media: the fact that Korea and Japan are rather unlikely partners to stage the first jointly hosted World Cup. Their recent history was difficult to the say the least, with the brutal Japanese occupation of Korea being made worse by the country's unwillingness to this day to meaningfully apologise.

Reconciliation will be a core theme for the Decade to Overcome Violence in countless places around the world; it is a task that only begins when peace treaties are signed and in fact is even harder to achieve than these. David Stevens takes a look at the present and future of reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the lessons to be learnt from there.

It is not just in Ireland that the difference between religion and politics is not always clear. Even now one can observe in the UK that categories do not quite seem to fit. While the Queen's Golden Jubilee is being in some places approached with almost religious devotion and fervour (albeit not quite with the same thrust towards radical social reform as the biblical Jubilee idea contained) at the same time the forthcoming nomination of a new Archbishop of Canterbury is reported like a general election or a close finish to the Premier League (the favourites and the outsiders, and even the betting odds are there, although doping does not seem likely to play a role). What actually is religion and what is politics?

In this issue:

Last CONNECTIONS' editorial in passing quoted Mano Rumalshah's comments in the CCOM Asia Forum, when he linked British interfaith work's liberal attitude to other religions with the neglect that persecuted Christians often face in Western public and ecclesiastical opinion when they try to make their plight heard. This reference led to some reactions from readers and in this issue Bishop Mano is given a platform to write at some greater length about Christians in Pakistan, while an article by Michael Ipgrave will look at the presentation of Islam in the British media. Muslim-Christian relations in different contexts and how the one influences the other is certainly a theme for controversial debate that we shall revisit from time to time. Alfred Häßler by contrast in a report on several months' study leave at the *University of Creation Spirituality* looks at a theme that is still rather marginal in church life: the destructive relationship of humankind to creation and the search for a holistic spirituality that allows a fresh start.

Sometimes reconciliation finds a symbolic expression in unlikely fringes of human life and has positive effects on the non-human world: This May climbers from Japan and Korea on their countries' first ever joint alpine expedition buried two bodies which had lain in the open for years and cleared two tons of rubbish from the South Col on Chomolungma (Mt Everest), including oxygen bottles of the British 1953 expedition – which as some will remember had been immaculately timed so that its success would become known just the day before the Queen's coronation. Which anecdote miraculously allows me to end by linking the two events which more than anything else in these days of June hold the imagination of people in these islands.

Kai Funkschmidt

Feature

Kirsteen Kim

Football and Christianity in Korea

South Korea, until the mid 20th century a traditionally Buddhist country, today has the highest percentage of Christians in the whole of Asia outside the Philippines with huge, fast growing churches. How did this happen, what is the history and present state of this thriving church that has generated a lot of interest throughout the world? For further information on the two countries church and theology see the new link list on www.ccom.org.uk

When the World Cup matches are played in South Korea's magnificent stadiums this year few will realise that little over a hundred years ago this thriving industrial power was an impoverished backwater of rice paddies and thatched cottages without railways or a single road, shut off from the outside world by mountains, sea, and by deeply conservative government policy. For centuries a tramping ground for the armies of Japan with their territorial ambitions on the Asian mainland, this peace-loving country steeped in Buddhist and Confucian traditions was in 1910 to be annexed by Japan and bled dry by a brutal colonisation. Liberation by Communist and US forces in 1945 led only to the bloody Korean war of 1950-53 in which more than 3 million Koreans died and since which the Korean people have been divided from each other in a perpetual cold war. No wonder a leading thinker has described his country as "Queen of Suffering".

This turbulent history has also seen one of the most remarkable examples of church growth, from a tiny persecuted minority to an estimated 30% of the (45 million) population in South Korea. The football stadiums of Korea are regularly hired by Christian groups for huge praise and prayer meetings. At night the skyline of Seoul is punctuated by red neon crosses marking hundreds of church buildings. The largest of these churches even sponsor their own professional football teams as a means of spreading the gospel further.

Korean church growth

Korean tradition has it that the country was founded in 2333 BC, which by Korean reckoning means it has a 5000-year history. People who migrated into the Korean peninsula from Mongolia thousands of years ago brought with them a religion which centred on the shaman (usually a woman) who could converse with the spirits of rocks, mountains, trees and also ancestors and exorcise them by means of dancing and trances, thus releasing those who were suffering under their influence. Mahayana Buddhism, along with Taoism, entered Korea via China in about the fourth century AD and Buddhism became the official religion of the Silla kingdom under which Korea was unified in 661 AD. By the fourteenth century Buddhism had become very corrupt and with the accession of the Yi dynasty in 1392 it was replaced as the religion of state by Neo-Confucianism. Monks were despised and were exiled to the mountains, where most monasteries remain to this day.

For Korean intellectuals Confucianism was a practical way of life or philosophy in which society was organised to reflect the former Golden Age which Confucius idealised and that rendered technological progress unnecessary. Confucianism, which is very rational, disciplined and unemotional, became the public face of Korea and chiefly a man's religion. Barred from taking part in Confucian rituals, the women kept alive the shamanistic religion, mixed with Buddhism. This duality of male and female, public and private, dignified and impassioned is basic to Korean culture and is very much reflected in the church today, which has both a formal, male-dominated public face and a strong charismatic expression which crosses denominations and in which women play a leading role.

Catholicism entered Korea in the eighteenth century, not through missionaries but through Koreans who encountered the religion in China and spread it among their compatriots on their return. Christians endured severe persecution in this most conservative of countries until Korea was forced to open itself to this and other western influences in the 1870s. In the 1880s Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries arrived in Korea from USA and the remarkable growth of the Protestant church began. The first Protestant missionaries arrived at a time when the Yi dynasty, which had maintained Korean society virtually unchanged for nearly 500 years, was crumbling under the forces of modernity. Korea was coerced into opening her doors to the West, but there were many inside who welcomed the fresh air and saw in Jesus Christ new hope for the future.

The Protestant missionaries themselves came, by and large, from the background of North American revivalism. They preached a gospel of radical conversions from past religious and social practices and personal faith. The missionaries made a deliberate decision to aim their preaching at the lower classes of Korean society, particularly the women, who they felt were most open to their message. The Bible was translated early on and, very significantly, the versions distributed were in the easy vernacular script (*hangul*) not in the Chinese used by the Confucian scholars. Schools and hospitals were opened for the poor but the missionaries accepted the political status quo and did not question Japanese rule.

In the early years of the century, culminating in 1907, the whole Church in Korea experienced what the missionaries called 'revival', which centred on public and very emotional confession of sins. There was loud simultaneous but individual prayer, fervent exhortation and ecstatic behaviour. This represented an indigenous religious movement and the extent and passion of it took the missionaries by surprise. The Korean Church continues to look back to this, and other later revivals, and tries to recapture the spirit of it in regular revival meetings today. The habits of dawn and all-night prayer meeting were established then. Another legacy is that there are charismatic tendencies in almost all denominations. The missionaries used the 1907 revival as a springboard to the first of many national movements for evangelism which resulted in astoundingly rapid church growth.

From the start the missionaries used the Nevius method of evangelism which emphasised the 'three selfs' of self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing churches.[1] From about the 1930s Korean denominations were largely Korean-led. Not surprisingly, differences between these groups do not run as deep in Korea as in their countries of origin and there is considerable uniformity. There is, for example, one hymnbook for all the Protestant denominations and orders of service and church polity are similar. Nationwide evangelistic campaigns too can command very wide support. However there have been many later schisms in Korea which are harder to overcome and cooperation of churches at a local level is rare. There is plenty of scope to blame the Nevius method in this regard, but it is also a reflection of Korean competitiveness and capitalism.

The gospel preached by the missionaries was politically quietist. However Korean Christians understood a nationalistic message and were prominent in the independence movement against the Japanese in 1919. The imposition of Shinto worship and the Japanisation of education were resisted by Protestants who suffered persecution for this. The North Korean communists were anti-Christian and so many Christians fled to the South during the Korean War. Little is known about the churches in North Korea, which were forced underground by the new regime. During the Korean War the credibility of Christianity was raised by the involvement of churches in tending refugees and wounded. The role of the US in the liberation, protection and rebuilding of Korea also increased the attraction of Christianity in some quarters. 'America' in Korean is literally 'beautiful country' and during the hardship of post-war years many fled there, regarding it as a paradise. The diaspora Korean church in North America is very strong and there continue to be close links between Korean and North American Christianity.

After the Korean War until 1988, South Korea was ruled by a series of military dictators who seized power in coups and maintained it through doctrines of national security in the face of communist threat. Human rights were sacrificed to the interests of security and the push to build a strong industrial base for the nation. This period was also the time of fastest church growth. Though the Catholic Church often took the side of the poorest, by and large the Protestant churches supported the governments, regarding these as preferable to communist rule. They encouraged their congregations to work hard to build a strong nation because national prosperity was seen as the way to ensure the independence and eventual unification of Korea.

Korean theologies: prosperity and poverty

Two very different Korean theologies have been propagated worldwide: The first is the popular prosperity theology, of which Cho Yonggi, pastor of the half-million strong Full Gospel Church in Seoul, is an extreme and explicitly Pentecostal example. Prosperity teaching in Korea is not just the preserve of the Pentecostals; a theology of grace and blessing predominates in the mainline Korean Protestant churches and it has a particularly Korean flavour, especially in its emphasis on hard work, fervent prayer, and the interests of the nation. The second is a Korean liberation theology, known as *minjung* theology, born in the dark days of dictatorship when Christians protesting at worker exploitation and other social injustices were imprisoned as 'communists'. The former consciously continues the legacy and revival religion of the missionaries, though unconsciously contextualising it, and unashamedly espouses the material benefits of economic prosperity for all. The latter is a reaction on the part of a comparatively small number of intellectuals and political activists against colonial mission and the political quietism of the majority involving a conscious expression of the gospel in the symbols of Korean traditions. These two theologies have very little actual contact in Korea. The proponents of each are mutually antagonistic and move in different circles. At the seminary level and at the church level they are generally represented by different institutions.

Minjung theology was immediately rejected by most Christians because of its use of biblical criticism and its lack of love for the church. For their part, *minjung* theologians have attacked the mainstream churches for representing "salvation, wealth and health" as the very essence of Christianity. Nevertheless both the prosperity and the *minjung* theologies are addressing the problems of the poor, though in very different ways. The former encourages the poor that by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, their hard work and prayer can lead to economic and material blessing for themselves and their country. The latter regards the poor as victims, sees the hope for them only in structural changes to society and international organisations, inspired by the political example of Jesus Christ. The former rejects Korean religious (but not cultural) heritage and regards Christianity as an alternative religion, though in its expression it retains many features of the preceding religions. The latter contrives to use the language of the religions but in a form that many Koreans do not recognise as spiritual. Despite their theological differences, both theologies see the suffering of Jesus as crucial to salvation. They both seek to identify with Christ through self-sacrifice and to appropriate his work for the benefit of their nation.

Conclusion

When the World Cup is played in Korea this summer, Koreans – Buddhist, Confucian, secular and Christian – will be rooting for their national team. Though Japan will be the dominant partner in the event, Koreans will take pride in the prosperity and recognition they as a nation have achieved in such a short space of time. The Christian gospel cannot be reduced to material gain, but for a poor nation it is a great blessing and a reason for thanksgiving. This is why at Easter this year Korean churches displayed a banner proclaiming "Easter glory! Worldcup victory". Whatever the source of blessing, whatever the special conditions that brought it about, and whatever the injustices that remain, Koreans are mindful that, had it not been achieved, they would not be co-hosting the Cup and Korea would still be a little-known backwater without influence and even more at the mercy of its powerful neighbours.

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[1] Named after John Livingstone Nevius (1829-1893) who was an American Presbyterian missionary to China and formulated this plan in relation to Korea in 1890. It spells out the 'three self' ideas similar to those of Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn under whose names they became more widely known. [Note fr. KMF]

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Michael Ipgrave

Football and Christianity in Japan

The German theology series 'Theologiegeschichte der Dritten Welt' (History of Theology in the Third World, ed. Klaes-Sundermeier) among volumes on Africa, Latin-America, Asia and India also contains a volume on Japan. This delicate detail in a very good series went widely unnoticed and yet: why publish on Japanese theology in a series on 'Third World' theology? This little aperçu is paradigmatic for a country that does not easily fit into categories of understanding. Consequentially Michael Ipgrave starts exploration with the ambiguity of many areas of Japanese life.

"In a way it is going to be like an earthquake; we have made thorough preparations and all that is left to do is put things in motion and enter uncharted territory." Such are the reported words of the Mayor of Yokohama, Hiroshi Nakada, as he looks forward to the prospect of the World Cup coming to his country, its final being played in his city on 30 June. Of course, one of the tracts of "uncharted territory" whose seismic impact he fears most is that occupied by English football fans, whose boisterousness is notorious in Japan. The mayor's forebodings are to some extent understandable, particularly as they are underlain by major cultural differences about ways in which people should or will behave in public. Perhaps, though, it is possible to take his words as indicative of a deeper ambiguity among many Japanese people about attitudes to the West. On one hand Japan has borrowed enthusiastically from European and American culture; on the other hand there remains a strong and self-conscious sense that Japanese ways of doing things are somehow different. The World Cup may highlight this in a rather dramatic way: Japanese people are hugely excited at the prospect of hosting this tournament, which will build on the enormous popularity of 'J-league' football, yet at the same time they fear the 'earthquake' which lies ahead. Yet similarly ambivalent attitudes to the West can be traced more generally throughout modern and pre-modern Japanese history and they are crucial to understanding the opportunities and limitations of Christian mission in Japan. In what follows I want to illustrate this tension with reference to three very different examples drawn from the Japanese Christian story.

The wreck of the San Felipe

In 1596, a Spanish treasure galleon, the *San Felipe*, was shipwrecked off the coast of Shikoku in west-central Japan; its cargo came into the possession of the military ruler of the country, Hideyoshi. Christian missionaries, principally Jesuits under Portuguese patronage, had by then been in Japan for almost fifty years, and had met with considerable success, particularly in the western regions. Several local lords had been converted, churches and schools built, and thousands of ordinary people baptised. Yet there was also considerable suspicion of the new religion among the ruling classes, for several reasons: its demand for exclusive commitment seemed strange to those used to the traditional Japanese pattern of multiple religious belonging; its teaching of the individual dignity of each human soul appeared to be subversive of the hierarchically ordered society of the time; and, most worrying of all, it was clearly closed linked in some way to the foreign traders who had arrived in the island kingdom at the same time.

The reported reaction of the captain of the *San Felipe* to the loss of his treasure dramatically reinforced this last fear. In an attempt to seek redress for his loss, he apparently threatened Hideyoshi by claiming that not only would the King of Spain intervene on his behalf, but when he did so the despot's Japanese subjects would also rise on his behalf. Not implausibly the opponents of Christianity among Hideyoshi's advisers seem to have seized on this blustering as evidence that the 'foreign religion' represented a dangerous fifth column infiltrated into the heart of Japanese society, and the Church found itself facing the first wave of a growing tide of persecution: on 5 February 1597, the Jesuit Paul Miki and twenty-five of his companions were crucified at Nagasaki. Over the next half-century, the government's repression of the faith intensified both in thoroughness and in cruelty, provoking in 1637 an unprecedented rebellion by the oppressed Christian peasantry of the Shimabara peninsula in Kyushu. Yet this was in no way a fulfilment of the sea captain's threat: so far from being linked to outside military powers, the rebels were massacred by government troops who were aided by a bombardment from Dutch ships. On the site of the peasants' final stand, now three diminutive memorial statues on the cliff-top look out to sea, waiting for the hoped for return of the missionaries to renew the people's faith. It is a profoundly moving place to visit.

The Japanese government's ferocious reaction is not difficult to understand. It is true that in many ways the early missions had made striking efforts to present the Christian faith in ways which were accessible to Japanese culture: like their brothers in China, Jesuits in Japan under the leadership of men such as St Francis Xavier and Francisco Valignano wrestled seriously with issues of inculturation.

Nevertheless,the faith as they taught it was bound to appear culturally foreign; its vocabulary was full of Portuguese and Latin loan-words (their Japanese coinage for 'God', for example, was *Deusu*); the *San Felipe* episode seemed to demonstrate clearly their close alliance with overseas traders; their attitude to the indigenous Shinto-Buddhist religiosity of the country was uniformly hostile. At a time when its leaders were hostile to, because fearful of, outside influence, such a clear identification of Christianity with foreign culture was bound to create huge problems for the church's mission. In many ways, that identification of Christianity with foreignness has never been entirely lost in Japan.

Fukuzawa Yukichi's proposal

In some periods of Japanese history, though, the fact that Christianity is seen as essentially a foreign religion has had a much more ostensibly positive significance, as the figure of Fukuzawa Yukichi demonstrates. Fukuzawa has one of the best-known faces in Japan, as his portrait appears on 10,000 yen bank notes. He was a leading intellectual figure and educational reformer of the later nineteenth century. This was the period known in Japanese history as the Meiji Restoration; after centuries of military governments which had followed a policy of enforced isolation from the outside world a revolution led to the re-establishment of imperial rule and the opening up of the country to overseas trade and technology. The Meiji reformers were determined that Japan should benefit from the best of Western technological and economic achievements, and so embarked on a conscious programme to adopt into the Japanese context key elements of European and American life. At the same time, there was a concern among some not to lose the 'soul' of the nation in the rush towards modernisation – a point which was encapsulated in the popular slogan *tôyôdôtoku seiyôgakugei*: "Eastern ethics, Western science".

Within such an approach it would appear that Christianity – as part of 'Western ethics' – could have no serious part to play in modern Japan, however much the government might have to tolerate the renewed presence of missionaries to keep the Western powers happy. This certainly was initially Fukuzawa's position: in the1870s, he used his newspaper *The Chrysanthemum* to publish a series of attacks on Christianity. In 1884, however, he changed his mind, publishing an influential essay entitled *The Adoption of the Foreign Religion is Necessary*. As its name suggests, this was an appeal to the government to issue an edict declaring that henceforth Christianity was to become the state religion of Japan. Fukuzawa explained his about-face with the following reasoning: "The civilised nations of Europe and America have always held that non-Christian countries could not be treated as enlightened nations. Such being the case, if we desire to maintain our intercourse with Western nations on the basis of international law, it is absolutely necessary that we remove completely the stigma of being an anti-Christian country and obtain the recognition of fellowship by the adoption of their social colour". So far was this from an expression of any personal sense of spiritual interest that Fukuzawa pompously added: "From the standpoint of a private individual, we may say that we take little or no interest in the subject of religion, as it does not affect our personal feelings or sentiments."

Extraordinary as it seems, Fukuzawa's proposal was considered with the utmost seriousness by the imperial Japanese government. The idea was eventually shelved largely because an official mission to the West reported back that Christianity did not in fact occupy quite the position in Europe and America that Fukuzawa had believed and therefore its adoption by Japan would not be regarded as necessary by the Western nations. This is quite natural given the way in which Fukuzawa had effectively reversed the 'inculturation' question. That is to say, rather than addressing the classical missionary dilemma, "How much westernisation is bound up in the Christian faith?", Fukuzawa was asking, "How much Christianity is bound up in western civilisation?" The questions are not the same, though many of the nineteenth-century missionaries misheard the Japanese question as if it were their own.

A wedding chapel in Tokyo

In contemporary Japan the two questions to some extent converge – as can be seen in the intriguing phenomenon of 'wedding chapels'. These are commercial premises, often run by hotels, which offer 'Western-style' marriage ceremonies to Japanese couples. Such services are increasingly popular – in 1998, 53.1% of weddings were 'Christian-style', a figure which contrasts rather remarkably with the less than 1% of the population who could be counted as Christians. It is not surprising that Mark Mullins, a leading scholar of Japanese Christianity, suggests that this trend towards Christian-style ceremonies "represents a natural Japanese appropriation of another religious tradition into the rites of passage of contemporary society".

However in a fascinating personal article Michael Fisch points out that it would be over-simplistic to describe these ceremonies as 'Christian' *tout court*. He describes how he, as a secularised American Jew with no Christian commitment, was able on the basis of his physical appearance to find employment as a 'minister' in a wedding chapel operated by a hotel chain in Tokyo. On the basis of his experiences, he points out the extent to which this growing phenomenon in reality is both a Japanese "performance of non-Japaneseness", and simultaneously a non-Christian simulation of Christian liturgy. As such, it clearly raises issues for the Japanese church – it would certainly seem rather naï ve to regard this as a straightforward missionary opportunity. On the other hand, it is an interesting reflection on the sense of identity of Japanese people that at such a crucial point in their lives so many should turn to the cultural and spiritual rituals of the West. Maybe it is a similarly complex emotional logic that lies behind Mayor Nakada's ambivalent attitude to the forthcoming World Cup final.

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David Stevens

A Time to Heal: Perspectives on Reconciliation and Overcoming Violence

How is reconciliation possible? David Stevens, general secretary of the Irish Council of Churches, explores how violence continues to have an impact on post-conflict societies for 10-15 years and how identities are shaped in distinguishing ourselves from others in a way which makes it hard to overcome our fixation on the other as enemy – because it would mean losing and rebuilding my identity. The Christian origin of 'reconciliation' shows how humans can be enabled to reach reconciliation.

Introduction

Since its beginning in 1983, the Faith and Politics Group - a group of Protestants and Catholics from both parts of Ireland –has been concerned about the meaning of reconciliation in a Northern Ireland context. It has sought to envisage what a politics of reconciliation might mean. This search has been carried out in a spirit of sober realism because the work of the Irish political scientist Frank Wright - briefly a member of the group - has told us that by and large national communities that co-exist on the same soil develop in rivalry with and antagonism to each other. We have been aware that national conflicts do not normally end up with reconciliation of the antagonists. More commonly they are concluded by final victories or forced separations. The words 'ethnic cleansing' have cruelly entered the world's vocabulary during the 1990s. Thus we were and are under no illusion about what might happen if a politics of reconciliation were not attempted or were to conclusively fail. Nevertheless we dared to hope that things might be different.

Issues of reconciliation and healing (the subject of the next Assembly of the Conference of European Churches) and overcoming violence (eg the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence Programme) have become more prominent in recent ecumenical discussion. The work of the Faith and Politics Group over 20 years may have something to contribute.

Conflicts within States

Frank Wright taught us that Northern Ireland conflict was not unique. One of the things happening in our world is that conflicts *between* states are being overtaken in frequency and perhaps in importance by conflicts *within* states. The forces of globalisation and homogenisation which threaten a sense of community on the one hand and the (re) assertion of identities - cultural, national, ethnic, religious, social - on the other hand, bring about situations of tension and conflict between communities. In such contested 'spaces' there are certain key areas of critical importance: the different communities' relations to the State and, in particular, to the law and justice systems; issue of symbolic expression, e.g. how events are publicly remembered and celebrated, flags and emblems; recognition of cultural diversity; issues of power relations and, in particular, how power is shared; issues of equity between communities; and how communities are to belong together. In contested spaces we are always trespassing against each other. We live with the 'other' in a mutual fear-threat relationship. We easily become caught in a cycle of conflict in which the actions and behaviour of one set of participants reinforce the actions and behaviour of the others, and the conflict keeps going. The result is a deep-rooted insecurity, antagonism and enmity and identities shaped by conflict and violence.

The diplomatic procedures inherited from the nineteenth century which were designed to effect reconciliation - or at least political settlements - between states are ill-adapted to deal with the issues of reconciliation within and between communities. Here reconciliation becomes much less abstract and more face-to-face. People who have been deeply hurt, whose loved ones have been killed and devastated by injury, actually have to come to terms with the presence on their streets of individuals who did these things to them. It is not surprising that in this context issues like prisoner release cause significant difficulty. We need to learn about the possibilities and dynamics of reconciliation because of the increasing incidence of conflicts within states.

Overcoming the Past

The example of Northern Ireland does not suggest that overcoming violence and achieving reconciliation are easy. We have a precarious political agreement. A political agreement is vital but it only provides a starting point for moving forward. We are all too aware of the continuing intractabilities of sectarian hatred; the undertow of hurt, pain and resentment; the competitive victimhood; many people's sense of loss; the way the conflict mutates into new forms; and the increasing segregation. This is not a society yet at ease with itself. Reconciliation remains elusive. All of this points to the need for social and spiritual transformation which will change people's views of each other and how they relate to each other.

Societies in course of transition have to struggle over how much to acknowledge, how to deal with perpetrators, victims and bystanders and how to recover. The American writer Martha Minow says

> A common formulation posits the two dangers of wallowing in the past and forgetting it. Too much memory or not enough; too much enshrinement of victimhood or insufficient memorialising of victims and survivors; too much past or too little acknowledgement of the past's staging of the present; these joined dangers accompany

not just societies emerging from mass violence, but also individuals recovering from trauma.

There are a whole series of potential goals for societies responding to collective violence:

1 Overcome communal and official denial and silence about the past and gain public acknowledgement;

2 seek to memorialise the past and educate about it;

3 obtain the facts in an account as full as possible in order to meet victims' need to know, to build a record for history, and to ensure minimal accountability and visibility of perpetrators;

4 end and prevent violence; transform human activity from violence - and violent responses to violence - into words and institutional practices of equal respect and dignity;

5 forge the basis for a domestic democratic order that respects and enforces human rights;

6 support the legitimacy and stability of a political accommodation or a new regime;

7 promote reconciliation across social divisions; reconstruct the moral and social systems devastated by violence;

8 promote psychological healing for individuals, groups, victims, bystanders, and offenders;

9 restore dignity to victims;

10 punish, exclude, shame, and diminish offenders for their offences;

11 express and seek to achieve the aspiration that "never again" shall such collective violence occur;

12 build an international order to try to prevent and also to respond to aggression, torture and atrocities;

13 accomplish each of these goals in ways that are compatible with the other goals.

(Adapted from Martha Minow *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*, Beacon Press, 1998.)

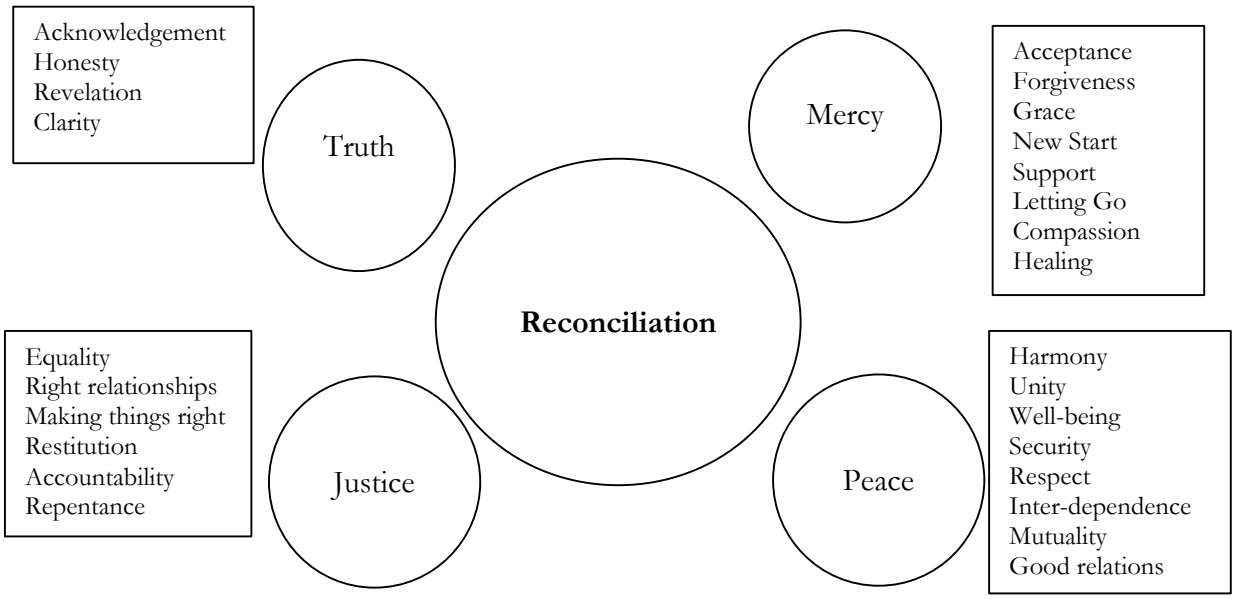
What is important to note is that there are tensions between many of these potential goals.

It is also important to note that the transition from inter-community conflicts to sustainable peace requires a minimum of 10 to 15 years, or longer. Societies coming out of long and violent internal conflict experience problems every bit as serious as those experienced at the height of the conflict. Transitions precede transformations.

The Meaning of Reconciliation

'Reconciliation' has a particular resonance in situations which have undergone extensive conflict where we need to make good again, e.g. in South Africa with its Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It remains hard, however, to give the word meaning and practical content. Perhaps that can only be done in particular situations.

It also has to be admitted that reconciliation as a word has been shamelessly misused, to slide away from issues of injustice and rightful disturbance. It has been used to quieten people down and lead them away from the reality of their situation. There are also forms of 'reconciliation', which are about making people fit into predetermined 'solutions'. There is also a tendency in discussion about 'reconciliation' to downgrade differences. Not all differences are reconcilable. In our understanding of reconciliation we have sought to talk about "living together in difference" which both emphasises difference and living together and links them. We also understand reconciliation in terms of the inter-related dynamics of forgiveness, repentance, truth and justice. Another helpful way to understand reconciliation is to see it as a place where the different conflicting parties meet and face together the claims and tensions between truth and mercy and justice and peace.



Adapted from J. Paul Lederach *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in a Divided Society,* The United National University (1995)

Living Together in Difference

Living together in difference and diversity - racial, cultural, social, religious - is an increasingly challenging issue facing today's world. It raises profound issues about community, identity, recognition and how we meet the other. Often there is dis-ease in the presence of difference and differences have been dealt with by belittling, dehumanising and demonising, overlooking, avoidance (polite or otherwise) and by making people fit in (sometimes through overt pressure). The possibility of real meetings between people where there is honest conversation, respect and mutual regard is narrowed in such situations and they are hostage to wider communal

fears. For instance, there is evidence that Bosnia's earlier tradition of tolerance was based only on courtesy.
All group identity is created by encountering what is different. Such encounter involves a **recognition** of the other. A recognition of the other can be based on fear and mistrust and/or a sense of superiority which lead to attempts at separation and domination. The identities engendered in such situations are often negative identities, based on opposition to the other. Asserting such identities also serves to increase an awareness of difference and separateness. An identity politics often emerges. Positive change requires a new recognition of the other and ourselves, new ways of relating, and ways of honouring both particularity and belonging together.

Negative identity involves a need to abuse the other, emerging out of one's own experience of abuse, fear, loss or powerlessness. If the rule of positive identity is "love your neighbour (the other) as you love yourself" (Lev 10:18) then the rule of negative identity is "do unto others what they have done unto you, or do it unto them first". One of the deepest resistances to peace and reconciliation in many situations is the stubborn commitment on all sides to the negative identities formed over and against each other. We need our enemy because of the identity they give us. We may desperately seek to continue the conflict because we cannot envision ourselves in a future which would include positive relations with the other. Periods of transition are particularly difficult for identities formed in opposition to others. For transitions to go in a good direction there needs to be a movement away from constructing identities over and against others to developing identities that through positive relationships respect others and leave room for difference.

People have a fundamental need for security. In societies governed by fear-threat relationships wisdom suggests that security comes from deterrence or getting your retaliation in first or from living among your 'own'. We all know about the threat from the 'other'; much harder to acknowledge is the threat we pose **to** the 'other'. Conflict situations generate endless justifications, blame and self-righteousness. There may, however, come a time when significant sections of different communities are ready to find a way out. These *kairos* moments have to be seized and confidence-building steps entered into. The realisation may dawn that there cannot be security for one without security for the other; that security comes from transformation and new relationships. We have to take the other into account and meet their needs as well as our own. For all of this to happen we have to 'see' the other - and ourselves - in a different way. There has to be new recognitions.

A Christian Vision of Reconciliation

'Reconciliation' is a word on many people's lips today, including politicians. This must be significant. However, Christian theology has used this word with primary reference to the atoning work of God in Christ –"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5: 19). How does the classical Christian understanding of reconciliation connect with the concerns of a conflictual humanity?

In our first document *Breaking Down the Enmity* we emphasised the enmity generated in conflict situations and the circle of violence and counter-violence. The New Testament shows a God who wishes to overcome breakdowns in relationships. There is a deep solidarity of God with suffering humanity. The enmity between God and human beings is overcome through Christ's loving embrace of us on the cross – "He is our Peace who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14). There is a mending of brokenness and we are brought to a new place ("there is a new creation"2 Cor 5:17) where we are able to make space for the other because Christ has made space for us. While we are made one in Christ particular identities are not abolished but they are relativised and subordinated. This new identity in Christ leaves no room for individual or collective claims of superiority or self-righteousness. Reconciliation in Christ is about being freed from anxiety about identity. We do not have to shore up our own selfhood or self-esteem. We are to trust in the goodness and grace of God.

God's loving forgiveness opens the way to repentance (the story of Zaccheus). Issues of justice and truth are not ignored. Thus love operates within a moral order which involves truth and justice.

All of this has social implications. Christians are the visible fruits of God's reconciliation in Christ. They are called to make this reconciliation visible - visible in terms of a quality of relationships, visible in terms of openness and hospitality. This visibility should serve the same purpose as Christ's visibility, namely to reveal God. This is the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19). Similarly, the Church is a community of reconciliation and is called to make this visible.

The innocent victim Jesus protests against a world in which violence is met by violence and the message of the resurrection is that the destructive powers of the world will not prevail. Such a vision of reconciliation speaks of something given us, of remade humanity, of the cost of love, of suffering vulnerability. It makes us increasingly sensitive to victims. It is a world beyond politics. But it offers a perspective in which to conduct our relationships in the world.

Violence demands its victims - its sacrifices. Peace and reconciliation may also demand 'sacrifice' though of a different sort: that involved in a commitment to a loving and non-violent God and by a commitment to stop the scapegoating and blaming that exists in a devious and violent world. It is a way of "living sacrifice" (Rom 12: 1).

Being a Community of Reconciliation

Faith communities can also be communities of reconciliation. Some of us are members of a community of reconciliation in Northern Ireland - the Corrymeela Community. Corrymeela has learnt the importance of

- belonging together in a community of diversity
- reconciliation being a practice and a journey, not a theory or a strategy or a technique
- a safe space where people can come and meet each other, where there is an atmosphere of trust and acceptance and where differences can be acknowledged, explored and accepted
- the importance of presence and accompaniment - of people who can give time and attention
- encounter and relationships; it is only in encounter and relationships that words like trust, reconciliation and forgiveness become real
- people telling their stories and listening to other peoples' stories. Our identities and lives are based strongly on the stories we tell about ourselves, our families, our

communities, our countries. Thus we need places where memories are explored and untangled.

- not writing people off as incorrigible baddies no matter what they have done - this is not to trivialise evil or say wrong does not matter
- the avoidance of self-righteousness and an awareness of our own hypocrisy
- surprise and the unexpected; reconciliation is something given as well as a practice
- taking small steps
- being sustained and nourished by hope

In Conclusion

Hope, forgiveness, reconciliation, acts of repair, the reweaving of the human fabric are signs of transcendence, that the world can be different and there can be a peaceable kingdom.

The publications of the Faith and Politics Group are available from the Inter Church Centre, 48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AZ e-mail:icpep@email.com. The Group is currently working on a document called "A Time to Heal: Perspectives on Reconciliation" where many of the issues raised in this article will be discussed at greater length.

Mano Rumalshah

Being a Christian in Pakistan

In his talk before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, held on 17 July, 1998, Bishop Mano Rumalshah tells of the plight of Christians in his homeland, Pakistan. The full article is downloadable from www.ccom.org.uk *together with other reflections from Bishop Rumalshah.*

Introduction

I would like to open my remarks with a few words of a martyr and a dear friend of mine who gave his life for the cause of freedom to be a Christian in Pakistan.

> The Christians of Pakistan are being held in a death-sentence blackmail by the Blasphemy Law, under which their small businesses are being taken over, their property seized and the situation is such that their women are not safe. Therefore, in protest against 295-C and other black laws and in the name of my oppressed Christian people, secularism and democracy, I am taking my life.

These were the last recorded words of John Joseph, Roman Catholic Bishop in Pakistan, who laid down his life on 6 May, 1998, to protest against the death sentence imposed on a fellow Christian under Pakistan's blasphemy law. The death of Bishop Joseph created shock waves throughout Pakistan and has utterly devastated my already marginalised community. This event has triggered a chain reaction where the majority Muslim community (about 96%) is tightening the noose on Christians in the most public fashion - by physical harassment and creating an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. My hope in being here today is to pay tribute to this sacrificial act of Bishop Joseph, to make sure that all this has not been in vain, and in doing so to focus the attention of my government and indeed the world on the plight of the Christian community in Pakistan. My concern also includes the issues of religious discrimination and persecution against fellow Christians and people of other faiths across the world who suffer dehumanisation and torture simply because they want to have the freedom to practice the faith of their choice.

Being a Christian in Pakistan

I am a bishop of the Church of Pakistan, which is a part of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Anglicans, of course, are known as Episcopalians in this country. The Church of Pakistan is the largest Christian denomination in our country today, formed in 1970 by the amalgamation of Anglicans, Lutherans, Scottish Presbyterians and the Methodists. There is also a strong Roman Catholic presence, along with other Protestant denominations. We Christians make up about *3%* of the population of Pakistan.

We are privileged to be part of the country of Pakistan, which we serve with all our passion and dedication, knowing that it is ours. Our ancestry on that soil goes back thousands of years. And yet it is a country which, in proclaiming the faith of the majority community, the faith of Islam, seems to be wittingly or unwittingly excluding us Christians and other religious minorities from its shared organic life. As you will know already, Pakistan was created in 1947 to be a homeland for the Muslims of South Asia. The founding fathers dreamt of a Pakistan for the Muslim, but where other religions could also feel part of it. Quaid-i-Azam said, "You are free, you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to go to any other place of worship in this state Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste. . . we are all citizens and equal citizens in this state." Perhaps that dream was too utopian. The creation of a religious state where all have equal status was bound to be wishful thinking, indeed a contradiction in terms. Pakistan was perhaps the first state in modern history created exclusively on the basis of religious identity. The events of the past fifty years have shown that in spite of having good intentions, such states are bound to evolve toward religious exclusivism.

Now allow me to share with you how the rights and freedoms of religious minorities have been eroded in Pakistan's 50-year history because of the majority community's view that this land is for the Muslims, to which many would add for Muslims *only*.

Take a simple word like 'freely'. In the original constitution of Pakistan, Christians and other religious minorities were allowed to "practice their faith freely". This word was removed from the constitution more than ten years ago as it was deemed to be threatening the Islamic fabric of Pakistan. It appeared to the religious minorities to be a quite innocuous

amendment at the time but we are now reaping its ugly consequences.

- In Pakistan, it is becoming increasingly difficult to build our places of worship. We are being told often, unofficially at least, that no permission can be given for the building of churches, simply because it is a land for the Muslims. In Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, a new church building was demolished by angry mobs even after permission was granted by the authorities to build. We rebuilt, only to have it torn down again. . . and then rebuilt and torn down a third time.
- Pakistan is now practicing an apartheid legal system. As a member of a minority, I am barred from standing for election as a Member of Parliament representing the majority community, or even from voting in the main elections for Muslim members of Parliament. Instead, I am restricted to voting for one of a handful of minority members of Parliament, with no influence on who runs my country. Non-Muslims have become politically voiceless. This is an aberration and an antithesis of anything called democracy. Our global family was in agony when apartheid was being practiced in South Africa and yet seems to be quite ignorant of the situation in Pakistan and perhaps other such places.
- As a religious minority we live under a constant feeling of socioeconomic strangulation. We are no longer a Church *serving* the poor, but a Church of the poor. There is massive employment discrimination, both in the public and private sector. Usually only the most menial jobs are available to Christians. In my own diocese in northwest Pakistan, *85%* of my people are severely deprived, working as 'sweepers' who remove human excrement from the streets. We are being socially ostracised and economically paralysed simply for the 'sin' of being Christians. As an example, the number of Christians in employment in the federal government of Pakistan is 0.7%, and 87% of those are in the lowest three categories. The reason? This is a land for Muslims, and we are merely Christians.

Over the years, Pakistan has been trying to introduce Shariah (the Islamic Law) and its related ordinances as part of a program of Islamisation. The Shariah promises to govern and regulate the lives of people as an obedience to the sovereignty of God. On the face of it, it looks harmless, even desirable. After all, in the Christian Bible, we too acknowledge the sovereignty of God and seek his Kingdom. But with the imposition of Islamic law, citizens can only respond to this sovereignty through an Islamic way. This makes life extremely difficult for those who are not Muslims. It is even suggested that non-Muslims in Pakistan should be given the status of a *Dhimmi* under the Shariah Law. This means that we will be treated like conquered people and would be offered protection only after the payment of a special tax. How could we become 'conquered people' in our own homeland? Currently, Shariah is being practiced selectively in Pakistan, but even then it has begun to affect our lives as Christians in serious ways.

For example, at least once a month I am confronted with cases where a Christian has accepted Islam mainly to get divorced or remarried. The worst aspect of it is that the Christian spouse left behind is not accepted as legally divorced; whereas the one who has become Muslim is accepted by the law of the land as legally divorced or remarried.

Take another example of this, if any adult Muslim converts to Christianity or any other faith, he is automatically denied his inherited rights. I know of a case of a convert who has been incarcerated for the last 17 years, even without any proper trial or verdict simply for his so-called apostasy.

Perhaps the worst aspect of Islamisation in recent times has been the use of the dreaded Blasphemy Law. This has been part of the legal statute for a couple of centuries, but has been resurrected over a decade ago as part of the Pakistan penal code. Its section 295-C says:

> Whoever by words, either spoken or written or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.

The intent behind this law seems perfectly reasonable because we should respect the great leaders of all religions. Such a law is there simply to counter any disrespect to such persons. Unfortunately, great problems arise when these laws get exploited and abused. In Pakistan, for us Christians and other religious minorities, the misuse of this law by members of the majority community has achieved draconian proportions. Its burgeoning and widespread use since 1986 has caused panic in my community as well as to other religious minorities. It is indeed like a Damocles sword hanging over our heads. It has often been used by private citizens to settle old scores and to take out vendettas. There have been some frightening incidents related to it. The worst aspect is that 90% of such cases never reach a court of law; the mobs resolve these cases in impromptu 'Kangaroo Courts'. And even if they do reach court, the courts increasingly tend to lean toward the Muslim accuser whose single testimony is enough proof of the crime and, of course, the witness of a Christian is not even admissible.

In fact, the ultimate despair of the late Bishop John Joseph was that he could not find a competent lawyer to appeal against the death sentence of his parishioner, Ayub Masih. All such lawyers feared for their lives. A judge who acquitted one of the few Christians to escape from such a sentence,was murdered in broad daylight - two years after his judgement. I offer here some of the examples just to show how our small community is being brutalised and victimised in the name of religion under this law:

- Tahir Iqhal, a young Christian bound to a wheelchair through illness, was a convert from Islam. He was brutally murdered by a frenzied mob because he was said to have at least inadvertently insulted The Prophet of Islam due to his conversion.
- A teenage boy was accused of writing insulting remarks against the Prophet on a mosque wall. He, along with his uncle, was sentenced to death, but with the intervention of the government at that time, was helped to leave the country. The boy was eventually certified to be an illiterate.
- A fourteen-year-old girl, Carol Shakeel, was accused of blasphemy at school. In order to save her life she became a Muslim with the consent of her family, because 225 local Muslim religious leaders signed an oath to kill her.

It is worth noting that until the introduction of section 295-C, hardly any cases under the Blasphemy Law surfaced during the previous 40 years in the life of Pakistan. I have here with

me a catalogue of these cases which have been properly documented and can withstand the test of credibility. You may wish to examine them at your convenience.

[...]

Legislation Before the U.S. Senate

And now I would like to share my views on the specific pieces of legislation your committee is considering. Let me paint a picture in broad strokes of what I believe could be helpful from the United States. As you know, I am here because I believe in the cause of religious liberty, in Pakistan and around the world. Believe me, it would have been easier to stay at home. But for me, and for many of my Christian brothers and sisters in Pakistan, silence is not an option.

I do not believe the United States can remain silent either. Since the Pilgrims first set sail in 1607 in search of a place to practice their religious beliefs, religious freedom has been a cornerstone of your country's history and culture. No, the United States should not stand by today in silence in the face of religious persecution worldwide. You need to hear the cry of people around the world who suffer for their faith, who are denied the basic right to believe, which you so naturally take for granted.

The central question is how the United States can respond most effectively to the cry of the persecuted faithful. I understand the legislation passed in the House of Representatives would mandate severe economic sanctions against countries that engage in persecution. This approach might have positive effects in certain circumstances - perhaps in Sudan. But I fear that in other circumstances, severe sanctions could trigger reprisals against the religious minority for having caused the sanctions and also cause suffering and misery to the poor of that country. It is my experience that this approach is less helpful, and in some cases can even do more harm than good.

But clearly, there are more choices than just imposing heavy-handed sanctions or doing nothing. There is an entire array of foreign policy options which can positively affect human rights conditions in other countries. The legislation we are here to discuss today, the Nickles bill, gives your government a range of options - from a private diplomatic reprimand all the way through to economic sanctions. This flexibility is crucial to effective action. In circumstances of severe persecution, the bill allows for more severe sanctions, but again maintains the flexibility of calibrating those sanctions for the particular situation. I believe your current law already allows for this response to gross violators of human rights. The bill also allows the sanctions to be waived if the cause of religious liberty would be jeopardised.

In Pakistan, I believe the most helpful response from the US is one that says "We don't like what we see and hear." The international community's recognition of religious persecution in Pakistan has a subtle and yet profoundly positive effect on the plight of the Christian community. Yes, some extreme elements react with anger and defiance. But, overall, as you say in the US, 'sunshine' on the situation helps. There is the need to have a constant dialogue between the US and our country on this and other issues of human rights. The diplomatic 'hotline' must be in action all the time. Of course all this may only apply to Pakistan. I do not know the best approach for other people who suffer for their faith around the world - in China, Sudan, parts of the Middle East. These are all very different situations which need different approaches. This case-by-case approach is the heart of the Nickles bill.

This year the international community is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which reminds us "to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance". One of the more important aspects of the Nickles bill, I believe, is that the bill uses the Declaration's broad, internationally accepted definition of religious persecution. This definition recognises both gross violations of human rights and the more subtle and prevalent forms of religious persecution experienced worldwide, such as church burnings, job discrimination, the stifling of religious expression and the inability to hold services. A severe limitation of the House bill is that it only responds to the most extreme cases of religious persecution, ignoring the vast majority of restrictions on religious liberty that occur around the world.

Finally, the Nickles bill includes another important provision, which requires the US government to consult with nongovernmental organisations, including churches, concerning the state of human rights and religious persecution. This provision is crucial if you are to find the most effective ways of fighting persecution, while at the same time protecting the religious minority in offending countries. It is obvious to me with this bill and with this hearing you are conducting today, that the Senate is committed to consulting the religious community. Sadly, the House version would not do this.

In this 50th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I call on this Congress, which has focussed attention on the important problem of religious persecution, to push for an international Bill of Rights to protect religious minorities everywhere. I am not calling for a hierarchy of human rights. I am calling for religion to have finally an equal seat at the human rights table.

As I conclude my statement, one factor seems to be overwhelmingly evident - there are situations in our world where your religious identity can be your death-warrant. This happens in Pakistan and other parts of South Asia. Although my personal experiences are those of a minority Christian in a majority Islamic land, it could equally be the experience of Muslims in the Philippines or Bosnia, of Buddhists in Tibet, of Hindus in Sri Lanka, and so on. I am also aware that these conflict situations are not exclusively based on religious identity. Other factors such as race and ethnicity are also major components of these situations. The difference is that we are born with our race and ethnicity and bear its consequences, both good and bad, for the rest of our lives. But religion is a person's free choice. I believe each and every human soul on this planet earth must be given complete freedom to choose and practice his own faith. Creed should never be mixed with race, culture, or status in life. It is indeed a sacred choice. No one should be allowed to mutilate and desecrate this God-given privilege. You, my American friends, uphold this principle dearly, and I am sure you understand our predicament. I hope the American people will continue to offer themselves as an instrument of peace, hope, and justice for human situations where this fundamental of all human rights is being denied.

Alfred Häßler

The University of Creation Spirituality

Bridging the Gap – On the Way towards Postdenominationalism

As a pastor of the Protestant Church of Kurhesse-Waldeck (the area of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha), Alfred Häßler spent a 4 month sabbatical in the autumn of 2001 at the University of Creation Spirituality (UCS) in Oakland, California. He shows an approach to the still widely disregarded fundamental challenge that ecological destruction poses to Christian ethics and ultimately our relationship to God. Albeit the theology presented here is somewhat unorthodox, it can be noted that it is of particular appeal to Christians who do not find the ecological challenge taken seriously enough in the mainline churches.

My interest in the University of Creation Spirituality (UCS) was raised by hearsay and various publications which I had come across. UCS offers 1 year Masters courses or shorter periods of study for those on sabbatical leave. In 2001, as the only theologically trained person I joined some 80-100 students aged 25 to 65. In my class there were teachers, engineers, artists, doctors, shop-assistants – in short, people from all realms of society. Most of them were from Christian and Jewish backgrounds (though not always practicising their religion). Among Christian traditions there is a marked presence of (sometimes ex-)Roman Catholics on the teaching staff, especially clergy and religious orders. This may be a reflection of the Roman Catholic contemplative and mystic traditions together with a stronger emphasis on Natural Theology than can be found in traditional Protestant thinking.

The first time I climbed the stairs of the UCS building, I was surprised to see a painting on the wall showing the development of the universe. One might rather expect to find such a painting in some scientific research centre rather than in a centre for spirituality. The explanation comes on the last step, when one realises that the history of humankind is marked by a strip only half the size of a finger, and the history of Christianity even less than a millimetre wide!

UCS offers a lot such little surprising insights. I had another one when I realised that the term 'creation' does not refer only to the biblical creation stories or the ecological movement but also to modern cosmology.

Matthew Fox, the expelled Dominican and now Episcopalian priest and one of the founders of UCS, speaks of a postmodern paradigm. The postmodern paradigm is created from the historical Jesus and wisdom tradition of the Bible, pre-modern Christian roots, such as the medieval mystics Meister Eckhart and Hildegard of Bingen; other spiritual traditions with a strong link to mysticism, such as the indigenous traditions of North America, the Goddess traditions, Kabbala, Sufi, Buddhist and Hindu traditions and last but not least, modern cosmology.

The notion shared by many scientists today that the universe is basically a blessing is one of the main assumptions of Creation Spirituality. Astrophysicist Arne Wyller, for example, speaks of an "invisible Planetary Mind Field that pervades the entire earth". [1]

Fox's creation-centred theology provides an understanding of revelation that is not exclusively focused on the Bible. The Bible is not the only way God revealed Godself to the world; the divine has been revealing itself from the beginning of the universe in the miraculous process of the expanding and diversifying cosmos. As Aquinas says: "Sacred writings are bound in two volumes – that of creation and that of the Holy Scriptures"[2]. Theology has ignored nature as revelation too long. But with every flower God seems to shout at us: Look, how beautiful!

Instead of claiming that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation, Creation Spirituality stresses many paths to salvation, found in all religious traditions. Citing Meister Eckhart, Fox speaks up for a deep ecumenism of all religions: "Divinity is an underground river that no one can stop and no can dam up"[3].

For me as a Christian the question that immediately arises is: what about the unique quality of Jesus Christ? Fox distinguishes between the man Jesus as an unconventional parable-teller, a subversive wisdom teacher and artist, and, on the other hand, the Cosmic Christ, the divine principle in creation and therefore in everybody. The Cosmic Christ from this point of view is not a symbol of distinction but of a balanced integration of all religions. The Cosmic Christ is not exclusive but inclusive. It is also not the only symbol of integration; Fox also speaks of the Buddha nature of all beings.

One might suspect that this thinking ends in syncretism.

Creation Spirituality is not about mixing different religions together but about benefiting from other spiritual traditions. It tends to give new access to religion(s) to people who have lost the sense of spirituality. It is not a new world religion but a way of living. Creation Spirituality is a way of seeing the interconnectedness of the different religions and spiritual traditions.

This amazing open-mindedness towards other spiritual traditions is based on the four dimensions, or four paths of Creation Spirituality.[4] The first path is called the *via positiva*. This path is about honouring life and creation basically as a blessing, as a precious gift. It is about beauty, awe and joy.

Next comes the *via negativa*, in a way the comparative, the dialectical opposite of the first path. *Via negativa* means the letting go and letting be of things. Although creation is good, we tend to cling to things and to step in the traps of egoism and fear. Through our experiences of suffering and nothingness we can learn deeper levels of trust.

The third path is called the *via creativa*. It is a synthesis of the previous paths. It contains the breakthrough, a new birth in the divine. All kinds of creative expressions through art, music and culture belong to this path.

The fourth path is the *via transformativa*. Without a transformation of life, without steps to justice and peace, the experience of God and creativity remains incomplete. All steps lead to compassion not only towards human beings but towards the whole of creation. Every step we take is as precious as the previous or the next. Thus celebration of life honours the present moment as the dawning of the Kingdom/Queendom of God.

Because of the very experiential approach of the mystics towards the divine, the teaching at UCS is well balanced between experience and intellect. It is not an 'either/or' alternative but rather a complementary approach. One does not only speak about Hinduism, one practices the Shabda Yoga in a ritual space, the Yoga of Sound. One doesn't only speak about African spirituality, one experiences the rhythm of the drum as the heartbeat of the universe and feels its heart-changing power.

By creating ritual space, one exchanges the common anthropocentric approach of the western culture for a cosmo- or theocentric perspective. Ritual space evokes powers of the spirit that the western culture tries to domesticate: fierceness, passion, rebellion, imagination and wildness. All these words are synonyms for the sacred.

One can experience the divine in many different ways, not only in ritual space, but in dancing, singing, writing or cycling. When done in an awareness of the preciousness of the moment, almost everything can become a prayer, an ecstasy of the profane, an entering in the sphere of the divine. Basically one experiences the divine every morning when one looks at the sun and thinks: Oh what a beautiful day! It is a way of saying "thank you", and that is the basic form of prayer. As Meister Eckhart puts it: "If the only prayer you say in your entire life is 'Thank you', that would suffice."[5]

Often we lack the openness to say "thank you" in such a pure manner. There are lots of obstacles that prevent our heart from opening. Therefore "an honorable (sic!) spiritual practice recognises the losses we have suffered, tells our story and sheds our tears to free us from the past."[6]Learning to pray leads to healing of the heart.

The mysticism Fox stands for is no shallow New Age spirituality that flees the world. It is a radical response to life because it can't be distinguished from a prophetic approach towards the world: "The way to encourage authentic mysticism is to encourage its sister, prophecy."[7] A creation-centred theology bridges the gap between culture and theology, prophecy and mystics, psychology and ritual, spirit and flesh, cosmology and theology, the New Age movement and traditional theology, western and eastern culture. It's a challenging view of the world that brings together seemingly separate pieces that essentially belong together.

The western theology that keeps to the beaten tracks can only benefit from this unconventional, radical (in the literal sense: leading to the roots) enterprise. Studying at UCS for me was like getting the big picture of worldviews I thought to be different and distinct. Matthew Fox proclaims this as a shift for an era of post-denominationalism: "A post-denominational era will be eager to learn from pre-modern religions instead of proselytising them."[8]

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1. Matthew Fox, *Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh*, Harmony Books, New York 1999, 59.

2. Matthew Fox, *Sheer Joy, Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality*, Harper San Francisco, 1992, 59.

3. Matthew Fox, *One River, Many Wells*, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, New York 2000, 5.

4. Matthew Fox, *Confessions: The Making of a Postdenominational Priest*, Harper San Francisco, 1997 , 285.

5. Matthew Fox, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, Santa Fe, Bear & Company 1983, 34.

6. Jack Kornfield, *After the Ecstasy the Laundry*, Bantam Books, New York 2000, 34.

7. Matthew Fox, *Prayer, A Radical Response to Life*, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, New York 2001, 95.

8. Matthew Fox, *Confessions*, 251.

Michael Ipgrave

Images of Islam in the British Media

In this paper presented in a lecture at the United Theological College, Bangalore (India) in January 2002, Canon Michael Ipgrave, Interfaith Secretary of CTBI and the Church of England looks at the role of the media in creating reality by shaping the perception of Islam in the British public.

1

There can be little doubt that Islam is associated in the contemporary British media with a range of predominantly negative images. I will not present the evidence for this in detail, but would refer to the discussion in the 1997 report of the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia set up by the independent Runnymede Trust.[1] Among the important points that report made were these: that negative images were sometimes presented directly, but equally often by way of insinuation or as the unchallenged assumptions which would be shared by media recipients – the case of press cartoons is particularly relevant here; that while all media were more or less implicated in this negativity, the worst offenders were probably the tabloid press; and that levels of hostility apparent in the media increased markedly in response to global developments – in particular, the oil crisis of 1973/74, and the issuing of a fatwa against Salman Rushdie by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989.

In regard to the last point, it is in fact very encouraging to report that in some respects British press reporting in the immediate aftermath of 11 September 2001 was more circumspect in its treatment of Islam than many of us had

[1] Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (ed): *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1997). The Commission's findings are corroborated by,for example, the detailed survey by Elizabeth Poole, 'Framing Islam: An Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of Islam in the British Press', in Kai Hafez, ed, *Islam and the West in the Mass Media: Fragmented Images in a Globalizing World* (Cresshill, NJ: Hampton, 2000), pp157-180. The negative themes Poole identifies in British press coverage broadly correspond to those I have suggested below.

feared it might be. For example, one of the most populist newspapers, *The Sun*, which is widely regarded as xenophobic, carried a banner headline on 13 September announcing: "ISLAM IS NOT AN EVIL RELIGION". This was hardly a subtle message, but it was a very timely one, given the acute danger of a serious wave of anti-Muslim feeling in Britain following the attacks in New York; reporting like this may well have played a significant part in helping to keep any backlash at a comparatively low level in our country. Nevertheless, as the military action in Afghanistan and its repercussions around the world unfolded, it was possible to detect the re-emergence in press reporting of some of the more usual themes of hostility, or at least suspicion, directed towards Islam. It is clear therefore that this is a continuing issue within the British media, and it is fair to assume that media realities both mould and reflect wider attitudes among the British public.

In this short paper, I want to identify three general factors which seem to contribute to the negativity of the British media with regard to Islam, and then to point to five particular themes in relation to which that negativity is generally expressed. Finally, I shall briefly point out a number of ways in which this problem can be addressed, with a particular view of the role of the Christian churches. It is the British context that I am addressing and therefore the particular situation of Islam as perceived by British people. Here it is particularly important to recognise that we are dealing with a double reference: 'Islam' is seen as both a global religio-political movement, with its heartland in the Middle East and as a community of faith and culture numbering up to two million people in Britain today. The Runnymede Trust report makes some interesting points about the way in which 'Arab' imagery derived from the former focus is in popular media often applied – with scant regard for cultural accuracy – to the latter field, to point to British Muslims, the overwhelming majority of whom are in fact of South Asian heritage. Rightly to understand the complexity of this bifocal reference presents a challenge for both British media and British Muslims; confusion in this respect is one of the motors of negativity.

2

The Runnymede Trust report sets the negative image of Islam in the British media within its wider discussion of 'Islamophobia', i.e. more or less deliberate hostility towards Islam. This is certainly an important factor, but it is also necessary to recognise two other problematic features which can and do contribute to negativity – one which is characteristic of modern British society, and one which is located within the British Muslim community.

The former is the widespread ignorance concerning, disparagement of, and to some extent hostility towards, religion of any kind in contemporary Britain. Actively anti-religious attitudes have always been more strongly represented in the media than at grassroots levels; but there is anecdotal evidence that hostility to all forms of religion has increased in Britain since 11 September , on the basis that fanatically held beliefs are responsible for most of the violence seen in the contemporary world (paradoxically, at the same time there has also been a marked increase in churchgoing and other measures of religious observance over the last four months). Far more common than militant secularism, though, is an attitude which sees religion as basically irrelevant to contemporary life except as a decorative addition; such a view, certainly, cannot find any significant place for faith communities in public life. These attitudes are fed by a surprising degree of ignorance about quite basic religious knowledge even among generally well-educated people. Britain's public life suffers from high levels of religious illiteracy, as has been apparent in the resistance encountered by those who suggest that religious discrimination, or incitement to religious hatred, is at least as serious a problem as racial discrimination or incitement.[2]

While these kind of attitudes have grown up and taken root within so-called 'post-Christian' circles in Britain, and while the implicit object of their disparagement is primarily Christian faith, they have also been extended in large measure to Islamic and to other non-Christian traditions. Indeed, a strong Muslim insistence on the centrality of religious guidance in every aspect of public life can seem particularly bizarre to post-Christian secularity and accordingly generate a negative response.

Secondly, negative images can also be exacerbated by failure to communicate adequately on the part of the Muslim community. In part, this reflects the organisational dynamics of that community. It would indeed be more accurate here to speak of 'communities' in the plural, for British Islam embraces a very diverse range of ethnic, linguistic, and theological traditions. Amid this diversity, there are few organisations linking together Muslims at a level higher than that of the individual mosque, and those umbrella groups which do exist generally find it difficult to cover a wide spectrum of Islamic life. At the national level, for example, the most credible organisation is probably the Muslim Council of Britain, yet even this relatively well-established and well-resourced body is by no means acknowledged as representative by large sections of Muslim opinion. In such a situation, where it is difficult to identify truly authoritative voices speaking for the Muslim community, the media will often naturally turn to those whose voices are shrillest – an extremist or provocative statement is far more likely to produce an exciting 'story' than a more balanced and reasoned point of view. Another factor impoverishing communications from the Islamic side is the fact that so many imams are still invited to British mosques directly from rural communities overseas; those of them who have little competence in English and no real understanding of the Western society in which they operate are unlikely to communicate effectively an Islamic perspective which can appear relevant and attractive to the wider audience served by the media.[3]

However, British religious ignorance and Muslim communications problems by themselves are insufficient to explain the degree of negativity associated with Islam in the British

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[2] The UK Government planned to include within a package of anti-terrorist legislation (drawn up after 11 September 2001) a new offence of 'incitement to religious hatred'. The proposals were strongly opposed by sections of public opinion, particularly on the grounds of freedom of speech. Following protracted political wrangling, they were eventually dropped from the government bill after defeats in the House of Lords. At the time of writing, no legislative protection from attacks on religion is provided in Great Britain, apart from the offence of blasphemy, which applies only to the beliefs and practices of the established Church of England.

[3] This is a problem identified in the Government's White Paper on nationality, immigration and asylum policy – "Ministers of religion clearly have an important role to play in society. We are concerned that some of those who come to the UK for this purpose speak little or no English and therefore have little understanding of UK society … This may make it hard for the individual to relate to the community in which they will teach and work and to play their part effectively as a religious leader" – *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain* (London: Home Office, 2002), p46.

media. There is also, as the Runnymede Commission report insisted, an element of deliberate bias more or less consciously directed against Islam and Muslims. To describe this, the Commission used the term 'Islamophobia', which it defined as 'unfounded hostility towards Islam', being careful to distinguish this from legitimate and reasoned criticism. The identification of Islamophobia as a specific phenomenon has not been uncontroversial, but it does now seem that there is a consensus that it is a reality as actual as, say, antisemitism. What is much less clear is how this phenomenon should be analysed. For example, some see it as a continuation and revitalisation of a long chain of specifically anti-Islamic imagery in Western Europe, dating back at least as far as the Crusades. Others locate it rather in a long-standing insularist suspicion of networks owing allegiance to 'foreign powers' – in this case, its natural predecessor would be the 'anti-Papist' strand in English popular thought. For others again it is a crystallisation of a cultural integrism in the sense of an inability to accept visible and unassimilating difference; in this understanding it would be with antisemitism that Islamophobia is in direct continuity. A fourth approach would eschew a longer historical backdrop in favour of the more recent perspective afforded by the end of the Cold War; having lost a communist adversary, it is argued, the West is in need of some other system to adopt as a *bête noire*, and Islam has proved to be the obvious candidate – a view given some academic credibility by a certain reading of Huntington's controversial thesis of the 'Clash of Civilisations'.[4] It seems to me that in fact Islamophobia in British society is probably a rather complex phenomenon which in its particular manifestations may be based on one or more of these several strands. Rather than trying to arrive at a single-cause theory of the genesis of Islamophobia, it may be that a more reliable, and more practically oriented, approach to the problem would be to identify some of the themes in relation to which negative images of Islam are found in the media. While these overlap and amplify one another, I suggest that there are five key motifs here.

3

(a) Islam as monolithic. Images of Islam in the British media tend to coalesce its diversity into one undifferentiated global force; naturally this appears as menacing to those who do not associate themselves with that force and so engenders a negative reaction. In terms of the three factors I outlined above, this certainly can be seen as a rather dramatic example of religious illiteracy; as a matter of empirical fact, Islamic communities are in their own way as diverse as Christian groupings, and the myth that Islam as such is a massive force set on world domination scarcely stands up against the sobering realities of inter-Muslim struggles for power. After all, the most humanly costly war of recent years was between two Muslim nations, Iran and Iraq.

Secondly, the image of an Islamic monolith is sometimes fed by those who appear to speak on behalf of Muslims. Most community leaders, understandably keen to emphasise an essential unity of basic faith and practice, are still reluctant publicly to admit the reality of differences among Muslims. Yet more problematically, self-appointed spokesmen from small and unrepresentative groups can often gain air space for an inflated and unrealistic rhetoric of coming Islamic world governance which can be deeply damaging to the way in which ordinary local communities are viewed.

Most importantly, the Runnymede Trust report suggests that the 'undifferentiated' stereotype exemplifies one side of a very important distinction between two views of Islam, which it describes as 'closed' and 'open' respectively. For the former, Islam is 'seen as a single monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to new realities'; for the latter, it is 'diverse and progressive, with internal differences, debates and developments'. From this distinction, the Commission argues, flow other polarities, as follows: *separate / interacting*; *inferior / different*; *enemy / partner*; *manipulative / sincere*; criticism of West *rejected / considered*; discrimination *defended / criticised*; Islamophobia seen as *natural /problematic*.[5] I believe that this is a profound insight into one underlying root of the negative imagery from which Islam has suffered.

(b) Islam as divisive. If within itself Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, in relation to the rest of the world, or the rest of British society, it then appears to function as a source of division. This is a view which has gained great prominence in Britain since the riots which marred the life of several northern English cities and towns in summer 2001. Reports published since those events have highlighted the extent to which Muslim communities are living in self-segregated neighbourhoods, with little or no meaningful contact with wider society.[6] There are certainly some very serious issues in social interaction involved here, and the lack of cohesion between different communities needs to be urgently addressed in the British context. It seems that the pendulum of social policy is now swinging away from an earlier emphasis on safeguarding the separate cultural integrities of different communities towards the imperative for them to integrate into a diverse and interactive society which can accommodate their several identities without assimilating them.

The relevant question then will be, whether Islam in Britain will prove a particularly problematic ideology in insisting that its followers need to be not only distinctive but separated. My own personal view is that, while there are some disturbing signs of self-segregation in British Islamic communities, these are not inherently related to Islam as such. Rather, I would see them as flowing from the unintended collusion of religio-cultural illiteracy on the part of some British policy makers with inadequate and defensive leadership on the part of some Muslim community leaders. In other words, the media image of divisiveness may well be picking up on serious social realities, but they are not especially Islamic realities.

(c) Islam as foreign. If Islam is seen as part of a monolithic bloc divided off from British society, it is natural to conclude that its true centre of gravity lies elsewhere – that British Muslims are adherents of a foreign ideology. Since 11 September [t] in particular, British Muslims have repeatedly found that their British identity has been questioned, as indeed it was during the Gulf War. At times this questioning has been direct and brutal, as in the insistence, for example, that those who did not approve of the military action in Afghanistan were being

[4] Cf Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Touchstone, 1998), especially pp209-218. Huntington himself, though stressing the importance of the end of the Cold War as signalling the re-emergence of 'civilisational clashes' sees these against a long historical backdrop of Christian-Muslim conflict.

[5] This series of binary oppositions is generalised to cover 'Closed and open views of the Other' in a subsequent report produced by the Runnymede Trust (Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain) – *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report* (London: Profile, 2000), p.247.

[6] Cf in particular *Building Cohesive Communities: A Report of the Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion* , and *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team Chaired by Ted Cantle* (both London: Home Office, 2001).

unpatriotic. The media has generally taken a more subtle line than this, but echoes of Lord Tebbit's infamous 'cricket test' (When Pakistan play England, which side do you support?) have not been far away.

Again, communication weaknesses on the Muslim side have not helped. For example, very soon after the attacks on New York, which elicited not only huge humanitarian sympathy in Britain but also a deep sense of a renewed Anglo-American kinship, some grossly insensitive anti-American comments from a few individual British Muslims were very publicly broadcast; by contrast, the robust statement from the Muslim Council of Britain categorically condemning terrorism[7] was afforded a much lower profile. Given that one Muslim viewpoint was registered by millions who were unaware of the other, many jumped to the conclusion that Muslims were in reality a 'fifth column' of a force deeply alien to a Western way of life.

However, there seems to be no reason in principle why British Muslims should not be entitled to participate in a trans-national Islamic identity without having their British credentials called into question as a result. This seems to be broadly the position of British Jews, for example, and to a lesser extent of British Roman Catholics. It is in fact likely that the idea of a 'hyphenated identity' which has become so important in the USA will take root in Britain, not only as a result of growing religious pluralism, but also as a result of two other factors which are loosening the old unitary sense of British identity: on one hand, the growing strength of national Scottish and Welsh, and to some extent regional English, identities; on the other hand, the growing process of European integration. The overall result of these changes will perhaps be that the previously simple dichotomy of 'British' vs 'foreign' will increasingly prove inadequate to describe a much more fluid and intertwined network of allegiances and kinships within which British Muslims may feel more comfortable.

(d) Islam as anti-modern. The depiction of Islam as a force essentially opposed to modern life is perhaps one of the most deep-rooted of negative images in the British media; it is sharply expressed for many by the question of the status of women, and in particular by the practice of taking the *hijab* or veil. As with the other themes I have described, the three factors of ignorance, poor communications, and a certain *tendenz* of thought all play a part in this perception of anti-modernism.

The term 'fundamentalism' is commonly employed to depict this perceived anti-modernist dimension of Islam; yet, if used uncritically, this is problematic for at least three reasons. Firstly, the word is of Christian provenance, and its transference to an Islamic context involves transference of a bundle of Christian-derived assumptions and projections about the course which Islam has taken or should take in history. Secondly, it is a term frankly incomprehensible to most Muslims if used as a term of opprobrium; for surely, they will say, it is good to hold by the fundamentals of the faith.[8] Thirdly, and relatedly, it is difficult to see what the opposite of 'fundamentalist should be. The often-deployed 'moderate', for example, hardly sounds like a term of approbation. I would not want to be described as a 'moderate Christian'.

This point over the use of the term 'fundamentalism' is indicative of an unanswered, and maybe unanswerable, question of modernity: namely, is modernisation a phenomenon which has grown out of the specificities of Western Christianity and which may affect other religious and cultural traditions not at all, or at least in very different ways; or is it, by contrast, a general development which awaits any tradition when it has reached a certain stage, with Western Christianity happening to have been the first to encounter this transformation? This is a question with considerable import for such practical issues as the legitimation and scope (universal applicability, or alternatively cultural boundedness) of human rights. One danger of a simple and unreflective categorisation of Islam as 'anti-modern' is that it forecloses such debates.

(e) Islam as violent. Doubtless the most problematic image of Islam since 11 September has been that of an intrinsically and indiscriminately violent religion, in which any consideration of means is ruthlessly suppressed in the service of absolute ends. In reacting to the apparently Qur'anic motivations of the al-Qaeda hijackers, Western Christians have, I believe, been particularly chilled by two aspects: their readiness to eliminate thousands of directly uninvolved civilians; and their preparedness to throw away their own lives. Last September, such motivations were frequently referred to, in a kind of shorthand, as 'Islamic Terrorism'; yet this phrase proved very contentious, being opposed by a variety of groups for any one of four reasons.

Factually, the association of terrorist activities with an Islamic motivation has been widely questioned. Throughout the Middle East, and in many sections of the Islamic community in Britain also, there is a general unreadiness to accept as authentic the evidence adduced as proof that a religious mindset led to the 11 September attacks. To the contrary, various current conspiracy theories assign responsibility to other agencies: the US Government itself, a Jewish network, and so on. What we have here is, then, a popular culture of suspicion directed against what is perceived as an anti-Islamic image equating the faith with violence.

Among those who do accept the actuality of a link between Islamic commitment and terrorist activity in the case of the al-Qaeda network, there may still be a reluctance to speak of 'Islamic terrorism'. For some, this is simply a pragmatic choice: in the present circumstances, it is recognised that such language is potentially inflammatory. In such a case, we see a preparedness to suppress the use of certain images in light of what is expedient – which in turn implies a recognition of the humanly constructed, and therefore humanly reconstructible, status of such images.

For others, the principle of selection of images is not expedience so much as equity on a comparative basis. They argue that it is unfair and partial to refer to, say, al-Qaeda as 'Islamic terrorists' when such language is not applied in the case of other faiths – the IRA, for example, is never described as a 'Christian terrorist' organisation. Now, it is in fact questionable how far the parallel can be pushed in this particular case. While it is true that the IRA claims to fight on behalf of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland, it does so in so far as that community's aspirations are identified with the reunion of the entire island, rather than for any specifically religious aim. The rhetoric of the material attributed to al-Qaeda, by contrast, is full of emphatically Islamic references and justifications, even at the same time as it is politically directed

[7] See www.mcb.org.uk/110901.htm.

[8] E.g.: 'While fundamentalism in the West is viewed as something obnoxious, the term in the East in the context of religion implies unconditional surrender to the Will of God and strict observance of the basic tenets of Islam … This is the essence of religion and this is what fundamentalism implies – Iqbal Syed Hussain, *Islam and Western Civilisation*, (Karachi,1997).

against the USA. Thus, it might be argued that the comparative indivisibility of the 'sacred' and the 'secular' in Islam in fact renders its religious discourse particularly susceptible to abuse in this way. The question at stake here is, how far media images of Islam are *sui generis*, how much they can be set alongside those of other religions.

Finally, many British Muslims argue that images of Islam must themselves be subject to evaluation and selection on the basis of Islamic theology and ethics. So precisely because attacks on and murder of innocent civilians are so manifestly contrary to any accepted norm of belief and practice among Muslims, it is impossible to describe these actions as in any sense Islamic; a stronger version of the same argument would say that it is impossible to accept their perpetrators as in any sense Muslims. In either case, the conclusion follows that the language of 'Islamic terrorism' is totally unacceptable – as many leading British Muslims have insisted, 'terrorism has no faith'. There is at first sight to non-Muslim eyes a certain circularity to this kind of argument which might appear to make the disowning of embarrassing elements of any faith rather too easy. To draw a pertinent parallel, for example, it would seem rather disingenuous to assert that the Crusades did not constitute a problematic element in Christian history because the Crusaders proved by their actions that they were not real Christians. On the other hand it might be argued that Islamic status is determined by ethical choice in a sense which Christian identity is not, so that un-Islamic actions truly do fall outside the circle of phenomena for which Islam *per se* can be held responsible. In Britain at least, the language of 'Islamic terrorism' is now much less used than in the immediate aftermath of 11 September . It is not clear to me which of the motives I have outlined has been most important in effecting this change, but each raises important issues for further reflection on the use or abuse of images of Islam.

4

I wish to conclude by drawing on my presentation to ask how it might be possible to address the problem of negative imaging of Islam in the British media – and in particular, what part might positively be played by the Christian churches. Although perhaps this does not need spelling out, it is clear to me that there are several reasons why engagement in this should be seen as a priority for Christian discipleship at this time: the love of the truth which alone will set us free, the injunction not to bear false witness against our neighbour and the vocation to act as agents of reconciliation are among those which spring fairly immediately to mind.

If my analysis is correct, it will be necessary to address negativity in terms of each of the three general factors I identified – societal ignorance about religion, failures in Islamic communication and the deliberate bias of Islamophobia. In response to the first, there is a clear need for a wide-ranging programme of religious education, in the broad sense of instilling an awareness of the ways in which religion in all its variety intersects with the public life of individuals, communities and civil society in today's world. This is a programme which will need to be focused in three particular areas: in educating young people, in influencing policy makers and other opinion formers, and in seeking to create a better awareness among the media themselves. In the former two areas, the Christian churches are certainly well placed to play a very important role, respectively through our extensive (and expanding) involvement in primary and secondary education, and through the very many levels of contact which we have with local and national government and other key public institutions. Direct influence upon the media itself is more difficult to achieve, given the strength of the entrenchedly secular lobby in some parts of the British media establishment.

Secondly, there is a clear need to improve communications from the direction of Britain's Muslim communities. This is of course primarily the responsibility of those communities themselves, and I sense a renewed urgency since 11 September in tackling the underlying problems of organisation and co-ordination which have so often hindered effective communication in the past. However there are ways in which the Christian churches can support, and act as a catalyst for, these processes. For example, Britain has comparatively well-developed organisations for multi-religious consultation and dialogue, which have been established with the active support of the churches; most prominent among these, the Inter Faith Network for the UK draws together representatives of nine different religious traditions, including Christians and Muslims. Finding appropriate patterns of representation in organisations such as these is in itself a spur to greater co-ordination and communication within the Muslims community. On a bilateral basis, the Archbishop of Canterbury is this year launching a major national project of local consultations between Muslims and Christians with a view to establishing a permanent forum for meeting and dialogue between the two faiths. One of the spin-offs of this may well be improved Islamic communications.

Thirdly, I hope that my discussion of the particular question of the use of the phrase 'Islamic terrorism' has shown the extent to which the deliberate use of certain imagery can be deliberately recast, and the need for extensive and careful discussions about the basis for such reshaping. The churches, with their long experience of ethical and theological reflection on the basic principles underlying choices in public life, are well-placed to contribute to such a debate, and to open up channels of dialogue with the Muslim community through which their perspectives can also be heard. Since 11 September , this challenge has taken on a new immediacy.

Let's go surfing

Evangelism on the Internet

Ponder three facts

- Over 75% of the British population has access to the internet at home or work
- 40% of sites visited throughout the world in December 2001 were UK sites
- Most of the denominational and Christian agency sites have only passing references to Jesus and none seeks to share faith in Jesus

Christians in the first century seized on the new invention of paper to record their stories and give them wide circulation. Christians fourteen centuries later seized on the new invention of the printing press to give the Bible to all who could read. Christians in the twenty-first century have yet to wake up to the possibilities of the internet for faith sharing.

For two years a group drawn from (but not appointed by) the main denominations and Christian agencies in England have been working to create a site designed to enable people to encounter Jesus in a meaningful and informed way. It is clear that the vast majority of our nation believe that 'church' is irrelevant and 'Christianity' is boring, but interest in Jesus is high. So this is a site about Jesus (hence the name – "reJesus").

I classify web sites into two groups. One group gives information and I use it only when I want that information (e.g. train times). The other group of sites is designed to be interesting, the sort that are worth visiting "just to have a look". They draw you into a community of those who visit the site regularly. A site worthy of Jesus needs to be in the latter group – a site of fun (the web is 'cool' or enjoyable medium), always changing (to encourage visitors to come back), varied from whimsical to very serious, informative (with reliable information – and UK sites have that reputation which is why UK sites get a disproportionate number of hits) and with a sense of community. So reJesus.co.uk needs to have information about Jesus and his teaching, stories and miracles (some illustrated by clips from films like the Jesus video), as well as how he has been seen and understood over 20 centuries. It needs to have stories about the followers of Jesus today and what they think he would think about today's news headlines.

The sense of community on the site is focused around the bulletin boards where anyone can post their opinions and argue with the others on the site. In due course chat rooms will be opened so there can be real-time uncensored discussion. If you cannot cope with that, take part in the pub quiz on Jesus and test your knowledge.

Of course as Christians we worship Jesus, and so there will be quiet areas where you can mediate to gentle music, reflect on icons or post a prayer by lighting a candle (which will burn down over 24 hours).

Thanks to two of the best Christian web designers (Simon Jenkins (ship-of-fools.com) and Bruce Stanley (embody.co.uk)) the site will be on line from mid-June and you can judge the quality for yourself.

The site is evangelistic – its aim is that people should become followers of Jesus getting ever closer to him. Those who wish to take a step of faith are encouraged to take whatever step is right for them – there is no standardised set of procedures all must follow. I liken it to crossing a mountain river where each person will seek the next rock on which to put his/her foot - each steps on different stones as they make their progress.

Those who make steps of faith will be able to get help and encouragement on line, and in conjunction with the Christian Enquiry Agency they may get literature and – if they specifically request it – contact from a Christian near their home who has been trained and validated for this work.

As usual with Christian projects, this one is under funded, and it will rely for publicity on the churches and their members bringing it to the attention of their friends. It is hoped that every church and agency site in Britain and Ireland (denominational, regional, area and local) will have a direct link to the site; and that local churches will use the publicity material to put the web address on their notice boards and hand out literature to those who will be interested.

Inevitably some Christians will be surprised by the site – it will not be what they would expect from an evangelistic site. It is important that those who are familiar with the worldwide web take time to explain that it is a medium which has its own style and way of doing things – it is not just putting books, tracts, leaflets or an evangelist on the web. These are appropriate for other work, but not for the web. There are lessons from the history of the Churches Advertising Network, which has been brilliant in producing posters which have interested the general public but which many in the church have criticised because they have not been in traditional forms using words which Christians (but not the rest of the population) are familiar with.

Interested? Pray for the site and its development. Become a 'friend' and get regular news about the site. Email us at rejesus.co.uk. Visit the site at www.rejesus.co.uk. And tell your friends.

Roger Whitehead

Japan and Korea

World Cup special link list: The history and presence of the two countries' relationship as reflected in their churches' histories, theology, their joint and individual statements is collected in a link list to be found on www.geocities.com/ccom_ctbi/ccom_korea_japan_link_list.html (or go via www.ccom.org.uk).

CCOM Forum Reports

MTAG

MTAG is 'resting' at the moment since the members of the 'old' MTAG have been sent for a well deserved holiday on a desert island (I wish) and the 'new' MTAG is yet recruiting eager new members.

MTAG's book, *Presence and Prophecy* is currently at the publishers and the accompanying material, which includes a book on prayer and reflection, is about to go to Church House Publishing. So no barbecue on the beach for yours truly just at the minute…..

In the meantime we are thinking about the kind of thing the new MTAG group should be considering. In particular we are interested in what it actually means to share the Christian faith in a culture like ours. Traditional Christian apologetic seems to have so little hold on people's lives in our individualised, materially driven society, that we have to ask, what is it about the Christian faith that *can* grab people's hearts and minds and bring relevance and meaning to what people believe and to how they behave. This last idea, that Christian ethics has a particular importance for Christian mission, is perhaps one that we particularly want to explore. It is one of the most searching questions of *Presence and Prophecy*. What is the point of mission if no recognisable *transformation* comes with it? Mission is not just something we promote in a vacuum. We are in the business of realising a kingdom vision. It is a vision of a reality in which God is present to us. I think we are in for a great deal of heart-searching, fascinating discussion and research, - and a real challenge.

Anne Richards

Middle East

The situation in the Middle East demands extreme concern as the scale of violence grows and the root cause of the Israel/Palestine conflict is not addressed. It is deeply depressing that the issue is now seen in Israel and in too many other places as one where one or other society must be destroyed. If that view prevails Israel's power must win in the short term, but to its grave danger, the threat of a wider, most dangerous conflict, and to a severe loss to the Christian community. This analysis is profoundly wrong; Palestinians and Israelis would accept a solution if they could be sure that on the one hand security was ensured, and on the other that domination and occupation was ended. Such a solution could be achieved if the international community took more forthright action than it has so far done. Meanwhile the innocent are suffering long and grievously.

The local Christian Church has ceaselessly witnessed, worked and appealed for a just peace. The Alexandria Declaration may have laid a foundation for better understanding and co-operation among the three faiths. The WCC is co-ordinating an ecumenical agenda of prayer, of advocacy for such a peace and of accompaniment where an official international presence is denied. Many British and Irish churches and agencies are sharing in the agenda in different ways and the Middle East Forum works to promote co-operation and make known ways for members' concern to find some effective expression. The Forum appreciates greatly its close working relationship with the International Affairs Secretary of CTBI.

With stability in Afghanistan not assured, with a crisis over Iraq looming, with understanding and positive relations among religions more than ever vital, the people of the Middle East need our prayers, our wisdom and our resolute work for justice, security and peace. The Forum hopes that the whole church can share in response to that need.

See also the letter from heads of churches in Jerusalem in this issue p.48f.

Colin Morton

Latin America/Caribbean

The economic crisis in Argentina has, at least for the present, resulted in a common desire by the churches there to work at understanding how this came about, speaking with one voice to condemn the forces that have created the situation. The by now almost regular occurrence of crises throughout Latin America is exposing the vulnerability under which those who previously thought themselves as secure are living. At any moment forces acting on a global scale can make life intolerable for the ordinary citizen of the region with clear repercussions on the Church. The one benefit of this, sad as it may seem, is that it forces Christians to re-examine the focus of their mission and their level of partnership. But the Holy Spirit moves in mysterious ways.

The Forum has met and shared understanding of the situation, not only in Argentina but also that in Bolivia and Central America with the Plan Puebla Panama. In October 2001, the Rev Dr. Margaret Stringer, returned mission partner with the Methodist Church, shared her reflections on Bolivia. While the Roman Catholic Church is by far the largest Christian presence in this and other Latin American countries it is responding with other churches, NGOs and Human Rights bodies to balance the effects of Prosperity Theology and an aggressive evangelisation that takes little account of culture. In May, Miss Penelope Pacheco Lopez, a doctoral studies student at the University of Kent, Canterbury spoke about the PPP (see above); this regional programme has to be scrutinised carefully and its purpose questioned. Is it indeed a plan for economic regeneration, or a way of controlling economic migration into the United States without regard to the effects on culture and environment?.

The new Focal Person, Revd Tom Quenet, Methodist Church Secretary for the Americas and Caribbean believes that the Forum is an excellent platform for sharing not only information, but as a way of debating and reflecting upon the issues that are and will become vital in the future. Globalisation and the response of 'The North', the HIV/Aids pandemic, transparency in mission and the shape of the struggle of those in need in the twenty-first

century are identified as key areas for focused consideration in the future.

Tom Quenet

Sri Lanka

A cautious optimism is present in Sri Lanka concerning the current peace process, facilitated by Norway. Rt Revd. Duleep de Chickera, bishop of the Colombo Diocese of the Church of Ceylon, visited England in April and spoke to some members of the Sri Lanka Relations Committee in London, giving a valuable update on this process. Central to it is the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by both the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam(LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) in February, with the facilitation of Norway. Bishop Duleep outlined the developments that had made the MOU inevitable and the principal responses to it in the country, from scepticism to welcome. He spoke about the possibility of peace talks in Thailand and the challenges facing both the GOSL and the churches. His own vision was of a country that recognised the need for a "just interdependent integration"; a country in which the Sinhala people recognised their need of both the Muslims and the Tamils, and the Tamils recognised their need of the Sinhala people and the Muslims etc. A political solution that went beyond federalism but avoided separation would be probably necessary, but models for this were few. A report of the meeting and the text of the MOU can be obtained from Elizabeth Harris (interfaith@methodistchurch.org.uk).

Elizabeth Harris

Africa

"To a large extent the missionary-founded churches (in Africa) have remained a colonised church and consequently our theology, theological education and ecumenical enterprise have been modelled and based on a eurocentric, hierarchical and patriarchal understanding and interpretation of the Bible", says Revd Dr Nyambura Njoroge, World Council of Churches Programme Executive for Education and Ecumenical Formationin a paper on theological education she presented at the 16-18 April 2002 Africa Forum consultation in Scotland. This, she says "can be nothing else but disempowering for it does not take seriously the African reality and context. The impact of the 50 years old project of developing and constructing African Christian Theology by Africans has yet to be felt in the lives of many starving and poverty-stricken Africans."

Participants and speakers at the consultation stressed the importance of applied theology by Africans, for lay people as well as those in theological institutions, which takes seriously such major matters as poverty and economics, customary practices, HIV/AIDS and Islam. In order that existing information be more readily available it was recommended that a list of African theologians be prepared for the CCOM web site.

"What Theological Education for Today, with a focus on HIV/AIDS and Islam?" was the somewhat esoteric theme for the consultation. It arose from the consideration of HIV/AIDS in Africa at last year's consultation, and of Christianity and Islam, with particular reference to Sudan, at the Forum meeting held last November. There was a pleasing representation of CCOM member bodies in this purposeful move out of England. Eight Africans who are studying in this country attended, sponsored by their supporting mission societies. We were also joined by a representative of DEFAP, the French Protestant Federation's missionary agency (www.coordinationsud.org/coordsud/membres/defap.html) and one from EMW (the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany, www.emw-d.de).

The Revd Prof. Kenneth Ross, General Secretary of the Church of Scotland Board of Mission gave the keynote address in which he spoke of the need to open up new paths in the structure, content and method of theological education in Africa. While Nyambura Njoroge came from Geneva to speak with reference to HIV/AIDS, theological education and Islam was considered by Revd Prof. David Kerr, Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World at New College, University of Edinburgh, who had just returned from lecturing in the USA. Publication of the much appreciated papers is anticipated.

There was also a visit to the Al-Maktoum Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Dundee, to be officially opened on 6 May 2002. We were warmly welcomed and shown round by Professor Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, Principal and Vice-Chancellor. Christian-Muslim Relations is one of the Institute's key areas of interest and studies there are open to people of other faiths.

Such were the riches shared at the consultation that the next Forum meeting, on Monday 24 June, is to be devoted to giving the themes fuller consideration.

The agony of the people of the Sudan, and the role of the churches there were highlighted by the Sudan Ecumenical Forum taking place in London 4-6 March 2002. Bringing together Anglican and Roman Catholic Church leaders and representatives of both the Sudan Council of Churches and New Sudan Council of Churches, as well as international partners such as CAFOD, Christian Aid and CCOM, the Forum concluded with agreeing the communiqué which can be seen on the CCOM web site. In it the delegates called on the European Union and the European governments "to exercise extreme caution in dealing with the Government of Sudan and not deal with the symptoms of the conflict, but to listen carefully to the voices of the civil society and churches in the Sudan for a just and lasting solution to the conflict."

This report and some of the contributions to this consultation are available on www.geocities.com/ccom_africa_forum.

Gordon Holmes

China

Following China's accession into the WTO and their successful bid for the summer 2008 Olympics last year there was speculation that a further wave of changes would be championed at the annual National People's Congress held this March. Those who read the ensuing reports or sat through the televised proceedings were treated instead to a conservative gathering with few surprises. Hot topics such as corruption and the Falungong were avoided while economic affairs became a focus. While government forecasts predict a 7% growth in the economy - a statistic considered unreliable by many economists - massive

unemployment in the Chinese hinterland is also predicted. As changes begin to be implemented pain is already being felt and strikes of many thousands of workers, first in the northeast and then spreading elsewhere in China, have been taking place.

On the religious front, despite frequent reports of arrests of Christian leaders, there have been rumours of changes to religious policy. Positive steps are afoot to consider extending the registration of churches outside the existing structures. In the Catholic Church Bishop Zen in Hong Kong has taken a strong line against the government in Hong Kong and Beijing. As a result Hong Kong is no longer the bridge it once was between the Vatican and China. In the Protestant Church the National Conference has just been called for the latter part of May. This meeting will steer the course of the church, with significant decisions on future leadership and direction to be discussed.

Many of these changes were discussed at the 19th US National Catholic China Conference I was invited to attend in Chicago in April. The conference title was "Spiritual Growth and Social Change in China" and provided the opportunity to hear first hand reports from different generations of Chinese church leaders and China specialists who sought to address the radical transitions that China is presently undergoing in the political, economic and social arenas in its quest for modernisation. The impact on ordinary citizens and the response and challenges that the churches face were the focus of many of the presentations and plenary sessions. The conference was followed by a 2-day meeting of the North American Ecumenical Round Table on China. This was a preliminary meeting to discuss the setting up of a new ecumenical China network, not dissimilar to the China Forum in the UK. Both gatherings provided the opportunity to share on common projects and partnerships in China and to explore new ways of working as China undergoes such transformation.

Forthcoming events in the China diary include the IV European Ecumenical China Conference, which will be held in Dublin. The conference will explore the theme "Spirituality and Values – an Exploration of Chinese and European Perspectives". Later on in the month a Round Table meeting will be held in London, discussing new religions in China, and from 28-30 June the Friends of the Church in China and the CTBI China Desk will co-host a conference in Durham, titled "Faith and Discipleship". For information on the latter please contact Ruth Baker at Ludwell, Faringdon Road, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 1BQ.

Caroline Fielder

Pacific

In January the Forum hosted a visit to the UK by Fr Neles Tebay, a Catholic priest from the diocese of Jayapura (West Papua) studying in Rome. As well as speaking to the Forum, Fr Tebay had a long meetings with *CAFOD*, the *Catholic Institute for International Relations*, *Survival*, and *Tapol.* He addressed a meeting in Trinity College, Oxford, sponsored by the Oxford West Papua Group and attended by over 70 students, met the chair (Anne Clwyd MP) and vice–chair (Jeremy Corbyn MP) of the House of Commons Human Rights Group, and went to the Foreign Office to speak with the officials on the Far East desk. Fr Tebay drew attention to deaths and human rights violations in West Papua and stressed the need for a thorough and impartial inquiry into the death of Theys Eluay, president of the Papuan Presidium, murdered at the end of last year.

The Focal Person attended a consultation in Paris in April with members of ECSIEP, a European NGO concerned to promote knowledge of the Pacific and assist Pacific NGOs. ECSIEP is to undertake a study of the impact of EU fishing policies on Pacific nations.

Several articles by Fr Neles Tebay on West Papua issues are available on the CCOM website (www.ctbi.org.uk/ccom, go to Pacific Forum).

Paul Richardson

Church of North India and Church of South India Relationship Committees

The India Relations Committees are currently undergoing a review, due to be presented to the Standing Committee in June. The process is interesting not only in so far as it concerns the structures of our members' India relations but also because this area of work can be seen as a typical example of how the devolved structures of the post-1990 CTBI and CCOM are put into practice, raising questions of ownership and ecumenical commitment both among British and Irish members and between these as a group and their Indian partners.

A larger meeting together with the General Secretaries of CSI and CNI, Revd Dyvasirvadam and Revd Dr Lall, and representatives from several Indian Theological Colleges took place in Bad Urach (Germany) from 5-9 May 2002. Apart from a theological consultation, focussing inter alia on *Indian perspectives on the Theology of Religions,* the meeting discussed the question of the relationship between Theological Colleges and the Church: how much freedom does theology and academic reflection need to thrive and how closely does it have to be linked to the Cchurch if it claims to be able to train for the ministry? This question is obviously further linked to that of financing, power and the role of outside partners (=funders). The meeting made a major contribution towards resolving some of these issues. The task now will be to put the resolutions taken in Bad Urach into practice.

KMF

News, Resources and Events

Globalisation and Mission

CCOM's next Annual Commission Meeting will take place from 13-15 September 2002 in Bangor/Wales on the theme "Globalisation and Mission". Speakers include Antonie Wessels (Amsterdam), who will look at the impact of 11 September on religion in general and mission in particular, as well as Edmond Tang and Allan Anderson (University of Birmingham) who will speak about Pentecostalism as a global movement with special reference to Asian Pentecostalism. A report will be published in CONNECTIONS after the event. See also www.ccom.org.uk.

Cluster bomb campaign

Everybody remembers the rather successful landmine campaign of the early 1990s. After years of lobbying from anti-landmine networks, including many churches, the Ottawa Convention was signed by 142 countries which banned anti-personnel mines altogether. (It was not signed by the USA, Russia, China, Pakistan, Turkey, Finland and India).

Less well known is that certain types of 'normal' weapons have much the same or worse effects as anti-personnel mines. Only recently with reports from Afghanistan did this kind of weaponry catch the attention of the public eye: cluster bombs. They have been known for 50 years now but are being 'refined' and consequently find wider distribution. The functioning is simple: hidden in a large bomb are dozens of smaller bombs ('bomblets') that are released in the air and explode upon impact, basically a kind of carpet bombing.

The problem is that for technical reasons up to 15% of the bomblets do not explode. They lie in the ground and often go off when triggered by civilians, sometimes children, weeks, months or years after a conflict. Since this is not the *intention* of the cluster bomb, they are not banned under the Ottawa Convention.

The damage is enormous and does not only include the direct effect of killing or maiming people up to 180 yards away, although even this is much worse than the average anti-personnel mine. But the indirect effect upon life in the area is enormous, too. Like landmines the existence (or even the suspicion) of just a few unexploded bomblets can make entire fields unusable for farming. So the matter is also very much one that gravely affects the chances of development.

Although at present there is not yet much of a civil society involvement on the issue, no international campaign as yet, Landmine Action and others are trying to raise awareness. One hopes to increasingly put pressure on the (mostly western) governments who employ cluster bombs. The demands are:

- that civilians be warned when cluster bombs were deployed near to their homes and fields,
- that the users of cluster bombs after a conflict provide accurate maps where they were used to enable specialists to remove the undetonated ones,
- that allowed targets be agreed and other targets be banned,
- obligation for the user to pay for clearing up after the conflict.

At present the UK government opposes most of these suggestions.

On 20 February a meeting organised by the CTBI International Affairs Desk (Paul Renshaw) took place at the Diana Fund offices in London Waterloo. Representatives of several churches were introduced to the issue by Richard Loyd of *Landmine Action,* the successful campaigners' network against landmines. Although 13 Church of England bishops had already intervened with Foreign Secretary Jack Straw on the issue in November 2001, it was agreed that the matter was relevant to all churches in Britain and Ireland and should be brought to their attention and ways of efficient ecumenical cooperation including networks like *Landmine Action* sought. *Landmine Action* actively tries to extend their network to churches and development agencies.

It seems obvious, particularly in the light of the World Council of Churches' current **Decade to Overcome Violence** that this kind of commitment to peace is a core task for the churches. Already a group of 13 Church of England bishops have written a letter to the government expressing their concern but further ecumenical engagement would be welcome. CCOM will bring this topic to its Forums for discussion.

Further information can be obtained from **www.landmineaction.org** or richard@landmineaction.org.

Resurrection

A survey by the weekly German church magazine *Chrismon* (14.3.2002) in 2001 asked people: "Which of the following answers comes closest to your concept of resurrection?"

I have no concept of resurrection, it is merely wishful thinking: 41%

The body dies, only the soul lives on: 30%

Resurrection is exclusively a symbol for hope: 15%

One is reborn as a different person in this world: 6%

Body and soul are recreated in another world: 5%

No reply: 4%

Reformed and Pentecostal dialogue

Delegates of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC, www.warc.ch) met with representatives and leaders of some classical Pentecostal churches in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 16-23 May 2002. This meeting started what is expected to be the second cycle of dialogue to which both groups have committed themselves in order to build upon areas of common faith and witness while seeking to overcome tensions in other aspects of church life. The report of the first round was published under the title

"Word and Spirit, Church and World", the theme of this cycle is "Experience in Christian Faith and Life".

The topic addressed in 2002 was "Experience in Worship". Dr Joseph Small, director of the Office of Theology and Worship of the Presbyterian Church (USA) presented a paper entitled "In Spirit and Truth: Experience and Worship in the Reformed Tradition". The focus was on Calvin's understanding of the presence of Christ in Word and Sacrament, the constitutive role of the proclamation of the gospel in Reformed worship, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit and the difficulty in assessing experiences in worship. Dr. Jean-Daniel Plüss, chairman of the European Pentecostal Charismatic Research Association, read a paper called "Religious Experience in Worship: A Pentecostal Perspective". He combined a theological and descriptive approach to religious experiences, illustrating their function in the community in terms of unity, diversity and reconciliation. An important focus was given to the relational nature of God and the role of testimonies. The discussion focused on the different ways of valuing a wide range of experiences in both Pentecostal and Reformed worship.

The delegates worshipped at Pinkster Gemeente in Amsterdam, one of Europe's oldest Pentecostal churches. In accordance with the intention to relate the discussions of the dialogue to the local Christian context, Dr. Cornelis van der Laan, Professor designate of the Chair of Pentecostal Studies at the Free University in Amsterdam, addressed participants on the beginnings of the Pentecostal movement in the Netherlands. He also described the unique history of contacts between Pentecostal church leaders and representatives of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands during the past 50 years.

The Spirit and the Spirits

The Churches' Commission on Interfaith Relations (CCIFR) is currently preparing an international conference on the theme "Ysbryd – The Holy Spirit in a World of Many Faiths". Under the chairmanship of Archbishop Rowan Williams it will be held 14-17 July 2003 in the University of Wales College, Newport which explains the title: *Yspryd* is Welsh for Spirit. The aim is to look into the question of God's presence in this world in the context of different religious traditions and even secular experiences of 'spirituality' etc. Speakers will be international and will look at the topic from a Pentecostal, Evangelical, Orthodox and Liberal-theological perspective.Further details will be available in due course on the website (**www.ccom.org.uk**).

Conversion and Identity

For the first time the *Societas Oecumenica* will hold its Annual Conference in Britain, on the theme "**Conversion and Identity in a Multicultural Europe**". *The European Society for Ecumenical Research "Societas Oecumenica"* was founded in 1978. The members are departments of ecumenical studies at European Universities of all churches and denominations, church-related institutes for ecumenical research as well as individual theologians working in the field of ecumenism. The gathering will take place in Salisbury/England, 22.-29. August 2002.

The question of how "Conversion and Identity" relate will not be new but will be of interest to anybody involved in reflection on mission theology. The programme includes a podium discussion on "Conversion, Justification and the Conservation of one's own Identity" and lectures and workshops on: Conversion and Postmodernism (*Ivana Dolejsova, Czech Republic)*, Ecumenical Reflections on Conversion in Pastoral Situations (*Michael Ipgrave, UK)*; The Need of Conversion for the Churches and its Importance for the Ecumenical Process (*Flemming Fleinert-Jensen, France)*; Conversion in Integrity: An African Approach (*Setri Nyomi, General Secretary of WARC).* Inter-Communal Violence (*Kenneth Leech, England)*; Conversion and Identity in a Russian Perspective (*Marina Shishowa, St. Petersburg)*; A Northern Irish perspective on Conversion (*Andrew Pierce, Dublin)*; Conversion and Identity in Israel and Palestine (*Michael McGarry, Tantur)* etc.

Further information available on www.ctbi.org.uk/ccom (go to 'Ecumenical Events'). Registration is possible with Dr. Dagmar Heller Im Bleeke 4, D-30826 Garbsen, Germany Fax: +49-511-2796717, dagmar.heller@ekd.de until **30 June 2002!**

Faith after 11 September

BIAMS (British and Irish Association of Mission Studies) is organising a one day conference on the theme "Faith in the World After 11 September" on 11 September 2002 in Birmingham (Carrs Lane Church Centre). Speakers include Prof Antonie Wessels, Rabbi Dr Margaret Jacobi, Sheikh Ibraham Morga and Canon Dr Andrew Wingate. Further information from BIAMS +44 (0)1223 741088, acc34@cam.uk.

German synod denounces religious persecution of Christians

The autumn synod of the Lutheran Church of Bavaria, largest member (2.7 million Christians) of the Protestant Federation in Germany EKD, publicly condemned the persecution of Christians in many countries of the world. They suggested that the granting of development aid by state and church organisations should be more closely linked to countries' abiding with the fundamental Human Right of religious freedom. As the hotspots of persecution the synod named Indonesia, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and China. (epd 30.11.2001)

"In Search of Holy Ground" The CTBI Assembly 2002 in Swanwick

"Religion is in the news, and the quest for a personal spirituality seems a major occupation of many in our society. But participation in the life of the churches continues to fall in most communities, and it often seems that we fail to find the common ground where our experiences of God in Christ can connect with the culture around us. In this Assembly we shall be in search not just of common ground, but of Holy Ground; of those spaces and touching places where people encounter the holy; where the gospel and people's questing can engage with one another. Along the

way we shall need to look honestly at the way people today think; at the reality of our churches and at what we can and cannot do, with Christian integrity."

This was the introduction to the theme of the biennial Assembly of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), formerly the Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland, which took place in Swanwick, Derbyshire from 26 February to 1 March. For first time delegates a pre-Assembly orientation was held from 25 February so that when the main body arrived there was a sense of belonging for everyone.

Early morning prayers and Eucharistic services were held before breakfast each day, and the worship sessions which followed and then ended each day carefully expanded on the theme of Holy Ground, using local history and material from the four nations. Whilst the worship opened up the theme and offered some innovative approaches as well as useful resource material, it did not seem to catch the warmth many would have wished or provide for the quietness important to many.

Delegates met regularly in seminars and reflection groups which helped explore the places where the Christian faith meets contemporary society. Three sessions of stimulating Bible Engagement, led by Bible Society staff, brought the challenge to relate scripture to reconciliation in Rwanda, to address issues of justice by using Old Testament stories and modern parallels and thirdly, by taking clips from the film "Pay it Forward", to challenge traditional thought on forgiveness and goodness.

The Assembly concluded with a service of Holy Communion at which the speaker Revd Joel Edwards of Evangelical Alliance sought to emphasise a holistic presentation of the gospel, which will engage the mind, emotions and issues of social justice.

CTBI has offices which work closely with churches in various parts of the world, including China, Middle East, throughout Asia, Africa and the Pacific region. The inspiration of growth amidst pain was evident, in debate, in the seminars, which dealt with specific regions, and also in the continuous conversations which took place with those having links with churches around the globe.

If the Assembly had given more weight to its specially commissioned book by Jeanne Hinton, *Changing Churches: Building Bridges in Local Communities*, more solid direction might have been found towards the holy ground of the encounter with the world. Her analysis of some of the local groups engaging in developing mission bears witness to the usefulness of the CCOM programme "Building Bridges of Hope" which enables churches to work effectively together in finding their mission. In this process an Accompanist, appointed by BBH, works with a local church or churches to revision them, and over a period of timerelease the life and energy of grassroots people into evangelism and outreach. Stories of people taking risks, big or small, for the sake of the Kingdom, inspire faith and help interpret the principles of good practice being suggested. More might have been heard and shared.

In the common search for fresh points of engagement with a fast changing world, only a commitment to be pilgrims together will give credence to the gospel or call from the Church the love Christ commands. That love is the essence of the holy ground sought, and at the very least glimpsed, at Swanwick.

Perhaps a prayer offered by one of the delegates in a Reflection Group may best summarise the theme and thrust of the Assembly:

"Creator God, in your love you have spoken to create the beauty of the earth and everything in it, we thank you and bless your name.

Saviour Christ, for your saving love which has pursued us in our waywardness, selfishness and sin, and returned us to the holy places of your purpose, we thank and bless your name.

Holy Spirit, for your love which beckons us to journey with you and encounter the living Christ in friend and stranger, and to share the good news in High Street and market place, we thank you and bless your name.

Creator, Saviour and Life giving Spirit, send us out to walk the journey of faith with joy, and with thanksgiving, that we may bless your name, now and always."

Des Bain

Middle East

A call from the heads of churches in Jerusalem to all the people in this holy land, Palestinians and Israelis:

"There is a time for killing, a time for healing; a time for knocking down, a time for building; …a time for throwing stones away, a time for gathering them; …a time for war, a time for peace." (Eccl. 3, 3-8)

"We, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in this Land, are concerned for the recent developments and the spiral violence directly affecting the lives of the peoples. We are distressed to find that the bloodshed is increasing in this Country. We are saddened to see more widows, orphans, mourning fathers and mothers on both sides. We deplore the increase of injured people because of killing, shelling bombarding, violence and incursion. We ask *'Is this the future that we all want for our children?'*

"We believe that they key to a just peace is in the hands of both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority. War, shelling and destruction will not bring justice and security; rather it will intensify hatred and bitterness.

"We believe that Israeli and Palestinian peoples are called to be partners in an historic peace.

"We would confirm that we care for the security of both peoples just as we care for the security of every human being. But the way the present Israeli Government is dealing with the situation makes neither for security nor for a just peace. We believe that the Israeli security is dependent on the Palestinian freedom and justice. For this reason, we join our voices with every Israeli and Palestinian seeking for a just peace. We ask everyone to take the appropriate measures to stop further massacres or tragedies for our two peoples. We want to say a frank, honest word to the Israeli conscience and Israeli Government asking that you stop all kinds of destruction and death caused by the heavy Israeli weaponry. What assurance can be offered to a people deprived of freedom, self-determination, sovereignty and equality with every Israeli citizen?

"To the Palestinian people we urge an end of every kind of violent response.

"We believe that the way of peace is the way of negotiation. If there is a strong will for making peace all the pending disputed problems will find a dignified solution.

"We appeal to the Israeli people to work for their security in such a way that is just and in which the Palestinians may enjoy their rights as represented in the International Legitimacy. We ask you in the name of the Living God, Whom we all worship, to raise your voice for justice, peace, and reconciliation which are the cry of the soul of all peoples of the world.

"Inspired by the words of King Solomon in Ecclesiastes, We can say: 'We have tried war, stones, killing and destruction all the period of the conflict. Time has come for peace, justice and the collecting of stones for building, reconciliation and healing.' Our prayers for peace are more urgently needed than ever.

"Know that we have contacted our partner churches abroad with their respective Governments to seek their assistance in our quest for peace.

"'I will hear what God proclaims; for He proclaims peace to his people, and to his faithful ones, and to those who put in Him their hope.'" (Ps 85, 9).

Jerusalem, March 9, 2002

Building Bridges of Hope (BBH)

"Is it Possible to Change Churches?" As I sat listening to the lively discussion of a BBH pilot leadership group meeting, I wondered just what being part of the BBH process meant for this ecumenical pilot. I was struck by the welcome and inclusive nature of the group, despite their differences.

These members and leaders of different churches were outwardly just a normal group, yet an experience earlier in the year had encouraged and enthused them in unexpected ways. They had organised in one of their churches an ecumenical week of prayer - for seven days, twenty-four hours a day, someone was praying for their town.

Now they were eager to arrange the next step of spiritual encounters. Then the question came, as innocent as a dove, from the Accompanier (facilitator), "What did that week of prayer as churches together mean for you as individuals?"

A minister said, "To go and pray with other churches was refreshing." Another said, "To realise that prayer was taking place for this town throughout the day was inspiring." A lady said "How wonderful that Christians from young and older generations prayed together." Still another said "The freedom to be ourselves in our own traditions was very good." Finally, a man said, "It has brought spiritual rediscovery for me. To be in God's presence in prayer has drawn me closer to God. It has reawakened my prayer life, now every Sunday afternoon I set aside one hour to pray, when previously I left prayer to the minister."

Transformation is taking place, sensitively, confidently and from the ground up in this pilot! What is distinctive about BBH in changing churches?

BBH is one among many excellent tools available today in Britain and Ireland for building missionary congregations. Its distinctive component is the discipline and pilgrimage of long-term accompaniment.

"How to change churches?" is the big question of our times. BBH has an amazing story to tell of how accompaniment and reflection, both in the past series of case studies and now with the current case studies, is releasing churches to re-imagine a future of being Church in the twenty-first century. BBH Accompaniment includes:

- Identifying the vision and mission of each local church, unique to its context. An example of this can be seen by the way in which one accompanier is assisting a pilot in retaining the founder's vision and values, and not losing this chapter to the second and third generation leaders. The accompanier has asked "What are the founder's vision and values? How are they being changed? Does the founders vision need to be adapted?"
- Listening. This is crucial in the BBH process. Not imposing a programme from the outside, but maintaining the agenda of the pilot instead, recognising the character and calling of each local church.
- Questioning – incisive questions linked to the BBH '7 Indicators' (eg, focusing vision, sharing faith and values, etc) is used to clarify objectives and attitudes to the next step of action.
- Signposting to other resources. BBH Accompaniers are not fulfilling the role of 'consultants, or mission strategists, or trainers', but may suggest a consultant or mission programme from outside resources to fulfil a desired aim.
- Reflecting – as in the story above, the pilot had positive thoughts about the prayer event, it was the question of naming exactly what this meant for the people, did it become clearer what was being said? Feeding back impressions and observations, including perceived subtexts.
- Enabling the group as a 'friendly stranger', or 'critical friend', whilst retaining reasonable independence.

Is it possible to change churches?

The seedlings springing from BBH pilots show that it is possible to see transformation in the most unlikely places, where attitudes are expanded, hearts softened, mindsets enhanced, structures flexed, confidence in being the gospel people renewed and churches re-engaging in word and action in their communities.

"Oh yes", said the Charismatic church member at the meeting above, "it is good to discover each other, for that's when God moves, when churches pray together."

If you are interested in becoming a BBH Accompanier, please contact Terry on 01787-227979 or terry.Tennens@tesco.net. Further info on BBH on : www.ccom.org.uk

Terry Tennens

Book Reviews

Faith in Development

Deryke Belshaw, Robert Calderisi, Chris Sugden (edd.): Faith in Development. Partnership between the World Bank and the Churches of Africa. Foreward by James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank and George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, Regnum Press International £.17.99 ISBN 1-870345-21-5

African church leaders' engaging directly with World Bank officials has a fresh and stimulating ring. The recent demonstrations on the streets of Washington during April 2002 meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund caught the headlines. Less publicised are the long standing discussions in World Bank offices involving NGOs such as Christian Aid, OXFAM and Save the Children, and others who represent the poor. 'Faith in Development' publishes papers from a conference in March 2000 hosted jointly in Nairobi by the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa and the World Bank. Along with 20 World Bank staff, some 150 Christian leaders from 20 African countries were present, representing a range of denominations and church groupings.

The origins of the meeting were in the 1998 Lambeth Conference, when James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, had shared some of the Bank's thinking. In his joint forward with the Archbishop of Canterbury reference is made to the Bank's interest in exploring areas of common concern between faith and development communities. 'Faith in Development' also includes the final communique (see below) and an introduction by the editors, two of whom, Deryke Belshaw and Chris Sugden are on the staff of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies which facilitated the conference.

In his paper 'Serving the Poor in Africa' Callisto Madova, a Zimbabwean Christian and World Bank vice-president for Africa, acknowledges that, in addition to 'the spiritual guidance and moral comfort' offered congregations, the churches are a source of schooling, health and other services. These the poor lack if they depend entirely on publicly funded programmes. He seeks to allay fears that the church might be pigeonholed as another NGO and said that the World Bank would work with the churches even if they were not providing such essential services to the poor.

Robert Calderisi, World Bank country director for Central Africa, sees the churches as able to share knowledge, challenge policies or the way they are implemented, and to channel funds to the poor. Other papers consider alleviating poverty, reducing conflict, addressing corruption, and discuss the roles of the state and private sectors, the AIDS pandemic and gender inequity. There is a paper by Agnes Abuom, the Africa President of the World Council of Churches, on 'Women's Issues in Health and Education'.

Ideological differences between the World Bank and the churches should not stop them working together, argues Molefe Tsele of the Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation in South Africa (ESSET). It would have been good to have been able to read more about how active the church leaders plan to be about the impact of World Bank policies on the poor and who will speak for them. At the April 2002 CCOM Africa Forum Consultation church workers from the Nairobi Muthare shanty town felt very distant from all such deliberations.

At the coming CAPA Council in June 2002 the actions following on from the conference are to be reviewed. They have, I understand, been limited in scope. Good work has been done on HIV/AIDS, but the mentioned one-day conference in Cameroon involving World Bank staff and 270 Catholic, Protestant and Muslim leaders was of less value. Problems have included the ownership by the churches of the conference processes and the decisions made, and also the priority that it has been possible to give to them. It may well be that such innovative encounters become learning experiences. The CAPA Council will no doubt consider the availability and capacity of African church leaders, given their many responsibilities, to undertake such work and how best to own the initiative in the name of the churches.

CAPA World Bank Statement: Alleviating Poverty in Africa:
oxford.anglican.org/press/20000310_poverty.shtml.

Gordon Holmes

Davie: Religion in Modern Europe

Grace Davie, Religion in Modern Europe. A Memory Mutates, Oxford: OUP 2000 (European Societies Series), ISBN 0-19-924124-4, £.17.99

In this book, which I found both stimulating and complex, Grace Davie analyses familiar material in a new way. She looks at religious tradition as a form of corporate memory and asks how we can understand sociological data about religion in terms of changing patterns of human memory. Where we might ask whether we are living in a post-Christendom society or post-Christian culture, she poses the question as one of changes to the formerly dominant Christian memory. Her 'believing without belonging' argument, with which we may already be familiar, becomes a challenging question about vicarious memory – are people willing to allow others to 'hold' the tradition for them? In which case, what happens during the process of generational change in the churches? Inter-faith matters are looked at in terms of different memories meeting each other and religious conflict as conflicting memory seeking to keep its hold on human community. I was fascinated by looking at the idea of symbolic memory - the hold sacred place and sacred acts has on our spirituality. Finally, Grace Davie sees the question of religious traditions surviving as one of mutating memory. We might simply ask 'Who is Jesus Christ for us today?'

Grace Davie admits that the task is both urgent and wider than the book. I would see it as a mission theological task with important practical implications for evangelisation and therefore I am grateful for the attention drawn to the

role of memory in the religious traditions of all faiths. However there are larger philosophical questions about both individual and corporate memory: my faith story/our story/God's story and also about the coherence and interdependence of the remembered events themselves. This has powerful resonance not just for Christians, but also for Jewish and other communities reflecting on world-changing events such as the Holocaust. What is it about the love of the living God that is *more* than Professor Dawkins' 'memes' hypothesis?

The concept of mutating memory is important, because it reminds us that we have to pay serious attention to what is already present in people's minds and hearts before those of us with a desire to share our faith begin to do so. What kinds of memories do we want others to carry, treasure, share and bequeath in the future? How much do we bother to think about the *consequences* of evangelism?

Anne Richards

Paterson: Whose Truth? *and* The Next Step

Gillian Paterson (ed.): Whose Truth? A Grassroots Perspective – theological reflections from a group of seekers and ibd.: The Next Step, A Grassroots Perspective – theological reflections from a group of seekers, published by Grassroots, Luton 2000 and 2002 £1.50 each, obtainable from grassrootsp@cs.com

In 1992 Gillian Paterson was asked to visit and tease out the mission theology issues arising from the work of Grassroots, the ecumenical community in Luton which is staffed by an international team of people from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe. The result is two booklets, written about a year apart.

Both booklets give the impression that Gillian Paterson was bowled over by the people and situations which she met, and that writing the booklets has been part of the way in which she has tried to make sense of what she saw, heard and felt. The result is a jumble of impressions, stories and reflections of a diverse, searching and arguing community and its work. There are stories of creative and innovative forms of mission in different situations, but – unfortunately – the insights are not brought together in ways which gave me new understanding and direction applicable to the generality of church life in Britain and Ireland today. Gillian Paterson has clearly been transformed by her experience, writing "Like all paradigm shifts, once you have made it, it becomes almost impossible to believe that you ever thought differently", but it is difficult for us to see what that means for us.

There is no list of the places where Grassroots in working, but it is clear that it is working among the poorest and most disadvantaged communities, and most of these are multi-racial and multi-faith with the extra pressures which that creates on community life. The main question raised for me is, if the poor are (like children) clues to the Kingdom of God, then what is the unique contribution of Christianity to such communities? With its experience in such different communities, I look to Grassroots to provide clues, but there are scarcely any clues in this. Grassroots is rightly acting to change the situations, but is there more to the Kingdom? There is much on the theology of incarnation, but not much about the cross and Easter. How far does the cross speak about bearing the pain without expecting change? I marvel at the great tradition of 'spirituals' which emerged from the horrors of slavery. Is this escapism, or finding a deeper meaning to life?

I also look to Grassroots to guide me in the tension (which Gillian Paterson acknowledges) of affirming the uniqueness of Christ while cooperating and befriending other faith communities. The booklets say much about spirituality, which is not defined but seems to include everything from God-in-nature to individual experiences. I wonder whether this is because, in a plural society the concept of Truth is more difficult to hold to?

It is clear that Grassroots is bearing witness through life, action and word to the love of Christ in taxing and demanding situations. Gillian Paterson acknowledges that such situations can unite people against the injustice around them (the 'enemy'). My over-riding question is, therefore, what does this say to middle England in which I and most Christians live? Grassroots has inspired us by its example, but it needs to help us by its reflection to apply the lessons to our different situations. Unfortunately these booklets did not help me in this challenge.

Roger Whitehead

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For reflection

"You know that the air and water are being polluted, as is everything we touch and live with, and we go on corrupting the nature that we need. We don't realise we have a commitment to God to take care of nature. To cut down a tree, to waste water when there is so much lack of it, to let buses poison our atmosphere with those noxious fumes from their exhausts, to burn rubbish haphazardly - all that concerns our alliance with God."

The Violence of Love by Oscar Romero.

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The last word

"Gentlemen, our constitution clearly states that the will of God can only be overruled by a two thirds majority."