

Country Perspectives

- [Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia](#)
- [Australia](#)
- [England](#)
- [Korea](#)
- [Malaysia](#)
- [Tanzania](#)
- [USA](#)

Christian Mission and Interfaith Concerns: A New Zealand Account

Although New Zealand may be viewed as a South Pacific country, part of Oceania, politically set within the Western world, in fact it is the earth's most eastern country in respect to the measuring of the day: the sun's rays of each new dawn fall first on our shores, at least according to the current convention of the international date-line. So it is appropriate that a report from New Zealand is heard as the last of an eastward reach of listening to a selection of examples from within the world-wide Anglican Communion.

I want to do three things. First, to draw out some hermeneutical reference points from the stimulating addresses given yesterday. The work of Fr Michael Amalados and Dr Sati Clarke will inform my later comments. Second, I want to give a contextual perspective to the mission and interfaith engagement of the Church in New Zealand. Third, I will attempt to give an illustrative flavour, rather than a comprehensive overview, of New Zealand engagement in interfaith concerns. In this regard I will note some formal structures and share some anecdotal examples, drawing out the links between these examples and the interpretive motifs of yesterday's speakers. In that way I trust we will gain some insight about interfaith engagement and concerns in New Zealand.

From the work of Fr Amalados I take two main points. The goal of mission, he reminds us, is essentially that of enacting and enabling the "kingdom of God", in respect to which the Church functions as both symbol and servant. The Church is to both present, and represent, the kingdom; and its life is to perform an enabling role in bringing about the values, incarnated dynamics, and lived reality of that kingdom.

Secondly, and by way of logical development from the foregoing, Fr Amalados draws our attention to a paradigm contrast, indeed a paradigm shift. On the one hand we have the traditional evangelical mission paradigm wherein the outworking of the kingdom necessarily requires the conversion of the 'religious other' as, otherwise, 'religious opponent'. On the other hand a rethought paradigm focuses on the idea of the kingdom being expressed in and through the promotion of mutual conversion, or a mutual turning to, the all-encompassing Divine Reality, howsoever conceptualised. This certainly suggests a radical rethink of missionary motif and praxis, one which, of course, is well-underway. But the traditional paradigm persists within the wider Church, and predominates still in the perception of the Church as often held by our religious partners, our religious 'others' in many parts of the world. Where mission is identified with conversion, and conversion is perceived as a cultural threat, the Church faces understandable pressure, a pressure which can yield unfortunate, even tragic, consequences. This is especially so for a Church whose missionary praxis is premised more on service and the invitation to conversation.

Dr Sati Clarke provides us with a hermeneutical framework couched in lively metaphor. On the one hand religion—any religion—may appear and act as terrifying Beast: human history and recent experience reminds us that at times religion can and does sanction evil and violence even as it proclaims values asserting the opposite. On the other hand, religion can be the enchanting Beauty: religion can present as invitation to enter a world of transcendent mystery; it can evoke attractively winsome responses of devotion and commendable intentions to discipleship. It is the prospect of profound transcendent beauty that feeds the perennial spiritual hunger of humankind. This portrayal of religion in general applies also the Church of course: the beauteous and the beastly

can both occur. We hope more for the one; at times we have to confront and overcome the other in our midst. Alongside this sobering hermeneutical analysis, the textile metaphor, which Dr Sati draws from scripture, yields a useful and insightful dynamic of the life and mission of the Church. In enacting kingdom values and meaning the Church may varyingly be the patch of relevance and coherence; the fringe point of compassionate contact; or the divided garment, scattered in, and available to, the world. Mission occurs in the context of multifaceted engagement.

When turning to the question of mission and interfaith engagement of the Church in New Zealand, some contextualising remarks are called for. New Zealand is a secular state with an embedded bi-cultural polity that now pervades institutional arrangements within society at large, as well as playing a defining role in the life of the Church. This bi-cultural basis is rooted in the 1840 Treaty signed between the Maori and the British Crown. The Treaty of Waitangi was important, at least in part, because it represented a less hostile means of establishing sovereignty than occurred, for example, in Australia. At its best the Treaty signals the desire for a peaceable coexistence of two races, under one governance structure, implying an ethic of independent yet mutual partnership between the two signatory partners. However, it is only in recent times that the partnership motif has come into clear focus and has been, since the 1980s, of particular concern to the life of the Churches^[1].

However, even as the country—which often is referred to as Aotearoa-New Zealand to reflect its bi-cultural heritage and contemporary identity derived therefrom—the pressing lived reality of most people in New Zealand is increasingly multi-cultural and poly-religious. According to the 1996 Census results, European (or *Pakeha*) comprised 79.6% of the population with Maori at 14.5%. Polynesians numbered 5.6% with Chinese 2.2% and Indian 1.2%.^[2] The New Zealand Official Yearbook 2000 indicates a decline in religious affiliation so far as the major Christian denominations are concerned, but an increase of persons identifying with other religions overall. The 1996 Census figures, upon which the Yearbook information is based, show that an increased number of people claim no religious affiliation whatsoever. Indeed this category rose by one-third over the previous (1991) Census to a point where fully one-quarter of the New Zealand population recorded themselves in 1996 as having no religion. During the same period the numbers of Buddhists and Muslims more than doubled, while Hindus increased by about 50%. However, each of these groups comprised less than one percent of the total population, and most of the increment would be due to immigration factors.

Of the Christian denominations, Pentecostals were the only group to experience significant growth—55%—in the census period 1991-1996. In the mid 90s Anglicans, comprising about 18% of the total population, were the single largest religious group, followed by the Roman Catholics on about 13%; Presbyterians on 12.5%; Methodists at 3.4% and Baptists on 1.5%. The Mormon religion, which has attracted a significant Maori constituency, accounted for a little over 1.1% of the total population of New Zealand. The major indigenous Maori Christian Church—Ratana—was fractionally over 1%. Although some details have since changed^[3], the overall religious demography would today be much the same.

In 1990 the Anglican Church in New Zealand enacted a major piece of constitutional restructuring to produce a three-way institutional arrangement of ecclesial autonomy within a form of federal relationship. The Church today is, constitutionally, The Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. Using the Maori term *tikanga* (meaning 'path' or 'way', and referring to diversity of customs and practices), the Church created three semi-autonomous independent entities to embrace, respectively, Maori, Pakeha (or 'European', which as an ecclesial category is inclusive of all other ethnicities who simply belong to that branch of the Church), and Polynesian. New Zealand society certainly contains a significant Polynesian population, and the city of Auckland is indeed the largest Polynesian city in the world. By way of explanation of the Church's action, one bishop has remarked:

The idea of a several *tikanga* church seemed to the General Synod at the time to be a concrete expression of the gospel principles of unity in diversity and partnership between cultures, rather than an ecclesial arrangement that was simply driven by ethnic issues alone. The development was initiated by ethnic issues, but we found that we were dealing with an Acts 15 dynamic where we needed to discover what freedom of cultural expression and cultural vision meant, without the inevitable smothering effects of simple democracy, where, in our case, the white majority could and often did pursue a mono-cultural vision. The Book of Revelation speaks of the gathering of many tribes and languages around the throne of Grace, implying eschatological realities where cultural identity and cultural self determination are intrinsic to the goal of the Christian vision. Some would say that the *tikanga* based church is therefore an anticipation of the vision and cannot be judged by a confessional or doctrinal statement that did not take this vision into account as being at the heart and the future of the gospel.^[4]

Thus each of *Tikanga Maori*, *Polynesia*, and *Pakeha* functions as an Anglican episcopal unit, rather like a province, each with their own bishops and institutional arrangements such as dioceses etc. Each *tikanga* may shape its own life and work, but within general parameters as laid down by General Synod, "which remains the governing body of the whole and has powers to overrule any other episcopal unit"^[5]. Every two years they come together in a General Synod to make determinations in respect of all three being members one of another comprising a single Church identity within the world-wide Anglican Communion, and to advance the question of

the inter-relationship between the three *tikanga*. Anglicans, in other words, are pursuing an internal ecumenicity and intra-religious dialogue across an ethnically sub-divided partnership which itself was effected to shift ethnic relations from a context of mission to that of ecclesial co-equality.

We are now in a position to turn to the matter of New Zealand engagement in inter-faith concerns. The first thing to say here is that, largely because of the recent history and focus of the Church as outlined above, the Anglican Church in Aotearoa-New Zealand is in any formal sense yet to engage directly and intentionally in interfaith concerns. Individuals, both clergy and lay, and some congregations, are certainly finding local *ad hoc* avenues of engagement, and there is some limited formal involvement by way of representation of the Church on interfaith bodies at least in some parts of the country. But, arguably, the traditional paradigm of mission as adumbrated above would predominate in the Church at large and acts as a sheet-anchor, if not mill-stone, to aspirations for better—indeed any, really for most situations—interfaith engagement

More broadly, however, interfaith relations are given a measure of expression through the existence of Councils of Christians and Jews, found in at least three of the major cities, and also Councils of Christians and Muslims in perhaps one or two more. There have also been occasional attempts in recent years, with mixed success, to create wider interfaith groups. An attempt to create a Wellington-based national interfaith council is presently underway. But let me give something of the lived flavour on interreligious interactions in the New Zealand context as I have directly experienced or observed.

Some years ago, in my town, a 'Civic Diary' for the year appeared. It contained useful information, contact addresses and so on, of organisations, sports clubs, and so on. But there was no mention, under 'R' in the index, of religions. And under 'C' I found but a very limited reference to a couple of charismatic churches. Christianity was not alone in being marginalised by an apparently secular publication meant to be of useful communal purpose. On inquiry I discovered the publisher, a fundamentalist Christian, not only was reluctant to be open to acknowledging the breadth of Christian traditions resident in our town, he was most certainly reticent about giving any sort of *de facto* credence to the presence of world religions. And this is a town which had, at that time, the first Mormon Temple in the Pacific, the first Sikh Temple in the country, a thriving Muslim community of diverse ethnic make-up, a vibrant Hindu community, two different Buddhist Associations, two Bahai groups, a Jewish community and association—though no Synagogue—to name some. But the view that other religions are 'opponents', in respect to which it is the Christian's duty to preach the Truth and win conversion, that motivated the publisher's non-acceptance of the right of the other to be simply present within our community, would be no isolated perspective. It alerted me then to the first task of interfaith dialogical engagement: the intra-dialogical task of educating one's own community.

There are now a number of both Theravadin and Mahayana Buddhist communities in New Zealand, including one derived from a Tibetan lineage with a retreat centre in a beautiful rural New Zealand setting. A daughter of mine attended a retreat there recently. (Inter-religious dialogue can be so often an intra-familial phenomenon). So too did an Anglican priest colleague, who has since determined to join the community in an attempt to live out a Christian-Buddhist inter-faith engagement, and to join with the Buddhists in the quest for common service to humanity. The local Anglican bishop (not the Priest's bishop), however, has led prayers of opposition to the very presence of a sacred Buddhist space within what is taken, presumably, as *de facto* Christian space. New Zealand harbours a 'God's own' myth. The religious other is an invader to be repelled if not assimilated. Here we see enacted the paradigm contrast highlighted by Fr Amalados, and also something of both Beauty and Beast, and, in the Priest's action, perhaps something of the Divided Garment metaphor at work.

During the course of last year there occurred an eruption in one of our geo-thermal regions. With a backdrop of spectacular moonscape proportions, where previously there had been verdant native bush, the Television interview of a scientist was juxtaposed with the interpretive narrative given by a local Maori elder, a *kaumatua*. The scientist calmly spoke of geo-physical forces, of blocked vents and build-up of steam pressure with its inevitable results. Scientific narrative proclaimed its truth of the matter. By contrast the Television's portrayal of a Maori perspective, which is inherently spiritual and relational, presented the indigenous viewpoint without context as quaintly atavistic and amusingly simplistic. A valid religio-ecological narrative, illustrating a particular religious meaning, was apparently dismissed as an untruth in the face of scientific explanation. The issue of narrative responses as varyingly explanatory and meaningful, highlighted by this incident, is an arena of interreligious concern, not just a case of science versus religion. In our country the question of both inter- and intra-religious dialogue between Christianity and Maori Spirituality has not had a good profile and has yet to be taken with any lasting seriousness, despite a few recent attempts.

A few years ago, in the late 90s, the newly-built mosque in my town was fire-bombed. It was reported in World News headlines. It sent shock-waves throughout our community, and indeed the country as a whole. Among the first on the scene were some representatives from the Jewish Association: Jewish memory of similar events in the life of that faith had been invoked afresh. Not far behind were Anglicans and Methodists, both of whom had lost wooden Churches to the arsonist's torch in recent years. An experience of solidarity through loss, if not

suffering, was underway. The wider community also weighed in such that the mosque—which had been gutted, but not destroyed—was not only refurbished out of insurance proceeds, but additional finishing touches, including proper fencing and a security system, were provided by funds donated from other religious groups and the wider community. Nevertheless, there were some Christians who rejoiced in the burning and had hoped that it would mark the end of the mosque. One even declared a preference to drive a circuitous route rather than pass by the mosque, which was prominently placed at a major intersection. Beast and Beauty juxtaposed. And yet the Church could be seen to be enacting a fringe point of compassionate contact, and being a servant and symbol of a kingdom wherein rejection and destruction have no place.

Finally, and again with reference to my own town, an example of the so-called 'dialogue of action' occurred with respect to the building of a Casino. Opposition to this project, which became a protracted and expensive exercise—the resources of Mammon know no limits—was led by a coalition of Anglicans and Muslims, Methodists and Mormons. While the cause was lost (and the irony that the General Manager of the Casino Company is an Anglican was not unnoticed), the exercise galvanised local interfaith relationships and bore witness to the prospect of the Church viewing its mission in wider than normal terms. Again the motif of symbol and servant of the kingdom come to the fore, along with the enacting of the revised paradigm of mission: that of mutual conversion to the ways of God in respect to social issues and action. And, in many respects, such a living and engaged dialogical mission expresses also the motifs of the textile metaphor of the Church: a patch of relevance; a hem of compassionate contact with the real world; rending itself from being a cloak of holy aloofness to be available in and to the world.

As I said at the outset, I can give no exhaustive overview, only share some personal flavours. But I trust it is enough to indicate that there are hopeful signs for the cause of mission and interfaith concerns within the Anglican Communion in my part of the world, and for the prospect of interreligious relations and dialogue more widely. Progress is slow, yet there is an emerging consciousness of the issues, and growing willingness to engage. The challenge ahead is to nurture and develop that.

Rev Canon Dr Douglas Pratt

Bangalore, India,
September, 2003.

[1.](#) See, for example, Douglas Pratt, 'From Missionary Paternalism to Bicultural Partnership: aspects of Anglican and Methodist experience in Aotearoa-New Zealand', *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXXII No.327, July/Oct 1993, pp. 305-315.

[2.](#) Source: *Statistics New Zealand 1996 Census*.

[3.](#) At the time of compiling this information the results of the 2001 Census were not available on the Statistics New Zealand Web-site.

[4.](#) David Moxon, Bishop of Waikato, *personal correspondence*.

[5.](#) Rev Dr Ken Booth, *personal correspondence*.

Australia

The Significance of Buddhism for the West: A Special Case for Interfaith Concerns in the Anglican Communion

It is an undeniable fact that Buddhism has come to play a significant role in the contemporary global community. This is particularly true about the West at large and Australia which I am representing at this consultation. Of course, Buddhism has played and continues to play a very important role in South and South East Asia too. However, there is a difference. Buddhism is a "native" religion of "Asia" and therefore its influence in the lives of the people of Asia is natural. Given that the history of the West was predominantly influenced by Christianity since the 3rd Century CE, the increasing influence of this South Asian religion – Buddhism – in the West must be carefully studied and understood. This is a *must* for the church and the Anglican Communion's interfaith concerns.

What is generally called Buddhism is a philosophy of life which is made up several schools of thought which are either branches or adaptations of the three main traditions: *Hinayana* (the "Small Vehicle" which is also known as

Theravada, the “teaching” or the “tradition” of the Elders), *Mahayana* (the Great Vehicle) & *Vajirayana* (the Diamond Vehicle).

The Buddhism which is practiced by an increasing number of Australians and westerners at large is either a tradition that represents one of the three traditions or a more eclectic form of “Buddhism” which is made up of elements from all three traditions which can be easily adapted to contemporary thought forms. This form of Buddhism is known as *Nawayana* (the new vehicle).

I have a particular interest (both academic and personal) in the traditional schools of Buddhism as well as their recent adaptations in the West. This interest has helped me to understand why Buddhism has come to fascinate the minds of traditionally Christian individuals and western nations. This understanding is important to make a contribution to interfaith-dialogue in general and to Buddhist-Christian dialogue in particular. The contribution Buddhism can offer is unique on many fronts. For instance, Buddhism has the following particularities which must be noted by the serious inquirer of interfaith matters:

- Buddhism operates outside the theistic framework of reference. (While *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* forms of Buddhism make numerous reference to gods (*devas*) one must note that they do not constitute a distinct *theo-logy*).
- Buddhism is not a “faith tradition” in the sense which we have come to use the phrase conventionally.
- Buddhism defies every thought category that is central to the Christian outlook and western worldview (eg. *Self, God and History*)

I became very conscious of these issues in the recent discussions that I was very privilege to have with Archbishop Rowan Williams and Prof. Keith Ward – they were distinguished visiting scholars in 2002 and 2003 at Trinity College where I lecture. While their brilliant lectures had much to offer to very fundamental questions we ask today, it became obvious to me that their fundamental assumptions, theological propositions and arguments belong to what we might call the “theological circle.”

Another good example I can think of to demonstrate the point I am making is the wonderful lecture that Fr. Michael Amaladoss SJ delivered to this gathering. In that lecture he underlined mission as God’s initiative. It is, indeed, a wonderful idea that can help Christians to engage in interfaith relations and acknowledge that all religions are fragmentary manifestations of God’s mission on earth. But when a tradition such as Buddhism has no notion of an Ultimate God the proposition of mission being God’s initiative becomes a difficult concept to apply universally, at least in relation to Buddhist-Christian understanding of God’s engagement in the world.

Since my presentation is not a formal lecture it is important to keep my argument simple and highlight some of my observations of how Buddhism has come to fascinate the minds of Australians. Following are some examples:

- People who are “converted” to Buddhism on a given day in Australia are much higher in numbers than those who would be converted or make a renewed commitment to the Christian faith. This includes conversions to “evangelical/fundamentalist” Christianity.
- When the Dalai Lama visited Australia in 2002 he was given an audience with 5000 high school children. He expounded the Four Noble Truths to them – that is all. But his visit to Australia and the encounters people had with him were seen in “messianic” terms. What is about our preaching about Christ that prevents people receiving him in messianic terms?
- People who attended my four-week study series on Buddhism in my small parish attracted twice as many people than the normal Sunday congregation. I too often expound the Four Noble Truths through biblical texts. (To be fair to Biblical interpretation I must say that I use the Four Noble Truths as a hermeneutical tool to expound some biblical passages). However, I do not attract 5000 people to hear me. While there some humour in my example here, one must ask why biblical passages no longer speak to people if interpreted in traditional ways.
- I receive invitations from conservative country regions of Victoria to speak on Buddhism. Some of these invitations come from groups that have spirituality sessions in pubs. (It is an interesting question to ask: why people would come to a pub and not to a church to discuss spiritual things? This says something about church.
- I also teach Buddhism (and also Religious Traditions of South and South East Asia) as a specialist unit for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. It is interesting to note how individuals who take these units

sometimes confess to have re-discovered their Christian faith through the study of Buddhism and other “Asian religions.” While this is to be expected in the study of any religion, I keep asking myself what is it about the “western culture” that prevents individuals coming to understand fully. Some reasons are explained below.

At present Buddhism is seen as offering an explanation for the following experiences in the West:

- The two World Wars and the subsequent catastrophes in the world which demonstrated that technology could be used not only to better life, but also to its destruction and to cultivate perpetual greed and selfishness. We must note here that globalisation and McDonalozation of the world have been made possible through technology.
- The “Just-War” theory which is a product of the Christian tradition. (the just-war theory was introduced by Cicero and then developed by St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and later by both Catholic and Protestant scholars). Many Western Christians and leaders used it again to justify the invasion of Iraq. Then, in the tradition of eliminating tyrants, we witnessed the killing of Saddam Hussein’s sons Uday and Qusay. Such an end to Saddam’s life is also, we are told, is desired and there is a US\$ 25 million reward for anyone who can lead to Saddam’s capture. Whatever the justification of such actions is, we know that there is a moral dilemma here which is created by the Christian tradition.
- The development of the capital-based market economy in the West. The “Christian faith” that once evolved as an inseparable partner of the Western tradition provided much of the “cultural resources” for political movements to harness, for instance, capitalism of which the end results were: individualism, materialism and consumerism. Consequentially, the ideal of *self* which had been seen as the gateway to all knowledge (and God) came to be regarded not as affirming a permanent soul, but as something for which one “shops”.
- The personalisation of the message of salvation and the problem of human suffering. These are, indeed, directly related to the phenomenon of individualism that has its genesis in capitalism. (By the way, Calvinism made a significant contribution to the propagation of capitalism).
- The phenomena of artificial intelligence, computer simulations, and the hybrid of humans and machines which have in recent times removed the relevance of an authentic *self*. They have also created issues in relation to human identity.
- The way in which suffering is understood within the Christian tradition; The New Testament does not explain why suffering exists in the world. The Gospel narratives implicitly represent Jewish views that suffering is due to a punishment or retribution to sin.
- Two opposing views of two Church Fathers – St. Augustine and Irenaeus – that shaped the western understanding of suffering. While St. Augustine claimed that humanity at creation was infinitely perfect and suffering was the result of the Fall, Irenaeus (c. 130- c.202) suggested that humanity was created imperfect and immature and that humanity must attain perfection through a processing of becoming in the Maker’s plan.

Many people who belong to the baby boomer and generation X have come to question these issues one way or another. While some may not intellectually question these issues, they still seek alternatives to lead their lives meaningfully. In that process they distance themselves from the Christian message. Why? Christianity as we know and experience it today is conceived to party to the western civilisation which has come to be its bearer. Therefore, to the average “westerner” Christianity (and its message) is interchangeable with the issues that I have outlined above.

Buddhism’s pervading influence in Australia and in the West in general is a direct response to these issues and Lord Buddha’s teachings is perceived as:

- an antidote and cure for the unbearable saturation of materialism, consumerism and individualism experienced in the West.
- an alternative to a civilisation tainted with blood spilt over religious and political wars.
- offering “non-theological” practical answers to these ills.

- a guide through life without placing any metaphysical importance on “self” or God – the (wrongly) supposed architect of the collapsed project of modernity.
- a means to revitalise the depleted spiritual sap of the western civilisation.

Aloysius Pieris SJ, the Theravada Buddhist scholar, commenting on the increasing western interest in Asian religions goes as far as to say: “...[the] contemporary West, in allowing itself to be seduced by the mystique of the East, may probably be indulging in a massive sociological ritualization of a deep psychological need to sharpen its Oriental instinct blunted by centuries of misuse” [*Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988, p. 8)].

The issues that I have briefly outlined in this presentation will help us to appreciate Buddhism and invite us to dialogue with it. Once we begin to decipher what is happening in our contemporary world and interpret them theologically one thing becomes obvious with regards to the significance of Buddhism: We have to dialogue with Buddhism not only because it is considered a “world religion” but because the influence it exercises in the contemporary West is both a commentary on the socio-cultural, religious and political state of the West and the events that have occasioned such a state of affairs.

The Revd Dr Ruwan Palapathwala

Inter Faith and Mission in England by Andrew Wingate

As with the USA there is an issue around the age of those involved in inter faith work, particularly among Christians. The Hindus involved in dialogue ask me to bring along more young people to the meetings to correspond to the young people they bring. Young Christians tend to belong to exclusivist groups.

The statistics in England state there are fifty five million people. Last year's census was the first to include a question on religious affiliation. The Muslims in particular were interested to have such a question, which was voluntary. About ninety four percent answered the question. Muslim numbers were only one point six million. They were perhaps expecting a higher figure and it probably is a higher figure because the asylum seekers (who would not register) are one hundred thousand per year at the present time - the greatest number there has ever been, and about seventy percent of those are Muslims. In the city of Leicester for example there are ten thousand Somalis, many of who would probably not register. There are five hundred and sixty thousand Hindus, about three hundred and sixty thousand Sikhs, three hundred thousand Jews, one hundred and twenty thousand Buddhists. The Buddhist figure is higher than people expected because of white conversions to Buddhism, greater than any other religion. The Jewish figure is declining each year, many going to the United States or Israel or clustering in cities where they feel safe. In Leicester where I am the Director of Inter Faith Relations and Training Officer there are forty four percent nominal Christians. Those attending Church would be probably be ten percent of that or a little higher perhaps if you take all the churches. The other faith figure is thirty six percent - nearly all of those are Indians, mostly Gujaratis. Conversions to Christianity are happening in small but significant numbers among Iranian asylum seekers. This has been very surprising. The only conversions that take place from among asylum seekers are Iranians.

The oldest area for Christian dialogue for people with other faiths is of course with the Jewish community. Jews have long taken refuge in Britain. For a period there were no Jews here, after the Black Death they were sent away. So for a long time there was no anti-Semitic problem in Britain because there were no Jews. Oliver Cromwell brought back the Jews because he said 'You cannot be a Christian without a Jewish neighbour'. In recent times the Council for Christians and Jews has played a very important part in enabling the dialogue since World War II to become part of the national dialogue scene and in many ways has paved the way for other groups. Issues of Israel Palestine of course make this particularly sharp at the present time. However, following two recent attacks on Muslim graves which took place in Leicester there has been a deal of solidarity from the Jewish community about the destruction of these graves. Recent years have seen a significant growth in initiatives for dialogues with the other religions, Christians and Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and others. They are encouraged through the existence, in London, of the Inter Faith Network which is a focus for the Government and others in wanting to gauge the opinion of the other religions. This has encouraged local initiatives. So there is a map of local Councils of Faith and in Leicester, for example, there has been one since the mid 1980s and Michael Ipgrave has been a significant figure in its foundation and development. The Anglican presence there is still very significant. We also have a faith leaders meeting convened by the Bishop and the Bishop is trusted by all faiths and is often called 'our Bishop' by faith leaders of the Hindu and Muslim communities. This deals with contentious political and international issues and after 9/11 made the significant statement - 'An attack on one

religion in our city would be considered an attack on us all' that is the NATO doctrine transferred to the inter religious field.

In Leicester we have a range of dialogue groups; Muslim Christian, Muslim Christian Women - which is much more lively in many ways, Hindu Christian, Hindu Muslim and a three faiths group- a so called Family of Abraham Group, as suggested by a Muslim Imam. These discuss contentious issues such as racism, faith schools, conversion, mission, asylum seekers, and refugees. They have engaged in common fasting, common fund raising for joint appeals for places like Afghanistan and the Middle East, Israel Palestine. We have had prayer publicly, with the media covering it, not together but alongside each other for the Iraq War and so on - showing solidarity against our government. I think it's partly because of the existence of this kind of group and their prior friendships that we have weathered a number of storms. In particular the post 9/11 period, the Iraq War period and the attempt of white racist groups to break up the harmony. There's an organisation called the British National Party, which is a very right-wing semi-fascist party, and they target Muslims quite unambiguously. It is illegal to attack races but not religions and the targeting of Muslims, gaining allies from certain helpful Hindus and Sikhs, has been in danger of disturbing the peaceful co-existence. In the North of England there have been riots and disturbances in a number of cities. There are now seventeen British National Party Councillors in the North of England, but none I think in London or the Midlands - may be one in the Midlands.

We have a National Office and Michael Ipgrave is that together, with a part time secretary - not just for the Church of England but for all the denominations put together. The reality of the Anglican establishment is good and bad. But one of the most significant aspects of both George Carey and Rowan Williams' leadership has been to enable confidence to grow among other faith communities that the Church of England basically is for them. Rowan Williams in particular was almost venerated amongst the Muslim community for his stance on the Iraq war and there were two million Christians, Muslims and secular groups who marched in London just before the Iraq war and we walked together carrying banners saying 'Not in Our name'. I travelled on a coach with fifty Muslims and three Christian priests and it was a wonderful experience of dialogue, particularly on the return journey when sacramentally they shared their food with us.

The present Archbishop has continued the initiative of George Carey in enabling a listening to Muslims exercise to take place in six cities, because each city is different. This has explored how Muslims and Christians interact, with a longer-term goal of forming a national group or forum for an ongoing listening initiative. Another major sector is in the economic and social regeneration of our major cities. They have been in flux because of the decline of industry and the need for regeneration economically and in a city like Leicester the Asians play a major part in this - Hindus there on the whole are not poor and their investment in the city is part of its regeneration. How can we enable them to feel fully part of our Local Council for example? The whole political scene in Leicester depends upon Muslim and Hindu votes. Muslims turned against the ruling Labour Party because of the Iraq war and the whole Council moved to Liberal Democrat control. This has made them realise their power in this respect.

There are big issues also about education. We have ninety church schools in our Diocese. Muslims want their own schools and I think we have to support them. They have a few private schools but are beginning to obtain State aided schools and I see this movement developing. As regards Christians, the education of Christians into the inter faith realities is a central part of my work. It is vital to increase the confidence of Christians in our cities who in many ways feel beleaguered, isolated and people of the past. The prominence of Hindu festivals, for example, on our streets and the fact that the Red Cross last Christmas took out of their shops all Christmas cribs for fear of offending the Muslims may fuel these feelings. Actually the Muslim Imam said that was a nonsense, but there is an over sensitivity from the multi cultural industry. Also, churches find it a very threatening situation to be in areas where there the population is perhaps eighty percent other faiths, mainly Muslim. Or again, where a congregation is forty people on a good Sunday whilst the mosque up the road has a regular congregation of five, six, even seven hundred. Michael Ipgrave and I are involved in the beginning of a study called 'Presence and Engagement' which is to enable churches in these areas to feel that they have a place, they are a sacramental presence within our multi religious context. These congregations need the support of the rest of the church because there are real dangers we will withdraw from those kinds of areas.

Finally, theological and biblical reflection is fundamental to how we consider all these issues. The link between our to keynote talks is very important. There is a danger of polarisation between the pluralists on the one hand and exclusivists on the other (forgive the labelling). There is a need to listen to each other, a need for intra Christian dialogue, a need for people not to feel superior to those who hold a different view. Rather we need to find the means to enable us together to grapple with the gospel command to do with mission along with the need to engage with the kind of social and national issues I have touched on whilst also sharing our faith at the deepest level. Those of us who may be on the more inclusivist side need to find a mandate and understanding of mission where we do not think that the salvation of those we are with depends on that mission, but that never the less we have a mission and need to discern what that mission is. Open Evangelicals I find are extremely

committed to this kind of journey and have a zeal for mission that takes them into this kind of encounter. Our national Hindu Christian dialogue (which Michael and I again are involved with and Israel) interestingly has been very difficult. The Muslim Christian dialogue are, I have found, straight forward give as good as you take experiences. The National meetings that we have with Hindus are fraught with rocks. Many people in Britain, perhaps most have a very romantic view of Hinduism. I never hear the word dalit mentioned and if we want to mention it in our national group we have to think do we mention the difficult issues at the beginning or wait until we have grown up a trust? This is one of the issues we have not raised but I know amongst the Hindus that come to our group there will not be one dalit, they have been written out of the map. Also the whole issue of conversion as in South Africa is with us also. We've spent two years trying to draft a goodwill statement that can be agreed by Hindus and each time we seem to be at an agreement they slip back from it This is because behind everything the Hindutva ideology is very strong amongst the leadership and money of course comes over to us from that. The VHP and the RSS are in Leicester and so on.

A word of encouragement about the 'patch' Sathi Clarke talked about in the keynote addresses. I've been very heartened on three occasions to be asked to be the patch or for Christians to be the patch. One was when there was a clash between Muslims and Jews and I was asked to chair a meeting of six Muslims and six Jews involved to try to get them to listen to each other. Second was when the local Islamic Institute, a very renowned place, asked us Christians to advise them on the setting up of a course for Chaplaincy work. We are now the advisers, half of the teachers and half of the examiners for that course because Muslims say Christians know about Chaplaincy - Imams are not used to that field. Finally the set up of the Muslim Hindu dialogue group came because of our Christian groups and the wish from one of the Muslim leaders to engage in that even more difficult dialogue. I am of course not part of that but he discussed that with me and now that is going along. In this dialogue Gujarat of course becomes the major issue very quickly and its very good to have the Bishop of Gujarat here and I hope we can hear about his situation at some point.

Inter Faith Dialogue and Christian Mission in Korea

By the Revd Dr Guen Seok Yang (Anglican Church of Korea)

1. General Context

Colonialism, cold war confrontation and developmentalist despotism were the three stages of last century of Korean history. Most Korean political, economic, cultural and religious conflicts are very much in debt to those historical experiences. For the majority of responsible thinkers in Korea, the crucial concern for their intellectual endeavour is how to overcome the heritages descended from those three historical experiences of perversion. Even in the overwhelming advance of globalisation, such a historical recognition is neither abandoned nor outdated by them. Rather, I believe, it is continued to be refined as a more elaborate idea, particularly within the Korean peoples' struggle against the ruthless appetite of neo-liberal capitalist globalisation.

The Christian history, particularly protestant history of Korea, has followed the same trajectory of the rather sad history of transaction with Western modernism. Under the colonialist formation of power relations, in which unequal communications were legitimised and the denial of Koreans interpretative potentials was socio-culturally generalised the protestant Christian mission was started. Because of the already formed colonial relations, Christianity could avoid an excessive burden to be a prime suspect of anti-Korean culture, and Christianity could compete and collaborate with Japanese colonialism under the common recognition of the inevitability of the unequal colonial power relationship with Koreans. The cold war in Korea has left not only several millions of victims but also deep scars of division. The atrocious antagonism between ideologies, and between religion and ideology, was the experience of the cold war confrontation. Through the war, Christian churches had experienced the oppression and antagonism by the communist ideology of North Korea. It was time for them to arm with anti-communist spirit. The exclusive and antagonistic attitude against the ideologies, cultures and religions became a socio-cultural character of the divided country. Exclusivism and dogmatism were the principles of cold war confrontation, not only for religions but also for political ideologies. Under the development of military dictatorship, this religious and ideological dogmatism was combined with the capitalist spirit of competition. It is not too excessive to say that this deliberate combination of religious ideological dogmatism and the capitalist spirit of competition is the main reason for the rapid economic and religious growth in Korea.

With the beginning of more democratised civil government and the end of the cold war system of the world in the 1990s, Korean society is experiencing unexpected confusions. For the development of democratic society and for the reunion of a divided country, Korean society demands a more tolerant and dialogical attitude of all segments of society. Korean society is waiting for the emergence of the new vision for humanity and community. I believe Korean peoples are expecting religions including Christianity to respond and to co-operate with others for the new vision of humanity and community. However, Korean religions including Christianity are not very ready to commit themselves to dialogue with others, particularly just to satisfy the peoples' expectation.

The overcoming of negative heritages of colonialism, cold war, and military dictatorship, and the participation to the constructive and co-operative dialogue with the other religions and ideologies, are both the basic contexts of Korean inter faith dialogue and for a Christian theology of religions.

2. The Social Practices of Inter Religious Co-operation

In spite of the history of conflict and division, there have been experiences of inter-religious co-operation for social and national issues. The most foundational experience of inter-religious co-operation for national issues was the "March 1st movement", in which all the Korean religions including Christianity had co-operated in the independent movement against Japanese colonialism in 1919. Until now, this experience has become the foundational reason for why all the religions should co-operate with each other on national issues.

Although the reason is not very clear, the Anglican Church of Korea has been known as a church truly respecting Korean traditional culture. Perhaps it maybe the distinctive church building styles following Korean tradition. But as on reflection, the most important Anglican missionary experience for the inter-religious co-operation was the 1960's mission for coal miners. According to Bishop John Daily's diary, this mission was started very accidentally. One day, he was searching for missing students in mine villages. They were students who were arrested and sent to the mines by military government. As he was going to leave one village student camp failing to find his missing students, one of those students in the camp, asked the bishop to pray for them. Most of the students were not Christians. The bishop's translator, he was also a Buddhist, translated their request. When the bishop hesitated ho to do so, the Buddhist translator sincerely asked him to pray for them. Bishop John Daily remembered the experience as on eof the most exciting moments of his mission in Korea. Several months later, he started his mission for coal miners in that place. This mission has been known as the beginning of Korean industrial mission of the Christian church. Furthermore, he wanted to build an octagonal hall as a church building at the village. He planned to provide the eight different corners of the octagonal hall to different Christian denominations and other religions including Buddhism. Although his dream was not achieved, his experience has become a very important heritage of Anglican ecumenical and inter-religious co-operation.

Recently, the inter-religious co-operation for social issues and each of the religion's intended efforts to so-operate with other religions is clearly expanding. Many Buddhist temples are pronouncing congratulatory messages at Christmas. Some Christian churches, particularly Roman Catholic Churches, are celebrating the birth of the Buddha with Buddhists. But the most exciting experience, which will be remembered for a long time, was the 'three steps and one bow' protest journey that was organised very spontaneously in order to stop the national government's land reclamation project. This journey led by Buddhist and Christian leaders continued for sixty-five days. Finally, it succeeded in gaining the co-operation of most of the religions in Korea, and temporally achieved its goal of stopping the land reclamation project. With the success of this very religious protest journey for an environmental issue, the inter-religious co-operation for social issues becomes a much more widely and easily accepted agenda for Christian churches in Korea. We can expect that this developing and widening co-operation among religions in Korea will be advanced into a deep spiritual and theological dialogue.

3. Historical Experience of Inter Faith Dialogue

The history of inter faith dialogue in academic groups has to go back to the first encounter between 18th century Korean Confucian scholars and Christian literature, which was published as the result of 17th to 18th century Jesuit mission in China. This Christian literature includes the Chinese translation of Christian texts and Christian or non-Christian Chinese scholars' texts about Christianity. Through this encounter, a very spontaneous Confucian-Christian community has been established without any direct intervention from Roman Catholic missionaries in China. Although this pre-colonial and very voluntary acceptance of Christianity by Koreans has not been seriously reflected by official Roman Catholic historians or even by Korean scholars of mission studies, I believe this historical experience tells us many things about the present discussions about inter faith dialogue and Christian mission. Here I would like to talk about just one point. It is about what kind of process Confucian scholars had taken to understand Christianity. This small group of young Confucian scholars' main concern was to find a new way of self-discipline and governing of people (or community relationship), which are key themes of Confucianism. They had voluntarily read Christian texts. Their reading of Christian texts was not confined to intellectual and doctrinal understanding. They tried to practice Christian liturgical and spiritual teachings. They used to their own style of comparative method to read Confucian and Christian texts cross-scripturally as well as top practice the self-discipline methods of Confucianism an Christianity very cross-religiously. Through these readings in liturgical or spiritual practices, they wanted to carefully work out what changes were made in their mind and soul, and they wanted to find what kind of help the Christina teaching could give for the new way of self-discipline and community relationship. One interesting thing was that this experimental study had been carried out in the Buddhist temple by a group of sincere Confucian scholars. These Confucians' voluntary encounter with Christianity had given deep influences for the reformation of Confucianism and one of the results of the encounter was the voluntary formation of Christian community in Korea. However, Roman Catholic missionaries in China criticised the leaders of this community as sinners who profaned God and the church,

furthermore, the Korean Confucian government suppressed them as heretics. I believe this pre-colonial experience of the encounter between Confucianism and Christianity tells us many things about today's issues, like "What is the foundational motivation for inter faith dialogue?", "What kind of process has been taken in inter faith dialogue, particularly in relationship to various aspects of religious practices?", "What is Christian mission in the situation of inter faith dialogue?", "What is an equal and creative dialogical relationship among partners?".

Even after the beginning of protestant mission at the end of 19th century, this kind of comparative approach by Christian and non Christian Korean intellectuals has been continued. However, the present situation of inter faith dialogue, particularly after Christianity became one of the dominant religions in Korea, is not very easy. Rather, the Christian churches' narrow and triumphalistic attitude looks likely to suppress the sincere dialogue among religions.

4. The Present Disputes on Inter Faith Dialogue

In this final section, I would like to introduce the theological conflicts between church leaders and theologians involved in inter faith dialogue. In order to avoid too much theoretical discussion, I am explaining a discussion among church ministers, theologians and a Buddhist scholar, which was organised and publicised by one of the representative Korean theology journals, "Theological Thought". This dialogue shows us a development of the discussion of inter faith dialogue in Korea. As many Asian theologians know, Korean Christian churches except Roman Catholics were very antagonistic towards inter faith dialogue. Most Christian church leaders have regarded inter faith dialogue and pluralism as the most serious potential threat to Christianity. So, two eminent scholars from a Methodist Theological seminary had been expelled from their teaching position by Methodist church leaders. Some Presbyterian scholars has also been expelled or threatened with expulsion. But this situation is changing slightly since the middle of 1990s. With the development of the social experiences of inter-religious co-operation and public opinions' strong criticism of Christian exclusivism, the situation has advanced toward a more or less positive direction. The dialogue in the theological journal reflected such a changed situation.

In this dialogue, church ministers tried to put their emphasis on inter-religious co-operation for social issues rather than theological dialogue, and theologians did their best to persuade them of the need for theological dialogue. Here, what we have to look at is what kind of theological rhetoric and logic is used against intellectual and theological inter faith dialogue by church ministers. There is no change in their position that the inter faith dialogue, which is advocated by theologians, is paralysing the belief and the church membership of individual Christians as well as the mission and the very existence of Christian church. If I may summarise their assertions, in spite of the danger of over simplification, firstly, they consider that the inter faith dialogue promotes relativistic attitudes threatening the absoluteness of Christian truth. For them, all thoughts rejecting the absoluteness of Christian truth are anti-Christian. Secondly, they consider that Christians cannot devote themselves to mission without conviction about the absoluteness of Christian truth. Therefore, they assert that the pluralistic approach of inter faith dialogue is negating the inherited nature of the Christian church as a missionary community, and in the end it is destroying the foundation of the existence of the Christian church. Thirdly, they assert that theologians who are involved in inter faith dialogue are not in the position to decide the relationship among religions. Looking from their point of view, theologians' ideological and transcendental attitude pursue only what should be done without considering the living relationship with religions and religious individuals. Therefore, they ask theologians to reflect the living relationships instead of sticking to the ideological presuppositions. In this point, some of the contextual theologians support the church ministers' assertion. They also complain that inter faith dialogue in Korea is not very contextual, rather it is very western in its subjects and concerns. Fourthly, they assert that the problem of truth and the issue of co-operative practices for social issues have to be differentiated. Furthermore, they consider that co-operative inter-religious social practices have to precede theoretical and intellectual practices. Here, the church ministers advocate the reductive method of contextual theology, particularly of Minjung theology. Fifthly, they assert that the theologians do not have any concern for the development of the church and the concrete life of church members. They think theologians are people who judge the Christian church from outside the churches. They consider that is why theologians do not give any alternative suggestions about the issues that churches are facing in this secularised world of relativism. Although the assertions are expressed roughly and are rather church centred they clearly show the theological agendas that interfaith dialogue has to solve.

Inter Faith Dialogue and Mission in Malaysia

1. Introduction

One of the distinctive features of Malaysia is the great diversity of its peoples and cultures. Although the people have some common physical, mental and cultural characteristics, there are important differences among the various ethnic groups and peoples, especially in language and religion. The uniqueness and distinctiveness of

Malaysia's history, multi-racial population, religions and languages are not only seen as assets but have also become creative challenges in a pluralistic society.

2. The 'Melting Pot': Ethnic, Cultural and Religious Pluralism in Malaysia

Malaysia is a secular federation comprising eleven states in the Peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia and the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan. Successive periods of European colonisation entered the Malay peninsula beginning with the Portuguese in 1511, followed by the Dutch (1641-1824) and finally the British from the nineteenth century up to Malayan Independence in 1957.

The current total population of Malaysia is about 23.27 million^[1] with about 75% of them living in Peninsula Malaysia. The most outstanding characteristic of the population is its highly variegated ethnic mix. This feature makes it one of the prime examples of a multi-racial society in the world.

Generally speaking, Malaysians can be classified into two main categories: those with cultural affinities indigenous to the region and to one another, who are known as *bumiputera* (lit. 'sons of the soil'); and the *non-bumiputera* whose cultural affinities lie outside of the region. The *bumiputera* groups themselves, comprising 65.1% of the population, are highly differentiated. There are three broad categories: the aborigines (*orang asli*); Malays; and Malay-related.

Malays include those who have settled in the country (mainly in the Malay Peninsula) since the 19th century such as the Javanese, the Banjarese, Boyanese, Bugis, Bajau and Minangkabau. The third or non-Malay *bumiputera* category consists of ethnic groups found in Sarawak and Sabah. They are the Iban, the Bidayuh, the Melanau, Kenyah, Kayan and Bisayuh in Sarawak. In Sabah, the Kadazandusun form the largest single ethnic group with the Murut, Kelabit, and Kedayan forming significant minorities.

The non-bumiputera groups consist mainly of the Chinese (26.0%) and Indians (7.7%), with much smaller communities made up of Arabs, Sinhalese, Eurasians and Europeans. The Chinese population of Malaysia is derived largely from South China, with the Cantonese and Hokkien forming the largest dialect groups. Amongst the Indians, the largest group are the Tamils from South India and Sri Lanka, with significant Punjabi and Malayalee minorities.

Southeast Asia has been called "the cross-roads of religions". Religion is highly correlated with ethnicity and almost all of the major religions of the world have substantial representation in Malaysia. At present, Islam is the most widely professed faith in Malaysia with about 60.4% [58.6%]^[2] of the total population made up of Muslims. Nearly all Malays are Muslim, along with Tamil, Malayali, Gujarati and Punjabi Muslims, and around 20 per cent of the tribal peoples, thus making Islam the dominant religion. Christians form 9.1% [8.0%]; Hindus 6.3% [6.4%]; Buddhists 19.2% [18.4%]; Confucianists/Taoists/other traditional Chinese religionists 2.6% [5.3%]; Folk/Tribal Animistic Religionists 1.2% and Others 2.1% of the total population.^[3]

Although the total Christian population is about nine percent, in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak this rises to about 40 per cent. In Malaysia, there are some 400,000 Roman Catholics, 150,000 Methodists, 80,000 Anglicans, and around 200,000 other Christians, including fast growing Pentecostal and independent neo-charismatic churches.^[4] A study found that there are 4,553 Christian churches in the nation, 3,113 of which can be considered Evangelical.

The Muslims are mainly of the Sunni stream, adhering to the Shafii school of law. However, Shi'ite elements are evident, and Malays are attracted to the mystical aspects of Sufism. The Chinese mainly practise Chinese folk religion, with ancestor veneration rituals, and elements drawn from Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. The Indians are mainly Hindus, mostly Saivas, though with some Vaishnavas among immigrant groups with roots in northern India. There are also small, well-knit communities of Sikhs in most urban centres.

3. Religious Freedom and the Position of Islam in the Constitution

Since achieving independence in 1957, Islam has been the official religion of the Federation of Malaya. This does not in any way suggest that Malaysia is an Islamic state. While the Malaysian Constitution recognises the government's obligation towards Islam, it also pledges to uphold freedom of worship and to allow non-Muslims to practise their own religions.^[5] The issue of religious freedom and the position of Islam in Malaysia provides for a most pertinent and interesting illustration of the interaction between religion, politics and socio-economic factors in the modern world.

4. The Rukunegara and Vision 2020

A set of principles known as the Rukunegara (or the National Ideology) serves as a guide to peaceful and harmonious living in Malaysia. The following is the set of articles/principles formulated as an endeavour to bring about national unity among Malaysia's multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society:

- Belief in God
- Loyalty to King and country
- Upholding the Constitution
- Rule of law and
- Good behaviour and morality.

The year 1990 marked the end of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and the formulation of Vision 2020. Malaysia intends being a fully industrialised and developed nation by the year 2020. Vision 2020 provides the basis for the development of a Malaysian society within the context of accelerated industrialisation and the internationalisation of the Malaysian economy anchored in the principles of the Rukunegara. Within the ambit of the shaping of the common Malaysian identity and destiny, the Rukunegara and Vision 2020, will occupy cardinal reference points.

5. Ecumenism in Malaysia

When Malaya achieved independence in 1957 the churches began to show signs of 'nationalisation' by moving from expatriate to local leadership. The Malayan Christian Council, inaugurated in 1948 later became the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM) in 1975.

The National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) brought together a vast variety of non-mainline evangelical denominations and congregations to form a new ecumenical body in 1983.

The Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) was established in 1985. The CFM brought together three major streams of Christianity - the Roman Catholic Church, the Churches affiliated to the CCM and the NECF. There was the need for a more broad-based ecumenical body and a unified voice in dealing with the government as well as other religious and secular bodies in the country. The primary challenge facing ecumenism in Malaysia is in relating Malaysian churches to local cultures and traditions.

6. Interfaith Groups in Malaysia

Interfaith interaction and engagement in Malaysia can be noticed at three distinct levels:

- as religious, hierarchical elite for consultative purposes,
- as intellectuals/professionals who form citizens groups in dialogue with a view of promoting interreligious harmony and understanding, and
- as grassroots interreligious NGOs in social action.

6.1 Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism

MCCBCHS, established in 1983 is composed primarily of religious officials from the four main religions. The chief role of the *Majlis* (Malay for Council) is to act as a consultative and liaison body. The Majlis has expressed concern about the Islamisation policy of the government as well as other human rights and social issues. The Council acts as a watchdog organisation monitoring enactments and policies that affect the religious life of minority religious groups in the country.

6.2 Interreligious Spiritual Fellowship (INSaF)

INSaF is another interfaith organisation initiated by the Hindu charitable body, The Pure Life Society. Members of INSaF come from various religious backgrounds, including Islam. They are largely professionals who share a common view of the universality of God and the shared humanity of all people. Interaction and interreligious understanding among members is fostered through religious dialogue and symbolic friendship acts such as gathering for Religious Harmony Day and Organ Donation Campaign.

6.3 Malaysian Women in Ministry and Theology (MWMT) and Asian Women's Resource Centre (AWRC)

These groups are determined to raise awareness, especially in the church, on issues related to gender roles and power sharing. These ecumenical organisations also share advocacy work and awareness raising together with other women's groups such as Sisters in Islam. They also promote interfaith solidarity among women.

6.4 International Movement for a Just World (JUST)

This movement advocates civilizational dialogue. It has organised interfaith dialogue on issues related to globalisation in cooperation with the International Christian Peace Movement (Pax Christi).

6.5 Malaysian Interfaith Network (MIN)

This body was formed recently in December 2002 comprising of representatives from all the major religions including Islam. MIN was established to provide a platform of communication for the various interfaith organisations, initiatives and actions in Malaysia; to promote the common values shared by all faiths; and to foster interfaith understanding and co-operation.

6.6 Grassroots NGOs in Social Action

There are a few interreligious groups which have made their impact through involvement in social action. They deal with grassroots problems of poverty alleviation, single-parent households, domestic violence, etc. Some groups provide legal aid for squatter populations. There are other interreligious groups which work with people suffering from HIV/AIDS.

7. Key Issues and Challenges Facing the Church in Malaysia

- By and large the Church in Malaysia is still considered a Western vestige and outside the mainstream of the nation's life and development. The greatest challenge of the church here is to develop a Malaysian identity.
- Secondly, Christians have tended towards a ghetto mentality among themselves. The churches have been preoccupied with their own existence and organisation, and correspondingly they have lagged behind in prophetic concern for social relevance and outreach of the gospel into the mainstream task of nation building.
- Another part has been a pietistic heritage, which does not take social struggles seriously. In many instances, there has been a lack of understanding and knowledge about the dynamics of social change.
- With the growing intensity of the Islamisation policy, non-Muslims are anxious about greater restrictions being imposed upon the practice of their religions.

8. Contemporary Challenges to the Church's Mission

- There is first of all the challenge to a wider and deeper understanding of mission and evangelism. Christians are being challenged to see nation building as the area in which God is at work through the Holy Spirit. Christians need to be conscientised to come out of their shells and exercise a more caring attitude to issues of national interest and take their rightful place as the salt and light in society.
- Secondly, this whole situation in Malaysia holds a challenge for Christian unity and church union. The government will listen to *one* "church" voice, but not to a host of voices from divided churches. More concerted efforts at transcending denominational, cultural, racial and linguistic barriers should unite Christians in Malaysia for further effective Christian witnessing.
- Thirdly, there is the challenge of new approaches to mission and service. Christians are called to cooperate with others for common good in addressing issues such as social ills, moral decadence, social and communal injustices, etc. A deeper and more critical understanding of one's faith in a pluralistic context will help the Christian present Christ in a confident manner through daily encounters and interactions.
- There is an urgent need for a serious effort to understand Islam and other Asian religions. Mission and evangelisation can hardly be relevant and meaningful in a multi-religious context unless Christians in Malaysia formulate a contextualised and relevant 'theology of religions'.

1. Statistics based on *Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristics Report: Population and Housing Census 2000*. Putrajaya: Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2001. Available: <http://www.statistics.gov.my/English/PageDemo.htm> [6 November 2001].
2. The figures from the *Population and Housing Census of Malaysia 1991* are given in square brackets.
3. Statistics for Folk/Tribal Animistic Religionists and Others are based on *Population and Housing Census of Malaysia 1991*. Kuala Lumpur: Department of Statistics, 1991.
4. Ian Harris, Stuart Mews, Paul Morris and John Shepherd(eds.), *Contemporary Religions: A World Guide* (Harlow, Middlesex, UK: Longman, 1992), p. 439.
5. See Tun Mohammad Suffian bin Hashim, *An Introduction to the Constitution of Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer, 1976), pp. 218-9.

Inter Faith Relations in Tanzania

By The Revd Canon John Simalenga<

The Arabs settled along the East African Coast Way back in 13th century. When the Portuguese reached East Africa in the 15th and 16th centuries on their way to the Far East, they saw Arab settlements at Kilwa and Mombasa.

Between 17th and 18th centuries Arabs and Portuguese together engaged in slave trading, which was abolished in the 19th century by the British Government. The coming together of Arabs, Portuguese and Bantu resulted in the making of Swahili language and culture along the East African Coast.

For many years, Christianity, Islam and Indigenous religions have co-existed peacefully. This was evidenced through intermarriages and sharing of communal festivals such as weddings, burials, etc.

From 1980s, East Africa began to experience the emergence of fundamentalist groups funded by Iran, Libya and Sudan. These groups began to wage war against Christians and declared 'jihad' to spread the Muslim faith. Coupled with using Muslim political leaders, Christian methods of evangelisation were used such as open-air crusades, building of schools, hospitals etc. Muslim men were also engaged to marry Christian girls and start small businesses. In the political and economic areas there was a strong move for African states to join the Organisation of Islamic Countries.

The climax of these fundamentalist activities was the al Qaeda bombings of US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998 when hundreds of people were killed.

Today fundamentalist activists are still active but largely checked.

From 2000 an Interfaith Council of Religious Leaders was formed in Tanzania and its main task is to dialogue on poverty eradication, the HIV/Aids pandemic and good governance. Tanzania has a population of 38 million - 45% Christian, 30% Muslim, 20% Indigenous and 5% other faiths.

Inter Faith Dialogue and Mission A perspective from the USA

Jolinda Matthews works at the University of Kansas in Ecumenical Christian Ministries and has also been actively involved with the World Student Christian Federation over the past eleven years.

National Context

Mythology of the founding of the United States is being rewritten in some ways to be one of the founding of the United States as a Christian Nation and not as a nation where freedom of religion is paramount. Examples include: Arguments around a Ten Commandments monument that was placed in a court building in Alabama by a judge. Lawsuits ensued to try and have the monument taken away because of the symbolism of the Ten Commandments. The judge wanted to emphasise the Christian foundation of the decision making in his courtroom. The law ruled that the monument should be removed although over a hundred Christians assembled to protest and pray that the monument might remain. Recently Court cases have been brought concerning the national pledge of allegiance requesting that the words 'under God' be removed from it as some students feel that being asked to say these words infringes on their rights. The term was only added in 1954 in response to Communism. At the same time there has been a call that there be a Constitutional Amendment to rewrite the

pledge so that 'under God' is retained. In Kansas within the last eighteen months evolution was taken out of the science syllabus and replaced with creation although this has since been revoked.

The current administration in Washington, both the President and the Vice-President, hold a Christian belief that by God and by history the United States has come to have a role of spreading Christian idealism in democracy. Also the largest and fastest growing Christian groups are non-denominational and fundamentalist. The main line denominations are not growing in such large numbers. These fast growing groups present Christianity as 'The Way' with little room for other faiths to be part of the dialogue.

Local Context

Events of September 11th 2001 brought out a lot of violence against Muslims throughout the United States. The local campus ministry declared itself a safe space as of September 12th 2001, so that anyone who felt they had been harassed or felt unsafe could come to the ministries' building for assistance. Surprisingly fourteen students turned up saying they had been harassed in the first twenty-four hours and that they wanted to return to their home countries, abandoning their studies. The Campus Ministry offered support and responded to requests from Muslim students for a broader dialogue even though their Mosque had been apprehensive. The dialogue continues, it is not just Muslim Christian dialogue but includes other faith groups.

Dialogue

At a local, state and national, level their continue to be dialogues between different faith groups, Christian Muslim, Christian Jewish, Jewish Muslim - all feel that they are being 'watched', and individuals that they are restricted by concerns not to appear to want to convert or to give away 'secrets' of the faith they represent. These are often a Christian led initiative, which brings its own limitations.

The Episcopal Church

Nationally for the Episcopal Church, Inter Faith work is a part of the Ecumenical Office. The Ecumenical Office was charged with taking on this work in 1999. The Inter Faith Office works with a number of organisations including:- The National Council of Churches, which has its own Inter Faith Relations and Inter Faith Office, also The Council for a Parliament of World Religions, (The Inter Religious Council of Central New York works through this office) The United Religion Initiative, The United States Conference of Religions and Peace, The World Conference on Religion and Peace, a number of Jewish Christian dialogues around The National Conference for Community Justice, The Council of Synods on Jewish Christian Relations. Around Muslim dialogue the Episcopal Church works with three organisations:- The Islamic Circle of North America, The Islamic Society of North America, and The Muslim American and Society, as well as its role with NIFCON.

A major new initiative to come out of the Ecumenical Office post September 11th is the Inter Faith Education Initiative, a joint project with the Episcopal Relief and Development Chairs. Responses to September 11th (fear, anger, and suspicion) revealed how misinformed many Americans are about the belief and practices of other religions. The Inter Faith web site outlines the basics of the faith of sixteen world religions and general guidelines. Educational events have also been held in the New York City area as well as seminars and resources for the National Church to do work around education on Inter Faith issues.

It has been recognised that there is too much work for one person to hold both the Ecumenical and the Inter Faith brief. There is an initiative by The General Convention was to make a full time position of an Associate Deputy for Inter Faith Relations. This role will be developed and the goal is to have a person in post by 2006. Although the goal is a long time off the commitment is to make this a permanent post.

Concerns

Those involved in both Ecumenical and Inter Faith work are ageing, young people are by and large not engaged in these dialogues. On the National Council of Churches there are few young people. There is a concern that work will not be continued beyond the current generation.

The move to the establishment of a Christian Nation as outlined at the beginning is alarming. A threat to the freedom of people to practice religion other than Christianity is also a threat to the freedom to practice Christianity in an authentic way.