

Inter Faith in Action – Perspectives

Perspective on inter faith relations from countries around The Communion. These were first presented at one of the NIFCON regional Consultations.

- Aoteroa, New Zealand and Polynesia
- Australia
- Egypt
- England
- Germany
- Ghana
- Korea
- Liberia
- Malaysia
- Pakistan
- Sudan
- 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 beautiful 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 variously 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 Churches¹.

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

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.

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 changed³, 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

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*.

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.

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 *Vajirayana* forms of Buddhism make numerous reference to gods (*devas*) one must note that they do not constitute a distinct *theology*).

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 McDonaldisation 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 partly be 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

Diocese of Egypt and North Africa with The Horn of Africa

by the Revd Raja Zabaneh, Bishop's Assistant For Interfaith Relations

- Egypt is a republic with Islam as the state religion. Approximately, 90% of Egyptians are Muslims the rest of the population are Christians.
- the real number of Christians 2006 World Fact book estimates that they constitute about 7.6 million or 10% of the Egyptian population.

Historical Background of Egypt

- Christianity entered Egypt in the first half of the first century A.D.
- In 639 an army of some 4,000 men were sent to Egypt under the command of Amr ibn al-As.
- When Islam entered Egypt after the defeat of the Romans on the hands of the Arabs, most Egyptians converted to the new religion while some Egyptians remained Christians When Amr Ibn El Aas, the Arabian army leader, conquered the Romans he assured people that their lives and belongings will not be touched, they will be safe in their homes
- The commitment of the Egyptians in early ages with Islam, and the engagement of their history with the Islamic ideology, have strengthened the most powerful tie, and strongest relations between them and their faith. The thing that helped them a lot in their struggle against all the hard challenges.
- Sustainability of the Interfaith Dialogue is due to the common identity of Egyptians.

The Diocese of Egypt and the Interfaith Dialogue

- Consecutive meetings with the interfaith Committee in the Diocese and the interfaith Committee in Al Azhar, to strengthen the Dialogue Concept not only among leaders and decision makers but also among decisions executives and nationally basis.

Planting the tree of Hope Project

- A joint project in coordination with the Episcopal Church in Egypt and Al Azhar El Sharif and the Ministry of Education to implement the Dialogue concept through developing the Educational system starting from primary classes passing through the higher classes.
- The Impact of this project is via competitions between several schools, networking, trips, and Family awareness programs where we find a lack of understanding in this issue and to let the students learn the Culture of dialogue.

Problems Encountering the Interfaith Dialogue

- Lack of Understanding to Both Religions.
- Lack of acceptance to Others Beliefs
- Criticizing without Clarifying

Planning to Demolish these problems

- Planting the Tree of Hope Project aiming to strengthen in our Children the Dialogue Culture.
- Advocacy through the Media to promote the culture of Dialogue.
- Sessions and Seminars to enable Muslims and Christians to learn their beliefs.

Egypt is Affiliated to all the Arab World

Libya - The concept of the accepting and respecting other beliefs was shown from the leader of the Islamic movement, in donating a Church from the 14th Century to the Anglican Church of Egypt

Publishing Papers of Dialogue

- Dialogue is the language of Jesus Christ... He used to teach and preach through dialogue and he used the language of dialogue to bring people to the truth.
- As well who reads the Holy Qur'an will find verses that commend dialogue as a method to solve numerous issues between different parties.
- By practicing dialogue, we deny a victory to those who would attempt to use religion to divide all humanity.
- Through interfaith dialogue, we can change the world for the better.

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 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 Gujrat of course becomes the major issue very quickly and its very good to have the Bishop of Gujrat here and I hope we can hear about his situation at some point.

Christian-Muslim relations and the protestant churches in Germany

By Rev. Dr. Barbara Bürkert-Engel, Ludwigsburg/Germany

1. The socio-political context

As a long-term result of the age of enlightenment and the ideas of French revolution, state and religion are separate. That's true to most of Europe, yet with a wide range of interpretation what this "separate" means in the political realm. On the one side of the scale we have countries like Italy or Poland with the roman catholic church, especially in its ethical teaching, being highly influential on legislation. On the other extreme there is French laicism, that keeps religion and religious symbolism strictly out of the public realm. Germany is something in between, not only geographically. One of the most precious principle of our constitutional law is religious freedom. The state has to guarantee it and to safeguard both the individual and the collective right, even in its negative form: the right not to believe.

History has provided us with political arrangements that worked so far. Muslim presence forces us to rethink and debate in public issues such as: what is the theological significance of religious communities in a society of western freedom? Or what role should and can religion play in the organizing of public life? Far too long we allowed mass media to be the first ones to jump on the topics involved, fuelling the necessary political discourse with rather heated emotions.

65% of our population are Christians: roman-catholics and protestants being about equal in numbers (25,9 mill / 25,8 mill), followed by 1,2 mill orthodox Christians. 30% have no official religious belonging at all. 5% are members of other religions: with a small number of Jews (0,2 Mill), and 3,2 mill Muslims. That makes up for about 3,8% of the population. Numerically Islam in Germany forms the second biggest Muslim minority in Europe. Or to put it differently: it is the largest minority religion in Europe. More Muslims live in protestant Northern Europe than catholics; and there are more Muslims in catholic southern Europe than protestants. However, compared with the west african setting, the Muslim segment of german population is extremely small. So why on earth are we dealing with that issue?

Because Islamophobia has been a growing phenomenon and it goes hand in hand with xenophobia, the fear of the stranger. In may 2006 2/3 of the polled Germans negated a peaceful coexistence with the Islamic world, 58% fear growing conflicts between Christians and Muslims and 40% wish legal restrictions on the religious practice of Islam

in this country ¹. If one flips the coin, Muslims experience discrimination: 57% say, they were discriminated at their working place; 49% feel disadvantaged while looking for appropriate housing; and 48% claimed that applying for a job was more difficult for them than for non-Muslims ².

Historically speaking, Islam in Germany is a rather new phenomenon. There have been individual Muslims (former prisoners of the Turkish wars, slaves and diplomats) since the 18th century, yet Islam officially arrived in my country (unlike Great Britain or France) with the foreign workers of the late fifties, followed by refugees and asylum seekers. It has been and remains the religion of the foreigners, the strange religion. Only about 1 million Muslims hold German passport (in contrast to Great Britain or the Netherlands where over 50% are citizens which means: they have the right to participate in elections and be elected). In Germany Muslims are less integrated in the political process of decision making. Unlike e.g. Protestants, Catholics or Jews they are not organized as "Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts" and therefore suffer from structural disadvantages: the state doesn't collect religious tax on behalf of them; their representation at communal development plans or media boards depend on good will; Islamic tuition as official subject in public schools structured parallel to Protestant or Catholic religious teaching is still on the agenda.

At the peak of the cartoon crises, Henryk Broder ³, a well-known Jewish journalist told that joke: "Jesus and Moses are sitting in a café making small talk. Suddenly Jesus stops asking: "By the way, Moses, do you know what happened to Muhammad?" Moses looks around and orders: "Muhammad, two coffee please!" Of course, I would never dare to tell that joke in a dialogue meeting. I am sure, nobody could laugh. But it is very much to the point: Christians and Muslims in German society are not on equal footing. Our social reality is multireligious and multicultural, yet our public awareness and our laws are not. They are biased towards Christian tradition. To give you just a few examples: The annual opening of parliamentary session always starts with a service. Of course, non-Christians are invited to it as well, but its Christian ecumenical. Christian nuns can wear their habit in public school, female Muslim teachers not. By law (Staatskirchenvertrag) public media stations not only cover various religious affairs, but have to allow for certain programs of Christian religious teaching, yet so far the Islamic community has no equivalent right. Besides two political events, only Christian feasts are public holidays. In some areas public life closes down even at the feast of Mary's Conception or Corpus Christi (although the majority of people have no clue what these feasts mean). Muslims celebrate Id al-fitr, Id al-adhar, Lailat al-qadr or Maulid without public notice. How should public know? All regular stationary calendars indicate only Christian dates, rarely Jewish festivals. It's up to interreligious activities to find out and publish themselves other-religious festival dates. Our society is multireligious, our awareness is not

2.) Interreligious church activities and issues

Many churches, church areas and umbrella organizations have their own special working units and representatives on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations. Church academies host networks of dialogue-groups, interreligious peace workers or Christian-Muslim couples, they hold seminars, summer-universities or conferences. Some of them have even specialized on this topic.

It's specific to our situation as churches in Germany, that we are engaged in two important, but very different dialogues: the Christian-Muslim, which is at stake here. And the Christian-Jewish, with a much longer and a far more complex historical and theological setting. The two dialogues run parallel - to say the least; more accurate: there was and still is a notion of competition / rivalry between the two: the synods and churches deal with the topics involved in very different ways. We have separate networks for the Christian-Muslim and the Christian-Jewish dialogue. The Evangelischer Kirchentag runs at least two different programs. In the nineties, when the notion of an abrahamic / monotheistic ecumene entered the scene, some dialogue initiatives opened up for discussions among all three monotheistic faiths. At some point there were good chances to weave these different strings of dialogue together, yet, at least on an institutional level, it didn't happen.

For various reasons: Both dialogues are backed by very different pressure groups. Those engaged in it, are torn into opposing solidarities in the political context of the Middle East. And their theological implications run into very different directions: the highly sensitive Christian-Jewish dialogue exposes the anti-Judaism of our theological tradition and church history and asks for a re-reading of our own scriptures. At least in a German setting, "antisemitism" means exclusively anti-Judaism, leaving aside the other relevant Semitic branch.

What holds long tradition in churches e.g. of the Middle East, has only recently become good practice in Germany: archdeacons, bishops, or the head of the EKD publicly greet the Muslim community at the end of Ramadan. These greetings are welcomed as a sign of respect to our neighbours in faith, yet they seem to get stuck somewhere in

¹ Institut for opinion research, Allensbach may 2006

² Halm, Dirk/Sauer, Martina: „Parallelgesellschaft und ethnische Schichtung“; in: APuZ 1-2/2006, 18-24.

³ Der Tagesspiegel, 03.02.2006

between on their way from top to bottom: local Muslim communities are little aware of them, and local Christian parish churches don't feel called to imitate them.

Mixed seminars for ministers and imams together are held sporadically, which is a promising idea, for both sides: imams learn more about the way, our churches are organized, and the questions, we face right now. And ministers get into contact with local imams

What are the major topics of Christian-Muslim encounter discussed within the churches? Its the building of mosques and the public azan; the head scarf for Muslim women in school and in public life; the establishment of regular Islamic tuition in German language parallel to protestant, catholic and Jewish religious teaching; issues of integration, tolerance and its limits; world wide ecumenical awareness and solidarity with Christians in Islamic countries; interreligious marriages and services of blessing; the legitimacy and limits of shared prayer, with both Muslims and Christians been present; sensitivity on Islamic issues within development agencies - just to mention a few topics

3.) where are we heading at?

You may have realized/wondered: so far I hardly mentioned theological questions arising from Christian-Muslim encounter. For good reasons.

Of course, our synods and committees discuss theological issues arising from dialogue in diverse sometimes very heated ways. Yet recent theological statements of the churches on Christian-Muslim dialogue tend to get increasingly conservative, dogmatically closed in. That is true to the latest publication of the EKD with the telling title "clarity and good neighbourhood"⁴, which awoke strong reactions from our Muslim dialogue partners.

Islamophobia is increasing – and the church communities participate. Secularism is increasing. And we as churches are afraid. As part of European Christianity we suffer from deep crisis. There seems to be an easy way out - In the words of a member of my congregation: "now we have to sell the church building. And all this because of Islam", meaning: its because of our pluralistic situation, that our churches are empty. It's because of Islam, that Christian teaching has so little relevance any more to people... We know, it's not! Yet there are even church documents that put the diminishing significance of the churches on equal footing with the challenging presence of Islam. It's a common and very dangerous argument: Islam is our enemy again. And "Christian Europe needs to be defended again.

Church theology, the official statements of many of our synods show a closed-in, non-dialogical concept of identity. They define, they wrap up. "Here we go, that's you. And now go, say who you are, reach out to society and respond to their needs!" "Necessity", "responsibility", "implications" - these are words with substantial weight and significance. But they don't imply reciprocity, they don't breath, they don't live, they don't taste. Old dark bread, german "Vollkornbrot": very healthy, but not fluffy, lacking the spirit. The whole situation is felt to be a big burden. That's why many of our responses as churches to the interreligious challenges are so late and lack courage: They smell of tiredness. They are half-hearted and fearful.

We meet as Christians and Muslims – but we don't live together. We define – but we don't pray together. We still act as hosts, not as guests sitting at the same table. Because the project of Christian-Muslim dialogue is not rooted in shared spirituality. We are lacking vision, we don't know, what hope drives us, what kind of future we want to expect and work for, as Christians and Muslims together. I Think, that's one of the reasons, why dialogue didn't become a movement within our churches.

The birthplace of MODERN Christian-Muslim dialogue has been within the churches. Today an exodus takes place, dialogue seems to become secularized. Just a few indicators: Recently the government established a permanent Islam conference – without participation of the churches. The municipalities initiate interreligious working groups, with the churches been only one among many. That's new to us. And I am not sure where it will lead us to.

⁴ Klarheit und gute Nachbarschaft. Christen und Muslime in Deutschland, EKD Texte 86, Hannover 2006

Interfaith Relations in Ghana: Faith and Citizenship

Introduction

Ghana has an estimated population of 20 million, comprising of over 60 different language and ethnic groups. On the religious front, the population is made up of adherents of African traditional religion, Christians, Muslims and more recently, pockets of religions and sects of Eastern origin. Christianity, Traditional religion and Islam are, however, the three dominant religions. According to the 2000 population census, Ghanaians are predominantly Christian, with more than two-thirds (68.8%) of the total population claiming to be Christian. Muslims are the second largest religious group with 15.9% followed by practitioners of Traditional African Religions with 8.5%.

Ghana is divided into ten political administrative regions. The Northern region is home to the largest Muslim community in the whole country (home to over a third of the total Muslim population). The most Islamised ethnic groups in Ghana are the Dagomba, Gonja, Mamprusis, Walas and the Bisa to some extent; all of northern extractions. We also have small proportions of southern ethnic groups like Fantis and Ashantis who are followers of the Ahmadiyya Movement which for that reason is locally known as "Fante or Asante Nkramo", i.e. Fante or Asante Islam in contradistinction to mainstream Islam patronized by people of northern Ghanaian origin and West African nationals. A number of Gas of the coastal area are also found in mainstream Islam.

Celebration and Confrontation

There is a Ghanaian proverb which says "too much meat does not spoil soup". On the whole, this proverb typifies the Ghanaian and indeed African ethno-religious make-up. At all levels, Christians and Muslims mix and do things in common right from the family to national levels. At the national level Ghana has a Catholic President and a Muslim vice who were sworn into office by a lay Methodist Chief Justice. Muslim chiefs in northern Ghana are known to invite Christians to come and plant churches within their domain. Christians and Muslims attend each other's religious festivals and services. Easter, Christmas, *Id ul-fitr* and *id ul-adha* are all national holidays celebrated by all. Muslim and Christian leaders attend and/or deliver goodwill messages at each other's national conferences, synods and conventions. Muslims ask for and appreciate Christian prayers offered in the name of Jesus! Similarly Muslims offer prayers for political leaders irrespective of their religious affiliation.

That is the good news. The bad news is that Ghana has had her fair share of inter-religious tensions and violence. In the mid 90s inter-religious violence in some key cities like Accra, Takoradi, Kumasi and Tamale were common phenomena. In Accra one source of inter-religious tension has been a controversial traditional ban on noise making, especially drumming for the duration of a month. Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians have always defied the ban claiming it is an infringement on their freedom of worship leading to confrontation and violence with adherents of primal religions and traditional authorities. After a series of interventions and meetings, this issue is now almost resolved with most Christians observing the traditional annual ban on noise making.

There is a history of tension and violent confrontations between different Muslim groups in Ghana, especially between Ahmadis and mainstream Muslim groups. The bloody confrontations of the early 1930s between Ahmadis and mainstream Sunni Muslims gave way to mutual suspicion, contempt and non-cooperation up until the end of the last century. Now there are attempts on the part of the national leadership to build bridges. A clear sign was December 2006 when the National Chief Imam attended the Ahmadiyya annual convention for the very first time and delivered a goodwill message. Another level of tension is that between indigenous Ghanaian Muslims and other West African nationals over leadership. The latter see themselves as the rightful custodians of the Islamic tradition and resent taking subordinate roles to indigenous Ghanaian Muslims. This has resulted in a number of violent confrontations during Friday prayers leading to the closure of a number of mosques by the authorities.

Between the mid and late 90s there were a number of violent confrontations between missionary minded Muslim groups made up of graduates from Arab universities and the majority traditional Ghanaian Muslim groups. The most notorious of these groups is what is known locally as the *Ahl ul-Sunna*, a Saudi trained *Wahhabi* inspired group. They verbally attack and publicly condemn traditional Muslim practices like production of charms and wearing of amulets which they see as mixing Islam with traditional religious practices and as such un-Islamic. The brand of Islam they see as 'pure' or 'orthodox' is that which is espoused in Saudi Arabia or other parts of the Arab-Muslim world.

Direct Christian-Muslim conflicts in Ghana have been few and far in between. Back in the mid 1990s there were isolated instances of Muslim groups attacking Christian preachers or churches for allegedly insulting Islam. These incidents took place in cities like Kumasi and Takoradi. Both in these places, Presbyterian churches were the targets of Muslim fury. In one of the instances, the leadership of both communities met at the national level and resolved to share the cost of repairing the damage caused. In some cases, Muslim groups attacked Christian preachers for provocative preaching and alleged insults against their beliefs. These confrontations have largely subsided and there has hardly been any such Muslim-Christian violence since the beginning of this century.

Factors Influencing Christian-Muslim Relations

Historical/Colonial Factors: Colonial policies of banning missionaries from 'Muslim' areas contributed in widening the divide between Muslims and Christians especially in the areas of education and development. This has resulted

in a situation whereby in Ghana Christians who are mostly southerners are generally better educated and the south better developed than Muslims who are generally northerners. This has been a source for stereotypical perceptions and resentment.

British policy of Indirect Rule which led to imposing Muslim rulers over non-Muslim groups especially in British Protectorate of northern Ghana contributed to the legacy of resentment most of which boiled over into open conflicts after independence. In one such conflict in 1994 between the Gonjas and Konkombas in northern Ghana, a Presbyterian minister was killed in his manse in Salaga while some Churches and Church institutions were attacked by Gonja fighters who are predominantly Muslim. Memories of Muslim slavery in parts of northern Ghana evoke resentment on the part of the victims and reinforce stereotypical views of the other and sense of superiority on the part of the erstwhile raiding parties. All of these tend to negatively impact Muslim-Christian relations in Ghana.

Muslim Dawah and Christian Missions

Ahmadis have a long tradition of polemical public preaching in Ghana. The leadership of the group which for a long time was dominated by Pakistanis, apparently imported polemical preaching from the 19th century Indian sub-continent. Ahmadiyya instituted public preaching against Christianity and mainstream Islam in Kumasi in the early 1930s. Until then Muslim and Christians simply minded their own business so to speak. Ahmadi anti-mainstream Islamic and anti-Christian preaching provoked bloody confrontations with mainstream Muslims in parts of Ghana. Ahmadis toned down their attacks on mainline Muslims with the appointment of the first Ghanaian leader of the Movement in the mid 1970s focusing their polemics mainly against Christians. In 2004 in Tamale in northern Ghana, the Regional Minister had to warn a Pakistani Ahmadi preacher who constantly attacked Christian practices, beliefs and the Bible on radio. Other mainstream Sunni groups joined the preaching bandwagon back in the 1980s leading to the proliferation of audio tapes and other literature to win non-Muslims to Islam and to show how wrong Christianity is.

As the pool of Traditional believers from which Christians and Muslim use to fish dries up, the two missionary religions are now fishing from each others ponds. Christian groups have sprung up with the sole aim of converting Muslims to Christianity. The most popular of these ministries is the *Converted Muslims' Christian Association* now called the *Straight Way Chapel* in Kumasi. This ministry was started in the late '80s in Kumasi by a convert from Islam and now operates in many parts of the country. Public preaching is conducted by this and similar groups in Muslim dominated neighbourhoods. Muslim converts are paraded in churches and at conventions to give "testimonies" about Islam and their conversion, most of which involve exaggerations and blatant distortions. Many have learnt lessons from the resultant attacks and are now toning down their polemics.

Political Interference and Opportunism.

Even though Ghana is a secular country, it has a long history of politicians manipulating religion for their political ends. The PNDC military government of the 1980s which started out with pro-Communist policies, pulled down the central mosque in Accra to make way for a car park. This evoked anger and curses from the Muslim community both local and abroad. Later on however, especially after the fall of communism, and in the eyes of some Ghanaians, the government seems to have lurched towards Islam and Muslim countries as possible alternative allies. In 1989, certain steps were taken by the Government which were widely viewed by the Christian population as attempts to undermine religious freedom in general and Christianity in particular.

First came an attempt to ban all broadcast of Christian gospel music over the national radio and television. Then followed the taking control over administration and replacing 'religious instruction' with 'cultural studies' in the curriculum of Christian Mission schools. Other measures included the enactment of an infamous 'Religious Registration Law' requiring all religious groups in the country to register with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism under conditions viewed by the mainline Christian leadership as dubious. These policies have long been reversed.

At the time that Christians were feeling they were coming under undue pressure from the government, a policy of positive discrimination was adopted towards Muslim Missionary schools, popularly referred to in Ghana as 'English/Arabic school'. The Government provided financial, personnel and material support for these schools. It permitted and in fact paid for the teaching of Arabic in the schools which in the eyes of Ghanaian Christians and Muslims alike is inextricably linked to the promotion and propagation of Islam. The Government also declared *Idd-ul-Fitr* and *Idd ul-adha* as national holidays. These policies are all still operative.

All these developments raised a sense of concern amongst most Ghanaian Christians. Since the change of government in 2001, most of the leadership of major Protestant denominations are viewed by Muslims and wider Ghanaian society as sympathetic if not openly supportive of the ruling party. The leadership of these churches who were once constant critics of the PNDC/NDC government in the 90s have become less critical of the present ruling party, the New Patriotic Party or NPP. Both leading political parties are vying for Muslim votes with the NDC portraying itself and generally viewed as the party with the largest Muslim/northern following. In other not to be outdone the ruling NPP government continues the tradition of government using tax-payers money to subsidise Muslim pilgrimage and is building a huge mosque for Muslims in Accra. Party politics may therefore have build

bridges between ordinary Muslims and Christians but it has also opened up new frontlines of polarization in Ghanaian society.

External Factors: Muslim countries tend to export their own rivalries into Ghanaian Muslim community by supporting and funding different Muslim groups. This is especially so with Saudi Arabia, Libya and Iran who compete at funding rival Muslim groups. Ghanaians felt the reverberations of the Impact of 9/11 and subsequent US led invasion of Iraq. Churches were threatened in Tamale but tension was diffused through personal contact with the local Chief Imam who condemned the threats in strong terms in the mosque and on the local FM stations. In October 2006 there were reports in the Ghanaian media of al-Qaida tapes in circulation in the capital, Accra. The National Chief Imam issued a strong statement publicly condemning such videos.

Family, ethnic and other bonds

There are numerous "inter-faith households" and members of same ethnic groups adhering to different religious persuasions. In such cases, bonds of family and ethnicity are stronger than religious affiliations and serve to neutralize religious animosities and in fact build interfaith bridges. There are instances where relatives of the Christian and primal religious traditions are called upon to contribute money for Muslim relatives to perform the pilgrimage in Mecca. Muslims attend ordination services involving Christian relations, friends or neighbors. Annual traditional festivals which are now a common feature of the Ghanaian religious calendar afford Christian, Muslim and their traditional counterparts of the various ethnic groups the opportunities for solidarity, renewal of ties and contribution towards developmental projects.

In Ghana, when we talk of people of different religions, especially Muslims, we are not talking about a community of immigrants or illegal immigrants or historical invaders and colonizers as in other places like the West, North Africa, Sudan or even Northern Nigeria. Muslims in Ghana are close relations and have always been full fledged citizens. Muslims and Christians work together very closely in various political parties. In most cases, party political loyalties override those of denominational or sectarian religious considerations. Hence it is common to find Muslims and Christians who share a lot in common in politics than they do with their co-religionists. As a result, though it has become an unspoken norm in Ghana to share the highest offices of president and vice-president between Christians and Muslims, many Muslims will vote for two Christians standing on the platform of a particular political party rather than an all Muslim ticket on a rival political platform! It can therefore be said that in Ghana Muslims and Christians don't have a luxury to tolerate one another. We actually literally celebrate each other!

Christian responses to the Muslim presence

It is fair to say Ghanaians Christians are not adequately prepared to respond to the challenge of the Muslim presence. Until very recently, very few seminaries taught Islam as a small part of comparative religion. The notion of a Muslim amongst the majority of southern Ghanaian Christians is that of a dirty, illiterate watchman from the north or uncouth bunch of strangers living in the dirtiest and filthiest part of the city known as *zongos*. These perceptions, however, have more to do with ethnic prejudices southerners generally harbour and express towards northerners than with religious ones. To such Christians of southern extraction, the Muslim presence has little or no relevance let alone consequence to them. It must be said, though, that in the wake of 9/11 and the recent *shari'ah* related violence in Nigeria is awakening some of the Christian leaders from their deep slumber on Christian-Muslim issues.

Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians on their part generally see Muslims purely as objects of evangelism. As far as this group of Christians are concerned, the only legitimate relationship a Christian can have with a Muslim is in the area of evangelism. The study of Islam to such Christians is always geared at looking for the "weaknesses" in order to prove to Muslims that there is no salvation in Islam.

There are however those who are seriously seeking to promote a better understanding of Islam and trying to creatively address the Muslim presence. The Christian Council of Ghana has an Interfaith Desk which seeks to organise seminars on Islam for Christians. Response to this approach is still very low key but set to pick up in momentum. If Ghanaians are to live to the proverb that 'too much meat does not spoil soup' then more needs to be done by injecting some intellectual dialogue into the dialogue of life for the latter on its own has proven in many instances to be very fragile.

It is in this connection that the Presbyterian Church of Ghana officially took a decision during the last General Assembly to establish an Interfaith Research and Resource Centre with the aim of informing and equipping the Church to respond biblically and intellectually to the Muslim presence. The Centre which takes off formally in September 2007 will work in partnership with all mainline protestant and Pentecostal denominations to organise seminars on interfaith issues, run short certificate courses on Islam and Interfaith Relations for Christians, facilitate Christian-Muslim dialogue sessions on issues of common interest and concern as well as initiate an academic programme of study on Islam and Interfaith Relations through the Akrofi-Christaller Institute.

Factors that undermine a sense of citizenship:

In Ghana like in all African countries there are multiple layers of identity labels. These include the clan, ethnic, religious and national. The concept of the Nation State is the new arrival on the market-shelf of multiple identities. The nation state of Ghana is therefore having to compete with the older identity categories for the loyalty of

Ghanaians. The competition has been complicated and in some cases undermined by the fact that the nation state is an artificial and arbitrary creation of outsiders, Western European colonial masters. The artificial lines called 'boundaries' have split ethnic communities into different countries. In these situations the choice of citizenship or faith in the nation Ghana is pitted against that of ethnic identity which is no respecter of national boundaries. In these cases the sense of citizenship always suffers.

Another undermining factor is the failure on part of state to earn the trust and confidence of citizens. Lack of good governance, local grievances of injustices and regional feelings of neglect in national development are all contributory factors. In the last month in Ghana, northern Ghanaians have organised number of demonstrations against the state for neglecting their areas and a group has recently emerged putting together a legal case against the British government seeking compensation for been responsible for the historical neglect of the north. Tied to lack of good governance is the issue of endemic corruption of state structures. Overwhelming majority of Ghanaians have little or no faith at all in the judicial system and security agencies of the state. The tendency therefore is for people to fall back on their ethnic and religious groupings, take the law into their own hands, and seek justice the form and way they know best.

Concluding Remarks

In my estimation therefore, the issue of citizenship is not a lack of trust between different faith communities, certainly not necessarily mutual mistrust between Muslims and Christians. It is lack of confidence and faith on the part of both Muslims and Christians in the state. Two things are needed in my judgement. First is a common unifying factor at the national level. In Ghana, the national football team, the Black Stars, and now the personality of Kofi Annan, immediate past UN Secretary General, seems to be the only strong unifying factors that is able to bring Ghanaians together. Secondly, Christians and Muslims need to unlock themselves from the secular-democracy versus shariacracy debate and together explore ways of fashioning more credible political and judicial systems that can compete with the older identity categories for the faith and confidence of the citizens. I don't think we can do this successfully unless and until African Muslim and Christians are prepared and permitted to take responsibility for their respective faith traditions to which they are the majority adherents compared to the historic centres of the Christian and Islamic traditions.

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 to do so, the Buddhist translator sincerely asked him to pray for them. Bishop John Daily remembered the experience as one of 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 co-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 temporarily 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 to practice the self-discipline methods of Confucianism and 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 Christian 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.

Liberia

The Revd Canon Dr Herman Browne was asked at no notice to speak about his home country. He spoke with affection of the greenness and beauty of the countryside and with a sense of optimism for the future. The following brief note records key points.

Nearly 80% of the country is neither Muslim nor Christian, but adherents of African Traditional Religions. Whilst a significant part of our commercial sector was handled by Muslims, Christians dominated the political scene, and remain predominantly urban.

The civil crisis presented both Muslim and Christian communities with the singular task of having to preach peace. This endeavour generated an unprecedented level of co-operation that resulted into a common plan for the removal of former Pres. Charles Taylor, the deployment of ECOWAS military troops, demobilisation of soldiers, and the immediate launch of relief items. This four point plan was adopted and implemented by ECOWAS which has led to the presence of UNMIL in the country and a remarkably peaceful country to date.

There were clear signs that Liberia was getting back on its feet again. The resilience of Liberians was again demonstrated clearly with the election of her (and Africa's) first female President. There are gradual signs of significant progress in her 12 months in office. In the areas of:

1. governance and accountability
2. appointment of highly competent Cabinet ministers
3. Her own accessibility to the people and her promotion of press freedom
4. Foreign investment in development initiatives in areas of clinics, schools, electricity, roads,
5. increment and regular payment of civil servant wages.

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 million¹ 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.

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].

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

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.

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'.

An Introduction to the Country of Pakistan

By The Rev. Canon Patrick Pervez Augustine

"... It is the will of the people of Pakistan to establish an order ... where shall be guaranteed fundamental rights, including equality of status, of opportunity and law, social, economic and political justice, and freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship and association..." from the Preamble, Constitution of Pakistan

Pakistan - History

The Pakistan Movement took shape in the early part of the 20th century. Although the vision of Pakistan was first given by Muhammad Iqbal in 1930 during his famous address at Allahabad, it was clear long before then that there was a Hindu-Muslim disharmony that could not be ignored forever. Muslims had been rulers over a large part of the sub-continent for about 800 years. During the British Raj Muslims felt marginalized and they had become a minority. Ultimately, the "two nation theory" emerged, which stated Muslims and Hindus could not live together because they had different ways of life. Thus, a movement for a separate nation called Pakistan took shape, focusing on "Islam" as the basis for Muslim unity. Unlike other nationalism that have emerged in other places of the world in the struggle for freedom, such as Turkic, Arab, and Malay nationalism, etc., the Muslims of India were of different ethnicities, languages and cultures, united only by the slogan of Islam.

Pakistan was created on August 14 1947 to be a homeland for the Muslims of the Indian Sub-Continent. The revivalists, particularly Abul Ala Mawdudi's group and some rationalists insisted that Pakistan is a new homeland for Muslims. It was formed with the slogan, *Pakistan ka matlab kya, la ilaha illa Allah*, meaning, "What is the meaning of Pakistan? There is no God but Allah!" (The cry rhymes in Urdu).

The founding father of Pakistan Mohammad Ali Jinnah and his compatriots were secular modernists in their outlook and practice, at the same time appealing to popular Islamic sentiments as a way to rally the people. In a famous speech at Independence on August 15, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, advocated religious tolerance and the right of every individual to practice his own religion. He emphasized that in the state of Pakistan religion was to be a private matter. Within a year popular protests had forced the leaders to change track. The precise role which Islam should play in public life has since been a major feature of political discourse.[1] Sadly, that ideal has been eroded as successive governments have implemented a program of Islamisation. The landmark event that took place shortly after the founding of Pakistan was the approval of the Objectives Resolution. The points in the resolution were designed to govern any constitution that would be written. These points could be summed up: (1) Sovereignty belongs to God, not the people, and (2) no law shall be framed that is repugnant to the Qur'an and Sunnah. Islamists believe that the future of Islamic revival is destined to commence from Pakistan.

Until 1971, the country consisted of East and West Pakistan separated by 1,000 miles of Indian territory having little but Islam in common. After a brutal war, East Pakistan became Bangladesh, a separate nation. Pakistan's history has been unsettled right from its creation, and is still unstable. "What we in Pakistan have consciously constructed instead is rule by a small elite—never democratic—all working with a tribal-feudal mind-set, 'in the name of the people' with democratic camouflage. This small elite comprises of feudal barons, tribal warlords, and politicians of all hues. In Pakistan we inherited a feudal, patriarchal society. The population is divided into vertical compartments of provinces, tribes, clans, castes, and subcastes.—Our history of dysfunctional democracy has caused us great grief, most hauntingly in the separation of East Pakistan in 1971."

Pakistan is divided into four provinces: Sind, Baluchistan, Punjab and the North West Frontier Province. The country is a kaleidoscope of different ethnic groups, each very distinct. One estimate is that 70 different languages are spoken in Pakistan but in general citizens have one thing in common: Islam.

The Situation Today and the Concerns of non-Muslims in Pakistan

Pakistan's total population is 138 million. Non Christians known as minorities comprise four percent or less of the population. According to Pakistan's Year Book Christians are 3% of the population. A similar number of other religious minorities like Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhist and Bahai's also live in Pakistan.

Following are the major concern minorities face in Pakistan:

1. The first is the issue of a separate electorate. Since its inception the nation has been divided into two camps of voters, Muslims and non-Muslim. Non Muslims have separate seats and can be elected only to this certain number of seats. This requirement has cut Christians and minorities off from mainstream politics and has turned them into second-class citizens.

2. The second issue is the controversial blasphemy law. In 1982, under President General Zia Ul-Haq, Blasphemy Law section 295-B was passed. This law dealt with defiling the Holy Qur'an, a crime to be punished with life imprisonment. Four years later, section 295-C was added, concerning offenses against Prophet Muhammad, which were to be punished with life imprisonment or death and a fine.

This section was given even greater force when the federal Shari'at Court in Pakistan ruled that the life imprisonment option should be disallowed, leaving death as the mandatory sentence for defiling the name of Prophet

Muhammad. This ruling was enforced in 1991. The problems of bribery and corruption and passions of an illiterate society preclude the opportunities for a fair trial even for the poor Muslim masses, let alone poor minorities who have no way of protecting themselves from false or impulsive accusations.

3. The Third concern is the legal rights. In normative interpretations of Islamic law, non Muslims cannot give any testimony in cases involving had common law with divinely defined punishment). The law also requires two women witnesses to equal the testimony of one man (for Muslims and non-Muslims alike). In the law of Qisas (retaliation), non-Muslims testimony is accepted only if the accused is also a non-Muslim. These laws, although part of an interpretation of Islamic law, can be interpreted to be counter to the norms of human rights and pluralism that are being advocated the world over.

4. The fourth concern is that of conversion, which raises a number of issues. When minor children convert to Islam, for example, it is possible, as was ruled in one magisterial decision, that they can be taken from the custody of their Christian parents and placed in Muslim families.

5. The fifth major concern has to do with education. Students in grade school must take Islamic studies as a mandatory subject. While at an earlier time non-Muslim students were allowed to elect exams in their own traditions, this option was withdrawn in 1962. Certain basis in the syllabus hamper the growth of a pluralistic society. According to the article, "the curriculum seems to encourage Islamization of non-Muslims.³

Christians in Pakistan:

98% Christians in Pakistan live in Punjab; approximately 60% of whom live in the villages. Most of the Christian in Punjab were converted from the lower-caste Hindu background. There are also recent tribal Hindus landless workers in Sind, who have recently converted to Christianity, coming from the Katchi, Parkar, Kholis and Marwaries tribes. These people before they were converted were poor, illiterate, exploited and were kept out of the political-economic order of the day. The Christians though better today, does not reflect any major progress in spite of some hundred plus years of consistent missionary aid and development.

The Roman Catholics constitute about 55%, and the rest are divided among different Protestant denominations. Among Protestant the Church of Pakistan (a United comprising of the Anglicans, American Methodists, Scottish Presbyterians and Scandinavian Lutherans constitute the largest group, followed closely by the American Presbyterians, and the rest are Evangelical churches constituting a very small percentage.⁴

Examples of the impact of the Islamic laws:

In Islamabad, a Muslim professor, Dr. Sheikh at a medical college in 2004 was found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to death after students complained about him to the local religious leaders. Dr. Sheikh in a letter from Central Jail Rawalpindi complained about the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan which, he said, "is wide open to abuse, through and by the miscreant mullahs for political, repressive and vindictive purposes on the pretext of undefined blasphemy... its abuse is a rising wave of aggressive ignorance, incivility and intolerance as well as the medieval theocratic darkness."

Dr. Sheikh noted that his trial was held in Camera inside the jail. "The learned court ... succumbed to threats and after dubious in camera proceedings sentenced me to the death penalty under the said Blasphemy Law 295/C PPC without good evidence ... even my solicitors were harassed with a fatwa (bull) of apostasy and they were threatened with the lives of their children."

May 6, 1998, The Rt. Rev. Dr. John Joseph, Roman Catholic bishop of Faisalabad and a high profile human rights activist, shot himself dead in the dark corridors of a sessions court in Sahiwal in protest against the death sentence recently given to a poor Christian Ayub Masih for blaspheming Islam. This is the same spot where Ayub Masih, a Christian of his diocese, was shot at on 6 November 1997. Earlier on the day of his death the late Bishop sent a open letter to Pakistan's largest English language newspaper, Dawn. Following are the two excerpts from Bishop Joseph's letter:

After several serious consultations, the following points became clear: "We have to act in unity and coordination: The bishops inside and outside Pakistan, the parliamentarians inside and outside the parliament, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, men, women and the youth, all in harmony, Pakistani NGOs and NGOs abroad to support the repeal of Sections 295-B and C in the Pakistan Penal Code. Now we must act strongly and in unity, without worrying about the sacrifices we shall have to offer. Dedicated persons do not count the cost.

The Final push: 295-C is the greatest block in the good and harmonious relations between Muslims and the religious minorities in Pakistan. In order to achieve national harmony, let us give a mighty push to this immense boulder, before it crushes all of us. Once this obstacle is away, each Pakistani will be able to live and work in peace and our beloved motherland, Pakistan will prosper. Let us pray continuously for it, publicly in private, throughout the country. Amen.

Why Such Militancy in Pakistan:

Pakistan since 1970s has been breeding ground for a number of militant groups. This is in part a by-product of the Afghanistan conflict. In order to defeat the Soviets, the US Saudi Arabia, China and Egypt assisted and armed Afghan mujahideen and others, including Arab militants, to fight against the Soviet invaders. Through Pakistan, the CIA provided weapons and funds, eventually totaling more than 3 billion dollars, to a fratricidal alliance of seven Afghan resistance groups, none of whose leaders were by nature democratic, and most of whom to a greater or lesser extent fundamentalist in religion, autocratic in politics, and venomously anti-American in both respects.

Once the Soviet machine was defeated, the US quickly dropped the Afghan problem and abandoned support to Pakistan. The US began to return to its all-consuming non-proliferation agenda, under which Washington withdrew all economic and military assistance to Pakistan. The Pakistan government and the Jihadi Islamic forces felt abandoned and betrayed by the West.

Christians are often seen by Muslims as party to the West. After 9/11 there have been attacks on the worshippers in Pakistani churches and Christian schools and hospitals. On October 29, 2001 four gunmen entered inside St. Dominic's Church, Bahawalpur and started shouting: "Pakistan and Afghanistan, graveyard of Christians. Allah is Great. This is just the start." They opened fire and killed 17 Christians. Since then a senseless slaughter of Christians has been repeatedly done several times in different parts of Pakistan.

A culture of militancy, weapons, and drugs now flourishes in Pakistan. A deadly al Qaeda terrorist network entrenched itself in our major cities and the mountains of our tribal agencies on our western border with Afghanistan. A culture of targeted killing, explosives, car bombs, and suicide attacks took root. ... Today, the central masses are confused about where Islam actually stands on various issues facing the world in general and the Muslim world in particular. They need to be drawn away from the clerics' obscurantist views, and toward the enlightened, progressive, moderate message of Islam. The challenge is great, no doubt, but it is eminently achievable.

Building Bridges—Building the Kingdom of God:

Over the centuries, both Christianity and Islam expanded through empire and on a few but terrible occasions have confronted each other in conflict. Woe unto us if we allow a clash of civilisations to develop along the lines that the scholar Samuel Huntington suggested could be in prospect. With the weapons of mass destruction that exist in our technological age, a truly awesome conflict between the two could result in bloodshed on an unimaginable scale. A cause of hope for lies in the fact that two great missionary faiths of Christianity and Islam now increasingly are encountering each other, especially in the West, not by empire building but by migration. Pakistani Muslims now

live in the neighbourhoods of Christians and non-Christians as minorities. There are tremendous opportunities to build bridges on an individual, neighbourhood and community scale. Our task is to live together in peace and to talk with each other so that even the simplest levels of dialogue can develop the awareness of common values and aspirations that lead to mutual understanding, tolerance and even co-operation.

An excellent example of bridge building and peace making is the story of Bishop David Smith of the Anglican Diocese of Bradford, England, and Mr. Ishtiaq Ahmed, Information Officer for the Bradford Council of Mosques and Director of the Racial Equality Council, set an excellent example in October 1997 by visiting Shantingar, a Christian village in Pakistan burnt by Muslim extremists in February 1997. They traveled together to both Muslim and Christian places of worship and shared the message of peace and reconciliation.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Williams visiting Pakistan in November 2005 spoke to a group of Muslims and Christians and encouraged constructive dialogue between two faith Communities. He said, "Dialogue is not debate; dialogue is not proselytism; dialogue is not the attempt to persuade; dialogue is not negotiation. When I enter dialogue with someone of another religious tradition ... I am not out to secure agreement, but to secure understanding. An honest and constructive dialogue leads us to go away thinking 'Now I begin to see a little better what it is like to hold those views, pray those prayers and to live those lives'. "Dialogue is possible, dialogue is necessary and, happily, by the grace of God, dialogue is above all, actual. The very fact of our meeting this afternoon is, I hope and pray, a sign of how that dialogue can and will unfold in the years ahead."

If we embrace the idea of dialogue, if we would reach out to foster understanding and create bonds of community, how do we—Christians or Muslims, as a practical matter—go about doing so? What should be our agenda? What are some concrete ways in which we can overcome mutual suspicion?

The Church in Pakistan may be small but its witness to peace, harmony and reconciliation can be a powerful tool to heal the nation. As Christian we should let the light of Christ's love shine in our lives, as we follow the Golden Rule of doing to others as we would have them do unto us, and as we strive to love our neighbors as ourselves. We must respect the integrity of individuals and groups even as we witness to Christ in their midst. Christians bear witness in the way in which we love; it is God who converts.

Speaking in Rawalpindi on Tuesday 22nd November 22, 2005 The Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Williams told the Christians that their situation was similar to the boy whose loaves and fishes fed the five thousand (in John 6 v 5-14):

"For us, gathering as a small church in the middle of a society that is mostly not Christian, we think 'what can we do and what can we give?' We give our love, we give our compassion to those around us; we give our service and our witness: and the apostles of Jesus Christ say to us 'Don't worry; give it to Jesus, he knows what to do with it.' " "So however small the gifts we feel we are giving, however small the influence we may sometimes feel we may have, give what we have to Jesus and he knows what to do with it. This does not come without cost ... when we offer our service and compassion and step out from the crowd, we don't feel very safe... but it is those acts of generosity where we take a step towards love and compassion that is when Jesus can most use what we give."

May the faith of Christian in Pakistan uplift them in a spirit of courage, commitment and joy that will enable them to enter into dialogue and build bridges of communication that can create the understanding and mutual respect that will establish tolerance and peace for peoples of all faiths throughout our nation and the world. My prayer is that the Muslim community in Pakistan will come to join us in the common purpose, in turning from heartache to the realization of that hope for peace and harmony.

Sharing of Country Perspective: SUDAN

By Revd Enock Tombe, Provincial Secretary, Episcopal Church of the Sudan, Former General Secretary SCC

Brief historical background of the Sudan:

Before colonial conquest:

The territories now called the Sudan was occupied by many people from different tribes. Each tribe lived and roamed the land under its control. Some of the tribes had developed their own political systems such as Shilluk in Southern Sudan. The Shilluk had a kingdom. In Northern Sudan there were at least three Nubian Kingdoms which became Christianized between 543 – 1503 AD.

Turkish and Egyptian Rule 1821 – 1884:

During the Ottoman empire, Turks in alliance with Egyptians invaded and ruled the territories now called the Sudan with its present borders.

Mahdists Rule 1885 – 1898

A Sudanese Muslim from Northern Sudan declared himself a Mahdi and rose against the Turks. He mobilized a rebellion and eventually chased away the Turks and their Egyptian allies. The Mahdi, actually called Mohamed Ahmed, introduced the first Islamic rule in at least Northern Sudan. His followers are known as Ansar up to today.

British and Egyptian Rule 1899 – 1956

The British in alliance with Egyptians invaded the Sudan and defeated the Mahdists. The condominium rule then governed the Sudan as a secular state.

Independent Sudan 1956 – now

The Sudan became an independent state on 1.1.1956 sharing borders with Egypt and Libya in the North; Eritrea and Ethiopia in the East; Kenya and Uganda in the South; and Democratic Republic of Congo, Central Africa Republic and Chad in the West.

Population and Religion:

Total population is currently estimated around 35 million people. The first census was conducted in 1956. The composition of the people based on ethnic identity were as follows: 61% of African stock, 30% of Arab stock and % of other racial groups (Non-Sudanese). No other proper census was carried out due to the instability in the Sudan. However, the next census is planned for November 2007 in order to prepare the country for elections in 2008 and a referendum in Southern Sudan in 2011 as agreed in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) 2005.

The previous Census of 1956 did not include the question of religious composition of the population. However other impartial censuses especially that of 1983 attempted to address the question of religious affiliation. Generally, it accepted that Muslims form the majority of 70% of the population, Christians are estimated around 25% and the rest (5%) are considered followers of African Traditional beliefs. Muslims are found mostly in Northern Sudan and identify with Arab culture whereas Christians are found mostly in Southern Sudan and identify with African culture in terms of languages and customs.

Civil Wars between North and South Sudan

First Civil War 1955 – 1972 (17years)

Southern soldiers mutinied in Torit, a small town in Southern Sudan in August 1955, just a few months before independence of the Sudan was declared on 1.1.1956. The soldiers refused transfer to the Northern Sudan. The Torit mutiny provided a spark for a total rebellion of the Southern Corps that were stationed in the then three Southern Provinces collectively known as Southern Sudan.

Southerners in general resented the re-colonization of the Southern Sudan by Arab-Muslim Northerners following the departure of the British from the Sudan in 1955.

Southern freedom fighters, organized under different labels fought for separation of the Southern Sudan from Northern Sudan from 1955 up to 1972. Through the mediation efforts of the WCC and AACC under the Emperor Haile-Selassie of Ethiopia. Thus the peace agreement was known as Addis Ababa Peace Agreement 1972.

Southern Sudan then enjoyed regional autonomy from 1972 – 82. In September 1983, the President of the Sudan, General Jaafar Mohamed Numeiri, decreed Islamic laws (Shari'a) all over the country in order to protect his power against both Southern and Northern opposition groups. Hudud sentences were carried out in Khartoum. Thieves had their hands chopped off, adulterers were lashed as well as drunkards. The declaration of Shari'a just fueled a second rebellion in another small Southern town, Bar, on 16th May 1983 by Anya-nya forces that were absorbed into the national army from the first rebellion.

Second Civil War 1983 – 2005

The Southern-based second rebel movement this time called for the creation of a New Sudan of justice, equality and prosperity for all Sudanese regardless of tribe, race, religion or any other label of discrimination. The rebel movement is called Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SDLM) with an armed wing called Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA). The civil war spread this time beyond Southern Sudan to include Northern Sudan territories of Nub Mountains, Funj and Beja areas in Central and Eastern Sudan respectively as well as the Abyei area.

Through the mediation of IGAD countries led by Kenya under President Daniel Arap Moi and later President Mai Kibaki, with support from USA, UK, Norway and Italy, so-called friends of IGAD, a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) was signed on 9th January 2005 in Kenya. The CPA gives the Southern Sudan an interim period of six and half years to remain part of the Sudan. At the end of the interim period in 2011, the Southern Sudan people will decide whether to remain part of the Sudan or become an independent state through a referendum.

Three other areas that had joined the rebellion in the Southern Sudan have been granted self-administration status. These areas are Nuba Mountains, Funj (South Blue Nile) and Abyei, with each of them having a separate peace Protocol.

Darfur Rebellion 2003 – now

In February 2003, another rebellion broke out in the Darfur region of Western Sudan. Nigeria then offered mediation and there is now a precarious peace agreement reached since May 2006 in Abuja, Nigeria.

However, the war in Darfur is still continuing despite the peace agreement signed. African Peace-keepers have been sent to Darfur by the African Union (AU) but only as monitors - The forces have no mandate to protect civilians caught in the cross-fire between the Western Sudan rebels and Sudan government forces in alliance with Arab Militias known as Janjawed (Devils on Camel Backs, armed with GM3 rifles).

There is a call for UN Peace-keepers but President Bashir has consistently rejected them on the pretext that they will re-colonize the Sudan.

Another civil war almost broke out in Eastern Sudan between Beja Congress and the Sudan Government forces. Thanks to the mediation efforts of Eritrea, there is now a peace agreement between the Beja Congress and Sudan Government.

Root Causes of Civil Wars in the Sudan

The root cause of the civil wars are mainly injustices in power and wealth distribution between the central government in Khartoum and the regions: South, Nuba Mountains, Funj, Eastern Sudan and now Darfur in Western Sudan. The rebellion started in the South because it felt marginalization from the centre in terms of power, wealth and identity.

Northern Sudanese elite from riverian Arabized Nubian tribes had been dominating political and economic powers in Khartoum and neglected the different regions of the country. The elite used Islamic religion and Arab Culture as tools for assimilation of the country under the guise of uniting the nation. However, the Sudan

is inhabited by over 500 ethnic groups speaking different languages. The unification policies under Islam and Arabism clashed with the reality of diversity in the Sudan apart from the under-lying exploitation economically and socially of the peoples from the regions.

Christian – Muslim Relations

It is important to note at the outset that Christians and Muslims have never been in conflict at the community level or even as individuals. However, relations between Christians and Muslims have been characterized by State hostility and persecution against the Church.

In 1962, a Missionary Act was passed by the government of General Ibrahim Abud. In 1964, the Abud regime used the 1962 missionary Act to expel foreign Missionaries from Southern Sudan on the pretext that they were involved in inciting the first rebellion led by the Anya-nya forces. In 1983, General Jaafar Mohamed Numeiri decreed Shari'a all over the Sudan despite the existing diversity in religions. Between 1900 – 2000 the government under General Hassan Ahmed El Bashir carried out systematic demolition or confiscation of Church property especially in Khartoum under the pretext of town planning. The government also restricted freedom of religion and Christians especially in Northern Sudan. For example, Christian children are required to enter a pre-school before being admitted in primary schools; a pre-school in Northern Sudan means a Koranic School. The Church did not have a capacity to open many Christian pre-schools. Therefore Christian children had no option than to attend a Koranic school in order to qualify for entrance into a primary school.

In the face of state persecution since independence, different Christian denominations came together in January 1965 and formed the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC). The SCC was meant for Christian fellowship, solidarity and ecumenical witness by the member churches. In fact, the SCC initiated the peace process that led to the Addis Ababa Peace agreement of 1972. After the second civil war broke out in 1983, another Council of Churches was created by the Churches in Nairobi to take care of the people under SPLM/A controlled areas while SCC was restricted to operating in government controlled areas during the second civil war. Now the two sister Councils of Churches are in the process of merging this year.

During the war, the SCC through the encouragement of partner Churches abroad and PROCURA was encouraged to promote inter-religious dialogue with Muslims. The papal visit to Khartoum in 1993 and the visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1995 to Khartoum added to that encouragement. However, it was the effort of the US Centre for Religion and Diplomacy based in Washington that provided the much needed funds to organise an International Conference on Christian-Muslim relations at national level. Amongst its recommendations was the need to establish an independent Council to promote inter-religious dialogue and peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims in Sudan. In 2003, Sudan Inter-Religious Council (SIRC) was launched in Khartoum and has been in operation up to now.

At denominational level, the Episcopal Church of the Sudan (ECS) has approved the establishment of a Commission for Ecumenical and Inter-faith Relations during the Provincial Synod held in January 2006 in Juba.

Bishop Andudu Elnail has been appointed to lead the Commission. There is an urgent need for funding to enable the Commission get off the ground to build the capacity in each ECS Diocese for inter-religious dialogue and to promote the same at national level together with other churches in the Sudan.

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.