BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS: STORIES OF ENGAGEMENT AND UNDERSTANDING

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between Christians and Muslim represents one of the key issues for the 21st century. Over the past 1400 years, this relationship has been marked by both conflict and co-existence, according to changing times and circumstances. As both religious communities look forward, it is important that they build bridges of peace and friendship, and learn to negotiate certain key differences. This article considers how Protestant Christians have gone about this task in recent decades. Several case studies are presented, providing tools for Christians to engage with their Muslim neighbours in different ways.

● Key Words: Muslim-Christian Dialogue, Religious Freedom, Ecumenism

INTRODUCTION

Since the Second World War, large population movements and migrations helped create increasingly multi-faith societies in Western countries.[1] At the same time, rapid developments in technology have created global communications networks. So societies that were in the past almost exclusively Christian, and that had little perception or understanding of other faiths, were forced to view other religions in new ways. Churches in the West and beyond have responded to such change by reviewing Christian attitudes to and methods of engagement with other faiths.

Christian scholars have identified a spectrum of attitudes held by various Christians towards other religions. They are broadly grouped as follows:

• An exclusivist position, which applies to those who believe that Christianity, and only Christianity, possesses divinely revealed truth and offers a path towards salvation. This position tends to regard other religious faiths as either grossly misguided or outrightly Satanic.

• An inclusivist position, which holds that certain other faiths may include some elements of divinely revealed truth, but do not, apart from Christ, offer a complete path to salvation. In order to offer this, such religions need to embrace Christ. In other words, such religions without Christ represent, at best, a halfway house.

• A pluralist approach, which lessens the focus upon Christ and increas-

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1. The observations in this article are largely based on Western contexts, where Muslim minority communities have grown rapidly over the last half century. However, these observations are also relevant for East Asian nations as well, such as South Korea, where the Islamic community has grown thirty-fold during the same period, from 3000 in the 1960s to around 100,000 in 2006. Cf. Don Baker, "Islam Struggles for a Toehold in Korea". Harvard Asia Quarterly Vol. X no. 1 (Winter, 2006)

esthe primary focus upon God. Other religions are seen as alternative manifestations of God's truth and offer alternative routes to salvation. Thus Christianity becomes merely one of many paths to a knowledge of God and salvation.

The Christian churches largely took an exclusivist approach, especially during the first millennium, the period of the Crusades, and the European colonial era. But as the world moved into a post-colonial period following the Second World War, the Christian churches revised previous approaches. In the light of the new historical and social realities, they developed new policies and strategies for multi-faith contact.

Nevertheless, some churches have maintained an exclusivist position. Many others have made a marked move from exclusivism towards inclusivism, and some have shifted towards a clearly pluralistic position. All have been affected by internal divisions on what has become one of the most controversial subjects for the churches today.

The way in which this subject has been addressed at a structural level is informative for Christians seeking to engage with followers of other faiths at a local level. We will examine this more closely by looking at two major groups comprising Protestant Christians, and comparing their approaches to Muslim-Christian dialogue in particular. But before we do this, it is important to consider the fact of diversity within Islam.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF MUSLIMS

Muslim diversity can be seen in terms of different criteria: ethnicity (Arab, Turkish, Persian, Malay/Indonesian etc); geography (Arab World, Central

Asia, South Asia etc., European); nationality (Egyptian, Moroccan, Pakistani, British, American); sectarian groups (Sunni, Shi'a, Isma'ili, Ahmadi etc.), and in various other ways.

But a particularly helpful way to consider diversity among Muslims is to consider differing Muslim views of and approaches to their sacred texts and to authority within the faith. If this is done we might see a two-fold split at the macro level, between Traditionalists and Reformists.

Traditionalists draw on the accumulated wisdom of scholars down the centuries to guide their own interpretation and practice of their faith. Such Muslims follow their religious readers in making important decisions. These leaders might be mosque imams or text-focused religious scholars (*ulama*), or if Muslims have particular mystical leanings they might be led by more charismatically-inclined spiritual guides (*wali*) who are believed to have special powers of blessing and even intercessory powers.

Competing in reform

Against the Traditionalist stand the Reformists. For them scholarly wisdom accumulated down the centuries is a mixed blessing: on the one hand it can inform the big questions of the day, but it can also clutter up the essential message of the faith of Islam. Reformists broadly fall into two types. First are the literalists, for whom the primary texts and the Prophet Muhammad should form the main rudder for facing the challenges of the modern world. These reformists are more backward looking, reading straight from the page of the texts and the Prophet's life into the contemporary world. They are Islamist, in that they stress the holistic nature of Islam, making it relevant to politics, society, economics and so forth. Furthermore, this group aims to create Islamic states based on literal applications of Shari'a Law. This group includes some who are violent and respond to the call to military *jihad*.

Against the more literalist-minded Islamists stand Modernising Reformists. While they share the reforming zeal of the Islamists, wanting to use the primary textsas the rudder for facing the challenges of the modern world, the Modernisers treat the primary texts quite differently from the Islamists. The Modernisers read the texts rationally rather than literally, allowing their interpretation to be shaped by the realities of the modern world around them. They argue that some parts of the primary texts and Shari'a legal codes are time-bound in their application, having been suitable to 7th and 8th century social contexts but no longer having relevance to the 21st century world. While the Islamists look backwards for their answers, the Modernisers look ahead.

While such labels do not neatly fit all circumstances and all individuals, it is possible to broadly identify people and groups along these lines. We will now briefly consider the history and priorities of two Christian umbrella groups – the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance – before looking more closely at the ways that these groups engage with Islam and Muslims.

APPROACHES TO MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Ecumenism, Dialogue and the World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches (WCC) dates back to 1937, when church leaders agreed to establish a world council to strengthen Christian unity. This initiative was delayed by theonset of the Second World War, but the proposal was presented soon after the war concluded.

The WCC was established on 23 August 1948 at its first general assembly in Amsterdam. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, the WCC

comprised almost all principal Christian denominations, covering over 560 million Christians, and around 350 churches, denominations and fellowships. The WCC represents churches in over 100 countries and fellowships. While not formally a member of the WCC, the Roman Catholic Church sends observers to WCC events, and Catholic-WCC contacts are regular.

The WCC has experience a remarkable change in its membership. At the time of its establishment, almost two thirds of the founding churches came from Europe and North America. In the early 21st century, almost two thirds of the member churches come from the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific. This reflects a noticeable shift in the centre of gravity of world Christianity from Europe and North America to the Third World.

The WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism was established in 1961. It first met in 1963 in Mexico City, and three years later a consultation in Lebanon, attended mostly by Christian representatives based in Muslim countries, agreed to initiate meetings with Muslims.

In March 1967 a consultation was held in Sri Lanka where a significant statement was issued: "Dialogue implies a readiness to be changed as well as to influence others… The outcome of dialogue is the work of the Spirit."[2] Two years later, a Muslim-Christian dialogue under WCC auspices in Switzerland identified three principal aims of such dialogue:

1. to achieve greater mutual respect and better understanding
2. to raise questions which lead to deepening and renewal of spirituality
3. to lead Christians and Muslims to accept and fulfil common practical responsibilities

2. Ataullah Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the 20th Century,* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 30.

In 1971, in recognition of the importance of the dialogue initiatives of the previous decade, the 24th meeting of the WCC Central Committee at Addis Ababa established a new unit, called Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, simply known as the Dialogue Unit.

In a watershed meeting in 1977 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, Guidelines on Dialogue were drawn up. The WCC itself observes that 'These guidelines serve as the basis of interreligious dialogue sponsored by the WCC and many churches around the world'.[3] Indeed, various local guidelines have been drawn up by various WCC member groups such as the Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland (CCBI), the Episcopal Church of Canada.[4] and the Presbyterian Church (USA),[5] but they closely reflect the 1977 Guidelines of the WCC.

During the 1980s, the WCC gradually changed its focus from the international to the regional level for promoting dialogue activities, and in the early 1990s the Dialogue Unit was restructured to become a sub-unit of the WCC Secretariat called the Office of Inter-religious Relations (OIRR).

The WCC invited fifteen guests of other faiths to the 1998 General Assembly in Harare. Furthermore, the Assembly asked the OIRR to give visibility to 'dialogue and co-operation with people of other faiths'. Thus the WCC has been a pioneer in emphasising interfaith dialogue; moreover it has identified dialogue, rather than traditional mission, as the central plank of its multi-faith policy.

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3. 'Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies', World Council of Churches, 1 February 2010, viewed 22 September 2010, http://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/guidelines-on-dialogue-with-people-of-living-faiths-and-ideologies.html.

4. *Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue*, Ecumenical Office of the Anglican Church of Canada, Toronto, (1986).

5. *Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue*, Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, Presbyterian Church (USA), Louisville KY, http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/interfaithrelations/pdf/guidelinesforinterfaithdialogue.pdf, viewed 11 January 2012.

WCC Guidelines on Dialogue

In 1991, the Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland published a local version of the WCC's four principles of dialogue. Each of the principles was explained:

Principle 1: Dialogue begins when people meet each other
● Christians are encouraged to focus on individuals, not systems. In other words, when meeting a Hindu or a Muslim, Christians should not assume that they match stereotypes of the system of Hinduism or Islam.

Principle 2: Dialogue depends upon mutual understanding and mutual trust
● Partners in dialogue should be free to define themselves, in their own terms. Christians should seek to clear away misconceptions held by others about what Christians believe and teach.

Principle 3: Dialogue makes it possible to share in service to the community
● Community depends on the cooperation of all its parts. When the parts consist of people with differing religious faiths, dialogue offers a way towards harmony.

Principle 4: Dialogue becomes the medium of authentic witness
● Dialogue based on trust provides opportunities for all to witness to their faith. It requires that each person be prepared to listen as well as to speak. The CCBI documentation adds that 'Dialogue assumes the freedom of a person of any faith including the Christian to be convinced by the faith of another'.

Further publications from WCC-affiliated church groups reinforce this new openness to other faiths. An example is *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue* prepared by the Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns in 2008, which states:

> "It is not for us to set limits to the work of God, for the energy of the Holy Spirit cannot be confined. 'The tree is known by its fruits', and'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.' When we meet these qualities in our encounter with people of other faiths, we must engage joyfully with the Spirit's work in their lives and in their communities."[6]

Mission, Freedom of Religion and the World Evangelical Alliance

There are many Christian Protestant groups which have not joined the WCC. These groups are chiefly evangelical, and many came together to form the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), which functions as an umbrella body like the WCC but bears a number of features which set it apart from the WCC.

The WEA traces its origins to l846, when 800 Christian representatives from 10 countries met in London to form "a definite organization for the expression of unity amongst Christian individuals belonging to different churches". This gathering resulted in the foundation of the Evangelical Alliance of the UK.

Just over a century later, a worldwide evangelical grouping was formed, with the establishment of the World Evangelical Alliance in 1951. By the early twenty-first century its global network comprised 128 national and regional

6. *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue*, (London: The Anglican Consultative Council, 2008).

Protestant evangelical church alliances, supplemented by over 100 associate member organisations, together representing a constituency of approximately 420 million Christians.

The WEA is structured according to various departments: the Church and Society Department, the Leadership Development Department, and the Publications Department as well as various Commissions: the Commission for Women's Concerns, the Theological Commission, the Youth Commission, the Missions Commission, and the Religious Liberty Commission.

The Missions Commission of the WEA provides an approach to Christian-Muslim relations still considered a priority by large segments of the Protestant churches. This approach of traditional sending mission has increasingly been pushed off centre stage in the WCC with its preference for interfaith dialogue.

The WEA Missions Commission aims to initiate regional and national evangelical alliances where they do not exist, and where these alliances do exist, the WEA Missions Commission operates through 'providing a pro-phetic and proactive voice into the worldwide church in relation to theology, missiology and mission practice.'[7] The other WEA commission which bears directly on Christian-Muslim relations is the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC). The stated purpose of the RLC is crucial for understanding evangelical approaches to relationships with other faiths:

> "The purpose of the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Com-mission (RLC) is to promote freedom of religion for all people worldwide as defined by Article 18 of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, and in accordance with Scripture. Our aim is to help all people, but especially

7. Mission Commission, World Evangelical Alliance, http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/list/?com=mc, viewed 23 September 2010.

Protestant Christians, to exercise their faith without oppression or discrimination."[8]

The phrase "in accordance with Scripture" points to a characteristic feature of evangelicalism, namely the degree to which policy represents an outworking from Scripture. Furthermore, the emphasis on Protestant Christians demonstrates the WEA's position of overtly identifying itself as a special interest body. This contrasts with the approach of the WCC, for which a broad-based, ever-expanding ecumenism is the stated goal.

The RLC specifically targets freedom in a number of areas: religious education, public and private worship, sharing of one's faith, and the freedom to change one's faith. The RLC monitors infringements of religious liberty and reports on it on a regular basis via press releases and email notices. Furthermore, the RLC holds an "International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church" each year in November.

The nature of the work of the RLC means that Muslim locations and authorities, especially where Islamist revivalists are in power or exert great influence, regularly appear in RLC reports. The common prohibition in Muslim majority countries on non-Muslims sharing their faith with Muslims, and the widely reported discrimination and persecution against Muslim converts to Christianity, mean that RLC comment on practice in Islamic countries is quite robust.

Thus the work of the WEA, with regard to both the Missions Commission and the RLC, serves to supplement the differently orientated work of the WCC in Christian-Muslim relations. Though WCC consultations do address subjects such as religious liberty and freedom of religion, the dialogical focus

8. Religious Liberty Commission, World Evangelical Alliance, http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/, viewed 23 September 2010.

and the mixed faith presence at WCC interfaith meetings means that some of the more challenging questions and statistics are not articulated in WCC contexts as much as occurs in WEA contexts.

CASE STUDIES: MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN PRACTICE

How are approaches to other faiths based on ecumenism, dialogue, mission and religious freedom translated into action at the grassroots level? In the following pages we will present a variety of case studies showing how Christians of different church groups build bridges and address obstacles in their engagement with Muslims.

Recommendations for Dialogue from the British Churches

The World Council of Churches' four principles of dialogue were expressed by the Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland (CCBI) in terms of a series of practical suggestions as to ways Christians could partner with adherents of other faiths. Areas of co-operation identified were in community meetings, clergy action, social action and advocacy, education, and worship.

Areas of co-operation	Recommended action for Christians
Community meeting	Make an effort to meet adherents of other faiths: neighbours, work colleagues, parents of children's school friends
	Contact a local inter-faith group
Clergy action	Christian clergy should provide counselling support to adherents of other faiths in times of crisis
	Clergy should get to know religious leaders of other faith communities personally and involve these leaders in matters pertaining to the whole community

Social action & advocacy	Cooperate in matters of common cause: racial harassment, drug abuse, inadequate housing
	Provide assistance to other faith communities to procure worship facilities, and freedom to observe dress codes, dietary restrictions, etc.
	Address the issue of access to public broadcasting by other faith communities
	Beware of linking Christianity with underlying racist attitudes. Religious argument can be used as a cover for racial prejudice.
Education	Rethink attitudes concerning religious education in schools
	Revise Sunday school materials to eliminate attitudes seemingly critical of other faiths
	Promote studies of world faiths and inter-faith relations at tertiary levels
Worship	Pray for people of other faiths
	Pray with people of other faiths

It should be noted from the above list of suggestions that diverse kinds of engagement are proposed. While exchange on theological and spiritual matters is included, dialogue is not seen to end there. There is also room for inter-religious dialogue on many different planes as well: joint civic action and advocacy, cooperation in pursuing common educational goals, and simple neighbourly interaction. In the case studies that follow, we will therefore address different kinds of dialogue, referring to particular case studies to illustrate how Christian-Muslim interaction has been fruitful.

In the United Kingdom, the above recommendations have been used in certain locations for increasing numbers of inter-faith dialogue activities, particularly among the more liberal wings of the various Protestant churches.

In Australia, the National Council of Churches of Australia was instrumental in the founding of the Australian National Dialogue of Christians, Muslims, and Jews in 2003. The specific actions proposed for this ongoing dialogue were regular meetings; media releases; news stories for the respective Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities; public forums and creation of

educational resources.[9]

But Evangelicals Do Dialogue too

It would be a mistake to ignore the participation in dialogue by many evangelical groups, as the following case studies will show. In June 1980 the evangelical Lausanne Movement sponsored the "Mini-Consultation on Reaching Muslims" in Pattaya, Thailand. The recommendations of the Report of this gathering[10] called for respect for other cultures, training in churches, a call for sensitive proclamation, a call to dialogue, and a call to work for justice issues.

This report portrays the sharing of the gospel as an integral part of dialogue, finding Scriptural support for this view in saying "in the New Testament the word 'dialogue' often means a conversation conducted to convince another party of the truth (e.g., Acts 17:2, 18:4)." The report refers to this as *discursive dialogue*, and adds that there are other forms of dialogue in use in the modern day:

> "*dialogue on religious experience*, in which members of different faiths
> seek to share their particular religious experience with one another. There is
> also the so-called *secular dialogue*, in which representatives of different faiths
> discuss ways in which greater communal understanding can be developed,
> how common action can be taken to correct various social evils, and how
> followers of different faiths can co-operate in the task of community develop-
> ment and national reconstruction."[11]

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9. 'The Australian Dialogue of Christians, Muslims and Jews', National Council of Churches in Australia', viewed 23 September 2010,http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/interfaith.

10. http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/58-lop-13.html, viewed 25 April 2012.

11. Cf. Eric J. Sharpe, "Dialogue of Religions", in Mircea Eliade (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 4, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 347.

The report affirms dialogue as "a valid and even necessary activity for Christians."It argues that through dialogue people learn how others appreciate the significance of life, they can gain an insight into the nature of other people's religious experience, and avenues can be explored for pursing joint action on social issues. Emphasising this spirit of openness, the report adds "…it may be that the Christian can learn much from the life-style, devotion, or learning of the other."

However, this 1980 report enunciates clearly the other voice of Christianity, affirming key beliefs as non-negotiable: "We believe that Christians are called to witness at all times, and in all situations, to the new life which they have received through Jesus Christ by the operation of the Holy Spirit. … People must be allowed to accept or to reject the claims of Jesus Christ in an atmosphere of freedom." Criticism is made of dialogue in which:

> "other religious systems 'complement' the Christian gospel — i.e., they have insights about the nature of God or the plan of salvation which the gospel lacks. To achieve a 'rounded' knowledge of God and his will, it is asserted, we must listen to the witness of other religions. Such a concept of 'mutual witness' we cannot accept, although personal appreciation of the nature of the gospel may become clearer through dialogue. The gospel itself is the full and complete revelation of God and his plan of salvation. … dialogue is and should be an integral part of Christian mission. …The aim of dialogue must most surely be to learn and to appreciate, but it must chiefly be to teach and to tell men and women about Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life."[12]

The essence of the above balance between openness to other faiths and

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12. http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/58-lop-13.html, viewed 25 April 2012.

affirming non-negotiable principles of Christianity was encapsulated in statements of the Lausanne Movement World Congresses of 1974, 1989 and 2010. The Lausanne Theology Working Group report prepared at the 3rd major meeting of the Movement in Cape Town in 2010 stated succinctly:

> "In short, all religions can include elements of God's truth, can be massively sin-laden, and can be systems of satanic bondage and idolatry."[13]

Thus for the Lausanne Movement, and for evangelicalism in general, dialogue has its place as part of the broad objective of transmitting the message of the gospel to all people. Freedom of religious choice is a key condition for this to happen, hence the emphasis of evangelicalism upon religious freedom and choice. Dialogue is seen as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.

Model A: Dialogue on Religious Belief in Birmingham, UK

Perhaps the first kind of dialogue that Christians and Muslims think about is on the theological level: meeting to discuss matters of faith and belief. One such grass-roots dialogue activity which has been published by the WCC relates to a group engaging in dialogue on religious experience in Birmingham, UK.

Andrew Wingate, an Anglican minister and former missionary in India, initiated a series of dialogue encounters between his parishioners and Muslims in Birmingham.[14] Wingate writes: "My time in India convinced me that we come to understand other faith not from books and texts, but from meet-

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13. http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/cape-town-2010/1194-twg-three-wholes-condensed.html, viewed 25 April 2012.

14. Andrew Wingate, *Encounter in the Spirit: Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Practice*, (Geneva, WCC Publications, 1988).

ing people ... we meet with people who follow Hinduism or Islam, not with Hinduism and Islam."[15] This statement is consistent with the first principle of dialogue as drawn up by the WCC.

In order to initiate meetings, Wingate approached the local Islamic Centre in his area of Birmingham to initiate discussions. He received a positive response, which led to the first meeting between about fifteen Christians and Muslims, for which the agreed topic of discussion was "prayer". The second dialogue meeting was held at a local mosque. For this meeting, the Christian women and the Muslim women sat apart from the men, in accordance with standard mosque practice.

Many of the meetings were held in private homes of members of the dialogue group. The third meeting was held at the home of one of the Muslims. The focus forthis session was on joint Scripture readings covering wide-ranging topics. At Christmas time the Christians participants paid a Christmas visit to the homes of Muslim contacts, and shared a meal together. A further meeting was held in one of the Christian homes. On this occasion, the family dog was kept away from the group out of respect for Islamic scriptural portrayals of dogs as unclean animals.[16]

As relationships developed there was room for more candid and heartfelt comments. For example, on one occasion one of the Christian women described Islamic worship as sombre and Islam as a sad religion on the basis of what she had observed. This led to considerable discussion.

Another meeting was held in Wingate's house. On this occasion the Mus-

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15. Wingate (1988), 3.

16. "Ibn Mughaffal reported: The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) ordered killing of the dogs, and then said: What about them, i. e. about other dogs? and then granted concession (to keep) the dog for hunting and the dog for (the security) of the herd, and said: When the dog licks the utensil, wash it seven times, and rub it with earth the eighth time." Cf. Siddiqi, *Sahih Muslim*, Vol. I, Book 2, No. 551.

lim participants were all men, whereas the Christian group included women. As the dialogue meetings continued, Wingate records that the meetings between women tended to be on a one-to-one basis, in accordance with Muslim wishes. The meeting in Wingate's house centred around the place of Jesus in personal Christian faith. The meeting included personal testimonies by many of the Christians present, though a measure of Christian diversity was recorded on this point, with some Christians less inclined to speak of a personal relationship with Jesus as such.[17]

Concluding his work, Wingate ponders key questions which arise regularly from such inter-faith gatherings:

> "...I am faced with the question whether they are worshipping the same God as me. Intellectually, I know they must be, as there is only one God, and that is a basic tenet of both our faiths. But deep in my heart, can I feel that they are doing so, even though they do not see God in his complete fullness (if I felt they did, then I would be a Muslim)?" [18]

This local activity successfully brought together Christians and Muslims to engage in dialogue discussions on respective religious beliefs and experiences. Meetings were carried out with due regard to issues of sensitivity and mutual respect, but nevertheless discussion on controversial topics arose. The overall tone seems to have been inclusivist rather than pluralist, with an emphasis on seeking to identify truths and shared beliefs without necessarily calling on either faith community to compromise on certain central tenets of either faith.

17. Wingate (1988), 20-22.
18. Wingate (1988), 60.

Dialoguing on the Apostles Creed

One potential focus of such dialogue with Muslims on religious belief might be the Christian creeds, developed by the early church to encapsulate its core articles of faith. The Apostles Creed provides a particularly useful reference point in seeking to identify possible theological bridges and obstacles between Christians and Muslims. It is divided into three sections, with every line being significant.

I believe in…

God the Father almighty
maker of heaven and earth

and in Jesus Christ, his only son, our lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead and buried.
he descended into hell,
on the third day he rose again from the dead.
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the father almighty;
from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit;
the holy catholic church;
the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting.

As a point of discussion with Muslim neighbours or acquaintances, the first section may provide a useful bridge. It identifies God as creator of both heaven and earth, which is consistent with the perception of God within Islam as articulated under the first Islamic article of faith. However, a perceivable difference surrounding the use of the term "Father" is a potential obstacle in Christian-Muslim relations. This expression is used figuratively in the Apostles' Creed, but Muslims tend to interpret this Christian usage in a literal sense, particularly in relation to God being the father of Jesus; indeed, at several points in the Qur'an, the suggestion of God having a son is strongly criticised. Therefore, discussion of this phrase would require Christians to emphasise the metaphorical use of the term "Father" in both the Apostles' Creed and, indeed, in broader Christian theology.

Regarding the second part of the Apostle's Creed, though Muslims accept Jesus as a prophet, they would not accept the first line which refers to his divinity. This would directly challenge accepted dogma presented under the fourth article of Islamic belief relating to the primacy of Muhammad among the prophets. However, Islamic belief can accommodate the second line "who was conceived by the Holy Spirit", as well as "born of the Virgin Mary." The 19th chapter of the Qur'an records that Mary became pregnant through the Spirit of God, not through man.[19] Furthermore, in accordance with orthodox beliefs, Muslims would not accept "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was cruci-

19. The Holy Spirit was involved in a specific action at a particular point in time. That was the fertilisation of Mary, but that is not interpreted by the Qur'an or Muslims as in any way signifying the divinity of Jesus, who is regarded entirely as a human being. The impregnation of Mary by the Holy Spirit specifically points to the all-powerful nature of God to be able to do such a miraculous thing, according to Muslim belief.

fied, dead and buried. . . rose again from the dead." Islam does not allow for Jesus to have died on the cross. The Qur'an and its commentaries state that a substitute person who resembled Jesus was put on the cross and was crucified in his place. Thus once again similarities exist in the view of Jesus, but some differences represent potential obstacles to Christian-Muslim interaction.

Regarding the third section of the Creed, Muslims believe in the Holy Spirit of God, but it is a different concept of the Holy Spirit from that understood in Christianity. In Islam the Holy Spirit serves as a vehicle for God to carry out particular events. Thus the Holy Spirit impregnated Mary. Elsewhere in the Qur'an the Holy Spirit takes various forms to implement God's wishes. In fact, it is one of the angels, referred to under the second article of faith of Islam. In Christianity, the Holy Spirit is much more central to the God head and indeed is regarded as a regular and essential element in God's ongoing communications with humanity. Thus the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost when they spoke in tongues.[20] But the coming of the Holy Spirit to humanity is not limited to historical events related in the Bible. The Holy Spirit continues to function as the dynamic presence of God in the life of the believer. Here again is a key difference potentially posing an obstacle to Christian-Muslim understanding.

The concepts of forgiveness, resurrection and everlasting life exist within Islam, particularly in connection with the last two Islamic articles of faith. These serve as potential bridges between the two faiths, though at a deeper level the detailed understanding of forgiveness varies across the two faiths, and can represent an obstacle if dialogue is mishandled.

Bridges and obstacles in Christian-Muslim dialogue on religious belief can be summarised as follows:

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20. Acts of the Apostles Chapter 2.

BRIDGES	OBSTACLES
God as Creator	God the Father
Jesus as Prophet	Jesus as Son of God
Jesus born of the virgin	Jesus' crucifixion, death and resurrection
Jesus as Messiah	Holy Spirit (as Trinity)
Jesus calling his disciples	A Triune God
Jesus' miracles	Scriptures
Jesus' ascension	Forgiveness and punishment
Day of resurrection and judgement	God as love
Function of creeds	Prayer as personal communication with God
Concern for the poor	Mission and conversion
Social reform	

A word of caution is needed in concluding our discussion of dialogue on religious belief. Dialogue participants must be wary in approaching what may at first appear as areas of similar belief between the two faiths. Outward resemblances can be deceptive; similar terminology can mask deep-seated differences in understanding. Aspiring dialogue participants, in seeking to sensitively represent their own faith and interact with adherents of another faith, should proceed cautiously so as to avoid any risk of misrepresenting their own faith or the beliefs of others. This requires careful preparation, sometimes including formal study.

Model B: Dialogue for Conflict Resolution

A dialogue of a different form is seen in the WCC Encounter Youth Exchange Project. This was an inter-faith initiative of the Anglican Diocese of Chelmsford, England with the Maronite Diocese of Haifa and the Holy Land. The project was launched in September 1998, with the aim of seeking "to promote a better understanding of, and to work towards reconciliation between,

Christians, Jews and Muslims by offering young people an opportunity for encounter by way of educational exchange visits between the Holy Land and England."[21]

Thus the purpose is not so much focused upon a deep exchange of respective theological perspectives. Rather it is dialogue aimed at conflict resolution through showing the human face of communities in adversarial situations, in the hope that cycles of negative stereotyping will be broken. In the words of Project Co-ordinator Anne Davison: "We're using them as role models - an awareness-raising thing. It will be a chance for our kids to see something positive."[22]

The project's first encounter occurred in September 1998 in the form of an inter-faith meeting in East London, attended by students and staff from King Solomon High School (Jewish), the Ursuline School and Canon Palmer School (Roman Catholic Church) and Muslim students from Newham College of Further Education, all based in Britain.

In the second Encounter, held in August 1999, twelve young British people between the ages of 16 and 18 (four Christians, four Jews and four Muslims), with an equal balance between boys and girls, travelled to Jerusalem to meet a similarly constituted group for a ten-day Encounter. They participated in workshops at Neve Shalom (Wahat as-Salam in Arabic), a unique village[23] where Jews and Arabs live side by side, committed to working through their differences.[24]

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21. Anne Davison, "Encounter Youth Exchange Project Between England and the Holy Land for Christians, Jews and Muslims", *Current Dialogue* (32), (December 1998).

22. *The Jewish Chronicle*, (12 February 1999).

23. The website for this village is found at http://nswas.com/.

24. "Youth exchange project", *British Muslims Monthly Survey*, Vol. VII, No. 2, (February 1999), 10-11.

Prior to the Encounters, the respective groups participated in a preparation programme involving both cognitive and experiential activities. Both the preparation programme and the Encounters included activities focussing on basic principles of dialogue and conflict management techniques. The Encounters also provided time for visits to places of worship and historical interest and for fun.

This programme is funded by sponsorship and participant resources, and carries the stamp of the WCC as promotional body. This shows another dimension to WCC inter-faith activities, moving beyond the dialogue on religious belief to engaging with some of the most intractable inter-community conflicts.

In a similar spirit but different location, a tripartite dialogue body grouping Christians Jews, and Muslims was formed in Australia in 2003 and called the Jewish-Christian-Muslim Conference of Australia (JCMA). Its first significant event was a residential conference, including forty-five people drawn from the three faiths in equal numbers with a wide range of interests and held in Brisbane from 23-26 August 2004. The event took as its model a series of interfaith conferences held in Europe on an annual basis since the initial gathering at Bendorf in Germany in 1973.

Participants were drawn from clergy, lay people active in congregational life, academics, welfare and community support professionals, and tertiary students. The programme included time to share personal experiences and approaches to worship, and have group discussions on differing religious beliefs and community life under the guidance of fellow conference participants with experience in interfaith dialogue.

Following the success of this initial conference, the JCMA organized an annual four day residential conference for families, men and women and a Women's only conference. JCMA subsequently obtained a Living in Harmony

Grant from government to run a pilot Secondary Schools project in Metropolitan and Regional Victoria in 2006.[25]

Model C: Dialogue on Social Issues – Faith and Society

Dialogue initiatives have not been restricted to WCC - inclined church groups alone. Indeed, evangelical Christian contact with Muslim communities has witnessed an increasing variety of approaches, including dialogue. One of the most significant initiatives in this regard was the Faith and Society dialogue group in Britain, that ran from 1997-2003.

The Faith and Society group resulted from an increasing perception among evangelical groups that there were many areas of shared social concern among Muslims and Christians, and that the potential for partnership on these issues was not being addressed through existing methods of Christian-Muslim interaction. Accordingly, a pilot conference was held at the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity in November 1997, called "Faith and Power". The stated aim of the conference was "to reflect on areas of public life in which Christians and Muslims seek to work out the social and political implications of their faith in an increasingly secular society in Britain today."

This conference included plenary presentations on issues of social concern by Christian and Muslim speakers, including Bishop Lesslie Newbigin of the Church of England, Professor Lamin Sanneh of Yale Divinity School and Professor Tariq Modood of the University of Bristol. The plenary presentations were followed by meetings of focus groups addressing specific themes. The Christian: Muslim ratio at this initial conference was 9:1, of an overall attendance approaching 200 people.

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25. http://jcma.org.au/the-jcma

In the wake of the inaugural "Faith and Power" conference, a meeting of the organising committee was held on 6 January 1998. Members deemed the "Faith and Power" conference a success, but it was felt that effort should be devoted to achieving a greater sense of numerical balance between the faiths in future gatherings. Subsequent committee meetings in March and April 1998 led to the formal establishment of an ongoing dialogue group, under the leadership of Canon Christopher Lamb, Interfaith Secretary of the Church of England.[26]

A second conference for the renamed Faith and Society group was held on 7 October 1998 at the Islamic Foundation in Leicestershire. The theme was "People of Faith in Britain Today and Tomorrow", with the Christian plenary speaker being Canon Christopher Lamb and Dr Ataullah Siddiqui of the Islamic Foundation in Leicester. It was attended by around 140 people, with the Christian: Muslim ratio being approximately 60:40.[27] Of this number, around thirty-five expressed interest in participating in regular meetings of focus groups.[28] As a result, focus groups on Family, Sexuality and Gender, Education, and Religion and Public Life were convened in February and March 1999 to discuss relevant issues of common concern to Christians and Muslims.[29]

In October 1999 the Faith and Society group held its third annual meeting in Birmingham, and attracted around 100 Christians and Muslims, of whom

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26. Around the same time, a separate group focusing on mission and evangelism, called *Christian Responses to Islam* (CRIB), was established under the chairmanship of Bryan Knell, Head of Arab World Ministries UK. *Faith and Society and CRIB* were not organically linked but had some common membership.

27. The 1997 and 1998 conferences are discussed more fully in Ida Glaser. "Faith and Society in the UK." *Transformation* 17.1 (January/March 2000): 26-29.

28. *The Faith to Faith Newsletter* No. 1, (November 1998), 1.

29. *The Faith to Faith Newsletter* No. 2, (April 1999), 4.

around 80% were Christian.[30] The theme was "Seeking the Common Good".
Reverend John Austin, Bishop of Ascot, Birmingham delivered a plenary
presentation on behalf of Christian participants. He called on the audience to
learn to tell their respective stories in "an inclusive way". He further lamented
the state of economic imbalance in the world and called on people of faith to
overcome jointly "the idolatry of economic concerns" in the modern world.
Unlike Bishop Austin's presentation, which was virtually devoid of references
to biblical text or overtly Christian discourse, Imam Abduljalil Sajid, a leading
figure in the Muslim Council of Britain, set his plenary presentation firmly
within an Islamic theological framework. Imam Abduljalil argued that the
notion of the Common Good was heavily embedded within the vocabulary
of the Qur'an, and the five pillars of Islamic duty were an effective device for
encouraging Muslims to build concern for others into their daily lives. Imam
Abduljalil called on people of faith to work together to increase the public role
of religion.

Both keynote speakers agreed that dialogue did not demand complete
compromise, and that different faiths involved in inter-faith co-operation
should take care to preserve their distinctive features and beliefs. There was
also agreement on the need to address the world-wide imbalance in the distri-
bution of resources and wealth.

During the afternoon, participants broke into five focus groups, addressing
a range of social issues: the media; family, sexuality and gender; religion and
public life; education; and law. The media group based its discussion around
the question of "How to get God in the headlines". Members agreed to seek
to identify people of faith in the media who could assist to increase the public

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30. Peter Riddell "Christians and Muslims are 'seeking the common good'", *The Christian Herald*, (23 October 1999), 3.

profile of religion. Members also agreed to lodge complaints when material offensive to religious concerns appeared in the media.

The group discussing family, sexuality and gender considered a practical case study of family breakdown, and underlined the importance of support and education in the early stages of family formation. In a similar vein, the religion and public life group considered several practical case studies, showing co-operation between Christians and Muslims in various British cities. The education group initiated plans for visits to mutual places of worship by Christians and Muslims. The Law group addressed the different philosophical bases to English and Islamic Law, and considered the challenge ahead with the advent of European laws in Britain.

The annual day conference for the Faith and Society group for the following year was held on 28 October 2000 in Bradford at the Carlisle Business Centre. The theme was "Faiths in Society: A Challenge to Policy Makers", and the particular focus fell on the city of Bradford, which contains a significant Muslim population. The event attracted around 90 participants, of whom approximately one quarter were Muslim.

The day began with reflections on Christian and Muslim scriptures. This was followed by a Christian plenary session, given by Guy Wilkinson, Archdeacon of Bradford. He spoke of the church's perception of its own place and of that of the Muslim community, and then considered the public policy perception of religions. He concluded by suggesting ways that Christians and Muslims could jointly engage with public society, calling for joint action on social issues, co-operation to address negative media images of religious communities, and efforts to overcome territorial separation (stating that "white flight"is the church's responsibility and that Muslims should not encourage territorial separation).

The Muslim plenary address was given by Mohammed Ajeeb, former Lord

Mayor of Bradford. He called for frankness and honesty in dialogue, and cited instances of how Muslims had been victims of Islamophobia in Bradford and elsewhere in Britain. He stressed that Muslims perceived the Church as influential in public society, and called on the Church to assist the Muslim community in its situation of relative disempowerment.

In small group discussion, responses were given to the plenary talks. Some participants commented that significant public resources were channelled into the Muslim community and other minority communities in Bradford. One Asian Christian present asked how Muslims in Bradford contributed to the common good, rather than merely focusing on Muslim rights. This led to considerable discussion between Muslim and Christian speakers present. Focus groups met in the afternoon, assembled according to the topics of Law, Media, Education, Religion and Public Life, and Family, Sexuality and Gender

In the crisis surrounding the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Faith and Society event planned for late 2001 did not proceed. After a two-year hiatus, a group of Christians and Muslims met on 29 October 2002 to plan a resurrection of the dialogue group.[31] This meeting set the topic for the next conference in 2003 as "Faith and Citizenship". Committee members agreed to seek funding from both Muslim and Christian sources, and mapped out the program for the 2003 conference.

The Faith and Society Day Conference of 26 May 2003 was held at the Islamic Cultural Centre, London Central Mosque, in Regents Park. There were 45 attendees, of whom only seven were Muslims, all speakers or com-

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31. Those present were Canon Michael Ipgrave (Chair), John Webber, Julian Bond, Peter Riddell, Saeed Abdulrahim, and Imam Abduljalil Sajid.

mittee members.[32] In his welcoming comments, Canon Michael Ipgrave set the scene by posing a key question: "We are citizens of this country. We are also people of faith … How do we belong together and interact with one another?"

The Muslim plenary speaker was lawyer Ahmad Thompson, a white British convert to Islam. He began by pronouncing the Islamic profession of faith, the Shahada, also quoting from Qur'an chapter 97. He declared that there were two kinds of people in creation: those with faith (*mu'minun*) and those who reject faith (*kuffar*). This division, he explained, would determine their fate: the Garden or Hell Fire respectively. Thompson devoted most of his talk to an expose of the Five Pillars of Islam.

In question time Thompson engaged in extended polemic on political issues, lambasting what he termed "*kafir* [infidel] kingdoms"and tyrannies, including the Pyramid civilization, the Incas, Stalinist Russia, and extending to the USA, commenting "Once America has control of the oil in Iraq, it will be able to eliminate its own balance of payments", and declaring that the Zionists want an empire from the Nile to the Euphrates. His talk concluded with the declaration that "if we people of *iman*[faith] make a stand when people of ignorance control society, we can transform society."

The Christian plenary speaker was Dr Derek Tidball, Principal of the London School of Theology. He argued that "the Christian life cannot avoid addressing engagement with the world. But we cannot read straight off the page from Scripture." He pointed out that the Bible does not portray Christians living in a democracy. Therefore, he added, "we need hermeneutics to relate

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32. The poor Muslim attendance was due in part to an almost total absence of advertising of the event among the Muslim community.

Scripture to the modern world." Tidball drew on four "moments in Scripture" (Israel as theocracy, the period of exile, the period of Jesus Christ, the period of the Apostles), then addressed the challenge of relating Scriptural principles to the modern world, concluding that "to require religious people not to participate in politics is in effect to disenfranchise a section of the population."

In further discussion, Ahmed Thompson called for every religious community in Britain to be self-governing, and that ecclesiastical councils, the Jewish Beth Din and Shariah Courts should all be recognised by the legal authorities of the land. In response, one Muslim participant said: "Thompson speaks as if there is nothing positive about the West. That worries me." Thompson commented further: "It is important to understand why there are laws. For example, don't shun pork simply because it is prohibited. We should understand that the meat is bad. It is the only meat that goes bad from the inside out."

The 2003 Faith and Society conference proved to be the final event of this group. Throughout its life it had been beset by several problems. The first was the ever decreasing Muslim attendance, culminating in the 2003 meeting where virtually no Muslims from the general community participated. Furthermore, some unreasoned polemic from certain Muslim speakers, combined with some bland, self-effacing presentations from certain Christian speakers, created more dissonance than consonance among the audience, discouraging the kind of commitment needed for such dialogue groups to survive and flourish.

Nevertheless, Faith and Society provided an example of how evangelical Christian approaches to other faiths have diversified beyond traditional mission activities. In the early years (1998-2000) Faith and Society facilitated significant and ongoing contacts between evangelical Christians and Muslims in Britain. Though its discussions ostensibly addressed issues of social concern,

nevertheless scriptural and theological references were also frequent from both sides, and provided an opportunity for Christians and Muslims to engage as people of faith, as well as common inhabitants of British society.

Model D: Christian-Muslim Debate

It is noticeable that dialogue activities such as those described above produce positive interest and engagement from two of the three Muslim categories discussed at the outset of this present paper: namely traditionalist and modernising Muslims. On the Christian side, participation in dialogue has been seen to come from liberal, traditionalist and evangelical wings of the churches.

There is one Muslim voice which has not yet been heard; namely, that of Islamist militants who, according to Ishtiaq Ahmed, represent 10–15% of Muslims in Britain[33]. Where do they fit into Christian-Muslim relations?

Islamist radicals in Western countries have been posing a unique set of challenges to the Christian faith. Islamic student groups on university campuses in Western universities have been engaging in increasing levels of anti-Christian polemic, as part of their mission (*da'wa*) activities. They have been distributing material written by such famous Muslim polemicists as Ahmed Deedat, in their effort to pose searching challenges about the reliability of the biblical materials. A relatively benign example of such anti-Christian polemic is the following:

> "The gradual realisation of the distortions present in a number of their holy books is bound to lead the Christians, sooner or later, to admit to the truth of the fact that the greater part of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures have undergone great changes and distortions.

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33. Paul Vallely, 'Bradford rises above the ashes', *The Independent*, (14 January 1999).

We have shown that the Christians do not possess any authentic records or acceptable arguments for the authenticity of the books of either the Old Testament or the New Testament." [34]

Such challenges have been ignored by most Christian groups engaged in multi-faith contacts, whether liberal, traditionalist or evangelical. However, some evangelical groups have responded by accepting challenges to public debates, following a practice used in earlier periods by Christian missionaries such as Karl Pfander.

Such public debates are increasingly popular on Western university campuses. In Britain they are typically organised by student Islamic societies, and are designed around a strictly enforced structure. Such debates attract large numbers. For example, a debate organised by the Manchester University Islamic Society and the Christian Union on 19 April 1997 attracted 500 people, filling the hall to capacity and disappointing many would-be attenders who were not able to enter the hall. The Christian speaker was Jay Smith,[35] a prominent debater on Christian-Muslim topics in Britain and the US. Muslim arguments were articulated by Shabir Ali, a leading debater from the Da'wah Centre, Canada. Three topics were discussed: 'Similarities and Differences between Islam and Christianity', 'The Nature of Sin' and 'What does Islam or Christianity have to offer the campus?' Each speaker spoke without interruption for ten minutes, then each was given five minutes to respond to the other. Questions were then received from the floor, with the Chair enforcing the strict rules of discussion and debate.

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34. M.M. Rahmatullah Kairanvi, *Izhar-ul-Haq (Truth Revealed): Contradictions and Errors in the Biblical Text,* 2nd edn, (Jeddah: World of Knowledge for Publishing and Distribution, 1992), 52.

35. For a robust defence of the debate method, cf. Jay Smith, 'Courage in our convictions: The case for debate in Islamic outreach', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly,* vol. 34, no. 1, (January 1998).

Since that event, public Christian-Muslim debates have been taking place with increasing frequency overseas around the world. For example, in Somerset West, South Africa, Jay Smith appeared in public debate with Yusuf Ismail, Muslim polemicist after the style of Ahmed Deedat, on the subject of "The Biblical and Qur'anic Approach to Peace and Violence" on 21 April 2012.

In Australia, Christian-Muslim debates have been held increasingly in Sydney and Melbourne since 2005. For example, on 15 September 2010 a Christian-Muslim forum pitted evangelical Bernie Power against Muslim convert Musa Ceratonio on the question 'Is the Qur'an the word of God?' The organisers expected an audience of around 30, but an additional 100 attended, demonstrating how such debates address a felt need of both Christians and Muslims. Dr Power similarly took part in a dialogical debate with Rafiq Clarkson at the Melbourne City Conference Centre on 20th April 2012 addressing the topic "Spiritual role models for the 21st Century". Over 200 Christians and Muslims were in attendance.

A place of regular debating interaction between Christians and Muslims in Britain is Speaker's Corner at Hyde Park, where militant Muslims had come to dominate the scene until challenged by the evangelical Hyde Park Christian Fellowship since the latter years of the 1990s.

This approach can be more apologetic and polemical in methodology than dialogical. Arguing for the importance of this approach, Smith calls for a redefinition of 'dialogue' based on the biblical example of Paul's methodology, saying:

> "Paul's premise for dialoguing was not simply to learn from others, and from there to compromise his beliefs in order to evolve another set of beliefs. He knew this would bring about syncretism …he sought to prove what he said (Acts 17:3). He marshaled arguments to support his case, provided

evidence, and therefore engaged in argument …His job was to persuade [his hearers] of the truth of the gospel. What they did with that truth was then their own responsibility."[36]

This method is highly controversial, attracting much opposition from within Christian circles, including evangelical opposition[37]. However, it also attracts considerable support. It requires a large dose of courage, both in terms of facing a particularly intimidating manifestation of Islam as well as dealing with hostility from certain Christian individuals and groups. At the time of writing, the debate methodology leads the way among Christian approaches to Islam which specifically address anti-Christian polemic from radical Muslim groups.

CONCLUSIONS

In a twenty-first-century context, is an exclusivist approach, arguably based on a biblical model, the best way to achieve Christian goals? Previous discussion, including the examination of selected case studies, points to a wide variety of approaches to Christian-Muslim interaction. We have examined various kinds of dialogue: dialogue on religious belief, dialogue for conflict resolution and dialogue on social concerns (called by some "secular dialogue"). In addition to these three, we could add traditional mission (by both Christians and Muslims) as a mode of interaction, campaigns on advocacy and justice, and apologetics in the form of debate.

Our examination of church policy and practice, with a particular focus

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36. Smith (1998), 29.

37. Refer critique of Smith's methods from several Christian writers in Smith, 'Courage in our convictions".

placed on the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance, suggests that different Christian groups share certain methods but some modes of interaction are avoided by specific groups. Indeed, the method chosen will be largely determined by the kinds of Christians and Muslims involved in the interaction. This can be tabulated as follows, with the numbering system reflecting the broad priority given by each Christian group to the respective mode of interaction:

Modes of Christian-Muslim interaction			
	Muslim modernisers	Muslim traditionalists	Islamists
World Council of Churches	1. Dialogue on religious experience 2. Dialogue on social concerns 3. Campaigns on advocacy and justice	1. Dialogue on religious experience 2. Dialogue on social concerns 3. Campaigns on advocacy and justice	
Christian evangelicals	1. Traditional mission 2. Campaigns on advocacy and justice 3. Dialogue on social concerns 4. Dialogue on religious experience	1. Traditional mission 2. Campaigns on advocacy and justice 3. Dialogue on social concerns 4. Dialogue on religious experience	1. Traditional mission 2. Campaigns on advocacy and justice 3. Debate/ apologetics

Several important observations can be drawn from the above diagram:

• The World Council of Churches, predominantly representing liberals and traditionalists in its Protestant segments, tends to engage primarily with Muslim modernisers and traditionalists, preferring to ignore Islamist militants.

• The WCC prefers the modes of dialoguing on religious experience and

social concerns, with a lessening emphasis on campaigning for advocacy and justice, and a disavowal of apologetics and debate.

● Christian evangelicals, grouped under the WEA, maintain the priority of traditional mission as well as advocacy and justice issues. Nevertheless, there is an increasing evangelical participation in dialoguing on religious experience and social concerns. Furthermore, the only Christian group to be responding directly to the Islamist minority and its anti-Christian polemic comes from the evangelical stream, using debate.

The varied modes of interaction presented above are an appropriate reflection of the rich tapestry of both Christianity and Islam. Such diverse approaches may well be the most appropriate way for the future, given the diversity of Muslim communities with which Christians are interacting. It would be inappropriate to engage in robust debate with congenial Muslim traditionalists, just as it would be to engage in soft dialogue with Islamist militants. Christians interacting with Muslims need a kitbag of tools as it were, selecting the appropriate tool according to the type of Muslim with whom they come into contact.

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