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A free, monthly online publication that provides you with evangelism and missions news and information.

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## PUBLISHER'S MEMO

### Being the Church in Different Cultures

By Doug Birdsall

**From the very beginning of the early Church, it was clear that the gospel message was not intended for an exclusive culture or people**, but was rather to be translated, accepted and expressed in a multitude of languages, cultures and peoples. The message is for all so that “every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11). The great hope in the end is depicted in the fantastic vision when “a great multitude, which no man could number, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne, and in front of the Lamb, wearing white robes, and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb’” (Revelation 7:9-10).

As great and inspiring as this vision of heaven is, the natural human inclination throughout the history of the Church has been to attempt to make the gospel exclusive—with our own unique cultural expression of the gospel and church as definitive. It happened in the very beginning of the Church when Peter was confronted by both Jesus and Paul. It has also been experienced through the expansion of the Church in the age of Western imperialism and now faster than ever through the age of globalization.

The Holy Spirit made it clear from the very beginning that the gospel also belonged to those perceived to be “outsiders” (Gentiles in the case of the early Jewish Christians). He also made it clear that those who accepted the message of Christ are to be included in the worship and fellowship of the Body of Christ, without discrimination or favoritism.

### Being the Church in Different Cultures Today

This challenge of discerning what it means to be the Church and to be the Church in different cultures persists today. Although the gospel message is timeless, the world today has become more complex. Expressions of the Christian faith and how we come together in community have also become increasingly more complex and varied. From house churches to mega-churches to Internet churches, from churches in the great urban cities of the world to churches in Islamic contexts, Buddhist contexts, socialist contexts, poverty-stricken contexts and so on, the challenges are formidable. And yet, there exists the potential for the universal Church to indeed be the divine Body of Christ.

In this issue of LWP, I am delighted to present several perspectives on **what it means to be the Church in different cultures**. Having come from our first executive team meeting for Lausanne III in 2010 just a few months ago, I had the wonderful opportunity to meet with African church leaders. I am excited to present to you a South African perspective in Michael Cassidy’s article on what it means to be the Church. From Africa, we continue the exploration of the phenomenon of Christ followers within Hindu and Muslim contexts as presented by Jonas Jørgensen. Moving to Oceania, we have an update from Daniel Willis, an International Deputy

Director for Lausanne. Knud Jørgensen explores the status of church structures in Europe, and the growing trend of house churches is explored in two different perspectives by Peter Brierley and David G. Wyman.

It is my prayer that as we engage in thought and action on what it means to be the Church in different cultures and challenging contexts, we will be inspired and spurred on toward the hope of the gospel for every nation, tribe and tongue to sing before the throne of God on that great day.

**Doug Birdsall** is executive chair of the [Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization](#). He served as president of [Asian Access](#) from 1991 to 2007 and continues to serve on their board of directors. Birdsall is a graduate of Wheaton College, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Harvard University. He is co-publisher of Lausanne World Pulse.

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## NEWS BRIEFS

### **AROUND THE WORLD: Christian Persecution Showing No Sign of Improvement**

According to the German yearbook, *Martyrs 2007*, at least one in ten Christians around the world suffers persecution. In Iraq alone, three in four Iraqi Christians have left their country in fear of harassment, kidnapping or death. There are more than 200 million Christians worldwide who suffer persecution or discrimination; unfortunately, according to the report, there are no signs of improvement. ([idea](#))

### **AROUND THE WORLD: Kirk Franklin Named CEO of Wycliffe International**

Kirk Franklin was recently appointed by the Board of Wycliffe International to become the new executive director (CEO) of [Wycliffe Bible Translators International](#). He replaces Dr. John Watters. Franklin, a citizen of both Australia and the USA, has served with Wycliffe since 1980, most recently as executive director of Wycliffe Australia. He spent twenty-five years in Papua New Guinea (PNG), is fluent in the Tok Pisin language of PNG and has traveled to twenty-five countries, meeting with mission organizations and speaking at churches and mission events. "Bible translation is a key facet of the overarching mission of God," Franklin stated. "We face tremendous challenges. More than two thousand of the world's minority language groups still need access to scripture in a language and format they can readily understand. The raising of resources for Bible translation takes place in a rapidly changing social, cultural, economic, political and religious environment in each nation and globally." ([Wycliffe International](#))

### **AROUND THE WORLD: SVM2's 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting**

[Student Volunteer Movement 2](#) (SVM2) is holding a *21 Days of Prayer and Fasting* 15 February 2008 through 6 March 2008. The event will engage the emerging generation to return to Christ as the fountain of life. Highlighted in each of the twenty-one days will be the core elements of repentance, personal holiness, finding joy, healing, experiencing satisfaction in Christ and being channels of that fountain to the nations. The prayer and fasting can be done either alone or in a group, in any location. Participants can download a prayer and fasting guide. ([Student Volunteer Movement 2](#))

### **ETHIOPIA: Graduates Aim to Reach the Horn of Africa for Christ**

The Awassa District Centre located in Awassa, Ethiopia, was the site of a December graduation ceremony for forty-four students receiving a diploma of ministry or certificate in ministry from the Horn of Africa Creative Leadership Institute. Speaker and Horn of Africa field education coordinator Terry Barker asked the graduates, "Who do you say that Jesus is?" and challenged them to live with the knowledge they acquired in school, pass it on to others and be prepared to answer those who question their faith. Horn of Africa field strategy coordinator Howie Shute sent his congratulations and reminded the students that the Awassa Centre is part of a bigger system of education and training. He believes their district has become a leader in a great movement of God across the Horn of Africa, with thousands of new churches being planted and thousands of new converts coming into a relationship with the living Lord. The message further stated, "Having a system of multiplication of

pastors is a must in order to sustain the system of multiplication of churches that is taking place in the district and the field. This means that you are all teachers and you must teach and teach until Jesus comes.” ([Nazarene Communications Network News-Africa](#))

### **GERMANY: Churches Preaching “Light” Version of the Gospel**

According to German theologian Christoph Stenschke, evangelical Christians in Germany have embraced a postmodern “light” version of the gospel. Stenschke says that in contrast to preachers speaking on repentance, hell and sin, as they did in previous decades, most sermons today are a call to “make friends with Jesus.” The outcome has been little life-long, life-changing discipleship and enthusiastic commitment to the faith. Germany’s largest evangelical church, the German Baptist Union, for instance, has not seen experienced any significant growth in years. ([idea](#))

### **HAITI: Clean Water Transforming Communities**

Something as simple as clean, safe water can transform a community. For churches in Haiti—where more than half of the eight million people do not have access to safe drinking water—this means they can become the source of both the literal and spiritual water of life. At the Saint Michel, Haiti, Church of the Nazarene, a hand-pump well has allowed church members to offer water to their community. It means they can provide water for the children at their day school—a necessity for growing and learning. It also helps them cook the food for the school’s daily feeding program. In the northern peninsula of Haiti, La Reserve Church of the Nazarene is also finishing a fresh-water cistern that will provide water for a community in the mountains and for the kids at their day school. Through the Haiti Water Project, groups are partnering with local churches to empower them to provide sustainable water resources for the people in their communities. ([Nazarene Caribbean Communications Office](#))

### **INDIA: Verse-by-Verse Teaching Translated into Hindi**

Pastor [Chuck Smith](#)’s (founder of [Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa](#), California, USA) verse-by-verse Bible teachings have been translated into Hindi through the efforts of K.P. Yohannan, founder of [Gospel for Asia](#) (GFA), and the GFA team. In a country where nearly 600 million people speak Hindi, GFA hopes to get 100,000 CD copies of Smith’s teachings into the hands of Indian pastors and missionaries. “One of the greatest crises we have is when revival breaks out and millions of people turn to Christ—but then, when there’s not enough teaching of God’s word, usually they end up in all kind of extreme cults,” said Yohannan. “So we felt compelled to give to pastors something they can actually listen to and then be able to teach their congregations. This project is Pastor Chuck Smith teaching through the Bible; Genesis to Revelation; chapter by chapter; line by line.” For nearly five decades, Smith has been teaching thousands of people God’s word every week. The [Calvary Chapel](#) movement birthed the modern-day worship music and contemporary Christian music. ([ASSIST News Service](#))

### **IRELAND: Significant Decline in Religious Knowledge**

According to a new poll, levels of religious knowledge throughout Ireland are decreasing significantly, and in Northern Ireland (NI) are even lower than in the Republic. According to an [Ekklesia](#) article, the poll is believed to be the first ever conducted on the subject in NI and is the follow up to a religious knowledge poll conducted in the Republic of Ireland on behalf of The Iona Institute and the Evangelical Alliance of Ireland (EAI). Those organizing the poll conclude that, contrary to popular belief, NI is less religious than the South and that it was already known that church attendance figures in the North were lower than in the South. The poll found that levels of religious knowledge among Northern and Southern Catholics were roughly the same; however, in general, levels of religious knowledge among Northern Protestants were lower than among Northern Catholics. The one question where Protestants were more likely to know the answer was when asked what the first book of the Bible was. Sixty-eight percent of Protestants knew it was Genesis, compared to only fifty-four percent of Catholics. However, only forty-two percent of respondents in the North knew there are four Gospels. Thirty-nine percent of Catholics knew the first of the Ten Commandments, compared to twenty-six percent of

Protestants. The poll also found a marked difference between the levels of knowledge found among younger and older age groups. Just twenty-one percent of NI respondents aged 16-24 knew there are four Gospels. Stephen Cave, of the Evangelical Alliance (Northern Ireland), explained, "The results of this poll throw serious doubt on the claim that we are a 'Christian country.' The findings present a serious challenge to the Church and those involved in religious education." ([ASSIST News Service](#))

### **JAPAN: Increased Poverty among Young Adults**

Japanese Christian groups are noticing increasing poverty among young adults. This in a country that once had an image that its companies provide lifetime employment and that it has a strong middle class base. "If one applies the commandment, 'You shall not kill,' this should mean allowing poor young adults in Japan who have insecure lives as part-time and contract workers to live properly," says the Rev. Iwao Hayashi of the United Church of Christ in Japan. ([Ecumenical News International](#))

### **SRI LANKA: Church Groups Call for Solution to Ethnic Conflict**

Church groups in Sri Lanka have made a united call for a political solution to the ethnic conflict that has divided the island for two years and claimed more than six thousand lives. "Fighting will not lead us anywhere," the Rev. W. P. Ebenezer Joseph, president of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka, said. In recent months, Sri Lanka has slid back into civil war between security forces and Tamil rebels seeking autonomy from the mainly Buddhist Sinhalese majority. Although a 2002 ceasefire put in place by Norwegian mediators ended two decades of conflict, fighting flared again after the election of President Mahinda Rajapakse in November 2005. Rajapakse won with the support of Sinhala nationalist parties. ([Ecumenical News International](#))

### **UNITED STATES: Jewish and Muslim Interfaith Dialogue Project**

Two major religious organizations, one Jewish and one Muslim, have unveiled an interfaith dialogue project intended to reach hundreds of thousands of their members across the United States and Canada. At its biennial convention in San Diego on 15 December 2007, the Union for Reform Judaism announced it had begun discussions with the Islamic Society of North America. ([Ecumenical News International](#))

### **ZAMBIA: First Lady Says Country a "Christian Nation"**

Maureen Mwanawasa, the First Lady of Zambia, has stated in an interview concerning HIV/AIDS in Zambia, that her country has become a "Christian nation." According to Mwanawasa, "The Church is one of the biggest helpers of [Zambia's] government in the fight against HIV/AIDS....Actually, our country was declared a Christian nation, so you can see how dependent we are on God for an answer to the challenge." Her husband, President Levy Mwanawasa, caused a sensation in 2005 when he gave his life to Christ and, as President of Zambia, was baptized at a local Baptist church in Lusaka, the country's capital city. "This baptism was an incredible occasion for the Baptist witness to many people who have not been in church before," said Troy Lewis, a Southern Baptist missionary in the southern African nation of more than ten million people. "They heard the gospel of Jesus Christ." On the day of his baptism, Mwanawasa shared his spiritual journey before a packed chapel service. He told listeners he had been "struck" by Jesus—similar to the Apostle Paul's experience on the road to Damascus. ([ASSIST News Service](#))

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## **THEMED ARTICLES: Being the Church in Different Cultures**

### **What Does It Mean to Be the Church in Specific Cultures?**

By Michael Cassidy

**The Church of Jesus Christ is that body of people in any given socio-cultural context who have committed their lives to Christ and who worship and follow him in obedient discipleship, faithfully receiving both**

word and sacrament, and witnessing of him not only by godly character and example but by practical and compassionate action. Where truest to itself, the Church is both salt and light in any given society—as salt arresting decay and as light dispelling darkness.

As such, the Church lives according to certain biblical universals which are worked out and applied within a diverse set of cultural particulars and variables according to any given context. The Church is thus in the world but not of it (John 17:14-18).

This also means that all Christians have a dual nationality and a double address. They are on the one hand *in Christ* and on the other hand *in a specific locale*. The apostle can thus write to the saints and faithful brethren “in Christ at Colosse” (Colossians 1:2). Their spiritual identity and locale was *in Christ*, while their physical locale and identity was derived from being contextually located *at Colosse*.

It is the interplay, interface and interaction between these two identities, the one spiritual and the other geographical, which creates the challenges relating to what it means to be the Church in specific cultures.

### **Universals of the Church**

Of course, wherever the Church is, regardless of cultural context, it has the universal obligation to be true to Christ and his word, to be in spiritual togetherness with one another (e.g. Acts 2:44) and to be in prayer for the world and the culture of each context.

It will see itself obliged to proclaim the gospel to all who have not heard, to disciple those who have come to faith and to bring into reconciliation all who are alienated or divided from one another. It will stand as the symbol of hope and it will be the bearer of it. It will declare and show how people who are lost can be found. It will prophetically address societal issues in terms of justice and righteousness. It will care for the poor, marginalized and oppressed. It will uphold biblical family life and both affirm and demonstrate Christian marriage as monogamous and heterosexual. All these tasks and others the Church will seek to faithfully perform regardless of cultural context. These are the universals.

However, the Church does not dangle in thin air; its message and witness therefore must be culturally rooted and contextually applied.

### **Culture and Context**

This is where the real challenges of relevant and meaningful witness come in.

On the one hand, the hard fact is that culture is absolutely critical because culture is all about how people live and behave in different situations, nations, tribes, races or contexts. On the other hand, the gospel is all about God addressing us from his perspective concerning how he wants us to live and behave in our various cultural contexts. For example, God has not called us to live in the first century or in the Middle Ages; he has called us to live in this new millennium in the context of a very secularised, Western and neo-pagan culture. We must therefore struggle to relate our faith to the contemporary scene and help Christians develop both a Christian critique of its presuppositions, values, standards and behaviours.

Therefore, we will not reshape the gospel in sympathy with the relativistic assumptions of most modern cultures. In fact, it is this set of assumptions we need to critique.

Defining culture further, one of my former colleagues in [African Enterprise](#), Jonathan Wilson, made this observation:

“Culture is the totality of learned assumptions and behaviours associated with any distinct social grouping. We all belong to cultures. Cultures assume truths about life, principles of social interaction, priorities and values, and build structures and patterns of behaviour that give life to these beliefs and values. Therefore, all cultures are rooted in worldviews. Worldviews are those deeply, often unconsciously, held assumptions about why life is the way it is and how life works.”

And of course, all of life and behaviour are affected by our worldview.

### **Challenges for the Church**

This is where the Church faces tremendous challenges in terms of knowing when to affirm various aspects of culture, critique them, outright condemn them and/or judge them. Because the Bible is our authority, we see it standing over culture rather than under it. This applies to ideology as well. In the apartheid era in South Africa, political ideology in certain sectors of the Church was placed over biblical principle and turned into a type of hermeneutic by which scripture was interpreted to justify racist and segregationist policies.

This underlines the necessity of our apologetics and mission being carried out “worldviewishly” in terms of challenging non-biblical worldviews and our prophetic witness operating contextually in terms of challenging, rebuking and seeking to change those cultural practices contrary to scripture. While we as human beings and the universe around us are God’s creation, culture is humanity’s creation and therefore manifests human fallenness in all its assorted dimensions. That is why our witness requires us to challenge culture.

For example, in South Africa where I live, there is a strong tendency within our society to say that anything that is African, black and cultural is good and okay. Therefore, the worship of ancestors, the consulting of witchdoctors or spiritist media, and even polygamy, become acceptable. Animal sacrifice as a means of placating offended ancestors is also becoming more rather than less acceptable. Even in the Church these practices are sometimes sanctioned. However, this kind of line is immediately found faulty as soon as one makes similar statements for white or Western culture. No African would agree that everything white, Western and culturally acceptable to whites is right and morally valid.

Clearly, we cannot start with personal, private or traditional feelings about what cultural practices or outlooks are morally acceptable. The criteria and principles by which we make these cultural judgments must be objectively located in biblical principle and in the authority of the Judeo-Christian scriptures.

### **The Missionary Enterprise**

But carrying this out successfully is not always easy, as the nineteenth century missionary enterprise will testify. British theologian Chris Wright helpfully asks questions along these lines in regards to early missionaries who made judgements about other cultures which were based not so much on essential Christian and gospel values as on their own cultural assumptions: “Were they mistaken in making judgements at all? Their judgements may have been faulty and laden with unexamined assumptions of Western superiority, but is it illegitimate to criticise any features of a culture on any grounds?”<sup>1</sup>

Wright goes on to argue that it is not illegitimate, because we have in the Judeo-Christian scriptures an objective authority that judges culture:

“All culture is a human product and therefore manifests both the dignity of the image of God and the depravity of human fallenness. So while we may not be in a position to make judgements on other cultures, from the *horizontal* viewpoint of our own, ...nevertheless the revelation of God in scripture and Christ gives us an elevation (which of course is neither of our own creation nor to our own credit) from which such a critique can be made.”<sup>2</sup>

## **The Civil War of Values in the West**

The struggle of the Church to be the Church in specific cultures does not relate simply to places like Africa. It is very real and almost more overwhelming in the West where we have what **James Dobson** has called “a civil war of values.” James Davison Hunter thus wrote, “The cultural war emerges over fundamentally different conceptions of moral authority, over different ideas and beliefs about truth, the good, obligation to one another, the nature of community and so on. It is therefore cultural conflict at its deepest level.”<sup>3</sup>

Quite right. In fact, there is a struggle for domination between two different sets of ideas and moral assumptions.

On the one hand, there are those who view the universe atheistically and mechanistically as an accidental consequence of Impersonal Energy + Time + Chance. That view of the universe will generally produce behaviour and action in direct contradiction to everything the Christian stands for. On the other hand, there are those who see the universe and everything around us as the result of a creator’s hand and ultimately having a transcendent God as the author and explanation of everything. The Christian will go further and affirm that our own worldview involves understanding Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the living God and the Bible as his written and expressly declared word, will and self-revelation. The cultural, moral and spiritual clash between those holding these different worldviews is obviously going to be real and fierce.

All of this places a tremendous responsibility and challenge upon Christians at this time.

As **Cape Town 2010: The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation** approaches, programmers of the Congress will need to work diligently in helping all participants, not only those in Cape Town, but those hooked up by satellite and Internet feed around the world, to struggle with these issues of gospel contextualisation and cultural application. If we do not, we risk serious irrelevance. We cannot do our evangelism and mission in the twenty-first century as we have done it in past centuries or even decades. The situation is new. The contexts are profoundly challenging. Contemporary cultures are involved in massive and rapid change and by and large moving into greater and greater moral and spiritual lostness.

The Christian Church accordingly has a word for the world about our Lord Jesus Christ, his atoning death on the cross, his resurrection and his offer of eternal life and meaning to all who repent and believe. This is a matchless message that can meet the needs of humans everywhere. But we have to work on making it contextually relevant and culturally comprehensible. Being in the world but not of it, we will tackle its needs and challenges while not being seduced by its presuppositions, worldviews or moral behaviour.

The challenge, exciting and overwhelming, is before us all.

## **Endnotes**

1. Taken from *The Gospel in the Modern World—A Tribute to John Stott*. 1991. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 40.
2. Ibid.
3. Hunter, James Davidson. 1992. *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. New York: Basic Books.

**Michael Cassidy** is the founder of **African Enterprise**. Author of a number of books, he has also played a key role as a Christian leader involved in reconciliation in South Africa.

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## **The Dilemma of State Church Structures in Europe**

**By Knud Jørgensen**

**How important is religion to people in Europe?** In Muslim nations, about ninety percent declare that religion “plays a very important role” in their lives, while the United States figure in 2002 was about sixty percent. The average figure in 2002 for Europeans was twenty-one percent, with national variations (Italy, twenty-seven percent; Germany, twenty-one percent; France, eleven percent). A survey of British respondents in 2004 found only forty-four percent professed a belief in God; thirty-five percent did not believe in God.

### **The Dramatic Decline of Churchgoers in Europe**

European levels of church attendance are deteriorating. Forty percent of Americans visit a place of worship weekly, compared with less than twenty percent in most of Europe. The British attendance figure is fifteen percent, with twelve percent in Germany and less than five percent in Scandinavia—and these figures include attendance at any place of worship, whether church, mosque or synagogue. Between forty and fifty percent in Scandinavia practically never attend a place of worship.

The **Evangelical Church in Germany**, EKD, which includes most Protestants, has lost over half its membership in the past fifty years. Only one million of its twenty-eight million members demonstrate any regular participation.

What are the reasons for this drastic decline? There are a number of reasons, including the effects of the Enlightenment, secularisation and the consumer society. My thesis in this article is, however, that *the Constantinian structures of churches in Europe, and particularly in Protestant northern Europe, have played a significant role*. I am well aware that formal state churches are rare today and found only in Norway and Finland (and for all practical purposes in Denmark); however, the state church structures have actually, since Constantine in AD 313-325, played an essential role in most of Christendom.

### **Gospel Reductionism**

Darrell L. Guder wrote in 2000 about the conversion of the Church. This conversion is related to re-thinking theology, evangelization, worship, leadership and structures. Most importantly, it demands undertaking measures against the *gospel reductionism* within the Church. The early Church went from “movement” to becoming an “institution.” Constantine’s Church replaced the understanding of the gospel with a focus on an event with the formulation of a defined faith system consisting of truths. The Kingdom of God was conceived as the eternity that awaits a Christian after death; salvation was given to the individual by the church, in particular through the sacraments. On the basis of these gospel reductions, the organizational structure of the Church was transformed into state religion and the administrator of religious meaning in society.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, according to Guder, the reformation and pietism have reduced the gospel to a matter of salvation for the individual:

“The benefits of salvation are separated from the reason for which we receive God’s grace in Christ: to empower us as God’s people to become Christ’s witnesses. This fundamental dichotomy between the benefits of the gospel and the mission of the gospel constitutes the most profound reductionism of the gospel.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Structures and Secularisation**

These structures have, in the course of the centuries and in close collaboration with the Enlightenment, also paved the way for the so-called secularisation (“so-called” because most scholars were wrong when they predicted that religion would lose its influence and eventually disappear). What actually occurred was that Christianity and the Church lost its support and position within Western society and have become increasingly marginalized, while at the same time religion in general has flourished throughout the rest of the world. In England, church membership has fallen to fifteen percent, and in several East-German cities memberships have dropped as low as ten percent. In my time, church membership in Denmark has dropped by fifteen percent, and church attendance has decreased by seventy-five percent.

At the same time, our Scandinavian societies have developed into multi-societies (multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious). In the midst of this development, faith is cut loose: one-third of the Danish population believes in reincarnation, and large groups make use of religious or quasi-religious therapists.<sup>3</sup>

A 2003 overview sketches some main challenges to churches from the Constantinian era:



### The Need for New Paradigms

In his pioneer book on missiology<sup>4</sup>, South African missiologist David Bosch claims that we are experiencing a shift from the modern Enlightenment paradigm in the history of Christendom toward a postmodern, ecumenical paradigm. In this shift, old answers will not suffice. A paradigm shift requires a shift in worldview. Above we have looked at the dramatic changes in the established churches of the West which led to the closure of the era of Christendom. During the last decades of the twentieth century we experienced a religious shift from the North to the South, and a shift of gravity with regard to church and Christians: a massive growth in the South and East, whereas Western churches experienced a disastrous decline.

Thus it is clear that *Corpus Christianum*—the idea of a unity made up of state, religion and culture as the canopy for the Church’s work—no longer functions. The West is witnessing the end of an era that lasted from the Constantinian state Church and Church tradition dating from the fourth century. This calls for a dramatic readjustment process. The idea of *Corpus Christianum* symbolized wedlock between the Church and the holders of power, which, in different ways, turned a missionary Church into a pastoral institution.

As the state religion of Rome, the Christian faith became the civil religion and the society’s administrator of religious meaning. The Church’s structure adopted the shape of society’s structure, with parochial churches, and a clear division between *clerici* (priests) and *idiotes* (lay people). Faith was practiced by taking part in the arrangements of the Church, and evangelization was replaced with (forced) “Christianization.” Breaking with the Constantinian tradition and its access to power and influence is not easy. In other parts of the world, a break with the Constantinian Church has already taken place, or it has never been present in the first place. To us in Europe it has become an obstacle to mission because it conceals the fact that we are situated in a mission context.

According to Stanley Hauerwas, “Constantinianism is a hard habit to break. It is particularly hard when it seems that we do so much good by remaining in ‘power.’ It is hard to break because all our categories have been set by the Church’s establishment as a necessary part of Western civilization.”<sup>5</sup>

Most often I meet the following argument: The Constantinian structures, with parishes, pastors and public support, offer a multitude of opportunities for relating to people in connection with baptism, confirmation, wedding and funeral. In the Christendom era when the population was largely Christian, the argument was valid; however, it is not valid in a situation where we actually find ourselves in a mission situation.

In such a mission situation, “Christianization” is no longer the answer. A mission situation calls for mission, because our European societies are no longer homogeneous culturally and religiously. We are confronted with a multicultural and multireligious context where the state church structures are obsolete. And we are confronted by a postmodern culture where the parish structure no longer attracts people in the cities and only partially in the countryside.

**Missional Church**

The alternative for many in Europe is a *missional Church*. The vision to be a missional Church is born out of a critique of our conception of being church. The response to a mission situation is not to initiate efforts to “communicate with modern humanity”; rather, it is to ask what is wrong with today’s Church since the gospel appears so irrelevant to so many.

The features of the Constantinian Church are similar to a Lutheran conception of the Church as the place for preaching of the gospel and administering the sacraments. A missional Church is where the people of God—in following Christ—participate in God’s mission through being, word and deed in their daily lives. The symbols of the Constantinian Church are the place, the temple, the word, the sacred; whereas, the symbols of the missional Church are the way, discipleship, wholeness and everyday life. Likewise, one can distinguish between the custodians of the Constantinian Church—a clerical hierarchy of static institutions—and the custodians of the missional Church—lay people who dynamically live out their faith in everyday situations.

<b>Constantinian ↔ missional identity</b>	
<b>From</b>	<b>Towards</b>
Majority church in the centre of culture	Marginalized minority church
Mono-culture/-religion	Multi-culture/-religions
World evangelization accomplished	New evangelization of every generation
The unchanging structure of the church	Ecclesia semper reformanda
Institutions	Sojourning
Focus on control – rules	Uncontrollable, guided by convictions
Institutionally resourceful	Powerlessness, suffering servant
The church as a co-sponsor of culture	The church as a critic of the culture

In the midst of this paradigm shift, the question is: How can we be God’s Church in our time? This is not a matter of new methods or models. Encountering the challenges of the Church and a changing society, Europeans tend to think in terms of analyses, solutions and projects—new church models, electronic church, reshaped worship and evangelization efforts.

In reality, the shift we experience raises questions about the theology and spirituality. We are forced to reread scripture about what it means to be God’s people in the world. In this light, one can only wonder how, for decades, we have made the whole known church structure such an integral part of the gospel, and how we have carried out a determined reduction of the gospel (from making disciples to a preoccupation with the personal

salvation of the individual) and what it means to be Church—from the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church to a Church that defines itself only by what it does (i.e., the preaching of the gospel and the administration of baptism and communion). In this way, the reformers shifted the attention away from what the Church is to what the Church does. Through this focus on sermon and sacraments the *church service* became the primary task of the Church. The reality is, the Church is also called to engage in functions like fellowship, making disciples, service and witness. Wilbert Shenk is preoccupied with the same issue:

“The confessional statements...all emphasize the function rather than the being of the Church. Ecclesiologically, the Church is turned inward. The thrust of these statements, which were the very basis for catechising and guiding the faithful, rather than equipping and mobilizing the Church to engage the world, was to guard and preserve.”<sup>6</sup>

In this way, there was little room for the gifts of the Spirit, equipping, mission and the service of lay people.

The term *missional Church* is an expression of the fact that the Church is not primarily the institution with services, activities and a mission in the periphery. Therefore, the task is not to invent a number of mission programs aiming to attract new churchgoers. Instead, we are challenged to be people of flesh and blood carrying the reality of the gospel within themselves, communicating it through missional being and action. For that reason, it is likely that the famous, but seldom realized, priesthood of all believers will become the basic Church and mission structure. Together with this structure, one could hope for a rediscovering of the gifts of the Spirit in a broad biblical conception.

This focus on *church as mission* also means that our ability to be magnets attracting people to Christ becomes important. Therefore, a missional Church should emphasize meditation, spirituality, presence, genuineness and lifestyle. Modelled by our brothers and sisters in the South and East, we should become personal carriers of the spiritual reality the world longs for. Before becoming centrifugal we should return to the centre.

And when going out, our primary task is to be witnesses. The missional thinking often and markedly underlines that the Church’s missional call is to be witnesses. Mission is witness. *Martyria* is the sum of kerygma, koinonia and diaconia—all of which constitute important dimensions of the witness by which the Church is called and sent with. According to Guder, “We are using a missiological hermeneutic when we read the New Testament as the testimony (witness) of witnesses, equipping other witnesses for the common mission of the Church.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, testimony becomes a demonstration through the lives and actions of God’s people to the fact that the Kingdom of God becomes present in the disciples of Jesus Christ. This is how the testimony of the gospel defines the identity, activities and communication that the Church has been called to since Pentecost.

Rather than Constantinian structures, we need to mirror the following:

- **Humility.** A recognition of weakness and crisis
- **Variety.** Various ways to be church (i.e., family, synagogue and temple)
- **Lay-person focused.** Focus on lay people as the ordinary pastors, and the ordained pastors as assistants to the ordinary pastors
- **Contextualization.** A more profound engagement with both culture/context and the Bible

- **Defining mission.** A reinterpretation of mission as what the Church is, does and says, including: development of spirituality, involvement in the culture of the local community, learning to speak of our faith and learning to listen and to encourage dialogue with people outside the Church.

## Endnotes

1. Guder, Darrell. 2000. *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans. 103ff.
2. Ibid. 120.
3. See also Leif Gunnar Engedal and Arne Tord Sveinall's analysis of Norwegian conditions in *Troen er løs*. 2002. Oslo: Egede Instituttet.
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5. Hauerwas, Stanley. 1991. *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas*. Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Abingdon. 18.
6. Shenk, Wilbert R. 1995. *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed*. Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, USA: Trinity Press International. 38.
7. Guder. 2000. 53-55.

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## Fresh Expressions of Church in England

By Steven Croft

**For many years, Christians in the United Kingdom have been starting new initiatives.** On the one hand, these initiatives are a response to the love of God; on the other hand, they are a response to the growing distance between society and church. It is no longer enough to sit in church and invite people to come and join us. We need to go where people are, to listen and serve and shape community in new ways. As Christians have done this, these new initiatives have led to new communities of Christians meeting on different days of the week, in different places, learning to be church together.

### Mission-Shaped Church

In 2004, the Church of England published the report "Mission-Shaped Church." The report coined a new term to describe these communities: *fresh expressions of church*. The Church of England is now well on its way to becoming what the Archbishop of Canterbury has called a mixed economy church: traditional parishes alongside fresh expressions of church. The Church is not attempting to create new congregations at the expense of traditional congregations; it is hoping to create new congregations alongside them.

One of the most interesting parts of my job as a team leader in this effort is discovering these stories and sharing them with the rest of the Church. The most effective way to do this is through short DVD clips. So far, we have produced two (available from [Church House Publishing](#)).

**DVD 1** tells fourteen stories of typical fresh expressions of church. For example,

- In Stoke on Trent, a group of Methodists have opened a café on High Street for church in the coffee culture.
- In Portsmouth, a church which has very few children attending Sunday service has begun a monthly, midweek, all-age gathering based around arts and crafts and a meal together. It rejoices in the title of “Messy Church” and has inspired a host of similar projects across the country.
- In Essex, a small urban church had the faith to partner with the local authority and raised money for a skate park. There is now a thriving youth congregation at its heart.
- In Liverpool, the Methodist church had withdrawn from the city centre. As the regeneration of the city began, the church sent Barbara Glasson. She walked the streets for one year, listening. Out of that listening emerged a new Christian community—Somewhere Else—based around baking bread together. She now leads seminars called “Baking a church.”

Many of these new initiatives are modest in terms of resources but high in terms passion and energy. A small number involve high investment in either buildings or staff. The Church of England employs about two hundred people full-time to plant or establish these new communities; this number is rising each month.

**DVD 2** looks at four different sections of the movement.

1. The first programme looks at *fresh expressions of church in places of work or leisure*. It includes: (1) cell groups in the police force on Merseyside, (2) an RAF chaplaincy which has developed a new midweek gathering called Re:Fresh and (3) Tubestation, an attempt to grow church for the surfing community in Cornwall.
2. The second programme looks at *fresh expressions of church in the sacramental and contemplative tradition*. We are seeing a movement which spans tradition. This features a Goth Eucharist, one of a number of such initiatives around the country.
3. The third programme looks at *rural examples* and tells the inspiring story of a rural hamlet with thirty houses where the church was facing closure and the congregation at the traditional services had dwindled to just four people. The minister and congregants decided to offer just a handful of services each year; however, these would connect with the entire village. Today, over seventy percent of the population attend church regularly and the church is back at the centre of the community.
4. The final segment looks at *fresh expressions of church among children and young people*. My favourite example is the youth worker placed in a church secondary school and who is attempting to grow church there intentionally.

### **A Precise Definition of *Fresh Expressions of Church***

“Mission-Shaped Church” deliberately does not define the term *fresh expressions of church* but describes a range of twelve different types of activities. We have waited to attempt a definition because the overall picture is still very fluid. In consultation with people working in the field, we published this definition in May 2006:

“A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. First, it will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples. Second, it will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.”

The key elements are (1) mission as the main motivation, (2) incarnational mission in terms of the way things are established and (3) a sense of journey, growth and development.

### **What Is Meant by Incarnational Mission?**

Incarnational mission is mission after the pattern and in the style of Jesus. People beginning fresh expressions of church are not going with their hands full of what they have to offer. Nor do they have in mind a particular set pattern of what a fresh expression will look like. It is more like a journey that begins with listening to the context and the wider community. It continues with loving service. As people listen and serve, new communities where people come to faith are formed. Only later does worship begin.

### **How Much of This Is Going On?**

After three years of research, we are still discovering new things. There are over six hundred examples (involving thirty thousand people) in our database. Anyone can search it by diocese, district, county or category. This is a small but visible proportion of the Church of England and the Methodist Church and it seems to be growing.

The Church of England published some new research a year ago that suggests around one-third of parishes are already involved in some way—and that more are planning their first fresh expression of church.

So is this kind of thing really that fresh? Since New Testament times, Christians have been called to see the gospel embedded in different cultures in appropriate ways. That is not a new development. Some of the examples of fresh expressions we have come across, however, are new and fresh for a particular parish or deanery. Our society is now changing at such a rate that this kind of fresh expression of church has moved from being highly desirable to vitally important if we are to connect with more of our culture.

Most dioceses and districts in the Church of England are now moving in this direction. Some are changing strategically and intentionally by planning to develop a mixed economy. Others are moving much more slowly but gradually beginning to own the vision. There are very few places where there is no movement at all.

For the Church of England as a whole there are two key developments:

1. *New guidelines for both lay people and ordained pastors on what has been called pioneer ministry.* We need to nurture the gifts of those who have real strengths and potential in this area. You can find both sets of guidelines on our website.
2. *“New Dioceses, Mission and Ministry” measure approved by Synod in February 2007.* This creates a new legal device, called a Bishop’s Mission Order, which enables the recognition of new non-geographical communities alongside parishes. This is a radical and brave step for an established denomination and a very strong sign of our intent to place God’s mission at the centre of our common life.

### **Problems and Difficult Questions**

Everything is not yet neatly sorted; we are learning as we go. There are currently three big issues we face:

1. **We are attempting these new developments at a time of considerable anxiety.** An emphasis on one thing (fresh expressions) can easily be “heard” as diminishing something else (traditional parish ministry). We need both to serve the whole of our changing society.
2. **We do not yet have a depth of wisdom and maturity in how to do this well.** Everyone is learning as we go forward. The lessons being learned in one part of the country need to be captured and made

available to everyone as quickly as possible. To best to do, we launched a new website, [www.sharetheguide.org](http://www.sharetheguide.org).

3. **We have not, in recent years, been very good at two key areas of theology—missiology and ecclesiology—that are vital to understanding fresh expressions of church.** Although there are some good resources to help us think about mission (e.g. the Anglican Communion’s five marks of mission), we have far too few to answer the important questions of the church in our culture. How do we define the essence of church? How do we describe and understand the richness of the church? How do we decide what is and is not church? How do we chart a specific Anglican identity within these frameworks? How do we rightly order ministry and the administration of word and sacraments within fresh expressions of church? And how do we ensure unity, holiness, catholicity and faithfulness to the apostles’ teaching and mission? Last year we ran a series of lectures across the country by leading theologians to address these hard questions. The outcome of that is a new book of essays, *Mission Shaped Questions*, to be published this month.

To find out more about fresh expressions, go to: [www.freshexpressions.org.uk](http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk). We would love to hear of similar developments in other parts of the world.

**Steven Croft** is team leader of **Fresh Expressions**, a new initiative established in England by the Archbishops and the Methodist Council. He works with colleagues across both churches to encourage new forms of church for a changing culture.

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## **Global Christianity, Contextual Religious Identity and Local Theologies: Īsā Imandars and Khrist Bhaktas in South Asia**

**By Jonas Adelin Jørgensen**

### **Case 1: Jesus Imandars in Dhaka, Bangladesh**

Cultural and religious life in Bangladesh is deeply influenced by Islam, the faith of more than four-fifths of the population. In the Bengal region, Christianity was first introduced by Catholic missionaries in the seventeenth century and later by Baptist missionaries (including William Carey) in the nineteenth century. However, the number of Christians has always been very low in the delta, and the converts to Christianity typically come from low-caste or outcaste Hindu communities.

To a large extent, religious life in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, follows that of rural Bangladesh where Sufi mysticism is an alternative to the more legalistic and somewhat restrained religious life of Sunni Islam. In contrast to the villages, however, Dhaka is open to the global economic market and to global culture. The whole drift of modern city life in Dhaka is thus toward global economy and an entertainment culture but at the same time rooted in Sufi-inspired Sunni Islam. This is the context for the groups of believers in Jesus which I followed during my fieldwork<sup>1</sup>, and who term themselves Jesus *imandars*, or more correctly, “*Īsā imandars*”—“those faithful to Jesus.”

### **Worship and Worship Environment of Īsā Imandars**

I frequently participated in the Jesus-prayers, the *milad-e-Īsāe*, of one of these groups of *imandars*. The leader of the group, Mehrab, made his living from a small company; the group met on Fridays in Mehrab’s office. Although Mehrab’s daughters and wife occasionally joined the group, the small *jama’at*, “fellowship,” consisted solely of male participants. As the men arrived, Mehrab’s daughters handed them copies of *Kitab ul Mugadesh* (a Muslim Bangla translation) and a homemade collection of *Īsāe* songs, “Jesus songs.”

Both books were placed in the decorated wooden bookstand in front of each participant so that the books did not touch the floor. Some of the songs were translations of well-known English devotional songs while others were accommodated folk songs, *baul gan*. Each meeting started with singing.

As in Muslim religious culture in general, reading and reciting long passages from the *kitab*s, the “holy books,” was a regular part of every meeting in Mehrab’s *jama’at*. However, rather than reciting the Qur’an in Arabic, the *imandars* read and recited the *Kitab ul Mugadesh*, the Bangla translation of the Old and New Testament. In particular, the Book of Psalms (*Zabur*) and the apostolic letters were frequently recited.

Mehrab would usually deliver a sermon which related to one of the texts read aloud; an underlying theme in all his sermons was the relationship between Muslims and *imandars*. The question of whether an *imandar* was still a Muslim especially occupied the minds of the believers. “Jesus was a Muslim,” Mehrab once said, “*Muslim* means ‘surrender to God,’ and Romans 2 says that Jesus surrendered his life and so I am also a Muslim.” There are, of course, different kinds of Muslims: those committed to God through Muhammad and those committed to God through *Īsā*, Jesus; the *imandars* are of the latter type. Mehrab often concluded his sermons with a call to the *imandars* to be holy; not simply to pursue the ritual holiness of Hinduism or Islam, but to partake in the living prophet’s (Jesus’) holiness.

Besides the recitation of the *Kitab ul Mugadesh* and the sermons, prayers are an important part of the *imandars jama’at*. In contrast to the formal and highly-ritualized Muslim *namaz* prayers (i.e. *salat* in Arabic), the *imandars’* prayers are more informal and personal. However, it is not only through prayers that the interior and personal relationship with God is built; it centres on the *imandars’* emphasis on *faithfulness* as the fundamental characteristic of an *imandar*. To truly become faithful to God is not merely an outwardly ritual activity; it is an interior and personal commitment through following the once-sacrificed, but now living, prophet *Īsā Mashi*.

### **Prophethood and the Nature and Person of Jesus**

A central claim in the *imandars’* theological understanding is thus the nature and person of Jesus. Particularly, the notion of prophethood occupies the *imandars’* minds. In agreement with common Islamic theology, the *imandars* recognize Jesus as a prophet witnessed by his *nispap* (sinless-ness); however, somewhat in contrast to orthodox Islamic beliefs, they underscore the continuity of Jesus’ prophethood, manifested by God through Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus is thus not only a prophet but *the* prophet, the embodiment of ethical qualities and divine spiritual power. Jesus’ death on the cross is therefore not merely the death of a human but should be understood as *qurbani* (sacrifice). Through interior faithfulness toward Jesus, his demands and his guidance, the *imandars* participate in Jesus’ sinless-ness and sacrificial death. In this way, the *imandars* argue theologically for interconnectedness between Jesus’ authority as prophet, his sacrificial death and their own relation to God through faithfulness toward Jesus.

In their religious practice and theological reflection, the *imandars* translate Christianity in a number of respects such as recitation of the *kitab*s and the exercise of personalized ritual prayers. Through this translation, they consciously place themselves in a broader Indian Islamic form of religiosity with its folk songs and *milad* prayers. Also, the central Christian claim concerning Christology is translated into meaningful Islamic terminology. However, the *imandars’* understanding clearly transcends Islamic Orthodox theology insofar as the interconnectedness between Jesus’ prophethood, sacrificial death and sinless-ness is concerned. Therefore, even if the *imandars* claim to still be a type of Muslims, they display a fundamental identity with the larger Christian theological tradition.

### **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> The fieldwork was carried out in October–December 2002 and January–October 2004. The fieldwork consisted of participant observation in a number of religious groups and in qualitative interviews with thirty-five men and eight women from Muslim backgrounds.

## Case 2: *Khrist Bhaktas in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India*

Christians have been present in the south Indian city of Chennai (Madras) for almost two millennia. In fact, Thomas, the “apostle to India,” is buried in Mylapore, part of modern-day Chennai. South India has historically been a meeting place of indigenous Hinduism and foreign Islam and Christianity. To this add the fact that south Indian society is to a high degree characterized by caste consciousness and caste conflicts. Throughout the history of Indian Christianity, churches have attracted converts from various Hindu religions and sects. These converts were more often than not estranged from their birth communities, their castes. For some converts, this has been the *raison d’être* of conversion; for others, conversion has been a traumatizing and depersonalizing experience.

The group of *Khrist bhaktas*, “devotees of Christ,” which I had the chance to follow during my fieldwork,<sup>ii</sup> displayed an original solution to this dilemma. Not wanting to disassociate themselves from the wider social and religious life in south India, they consciously placed themselves outside the liturgical and theological framework of institutionalized Christianity. At the same time, as the following glimpse of their liturgy illustrates, they insisted on maintaining a relation to Jesus as Christ and offered their own original interpretation of what faithfulness toward Christ might mean in a Hindu context.

### **The Worship and Worship Environment of *Bhaktas***

Each gathering of *bhaktas* took place Saturday evenings in Prakash’s private apartment. Like the rest of the group, Prakash, a young professional, came from a middle-class, high-caste family. He had become interested in relating faith in Christ with Hindu culture. Sarasvat, an elderly gentleman in saffron robes who led the group, was in charge of the preaching and liturgy. He usually arrived before everyone else to start preparations. After decorating the floor in the spacious living room with an intricate *kolam* design (a star-shaped figure made by coloured powders and symbolizing the experience of cosmic liberation), he would light the traditional brass lamp and place it on top of the *kolam*. Needless to say, both the *kolam* and the auspicious brass lamp are elements familiar to south Indian Hindu culture.

He would then place some fruit, flower garland and a small pot with incense on his left side. On his right side, he would place a large brass pot covered with banana leaves and a small pot with milk. He put a wooden table in front of him. The function of all these items would soon be revealed when the *satsang*, “teaching of truth,” started.

When the men and women arrived, they silently seated themselves on the mats laid out on the floor. After a word of greeting from Sarasvat, the group started singing *bhajans*, soulful devotional songs. Typically, the *bhajans* call for surrender to God, praise Jesus as the “giver of salvation” or as the “true teacher” or picture the intimacy between the devotee and Jesus through bodily metaphors (e.g. sitting “at the feet” of the true teacher, adoring the “loving face” of Jesus). The singing of *bhajans* is not accidental or purely ornamental. It consciously draws on a classical Hindu form of devotional singing. These simple but soulful songs express in emotional language the intimate relationship between the devotee and the god. Among the *Khrist bhaktas*, *bhajans* are viewed as significant expressions of *bhakti* (devotion); the *bhajans* are instrumental in the devotees’ approach to the divine.

Sarasvat’s sermons often formed as a discussion on spiritual topics such as, “What does it mean to know God?” He also frequently gave ethical advice such as, “How the *bhakta* should relate to Christians and Hindus.” I especially remember one of Sarasvat’s sermons about a young man with whom he had corresponded. The man had asked, “How can one know more about God?” to which Sarasvat disappointingly answered that no one could *know* anything about God. All one could do was to *love* God and enter into a loving relationship with God through *bhakti*. In this way, Sarasvat succeeded in expressing a profoundly Christian theological point through the well-known and popular Hindu concept of *bhakti*.

Communion was also a key element at the meetings. It took place not with bread and wine but with bananas and milk, and was distributed after reading about the “big gift” of Jesus Christ in 2 Corinthians. Occasionally, Sarasvat would use a coconut instead of bananas and milk; he would symbolically break the coconut while reminding the *bhaktas* that the Body of Christ was broken for the sins of the *bhaktas*. The translation of Christian theology was thus not only verbal but also physical through elements from common Hindu temple rituals.

### **Dynamic Interpretation of Hindu Ritual and Culture**

The *bhaktas* seem to offer a dynamic interpretation of the Christian theological universe into popular Hindu forms through *bhakti* devotion, *bhajan* singing and the use of bananas and coconuts in religious ritual. The drawing of *kolams* and the use of the traditional devotional lamp are part of everyday religious ritual in Hindu households; for the *Khrist bhaktas*, the light symbolically lit does, however, refer to the one who is called “the light of the earth.”

The singing of *bhajans* draws on the classical Hindu tradition for devotional songs accompanied by traditional instruments such as a harmonium and *tabla* drums. Simple tunes and repetitive words turn *bhajans* into almost meditative chanting. In the sermons, as well as in theological understanding, *bhakti* plays a fundamental role. Although they share this insight with a number of Hindu *bhakti* movements, the God who is venerated and glorified is the Father of Christ. The *bhaktas* thus adopt a Hindu style of religious life and a number of Hindu theological concepts and forms, and it is indisputable that their religious life follows an all-Indian *bhakti* type of religiosity. But at the same time, the content of the *bhakti*—the meaning of what is going on—has a strong family resemblance to the Christian theological universe.

### **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> The fieldwork was carried out in October–December 2002 and January–October 2004. The fieldwork consisted of participant observation in a number of religious groups and in qualitative interviews with eighteen men and five women from Hindu backgrounds.

## **An Analysis**

**Christianity has been present in the South Asian subcontinent for almost two millennia.** And although it has been tolerated and even respected as one religion among the numerically larger Islam and the indigenous South Asian religious traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism, Christianity has not been endorsed by the majority of the people here.

Furthermore, in contrast to the religious situation in Europe, religions have never lost their public role in South Asian society. Conversion from one religion to another carries strong social connotations and has—or is imagined to—influence not only the individual but the whole community. Religious identity thus still plays a fundamental role in the self-understanding of most people and communities in South Asia. This also holds true for Christian identity. But how exactly does Christianity interact with other major religious traditions and how does this interaction affect Christian identity?

The interaction between religions and religious identities can be studied in numerous ways; to the right, I have presented two case studies of theology and religious identities among believers in Christ from Muslim and Hindu backgrounds. Here, I attempt to say something more general on: (1) how conversion to Jesus as Christ results in what I would term a *contextual religious identity*, (2) local theologies and (3) what we can learn from these marginal groups in the global Christian community.

### **Are the *Īsā Imandars* and *Khrist Bhaktas* Really Christians?**

The question whether the *imandars* and the *bhaktas* are “really Christians” is a theological question which cannot be determined historically or phenomenologically (the study of phenomena). As a researcher, my view into the real nature of things is limited and only God knows believers’ hearts. Therefore, my approach in dealing with *Īsā imandars* and *Khrist bhaktas* has been an attempt to describe and analyse how they reach their faith in Jesus as Christ on a number of related levels.

The very terms which they used to designate themselves is quite revealing for their self-understanding: the believers from Muslim backgrounds termed themselves *Īsā imandars*, that is, “those faithful to Jesus,” and the believers from Hindu backgrounds called themselves *Khrist bhaktas*, that is “devotees of Christ.” They are self-consciously not “Christians,” although their religious faith shares a deep family resemblance to the larger Christian community.

The *imandars*’ and *bhaktas*’ theological understandings centre on an existential, Christological claim to truth. Only Jesus—not Christians or Christian churches—is said to be unique and exclusive; he is viewed as the personified criteria of humanity and divinity by which one must let oneself be corrected, guided and inspired. It is true that the *imandars* and *bhaktas* do not always conceptualize their existential commitment to Jesus with terms from the Christian theological tradition; however, the fundamental relational nature of their commitment to Jesus as truly divine and truly human should not be doubted.

In their commitment to and understanding of Christ, it seems that the believers engage in a reinterpretation of themselves and their past religious traditions. This reinterpretation takes place through a “Christological lens;” that is, through their understanding of and commitment to Jesus as Christ. I believe that the reason why the believers do not simply adopt Christianity wholesale (but include forms and elements from their own past traditions) is the question for meaning of their own past as well as of Christianity.

### **What Can We Learn from the *Īsā Imandars* and *Khrist Bhaktas*?**

Both groups of believers are marginal compared to the number of Christians in institutionally-established churches. However, to understand transformation of Christian identity accompanying the globalization of Christianity and the interaction between religious traditions, a study of exactly these marginal groups is helpful because they place themselves in a cultural and religious cross-pressure where the questions of a contextual religious identity and local theologies become crucial.

The religious identities resulting from this cross-pressure do at one and the same time share fundamental insights into the nature and work of Jesus Christ with the global Christian community and differ in terms of form and concepts.

The religious life of the *imandars* and *bhaktas* is surely a *bricolage*, a mixture between Christian theological ideas and forms from other religious traditions; however, contrary to simply denoting a dilution of Christianity into inauthentic or “syncretistic” forms, I would argue that the practice of the *imandars* and *bhaktas* could be viewed as new and creative manifestations of Christianity in a global age. I believe that there is a theological point in the *imandars*’ and *bhaktas*’ identification of the relation to Jesus Christ as central and essential and in their rather free interpretation of culture and symbols revolving around this fundamental relation.

From this perspective, one can conclude that the resemblance with the larger Christian tradition and community ensures Christian identity. At the same time, the differences enlarge our understanding of what actual and lived Christian life and Christian theology might include in globalized Christianity. There is a multitude to Christianity in its global age which we in the West are only beginning to realize.

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## **PERSPECTIVES**

### **Churches in Homes: New Efforts in Reaching Today's Globalizing/Diversifying World**

**By David G. Wyman**

**It all began with Moses.** God spoke to the old man. He said it was time to die. The years of discipline had passed. Now God's chosen people would cross the Jordan River and take the land they could have had so many years before. Moses, however, could only look and die. Yes, he also took a final opportunity to speak to his rebellious but beloved people. Of all the advice he might have chosen to share, he called them together and said:

“Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and your alien who is in your gate, in order that they may hear, and learn and fear the Lord your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. So that their children, who have not yet been born, will hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live on the land where you are about to cross the Jordan to possess it.” (Deuteronomy 31:12-13)

When Jesus came, Israel survived under the rule of Rome. Their challenge was to maintain their Jewish identity under the Roman oppression. They remembered the final command of Moses: Assemble everyone so that they will hear so that they will learn so that they will fear God so that they will obey God's teaching so that their grandchildren and generations yet to be born will continue to be blessed and, in being blessed, will bless all the peoples of the world. Today, we too need to remember that God's command always consists of “reasons and consequences”—God's “so that...” These precepts are important to world transformation and provide the foundation on which churches can be planted, grown and reproduced anywhere in the world, within any people group and at any point in time. God chose them as his consistent and universal plan for his kingdom. They provide the key to worldwide spiritual intervention and transformation without the burden of cultural interference.

Jesus chose not to change any part of God's command given through Moses. He led his followers to:

- worship God
- proclaim his salvation
- teach each other and those beyond
- minister to a sinful and needy world
- take care of each other

The command includes doing these things in such a way that even future generations will still do them the same way. Evidence of this command flows out of every story of every church discussed in the New Testament, both when they did obey and when they did not. New Testament writers taught these as the irreducible basics for Christ's Church. They presented them as universal and time transcending.

### **Extending God's Kingdom Worldwide**

The question we face arises not from whether intervention, involvement and worldwide transformation must consume our lives as believers—but from how to accomplish the task. This writer has long insisted that no

single method will prove sufficient. Those who boldly proclaim that one church model or another serves as the footprint for Christ's Church in the twenty-first century miss the point of the examples that God left across his word for those who live today. God surely has many more ways for us to extend his kingdom and establish his Church worldwide than we have even thought; much less developed and implemented.

Where and how then do we even begin the process? Perhaps the answer comes in the very conditions in which we find the world. For instance, after fifty-nine years of religious repression in China, the year 2008 reveals a vast expansion of God's kingdom. And where conditions are even harsher, with death stalking at every door knock, Christians and seekers meet regularly in a literal ring around the globe through the heart of radical Islam. Elsewhere, Cambodia now boasts perhaps four thousand evangelical home churches. India claims hundreds of new home churches each week, especially among the people groups most oppressed and intimidated by religionists and governments alike. Home-based churches are reproducing in hundreds of networks in nearly all the former Soviet republics in the rim around Russia.

Across Canada, where we live, isolated families seem less than encouraged to begin churches because they can likely never afford property, a building and a paid pastor. Dozens of tiny existing churches are spending their entire church lifespan feeling like failures because they never obtain all that they believe they need to be a successful and healthy church. In cities, it becomes more apparent every year that an average congregation can seldom afford the buildings and staff that will accommodate the present size of their group, much less future growth.

Sadly, many church and denominational leaders around the world exhibit a negative stance toward the concept of the home-based, lay-led church model. One such leader even declared to me that the home church may be biblical but it will not work, is not practical and is not effective in today's world.

### **New Wave of Churches**

However, God seems to be preparing the whole world for a vast new wave of churches that will be simple in organization, effective in teaching and evangelism and flexible enough to meet the needs of millions of people for whom other church models are not practical or possible. For many people, this forms the best model for today's church.

For others, it may not be so. Yet, many people around the world will never find the Lord through cell or traditional churches. This is not because of a lack of effectiveness of those models in many settings, but simply because the lay-led home church is the best and perhaps the only way that many people will participate in a church. Other popular models are better for many people. The big three types of churches are not in competition. The autonomous, lay-led, home-based church is only one model among many that God has for the nations. It has problems and advantages just like any other model. Additionally, implementing this model demands big shifts in our concepts of "church."

### **Obvious Concept Shifts in Having Lay-led, Home-based Churches**

The complete, healthy, autonomous Church of Jesus Christ has nothing at all to do with buildings. In the basic, literal definition of church as Jesus established it, neither size nor facilities exist. Some things seem quite difficult to get away from in our concept of "What is a church?" Two prominent ones are: (1) a church needs to grow numerically and (2), often as a consequence of that, a church needs to have the opportunity to worship together in numbers that require a building that is purchased, rented or borrowed.

### **Less Portentous yet Real Shifts in Having Lay-led, Home-based Churches**

A "church" has nothing to do with constitutions, committees, organizations (within or beyond the church), choirs, praise teams, salaries, relationships to secular or religious governments, elected officers, designated

office positions, budgets, long-range planning, conferences or any other extra-biblical trappings. Those things are needed and helpful in some church models. Not so in the home church.

The church is not about formally trained pastors *per se*. A church may have a “called” pastor, bishop or elder; however, the actual, literal, Greek wording in the New Testament has nothing to say about the “office” of the pastor. It is a function, not an office. Acts 20:28 reads within the conceptual image of “the shepherd who watches over” and 1 Timothy 3:1 renders it: “If one wants the overwatching.” *Hierateia*, “office” or hierarchy, is not there. It has not been changed from a different word—it is simply not there. The insertion of that word in translating demonstrates a pre-conceived concept. Jerome and other early translators had already made up their minds. In Romans 11:13, Paul claims “ministry,” not office. In Romans 12:4, it is “function” to describe the work of all of the members of the Church (including the bishops/elders). Only in Luke 1 and in Hebrews 8 do we find the actual word “office.” In all three cases it refers to the office of the priest (as opposed to, or different than, Christ’s declaration that all who are in him are priests). He declared the “office” of priest vacated and he, himself, the only high priest.

Too much effort goes into searching for, placing and training leadership. When a home church accepts the idea that a trained pastor must be installed to lead a congregation, two strikes against that church exist. It probably cannot survive, at least as a reproducing home church. The only way that these small churches can possibly survive, thrive and reproduce is to share all the leadership among themselves within that church. And, in everything they do, it must all be so basic and simple that they can actually do it. To expect to someday have a “pastor,” as we conceive of that position, will set that church up to feel incomplete until they get one.

The greatest difficulty that exists in establishing, growing and reproducing home-based churches centers on the professionally-trained pastor-types. I am one of those and I have struggled with the idea that lay-persons can invite friends into their home, start a church with that group, win people to the Lord, lead the ordinances, teach and train each other and reproduce other similar churches with the capability of the same growth and reproduction. This reality may often appear more than many of us professional religionists can bear.

As full-time, called and trained ministers, our whole sense of security in ministry seems to demand churches that are visible, stable and with a considerable group to whom we can preach and be rewarded with a sense that they know us, love us and appreciate what we do. Our preparation and position in ministry is very much about us. There is something in us that fears a mobile, transient, flexible, Spirit-guided movement that constantly shifts, disappears, reappears and moves in ways utterly beyond our control.

### **A Biblical Look at Lay-led, Home-based Churches**

Interestingly, Paul did apparently pastor several churches. However, in his writings, he spent almost no time thinking about those or discussing them. His primary focus as a trained leader and evangelist was as encourager, long-range teacher, counselor and sometimes harasser to many churches—probably mostly small, self-sufficient, home-based and lay-led congregations. And he refused to hold an official position with them or exert control over them in any way. Not only that, he even says to the small home churches already reproduced across Rome: “I myself am (totally) convinced, my brothers, that you (within) yourselves are (completely) full of goodness, complete in knowledge and (fully) competent to instruct one another.” (Romans 15:14, with Greek grammatical emphasis added).

Paul’s statement that concludes his fourteen chapters of doctrinal and practical counsel does not surprise us. We know that the entire book was not written to pastors or other selected leaders. Nor was it written to large congregations. Paul directed this profoundly theological writing to the lay members of dozens of small, autonomous home-based churches. And each operated, it appears, under a method of leadership shared by the entire body of lay-persons within each small church.

That biblical example of participation in leading by the whole group served as a key for the growth and reproduction of those churches. The same pattern continues to be as effective today. Our task is to create an understanding of the nature of the Church that will promote and not hinder the development of lay-led home churches with leadership participation by the whole group.

Help for starting, growing and reproducing these lay-led home-based churches can be found at: [www.homechurchonline.com](http://www.homechurchonline.com). All materials on the website are available for downloading, printing and sharing at no cost.

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## URBAN COMMUNITIES

### Transforming Lives in Cairo's Garbage Villages

By Glenn Smith

**While he revolutionised Bible missions in Egypt, she became "Mother Theresa" to the untouchables of Garbage City outside of Cairo.**

The husband and wife team of Ramez and Rebecca Atallah allow God to inspire them to help people know God better and express Jesus' love in Cairo. Ramez was born in Egypt; he immigrated to Canada as a child in the 1960s. In 1980, the couple took their children and moved from Montréal to Egypt. Since 1990, Ramez has headed up the [Bible Society of Egypt](#). His desire was to see scripture become relevant for Egyptian Christians, so he began finding new formats and styles in which to present God's word. Both Ramez and Rebecca work closely with the Coptic Orthodox Church in their respective ministries.

#### Touching Untouchables

Rebecca is a key worker at the St. Simon Coptic Orthodox Church in the Mokattam garbage village. Over the last twenty-five years she has helped with church planting and providing Christian education among the lowest of the low, Egypt's untouchables. Her gentle, compassionate way of ministering and befriending people has helped hundreds of untouchables realise their potential and value in God.

#### Overview of Cairo, Egypt

One of the oldest cities in the world, Cairo (Egypt) has a rich history and culture that dates back to biblical times. Whereas the pyramids, the Nile and the rich culture may appeal to foreigners, such romanticism may not be prevalent among the nearly twelve million people who live in Cairo.

Every ten months, the country's population grows by one million; every day, this capital city sees an influx of one thousand new residents! Fifteen percent of the city's population does not have access to portable water, 4.2 million residents live without access to a sewage system and Cairo's poor air quality accounts for over two percent of all deaths. Cairo boasts to having one of the poorest air pollution levels in the world.

Often considered the "Jewel of the Nile," Cairo may preach elegance to the world. But for the millions who live in abject poverty and in wretched conditions, Cairo is less of a gem and more of a rock.

(Taken from [Urbana's Global Urban Trek](#).)

Villagers collect garbage from city apartments and recycle it. They are not paid by the government; however, they receive small tips from the people whose garbage they collect. The rest of their income comes from recycling garbage.

Many of the villagers feed most of the organic garbage to their pigs—indicating that they are at least nominal Christians (Muslims will not have anything to do with pigs). “While this means the villagers are a despised minority, it also means there are various freedoms in the garbage village that we don’t have anywhere else,” Rebecca says. “We can meet openly as we assume everybody is a Christian. We can say things without being accused of evangelising.”

### **Garbage, People and Pigs**

Father Samaan, a Coptic Orthodox priest, manages the work Rebecca is involved in. Thirty years ago, he gave up his job in the city to become an ordained priest in the garbage village. When he began, the village had no churches, schools, electricity, water, medical care or markets. It was just garbage, people and pigs. When thousands were brought to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, the first thing they wanted to do was build a church—and Father Samaan became their priest. Today, the garbage collectors are filled with love and motivation from God. This is what changed their village. The village is a bustling, hopeful community of thirty thousand people. They still collect garbage; however, they now have three schools, a hospital and many churches.

### **Blessing in Caves**

The churches are located in caves that were blocked by rubble. It was only when one small cave was discovered that residents realised they were surrounded by caves. While that first cave was being converted into a chapel, residents found another one that is now used for church services of up to four thousand people. They soon realised that another cave could be transformed into an enormous amphitheatre to seat fifteen thousand people. “Regular church services are held there and people come from all over Cairo—not just from the garbage village—to worship with other Christians,” Rebecca explains. “It is the only place, other than the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral, where Christians can meet in large numbers in Egypt.” Father Samaan now pastors the largest church in the Middle East and one of the best known in Egypt.

### **Helping Refugees**

Rebecca also ministers to Sudanese refugees who have come to Egypt as a result of the war in Sudan. Because Egypt does not have United Nations refugee camps like the African nations around Sudan, refugees who come to Egypt have no means of support other than what the churches provide. “It is good they are out of Sudan, because they were very badly treated there and many were fleeing for their lives,” Rebecca says. “However, while they are safe in Egypt, there are a whole host of new problems that they never could have envisioned.

“Our English-speaking church ministers to about seventy Sudanese people each week. They are lovely people who, under persecution, have discovered a deep relationship with God. We keep praying that the war will stop so they would be able to go home again. That is really what they want. In the meantime, we will help in any way we can.”

**Glenn Smith** is senior associate for urban mission for the [Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization](#) and is executive director of [Christian Direction](#) in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. He is a professor of urban theology and missiology at the École de théologie évangélique de Montréal at the Université de Montréal and at the Université chrétienne du Nord d’Haïti. He is also professor of urban missiology at Bakke Graduate University in Seattle, Washington, USA.

## **Loving the Urban Poor in Cairo**

**By Rebecca Atallah**

**I have been involved for more than twenty-five years in a section of Cairo that is inhabited by garbage collectors, the most despised of all classes in Egypt.** It has been thrilling to help the church there to improve the quality of its school and to better the economic and medical status of some of the more destitute families in this “garbage village.”

However, if I have accomplished anything of real value, it has been by befriending some of the garbage collectors and their families. It is not in the new programs I have started, or in the money I have helped to raise. These, of course, are very helpful for those in need; however, they are not the most important thing I have done. These things will not last to eternity, except as they have helped to change the attitudes and characters of the people involved, including me.

### **An Introduction into the Garbage Villages of Cairo**

My experience began with a teenage boy standing at our door. He was so dirty I could hardly make out his features! Quite honestly, he wore clothes I wouldn't have even used as rags. The large, decrepit-looking basket slung over his shoulder was almost full of garbage; its weight had already caused him to be stoop-shouldered.

When my husband asked the young man in Arabic what he wanted, he explained that he was our trash boy and would be coming every day to collect our garbage. He actually wanted our garbage! This was my introduction to the garbage people of Cairo; through this boy, Salah, I learned quite a bit about these people.

Salah awoke every day before sunrise and left his ghetto in the middle of the city to travel by donkey-cart to our area. Here, he collected the trash from every apartment. After returning home, he and his father would turn over the day's pickings to the women of the family, who, with bare hands, would sort it into piles of plastic, cardboard and glass for recycling. They gave the food items to their goats, chickens and pigs. These same animals shared the communal courtyard with the family and the garbage. I could not imagine the filth and unsanitary conditions they must be living in; however, the stench of Salah's clothes said it all. Interestingly, Cairo has one of the most economically efficient recycling programs in the world. Unfortunately, the human cost is incredibly high.

### **Meet the People of the Garbage Village**

Come with me on a visit to the garbage village. Here, you will find:

**Miriam.** Miriam is a 16-year-old girl who attends the village church. She lives in a tiny, one-room hovel with her parents and five siblings. Their yard is continually full of dirty animals and garbage, which they have collected in their small donkey-cart from a far-away section of Cairo. The women of the family carefully sort out this garbage each day to feed their animals and to sell what they can. The stench of garbage permeates the air and everything a person wears. Miriam's mother lost several children either just after birth or in early childhood as a result of the unsanitary conditions in which they live.

One day, as I sipped tea with Miriam's parents, we discussed plans for Miriam's upcoming marriage to her cousin. The marriage had been arranged by them against her will. I tried to convince them that she would not be happy with this man—even if he was financially more comfortable than they. I cried out, "He is not a believer! And besides, Miriam loves Maged, who is a wonderful believer from the church!" Only later did I realize that I had said the wrong thing. I later heard that Miriam's mother was scandalized that it could be said her daughter "loved" a man.

I went home to my comfortable, clean apartment. After a refreshing shower, I shared my despair with my husband. Often I am misunderstood, not only because of my accent when speaking Arabic, but also because of my completely different worldview. We prayed about it and I knew God could do miracles in spite of my mistakes.

Many months later, after much prayer and fasting by those of us who love Miriam, we attended her and Maged's wedding. God had broken into the situation and overcome centuries-old marriage traditions. I am encouraged; however, I also think of the many cases where the story will not end happily because there are no friends to

share the girls' struggles and intercede for them to both God and their parents. Real love always costs. It is a risk, and it often hurts to get involved. Yet, this is perhaps what the poor most need and want from us. Love.

**Jehan.** One of the people I met when I first arrived at the garbage village was Jehan, a 12-year-old, who, despite being from a very poor family and lacking self-confidence, had a sweet personality and displayed some real leadership qualities. Sure enough, after graduating from our church-school, Jehan joined the Vocational Training Workshop, which is now an important part of village life. There, she learned to make beautiful handicrafts from recycled cloth. This helped to raise her family's standard of living. Jehan, in fact, was one of the first village girls to travel abroad. She was sponsored to represent the workshop at international conferences on recycling.

**Suma.** Suma was a teenager at the church-school when I arrived. She was from a very poor, dysfunctional family, who, until this day, still lives on the same level with their garbage and pigs. (Most families have built a second story onto their homes, where the people live.) But Suma seemed to be different from those around her. True, she had the same circumstances: at age sixteen, she was engaged to a man she hardly knew, one year later was married and the following year gave birth. I helped her through these times. We laughed and cried together as she learned to take on the responsibilities of a woman while still only a teenager.

Suma and her husband believe that since they are married, they must stick together and learn to love each other. This is just what they have done. She, along with other villagers, is a main reason I could never leave the garbage village. As we have learned to love each other, part of my self-identity and reason for living has become that these people are like my second family. The truth is, we all need each other desperately.

**Azaz.** Another person I have learned to love is a young man named Azaz. He was only twelve when a landslide at the village killed his parents and five siblings. Azaz went to live with his grandparents. Psychiatrists told us that if he did not have years of intensive therapy, he would end up severely emotionally-handicapped. But he is not. Azaz is growing up pretty normally; he does not seem very different from most of the teenagers around him. The sadness, which will likely always be there, comes out once in awhile and has sometimes results in anti-social behavior. When this happens, an uncle or a youth group leader takes him under his wing and gives him extra attention and, when needed, discipline. Azaz now has the security of a wider family.

**Martha.** My life in Cairo includes other groups of people besides the garbage collectors. I also work with prisoners and refugees. Martha, for instance, is a Sudanese refugee who helps me clean my house once a week. She has been aided by a refugee program we run in our community church. Martha has eight children, whom she is raising herself. Her husband is fighting in the civil war in Sudan; Martha does not know if she will ever see him again. Most days when Martha comes to work, she is pretty upbeat; however, a few months ago she showed up devastated.

The night before, she and her children had been evicted from their apartment; their possessions were thrown onto the sidewalk. It was racial prejudice on the part of her landlord and neighbors. Martha had no money and there are no housing services in Cairo for refugees. Martha and I spent a long time that day weeping together and crying out to God for a solution. I gave her some money for another apartment. She stood tall, faced her problem (knowing that God was on her side) and walked out of my place with a smile on her face. Martha has already been in and out of three more apartments. I am confident, however, that the same Jesus who has been with the garbage village people through all of their trials will continue to be with Martha and her children.

### **Final Reflections in Ministering among the Poor and Needy**

Let me conclude with two reflections on what I have learned in Cairo.

1. **Wealth and possessions do not make you happy, neither does the lack of them make you unhappy.** Our circumstances do not make us who we are; it is how we respond to them that is crucial. I have

found more joy and peace among the poor, despised garbage collectors of Cairo than among the upper-middle-class people I rub shoulders with but who do not know the God whose love is not based upon one's wealth or social position.

2. **Love is a two-way street and includes dependence on the other.** Ministering among Cairo's poor has made me realize how much I need them. As I see their responses to daily trials which would simply devastate me, I learn to put life into perspective. I have come to see how important it is to accept our problems as opportunities to further learn to trust our heavenly Father. I have learned what love is all about—how it comes through being committed to each other and sweating through our difficulties together. It is about learning from the person I love and allowing him or her to give to me, regardless of his or her intellectual aptitude or social position.

At the end of the day, I honestly feel that I have benefited more from the poor and needy I work with than anything I have been able to give to them. Perhaps that is often the way God works.

*(This article was written and edited with the help of [Glenn Smith](#).)*

**Rebecca Atallah** ministers to the poor in the garbage villages of Cairo and to the Sudanese refugees living in the city. After growing up in Haiti as the daughter of missionaries, she immigrated to Montréal, Canada. She and her husband moved to Cairo twenty-eight years ago.

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## RESEARCH

### [House Churches in the United Kingdom](#)

By Peter Brierley

**At the time, it seemed very innovative, and, indeed, odd.** Go to worship God in someone's home? But while the Chinese Home (or House) Church Movement had started in the 1950s as a reaction against the religious clamp-down of the Communist takeover in 1949, and the burgeoning African Independent Churches had been meeting in homes for several decades by the 1960s, nevertheless, in relatively staid British church life, meeting in a house was unusual and viewed with much suspicion.

Initially, it was known theologically as “The Restoration Movement”; however, in the 1970s the more popular term was “The House Churches.” As the different fellowships grew and meeting in houses became physically impossible, in the 1980s the then-apostolic leadership changed their name to “The New Churches.” However, old habits die hard, and the mental picture that many outside the movement have is still “House Churches.”

#### **Early History of House Churches in the UK**

The formative influencers in Britain were two men from a Christian Brethren background—Arthur Wallis and David Lillie—who convened three conferences in Devon in 1958, 1961 and 1962 to explore the restoration of the New Testament Church. Wallis started the first house church in 1964, and others, increasingly inclined charismatic Bible teachers, joined the effort. Those attending them delighted in a new freedom of worship away from traditional practices and restrictions. It was the beginning of the impact of the charismatic movement outside the Pentecostal churches which has now touched (and transformed) thousands of churches of all denominations in the UK and abroad.

The early 1970s saw leaders such as John Noble, Gerald Coates, Terry Virgo, George Carleton and David Mansell, who not only started a series of house churches (each of which were later called “streams,” although in most respects they were like small denominations), but began to meet together. Independently, a former Guyana

missionary, Bryn Jones, started a “community church” in Bradford. A series of Bible Weeks began (initially at Capel and then in 1976 in Harrogate). These events drew thousands of people and many of those attending enjoyed their vitality and exuberance without embracing the Restorationist philosophies of “covenant relationships” and “apostolic ministries.”

The numbers attending House Churches grew rapidly in the 1970s; the two hundred operational in 1980 were attended collectively by some ten thousand people.

A conference called by Wallis in 1971 was a catalyst in identifying seven key leaders, subsequently augmented to fourteen, who were considered to have apostolic authority. Humanly speaking, it is these fourteen who were the engine behind the growth seen in the 1970s. Eschatologically, the movement sought the emergence of a spotless bride ready to welcome the returning king. In practice, the leaders were bound together in covenant relationships, joined together in a way which would supersede the broken state of the old denominational churches. The fourteen charismatically gifted and proven men were called “apostles.”

### **Growth in the 1980s**

The 1980s was an interesting decade for the British Church. Several noteworthy things happened:

- Billy Graham came to the UK with the widely-acclaimed Mission to England in 1984 and 1985; Luis Palau held his Mission to London in 1983.
- Clyde Culver became the new young general secretary of the Evangelical Alliance, and proceeded to transform the image of evangelicalism over the next twelve years.
- The British Church Growth Association began in 1983, following and promoting the work of former Indian missionary Donald McGavran. It focused on helping church leaders to have hope that their congregations could change.
- Teenagers aged 15-19 began leaving the Church in large numbers; courses for youth workers began to help slow down the rate of decline.
- The Jubilee Centre began in 1983 with an emphasis on researching crucial societal changes.
- MARC Europe began in 1983 with seminars to train Christian leaders in management and leadership. From 1984 to 1991 some ten thousand leaders attended two seminars each; this was equivalent to one-quarter of all clergy.
- Although Spring Harvest began in 1979, it was during the 1980s that it expanded with huge popularity, bringing charismatic influence and the desire for change to numerous evangelical (and other) churches. By 1989, one in eight evangelical churchgoers in the UK had been to a Spring Harvest event.

It was in this atmosphere of change and challenge that the “House Churches”—now named by the Apostolic Brotherhood as “New Churches”—grew rapidly. In numerical terms, they increased almost eightfold, from ten thousand members in 1970 to 76,500 collectively by 1980, and in number of churches from two hundred to 1,100. They saw substantial growth in the Midlands and Southeast of England, and especially in the counties along the southern coast.

Their desire, as expressed by David Winter in his 1988 book *Battered Bride?*, was “to liberate its members from the constraints of a dead religion: from traditional church order, liturgy, clericalism and formality.” In a sabbatical thesis, Derek Hills of Tonbridge Baptist Church summarises the Restorationists as desiring and

attempting “to return to a pure Church, a Church restored to the pattern of Jesus, to pour new wine into new wineskins.” As their leadership was recognised, more and more churches put themselves under their authority.

A key element in New Church practice was the importance of discipling Christian people. Members were relationally linked to others, within which each one was “covered” by someone else, and these then went on to cover another member. Those thus covered shared their daily lives, jobs, friendships and recreations and found much freedom and joy in so doing. However, there was the constant danger of authoritarianism or legalism creeping in, and sometimes the covering simply went too far.

There were also many churches which followed the charismatic and discipling principles of the New Churches but held back from being formally part of one of the streams. These were often called the “XXX Christian Fellowship,” where “XXX” was the name of a town or village. It has always been difficult to estimate the total number of these one-off independent churches; however, in *Religious Trends* No. 2 they were estimated at 150 churches with five thousand members in 1980. This number grew to eight hundred churches with forty thousand members by 1990 and was subsequently estimated to be 1,400 churches with seventy-five thousand members in 2006.

### **Fracture in the 1990s**

The rapid growth of the New Churches in the 1980s continued in the 1990s, but not easily. Rapid growth requires a time of consolidation, and this did not always happen. Disagreements about the type and nature of leadership appeared and two of the most well-known streams, *Harvestime*, under Bryn Jones, and *Ichthus*, under Roger Forster, saw severe splits in their churches, with *Harvestime* becoming Covenant Ministries in the process.

Nigel Wright, in the 1998 book *Charismatic Christianity*, describes ten groups of New Churches:

1. Two older clusters associated with Pastor North and the town of South Chard, where baptisms were in the name of Jesus only.
2. The Jesus Fellowship, initiated by a Baptist pastor, Noel Stanton, who practised the sharing of goods in community and who developed the Jesus Army, an aggressive but effective means of evangelism among the marginalised sections of society.
3. The “Basingstoke” group called “Salt and Light,” led by Barney Coombs. This group developed the shepherding or discipling process already described.
4. The churches associated with Bryn Jones and his brother Keri. At one stage, these churches were probably the most negative toward traditional denominational structures; however, as both brothers gained degrees in adult life, greater opportunity for debate was given. Bryn died in 2002, and in 2004 Covenant Ministries (CM) split into Lifeline International, Ministries Without Borders or remained as CM but re-named Together.
5. Terry Virgo and New Frontiers, based in Brighton, has been one of the streams most prodigious in planting new congregations. Wright describes Virgo as having “pastoral concern, teaching ability and wise counsel plus (an) ability to gather and maintain a strong team of leaders around himself.” According to *Religious Trends* No. 7, Newfrontiers (with the two words now joined together) is by far the largest stream with 27,300 members across 191 congregations in the UK in 2006.
6. A small group of churches centred on King’s Church in Aldershot under Derek Brown and Mike Pusey, who were originally Baptists.

7. Gerald Coates and John Noble (initially of Team Spirit), who came together as Pioneer. Coates is a colourful entrepreneur, Wright says, “an outstanding communicator” but more as “a prophetic preacher than a biblical expositor.” Coates made an important prophecy about the Salvation Army very publicly at a 1992 Challenge 2000 Conference, which has been partially fulfilled.
8. The Ichthus Fellowship in South London under Roger and Faith Forster, whose theology is Arminian and Anabaptist and who was strong on church planting, rigorous in challenging the societal norms of the day and saw women as on equal terms with men. Both Forsters have played significant roles in the leadership of the Evangelical Alliance and Spring Harvest.
9. The Sheffield House Church under Peter Kenwick and other like congregations. Peter, “an astute and sane counselor,” as Wright describes him, distanced himself from the mid-1990s Toronto Blessing, which brought some restoration streams closer together, but overall caused part of the 1990s fragmentation.
10. Dave Tomlinson, based in Brixton, who subsequently became a Church of England clergyman. He wrote *The Post-Evangelicals* in 1995, which argued that evangelicals need to keep abreast of modern, critical biblical scholarship, and come to grips with the world as it is. He began a church called “Holy Joe’s,” which was based in a pub.

### New Churches in 2006

Where are the various streams today? Their overall attendance numbers in England, as measured by successive English church censuses, have begun to decline:

In...	there were...	across...
1979	64,000 people in attendance	419 churches
1989	167,000 people in attendance	1,026 churches
1998	200,500 people in attendance	1,389 churches
2005	183,600 people in attendance	1,307 churches

The largest streams, with five thousand or more in attendance, were in 2005: Newfrontiers had 34,600 people attending, Association of Vineyard Churches had 11,600, Salt and Light had 10,700, Ground Level had 8,100, Pioneer had 7,000 and Ichthus Christian Fellowship had 6,800. Their strength is still largely in the southeast of England and along the southern coast. One leader in seven (fourteen percent) is female.

The New Churches remain a significant movement, accounting for six percent of total English church attendance. Much of their charismatic influence and social concern has been caught by and shared with other denominations; this is not the case with their discipling programme. Many of the leaders in the 1970s are still leaders, and one of the key challenges they face is the consequential transition that will have to take place in the next decade if House Churches are to gain momentum. They have made a major contribution to English Christianity over the past thirty years; however, they are now very much in a watershed situation as they face the next thirty years.

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# LAUSANNE REPORTS

## Lausanne South Pacific Region

By Daniel Willis

**The South Pacific region, like many of the Lausanne regions, is diverse.** There are highly developed and economically rich economies, and there are remote, rural and subsistence communities. The challenges for evangelism are enormous and those of us who are highly educated have the greatest challenge in understanding the lifestyle and priorities of a “simpler” community.

### Student Ministry

Across the region, the work among students is seen as paramount. This is evidenced by the growth in the number of different agencies working among this segment of the population. In the 1960s, there was one major player; today, there are several hundred. There is both a positive and a negative in this. The positive is that there are many more people working on the ground, seeking to introduce students to Jesus and equipping and discipling those who come to faith. The downside is that there is often disunity between the groups, leading university administrations to threaten expulsion of all Christian groups from some campuses.

Throughout the various islands in the region, the **International Fellowship of Evangelical Students** (IFES) is present, working to introduce and bring students to a mature faith in Christ. In New Zealand, the work among some 100,000 international students, the majority of whom are from Asia and China, is seeing encouraging results.

The federal government of Australia has introduced a chaplaincy scheme into the high school education system. Christian groups have been proactive in applying for funding to place a chaplain in their local schools. In Queensland, **Scripture Union** has coordinated this approach and now has nearly four hundred chaplains caring for young people’s spiritual and emotional needs through pastoral care, activity programs, community outreach and adventure-based learning.

### New Zealand: Evangelistic Challenges and Opportunities

Jim Chew reports that New Zealand is becoming progressively secularised. In the 2006 census, 32.2% (1.3 million) of the people said they had “no religion.” The census also revealed that mainline churches, especially Anglicans and Presbyterians, had fallen in the number of adherents. If these trends continue, less than forty-nine percent of New Zealanders will profess any adherence to Christianity by the next census in 2011. Less than five percent attend church weekly. “These sad facts...drive us to our knees and to a greater urgency,” writes Hon Graeme Lee, chair of the Evangelism Network.

At the same time, percentages of people from other major religions, such as Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism, have increased markedly, partly through immigration.

In this milieu, many church leaders have sensed a spiritual vacuum and with it, a spiritual hunger for God. “Mass evangelism” is alive and well! In a recent “Harvest Mission” in the capital city of Wellington, 14,300 people came to the TSB Bank Arena over a weekend to hear evangelist and pastor **Greg Laurie**; 1,760 made registered decisions to follow Christ. In addition, 1,510 people watched the live webcasts.

An increasing number of churches are becoming “missional” and not just “attractional.” They are reaching out by serving their communities in their neighbourhoods and cities. Churches have also successfully used courses such as *Alpha* and *Christianity Explored*. The marketplace is a constant challenge for Christians. The media is generally critical of evangelical Christianity although “politically correct” toward other faiths. These pose

challenges for the Church in New Zealand. However, many committed believers are living out their faith among the lost. They need our prayers and encouragement.

### **Training in Evangelism**

Many organisations across Australia are constantly involved in the training and equipping of Christians to enable them to share their faith with friends and colleagues. Some training events include:

- **Salt Shaker conferences.** At the invitation of **Bible Society NSW**, **Rebecca Manley Pippert** recently spent three weeks in Australia, conducting Salt Shaker conferences.
- **Connect 09.** The Sydney Diocese of the Anglican Church is planning a major evangelistic initiative in 2009 called Connect 09. The initiative will seek to connect Christians with their community and the community with the Bible. Throughout the next eighteen months, there will be many opportunities to train people to be more effective in sharing their faith.
- **Gospel Outreach Ministries conference.** Gospel Outreach Ministries has prepared a four-day conference for early 2008 in which the issues of preaching, evangelism, planting churches and raising up workers will be addressed. An impressive array of speakers will help participants engage with the Australian psyche and work out how to do evangelism in their local context.
- **Catholic World Youth Day.** With the Catholic World Youth Day being hosted in Australia in 2008, many are working on a way of utilising the event to bring a relationship with Jesus to the fore for visitors. Some within both the Catholic Church and other denominations are working on ways to help the people come to a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### ***Jesus. All about Life***

Over the past few years Bible Society NSW has developed a prime time media campaign called **Jesus. All about Life** (JAAL). To date, it has run in three places—Adelaide, Canberra (and its regional surrounds) and the state of Tasmania. In 2008, the campaign will run in Western Australia and in 2009 the campaign will run across Sydney.

The Tasmanian campaign was the first to cover an entire state. It ran for seven weeks and involved 208 local churches. According to JAAL director Martin Johnson, eighty percent of the churches in Tasmania got behind the campaign. “The local Tasmanian committee said this was the highest number of churches ever involved in a cooperative event,” he said.

Local committee organisers believed that the sense of ecumenism present during JAAL was a very positive message for the churches. Brian McFarlane, a lay Catholic leader in Hobart, commented, “JAAL gave us the opportunity to encourage ordinary Catholic parishioners to take part in what the church has been teaching them for decades—the very essential role of bringing the gospel of Jesus to their friends, families, people they know, their circle of acquaintances.”

Andrew Hillier, chair of the Tasmanian committee, shared, “We saw a guy come into one of our churches who said, ‘I want to know more about the person of Jesus.’ One of our guys spent two to three hours with him and this man gave his life to Christ. We asked him how he found out about our church. He said, ‘I’ve been seeing the *Jesus. All about Life* ads and yesterday I felt the urge to go to church and I picked yours.’”

While the campaign was on air in Tasmania, Andrew Fisher, driver of a **V8 Ute** in the national Yokohama V8 Ute Racing Series, displayed the JAAL brand on the side of his car. With round seven of the V8 Ute series

scheduled to run at Tasmania's Symmons Plains raceway, local organisers took advantage of the event and organised a family day at the racetrack during which Fisher spoke about why he had Jesus on his Ute.

"The Jesus Ute is a great way of connecting with people who would never go inside a church," said Fisher. "On Sunday, they're at their place of worship—the racetrack. Now they can see and hear about Jesus at the track." In 2008, the V8 Ute will be used at a number of major Christian gatherings and conferences to promote the campaign and demonstrate how easy it is to share the Christian faith. Fisher and the V8 Ute will also be involved in bringing the Christian message to students across the nation.

### **Measuring the Success of JAAL**

Measuring the success of this style of media-based outreach has meant that the JAAL team at the Bible Society has had to look at some new yardsticks.

1. **Number of churches.** The larger the number of churches, the greater the opportunity for the gospel message to be delivered to the wider community. Because JAAL is really a mobilisation campaign more than a media campaign, the most effective way for Christians to be motivated, trained and involved is through the local church. The greater the number of local churches involved, the greater the opportunity for impact.
2. **Evangelism.** What the three JAAL campaigns have sought to do in the wider Christian community is to build a greater heart and preparedness for evangelism. The knowledge that a campaign is coming helps church leaders get prepared and church members build their skills. We have developed a DVD-based training course for churches called "Getting Ready for Mission." Each local church that signs up for JAAL needs to decide how it will use the media coverage and how it will deliver the gospel message personally and locally. The ideal end result of this is that: (1) church members connect to family, friends and associates and (2) local churches organise events where the gospel will be shared.
3. **Courses.** Over several weeks, courses like *Alpha* allow people to explore the Christian faith and build relationships within a church community. Many churches need an opportunity and an excuse to organise and run a course, perhaps for the first time. The JAAL campaign offers that opportunity and churches can decide to run *Alpha* or the 5-week JAAL course.
4. **Number of people hearing the gospel.** To raise the name of Jesus across a region or city is a difficult and expensive process and is best achieved when churches and Christians work together. The JAAL model allows ninety percent of the potential audience to hear and see the name of Jesus over a four to six-week period.

### **Bible Society NSW and the Future**

Bible Society NSW has just announced support for a Sydney *Jesus. All about Life* campaign for Spring (northern Autumn) 2009. "We have the strong backing of the major denominations and key church leaders and have started planning to bring JAAL to Australia's biggest city," said Johnson. "We need prayer across the country and the world as we develop our team and look at what needs to be done to put this in place." Pray for:

- opportunities through radio and television to draw people to Christ
- those who will attend the various training opportunities to grow in their ability to share the faith and to work out how to do it contextually
- the 2008 and 2009 JAAL campaigns
- a continuing awareness of the opportunities to reach people for Christ across the region

- better networking and sharing of resources across the region

Rev. Daniel Willis is CEO of **Bible Society NSW** and the International Deputy Director for the **Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization** South Pacific (Australia/Oceania) region. He is involved in mentoring younger leaders around the world and holds degrees in business, theology and education.

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## Chinese Missions in Africa: Consultation and Action 2008

**Theme: “A Call from Afar—The Challenging Task of African Evangelization”**  
**3-8 April 2008**  
**Nairobi, Kenya**

The establishing of the **Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism (CCCOWE)** can be traced back to the **Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelization of 1974**. For more than three decades, through conferences and publications, CCCOWE has been striving to be a catalyst to mobilize worldwide Chinese churches for world mission. In 1998, the first “Chinese Missions in Africa” was convened in Pretoria, South Africa.

In the past decade, the development of gospel work in Africa has been going through quite a few changes. In order to address the needs in the new missional realities of Africa, CCCOWE will convene the second mission conference in Kenya in April. It is our sincere prayer and hope that more Chinese churches around the world will learn about the pressing need and the present situation of Africa.

### Plenary Sessions and Revival Meetings

- **AIDS Ministry in Africa** by Christine Hamilton, a registered nurse and seasoned missionary, working with those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS
- **Muslim Ministry in Africa** by Marv Smith, regional director of **Africa Inland Mission International**
- **Leadership Training in Africa** by Ally Chepkwony, director of Africa Inland Church Missionary Board
- **Strategic Missions Partnerships** by Oscar Muriu, senior pastor of the Nairobi Chapel

<b>We aim to:</b>	<b>By:</b>
Broaden Chinese churches' missional horizons regarding Africa	Informational and inspirational speeches and discussions regarding various disciplines in Africa
Call Chinese Christians to action	Firsthand mission field experience in Kenya, Congo, Egypt, Sudan and South Africa
Extend care and love to Chinese missionaries serving in Africa	Conference fee waiver and free pre-conference missionaries' retreat made available to Chinese missionaries already serving in Africa

If you are a missionary serving in Africa, prospective missionary going to serve in Africa or prayer warrior for the evangelization of Africans, this is the conference for you. This conference will be conducted in English and Mandarin.

For more information, go to [www.cccowe.org/eng](http://www.cccowe.org/eng) or email [africa2008@cccowe.org](mailto:africa2008@cccowe.org).

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