Plenary focuses on Christian-Muslim relations

Stories reveal interfaith tension and cooperation

by E.T. M alone, Jr

The diversity of Christian-Muslim relations was emphasised by stories of tension and cooperation from Africa, Asia, Britain and the Middle East in Monday’s interfaith plenary.

Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali (Rochester, England) opened the plenary with news of the killing of three Roman Catholic nuns in Yemen, reportedly by Islamic extremists. Later he reminded the Conference that the Prophet himself had very close relationships with Christians and Jews. Some were among his closest friends and colleagues...What then has gone wrong?

Bishop Tlava Johnson (the Gambian) described his overwhelmingly Muslim country—95 percent Muslim, three percent Christian—as a country of tolerance and openness, in sharp contrast to the tales Bishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon (Kaduna, Nigeria) told 20 minutes later. Bishop Johnson described his country as a secular state “with freedom of religion enshrined in the constitution,” where “Christians and Muslims attend each other’s weddings and funerals.” Intermarriage occurs, and “within the extended family there can be both religious communities” he said. “All state functions are preceded with prayers by leaders of both religious communities.”

Christians and Muslims collaborate on social concerns and in development work, he added. “A social priority of the Christian missions has been the establishment of schools.”

“Therefore, many Muslims have passed through Christian schools taking part in religious classes and acquiring a knowledge of the Bible and a deep understanding of the Christian tradition.” Christians may not have the same depth of understanding of Islam. Bishop Johnson pointed out that “experience has shown it is essential to have a knowledge of Islam in order to share the Christian faith effectively with Muslims.” He admitted that genuine conversion is rare.

The vigil will be held in the main plenary halls concluding with the 7.15am Eucharist tomorrow.

It begins with the Archbishop of Canterbury introducing Mr Vanier who will give a “holiness” reflection and address. Three bishops will then respond. Bishop David Andres Alvarez-Velazquez (Puerto Rico, US), Bishop Barnabas Dwijsen Mondo (Dhaka, Bangladesh) and Bishop Thomas Shaw (Massachusetts, US).

Euthanasia looms as critical issue for Section One

by Margaret Rodger

Do you have the impression that Section One is talking only about human sexuality and international debt? They are just two of a wide range of justice and social issues the section participants are addressing. Euthanasia, a critical issue for many parts of the Communion, is another important sub-theme.

The sub-section bases its theological-ethical reasoning on the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, its understanding of the sanctity of human life that is a gift from God, and the divinely mandated stewardship of the created order. It also emphasises the pastoral nature of the issue.

“Everyone wants a good death,” Archbishop Peter Hollingworth of Brisbane (Australia) says. “As the Lambeth Conference of Bishops, we must emphasise that God works redemptively through suffering. Those who advocate euthanasia show little awareness of the Christian experience that people may be redeemed and transfigured through their suffering.”

“Euthanasia, understood as active medical intervention to end a life, is still urgent, critical concern for our nation,” he added.

“Attempts were made by pro-euthanasia groups in a number of states in Australia to achieve legislation. Only the Northern Territory government successfully passed legislation to allow doctors to intervene to end or to assist someone to end their life. This legislation, the first of its kind in the world, was overturned by the Australian National Parliament.”

All dioceses of the Anglican Church of Australia were active in the Euthanasia N o! Campaign. In the Northern Territory Bishop R Ichard Appleby played a leading part in the ecumenical and interfaith action against the law.

“We were united in our opposition,” Bishop Appleby said. “A part from our ethical and moral objection...” Please see Euthanasia page 4

Spouses seek cures for health crises

by Roland Ashby

Twenty-eight thousand children die each day from largely preventable diseases. Every minute of every day eight babies die following pregnancy, and one woman dies from pregnancy-related complications.

Dr Yui Kawaguchi, of the World Health Organisation, related these and other startling figures in a major presentation to the Spouses’ Programme on July 22.

Speaking on the theme “A Healthy World? Strategies for Hope,” Dr Kawaguchi and other experts addressed key health issues facing the world.

In 1997, 5.8 million people were newly infected with HIV, and 2.3 million people died from AIDS, Dr Kawaguchi said.

“The Connected Generation,” a video about youth culture, and “Speak Out,” a video on youth challenges in 2000, will set the scene for a series of discussions with youth workers. First, however, Dr Oren Borgan, professor of youth ministries at an evangelical seminary in the United States and consultant to Section Two, will share his vision of "incarnational, contextual youth ministry."
Blasphemy law is like a hanging sword for the minorities.

The Most Revd Robin Eames, Canterbury, England told how Christianity can co-operate with Islam despite the best efforts of extremists. President Bishop Ghais Mal (Egypt) told "how the Christian minority live among the Muslim majority" in Egypt and the Middle East. He stressed that "through the centuries Muslims and Christians have lived together, during times of joy and times of trouble. They faced wars together, and so fought together, died together, and survived together..." Christians and Muslims, said Bishop Mal, "are part of the one body of Egypt." Bishop Mal went on to address the issue of persecution and emphasized that "we have to differentiate between persecution and difficulties and problems."

He draw a distinction between the word persecution "used when the government targets a minority group and wishes to displace that group," and the concept of troubles and difficulties which "are started by blinkered individuals or fanatic Muslims with closed minds."

The latter, said Bishop Mal, "I personally do not call persecution."

He drew attention to events of the past few years when "churches were burnt down, Christians were killed, Christian shops were raided and burgled" when claims of persecution were made. But "this was not a direct attack against the Christians for their own sake, but an attempt to bring down the stability of the country, hoping thereby to bring down the government and rule themselves."

"We see a great need for Christian-Muslim dialogue," said Bishop Mal, "I recommend it and, indeed, it has already been started." He stressed the importance of the work being done, including a 1996 visit to Egypt by the Archbishop of Canterbury and a return visit the following year of the Grande Shield to London.

The final speaker of the plenary was Bishop David Smith (Bradford, England). He expressed his hope that the story his diocese would "encourage and offer opportunity for challenge to others."

Bishop Smith told how Muslims in Bradford "look to the bishop as a spiritual leader, since it is his responsibility to ensure peoples rights." This focus comes from Muslims' sense that "they are in a strange land." Bishop Smith identified several policies established "to develop and foster good relations". Here are "to encourage people to meet, to build up a sense of trust and respect for those who are different, and to fight against Islamophobia where Islam is misrepresented."

The name of Bishop Martin B. Nyabola was misspelled in Tuesday's Lambeth Daily. We regret the error. 

Walsingham: It's Anglican! Indeed there is a Roman Catholic Shrine in this glorious Norfolk village, but the principal shrine of Mary is Anglican. More than 100 bishops plus spouses will be the guests of the Shrine Administrator on Saturday. More are welcome. Further information may be obtained by phoning 01338 202626. Walsingham has an international prayer fellowship through the Anglican Commission.
Spouses contend with strife and heartbreak
by Carol Barnwell

"Sanatan falls down, Jesus stands up," sang the group of eight spousés from the Province of West Africa, baying low or reaching high in physical response to the words. The impromptu prayer and prayer-filled foyer of Rutherford College with lively melody following dinner last week.

Even though the Conference provides a reprieve, the women, who have 37 children between them, say they pray constantly for family and friends at home in their troubled part of the world.

In May last year Eleanor Gbonda woke at 2am when 20 armed soldiers stormed her home in search of her husband. "There was a coup and the rebels knew the Church would never support them as they were looking for us," says M Gbonda, wife of the Bishop of Bo, Sierra Leone. "They took three vicars away that night." She says believing only prayer saved her family. "They went without food for two days. She says her hands softly in her lap, resigned to memories that will never leave her.

"When I heard about the coup I was praying for my daughter in the United States," Alberta Lynch, wife of the Bishop of Freetown, says. "I called home but got no answer. When I finally reached my sister I could hear heavy blasting from the guns." Finally reached my sister I could hear when her feverish three-year-old. In place of the absent bishop, M Lynch was visiting my daughter in the United States, Alberta Lynch, wife of the Bishop of Freetown, says. "I called her back on the group of women. They pray about the war in her country. "I can't speak of it anymore." In place of the absent bishop, M Lynch was visiting my daughter in the United States, Alberta Lynch, wife of the Bishop of Freetown, says. "I called her back on the group of women. They pray about the war in her country. "I can't speak of it anymore." In place of the absent bishop, Mrs Lynch prays over children left on the streets as a result of the years of conflict in West Africa. Others like Dorcas, a women's leader for the future who suffer so much today. The children become animated when the women engage them in song but mostly their eyes are blank. They look sad and tired. They have seen too much.

In one bed a mother and her daughter lie with bandaged stumps where their left hands used to be. They accept a bar of soap quietly as a gesture and hopefully stays away. They are grounded in our part of the world the congregation (mutedly) thanks you have everything and that you can help any situation. M Lynch, wife of the Bishop of Kumasi, recalls a mother who showed up at the bishop's home with her feverish three-year-old. In place of the absent bishop, Mrs Lynch prays over children left on the streets as a result of the years of conflict in West Africa. Others like Dorcas, a women's leader for the future who suffer so much today. The children become animated when the women engage them in song but mostly their eyes are blank. They look sad and tired. They have seen too much.

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Youth Continued from page 1

Opportunities will be offered twice during the plenary to listen in on conversations. First, Lindsay Urwin, Bishop of Hordham (England), will chat with Pete Ward, youth advisor to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and two youth workers about “an incarnational theology of youth ministry and praxis.” Later in the session, five bishops will reflect on good experiences of youth ministry in their own dioceses. A multicultural and ecumenical group of young “Bible dancers” will portray the story of the feeding of the 5,000 from John’s Gospel. They will also remember the Dunblane tragedy that took the lives of so many of Scotland’s schoolchildren.

The session will conclude with a celebratory song, which all will be invited to sing, and a challenge from Bishops Urwin and David Moxon (Wakato, New Zealand).

“Our message to the bishops,” says Bishop Urwin, “is that they themselves should go out and talk to the young people in their dioceses.”

Tomorrow’s evening service at 5:45 p.m., part of the day’s focus on youth, will be led by young people from the Diocese of Chichester (England). A youth band will lead the service of praise and the desire for humility, he says. A noted French Roman Catholic lecturer and retreat leader, M Vanier founded the first L’Arche community in Troyes-Breuil, France, in 1964. Today, L’Arche network has more than 300 communities in 29 countries.

In addition to serving the physical and psychological needs of its clients, L’Arche also seeks to their spiritual development, a characteristic that sets it apart from most institutions for the mentally handicapped.

M Vanier is also founder of the Faith and Light community movement, which brings together the mentally handicapped and their parents and friends for mutual celebration and support.

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He warned that if the world’s mean temperature increases by only one or two degrees centigrade, as recent scientific studies suggest, mosquitoes may extend their range to new geographical areas, leading to more cases of malaria and other infectious diseases.

He also expressed concern about the susceptibility of infants and children to the increased use of chemicals worldwide.

Sheila Ramalshah, wife of the Bishop of Pakistan, described Pakistan’s allocation of only two percent of its income to health care as “abysmal.”

She said: “It seems the powers-that-be have decided that it is more important to spend about 70 percent of the nation’s income on militarism and the related repayment of international debt. Such a situation means we are woefully ill-equipped...to serve our community through health care.”

Diseases related to women are being especially aggravated by Pakistan’s social structure: “In my area of the North Western Frontier Province, women can only be heard and not seen, except behind the high walls of their dwellings.”

Their lives become so domesticated and mechanised they are primarily perceived as child-producing machines. As for sexually related diseases among women, we dare not even voice the real truth.”

Mrs Ramalshah said the “whole issue of HIV positive and AIDS is still a taboo subject in our society. We are quite convinced there must be a lot of cases of this nature in our diocese, especially as homosexuality is rampant there. But there is neither public awareness nor any public debate on these issues.”

She added that she and her husband often feel “frustrated in sharing these needs with the western churches, who often react to them as if the Church is wasting its resources by seemingly duplicating societal programmes.” She challenged the Church “to be true and obedient to its call to servanthood by meeting the needs of suffering people.”

Protecting women from AIDS

Mrs Juliana O’kine, wife of the Bishop of Ghana, attributed Ghana’s growing AIDS problem to “the unlimited matrimonial powers that husbands generally wield over their wives...when it comes to contraception and AIDS protection.”

“The fact that only the male condom is widely available in itself gives a promiscuous man power to sentence a woman to death if he will not use a condom.”

Bishop Gerald Wolf (Rhode Island, US) strongly criticized the American health-care system. “I stand here, as a citizen of the most technologically advanced country in the world with regard to health care (and yet) if you’re unemployed or in part-time work in America, health care is difficult to attain.”

Captain Ian Campbell, International Health Programme Consultant for the Salvation Army, advocated a more integrated community development approach to the care of those suffering with AIDS, in which hospitals, clinics and churches offer community counselling, education and support “in partnership with people in the home, neighbourhood and local community.”

Archbishop David Gitari, of Kenya, said most illneses in his diocese were preventable. “Many people catch water-borne diseases such as typhoid, dysentery and cholera. They need to be told to boil water, even the tap-water, before they drink it.”

Simple education programmes have been most effective in tackling these problems, Archbishop Gitari said.

The final speaker, Mr Hugh Bailey, MP for York and Parliamentary Private Secretary to the British Secretary of State for Health, had the government believed the answer to these problems, Archbishop Bailey said. “What we are going to suggest is that if bishops and their spouses would wish they can wash each other’s feet.”

The reason, he says, is to underscore the nature of discipleship. As followers of Jesus, Christians are being called forth “to love and to serve each other.” In washing one another’s feet, they are learning about forgiveness, reconciliation, and the desire for humility.

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Opposition to euthanasia was because of inadequate consultation with the indigenous communities.”

Archbishop Hollingworth, chair of the Lambeth euthanasia sub-section, steered a debate that resulted in a resolution passed unanimously by the Australian General Synod in 1995.

The Lambeth sub-section is working to prepare a strong statement for the Conference, and has reached consensus on the definition of the term.

“Euthanasia does not mean termination of treatment by medics, or a patient’s decision not to seek further treatment, or the ending of life support for a patient in a permanent vegetative state,” Archbishop Hollingworth said. “It means active intervention by a medical team.”

The sub-section includes people with a professional background in the area, including Bishop Chilton Knudan (M’Ain), who has extensive palliative-care experience.

Archbishop Hollingworth said that Australian Anglicans, while actively opposed to euthanasia, called urgently for all State governments to provide sufficient financial resources for the further development of palliative-care facilities.

“This was a strong emphasis in our General Synod motion,” the Archbishop said. “We bishops must also include this stress in our Conference report.”

Bishop Appleby said: “Our reason was that the Northern Territory government passed their euthanasia law was the lack of palliative-care specialists and facilities in Darwin and the rest of the Territory. There was only a handful of palliative-care beds available.”