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**The challenge to mission and dialogue in a Pluralist
context**

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1	Title and Key Words.....	1
1.2	Background and Problem Statement.....	16
1.3	Aim and objectives.....	18
1.4	Central Theoretical Argument.....	19
1.5	Methodology.....	20
1.6	The World Council of Churches (WCC).....	22
1.7	Regional church councils (Africa).....	24
1.8	Summary and projected analysis.....	28
2.0	CHAPTER TWO: PLURALISM, MISSION AND DIALOGUE: DEFINITIONS.....	33
2.1	The Thematic and Hermeneutical Approach.....	34
2.2	Pluralism	
	2.2.1 Pluralism's literary basis and purview.....	35
	2.2.2 Pluralism's biblical basis and purview.....	35
	2.2.3 Pluralism's historical basis and purview.....	36
	2.2.4 Pluralism's scholastic basis and purview.....	39
2.3	Mission	
	2.3.1 Mission's literary basis and purview.....	42
	2.3.2 Mission's biblical basis and purview.....	42
	2.3.3 Mission's historical basis and purview.....	43
	2.3.4 Mission's scholastic basis and purview.....	50
2.4	Dialogue	
	2.4.1 Dialogue's literary basis and purview.....	54
	2.4.2 Dialogue's biblical basis and purview.....	55
	2.4.3 Dialogue's historical basis and purview.....	56
	2.4.4 Dialogue's scholastic basis and purview.....	58
2.5	Challenge.....	60
2.6	Context.....	61
2.7	The Theological Paradigms introduced.....	62
2.8	Summary and projected analysis.....	63
	2.8.1 Literary appreciation.....	64
	2.8.2 Biblical evidence.....	64
	2.8.3 Historical evidence.....	65
	2.8.4 Scholarly appreciation.....	67
	2.8.5 Projected concluding statement.....	68
3.0	CHAPTER THREE: CHALLENGES TO MISSION.....	69
3.1	Introductory parameters.....	69
3.2	The WCC and the Uppsala Report (1968).....	70
3.3	The WCC and the Melbourne Report (1980).....	77
3.4	The WCC and the San Antonio Report (1990).....	88

TABLE OF CONTENTS (contd.)

3.5	The WCC and the Nairobi Consultation (1975).....	96
3.6	The Kairos Document.....	104
	3.6.1 State Theology.....	106
	3.6.2 Church Theology.....	112
3.7	Mission and free-thinking scholarship.....	113
3.8	Mission and millennium preparations.....	115
3.9	Summary and projected analysis.....	119
	3.9.1 Official WCC Documentary Evidence.....	120
	3.9.2 Scholarly Contribution.....	122
	3.9.3 Summative Conclusion.....	124
	3.9.3.1 The Central Theoretical Argument.....	124
	3.9.3.2 The formulated definition of mission.....	125
	3.9.3.3 The theological paradigms.....	127
4.0	CHAPTER FOUR: CHALLENGES TO DIALOGUE.....	129
4.1	Introductory parameters.....	129
4.2	The WCC and New Delhi (1961) with Nairobi (1975).....	130
4.3	WCC-commissioned guidelines on dialogue.....	135
4.4	WCC Guidelines and multilateral dialogue.....	144
4.5	The WCC work of Ariaraja.....	151
4.6	A WCC-free contribution (Visser Thooft).....	154
4.7	Other WCC-free crucibles (O'Sullivan, Scherer and Bevans).....	156
4.8	Dialogue and millennium celebrations.....	160
4.9	Summary and projected analysis.....	162
	4.9.1 Official WCC Documentary Evidence.....	163
	4.9.2 Scholarly Contribution.....	164
	4.9.3. Summative Conclusion.....	166
	4.9.3.1 The Central Theoretical Argument.....	166
	4.9.3.2 The formulated definition of dialogue revisited.....	167
	4.9.3.3 The theological paradigms.....	170
5.0	CHAPTER FIVE: PLURALISM REVISITED: CASE STUDIES AND FIELD WORK.....	172
5.1	Case studies.....	173
	Bilateral relations in a plural situation (Christians and Muslims)	
5.2	Case Study: A unilateral focus in a plural situation (the Baptist Church).....	181
	5.2.1 Baptist ecclesiology.....	189
	5.2.2 Baptist mission.....	194
5.3	Case Studies: Two non-plural situations (<i>Ireland and Mauritania</i>).....	195
	5.3.1 Case Study: The Republic of Ireland.....	196
	5.3.2 Case Study: The Islamic Republic of Mauritania.....	198

TABLE OF CONTENTS (contd.)

5.4	Field Study: The basis of analysis	
5.4.1	Questionnaire - the mission question.....	200
5.4.2	Questionnaire - the dialogue question.....	203
5.4.3	Questionnaire - other questions.....	207
5.4.4	Interviews and observations.....	207
5.5	Field Study (Christians).....	208
5.5.1	Roman Catholics (RCs).....	209
5.5.1.1	RC teaching on the Church, mission and dialogue.....	209
5.5.1.2	RCs' responses to questions on mission and dialogue..... (14 respondents)	211
5.5.1.3	Analytical comments.....	211
5.5.2	The Church of England (Anglicans).....	213
5.5.2.1	Anglican teaching on the Church, mission and dialogue.....	213
5.5.2.2	Anglican responses to questions on mission and dialogue..... (12 respondents)	215
5.5.2.3	Analytical comments.....	216
5.5.3	The Methodist Church (MC).....	217
5.5.3.1	Methodist teaching on the Church and on mission and Dialogue.....	217
5.5.3.2	Methodists' response to questions on mission and dialogue..... (8 respondents)	222
5.5.3.3	Analytical comments.....	223
5.6	Field Study (Muslims)	
5.6.1	Inter-Islamic Teaching on mission and dialogue.....	225
5.6.1.1	Sunni Muslim (SM) teaching on mission and dialogue.....	227
5.6.1.2	Shi'ite Muslim (ShM) teaching on mission and dialogue.....	227
5.6.1.3	Other Muslim (OthM) teaching on mission and dialogue.....	228
5.6.2.0	Questionnaire Responses.....	228
5.6.2.1	Questionnaire Responses: Sunni Muslims (10 respondents).....	228
5.6.2.2	Questionnaire Responses: Shi'ite Muslims (5 respondents).....	229
5.6.2.3	Questionnaire Responses: Other Muslims (2 respondents).....	230
5.6.3	Analytical comments.....	230
5.7	Interviews of people with no religion	
5.7.1	Non-Religious (NR) people on mission.....	232
5.7.2	Non-Religious (NR) people on dialogue.....	233
5.8	Summary and projected analysis	
5.8.1	Case Studies.....	234
5.8.2	Field Studies.....	235
5.9	Summary and projected analysis	
5.9.1	The Central Theoretical Argument revisited.....	236
5.9.2	The formulated definition of pluralism re-visited.....	236
5.9.3	The theological paradigms revisited.....	236

TABLE OF CONTENTS (contd.)

6.0	CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION	238
6.1	Summary and projection analysis to Chapter One (Introduction).....	238
6.2.	Summary and projection analysis to Chapter Two.....	242
	(Pluralism, Mission and Dialogue)	
	6.2.1 Biblical Evidence.....	242
	6.2.2 Historical Evidence.....	243
	6.2.3 Scholarly Appreciation.....	244
6.3.	Summary and projection analysis to Chapter Three (Mission).....	245
	6.3.1 Official WCC Documentary Evidence.....	246
	6.3.2 Scholarly Contribution.....	248
	6.3.3. Summative Conclusion.....	250
	6.3.3.1 The Central Theoretical Argument.....	250
	6.3.3.2 The formulated definition of mission.....	251
	6.3.3.3 The theological paradigms.....	252
6.4.	Summary and projection analysis to Chapter Four (Dialogue).....	253
	6.4.1 Official WCC Documentary Evidence.....	254
	6.4.2 Scholarly Contribution.....	255
	6.4.3. Summative Conclusion.....	257
	6.4.3.1 The Central Theoretical Argument.....	257
	6.4.3.2 The formulated definition of dialogue.....	258
	6.4.3.3 The theological paradigms.....	261
6.5.	Summary and projection analysis to Chapter Five	
	(Pluralism Revisited).....	262
	6.5.1 Case Studies.....	262
	6.5.2 Field Studies.....	263
	6.5.3. Summative Conclusion.....	264
	6.5.3.1 The Central Theoretical Argument.....	264
	6.5.3.2 The formulated definition of pluralism revisited.....	264
	6.5.3.3 The theological paradigms.....	264
6.6	Final Conclusion.....	265
	6.6.1 The purpose of dialogue in mission.....	267
	6.6.2 Is dialogue a means of understanding other faiths?.....	268
	6.6.3 Is dialogue in mission an instrument of Christian witness?.....	269
	6.6.4 What about biblical salvation?.....	270
	6.6.5 What about benefits for the churches?.....	270
7.0	ANNEXURES	272
8.0	BIBLIOGRAPHY	279

ABSTRACT

This is a study, by qualitative and quantitative research, of the challenges facing mission and dialogue in a plural society. With clearly defined Problem and Background Statements, Aims and Objectives, Central Theoretical Argument and Methodology, it is proposed and introduced in Chapter One with academic precision and objectivity. The global ecumenate (i.e the World Council of Churches) and regional ecumenical bodies (e.g. Africa Consultative Council of Churches) are introduced briefly and circumspectly – at this stage – to help in the process of defining the nature of lines along which the study and research will be conducted.

In Chapter Two, the main conceptual terms – pluralism, mission and dialogue – are defined along with the other two terms of the title, challenge and context. The thematic and hermeneutical approaches used to facilitate the selection and use of biblical and historical material are explained and so are three theological paradigms – pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism – which help to clarify the nature of the problem being investigated and discussed.

In Chapter Three, the challenges to mission are discussed with respect to the WCC's work around the world and the divisions within the Church between Liberals and Evangelicals over the role and nature of mission. Problems to be encountered from outside are clearly also fully described.

In Chapter Four, the challenges to dialogue are discussed with respect to the WCC's work around the world and the divisions within the Church between Liberals and Evangelicals over the role and nature of dialogue. Problems to be encountered from outside are clearly also fully described.

Chapter Five is methodologically the empirical chapter. It makes use of case and field studies to illustrate the challenges and to bring out the problems and possibilities for mission and dialogue. Christians, Muslims and people with no faith are surveyed or interviewed and the results systematically analysed. They indicate some striking findings. Mission and dialogue are not everywhere understood by individuals exactly in the same as they are by their church or group and it is possible that with education people could be more broad-minded about them.

These and other findings from the qualitative study are conflated in Chapter Six to reach the final conclusion; namely, that the challenges to mission and dialogue in a plural society are not threatening to the Church's call to be proclaimer of the gospel, but rather they are compellingly propelling of it.

ABBREVIATIONS

NB. These abbreviations constitute only the main ones which occur throughout the thesis. Minor ones (such as those representing biblical texts) are assumed to be self-explanatory and no attempt is made to introduce them. There is a further set of abbreviations in the Bibliography for its specific anagrams.

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
AEAM	Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar.
ARCIC	Anglican and Roman Catholic International Conference.
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCC	British Council of Churches
CTE	Churches Together in England.
CWME	Commission on World Mission and Evangelism.
EACC	East Asia Christian Conference
EFMA	Evangelical Foreign Mission Association.
IFMA	Interdenominational and Foreign Missionary Association.
IMC	International Missionary Council.
IRM	International Review of Mission.
ISIC	Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity.
LEP	Local Ecumenical Project.
NLFA	New Life For All.
PACLA	Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly.
SODEPAX	'Committee for Development and Peace in Society'.
WCC	World Council of Churches

**To my wife
Ajuah Mereweather-Thompson**

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1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Entitled 'The Challenges to Mission and Dialogue in a Pluralist Context', this research falls within the subject classification of Mission Theology. The main key words of the title (CHALLENGES, MISSION, DIALOGUE, PLURALIST and CONTEXT) provide a focus for the study, and are defined and explained in Chapter Two. But in addition there are minor key words which also bear significantly on the study. These are defined and explained in this opening section of this chapter.

Otherwise, in this Introduction, we take a look at the background of the work and the problem being investigated, the aims and objectives as a clear directive, the central theoretical argument and the methodology as the basis on which both the research and write-up are conducted. All four major chapters of the work are produced under the careful searchlight of these technical tools and of the strategic use made by the **World Council of Churches** (WCC) and regional ecumenical bodies - also introduced here - particularly in the central chapters. We begin now with the first of the introductory matters, bearing in mind that they also constitute the basis of our analysis at the end of the chapters and in our final conclusion.

But before proceeding, here now are the other key words which are not in the title (CHURCH, CRISIS, CRITIQUE, ECUMENISM, EVANGELICAL, SCANDAL, WORLDVIEW). They feature significantly here and there in the work and the applications which follow are an attempt to define and explain them as clearly as possible.

Church

Here the need is not so much to provide a theological and doctrinal or ecclesiological definition of 'church' (see Chapter Five), but to explain its implications for mission and dialogue. In this regard, it does seem that the main role of the Church (as a universal body) is to carry out its mission to the world, as it was first put into place by Christ and carried out by the first apostles and disciples.

This mission is all-inclusive, encompassing pro-activity and involvement in the religious, spiritual, moral, cultural, social, political, educational and fiscal aspects of life, among other things. Within the social and political spheres, there are such aspects as health and employment in which the Church, if it is to be true to its mission as spelt out in the New Testament and in history, would be naturally involved. It would act as an instrument which brings pressure to bear on the institutions of society, and in this way it would be synonymous with 'Christianity', about which Sardar (in Siddiqui 1997:53) says:

Christianity is, and ought to be, an antithesis to secularism. Yet it became tied to a particular culture, a particular scholarly trend and the historic experience of a particular people. Instead of explaining the Bible and Jesus' ministry within changing circumstances, cultural settings and different languages, scripture and Jesus were made to serve the ends of European secularism.

Although the church became tied to a particular culture and historic experience of a particular people, the Church, in mission, would try to be as accommodative as possible. It would at the same time not allow itself to be tied specifically to cultural affairs. It fell short of this for Sardar as outlined in the above statement and when it undertook overseas missions. In Africa, for example, having previously harnessed itself to the political cultural system of the West and North, it took instead a crusader mentality as Lossky *et al*, (1991.61-3) have been at pains to indicate. The missionaries to Africa viewed Africans as having no valid religious insight at all. With a kind of social Darwinism, they entertained the idea that people of the tropics conducted their business so badly that peoples of the temperate zone had a divine right to manage their affairs for them, which systematically must include 'exploiting' their resources. For such reasons, Christianity - as represented by historic and global Churches (Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, Methodism, Baptists and Seven Day Adventism) - looked foreign and oppressive to a good number of African Christians.

Bassham (1979.60; *Evangelical News*, 10.07.9) underscores the point by maintaining that the argument is not that the Church should be more African or Asian than Christian in not wishing to be more European, but that – in its ecumenical essence - it should be both regional and universal. The distinguished West African theologian, Harry Sawyer (Sierra Leone Bulletin of Religion, 7.I.65), for instance, asked: How can the Church in Africa be both African and worldwide?

For the Church to accommodate this local, as much as global, character was thus essential; not least because countries to which it had spread were becoming politically independent in the last century. This is the sense in which Bassham (1979:137) discerned that delegates from several countries that had been independent for a number of years were, at the Second Assembly of the All-African Conference of Churches (AACC) held in Abidjan 1969. The main aim was to assist in “learning from reality what it really means to be the Church in the situation created by the aftermath of independence”.

With the theme “With Christ at work in Africa”, some 160 delegates representing more than 130 'Churches' and Christian Councils in 42 countries faced the hard realities confronting Christians in Africa. A pragmatic Church would, as was done in the Assembly, highlight the areas of these difficult situations (as Africa goes from one internecine crisis to another, besieged by famine and drought, floods and violations of human dignity through dictatorships) and provide the theological rationale for doing something about them. The Assembly said (see Bassham 1979.141): “All men created in the image of God are equal before him, are entitled to a share of the world’s wealth according to their needs, and are stewards of the same”.

Being true to its mission, the Church would give its relationship with other religions pride of place, demonstrating this by instituting meaningful dialogue alongside its endeavours in mission. The African situation is most illustrative of this, Christianity and Islam being the two religious and numerical heavyweights (see Appendix 1) and rivals both religions being proselytising and having been imperialistic. In the fourth century, Christianity had become the official religion of particular nations and empires such as Armenia, Assyria, Byzantium and later still Belgium, Portugal and Britain. Islam too (see Pobe 1991:12), soon after the prophet’s death in 632, became identified with the Caliphate, which ruled a vast empire that stretched from the Western Mediterranean to Central Asia.

A key issue for the African Church centres therefore on relationships between Christians and Muslims, particularly in places with a high Muslim population such as Northern Nigeria, Sudan and Gambia. Within this Church dialogue with Muslims would discuss:

- How Christians and other non-Muslims in predominantly Muslim societies could have a legitimate place in them as “Ahl-al-Dhimma” (people of protection, who have full rights to the protection of the Islamic state) and “ahl-al’kitab” (the people of the book – Jews and Christians), and how being also known as 'kafirs' (unbelievers) in some Islamic quarters would not upset this.
- How Christians marginalised in some countries were marginalised as minority communities (e.g., Copts in Egypt) and subjected to social legislation, and would not be left to close in upon themselves.
- How both religions could help maintain peace and stability in Africa, as priceless commodities in the continent. The practical question remains how Muslims and Christians can live together, showing that they worship the one God, the creator, and showing respect for each other's faith and beliefs.
- How Muslims could regain their pre-crusade (11th-13thcenturies) confidence in Christianity as the uncorrupted teaching of a Semitic prophet.
- How Muslim minorities in predominantly Christian societies should be entertained. Several African nations (e.g., Ghana) have found a solution by declaring themselves secular of one type or another (see Pobe 1991). But is this a solution? In secularist Britain, young Christians are being converted to Islam and radicalised with no public reaction. Yet where the reverse happens, Christian converts from Islam are persecuted and are in constant fear for their lives (see *Evangelical News*, 5/05/22).

It is also useful, in a study of mission (a globe trotting endeavour), to consider the universal aspect of the Church. This is not the Communion of Saints or Body of Christ theology, however much it may be glimpses of them. It is a description of a network of churches, denominations and Christian groupings across the world and across time. No single denomination can encapsulate it. Hence, Baptists do not describe their national/international structure as a Church but as a Union/Alliance bringing together local churches and country associations of churches. Many of the black-majority churches have a Council of Churches – nationally and internationally - to enable local churches to cooperate nationally, and

national churches internationally. So, in every denomination, value is invested both in local/national independence as well as in international and global cooperation.

The Roman Catholic understanding of the working of the denominational local/national/international church is that it is (see Churches Together in England Report, 1996:2):

1. Present in every diocese (the local or particular church united to its bishop) and expressed and embodied in each congregation gathered to hear and proclaim the word of God and celebrate the Eucharist, the chief means by which the communion of the whole body is sustained and built up.
2. Expressed also in the world-wide Church, which consists in and arises out of these local churches. The Church is both universal in time and space. It is a spiritual community, throughout the ages united to the Trinity. It is a world-wide society structured with hierarchical organs where unity is symbolised and sustained by communion with the see of Rome.

The difficulty is that denominational patterns of operation differ significantly. For example, decisions about the placing of most ordained ministers are taken by Baptists locally, by the United Reformed Church locally and at district level, by Anglicans and Roman Catholics at diocesan level. This makes dialogue about unity difficult, as we shall see further in Chapters Three and Four,. At the WCC's meetings in New Delhi (1961) and in Canberra (1991), as at the residential forum of Churches Together in England in July 1991, church unity was found to be fraught because different denominations understood and interpreted the meaning of the word 'church' very differently.

Before leaving this significant key word, a word about how it is written in the script. Apart from the required graphical appropriation at the start of sentences, an upper-cased beginning is only used for the universal body of Christ and with the definite article ('the Church'). References to denominations and their local establishments are started with lower cases ('churches'), except of course where they are specifically named (e.g., the Methodist Church / Clapton Methodist Church) as a congregation or an edifice.

Crisis

'Crisis' is used in its strictly theological sense and not in terms of a disaster, natural or political. Vuyaj Yotin's (1996:60) attempt to define the wider parameters of the current crisis for mission is helpful. What he calls a moment of crisis in which we are living is explained not in terms of a huge upheaval in human life, but as tension which exists between a radical modernity with science and technology and a cultural modernity of community ideals and religion. On the one hand, modernity has broken down much that was cherished in our traditional life (e.g., family life), through individualism, personal mobility and competition. On the other hand, faced with an inhuman world, people are searching for new identities and relationships for support and solidarity and finding them in spirituality and new movements. As a result, they are moving away from institutional controls and dogmatic certainties of church life and turning instead to associative experience of freedom to search and to choose.

Crisis - as used in this study – indicates a difficulty over the tasks of undertaking both mission and dialogue. It is comparable to the kind of difficulty one may encounter in embarking on a journey; namely, the uncertainties and prospects entertained about the journey, the traveller's dilemma of courage and fear, the adventurer's paradox of doubt and hope. The crisis is contained in the fact that mission workers are both willing and unsure and, like travellers/adventurers, are often put off by the difficulties to be experienced rather than encouraged by the outcomes to be achieved. It is very much also a crisis characterised by unwillingness to cross the boundaries of one's own faith to meet and participate with people of other faiths and ideologies.

The following is the background to the use of the word in this study. The criticism to which Christian mission has been subjected in modern times exemplifies the crisis. Such criticism is not in itself surprising for it is normal for Christians to be criticised in an oblivious world. In a volume written in preparation for the 1938 Tambaran Conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC), Kraemer (1947:24) formulated the tentacles of the crisis as follows:

Strictly speaking, one ought to say that the Church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it.

Awareness of the crisis ought to be the case, Kraemer argued, because of “the abiding tension between the Church’s essential nature and its empirical condition”. Christians are so seldom aware of this because for many centuries the Church has suffered very little and has been led to believe that it is a success. Thus, it “has always needed apparent failure and suffering in order to become fully alive to its real nature and mission (Kraemer 1947:26; see also *EN* 5.05.1), to make it faithful to its essence to be, controversially, a “sign that will be spoken against” (Luke 2:34). Equally, despite there having been so many centuries of crisis in the Church's mission, whenever there is a crisis-less atmosphere (as there has been in the West), there occurs the scope for a dangerous delusion.

By analogy, the Japanese character for “crisis” is a combination of sub-characters for “danger” and “opportunity” (Koyama 1986:4). It is the point where danger meets opportunity, where – for our purpose – crisis meets challenge.

Critique

This is a methodologically rather than a conceptually significant term appearing variously to review positions taken by churches, writers and scholars bearing on the Central Theoretical Argument. It is not rigorous and negative criticism but an appreciative judgement which gives an added dimension to the understanding of challenges to mission and dialogue.

Ecumenism

'Ecumenism', meaning 'the coming together of Christian denominations to work together in one Church', differs from 'Church unity/union' in that it refers only to a working relationship. The term was first used at the Edinburgh Conference in 1910. It is distinguished also – in this study – from its appositional form 'œcumenism', which ought to represent the ecclesiastical Councils of the Church which defined creeds and proscribed heresies in the historic Church from the Council of Jerusalem (AD 45) through Nicea (325) and Chalcedon (451) to the Second Lateran Council in 1139. Ecumenism global expression is found in the WCC, and there are as well many regional expressions such as the All African Council of Churches (1961) and the British Council of Churches (1942). These bodies thus provide the focus for the study, operating primarily with the mission of the Church in view and – administratively – creating a platform for 'dialogue about dialogue' and dialogue between churches and faiths.

The best way to understand the meaning of ecumenism is by looking at snippets of its history and geography. The geographical location in England of three major Christian traditions (the Church of England, the Free Churches and the Roman Catholic Church) made it possible for them to relate closely, serving more or less the same communities.

Alongside them there are also a great variety of smaller evangelical and Pentecostal Churches which had the opportunity to join the ecumenical movement with the establishment of the British Council of Churches (BCC) in 1942.

The aim of the BCC is explanatory of the nature of ecumenism. It is to provide a meeting place and framework for cooperation between the Church of England, the major Free Churches and some smaller churches. This national objective found local expression after the Second World War in the establishment of an increasing number of local councils of churches throughout Britain and Northern Ireland.

Although it appeared that the real objective was to bring Christians – divided by Churches – together, it soon became clear that it then mutated to an objective to get Churches (rather than Christians) to operate in a functionally unified way. In the 1960s and 1970s several union schemes between different Free Churches (not between all Churches) were proposed. Of these, only one came to fruition when most Churches of what were formerly Congregational and Presbyterian Churches (later, the Churches of Christ) formed the United Reformed Church in Great Britain. Even so, some Churches (within the denominations) chose not to be part of this and formed the Congregational Federation and the Fellowship of Churches of Christ. It is not surprising in this climate that proposals for a Covenant between the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church, the Moravian Church and the Church of England failed in 1982 to receive the approval of the General Synod of the URC.

That ecumenism does not mean the coming together of all those who profess and call themselves Christians is also seen in the fact that the Roman Catholic Church (the third major tradition in England) remained aloof from the movement until now. However, the visit of Pope John Paul II in the same year (1962) changed all that. Conversation began between the Roman Catholic Church and the member Churches of the BCC which led to the calling together in 1984 of an Inter-Church meeting. This meeting brought together not

only the three largest Christian traditions in England, but also a wide range of other churches including the Orthodox, the Lutheran and some African and Afro-Caribbean Independent, Pentecostal and Holiness Churches. It further initiated an inter-church process whereby Churches encouraged their members to study and pray together as part of the Church's mission. They studied such pamphlets as *'Not Strangers but Pilgrims'* and *'What on Earth is Church For?'* generally and as part of their Lent courses.

This development resulted in three national conferences in England (Nottingham), Wales (Bangor) and Scotland (St. Andrews) in 1987. Then, culminating in a major British and Irish conference at Swanwick in Derbyshire, a Declaration (see Appendix 2) was adopted by acclaim and personally signed by those present. The Declaration expressed a longing for total representation of all Christians at such meetings, showed a concern of Christians for the world, and committed churches to each other.

Of all the nuances expressed in this statement, nothing stands out more clearly about the meaning of ecumenism than the fact that it is an important instrument for mission and evangelism. This was further expressed in a statement signed by the leaders of worshipping Christians of some twenty churches at the Roman Catholic Southwark Cathedral in 1984, namely, that the coming together was 'to fulfil their mission to proclaim the Gospel by common witness and service in the world, to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit' (Swanwick Declaration, 1987:1; 17).

As a follow up, 'ecumenism' was again spelt out by Churches Together in England (1996) in September 1990 in this way:

Churches Together in England unites in pilgrimage those Churches in England, which acknowledge God's revelation in Christ, confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and in obedience to God's will and in the power of the Holy Spirit commit themselves

To seek a deepening of their communion with Christ and with one another in the Church, which in his body and

To fulfil their mission to proclaim the gospel by common witness and service in the world to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Spirit.

On this basis, ecumenism brings forth common worship even between disparate groups such as the Baptists and Roman Catholics. This happened soon after the Swanwick Declaration at Upton Chapel in East London between Baptists and the United Reformed Church, in North Lambeth (South London) with the Roman Catholics, in Liverpool, Scotland and Wales. On account of which Churches Together in England (see WCC Report, 1994) released another statement celebrating the Swanwick Declaration (see Appendix 1) as ecumenism *par excellence* in print.

Evangelical

Evangelical describes by estimate the largest group of Christians in the Protestant tradition who hold fundamentally to the inerrancy of Scripture. Within this, they are sub-dividable into Conservative and Liberal Evangelicals. In 1941, these Protestants formed the National Association of Evangelicals. Although they proclaimed basic fundamentalist doctrines and a Christian message, they “wanted no dog-in-the-manger, reactionary, negative, or destructive type of organization” (see Knitter 1985:21). The new movement grew under the able leadership of such notables as Harold Ockenga, Carl F.H. Henry and especially Billy Graham. Graham then also founded his Evangelical Association in 1950 which became - for all practical purposes - the embodiment of the new evangelical Christian movement, and solidified the distinction between fundamentalists and Evangelicals. The distinction was really more in the style than in theology. The Evangelicals shared basic theological viewpoints with fundamentalists (see Knitter 1985). Some of these were:

- An affirmation of verbal inspiration, inerrancy, and absolute authority of the Bible.
- A stress on the necessity of a personal faith in and experience of Jesus as the only Saviour and Lord.
- A resolute commitment to the urgency of converting the world to Christ.
- A mistrust of modern theology, especially the historico-critical method of interpreting the Bible. Yet, in their way of pursuing these doctrinal concerns, Evangelicals showed a greater regard for demonstrating the intellectual content and coherence of their views. They also wanted to be more open and cooperative with other Christian denominations, being conscious of the implications of the gospel (Knitter 1985:69).

During the 1940s and 50s (see Knitter 1985:72), a growing number of theologians and church leaders who shared either liberal or conservative (but not fundamental) convictions reacted against the polemic spirit, anti-intellectualism and social unconcern of Conservative Evangelicals. As a result, they caused and developed further divisions among the Evangelicals. Since the 1960s and especially the 70s, many liberal Evangelicals have been pressing for further adjustments to the modern world. The liberal swing has given shape to what can be called the “New Evangelical” movement (Knitter, 1985:77).

Thus Barrett,(1985:73), provides a somewhat different list of three types of Evangelicals:

- Fundamentalists: who maintain the founding spirit of the core and basic doctrines of authentic Christianity on the inerrancy and verbal inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth, the reality of the miracles of Christ, the physical nature of the resurrection, the total depravity of the human being, the substitutionary nature of the atonement, and belief in the pre-millennial second coming.
- Conservatives: who - as already explained - want to carry on the intent of fundamentalism but in a more open, critical style. Most of them belong to the World Evangelical Fellowship.
- The Ecumenical: who are the new Evangelicals and vest great interest in sharing interdenominational fellowship.

Costas (1974:56) thus remarked that one of the oldest tensions of the Church is the relationship between the Church in mission and the Church out of mission. But the real question – for our purpose – is: is there a different understanding between Evangelicals and ecumenicals on the concept of conversion (the explicit goal of mission)? Evangelicals lay great stress upon conversion, being “born again”. More often than not, it is defined in strong individualistic terms, and is often described as a crisis experience in line with the historical precedents of the evangelical awakenings and of revivalism. Sin (again, expounded in personal rather than structural terms) is to be repented of, and a new way of life embraced and personal holiness pursued (defined as some kind of esoteric separation from the world).

As we shall see further in Chapter Two, in place of conversion ecumenical energies are largely directed at liberation from socio-economic oppression, on the one hand, and dialogue with “living faiths and ideologies”, on the other. “Dialogue”, in the eyes of many Evangelicals, appeared to have as its aim a diminution of all that was noble and good for the sake of creating harmony (Hebrew *shalom*) within the global village (see Michael Green, 1976:256-274).

Stott (1975:22), one of the leading evangelical figures at the Lausanne Consultation of the WCC in 1981 (see Chapter Three), took up this matter passionately. Describing the Lausanne Covenant made then as “not so much a text for exposition as a basis for further theological construction, a springboard for fresh innovative thought”, he challenged participants to get to grips with the complexities of the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility. Without this, the Covenant - even though it had broken new ground in so explicitly affirming the place of socio-political involvement - still maintained the primacy of evangelism.

A number of important conferences held during the 1980s sought to grasp the nettle. For example, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation and the World Evangelisation Fellowship sponsored a consultation on 'Simple Life Style' at High Leigh, London in March 1980. Its purpose was to scrutinise (Western) Christian life style in its relation to evangelism, poor relief and justice. The consultation issued “a statement of commitment” which was one of the most prophetic evangelical documents on record. Worthy of special comment is its censure of the causes of injustice and its appeal for the structural transformation of society. James Scherer (1992:84) has highlighted the importance of High Leigh in the ongoing debate between ecumenical and evangelical positions as follows:

The actual content of the London Consultation went far beyond simple living, stewardship or benevolence, and touched precisely on God's preferential option for the poor, divine judgement on oppressors, the pattern of the Church's own identification with the poor, the risk of suffering for Christ's sake, and Christian support for change in the political structures – themes articulated with such passion in evangelical mission circles.

Scandal

'Scandal' is used primarily in connection with the way in which the Church has conducted itself with regard to mission and dialogue, in its failure to agree despite the fact that the gospel requires oneness of purpose. In this sense, it is almost as old as the Church itself.

It is not specifically an ethical matter deriving from a despicable and morally reprehensible (hence scandalous) behaviour. It is a dialectic and polemical debate leading to a needless dissension between Christians. Yet there is a sense in which disagreement with a prescribed code of conduct such as that given by Christ could itself be seen as morally wrong and scandalous.

'Scandal' is also usually associated with what theologians have called a 'scandal of particularity'. In general theology this refers to castigation of the designation of the period of the Incarnation as THE significant point in history when man was saved as irrational (hence scandalous).

In Missiology, it is put slightly differently. With regard to missions, Christ as the only way is an exclusivist (and hence scandalous) characterisation of Christianity as the only salvific way. "For the message about Christ's death on the cross is nonsense to those who are being lost; but for us who are being saved it is God's power (1 Cor. 1:18). At the heart of this conviction is what may further be seen as the scandal of the cross. By this conviction the cross is brought into sharp focus in I Corinthians 1:23-25 where Paul writes: "we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block (**σκανδαλον**) to the Jews and foolishness to Greeks, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (New International Version).

Fee (1990:73) questions the translation of the word **skandalon** as a 'stumbling block' since the word does not so much mean something that one is tripped by as something that offends to the point of arousing opposition. This interpretation seems confirmed by the other passage in which Paul speaks sharply of the "offence of the cross" namely, Galatians 5:11, when the offence (**σκανδαλον**) consists in the cross rendering circumcision irrelevant as a way to God. By its very nature, this is a thought which would have been offensive indeed

to the Jews for whom circumcision was the great initiation rite of the covenant. Carson (see Cotterell, 1990:78) explains why the cross should cause such offence to the Jews:

In the first century, it must have sounded like a contradiction in terms, like frozen steam or hateful love, upward decline or godly rapist – only far more shocking. For many Jews, the long expected Messiah had to come in splendour and glory; he had to begin his reign with uncontested Power. “Crucified Messiah”, this juxtaposition of words is only a whisker away from blasphemy, since every Jew knows that God himself has declared that everyone who hangs in shame on a tree stands under God’s Curse? (Deuteronomy 21:23)

That no real scandal happened could be argued from mission outcomes and be backed by scripture. Globalisation (if not unification) has been achieved; people have been liberated from oppression politically and spiritually; new communities have been built and rifts between nations healed. Hence the Hyderabad (India) Consultation (1964) Report (IRM 1995. 1. 168) says:

For centuries, India’s people have experienced various forms of domination leading to social separatism and fragmentation among our human communities. In the modern world these pressures are increasing and indigenous people – Dalits, tribal, women and other minorities – are forced to affirm their identities in the context of the fragmenting process of a single world market, global media, modernisation, and ecological imbalances. So many people in India, particularly those who live close to the soil, experience these forces as highly oppressive, dominating and dehumanising.

With some ingenuity, some basis could be found in the New Testament for these claims.

In Ephesians 2:11–22, Paul explains how the cross abolished the walls which divide people from each other; in I Corinthians 3, unity is encouraged between races, gender and all peoples; in Galatians 2, the Church is conjoined to equal treatment of all and to avoiding prejudice and racism; in the Book of Revelation 21:3 people are encouraged to form new communities and to co-exist peacefully.

But there is as well a tendentious use which could be made of the term 'scandal' in Missiology. It has been said that a church which attempts to be free from its missionary and confessional role (just to overcome giving offence and divisions) enters into a scandalous situation. This could be said to have been reflected in the following instances: with the confessing Church of Germany during the World Wars; with some churches in South Africa during the years of apartheid; and with the Baptist Churches in Serbia during

the recent subsequent struggle for political freedom; all of whom failed to decry politically corrupt regimes.

World-view

'World-view' is usually the philosophical equivalent of the way something is understood within a given discipline or field of enquiry. The worldview of the individual, that is to say the individual's understanding of the world and his relationship to it, his behaviour in it, is in large measure determined by that individual's religion. This is more or less how it is used in this study, with the exception that it is considered to have two main components: the theoretical and the determinative (praxis). The theoretical is compounded in the position taken by a group of people on any issue without obliging them to abide by that position. For example, professing Christians - who associate a concern for the lost with mission - do not actually have to fulfil that concern in practice by becoming involved in missions. Determinative world-view, on the other hand, is different; requiring not just a confession of generally held position of the tradition but a commitment to the practice of it. It is not enough to verbalise the view; far much more is required. Praxis is essential for the world-view to be influential (see Cotterell, 1990:53).

Cotterell (1990:53-54) indeed has something more clarifying to say which is useful when using the term world-view in discussions about missions. It means, he says, the contribution to the 'view' which originates within our 'world', i.e., in our experience. He goes on: "Depending on the area of the world where we live, we will have some idea of the seasonal variations of summer and winter, of dry season and rainy season etc. There will be awareness of good health and of disease. The basic facts of life will be known: birth and death, procreation. There will be some parallel knowledge of animals and of vegetation". In other words, our world-view on mission and dialogue is bound to be coloured by the Christian context in which we operate.

In this way, scriptures and other authoritative texts are contributory to the formation of world-views within religious and ideological systems: the Bible for Christians, the Quran for Muslims, the Bhagavad-Gita for Hindus, the Tipitaka for Buddhists, Das Kapital for Marxists, science and health literature and scripture for Christian Scientists, the Book of Mormon for Mormons.

Cotterell (1990:53-54), nevertheless, wishes to believe that it is possible to be interrogated from within regardless of the comprehensive nature of the answers provided by such authoritative texts for their positions. He suggests that such a challenge might come from two sources: (1) reason and what he calls 'existential thinking' which moves the individual on towards the path of reconstructing the world-view, and (2) self-interest by which the individual tries to impact the world-view towards his own end.

A significant example of how the world-view could be interrogated from within (for the common good or for self-interest) to be found in the ambiguous work of Enns (2005), Professor of Theology at the evangelical school, Westminster Theological Seminary. Going against traditional evangelical Old Testament scholarship which justifies mission on the accuracy of all scripture, he concludes that “to insist that someone living in the middle of the second millennium BC would have communicated the stories of Genesis in language that was identical to the Hebrew known to us from the Old Testament is simply an assertion, one that runs counter to the linguistic evidence available to us” (Enns, 2005:40)

1.2 Background and Problem Statement

It is well known that churches and their leaders take different approaches to the issues of mission and dialogue. Is the interest of the Church served by a disunited approach of Christians to mission and dialogue in a pluralist context, where the twin tasks (mission and dialogue) are naturally challenged for every Christian and all churches? The history of the WCC is a good illustration of the challenges facing the Church's twin tasks of mission and dialogue in a pluralist context (the global village). At times its achievements are celebrated, as on the occasion of its 50th anniversary at the Harare Assembly (December 1998) which brought together more than 5,000 participants from all the constituencies of the *oikoumene*.

Twenty years before, the work of the WCC was most incisively described at the Nairobi Conference (1975) as 'the whole Church bringing the whole gospel to the whole world' (Glasser, 1977:19).

Yet, at other times, the WCC is heavily criticised, justly or unjustly, for one reason or the other. For example, in the 1970s and 80s, it was criticised for being too political, for giving support to freedom fighters in various places throughout the world. For its part, it argued that it is the mission of the Church to support the weak and the oppressed (WCC, 1990:45). Bosch (1991:60) maintains that there is recognisably a present crisis in mission, about which Anderson (1974:30) had much earlier said Christians are confused and concerned. Interest in the present research arises out of such concern for the mission of the Church seen through the difficulties of the WCC. My personal interest is vested in the Baptist Union of Great Britain which often opposes the objectives of the WCC and has not always contributed to the mission and dialogue debate in a way that is helpful to the ecumenical body (see section 5.2 below). Working in this context as a Church minister, and having worked in the field of mission, with personal experience of the throes and delights of Christian/non-Christian dialogue, I (Mereweather-Thompson, 1995:10) had raised the following question almost a decade ago: "Does the upsurge of non-Christian religions pose a challenge to the mission of the Church?" There is, was the view expressed, great need for the Church to learn not to be ecumenically lukewarm and theologically inhibiting.

The problem of the research then is as follows: On the one hand, Christians - thinking biblically - see themselves as one. But, on the other hand, living ordinarily in the visible Church, they are clearly divided. **How can a divided Church effectively carry out mission and conduct dialogue with other faiths in a context which - by its very plural (diversified) nature - is demanding and challenging to the twin tasks of mission and dialogue?**

In this Introduction, Chapter One, the problem is stated. To resolve it, the research raises and tackles certain sub-questions in the main chapters as follows:

In Chapter Two: what is Christian mission and what does interfaith dialogue involve? What is a 'pluralist context'? Are the challenges to mission and dialogue any more in this type of context than they would be in other contexts?

In Chapter Three: how illustrative of the challenges to world Christian mission is the situation of the WCC and the work of scholars in the field?

In Chapter Four: how illustrative of the challenges to interfaith dialogue is the work of the WCC and the work of scholars in the field?

In Chapter Five: what can we learn from a distinctively pluralist context and from a non-pluralist context to resolve the problem? Could we gain useful insights from the mode of operation, for example, in an Islamic state? How Islamic states are influenced in both their political and moral life by the doctrine of Islam? Should such doctrines dictate the life style and what Allah demands ?.

1.3 Aim and objectives

The main aim of this research is to contribute to the development of a better understanding of the challenges to mission and dialogue posed in a pluralist context. I will suggest ways of overcoming the challenges to Church unity, Christian understanding, and world peace.

In this introductory Chapter One, the main aim – as stated above- is set in perspective. In order to achieve it, the subsequent chapters address certain objectives as follows.

In Chapter Two: To study mission, dialogue and pluralism; and to explain how the challenges to mission and dialogue come naturally out of pluralism.

In Chapter Three: To consider how the situation of the WCC illustrates the problem for world Christian mission, and the response of Christian denominations to the challenges.

In Chapter Four: To consider how the situation of the WCC illustrates the problem for interfaith dialogue, and the response of the various churches to the challenges.

In Chapter Five: To attempt a field illustration of the problem by reference to (1) the distinctively plural context of Britain and (2) two non-pluralistic contexts: the Republic of Ireland and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

1.4 Central Theoretical Argument

Impressionistically, the Evangelical churches generally have not responded adequately well to the challenges of a plural society facing the Christian tasks of mission and dialogue, and have maintained an ambivalent attitude to the work of the WCC. There is support for this feeling in some fairly recent works: Wesley Ariarajah (1985), Visser Thooft (1974) and Samuel Ryan (1970). Ryan indeed suggests that the thinking on mission promoted by the WCC caused a scandal, brought about a crisis, upset missionaries and unsettled bishops. The view here is that leaders in the Christian churches have generally been unable to support mission and dialogue in a pluralistic context. Indeed, there appear to be gaps in the thinking of some churches that threaten to undermine and weaken the mission and dialogic potential of the Church. Such gaps are seen, for example, where some theologians perceive dialogue and mission as diametrically opposed to each other. Also, because churches in the West have not learnt to receive expertise on mission and dialogue from churches in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and South America, it has been difficult for the Church as a whole to expedite the twin tasks with dignity and equanimity.

The expectation is that the study - referring to the biblical and historical contexts of mission and dialogue, and to the work of the WCC as the principal case in point (along with other minor global and local ecumenical projects) - will establish one thing. Namely, that it is vital for the Church to respond to the challenges of a pluralist society to mission and dialogue ecumenically and with one voice.

Further, it is argued that the more the churches respond with equanimity and purpose to the challenges, the greater the scope will be for mission and dialogue to succeed and for Christian understanding and world peace to be promoted.

1.5 Methodology

Classified under Mission Theology, this research is done from within the progressive Evangelical tradition

In this introductory Chapter One, the method of study and compilation is proposed and outlined. In consequence, the method as it relates to each chapter is as follows:

In Chapter Two - for a study of the definition and elucidation of mission, dialogue and religious and secular pluralism - biblical, historical and scholarly data are examined. The method by which the biblical passages are selected and explained is thematic (as in Coker, 1981) and based on hermeneutical rules suggested by Stacey (1979), which draw on historical and contemporary models to arrive at a decisive interpretation. Historical data are used because of the light they shed on the study. Scholarly data are chosen to reflect dated as well as recent thinking. Our main modern scholarly works are Hick (1977-87), Rahner (1976), and Kraemer (1938, 1956); and a personal work (Mereweather-Thompson, 1995) as a buttress. WCC documents and consultative publications and reports (e.g. 1961, 1968, 1979, 1980, 1990) are used to demonstrate trends in the mission and dialogue debate as well as action taken in the field. Information from the World Wide Web is also accessed for the most recent and up-to-date insights to 2006 (ww.wcc-coe.org)

In Chapter Three - for a consideration of how the situation for mission in a pluralist context is illustrated in the global village by the WCC, and of how Christian denominations respond individually to the challenges to mission in the specified context, WCC summits and publications (the Uppsala Report 1968, the Melbourne Report 1980, the San Antonio Report 1990, and the Nairobi Consultation Report 1975) are reviewed. These reviews are facilitated by scholarly contributions from Thooft (1974), Bassham (1979), and Frazier (1987), among other attached and unattached writers. The views of other key scholars – e.g., Bonino (1985), Muzorewa (1991), Pobee (1985), Brockway (1985) and Bosch (1991) among many others - are also solicited in the process. A wide range of modern and divergent views is gained from studies in Hart (2000), Patrid (2002) and from journals and articles up to 2005/6. In this way, the study is provided with breadth as well as depth and thereby with much-needed cogency and conviction.

In Chapter Four - for a consideration of how the situation for dialogue in a pluralist context is illustrated in the global village by the WCC, and of how Christian denominations respond individually to the challenges to dialogue in the specified context, there are reviews of (1) the official reports of WCC Assemblies at New Delhi (1961) and Nairobi (1975); and (2) the communiqués of BCC meetings, as the most appropriate regional ecumenical body in a nationally pluralist context. The work of both officially-commissioned (e.g., Siddiqui 1997, Faruqui 1995/7, Ariarajah 1985) and independent scholarship (Thooft 1974, O'Sullivan 1991, Scherer and Bevans 1995/99) are also reviewed in the light of studies in Hart (2000), Patrid (2002) and from journals and articles up to 2005/6. In this way, coverage of a wide range of views is categorically and systematically ensured.

In Chapter Five - for a decision as to how we should conclude, distinctively pluralist and non-pluralist contexts are compared, using case studies and proportionate findings from field research undertaken along the lines suggested by Hammersly and Atkinson (1983; see also Creswell 2008). Given my personal involvement in the problem debate, with experience in world mission in West Africa, this method is most appropriate. It facilitates detachment and objectivity by the way in which the enquirer asks questions. The London-based survey - small but significant - is carried out among three major Christian denominations (Roman Catholics, Church of England, Methodists) and the two main Muslim divisions (Sunni and Shiite). Questionnaires (see Appendices 5 and 6) are applied to samples across age, gender, social and ethnic backgrounds, to achieve a clear understanding as to what part these factors play in modifying world-views and group understanding of and attitudes to mission and dialogue.

Non-religious persons are interviewed to broaden the inquiry. For a final analysis, secondary data from books and journals are set alongside our primary data to reach an in-depth conclusion. But first, a word about the mission and ethos of WCC.

1.6 The World Council of Churches (WCC)

Beginning with the merging of two ecumenical bodies (the Universal Council for Life and Work and the World Conference of Faith and Order) after 1914 as a result of the Edinburgh Gathering of 1910, the WCC was brought into being by the International Missionary Committee, whose first Chairman was William Temple, a top ecclesiastic of the Anglican Church and later Archbishop of Canterbury. From the beginning, it thus became identified as a Protestant ecumenical movement, even though the Edinburgh Conference, in the debate on the destination of missions, deliberately confined attention to non-Christian (excluding Roman Catholic Latin-America) areas. But even within the Protestant rank itself there is a rift, as over 50% of all foreign missionaries in the world serve with missions that are unaffiliated, even indirectly, with the WCC. All this indicates a failure of the Church with regard to mission and dialogue, even at the prior level of ecumenism with the foundations of the world body.

Further twentieth century development of the WCC was as follows:

- In 1951, five Canadian churches became members and in 1952 it emerged as the world ecumenical body with the largest membership of 158 churches (particularly with the entry of the majority of Orthodox Churches) in 43 countries. Theologically, two dates were significant: 1910 and 1948. The former was a landmark for the destination of mission debate, and the latter was a watershed for the discussion about the nature and meaning of mission. These being on missions, it is worth noting that the WCC was in fact set up for dialogue, i.e., for the purpose of 'bringing together representatives of the churches to discuss the issues which had traditionally divided them and to explore the possibility of agreement' (Latourette, 1961:1378).

- In May 1938, representatives of a number of small ecumenical organisations met in Utrecht to draft a constitution for the WCC. It was officially described as a "fellowship of churches which accept our lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour". Its members were churches but it was intended to facilitate common study and action, not to legislate for the churches. With headquarters at Geneva, Switzerland, it began to function in 1938 as **the World Council of Churches in the process of formation** because of delay due to World War II.

- In 1948, in a great assembly at Amsterdam, it was officially constituted and launched. During the war years (1940-48), it did much to link up churches on both sides of the warring divide and became a major relief agency after the war.

- Dialogue between churches remained a major focus of the WCC. On the recommendation from its Third Assembly at New Delhi in 1961 a Joint Study Commission on Christian Education was established with the World Council of Christian Education whose mandate was to "work towards the formation of a common theological understanding of education". Since 1976, a unit of this education brief has been trying 'to focus the WCC and its constituency on both the understanding and practice of "ecumenical learning for the fully inclusive human community".'

- Mission to non-Christians was also important for the WCC education programme, particularly in two areas:
 - to be able to act ecumenically rather than denominationally;
 - to be able to approach the cultures of people receiving missions with care and understanding.

The WCC responded with equanimity to both of these concerns at the Willingen Conference (1995). Mission should be carried out in partnership, and should take full account of the culture of the recipients (International Review of Mission, 1993:337-338).

- The WCC is in itself a demonstration of networking and partnership action. At the end of the 1950s and during the 1960s it shared (as already noted) many activities with the World Council of Christian Education (the World Sunday School Association until 1947), both groups eventually merging in 1971. Close working relationship was also established with the International Missionary Council (IMC), and a looser but friendly tie with the World Student Christian Federation and the World Young Men's Christian Association. It met jointly with the IMC at New Delhi in 1961, integrating it as its Division on World Mission and Evangelism in 1971, as an indication of the central place of mission in the ethos of the world body. Concern for dialogue was there but was yet to be fully developed while it

fostered the creation of regional assemblies everywhere from the 1950s to give its efforts greater impetus.

1.7 Regional church councils (Africa)

A regional consciousness developed rapidly in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Pacific and the Caribbean (as areas with common problems) after World War II. According to Bassham (1979:33), the vitality of the regional groups found expression in similar ways. In Africa - significant for us as an area providing a sort of control group outside a heavily pluralistic society - an association of Evangelicals was first formed before that of a wider ecumenical group. Later, widened participation resulted in the All African Conference of Churches (AACC) in 1963. In Latin America, similarly, Evangelicals participated in a series of joint evangelism campaigns which were directed by nationals. In Asia, a number of churches and missionary groups (associated with the ecumenical movement) emerged to foster evangelism and to seek a closer association to strengthen the Church in the region and the world. This led to the formation of the East Asian Christian Conference (EACC), which in 1973 became the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA).

The Western and developed worlds were not excluded from this process either. In Europe, the British Council of Churches (BCC) – for example - was established to give regional expression to the work of the world body and to facilitate discussion between the main churches and the newer ones.

These developments are important in order to understand contemporary mission theology, for two reasons which Bassham (1979:63) outlines:

- First, Christians from Asia, Africa and Latin America have exerted a growing influence on the ecumenical movement through the leadership they have given to the WCC and its related bodies.
- Second, some of the concerns discussed at regional level have become significant WCC priorities for study and action.

Note may be taken of three matters of prominence in regional discussion: (1) joint action for mission; (2) the study of conditions concerning social, economic and political development; and (3) dialogue with people of other faiths. The urgent consideration of these matters at the WCC had frequently been prompted by the importance attached to them at the regional level.

With especial regard to Africa, the first international conference to meet in the continent resulted in the formation of the AACC. Discussing the theme 'Christian Mission in Africa', it was planned by J.H. Olden of the IMC. Prior to that, the IMC met at Le Zoute, Belgium, in 1926 and focused on Africa's needs in relation to the Church, race relations, evangelism and education. Three years later, the IMC created an International Committee on Christian Literature for Africa to promote the production and distribution of literature for use by missionaries throughout Africa. Then, following a Ghana meeting over New Year 1957/58 - at which 96 African Church leaders from 25 countries met together - the IMC declared the aim of setting up the AACC. At an Ibadan (Nigeria) sequel to this meeting in 1978, Akanu Ibiam of the Christian Council of Nigeria, chairman of the provisional committee of the AACC, described the profound impression the gathering made on the participants in this way (*AACC Review* 1979:136):

The ten days in Ibadan were a period of real and warm Christian fellowship. For the first time in known history, the Churches of Africa had an opportunity 'to discover and love one another' in that atmosphere, charged with vision and inspired by high ideals for Christian service, the Church in Africa woke up from its slumber, so to speak, and realised with great force and intensity the tremendous task and responsibilities which were here in the evangelisation of the peoples of Africa.

Then there occurred the WCC Kampala Assembly (1962), the main thrust of which concerned the acceptance by the African churches of selfhood. For African participants, this involved autonomy from outside control and the ability to determine their own goals. Hence, the formation of the AACC became a sign that the Church in Africa had now assumed primary responsibility for evangelism and Christian outreach in the continent. Its first assembly of the AACC (1963) demonstrated the necessity for this as 'an African witness to the Christian faith, a witness that would include all Christians in a deeper unity, relative to the needs and aspirations of African nations striving for independence and maturity' (*AACC Report* 3.1963, xi)

In the ensuing years, church renewal received much attention at Abidjan (Ivory Coast), particularly in regard to relations between Christian groups. The presence and active participation at these meetings of observers from some African Independent Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and some conservative Evangelicals, pointed to the AACC's commitment to fostering ecumenical contacts.

The main Abidjan Assembly (1965) faced the task of getting churches involved in such joint mission activities as education, medical work and evangelism. An appeal was sent to missionary societies and overseas churches asking them to cooperate with the local church in this design. At the same time it was acknowledged that much depended on how financial resources from African churches themselves could be tapped through membership and stewardship.

A major initiative concerning evangelism in Africa reached an important point with the completion of a comprehensive religious affiliation survey covering all Africa by David Barrett and others (1979:142) in 1972 (see also 7.1/Appendix 1). It revealed that of the 860 tribes of Africa, 213 were Muslims, 411 could be called evangelised, and 236 remained relatively open for evangelism from traditional religions. It spoke of evangelism as the work “to which the whole Church in Africa is called”, being empowered by the Holy Spirit to work for wholeness, liberation, repentance and renewal.

Lusaka, Zambia, hosted the third assembly of the AACC in 1974. This assembly made a most remarkable quest in calling for a moratorium on missionaries and finance from overseas. This was not a completely new idea, for as early as 1971, John Gatt, vice-chairman of the General Committee of the AACC, had promoted it. 500 participants (including 215 Africans delegated from 112 member bodies), heard Burgess Carr, a key contributor from the south of the continent, press the issue of the moratorium, saying (Barrett 1979:142):

The call for a moratorium is a demand to transfer the massive expenditure on expatriate personnel in the Churches in Africa to programme activities manned by Africans themselves.

After a hundred years of missionary activity in Africa, the Churches are still not able to stand on their own feet. We are still far too dependent!

The simple truth about the moratorium is that we, African Christians, have no desire to be the channel through which the continued domination of Africa is assured. Therefore we are determined to move speedily toward achieving self-reliance for our Churches.

The AACC then took a significant step which has bearing on our analysis by accepting the independent Pentecostalist-Aladura and Kimbanguist Churches of West and East Africa, respectively. It thereby expressed a recognition that mission is in need of non-European established churches in the global society. It also raised the profile of African-instituted churches to match those established by missionaries from Europe and the Americas. Where the mainline churches in Africa failed to meet the spiritual needs of some of their members, the new African Independent Churches were able to stand in their places.

Despite this indication of co-operative inter-church relations, Africa was never quite to escape the scourge of the intolerance of Western churchmanship. A strong antipathy towards the ecumenical movement appeared to be a major influence motivating the formation of the regional sub-group: the Association of Evangelicals for Africa and Madagascar (AEAM). In typical style, its constitution declared: “no full member of the AEAM may at the same time be affiliated with the World Council of Churches or its associated organizations” (*AEAM*, 1979:264). With an image characterised by this tone even among usually conciliatory African Christians, the AEAM has sought to raise its profile in other ways by:

- providing a forum to raise questions regarding the place and role of Western missionaries in Africa
- sponsoring the Evangelical Theological Society of Africa (an accrediting council for Theological Education in Africa) and the Bangui Evangelical School of Theology in French-speaking Africa.

Nevertheless, its main emphasis remains characteristically: to encourage evangelism, to contend for the authority of the Bible, and to maintain strong opposition to syncretism, with the aim of fostering Evangelical theological education and scholarship.

Is this the kind of background against which challenges to mission and dialogue would be ably and copiously met in a pluralist society? The devotional contributors Pippert and

Simens (1992:50) seem to think that opposition to evangelism is inevitable regardless. It remains to be seen.

1.8 Summary and projected analysis

This first introductory chapter summarises the division of the thesis into five main chapters through the eye of the title and key words, the problem and background, the aims and objectives, and the methodology. In this summary, these motifs will be used analytically to project the contents and arguments of the ensuing chapters. The chapter also states the Central Theoretical Argument of the thesis, explains some of its key words and briefly outlines a developmental history of the WCC and other regional ecumenates. It is therefore most incisive and vitally contributory to the achievement of the end to which the work is directed.

In brief, the Central Theoretical Argument says that the fact that 'mission and dialogue' is seen by some Evangelicals as 'mission versus dialogue' is the reason for their poor response to the work of the WCC and to the challenges facing 'mission and dialogue' in a pluralist context.

For its part, although its work has ebbed and flowed, it has to be said that had the WCC not requested Church unity so loudly and clearly, nothing much would have been done about it. Such organic unity as the Anglicans and Roman Catholics pursued in the past would not have come about without this advocacy. This clarion call of course raises the question: should the goal of all unity talks be geared towards reconciled diversity?

The second chapter, following on, is listed here as dealing with its problem, objective and methodology in relation to the definitions and explanations of the main terms of concern: mission, dialogue, pluralism, with challenges and context.

- The problem with pluralism, I will argue, is that it is by its very nature challenging to mission and dialogue. The problem with these twinned aspects in the work of the Church is that although they go together, churchmen see themselves as diametrically opposed. The objective of the chapter is to define and explain pluralism, mission and dialogue, with challenges and context. Its methodology

will enhance these definitions by hermeneutical and critical use of biblical and historical data and material from broadly selected scholarly arguments.

- Within that framework, the projected analysis is that mission and dialogue (with pluralism) will be seen as having made a steady and progressive journey in biblical history, religious history and modern secular history. This will facilitate investigation as to how mission was perceived in the past and how it was challenged in certain historical periods. It will seek to highlight how the link between Western culture and Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may or may not have helped the cause of Christian mission. It will argue that the multi-faith communities of the pluralist world have their own world-views which are necessary to be understood by Christians if they are to carry out mission effectively. It will thus wrestle not with how these world-views are formed but with how they impact individually and collectively on those who hold them within a given religion and how they shape the attitude and character of devotees. It will show that the pluralist position suggests that there is in fact a common content to the world's religions, and that each in its own way is equally salvific.

The third chapter is listed in this Introduction as dealing with the study's problem, objective and methodology in relation specifically to mission.

- The problem for mission, I will argue, is best illustrated by the ebb and flow in the history of the WCC. The objective of the chapter therefore is to further illustrate how the problem is compounded for mission by challenges from without and within. Its methodology will engage critical use of WCC documents and scholarly views in broad discussion.
- Within that framework, the projected analysis is that mission - having gone, and still going, through a crisis – should be aware of this crisis if it is to effectively overcome the hurdles facing it in a pluralist context.

It will be further argued that:

- the perennial division among mission theologians on what the task and mandate of mission should be reveals the level of the crisis in mission, and that failing to get consensus in this matter is a source of constant frustration in the mission thrust of the Church and the work of the WWC.

- the denominational divide in itself poses a hindrance to the overall success of mission, and that confessional theology can be inhibitive if participants are reluctant to move from their denominational stances.

The fourth chapter is listed here as dealing with the study's problem, objective and methodology in relation specifically to dialogue.

- The problem for dialogue, I will argue, is best illustrated by the ebb and flow in the history of the WCC. The objective of the chapter therefore as is to further illustrate how the problem is compounded for dialogue by challenges from without and within. Its methodology will engage critical use of WCC documents and scholarly views in broad discussion.
- Within that framework, the projected analysis is that with dialogue 'charity begins at home', and that:
 - the largely frosty responses which dialogue receives from most Evangelical conferences are a poor showing of Christian charity and injunction to follow the scriptural instructions to engage in meaningful conversation for conflict resolution.
 - criticism of WCC's approach to dialogue with non-Christian religions is unfair, coming – as it does – in the context of a clarion call for unity.
 - use made of the work of Wesley Ariarajah (1995) on the impact of inter-religious dialogue on the ecumenical movement, and of those WCC-free commissioned works of Siddiqui (1997), Faruqi (1995 and in Siddiqui 1997) and Thooft (1974) on dialogue are very significant.
 - the challenges to Christian-Muslim dialogue include the facts that:
 - at times these organised dialogues dissolved into heated debates in which the participants seemed to want to pour out their grievances
 - in the absence of an internationally representative body of Muslims, the WCC was dependent upon invited individuals whose views were not widely endorsed within the Muslim community itself.

The fifth chapter is listed here as dealing with the study's problem and background, aim and objectives and methodology in relation specifically to findings from case and field studies on mission and dialogue.

- The problem for mission and dialogue, I will argue - as revealed by case and field studies - is that they are subjected to world-views which shape the individual's thinking within the group. It is difficult in those contexts – without mitigating circumstances – to find independently-expressed personal views. The objective of the chapter is therefore to overcome this problem in order to have information that would facilitate a qualitative conclusion. Its methodology will thus engage both qualitative and quantitative research methods to look at case and field studies, respectively; identify 'main' and 'control' groups (i.e., chiefly, of a distinctively pluralist and non-pluralist contexts, in the first place); and use data from them comparatively and analytically.
- Within that framework, the projected analysis is that with case and field studies on mission and dialogue in a pluralist context it will be demonstrable that:
 - ethnographic studies of control groups of non-pluralist (both Christian and Islamic) orientation and unilateralist focus (such as is held by the Baptist Church) are most decisive;
 - such studies facilitate the understanding of the dynamics of pluralism and are very useful in combating the obstacles it presents;
 - it will not therefore be necessary to allude to all religions or even all the major world religions, nor to argue doctrinally for the veracity of the Christian faith or to critique the values of the other faiths negatively.

This introductory chapter is itself therefore now concluded with an incisive overview. Namely, that the chapter remains the means by which the study is held together and cemented. It is the basis on which the study - as an academic exercise - sustains its credibility, and on which it – as a work aimed at aiding a crisis – provides ideas for those wishing to see Christian mission and dialogue succeed in a pluralistic country and world. Between 2006 (when the study was essentially completed) and 2009 (when it was formally submitted) sufficient time has elapsed to test theory and this aim. A recent BBC survey (September 2009) [reference?] on what the ‘noughties’ (i.e., the years 2000 to 2009) have

done for God, seems to indicate that religion (Christianity in particular) has not fared very well. Secularism has gained more ground, and radical Islam has left its mark with the events of September 11, 2001 in the USA and July 2007 in the UK. The task then is to very effectively engage the tools of this chapter, fully enhanced in recent writing throughout the study, particularly as the priorities of defining pluralism, mission and dialogue (with challenges and context) are treated in Chapter Two.

2.0 CHAPTER TWO: PLURALISM, MISSION AND DIALOGUE

DEFINITIONS

What are **mission**, **dialogue** and a **pluralist** context? What is 'Christian mission', and what does 'interfaith dialogue' involve? What are the **challenges** posed in a pluralist **context** to mission and dialogue? How are they significantly different from challenges that would be posed in another context? The objective of this chapter is to study and define mission and dialogue; to spell out how a pluralist context naturally evokes debate about them; to explain pluralism itself and the challenges it poses to the twins.

For this, we examine biblical, scholarly and historical material, to accommodate all essential and reasonable views. The method by which biblical passages are selected and explained is thematic (as in Coker, 1981), and based on hermeneutical rules suggested by Stacey (1979) which draws on historical and contemporary models to arrive at a decisive interpretation.

Scholarly data are chosen to reflect dated as well as recent thinking, and historical material is adduced to shed light on the central argument. The main scholars are Hick (1977, 1980, 1985, 1987), the pluralist; Rahner (1976), the inclusivist; and Kraemer (1938, 1956), the exclusivist. There is buttress and disagreement, historically, from various WCC and other publications and, reflectively, from personal work previously done by the researcher (Mereweather-Thompson, 1995). Before proceeding, however, a word about the application of biblical and historical evidence in the process.

2.1 The Thematic and Hermeneutical Approach

It is obvious that in a work on 'mission and dialogue' from within the Evangelical tradition there would be need to make reference to the Bible. In order for the debate not to be solely informed by fundamentalist application of scripture, we engage here some academic strategies as indicated above. These strategies give the study objectivity and cogency.

We need to see 'mission and dialogue' and 'pluralism' through the eyes of the Bible, history, and scholarship. Scholarship stands out as clearly distinguishable from biblical and historical material. The Bible and history, on the other hand, are not so clearly

distinguishable from each other, and in this regard we need methodological assistance. David Stacey (1979:17), in *Groundwork for Biblical Studies* notes that historical studies of the Bible are not - in strict terms - biblical studies. By this we are able to begin our historical evidence for mission, dialogue and pluralism just outside the period and content covered by the Bible, as shall be seen. But when we use the Bible, in order not to try to establish history - Stacey warns - we need a basis for interpretation or hermeneutics, which he is at pains to distinguish from 'exegesis'. Since here we focus on interpreting allusions to the Bible in terms of historical and contemporary data, we are in the realm of hermeneutics (relating the biblical world to the present day) not exegesis (mapping understanding **out of** - not **in to** the biblical world).

Stacey also warns against the attempt by a student of one theological discipline to transfer the skills of another discipline into his or her own without reference to an 'authority' within the kindred discipline. This work in Missiology makes salient and appropriate references to scholars of Biblical Studies where the interpretation of Bible references is required.

As the Bible is a large book, we also need a method of selection and scheming. For this Coker's (1981:10-12) unpublished doctoral thesis in Comparative Theology on *West African Religion: An Ancestral Study in the Light of Hebrews XI* is extremely useful. He suggests that selection from the Bible could be done thematically once aspects or themes for investigation have been identified from history or contemporary practice. He makes this suggestion by virtue of the fact that in Hebrews XI pre-Christian Old Testament figures are celebrated as faith heroes regardless of their character. Then using key aspects in African religion - for example, foundation, leadership, sacrifice - he identifies corresponding explicit and implicit themes in Hebrews XI as the basis of his analysis. While explicit themes are clearly identifiable, implicit themes are not and have to be elicited. Finally, he achieves a credible overview of Old Testament content and history through the schematic presentation of its great figures as New Testament heroes and martyrs of faith in the panegyric.

The present study engages the schematic approach to determine biblical understanding of implicit pluralism, and the thematic one to discuss mission and dialogue. It will be seen that whereas the theme of mission is explicit in the Bible, dialogue is more implicit than explicit and - for the most part - has to be elicited.

2.2 Pluralism

Pluralism is considered in relation to its literary, biblical, historical and scholastic bases and purviews.

2.2.1 Pluralism's literary basis and purview

The *New Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'pluralism' as 'the state of being plural', and 'the doctrine that there is more than one ultimate principle in the universe'. From this it follows that a 'plural context' is a society in which there are many beliefs (theistic, non-theistic, atheistic) systems, each claiming ultimacy of belief or non-belief. It would also mean that the society may be reluctant to acknowledge any one system's claim to superiority, even if this were historically based. In such a society, members would be of diverse (autonomous?), ethnic/racial, social, cultural, language and religious groups.

2.2.2 Pluralism's biblical basis and purview

Automatically, this view rejects the biblical position, namely, and schematically, that of all the peoples of the created world, with various beliefs and gods, God (in the Old Testament) chose Israel as his people, through whom he established a covenant relationship (Gen. 16:2, 9), to be mediated to the other nations or races (Gentiles) through the Messiah (Isaiah, 42: 6). The Messiah (in the New Testament) came in Jesus Christ as Man (Son of Man) and God (Son of God), established the Church and mediated the covenant to Jewish and Gentile Christians. Christians were then the new people of God through whom God's unique revelation and his new covenant should be mediated back to the old people of God and to other Gentile nations, irrespective of their own religious perceptions. In this, they were given a dominical command to engage in **missions** (Matthew 28:19), but with regard to **dialogue** the evidence is less explicit and more implicit (for example, Mark, 7:24-30; Romans, 6:1-3) as we shall see in due course.

The Bible, thus, acknowledges a pluralist world but only implicitly and by default. The default occurs in the need to mention other nations apart from the chosen ones (Jews in the Old Testament, Jewish and Gentile Christians in the New). Hence, the occurrence now of one of the scandals (see 1.1 and also Mereweather-Thompson, 1995:53) to be addressed in the course of the study¹: namely, 'the scandal of particularity' (in time and history) with the experience and expectations of a single people. This form of the scandal appears to diminish in the New Testament with the notion that all nations could and should be Christians. Even so, it has to be said that this only serves to indicate that - on balance in the Bible - pluralism is as undesirable a way of life as polytheism is unwanted as a way of religion. Clearly, preference is for monotheism, monolatry, and unity in diversity.

2.2.3 Pluralism's historical basis and purview

Two examples of societies which could be and have been described as pluralist societies and which are facing these questions are Britain (with absorption of many ethnic groups and faiths from the legacy of an empire) and the global society (engulfing the entire diversity of mankind). To the mechanics and constitution of these we will have due recourse later (see Chapter Five), but in that the study requires us also to take account of historical data, we will now consider vital snippets in their history.

Global plurality, as Jevon (1896:1-10) had endeavoured to make clear, should of course be adjudged as being as old as the history of mankind itself. Even the Judæo-Christian and Islamic traditions, which seem to give priority to a Hebraic progenitor in the Fertile Crescent (Gen. 1 & 2; Sura 4), quickly introduces other Semitic and African nations. World history, however, written mainly from a Euro-Northern perspective, focuses less on peoples and cultures outside Europe for obvious reasons. As implied, it was written from a European/North American point of view for more or less the same readership. The history of other places - or so it was claimed - were not as well documented, particularly in 'primitive' and oral cultures (Galloway, 1909:42-67). But Jevon (1896:9) pooh-poohed this as the old scientific and evolutionary erroneous way of looking at the world.

The result was that with the global domination of Western civilisation through European expansion, imperialism and colonialism from the Industrial Revolution in the sixteenth century to the World Wars and the formation of the United Nations (UN) in the twentieth century (with the independence movement and the rise of nation states thereafter), the global society (often called the 'international community') seemed almost uni-cultural in spite of its diverse nature. In this, Christianity and Western civilisation were more or less fused and considered superior; other cultures and religions being seen - at best - as interesting supplements and - at worst - as primitive and not worth sustaining. Even the diatribe force of Islam and the ancient civilisations of the East were hardly given space.

The close relationship between Western culture and the Christian religion underpinned Pope Alexander VI's mandate to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain in the sixteenth century. Setting out the instructions according to which the New World was to be divided and developed, it granted "full, free and integral power, authority and jurisdiction" to Christian rulers. It also required them to evangelise the people by sending them "honest and God-fearing men, learned, skilled and experienced, to instruct the natives and inhabitants in the Christian Faith and to imbue them with good morals". Espousing this, William Carey, 1761-1836, European orientalist and sacred text translator, is quoted in Bassham (1979:3) as having written:

Can we hear they (non-Christians) are without the gospel, without government, without laws, and without arts and sciences; ... Would not the spread of the gospel be the effectual means of their civilization? Would not that make them useful members of society?

A significant element in the rise of nationalism and the quest for independence was the resurgence of traditional religions. In India, this process began with Ram Moham Roy, continued with Swamis Dayananda and Vivekanda into the twentieth century, and culminated with Mohandas Gandhi and other Hindu reformers. In Africa, it was later in coming; but when it did it was a significant factor in the growth of the independence movement of the twentieth century. It was influential even in the development of new liturgical forms in African independent churches (Parrinder, 1974:162). In other places of the world, it was pitched somewhere between its resurgences in India and its development in Africa (see Anderson 1970:27-30).

With regard to British pluralism, the history is very different. It seems appropriate to speak of two periods of pluralism: an ancient and a modern one. The ancient one began with the invasion of Britain in the second century from across the Channel to the south by Roman legions, and by an influx of the Barbarians into the outskirts of the Roman Empire, including the north of Britain, in the fifth century. While there is no evidence for the old claim that Christianity in Britain was founded by St Paul, it is clear that by this time the Church was already in the land, as the writings of the early Church Father, Tertullian (c. 208-211, *On the Soul* 30) indicate. So that, although Rome withdrew in the face of Barbarian onslaught, and further Germanic tribes of the Angles (from whom England got its name) and Saxons arrived in the sixth century, Christianity still remained; and that as a stabilising influence. Strong in warfare, these invaders eventually pushed many of the ancient Britons to Wales and Scotland, while they occupied England. As it happened, the Anglo-Saxons, especially the Angles, were unconverted and remained pagans for a long time. Then Christianity came to them again from two directions: from the south, through the missionary work of St Augustine of Canterbury from Pope Gregory the Great of Rome; and from the north - from Scotland (it having arrived there a little later in the sixth century). It is said the Gregory became interested in the evangelisation of England after he was given a group of British slaves, of whom he is reported to have said (see Renwick, 1963:66): *Angli s unt, f iant Angeli* ("They are English, let us make them angels"). After the withdrawal of Rome, the Church was slowly transformed and in turn it transformed society. From being an Imperial Church, it became a Church that reflected the feudal society (with a status system of land tenure) of Britain as much as it was a unifying factor. It held the people together even beyond the divisions which came with the Reformation and the break with Rome through Henry VIII and the birth of the Church of England in the sixteenth century.

Not so with the modern period of British pluralism of the twentieth century. This has proved more challenging to the influence of Christianity, to the extent that the period has often been called 'post-Christian'. Linked more regularly with the post-war influx of people from the former colonies in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and the West Indies in the wake of immigration for all sorts of reasons (political, economic, educational...) there were other factors too in its making. These include the disintegration of the British Empire with the end of colonialism, the separation of Christianity from colonialism, the resurgence of non-

Christian religions (Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism in particular, in addition to Judaism which was already a contending force in Europe), the decline of Christianity in the West, with the ascendancy of the secular society and Humanist ideals. Today Britain is for that matter readily referred to as a 'multicultural society'.

In all this, one factor which contributed to the weakening of Christianity and to the strengthening of the pluralist situation is the very existence of denominational diversity and disunity in the Church. Often ignored in the debate, they are both the reason why ecumenism is required and also the obstacle to it. Educationists (see Cox 1983:15) have made the point that one reason why the teaching of Christianity in schools became difficult and subject to so much debate is because the churches could not agree among themselves as to what brand of Christianity should be taught. The situation was further made difficult, as sociologists (see Hill, 1979:9-21) gleaned, by the fact that black immigrant Christians from the West Indies (and to a similar extent, from Africa) were not immediately welcomed by the main Churches in Britain (Roman Catholics, Church of England/Anglican, Methodist, Baptists, United Reformed Church, Presbyterians). Nor were they immediately supported when - as a result of not having been accepted - they started Pentecostal churches closer to the culture of the African diaspora. From all this, it became inevitable, by the end of the century, for a multi-faith, multicultural, pluralist society to have been well placed in Britain to challenge Christianity and church mission.

2.2.4 Pluralism's scholastic basis and purview

Infested with a variety of cultures, religious experiences, faiths, theologies and philosophies, the pluralist world poses an immediate challenge to mission and dialogue. Standing apart from Christianity, and apart from traditional religions like those of contemporary Africa, are five other religions generally accepted as major faiths: Judaism and Islam (from the Middle East), Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism (from the East). While it is possible, academics have attempted to find common elements between religions (see Rees, 1979:1.87). But more often than not it is the bigotry of leading religious enthusiasts (emphasising the fundamental and irreducible differences between them) that carries the day, as these examples (quoted by Cotterell, 1990:35) reveal. Forta, an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi, says:

At the most external level of all Judaism and Christianity stand poles apart..... Those who work for the community must never lose sight of the unbridgeable chasm separating Judaism and Christianity at the very core of both belief systems.

In the same vein, Seid Hossein Nasr (1981:19), an Islamic dialectic, also writes:

Islam does not accept the idea of the incarnation or filial relationship. In its perspective, Jesus was a major prophet and spiritual pole of the whole Abrahamic tradition but not a God-man or Son of God. The Qur'an does not accept that he was crucified, but states he was taken directly to Heaven. This is the one irreducible 'fact' separating Christianity from Islam, a fact which is in reality placed there providentially to prevent a mingling of the two religions.

Is there anything significant about the pluralist society which may impact positively on mission and dialogue? This calls for a review of the work of pluralist, John Hick. With an early persuasion as a strong evangelical - and even fundamentalist - Christian, Hick (as an academic and Professor of Theology), became dissatisfied with the narrowness, lack of investigativeness and sympathy of his fellow Evangelicals. Partridge (in Hart, 2000:248-9) makes it clear that the change came about in Hick when he moved to work within multi-faith Birmingham in England. Then when he later moved again from there to multicultural Carolina in the USA, he became a fully fledged pluralist theologian.

Among his incisive works, we look specifically at the following: *God and the Universe of Faith* (1977), *God Has Many Names* (1980), "The Theology of Religious Pluralism" in *Theology* 86 (1983:335-340), *The Experience of Religious Diversity* (1985), and *Theology of Religions* (1987).

In these studies, Hick - in varying degrees of passion for pluralism - shifts the centre around which all religions revolve, from Christianity and Christ to God. Finding a common content (as for example in the notions of peace, brotherhood and the afterlife) to the world's major religions, he argues that as Christianity *per se* stands for all that is "loving, honest and of good repute", its tenets and principles are the common perspective of all monotheistic and monistic religions, each with its own salvific path (1986:31; 1987: 33).

Hick had began his criticism of traditional Christian thinking because it dogmatically used a Ptolemaic model and placed Christianity as the "Sun" at the centre, with other faiths located in religious orbit around it, depending on their supposed closeness to Christianity. Thus Judaism, which shares a part of Christian scriptures, would have a lower orbit than Islam, which however would be closer to the Sun than Hinduism, and so on. To get to where he stood, Hick replaced this model with a Copernican one, involving a transformation of our understanding of the planetary system, the details of which are not immediately within our orbit to divulge.

The model has been criticised by both inclusivists (Rahner, Kung) and exclusivists (Kraemer, Newbigin) as a matter of course and conviction (see Rees, 1979:1, 86). To these we will refer later. Here, we may make the following point as an evaluation. Namely, although it is acceptable in theistic beliefs that there is **a common God**, who - in monotheistic systems - is the only **one** God (irrespective of how it is explained), whose sovereignty does not depend on human perceptions, it is still not clear whether the fact that religions and denominations do not use precisely the same point of reference in talking about God means that their 'Gods' are different. Is the God of the Old Testament the same as the God of the New Testament? Is Allah of the Qur'an the same as the God of the Bible? Is the God of Reform Judaism the same as the God of modern fundamentalist Shia Islam? Within the individual religions, was the God of rabbinical Judaism of Jesus' day the same as the God of the Torah, the Nevim and the Ketuvim (the Old Testament)? Is the God of mainstream Christianity the same as the God of Jehovah's Witnesses? And so it continues, *ad infinitum*. As there is no empirical way of examining this, even as there is no scientific proof for the existence of God, we cannot be detained by it any further.

2.3 Mission

Mission is considered in relation to its literary, biblical, historical and scholastic bases and purviews.

2.3.1 Mission's literary basis and purview

The Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology (Elwell, 1996:534) defines 'mission' as "the divine activity of sending intermediaries, whether supernatural or human, to speak or do God's will so that his purposes in judgement or redemption are furthered". Before this, Wright and Slater (1991:33), attempting to define the nature and source of mission from its Latin root *missio* meaning "I send", says that it emphasises the task for which the church is sent into the world. These definitions which, as they stand, put the emphasis more on the 'task' to be performed and less on the 'people' involved, are reversed in *The New Oxford English Dictionary*. There, mission is defined as 'persons' sent out as 'envoys' or 'evangelists'. The position of this study is that the mission of God starts and ends with people, as missionaries or recipients of mission.

Indeed, the term 'mission' ordinarily presupposes three categories of persons: (1) a sender/senders; (2) a person or persons sent by the sender/senders; (3) the person/persons to whom the person/persons sent is/are sent. As the entire terminology thus presumes that the one who sends has the authority to do so, it was often argued that the real sender is God who has authority to decree that people be sent to execute his will. In earthly practice, however, this authority has been understood to be vested in the Church, in a mission society, or even in a Christian potentate. In Roman Catholic Church missions, in particular, juridical authority remained for a long time the constitutive element for the legitimacy of the missionary enterprise (see Rutt, 1972:228). It was part of this entire approach by which mission is viewed in expansionist, field-occupational, conquering and triumphalist terms.

2.3.2 Mission's biblical basis and purview

The biblical position accords with the view that mission has the authority of God and that ordinarily it is a people to people concern. Indeed, there could not be a better confirmation of the divine source of mission, seen through the meaning of the root term 'sent', than what Jesus told his disciples in John 20:21: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you".

Schematically, in the Old Testament, the prophetic task shows the prophets as God's messengers to people, attempting to redeem them from sin. Explicitly, in the New Testament, Christians are commanded by Jesus to be witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1: 8), and he gave them power to go and make disciples of every nation, teaching the gospel to them and baptising them (Matthew 28: 19-20) in the Trinitarian name. Engaging our hermeneutical tools, the key words and concepts of these references (see Kittel, 1962:1-5) are, by implication: 'one sent out' (Greek *apostolos*, by association, apostle); 'witness' (Greek *marturia*, by association, martyr); 'disciples' (Greek *mathetai*, by association 'student' or follower); 'gospel' (lit. 'God's spell'), or 'good news' (Greek *euangelion*, by association, evangelist); and 'nation' (Greek *ethne*, by association, ethnic).

2.3.3 Mission's historical basis and purview

Although our methodological guide informs us that "strictly speaking historical studies are not biblical studies at all" (Stacey, 1979:28), there is a sense in which even the Old Testament – understood properly as it is argued in Howard and Grisanti (2003) offers not just prophetic but factual history. In this way, it could be used to calculate the date of the exodus and to explain the nature of the conquest of Canaan, for example. More definitely, the story of mission is at the heart of the New Testament, specifically *The Acts of the Apostles*. Beginning with the instruction of Jesus to the apostles to go and be witnesses to the utmost ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), the Christian community embarked on a dynamic proclamation which both expanded the Church and defined mission on every page of the New Testament itself, from the Gospels to the Book of Revelation. From now on the history of missions became primarily one of evangelisation and conversion.

Latourette (1961:85-268) delineates the development of this from the first clean sweep of Christianity across the Græco-Roman world in the first five centuries. Paying particular attention to the conversion and missionary journeys of St Paul, he raises the issues of how thought developed on mission in relation to the central doctrines and teachings, for example, of the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God and the Good News. Highlighting the cultural element from Pentecost onwards, he points out that the Church was never exclusively Jewish or Hellenistic in mission, there having been a variety of other linguistic groups (Syriac, Aramaic, Mesopotamians, Parthians, Medes.....) in its ambit.

However, Christian mission during the first five centuries was facilitated by the existence of the *Pax Romana* and Koine Greek as a common language, as much as by the existence everywhere of Jewish communities of 'God-fearers' of the *diaspora* and the availability of good roads. From Jerusalem, the mission of the Church moved through Antioch, Babylon and Alexandria to Ethiopia, India and Rome, where both Peter and Paul are said to have been martyred in 62 AD during the reign of the Emperor Nero. It appears that travellers from Rome founded the Church in Gaul (France) by the end of the second century, and it is said that the native inhabitants were able to use the Celtic language in Christian worship alongside Greek and Latin. Missions also went early to Egypt, Cyrene and much of North Africa, Spain and Britain.

One significant factor about the North African Church was that as the first Latin-speaking Church, it was not an indigenous mission. It nevertheless produced great theologians like Tertullian, Augustine and Cyprian. Tertullian features under 'Dialogue' as we shall see. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in the fifth century, dealt with the questions of freedom and grace in the belief that man has a creative mind. Cyprian was an advocate of the unity of the Church, and he believed that Christians who failed in witness through persecution should be accepted again into the Church. He did not succeed in holding the Church together, and the resultant split weakened it and made it vulnerable to the Muslim onslaught in the seventh century.

In Asia, the mission of Gregory the illuminator evangelised the area between the Black and Caspian Seas, while that of Gregory the wonder-worker - his inspirer - took the gospel to Cappadocia and Armenia in the third century. The Armenian experience is said to have been very successful because preaching was done in the language of the native people. But it is also said that when the king was converted to Christianity, he outlawed paganism; this then is the first record in history in which political influence was used to establish a faith. Indeed, royal influence often made or marred missions.

The work of one Ulphilus (311-383), a Goth of Northern Europe, trained in Nicomedia and sent back among his own people by Bishop Eusebius, was truly pioneering in Europe and is significant for one reason. It was successful only because Ulphilus reduced the language to writing and took the trouble to translate the gospel into it. Otherwise he was unsuccessful, as his brand of unorthodox Arian Christianity was later superseded by a more orthodox one.

We have dealt briefly already with the story of Christianity in Britain under 'Pluralism'. Among the people of Ireland, one feature of the mission of Patrick (see Quin 1965 III.779) is that he was preaching to a heathen tribe that was barbaric and entertained numerous beliefs in evil spirits. A great believer in the power of the Trinity to cast out evil spirits, he wrote the hymn commonly called 'St Patrick's Breastplate': "I bind unto myself today, the strong name of the Trinity." The Irish Church became known for its great fervour for mission.

Imperial patronage played an important part in the story of missions. Clovis, king of the Franks, brought his soldiers and people along with him after his conversion and baptism in 496, in appreciation of the help of Christianity in halting the expansionist intent of the Alemanni Germanic tribe. Clovis promised that should the Christian God assist him in preventing the annexing of his kingdom he would become a Christian. In the same way, one of the contestants for power in the kingdom of Northumberland in England, Oswald, like Constantine before him, vowed in 633 that if Christ gave him the victory he would turn to him and serve him. He also kept his promise on attaining success and sent to Iona for missionaries. Of course, the story of how the Emperor Constantine came to be a patron of the Church after his famous military victory in Italy in 312 is well documented for interested readers to consult (see for example Renwick 1963).

The mission of one Anskar (801-865AD) among the Scandinavians (Norway, Sweden and Denmark) also shows how a mission could benefit if supported by the crown. He became very successful when he received the confidence of the king of Denmark and was allowed to introduce Christianity there freely.

Likewise, in the fifth century, when the king of the Franks accepted Catholic Christianity, he became the first Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (which continued till the nineteenth century) and Catholicism became the pre-eminent Christian tradition. Earlier, as we have seen, it was still contending with other unorthodox brands (like Arianism and Donatism) for priority.

The faith of gifted and morally upright men and women was also very important in missions. With or without initially holding the office of a bishop or a priest, or of belonging to a monastic order, these 'faith heroes' achieved a lot in the mission field. They included Willibrod (653-739) who went to France, Winfrith of Crediton or Boniface (680-754) who worked in Germany, and Augustine of Canterbury (see Latourette, 1961:345-6). But papal patronage or commission was often a great help as in the case of Augustine and Boniface who, anxious to organise his mission well, sought the wisdom and experience of the Pope. Through this and his involvement in high politics, his mission in Germany and Holland is known to have been a success.

Again and again, a strong faith helped the establishing of missions. Boniface, for instance, cut down the oak tree war god, Thor, and used the planks to build a chapel. Local people had until then been fearful of the wrath of this god. Other men of faith, character and strong discipline in the history of missions are Aidan of Lindisfarne (seventh century), Cuthbert who succeeded him, and the monks Columba and Columban (Latourette, 1961:342-344) who worked extensively in Europe.

Mission also gained from the very nature of its own evangelistic thrust and outreach potential. This helped the work among the Slavonic tribes, Russians, Poles, Hungarians and Eastern Europeans in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In the case of the Slavonic tribes, a swift response of the Eastern Church at Constantinople to the request of King Ratislav of Moravia enunciated certain principles for mission.

- First, mission is not helped by division within the Church, as between Rome and France in the West.
- Second, it is not facilitated by delay and indecision, as the Western Church tended also to do.

- Third, it gains from the service of people who are educated in theology and experienced in administration or government.

The two brothers, Cyril or Constantine (826-869) and Methodius (815-885), who Ratislav sent out to the Slavs, were learned men in theology and government. They were also versed in the Slavonic language which they reduced to writing and most successfully used as a mission vehicle (1990:120).

By 1200 Europeans had been outwardly evangelised, and it was time to begin the consolidation of mission work for action in the wider world that was still to come. Indeed, until now the main problems for mission had been disagreement among Christians, the opposition of ruling houses where their support was denied and the rise and spread of Islam throughout hitherto Christian lands in the Middle East, Persia, North Africa and Southern Europe. The problems of pluralism for mission and dialogue were yet to be compounded out of these.

While work in the outside world was still to come in large scale, mention should be made of early missions to China. It seemed clear that this work was done by Nestorian Christians from Persia which, being monastic in organisation, suited the temperament of Buddhists. The monks paid great attention to learning the Chinese language into which a number of Christian books were translated during the tenth century. All this good work, however, suddenly came to an end when the central leader converted from Buddhism to Taoism (the word *tao* meaning 'the way', the title Jesus used of himself in John's Gospel).

The attention of the Church then seemed to have shifted in the eleventh century from mission to the crusades against Islam led by Pope Urban II from 1096, in a period which became known in Europe as the Dark Ages, shortly after William the Conqueror's victory in England in 1066. The crusades, even if they had succeeded, were certainly not vehicles of mission or dialogue. They were holy wars which were not supported by many missionaries who wished to convert Muslims peacefully, one Ramon Lull among them. Born and bred in a Muslim environment in Majorca about 1235, he felt called to the conversion of Muslims. He insisted that anyone wishing to convert Muslims must first learn about their customs, beliefs and language. Having met Muslims who had said they would be Christians

if he could prove that Christianity was better, he set about compiling a book with this intent using rational arguments. Insisting on a complete and utter dedication to the Christian life, he wrote (see Coker, 2002:3-5): "Missionaries could convert not only by preaching but also by living the Christian life." In the end, still convinced of the path of peace, he was martyred in Bugia in North Africa 1315.

From the sixteenth century, there was a new perspective to mission due to the Industrial Revolution and the Reformation. The Americas, the West Indies and Africa, south of the Sahara, were discovered. Voyages of discovery often included missionary personnel, and one of the aims in the establishing of new colonies was the presenting of the inhabitants with the Christian faith, by-passing the areas held by Islam. In 1556, Pope Calixtus III began a trend in modern mission with his appointment of a Portuguese Missionary Order of Christ with spiritual responsibility for Portuguese possessions. However, because Spain, not Portugal, discovered America, the missionary line had to conform to the Papal Bull drawn in 1493 by Pope Alexander VI from North to South Poles to avoid rivalry between the two exploring countries and their missions. Nevertheless, the potential was still set for denominational rivalry in missions to occur. (1990:126)

In 1534, Ignatius of Constantinople founded the Society of Jesus (SJ), which took an extensive interest in missionary work to win converts to Catholic Christianity. In their more reactionary form, they were called 'Jesuits', as more militantly opposed to Protestant groups. Most influential among them was Francis Xavier (1506-1552) whose missionary activities are closely connected with India and Japan, in areas where the main religion was Hinduism. Xavier worked for the conversion of many people belonging to the lower caste of untouchable Hindus, relying for the most part on translation though he tried learning their language. Making a rough and ready version of the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Ave Maria, he engaged an oral method of repetition to instill the basic elements of Christianity into the people. Disregarding the fact that at the time the system of government in Japan was disorganised, he concentrated instead on the Japanese people and culture. He found the people so intelligent and their culture so impressive to have been able to suggest that missions should not despise local customs but should build on them. His mission was very successful, though unfortunately it came to an end after he left, as a new centralised authority felt that foreign missions were interfering with

governance. This looks like a situation in which dialogue would have helped. Was it forthcoming in the centuries ahead?

The Reformation, preoccupied with changing the state of the Catholic Church, seemed to have diverted energy from such mission and dialogue as had been the focus of the Lateran Councils (1123-1517). The emphasis now was on radical change, a trend which the Roman Catholic Church tried hard to resist. One after the other, the Reformers - Luther, Calvin and Zwingli - defended the doctrinal positions to which they were committed but gave little attention to mission and dialogue as we know them. That was to wait - where mission is concerned - until the time of the Wesleys in England in the eighteenth century, and - where dialogue is concerned - until much later in nineteenth century with the start of the Ecumenical Councils.

During that period and most of the nineteenth century, a number of new missions to Asia, Africa, the West Indies and South America were initiated: the Church of England/Anglican Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (1699), and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (1701); the Baptist Missionary Society (1792); the London Missionary Society (1795); the (Anglican) Church Missionary Society (1799); the Wesleyan Missionary Society (1819); the American Baptist Missionary Board (1810); the Berlin Christian Society (1824); the Rhenist Missionary Society (1828); the Roman Catholic Picpus Fathers (1814); and the Evangelical Church's Sudan Interior Mission (1926). With all of these mission became ineluctably linked far more with missionary activity, evangelism, evangelisation and conversion than with dialogue and conversation.

However, it was not until the sixteenth century that this more expansionist intention took firmer hold, The Jesuits were the first to use the term mission in connection with the spread of the Christian faith among people (including Protestants) who were not members of the Catholic Church (see Olim, 1962:37-39). In this new sense, it was intimately associated with the colonial expansion of the Western world into what has more recently become known as the Third world or sometimes - more appropriately - the Two-Thirds-World. But it was not until the massive European expansion in the nineteenth century, that Christianity itself could really be said to have been established as a world religion. Despite the Iberian conquests in the new world, and the planting of Roman Catholic churches in the

Philippines, India, China and elsewhere, Christianity was largely confined to Europe and to Europeans who occupied the training centres of Africa and Asia.

Yet, a quick succession of events in the ensuing years shattered that confidence: The Great War caused enormous disruption of the missionary enterprise and helped to foster a growing resentment against the Western powers in the hearts and minds of many in Africa and Asia. Anti-Western feelings deepened in 1929-39 (see Bassham, 1979:4) with worldwide suffering and hardship caused by the depression which began in the West and then rapidly engulfed all nations.

2.3.4 Mission's scholastic basis and purview

Bosch (1991:17) says that up to the 1950s 'mission' equivocally and circumspectly referred to: the sending of missionaries to a designated territory; the activities undertaken by such missionaries; the geographical area where the missionaries were active; and the agency which dispatched the missionaries.

In a slightly different context, Miller (1987:31-34) says it could also refer to: a local congregation without a resident minister and still dependent on the support of an older, established church; or to a series of special services intended to deepen or spread the Christian faith, usually in a nominally Christian environment. More specifically, it refers to: a) propagation of the faith; b) expansion of the reign of God; (c) conversion of the heathen; and (d) the founding of new churches.

Scholarly rhetoric, however, has homed-in on 'task' rather than on 'people'. Costas (1974:43) stated that the Church is called to participate in the effectual mission of God. To engage in mission is to carry out the function of the basic nature of the Church. Blauw (in *BT* 3/1974:44) [Blauw 1974:44] argued: "There is no other Church than the Church sent into the world, and there is no other mission than that of the Church of Christ".

There has been an unending struggle between Evangelicals and Liberals on what is supposed to be the priority of mission. This is reflected in the damning Evangelical critique of the WCC's 'Renewal in Mission' Uppsala (1968) Conference document because it said nothing about the sending out of missionaries. Glasser (1977:53) noted that

conservative Evangelicals reacted strongly to the document because it "appalled them with its secularised gospel and the reduction of the mission of the Church to social and political activism". The Evangelical approach, then, stresses the 'task' (evangelism) more than the 'people' (*ta ethnē*) in mission; the theological 'object' - it could be said - rather than the human 'subject' of mission, the process rather than the goal and end of mission.

When millions of Christians profess a concern for others as 'lost' or in need of some form of help, this may be motivated by self-interest as much as by the scriptures or by experiential circumstances, for example, regarding health, home environment, education. Hence, a Marxist may be expected to demonstrate solidarity with the working classes, much in the same way as a Christian is supposed to show concern for the unconverted and the unsaved because of his/her belief in heaven and hell. Since, however, mission work is praxis (*qua* redemptive action) and not theory, Christian mission is expected to take steps to bring about those outcomes desired for others and verbalised by the vast majority of Christian believers.

The critique here is that since mission is the Church's participation in God's redemptive work (i.e., God's own mission to - and entry into the experience of - mankind), could the vexed question not be: "How well is the Christian mission prepared to enter into the experience of other cultures?" (see Cotterell, 1990:25)

We are led immediately to revisit the pluralist position. While it may be useful as a means of entering into the experience of other non-Christian phenomena, it does not answer the quest for praxis (as redemptive action) in entering those experiences. By suggesting that there is, in fact, a common content to the world religions, each of which has its own salvific path without reference of Christianity, it is greatly at odds with the particularity of the Judæo-Christian tradition which sees Christianity as the only valid way of life, past, present and future.

The dominant Roman Catholic view since the Second Vatican Council held in Rome from 1962 to 1965 was advocated by its chief protagonists and scholars Karl Rahner and Hans Kung, with Paul Knitter, an Evangelical thinker. The Council legitimised a shift from the traditional position of “no salvation outside the Church” (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) to a more open and pragmatic understanding of other religions. From a plethora of documents, the following three conciliar ones relate to our objectives:

1. *Lumen Gentium* (as a 'Dogmatic Constitution of the Church')
2. *Nostra Aetate* (as the 'Declaration of the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions'), and
3. *Agentes* (as a 'Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity within Christendom').

Spear-heading this position, Rahner (1976:81), a German Jesuit and a conservative liberal churchman, made his contribution to it in his monumental studies entitled *Theological Investigations* in twenty volumes. Giving classical expression to the inclusivist view, he greatly influenced the debate of Vatican II, particularly the *Nostra Aetate* (1965) in which the attitude of the Catholic Church towards other religions is succinctly summed up as follows:

The Catholic Church rejects that there is nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines that often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims - and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail - Christ who is the way, the truth and the life. In him whom God reconciled all things to himself, men find the fullness of their religious life.

Believing that the Church would have little or no mission if pluralism is accepted, Rahner modified the faith by coining the term 'anonymous Christian' for a non-Christian who gains salvation, however imperfectly, through his or her religion. This provided the basis on which the Council reached a broad understanding of the concept of *nullus salvati ex ecclesiam* by maintaining that God desires the salvation of everyone. Needless to say of course that on the question of universal salvation there is – both among Catholics and Evangelicals (see Parry and Partridge 2003.1-291) – no universal agreement.

Though the Swiss Catholic theologian, Hans Kung (1976:33), was his runner-up exclusivist, he was less conservative. He criticised Rahner for not allowing other religions a provisional but genuinely salvific opportunity, pending an 'existential confrontation' with Christ after death. A decade later, the Evangelical writer, Knitter (1985:42), was at pains to show that diversity within the Christian Faith itself allows scope for greater tolerance and wider salvific possibilities. Like Rahner, he systematically questions the doctrinal portrayal of Christ as the only way to God.

Rahner (1976:1-89) focuses on the priority of Christianity in religious diversity. Based on his 'Christian anonymity theory', he makes the following submissions.

- First, that Christianity understands itself as an absolute religion, intended for everyone, which cannot recognise any other religion besides itself to be of equal value.
- Second, that other religions did not - until the gospel - contain elements of human depravity, original sin and redemption.
- Third, that a non-Christian may be regarded as an 'anonymous Christian' if he/she has responded positively to God's grace, through selfless love for others, by which he/she shows belief in Christ.
- Fourth, that the Church cannot be an elite community of the saved, as opposed to the unredeemed mass of non-Christians, but a tangible sign of faith.

Though much of this is subject to criticism, as we shall see further under 'Dialogue', Rahner has been described as 'the chief engineer' and 'major architect of post-conciliar Catholic attitudes' towards other religions. His stance remains the position from which "a large number of Catholic theologians have taken" their cue on missions since Vatican II (see Hart, 2000:449-451).

Before proceeding, however, it ought to be noted that the new element for mission in the modern era is the willingness of the Church to consider issues which hitherto were 'unforbidden' territory. How did this come about? It seems clear that exegetical and hermeneutical interpretations of the gospel were responsible, bringing about significant changes in the overall landscapes that mission should address. They provided the basis on which Christian scholars could take the scriptures to task, and thereafter the practice of the Church itself. One of the clearest examples of this kind of self-criticism is that of Paton

(1996) who conducted a most trenchant censure of mission in China (see section 2.3.3). He questioned the advisability of the Nestorian Christian monks having done so much by learning the Chinese language and translating Christian books into it without having also similarly made common cause with the people in order to consider the way their lives could be enhanced.

Similar publications followed. In one year alone, 1964, four such books appeared, all written by missiologists or mission executives: R.K. Orchard, *Missions in a Time of Testing*; James A. Scherer, *Missionary, Go Home*; Ralph Dodge, *The Unpopular Missionary*; and John Carden, *The Ugly Missionary*. More recently, James Hessig, writing in *The Missiological Journal* (7/1981.I.13), [Hessig 1981] has even characterised Christian mission as “selfish war”.

But Beyerhuas (2005) makes a commendable attempt to turn around the perceived ugliness of mission intent by perceiving that Christian anonymity does not mean simply accommodating the major world religions - Marxism, Feminism, Rationalism, the New Morality - blindly. But rather, he argues, it entails sniffing out syncretistic impulses in these aberrant beliefs, with a view to entering into dialogue with them.

2.4 Dialogue

Dialogue is considered in relation to its literary, biblical, historical and scholastic bases and purview.

2.4.1 Dialogue's literary basis and purview

Perhaps the most significant of our key terms, 'dialogue' is definable as a discourse or conversation between two or more parties, formal in character, and with a view to resolving amicably some seemingly intractable problem/s. Sometimes taking the form of a written dialectical exchange - for example, the apologetics of the Early Church Fathers - it is less of an acrimonious exchange to exacerbate a difficult situation than of a logical communication to resolve conflict. Thus Brown (in Sutcliffe, 1984:27) says that dialogue may occur whenever people of different religions meet within a common social environment. He goes on to say: “Since religious beliefs and practices are the framework of reference to many questions about holidays and festivals, family life, birth, marriage, burial customs, dietary

laws and rules of hygiene, religious dialogue is often only implicit”.

2.4.2 Dialogue's biblical basis and purview

Indeed, while - as noted earlier - 'dialogue' is not as explicit a theme as 'mission' in the Bible, it is nevertheless implicitly potent in one form or the other. To begin with, Paul's activity in Hellenistic Ephesus was described as 'dialogue' (Greek *dialegesthai*, by association, dialect/dialectic, argument, discussion, debate...) in Acts 19:8-10. His speech in the Areopagus (Acts 17:27-37) containing reference to Stoic and Epicurean philosophies is indicative of a lively and appreciative style of dialogue. Then there is his already-mentioned diatribe style of writing, which was common in ancient Græco-Roman civilisation, by which he writes as if he was arguing with someone. Asking and answering questions, he exhibits - throughout his epistles - an exchange or an argument of some sort, by which he hopes to convince his imaginary interlocutor.

The closest we come to an explicit command for dialogue of the order of the dominical instruction for mission in Matthew 28:19 is in Romans 4:14-21 (see Mt 5:44; Lk 6:28) where Paul exhorts his readers to live in harmony and peaceably, to bless and not curse and in Matthew 8:15-17 where Jesus says this:

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when two of you are alone. If he or she listens, then you have succeeded. But if not take one or two others with you... If he or she refuses to listen, tell it to the church.

This is by no means a textbook prescription for successful dialogue even within the Church, let alone outside it with Christians and non-religious people. Jesus says as much in concluding with a statement on what is to happen in the eventuality of a failure to gain the desired end (Mt 18:17-21).

Nevertheless, Jesus showed clear preference for dialogue in his ministry, and only once did he resort to a non-dialogic form of action (Mk 11:15-19 and parallels, the cleansing of the temple) in a matter of the ultimate significance to the divine will. Otherwise, he held discourses with his assailants as much as with his disciples. On one occasion his wider circle of disciples left him, not being able to agree with him (Jn 6:60-70). On another, his opponents took up stones to cast at him, failing to appreciate his teaching about Abraham (Jn 8:48-58, see 10:22-31). In dialogues, he used logic as with the Tribute Money (Mk

12:13-17), but in other cases, such as the dialogue with the Pharisees over the forgiveness of sins, he backed up his logic with deed (Mk 2:1-12). In his temptations in the wilderness, he refuted Satan's proposition each time with reference and counter reference to scripture (Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13). Only to Pilate's question: 'What is truth?' (Jn 18:38) did he not give an answer, given the situation of his trial.

Nor was dialogue a monopoly of the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God is constantly in dialogue with his people through his prophets and servants. Job argues with God but does not utter the ultimate curse for not agreeing with him. The Psalmist likewise is often heard 'altercating' with God. In every case, God wins the argument by his infinite wisdom and logic, and by his omnipotent capacity to deliver his decisions.

Two aspects also stand out from a biblical perspective on dialogue which will be useful in this work.

- First, dialogue - as sound or fair speech - could be both exemplary and deceitful (Tit 2:8; Rom 16:8).
- Second, dialogue may express itself in 'salvific' conduct as much as in upright conversation (Ps 50:23; 1 Pet 2:12).

2.4.3 Dialogue's historical basis and purview

Historically, we have noted that patristic works of the first five centuries of Christendom were pioneering dialogues by way of correspondence. In particular, the *Apology of Justin Martyr* (c. 150) and his *Dialogue with Trypho* (c. 137) are noteworthy. In the latter, Justin tried to convince the Jew of the truth of Christianity. The Jew advised him: "If you desire salvation, first be circumcised and then follow God's new moons" in terms repellent even to Hebrew monotheism and ethics, let alone evangelical Christian thinking.

There were also other such public debates in the tolerant reign of Hadrian (AD 117-38) and Antoninus Pius (AD 138-161) between Jews and Christians (e.g., between Jason and Papiscus) in Alexandria as well as in other written correspondence between Christians and Gentiles in the same town. Glover (1975:21), writing about conflict of religions in the early Roman Empire, reviews the dialogic works of Clement of Alexandria (pp.190-203) and Tertullian (pp.197-217) to illustrate the exercise of written dialogue. The following is a

paraphrase of Clement (*Protr.* 120.1):

It is probable enough that an earnest man in search of God would explore the obvious avenues to the knowledge he sought - avenues much travelled and loudly vaunted in his day. Having explored them, it is again not unlikely that a spirit so pure and gentle should be repelled by rituals and legends full of obscenity and cruelty.

Clement goes on to add (the paraphrase continues), in a thought form of great value to the present study: "Yet.... his language is permanently charged with technical terms proper to mysteries, as he loves to put Christian knowledge and experience in old language".

The Latin father, Tertullian, for his part, in an Apology for Christianity (*Scap.*2) acknowledges that "it is a fundamental human right, a privilege of Nature, that any and every man should worship what he thinks right". Having originally seen nature as the authority, he later submitted that it worked side by side with the inspired word of God. He then wrote (*Adv Marc. 1.10*): "It was not the pen of Moses that initiated the knowledge of the Creator ... The vast majority of mankind (though they never heard the name of Moses, to say nothing of his book) knows the God of Moses none the less".

From the end of the fifth century to the Middle Ages, dialogue seemed restricted by the recession in missionary activity as the old Roman Empire slowly disintegrated during this period. We see this in the absence of the occurrence of an Ecumenical Council from Chalcedon (451) to the First Lateran Council (1123). At such a time leaders of the Church would have conducted a mental dialogue with the religious influences which were making inroads there and then: Islam and Hinduism. Also, such a dialogue would have been conducted in the minds of individuals who held the Christian banner high in the midst of political malaise and debacle, such as John of Damascus, John the alms-giver, Columba, Gregory the Great and Boniface.

From the Middle Ages to the Reformation (16th century), when there was no revival in Christian missions, there was equally no renewed activity of dialogue, as said before. There were no less than six major Ecumenical Councils from the Second Lateran Council in 1139 to Council of Trent in 1545. Different in aim and objective from the two Vatican Councils (1868 to 1870 and 1962 to 1965) of the Roman Catholic Church in the period following the Reformation and from the modern Ecumenical Protestant Councils of Edinburgh (1910)

and Tambaran (1938), they were to define Catholicity and orthodoxy and safeguard Church unity, respectively.

2.4.4 Dialogue's scholastic basis and purview

In the twentieth century, the most vociferous opposition to dialogue has come from exclusivists (see 2.7 below). Dialogue with non-Christians is a non-event, a diminishing of faith, a watering down of content and a pathway to loss of worship and expression. Pluralism is criticised for attempting to deprive the Church of mission while being at the same time unable to find a common focus for all religions. Inclusivism likewise is criticised for not perceiving this and thereby minimising mission and discipleship.

For inclusivists like Rahner, exclusivists are wrong because God desires the salvation of all mankind, and the vast majority of all mankind has never known the Jewish-Christian message. Dialogue is essential. It enables people to understand their own beliefs more clearly and in a way which takes account of the wider beliefs and non-beliefs of others in the community.

Exclusivism is somewhat synonymous with the name of the Dutch missionary, Hendrick Kraemer. In two works (1938, 1956) Kraemer challenged the inclusivist position, just as his students were to challenge the modern pluralists. He maintained that Christ's relationship to other religions is one of discontinuity rather than fulfilment and mutual appreciation. He also sharply criticised the reduction of evangelism to social services and mutual enrichment, and insisted that conversion cannot be minimised by encounter with other faiths and other non-faith concerns.

Other exclusivists include Newbigin (1978, 1987) and scholars in the dialectical Barthian school who are in sharp reaction to liberal theological trends. Himself an evangelical Christian, Kraemer stated his position (1938:37) in the light of the fundamental tenet that "God has revealed **the** Way and **the** Life and **the** Truth in Jesus Christ". The stance is adapted today generally by writers in the evangelical tradition.

Tidball (1995:3), one time President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, and Principal of London School of Theology, affirms the indispensable role of the Church in God's mission to the world. He established this in the wake of challenging suggestions that the Church would be helped by talking less and listening more; that it should listen to the world, especially to those with whom God particularly identifies, such as children and the poor.

We need, however, to consider the issues of race and culture in the business of dialogue. How much of a hindrance are they to the mission of the Church? Under 'Pluralism' we mentioned the failure of churches in England to have extended friendly welcome to black Christians from the West Indies and Africa from the 1920s to the 1960s. We may now also mention that modern missions abroad have often failed to enter into meaningful dialogue with those whom they seek to convert. In both cases, dialogue would lead to better understanding, affirm the biblical position, bridge cultural barriers, clarify the relationship between the institutional church and the kingdom of God, allow Christians to be penitent about past failures and scandals, and create a spirit of open-mindedness, trust and an opportunity for truth, forgiveness and reconciliation.

We need also to consider pluralist criticism of the inclusivist's position. The inclusivist view is too accommodative of the exclusivist position which – without a shadow of doubt – is a scandalous one, being so particular about one revelation. Not all Christian history is one which the Church could be proud of (Hick, 1990:38). In that case, whatever claims might be made for the uniqueness of Christianity, they cannot rest on the political history of the 'Christian nations'. In that case too, mission should not be so particularly focused, but – helped by informed dialogue – it should promote better understanding of the recipients and a plan for improving their lot. This brings satisfaction to the hearts of those delivering the service, joy to those receiving it and glory to God to all involved in sharing its hopeful message.

That said, it is time to restate what was received from historical data when considering 'dialogue', namely, that language used in dialogue must be as clear and distinct as possible to facilitate honest and truthful discourse, salvific conduct, reconciliation and conflict resolution.

There now follows discussion of two key-words taken also from our title (challenge, context) regarding which clarification is sought for the development of the discourse of the study.

2.5 Challenge

Definable as an invitation to a contest or a trial of skill, 'challenge' is not used in a confrontational sense. Conceived in the plural, it specifies the many ways in which the Church is tested with regard to mission and dialogue. It is equally a challenge for the churches to talk to (dialogue) each other as it is for them either to send missions abroad or to undertake mission in a pluralistic society at home. Philologically, a challenge is expressed by the simple word 'should' (or 'ought to'), so that where it is said – for instance – that churches **should** engage with each other in the ecumenical movement a challenge has been expressed. Hence, a great deal of actual expressions of challenges is to be expected in so requiring a work, mitigated only by the use of the relational term 'would', as is more appropriate in an academic discourse. Only in the Conclusion will an attempt be made to distinguish the degree and nature of the challenges.

But here it is useful to make the following observation: namely, that faced in the twenty-first century with very complex world issues (e.g., North/South dialogue, world poverty and debt relief, political correctness, environmental concerns and global warming, international terrorism, to name but a few), the Church would now see challenges to mission in a wider frame. They are now no longer to be confined to theological issues, but would include political, economic and social concerns as well. Such challenges would require courage and determination as much as knowledge and skill to be adequately met. Applying this specifically to the challenges facing younger evangelicals in the new world, Webber (2002) says that for them to meet the changes that have come about they should be pragmatic enough to see Christianity as a 'community of faith' rather than as a 'rational world-view' (2000:20). In this approach, one could take heart from the historical lesson that persecution never silenced the Church, being well aware of that old phrase “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church”. That is to say, if a good synonym of the word 'challenge' is 'problem' then possibilities are entailed, just as challenge itself does evoke a response.

2.6 Context

Used in conjunction with the word plural/pluralist/pluralistic, 'context' primarily designates a society in which – as said already – a range of world-views and religions compete. But it will be foolhardy to believe that this is the only sense in which 'context' is usable in this study. For one thing, it is difficult to understand a multi-cultural society without knowing what a uni-cultural one is. For another, 'context' is much more than a sociological term. It involves the milieu in which thinking is done and the background against which a subject matter is considered. Hence, in this study the methodological background is described as evangelical around which one could systematically build up a general Christian understanding.

In this respect, it is worth noting - here rather than elsewhere – that the context in which the word 'mission' is used is Christian and much wider than it would be in a secular setting where a 'mission statement', for example, may be defined by a few sentences or even a single word (see Appendix 3). 'Mission' is a much more meaningful term in Christian understanding, meaning 'the general purpose of the Church' in its singular form (mission) and 'the specific role of missionary work and evangelism in another country' in the plural (missions).

As a result, Evangelical missions in particular have been urged to become aware of the necessity for the churches in the non-Western world to find indigenous expressions of Christianity in ways appropriate to a people's culture and tradition. It was anticipated that - in the process - churches would become self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating. Known as contextual or cultural 'indigenisation', this objective is by no means a way of watering down the basic understanding of the gospel as it is sometimes suggested by Western missions (see *IRM* 1996: I.13).

In the early 1970s, the more accommodating ecumenical agenda pressed for a move beyond the principle of 'indigenisation'. It wanted to find new expressions and understandings of contextual theology which grow out of contemporary historico-cultural settings rather than out of the dogmatic theologies of the West. But – as could be expected - for many in the evangelical world, this process of contextualisation (or 'inculturation') represented a further threat to the integrity of the gospel as they understood it (see *IRM* 1996: I.13).

Indeed, as the plenipotentiary purposes of Christian mission still need to be affirmed as being above board, the following questions still need to be answered: Must the people of Africa become Europeans to be adjudged Christians? Must the Christian faith be Africanised to be true to the aim of pluralist Christianity? Regarding the first question, it may be said that there can be no reconciled Church as long as a faith - captive to an alien culture - is imposed on a local people (Pobee, 1991:19). Regarding the second, African missiologists and black theologians may continue to state and restate the case for indigenisation (Fashole-Luke, 1975:12).

That case would include two points:

1. That the denominationally divided and fragmented form in which Christianity came to Africa south of the Sahara in the 19th and 20th centuries from the churches of Europe and America had never been part of the religious experience of Africans.
2. That denominational advantage gained with colonial administration (e.g., Roman Catholicism with Portuguese Africa in Mozambique and Angola, Anglicanism with the British in their West, East and Central African colonies) smacks of the use of privileged position to gain pride of place with which Africa was unfamiliar.

Moving on, the geographical and social context of mission may be a local/national society (e.g., English/British) or the global/international community (the world). At the risk of repetition, both contexts would be illustrated by the work of national and international ecumenical bodies such as the former British Council of Churches (BCC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) respectively.

2.7 The Theological Paradigms introduced

There are three theological paradigms the use of which is – as already hinted - extremely useful to the analytical methods of this study: pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism. The best restatement of them appears in D'Costa's (1986) published doctoral work, and is defined in these terms:

- Criticised by inclusivists and exclusivists alike, religious pluralism, as our first

paradigm, is:

... characterised as the one that maintains that other religions are equally salvific paths to the one God, and Christianity's claim that it is the only path (exclusivism), or the fulfilment of other paths (inclusivism), should be rejected for good theological and phenomenological reasons.

(D' Costa, 1986: 24)

- Criticised by pluralists and exclusivists alike, religious inclusivism (D' Costa 1986: 80), as our second paradigm, is:

...characterised as one that affirms the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions, while still maintaining that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God.

- Criticised by pluralists and inclusivists alike, religious exclusivism (D' Costa 1986: 52), as our third paradigm, is:

...characterised as maintaining that other religions are marked by humankind's fundamental sinfulness and are therefore erroneous, and that Christ (or Christianity) offers the only valid path to salvation.

2. 8. Summary and projected analysis

The chapter began by stating the problem faced by mission and dialogue in a pluralist context, by asking questions about the nature of pluralism, mission and dialogue and by spelling out its objective and methodology. It also introduced the main key words (pluralism, mission and dialogue; with challenge and context).

- The problem is pluralism, with the seemingly unmitigated threat it poses to mission and – by association – dialogue.
- The objective is to start finding a solution to this problem by attempting in the first place to be clear about what the key issues, concepts and terms involved really mean.
- The method through which this objective is to be achieved involves a description of biblical, historical and scholarly information about these key issues, concepts and terms. This is assisted by certain prescribed tools of biblical selection and hermeneutics, historical scheming and judgement, scholarly viewing and criticism. Biblical selection, for instance, is aided by thematic and schematic application, and

historical scheming. Scholarly viewing is aided by the application of expository and analytical works covering a wide range of views, past and present.

Into this theoretical frame are introduced three theological paradigms: pluralism, exclusivism and inclusivism which tally roughly with the three central aspects (pluralism, mission and dialogue, respectively) of the study. These paradigms are useful for analysing data especially from the churches and their scholars who are protagonists of one or other, two or all, of the trio (pluralism, mission and dialogue).

2.8.1 Literary appreciation

There then followed the study of the meaning of the key terms, facilitated – in the first place – by a literary appreciation of their meanings from standard works, dictionaries and encyclopaedias. Hence, there occur the following definitions, which appear now in brief summaries:

- **Pluralism** is the belief that there is more than one ultimate principle, and thereby is a rejection of the superiority of Christian mission even on historical grounds.
- **Mission** has two perceptions:
 - A people-centred perception, with both a literary application and a broadly theological one. It betokens a sense of persons being sent out to other people (not places) with a definitive purpose.
 - A task-orientated perception, which is evangelically theological. It betokens a sense of intermediaries (human or supernatural) being sent by God to further his will.
- **Dialogue** is a discourse or a conversation, orally or in writing or both, between two or more parties to resolve a problem or a dispute.

2.8.2 Biblical evidence

In terms of the biblical evidence for the trio, the following were - implicitly or explicitly - thematically adduced:

- For pluralism: implicitly, from Genesis 16: 2 and 9.
- For mission: explicitly, from Acts 1:8 and Matthew 28:19-20.

- For dialogue: more implicitly, from Acts 19:8-10; Job and Psalms, and somewhat explicitly from Matthew 8:15-17.

2.8.3 Historical evidence

In terms of historical evidence, the trio drew the following information:

- For **pluralism**, for which two contexts are chosen - a specific one (Britain) and a general one (the world) - the following data are schematically selected.
 - For Britain, two periods of pluralism are detected:
 - i. An ancient implicit one: from early times to the Reformation.
 - ii. A modern explicit one: from twentieth century post-war Britain to the present time.

For the world, it is observed that although the pluralism is explicitly obvious in the very existence of many nations and religions, it was never avowedly acknowledged because:

- Biblically, there occurs a scandal of particularity as – in the main world-view of Judæo-Christian religion – other non-Jewish nations are only acknowledged by default. They are Gentiles (the nations) and in time are expected to lose their identity and become Christians.
 - Politically, the language, history, religion and culture of the West were given pride of place for a number of reasons, imperialism and colonialism not the least. For a great while it looked as if the global culture was to be homogeneously based on the culture of the West. This was expected to be the case even at the UN with over 250 independent nations from the four corners of the globe.
- For **mission**: although the Church was from the beginning racially mixed, its conversionist drive was towards oneness globally. In this, there are some significant features to note:
 - Britain and the West played an active part in Christian missions in the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
 - Although certain languages (Latin and Greek) had pride of place as biblical and liturgical languages, from the second century Christian missions had started using other languages in worship. Translation of

the gospel, too, began as early as the fourth century.

- Missionary bid towards conversion and oneness did not halt the process of schism and disunity which (despite Christ's prayer for oneness in John 17) bedevilled the Church from the very beginning. Indeed, such disunity has been submitted as one of the reasons why Islam was able to overrun Christian North Africa in the seventh century.
 - Disunity between different brands of Christianity is seen also as one reason why some missions failed or were slow in catching on. Indeed, the conversion of Russia, for example (where the Tsars had to choose between Eastern and Western Christianity), bears ample evidence to this.
 - Mission was throughout facilitated by several factors:
 - imperial patronage or papal commission
 - gifted, talented and committed faith heroes
 - sound theological knowledge and acute administrative skills
 - reduction of local language to writing
 - translation of scripture into local language
 - discovery of the new world overseas
 - It was throughout thwarted by the following factors
 - Church disunity and division, Christian disagreement
 - Ruling class oppression
 - Resistant faiths and ideologies
 - Islam as a proselytising religion
 - delay and indecision
 - transformation of aim from mission to crusade
 - failure to appreciate local cultures and customs
 - failure to introduce dialogue in difficult situations
 - the Reformation
- For dialogue, the evidence found is as follows:
 - written dialogues were conducted with people of the Jewish and Gentile faiths by early Church fathers known as apologists.

- the importance of the use of clear language in dialogues was early perceived by the Church fathers amidst the conflict of religions in the Roman Empire.
- somewhat in favour of dialogue, Church fathers spoke for freedom of religion, and spoke (rather like the modern inclusivist-pluralist) of non-Jews and non-Christians knowing the God of Moses.
- there was a noticeable lack of conversation in the Church between the Councils of Chalcedon (451) and Trent (1545).

2.8.4 Scholarly appreciation

In terms of the contribution of the paradigmatic scholars to the debate, the following information emerged:

- For pluralism, God – not Christ – is the Sun at the centre of the universe of faiths (so Hick).
- For mission, 'people' (as recipients and as envoys) – not 'task' – is the emphasis. Mission becomes exclusivist (with Kraemer), evangelical, strictly conversionist and non-dialogic where the emphasis is on 'task'. As people-orientated, it takes on the character of an entry into the experience of others, in the same way as God entered human experience with Christ. It fosters social activity motivated in love.
- For dialogue, inclusivism (with Rahner, Kung and Knitter) carries the day. This is because:
 - the Church is for all and God desires to save all.
 - non-Christians could be anonymous Christians.
 - knowing other faiths leads to a clearer understanding of one's own faith.
 - other religions are not just human constructs, God being absolute.

2.8.5 Projected concluding statement

There are many pointers from this chapter to the fact that pluralism - though by its very nature a challenge to (and a problem for) mission - could in fact be an opportunity (opening of possibilities) for mission, if only mission could be allowed to be partnered by dialogue.

The indications are that there might have been a chance for this partnership to occur had pluralism been solely religious pluralism, and had religion not been confused with racial, cultural and political issues. But because pluralism involves secular pluralism, the matter is much more complex than we could have imagined. This is because secularism at its worse is intolerant of religion and seeks to negate it. At its best, it is content to pay lip service to religion, and certainly does not seek – in its atheistic robe – to bring religions together, even if religions themselves wish to do so. Indeed, it is becoming ever increasingly difficult to conduct a religious dialogue in secular pluralism in the fear, as secularists put, of not offending someone else. Also, secularists see science as the only tangible basis for operation. Even the probability that God exists does not seem adequate enough to temper this view, given the way in which religious – often Christian – symbols are being systematically eroded from public life. The recent European Court (November 2009) ruling against the display of crucifixes in Italian schools is a case in point, notwithstanding the fact that these symbols have both religious and cultural significances. It simply flies in the face of history and, to say the least, goodwill.

All of which is not to say that religions themselves do not share the blame. Religious bigotry, as we have indicated and shall see further, is awfully difficult to manage, both when trying to evangelise and to dialogue. Then, of course, it is yet to be decided whether mission is an exclusivist or inclusivist – if not a pluralist – concept.

This chapter had sought to provide a basis for clear thinking with regard to the aim of the study. The next chapter will examine further ramifications of this aim with especial regard to the work of the WCC.

3.0 CHAPTER THREE: CHALLENGES TO MISSION

3.1 Introductory parameters

Having achieved workable definitions of pluralism, mission and dialogue, it is now time to consider the challenges a pluralist society presents to mission in the first place.

In this the work of the World Council of Churches (WCC) is crucial. This is because the WCC works in the global society which in itself is the essence of pluralism more than any single domain or nation within the world.

How illustrative of the challenges to world mission is the situation confronting the WCC as an attempt at carrying out an interdenominational ministry, ecumenism and church unity (as challenges from within) on a global scale? How elucidating of the challenges from outside (from other faiths, ideologies and perspectives) to Christian mission is its work among non-Christian groups in the world at large?

The objectives of this chapter are precisely to answer these questions, to relate the answers directly to the problems posed in a specific pluralist context to Christian mission, and to consider the responses of Christian denominations individually and ecumenically to these problems.

To meet these objectives, WCC summits on mission and reports are reviewed thoroughly. They are mainly: The Uppsala Report (1968), the Melbourne Report (1980), the San Antonio Report (1990), and the Nairobi Consultation (1995). The reviews are facilitated by key scholarly contributions from the classical period of mission evaluation (i.e., post-colonially from the 1970s to the 90s); from Thooft (1974), Bassham (1979), and Frazier (1987), among other attached and unattached writers. The views of other key scholars – e.g., Bonino (1985), Muzorewa (1991), Pobee (1985), Brockway (1985) and Bosch (1991) among many others - are also solicited in the process. A wide range of modern and divergent views is gained from studies in Hart (2000), Partridge (2002) and from journals and articles up to 2005/6. In this way, the study is provided with breadth as well as depth and thereby with much-needed cogency and conviction.

That said, it has to be noted that the discussions that follow on the outcomes of mission

conferences will significantly be enhanced if distinctive trends in the mission debate from very early are not overlooked. These trends were deliberated in the interrogative as follows:

- 'How mission?' (at Edinburgh in 1910)
- 'Wherefore missions?' (at Jerusalem in 1928)
- 'Whence missions?' (in Tambaran in 1938)
- 'Whither missions?' (at Whitby in 1947)
- 'Why missions?' (at Willingen in 1952)
- 'What is the Christian mission?' (at Accra, Ghana in 1957/58)

Significantly nothing emerged on 'who missions?', which – as will be seen in Chapter Five with our empirical study – is equally answerable in a situation in which Christians leaders and people are unsure as to who ultimately bears temporal responsibility for mission. The trends of the above questions will inform discussions ahead.

3.2 The WCC and the Uppsala Report (1968)

This Report, to which reference has already been made, came as a result of the Fourth Assembly of the WCC which met in Uppsala, Sweden in July 1968. One of the most notable characteristics of the Assembly was its concern for the world. 704 delegates from 235 member churches of the WCC met to discuss world concern in relation to the theme of renewal in the Book of Revelation: 'Behold I make all things new' (Rev. 21:7).

The Assembly was preceded by the publication of its preparatory document. In draft form, this document – entitled *Renewal in Mission* – sees the objective of mission as the bringing of fulfilment to 'the new humanity'. It highlighted religious, social and political points of tension in human existence as creating opportunities for mission, probably requiring the development of 'new instruments of mission'.

The actual report itself is revealing. It was the first showing of the rift between Evangelicals and Liberals. While many Liberals, key supporters of the ecumenical cause, were encouraged by a thrust for social and political action in mission, the great majority of Evangelicals left the conference feeling disappointed with the WCC. Against the stance taken by Liberals, an un-named Evangelical (see Bassham 1979:82) raised and answered

the rhetorical question: “Will Uppsala betray the *two billion*?” (i.e., those in need of the gospel) with a resounding “yes”, alluding to statements in the report which supported his scepticism.

Bassham (1979:83) summed up the mood of Uppsala by saying that it revealed a lack of common understanding between two major Christian positions: the Evangelicals who advocated conversion and church growth, and the Liberals who wanted a greater involvement by Christians in the world. The debate, over which no consensus was reached, centred on the question of the substance and nature of the gospel itself.

Evangelicals contend that the Church must be free to make known to the non-Christian world the distinctiveness of the Christian faith. Christians would then be able to invite non-Christians – in love, humility and persuasiveness – to commitment to Jesus Christ. This position, viewed and aired on the floor before the adoption of the report by the Assembly, was most strongly expressed by John Stott and Kenneth Grubb of the Church of England, and by Rudolf Obermuller of the Evangelical Church of the River Plate. After the publication of the report, Stott (1975:19) complained that he did not see in it “any concern for the spiritual hunger of man comparable to that which has been expressed regarding physical hunger and poverty”. Grubb (see Stott 1975:21) said that he would like “to have added to Section 1:2 of the report that ‘there is no other name than that of Jesus Christ given under heaven amongst men whereby we must be saved’”. Obermuller (see Stott 1975:34), the least conservative of the trio, also remarked that he “missed the emphasis on the biblical basis of mission that had appeared in the original document”.

Also, Hubbard (1974:10), Evangelical Adviser to Uppsala, remarked that while Evangelicals shared the Liberal concern expressed toward “the abused and afflicted, the poor and the oppressed of the world”, the need to see both evangelism and social concern as equally binding upon the Church “was not always reciprocated”. “To be honest”, he goes on, “I found myself baffled as to why I had to work so hard in a Christian assembly to agree on things that are such basic Christian affirmations”.

Glasser (1977:69), for his part, commenting in 1969 on the Assembly and the report, with especial regard to its 'Renewal in Mission' section, made this rather telling statement:

Little or nothing was said to remind the world in confusion, darkness and spiritual need that the Church of Jesus Christ has been entrusted by God with a more than adequate answer to its deep and wrenching problems. Evangelicals listen in vain for a clear word about either a living Christ who came to save people from their sin, or an eleventh hour warning of judgement to come. Nothing expresses the insecurity and anxiety of human existence more profoundly than the fact that the fear of extinction and the fear of judgement are compounded in the fear of death (Niebuhr). And yet Uppsala was virtually silent about the relevance of Christ's Gospel to these universal fears.

This reflects a widened rift between the right and centre-left positions of the Church on the understanding of mission. But despite such antipathy, not all Evangelicals reacted negatively to the Assembly and its report in all its components. Paul Rees (1979:15), in particular, in an editorial in *World Vision Magazine* praised the "common effort" of such diverse group of churchmen (as Roman Catholics, Anglicans, the Free Churches...) reflected in "the mood, the language and the thrust of Section II of the report". As a verification of this, the Assembly adopted the following recommendation:

The member Churches of the World Council, which have already experienced something of the mutual correction and edification made possible by our common membership in the Council need also the contribution of the evangelical Churches; and the desire to share with them in such ways as may be found mutually acceptable, in practical tasks of service and witness. It is our hope that all who share together the scriptural and Trinitarian faith in Jesus Christ as God and Saviour may thus be enabled both to work together and to build one another up in common faith. In view of the fact that there is in the membership of several member Churches a considerable body of those who accept the name "conservative-evangelical", their theological conviction, spiritual experience and missionary zeal might well find vital expression in the life of the World Council of Churches.

How lasting and damaging was this problem of the divisiveness of the Church deriving from church diversity and differences of churchmanship for Christian mission?

It has often been assumed (see Bochenski *et al* 1993:12) that the groupings of Evangelical Christians, who have tended to remain separate from the WCC, are thereby antagonistic to the whole concept of the visible unity of the Church. This, it appears, is only partially true, as could be seen from Clause 7 of the Lausanne Covenant (1974) to which both mainline and conservative Evangelicals committed themselves. It reads:

We affirm that the Church's visible unity in truth is God's purpose. Evangelism also summons us to unity because our oneness strengthens our witness just as our disunity undermines our gospel of reconciliation. We recognise, however, that organisational unity may take many forms and does not necessarily forward evangelism. Yet we who share the same biblical faith should be united closely in fellowship, work and witness. We confess that sinful individualism and needless duplication have sometimes marred our testimony. We pledge ourselves to seek a deeper unity in truth, worship, holiness and mission. We urge that development for regional and functional cooperation, for the furtherance of the Church's mission, for strategic planning, for mutual encouragement, and for the sharing of resources and experience each other.

Where the wider Church is concerned, prior mention may be made here of the New Delhi Assembly (1961) of the WCC (see section 4.1 below). At this Assembly – well before Uppsala (1968) - the Faith and Order Commission (full membership of which included the Roman Catholic Church) issued the following Statement (WCC 1961:116) on the 'visible unity' that defies abbreviation:

We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his church is made visible as all in each place who are baptised into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one full committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one gospel, breaking the one bread, joining common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching our witness and service to all, and who at the same time, are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such ways that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people.

Indeed, Uppsala itself called its member churches "to work for the time when a genuinely ecumenical council may once more speak for Christians and lead the way into the future" (WCC 1968:17). Uppsala's contribution to the goal of visible unity lay both in its emphasis upon what came to be called 'conciliar fellowship' and upon its perception of the Church as a 'sign of the coming unity of humankind'.

This became even the more strongly emphasised as time went by, till at the Canberra Assembly (1991) a new statement on the unity of the Church based on the concept of 'koinonia' (gift and calling) emerged. The statement which was prepared by the Faith and Order Commission had received some significant reformulations during the course of the Assembly. It described the elements of visible expression of the unity of the Church as

(see CR 1961.193):

- A common confession of the apostolic faith.
- A common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one Eucharistic fellowship.
- A common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognised and reconciled.
- A common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole creation.

Nevertheless, the Assembly was realistic about the achievement of the goal in the search for full communion which it noted will only be realised:

- when 'all the Churches' are able to recognise in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in its fullness.
- when on both local and universal levels this recognition is expressed through conciliar forms of life and action.

With respect to these notes, we may make the following points as an evaluation:

- There is an ambiguity - as the Assembly discovered after its deliberations - in the statement 'all the Churches'. It could be a reference either to congregations of one Church denomination or to all the denominational Churches. A decision on this would have a significant bearing on the interpretation of 'full communion' as used in this text.
- The notion of *koinonia* is fundamental to the quest for full communion. The *koinonia* in God's own life is the underlying reality of the Church in which all the baptised share. While a certain degree of *koinonia* already exists between the churches, they are called to take steps towards manifesting it fully in 'full communion'.
- The hope expressed holds together the emphases on both the blessings and limitations of diversity as integral to the making of the communion.

The Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela (1993) improved on this position. It expressed this in its own conference theme in the unity caption: *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness*. Its working document developed this caption in relation to the Canberra Statement and with regard to visible characteristic of *koinonia* as follows:

- A communion in faith is grounded in scripture and focused in the Nicene Creed.
- A communion in life is focused in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, nurtured by an ordained ministry within the ministry of the whole people of God.
- A communion in witness entails the renewal of the Church as prophetic sign of the kingdom.

The Conference added a fourth characteristic of *koinonia* by asking for work to be done to make the structures of authority and decision-making *koinonia*-friendly. It referred particularly to synodical and primatial structures which it saw as capable of facilitating unity.

Then, it also emphasised the virtues of ethical living - sometimes called the 'moral community element' (only indirectly there in the second part of the Canberra Statement). By this, churches were invited to re-commit themselves to work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, linking the struggle for these more closely with the search for a common sacramental communion.

In the ensuing years, the Churches Together in England (CTE) Report (1997:17-31), *Called To Be One*, took this objective further by investigating the different concepts of unity that could be manifestly explored and engaged by churches, such as: Federal Unity, Unity in Reconciled Diversity, Organic Unity or Union, Unity in Solidarity, Conciliar Unity in Fellowship.

In short, from 1968 (the Uppsala Assembly) to 1997 (the CTE Report) there began to appear a rift between the Evangelicals and Liberals over the nature of mission which increasingly became a rift between Evangelical and Ecumenicals over church unity. For this reason, Uppsala has been described as "a hotchpotch, a compromise document, a

variegated patchwork quilt sewn together, out of bits and pieces contributed by delegates and advisers whose convictions were in fundamental disagreement” (see Bassham, 1979:32).

As participants deliberated, they spoke of the forth-coming Nairobi Assembly of the WCC as possibly “the last opportunity” to avoid such a rift, urging that the assembly should reverse the trend of Uppsala to that at Bangkok (1963), for Uppsala, in their opinion, was “tearing the Church apart” (Beyerhus, 1996:485). Bailyes (see Beyerhus 1996:485) ridiculed the rift by saying that it was between the “ecumenical” and the “evangelical” faces of Christianity and its mission to and in the world. He goes on to assert that:

- neither can be unequivocally defined
- neither category is monochrome
- each contained within itself various shades and hues of opinion
- neither of these categories is to be taken as mutually exclusive, for there is ample evidence of overlap between the two.
- nevertheless, they are sufficiently different in their fundamental approaches to provide individually-separate frames of reference within which they both outline and highlight the debate.

Bailyes then raised some very serious questions among co-participants:

- Did McGavran (an Evangelical) express the fears and Wagner (an Ecumenical) the hopes of misguided pessimism and optimism, respectively? Or were they grounded in woefully opposite realities (world-views)?
- What is the cautious and tentative verdict of history some twenty years later?
- Is the Church still settled perilously on an ecclesiastical fault-line, waiting for an overdue earthquake of gargantuan proportions?

In earlier contributions to gain insight into the cause and nature of the rift, Bosch (1977:54) described the gulf between these two positions as being “light-years apart”. By the early 1990s, however, the atmosphere and tone of the debate was perceived by many to have softened considerably. By then, Padilla (1992:15) could declare that from “the perspective of holistic mission, there is no place for polarization between an ecumenical outlook and

evangelical one”. Properly understood, he stated that “what is ‘ecumenical’ and what is ‘evangelical’ do not exclude but complement each other”.

The next major WCC Conference held in the West after Uppsala was the Melbourne Assembly. Was it more or less an improvement on Uppsala and its sequels in the attempt to heal rifts within the Church which challenged its mission?

3.3 The WCC and the Melbourne Report (1980)

The World Conference on 'Mission and Evangelism' held in Melbourne, Australia, in May 1980 is described in the report as ranking as “one of the most important and influential ecumenical missionary conferences of the period”. Its main theme was 'Your Kingdom Come', but – the report says - “its statements concerning the Church's response to the poor took centre stage”. Adopting a forthright position with respect to the need for mission, it proclaims consciousness of the kingdom as well as concern “for liberation not oppression, justice not exploitation, fullness not deprivation, freedom not slavery, health not disease, life not death”. However, unlike Uppsala, this statement was set within the context of recognition that “the Church of Jesus Christ is called to preach the Good News to the poor”. It also espoused the following further significant statements:

The proclamation of the Good News is the announcement that the kingdom of God is at hand, a challenge to repent and an invitation to believe.

Preaching expects conversion. Conversion implies a new relationship both in God and with others. It is individual and social, vertical and horizontal, faith and works.

The Church manifests God's love for the world in Christ through word and deed, in identification with all humanity, in loving service and joyful proclamation.

At the very heart of the Church's vocation in the world is the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen.

Evangelism calls people to look toward Jesus and commit their life to him, to enter into the Kingdom whose King has come in the powerless child of Bethlehem, in the murdered one on the cross.

Christians owe the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to every person and to every people.

Against a background of this sort of 'internal crises' (i.e., the challenges to mission from within Christianity itself), comments in the *International Review of Mission* turn out to be useful as a report review. In it, Beyerhus (1996:335) expressed impatience with the main crisis by saying that Christians are tempted today to yield to 'syncretistic tolerance' and to "perform their service silently with no ulterior motives". What is meant is that the in-fighting among Christians – seen through conference deliberations – is most unhelpful, as people (non-Christian partners) who are the object of mission could themselves see through it. That is, they could see from Melbourne – as from Uppsala – not a singular message of conviction but a divided one with ulterior motives. Beyerhus referred to this as a malady which derives from an "insidious paralysis in the biblical convictions of many theologians and ministers of our churches". He further argued that situationist views of the Bible deprive its texts of their normative significance for faith and ethics, reducing them to the level of answers to sociological problems which men in their time had to face.

Such a view, as it stands, seems apt in Biblical Hermeneutics. But, in Missiology, Beyerhus' added argument - that critical methods of exegetical research have undermined the authority of the Bible – is somewhat unfortunate. He appears to be a victim of his own criticism, ineluctably siding – as he does – with one party to the debate (the Evangelical), rather than both.

Outside the *International Review of Mission*, Knitter (1985:40) has much to say that is useful as a comment on Melbourne. Citing the dichotomy between theologians, in a chapter entitled 'Christian Attitudes towards Religious Pluralism', he reveals the real nature of the problem of mission, and the difficulty faced by the WCC in attempting to formulate a mission statement for the whole Church. He shows the heightened nature of the problem by working from three – not two (as in an Evangelical/Liberal dichotomy) – models of mission thrust: the Evangelical, the mainstream Protestant, and the Roman Catholic. He goes on to show that – even within one model – there are further perplexing divisions. For example, he identifies two wings (liberal and conservative) in the Evangelical model. Referring to the liberal wing of the 'New Evangelical Movement' he writes:

They are open to even more ecumenical cooperation with other Christians and participate in the World Council of Churches and in national ecumenical movements. For this reason they are often called 'Ecumenical Evangelicals'.

They are moving away from insistence on the absolute inerrancy of the Bible, and affirm rather a 'limited inerrancy', or the 'infallibility' of the Bible in matters of faith and practice but not necessarily in the question of history or science.

They claim that Evangelicals in the past have been socially and politically naive and have aligned themselves with the oppressive *status quo*. They insist that political involvement and efforts for liberation of all the oppressed is part of the gospel. Many of the new Evangelicals make up what has been called 'the new Evangelical left'.

The Melbourne Report and its Assembly, it needs now to be noted, did not identify this complexity. It failed to envisage the three models (Evangelicalism, Protestantism, and Catholicism) and their rough correspondence to the paradigms of exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism (respectively), delineated in Chapter One of this study.

The assembly's sequel, the Vancouver Assembly (1983) was not much more perceptive either. It made no significant advances in terms of statements issued. This is partly because it was less deliberative and more celebratory in tone and content, and partly because it came so soon after Melbourne. But, significantly, it stressed the integral relationship between the unity and renewal of the life of the Church on the one hand, and the healing and reconciliation of the World's division on the other. The Church's unity and renewal should be a sign – a prophetic sign and instrument by which the transformation of the world can take place. Then - what is more - it witnessed a prominent representation of Evangelicals at the assembly and their observably positive contribution to it, which Bosch (1991:28) described as a “milestone in Ecumenical and Evangelical relationship”.

How does such positive advance impact on mission work in the mission field? This brings us back to the definition of mission (see section 2.3) in which it is shown that it involves both task and people.

Frazier's (1987:23) work is most incisive here as to how what could not have been achieved with Melbourne fuels the crisis in the field. He points in a direction which shows that there is today a preoccupation with an objective debate over the purpose and goal of mission which is different from yesterday's concern with the tactics and techniques employed by missionaries. Walter Freytag (see Frazier 1987:23) put it well when he said: “formerly mission had problems; today it has itself become a problem”.

In addition, missionaries are voicing distress and anxiety not just with the traditional problems of personnel and finance or with the perennial difficulties of the method and maintenance of mission, or – still less – with manifold hardship experienced in doing their job. Sensing that the missionary enterprise itself may be in danger of floundering, they are expressing uneasiness at the stifling nature of theological divisions and wondering if they really have a job to do (Engenvan 1996)

Frazier (1981:25) tacitly indicates that while there remains an impasse in WCC debates as to whether the object of mission includes the provision of help and justice for the poor, the missionary is losing what was his/her once-held identity from a more sonorous non-governmental organisations, like Peace Corps and Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), have stepped boldly and capably into the field of social and care services and - with greater monetary resources, personnel and techniques – have made the best efforts of missionaries look anaemic by comparison.

Frazier (1987:29), however, sees this situation both as a crisis (a challenge) and an opportunity (also a challenge). As he puts it: crises are usually occasions for progress. But one could systematically question this, as:

- some crises could psychologically have an adverse effect on the subject. The lesser the crisis in mission, the better the composure of the missionary for effective ministry.
- inability to carry out social responsibility as a missionary may itself be an opportunity missed to share the gospel.

Where Melbourne (1980) was not able to offer theological backing to combat this crisis, there may have been some ground for optimism coming from the Mission Theology of the Roman Catholic Church, from much earlier with Vatican II. Pope Paul VI, admitting in his first encyclical that the RCC had begun to question its own identity and was striving to gain a deeper self-awareness, was perhaps offering to the universal Church a mission theology of crisis-creativity which could be stimulating to labourers in the field.

Frazier (1987:43) both blames secularism for the crisis for mission and attributes the development of a new understanding of mission to it. With secularisation, the human and the worldly are vying to be taken as seriously and respectfully as the Christian and the religious. Rigid barriers between sacred and secular realities are thus being broken down. Religious attitudes and values are being remodelled with the hope of stimulating Christians to greater respect for, and participation in, the secular order (see also Webber 2002 and Pikkert, 2006).

Does this blend strengthen or weaken the work of mission? If the gospel is light and secular norms darkness, can they move together? Where Melbourne and the ecumenical councils did not consider these questions, Vatican II obliges. Its documents, quite unashamedly, affirm that the non-Christian world - to the very depths of the thinking behind the whole secular domain - is very much the dwelling place of the Spirit.

The Fathers of Vatican II were inclined, therefore, to be well ahead of Melbourne and the other ecumenical church councils in the way the world is understood and in the redefinition of the mission of the Church which this new understanding evokes. In the opening paragraph of the *Lumen Gentium* (see Flannery, 1975:26-31; *LG* 1968:48), the Church itself is defined as a kind of 'Sacrament' or 'Sign' and is referred to as "the universal Sacrament of Salvation". Needless to say these declarations represent an epoch-making advance in the Church's self-understanding. They summarise very simply, but very profoundly, what the Church is meant to be in a "world come of age".

But they belong strictly to a Catholic model, and they would be quite different from an Evangelical perspective. Hence:

- Bergson (in Anderson *et al*, 1974:93) freely observes that the terms (sign/sacrament) are too new to be comprehended by "the human mind" because it is "so constructed that it cannot begin to understand the new until it has done everything in its power to relate to the old"; and
- Frazier (1987:24) is of the opinion that the idea of 'sign' is a substitution for 'sanctuary' which for long is a working image of the Church. Once this happened, he proffers, the crisis for mission assumes new positions. It is no longer a matter of if the Church really has a job to do or whether the job it has to do is really being done. It is instead a matter of coming to terms with the disturbing fact that the

Church is failing to function consistently in the world as a relevant sign of God's redeeming love. This, he goes on to say, is demonstrably seen in its failure to be present and active in human conflict of today; there is a hesitancy to take sides, a refusal to speak out.

- Seeing a correlation between sanctuary-thinking and the assumed irrelevancy of the Church today, he explains this failure as due in great part to the persistent influence of sanctuary-thinking on the formation of mission attitudes. Be this as it may, the following evaluating points could be made:
- It does seem indeed as if we live in a world that is tragically getting out of control and that this creates difficulties for the mission of the Church, regardless.
- In that sense, the allegation that the Church is hesitant and failing to take part in the human conflict is not precisely justifiable.
- The Church in its redeeming work has to consider the oppressed and the oppressor alike. Both parties need the love and redemption of God. They both should be recipients of God's grace.
- There are attempts by the Church to find a way to deal with the crises. For example, the Church today has often sought to heal old wounds by apologising and making reparations for wrongs (e.g., with the Holocaust and the Crusades) done in the past, demonstrating that it is not willing to commit the same mistakes again.
- At the same time, the Church has to be careful not to be seen as condoning the perpetration of evil or letting it go unchecked (as may happen when dictators commit genocide and crime against humanity). Ideally, it should work through all sides in a conflict for an amicable resolution and rapprochement. In the process, it may justifiably come to the aid of those in the mission field and among its adherents without this being defined as unlawful sanctuary-thinking.
- Too much compartmentalisation of the effects of sanctuary-thinking as church-centred strategy is not good. For while it may be exclusivist rather than pluralist and inclusivist, it is still possible for it to be a means of nourishing and caring for those outside the Church as well.

Frazier (1987:42) intimated that if the Church is to emerge successfully from the crisis of irrelevancy in which it is now engaged, it will be through a gradual awakening to the fact that the world - and not the Church - is the focus of God's saving action, and that the Christian mission is a joining in that activity in the world. Christians have not been called to the Church for their own sakes, but for the sake of others – to serve as a sign and an instrument of God's universal saving purpose.

By Melbourne's standard and by that of Vatican II, exclusivism is not the name of the game and the toss up is between pluralism and inclusivism. Here, the work of Míguez Bonino (1985) – the only Latin American Protestant observer at the Second Vatican Council - supersedes Frazier's.

Bonino pointed out that work in the mission field is difficult, leaving many missionaries uncertain and confused. In addition, criticism from overseas churches and secular specialists becomes sharper and sharper as time goes on. As a result, missionaries feel more and more insecure and unable to function well. In consequence, many missionaries return home early, and mission boards engage in self-examination to reorganise and improve the situation.

Bonino accounts for the crisis in a variety of ways. It is partly connected with upheavals caused by the breaking in of conflicts in theological interpretation from the academic world – its traditional domain - into the mass media. It is partly also linked with the growth of younger Churches through the activities of which the missionary enterprise has somewhat lost its pioneering position, while – at the same time - becoming bureaucratic. He put his criticism succinctly as follows:

The basic fact, though, to which all the other factors are related, is this – and the crisis we face hinges on it: we have discovered that the missionary enterprise[?] of the last one hundred and fifty years is closely related to and interwoven with expansion of the economic, political, and cultural influence of the Anglo-Saxon World. We from the (so called) Third World call this expansion neo-colonialism or imperialism. It has been related to the idea of manifest destiny, civilizing enterprise, the white man's burden, and many other slogans.

Bonino copiously discusses how this came about with regard to four tangible scenarios:

- First, it is linked with the process through which the world has been - and is increasingly being - divided into the affluent Northern/Western World and the impoverished 'Third World'.
- Second, it is linked with the fact that the countries in this 'Third World' no longer accept the deteriorating situation which this superimposed divisions engendered. It has led to a struggle by two-thirds of the population of the world for their own liberation, which is seen as a fight against imperialistic aggression.
- Third, consciously or – most likely - unconsciously, the missionary enterprise has been related to political routes of expansion, the channels of this process of expansion and domination.
- Fourth, Christians - in both the sending and the receiving countries - are increasingly aware of and concerned with this crisis of failure in missions. This – in turn - has resulted in remorse of conscience, uncertainty and loss of confidence, and a crisis of identity for many missionaries and national church leaders.

Bonino (1985:39) sees no short cut to solving the problem. He suggests trying to introduce a number of modifications without coming to terms with the basic issues. For these, he says, social action projects with development goals and humanitarian motivations might be useful as a starting point. Ultimately, the mission of the Church would be fully sustained by a mixture of welfare state, Rotary Club and debating society activities. As he hopes that all such activities must, however, be centred on and rooted in Jesus Christ alone, he says:

This crisis is God's call to conversion, and to obedience. It is the way to a renewal of all our Churches. It is the opportunity for a deeper understanding of the gospel. It is the possibility of bringing to the obedience of the gospel areas of life and thoughts, which so far have been held captive by the World. In a way, I think this is the time for a new birth for the Church.

Bonino's background is explanatory of his stance. He is no stranger to exploitation, poverty and injustice. Unless mission is able to deliver the goods at all cost by restoring justice and liberation to deprived humanity, it would be as inactive and out of touch with the modern world.

But, even so, Melbourne - in its chosen theme (in line with that of the Willingen Conference) “Your Kingdom Come” outclassed San Antonio. It implies both a call to pray for the coming of God’s Kingdom and also to work actively for its existing mission. Accordingly, the theme is developed under four sectional issues as follows:

1. Good News to the Poor.
2. The Kingdom of God and Human Struggles.
3. The Church's Witness to the Kingdom, and
4. Christ – Crucified and Risen - Challenges Human Power.

Regarding awareness of these issues, Melbourne eclipsed San Antonio in one respect. While 'the Kingdom' is the main theme, focus on the poor and the Church’s response to the poor was its defining feature. Following this, it was said that the Church’s relation to the poor had become the new yardstick for judging its missionary fruitfulness.

But Melbourne was not alone in eclipsing San Antonio in this regard. It followed closely on the heels of the third Latin American Conference of Catholic Bishops in Puebla, in 1979, at which the Church’s “preferential option” for the poor was re-stated with respect to the four Willingen Conference sectional issues as follows:

- With regard to section 1: Good News to the Poor, the conference made the following recommendation to the Churches:
 - THAT CHRISTIANS BECOME CHURCHES IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE STRUGGLES OF THE POOR.

The churches would have to surrender their patronising attitudes of benevolence and charity by which they have condescended to the poor: In many cases, this would mean a radical change in the institutional life of the missionary movement. The churches must be ready to listen to the poor, to learn about the ways in which they have helped to make them poor.

- THAT THE CHURCH JOINS THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE POWERS OF EXPLOITATION AND IMPOVERISHMENT.

These powers include the trans-national corporations, governments and the churches and their missionary organisations themselves, where they have joined

in exploitation and impoverishment. To join in the struggle against them is to be on the side of those who will claim the reward that Jesus promised to those who are persecuted, those who will claim the martyrs' crown of victory in today's world.

- THAT CHRISTIANS ESTABLISH A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH THE POOR INSIDE THE CHURCHES.

For this to happen, the structures of mission and church life must be changed to conform to patterns of partnership and servanthood. This will require a more unified mission outreach that does not perpetuate the wastefulness and confusion of denominational division. The life-style of both the clergy and lay leaders need to be changed so as to allow them to come closer to the poor.

- THAT THE CHURCH PRAYS AND WORKS FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD TO COME.

To pray for the Kingdom will enable churches to work more earnestly for the Church's development, to look more eagerly for signs of the Kingdom in human history and to await more patiently its final consummation.

Section 3 of the Melbourne affirmation – the Church's witness to the Kingdom – also deserves further attention. In it, the role of the Church –which as the prime agent of mission does not itself go free from criticisms – is summed up in these two statements:

- The whole Church of God, in every place and time, is a sacrament of the Kingdom which came in the person of Jesus Christ and will come in its fullness when he returns in glory.
- The life and witness of our present churches is very diverse, and it is not our calling to be judges of their value to God. We can only look at the aspect of how the churches could effectively carry the marks of Christ himself and be a sign of the Kingdom in that life and witness.

Then as the *raison d'être* for the Church as the agent for God's mission, there occurs a statement, though tacitly expressed, of the pluralistic world that mission should address:

As the whole Church is set in a world of cultures and nations, we have to witness to the Kingdom by reflecting both the universality of the gospel and its local expression. As Christians work together to serve the needs of struggling people, so they reveal the unifying power of Christ. As they honour the inheritance of each person (culture, language and ideals) so they witness the personal care of God.

In this, it is often forgotten that one of the main challenges to mission comes by way of a debate as to exactly who is responsible for mission. The Melbourne Conference defined proclamation as the responsibility of the whole Church and of every member. Although the Spirit endows some members with special gifts to be evangelists and a great diversity of witness is found, the credibility of the proclamation of the Word – it is submitted - rests upon the authenticity of the total witness of the Church.

But Melbourne went further to postulate what it called 'authentic proclamation'. This is defined as the spontaneous offering of a Church, which:

- i. is a truly worshipping community,
- ii. is able to welcome outsiders,
- iii. is ready to move like a pilgrim, and
- iv. whose members offer their services in both church and society.

Such a Church – it is claimed - will not defend the privileges of a select group, but rather will affirm the God-given rights of all. It is the Lord who chooses his proclaimers – often among the poor, the suffering and the oppressed – and strengthens them through the Holy Spirit with the power of the incarnate word.

For this reason, Melbourne has been favourably viewed in both Ecumenical and Evangelical circles as “a point of convergence” (see Bailyes 1996:73). Its bridges were further strengthened at the Stuttgart (1988) Consultation's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism in which Evangelicals present played a prominent role. Although this gathering had a different emphasis on how the gospel is to be shared, there was a clear consensus that evangelism “always means that – in one way or another – people are called

to faith in Christ” and that it “always includes the explication of the gospel” (Bailyes, 1996:26)

Would San Antonio take this further with all the best gains from Melbourne?

3.4 The WCC and the San Antonio Report (1990)

The San Antonio Assembly, in Texas, (May 1989) did little extra and its report is likewise generally seen (see Beyerhus, 1996:35) to have said little that is new. It took hold of previous statements such as those made in the Ecumenical Affirmation from the Stuttgart Consultation (1988) and expanded, clarified and illustrated them. It also made many proposals for immediate action, expressing the wish that fine words would be translated into concrete deeds.

Nevertheless, there was a pointer in the forward direction. This came in a form of a letter that had been sent by a group of “Concerned Evangelicals” in San Antonio to the sequel meeting at the Manila (Lausanne) Conference in July 1989. This letter was deeply appreciative of the many good things that were enriching in the experience of those who had taken part. It welcomed “the importance given to the cross” and praised the conference for the “ample opportunity” there was “for Evangelical concerns to be voiced” and expressed in conference documents. Furthermore, it sounded a categorical warning note against any possible misunderstanding and misrepresentation (*Beyerhus 1996:495*):

We feel that the expression of concern for the rights of the poor must not be misunderstood as showing that the World Council of Churches has relinquished the central concern of devotion and faithful witness to Jesus.

We have been encouraged by the way in which Christians from many traditions have joined ... in confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of the world, and in affirming that they cannot point to any other way of salvation but Jesus Christ. We ask that you join us in refusing to identify the WCC declaration about the cries of the oppressed for justice as a retreat from an affirmation of the centrality and finality of Jesus Christ.

The letter further suggested ways in which the WCC and the Lausanne movement could begin to cooperate somehow; not least in planning shared and simultaneous conferences on mission and evangelism.

With this inspiration, the Manila Manifesto (II: 9) takes up the question of collaborative evangelism and makes the following clarifications (*Beyerhus* 1996:496):

Our reference to the “whole Church” is no presumptuous claim that the universal Church and the Evangelical community are synonymous. For we recognise that there are many Churches, which are not part of the Evangelical movement. Evangelical attitudes to the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches differ widely. Some Evangelicals are praying, talking, studying scripture and working with these churches. Others are strongly opposed to any form of dialogue or cooperation with them.

Some of us are members of churches which belong to the World Council of Churches and believe that a positive yet critical participation in its work is our Christian duty. Others among us have no link with the World Council. All of us urge the World Council of Churches to adopt a consistent biblical understanding of Evangelism.

We confess our own share of responsibility for the brokenness of the body of Christ, which is a major stumbling block to world evangelism. We are determined to go on seeking that unity in truth for which Christ prayed. We are persuaded that the right way forward toward closer cooperation is frank and patient dialogue on the basis of the Bible for all who share our concerns. To this we gladly commit ourselves.

The documentary evidence from San Antonio to Manila does indicate that both Ecumenical and Evangelical understanding of mission evolved during the period. The Ecumenical emphasis on social action (in its various forms and guises) has been tempered with the realisation that gospel proclamation cannot – with any justification – be marginalised to the peripheries of mission. Deed must be interpreted and expounded by word. Evangelicals, in the same vein, should recognise that Kingdom imperatives of social righteousness (and the consequent socio-political involvement entailed) are congenitally inherent to faithful gospel proclamation. The Word needs to be incarnated and authenticated by deed. The Manifesto further reads (*Beyerhus* 1996:4; 96):

To the extent that both camps have rediscovered and formulated a more holistic understanding of mission, it is clearly possible to speak of a nascent convergence taking place. But it would be unreasonably premature to speak in terms of agreement or accord.

The channels of communication are not open and the dialogue is more wholesome and less fraught than it was in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, suspicions of each other are far from dead and buried. But at least the prophesies of imminent doom heard in those days have proved to date unfounded.

The Manila Manifesto (1989), too, on second thought represented the quintessence of the debate highlighted and generated at Lausanne amongst evangelicals (Beyerhus 1996:4; 93). Its authors describe it as a “public declaration of convictions, intentions and motives” which went positively forward with mission. Hence, Section Four of Part Two ('The Gospel and Social Responsibility') include many vital statements concerning the relationship between evangelism and socio-political action.

That said, 'whither now?' or 'whither mission?' as the question was asked at the Whitby Conference in 1947 (see Beyerhus 1948:12; 14). At yet another sequel to San Antonio, at the Seventh Assembly of the WCC in Canberra (1991), it could still be seen that the challenges to mission from within Christianity itself were not diminishing.

According to a bishop at this Assembly, Heinz Joachin, a “vital coherent theology” continued to elude the ecumenical movement significantly enough as to hinder progress on mission. He stated (Beyerhus 1996:497):

We are also discovering that our traditional theological paradigms are still not yielding any convincing answers to new challenges, not enabling us to make progress. So in the World Council one cannot wonder at finding a diversified theological picture, which is often really very confused. At the end of the road from Vancouver to Canberra, it must be said that despite all the efforts so far made, the task we were set still remains ahead of us.

In an open letter issued by those sharing Evangelical concerns at Canberra, it was noted that “this theological deficit not only conspires against the work of the WCC as a Christian witness but also increases the tension among its member churches”.

But this was not just a problem posed for Ecumenicals, as the Conference Report also gleaned. “For Evangelicals too”, it says, “there is still a distance between the daily struggles and suffering of human life and the technical and theological doctrinal discussion”.

The report concluded that it is clear that Evangelicals and Ecumenicals need to continue to hear, heed and respond to each other in the years that lie ahead. They need more and more to “discover each other not as antagonists but as believers together”. Reflecting on their experience at the Canberra Assembly (1991), church leadership declared that the time was somewhat ripe for new and more serious efforts to bring an end to the continuing rift between the two contending camps (Beyerhus, 1996:486). Pointing to the fact that the contents and tone of an open letter (entitled “Perspectives from Canberra”) which the group of about 100 Evangelicals issued were largely positive – though somewhat critical of the WCC - they attested they could see grounds for optimism.

Bailyes (1996:31) in fact stated that the letter received a sympathetic hearing and led to various expressions of hope that relations could be strengthened. Indeed, one of the tasks of the newly constituted WCC Office of Church and Ecumenical Relations was described as “to develop and strengthen relationship with Evangelical organizations and charismatic groups”. Needless to say that mission was not going anywhere without this (see *EN* 2006:1-2).

Scherer and Bevans (1992:1-33), writing soon after Canberra (1991) about new directions in mission and evangelisation – in views somewhat revisited more recently by John Stott (see *EN* 2006:16-17) enumerated seven changes in the modern world undermining missionary praxis as follows:

- We now live in a pluro-centric, rather than in a Western-dominated, world.
- Structures of oppression and exploitation are today being challenged as never before.
- A profound feeling of ambiguity exists about the value of Western technological development in relation to the older idea of ‘progress’.
- What we have inhabited is a shrinking global village with finite resources, and this calls for growing mutual interdependence.
- Humans are for the first time aware of their capacity to destroy the earth and make it uninhabitable for future generations.
- Societies everywhere now seek their own local cultural identities and reject slavish imitation of Western models.

- Freedom of religion and greater awareness of other faiths forces Christians to re-evaluate their own earlier attitudes toward other faiths.

Other factors might be added to this list, but the point being made with or without them is that - quite literally – because “we live in a world fundamentally different from that of the nineteenth century, let alone earlier times”, the work of mission and evangelisation has begun to move in “new directions”.

Wright and Slater (1991:5-10) had indicated that to do this missiology needs to be studied. They maintained that it does not entail simply studying foreign missionary organisations, but involves an orderly study pursued in three ways:

- Historically, considering the way the church has grown at different periods and the impact its mission has had on society and culture.
- Systematically, examining the interaction of Christianity with other belief systems both secular and religious.
- Ethically, performing in the Church the declared moral will of God for every aspect of life, not just the religious alone.

They summarise their discussion as follows: that the theology of mission means studying the purpose and nature of Christian Mission as a recognised branch of Theology from the beginning of the modern missionary movement. Then the question – as it was asked at Edinburgh – was 'how mission?', a much different one from 'whither mission?' which we have interpreted as signifying the vocative rather than locative destination of mission. Yet, initially attempted in the West, the theology of mission is increasingly influenced by the growth of the Church in the developing world with concerns that often stem from situations of poverty, disadvantages and persecution similar to those of the early Christians.

They also raise a salient point about the genesis of mission, suggesting that it arose primarily out of the nature of God and only secondarily from the nature of the Church. The living God of the Bible is a sending God, they submit, and in the Old Testament, he is revealed as one who sends his people out into the world, scattering them to do his work. In the process, they continue, God (a) gathers in his people and (b) sends them out. In these apparent opposites, God is most inherently extrovert in Christ's coming into the world and

in the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church at Pentecost. The descent of that Pentecostal power provides the motivation for the Church's mission and the basis of its ability to accomplish the task to which God called it.

Well before this, at the Tambaran meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1938 (see *IMC Report 1938:3*), a statement by the German delegation was a catalyst in the development of a new understanding of mission. The delegation confessed that only "through a creative act of God will this Kingdom be consummated in the final establishment of a New Heaven and a New Earth," and it continued: "We are convinced that only this eschatological attitude can prevent the Church from being secularised". The interrogative factor of the 1938 Tambaran Conference being 'whence mission?' Altizer (1988:340) illustrated the Kraemerean exclusivist nature of the 1988 answer in this way:

The question of Tambaran 1938 has taken on new form. The fullness of the revelation of God in Christ and the unique decisiveness of that event are themselves matters of debate among Christians. The 'promise and fulfilment' scheme by which many opposed Kraemer has come to be viewed by some as itself an unacceptably triumphalist approach. Conversely, the stress Kraemer put upon the uniqueness of each religious tradition has been adopted by many who disagree with him and who argue that these faiths offer alternative parallels to God's saving action. The very notions and practice of Christian 'mission' that were the occasion for discussion in 1938 have become suspect or have been significantly reformulated among some branches of the church.

Barth (see Kung 1987:229) also made a distinctive contribution in this area under the influence of an Enlightenment approach to theology. Indeed, it is well known that his contribution to missionary theology reached a peak at the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council in 1952. It answered the question 'why missions?' with the idea (not the exact term) of '*Missio Dei*', which first surfaced with the understanding of mission being derived from the very nature of God. Hence, it was put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology.

The classical doctrine of the Mission of God itself is worth some attention. Essentially, it is viewed as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit. To this was added yet another movement; namely, that of God the Father, Son and

Holy Spirit sending the Church into the world.

As far as missionary thinking was concerned, this consortium with the doctrine of the Trinity constituted an important innovation. At the Willingen Conference in 1952, (see Van & Holf, 1972:160f; and Dapper, 1979:27) this image of mission as participating in the act of God's sending was an indication that mission has no life of its own, and that only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission.

Though Willingen recognised a close relationship between the Mission of God and church mission, the latter was not seen in triumphalist categories but in solidarity with the incarnate and crucified Christ. For whereas Willingen was convened under the theme "The Missionary Obligation of the Church", the addresses delivered at the meeting were published under the title 'Mission under the Cross' (Beyerhus 1953:13). In this way, the possibility of missionary complacency was prevented by the emphasis on the cross despite the triumphal affirmation that the mission was God's own.

In attempting to flesh out the *Missio Dei* concept, the following could be said:

- In the new image, mission is not primarily an activity of the Church, but an attribute of God. "It is not the Church that has a Mission of Salvation to fulfil in the World; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the Church" (Moltmann, 1977: 64). Powell (2006:39-51), in appreciation of the ecclesiology of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, somewhat underscores this by noting that a teaching which fails to put supreme emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit is doomed to be a complete failure.
- Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world and the Church is viewed as an instrument for its own mission (Aagaard, 1974:23).
- To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love towards people, since God is the fountain of love sent to mankind and the world (Aagaard, 1974:421).

In spite of the semantics used to define mission, an operative word that constantly appears as a recurring decimal is 'God'. To put it bluntly, God is the agent of mission. His tri-unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit emphasises the unity and sum totality of the Godhead as an

enabling locomotive that moves the Church to work. The Church should not just be regarded as an instrument but as the vehicle whereby God's love and power are communicated to the world. That indeed it is the agent for God's mission to the world is neglected in various conciliar statements (e.g., Melbourne 1980, following Mexico City 1963, and Bangkok 1973), though not precisely in the San Antonio Statement (1990) which is the focus of our discussion to this point.

The fact then that this challenge had been taken up by the WCC Willingen Conference which examined the nature and source of mission was a great plus factor in the process. It concluded that, as the saving action of God precedes the Church and mission, the Church is not the starting point or the goal of mission but the one sent on mission. Multiso-Mbinda (see IRM 1995:335) thus notes that a shift occurs at Willingen from "emphasis on an ecclesiocentric mission to mission-centred Church".

If therefore a vital, coherent and cohesive theology of mission was still lacking at this stage, it may be useful to retrace our steps and go as far back as Nairobi (1975) to ask 'why?'

The preparatory papers sent from Geneva to the WCC's constituent church bodies gave little indication of any belief that any good could come out of Nairobi. The Evangelical constituency viewed the Nairobi Assembly with a considerable degree of foreboding. However, within the first week of the Assembly meetings a more optimistic note was being sounded. Rejoicing in a report received from Nairobi submitted by Harvey Hoestra, Donald McGavran draws attention to a fledging change of emphasis by saying confidently: "It is made clear that Nairobi (1975) was strongly influenced by the Lausanne Conference (1974).

But before this, the pre-conference negativity had created a "grass roots rebellion" reported by Hoekstra (see IRM 1995:335). "Many delegates", he says, "are voicing a deep-seated misgiving about the direction the WCC is going. There is a widespread concern that if this assembly does not express itself decisively on this issue of Evangelism, it will be disastrous for the WCC".

As we shall soon see, there was success of a different kind at Nairobi, and this appears to have been stimulated by the use of the New Life For All model for evangelism in Africa

and the work of the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly (PACLA). At Lausanne, African participants began to plan an All–African Churches Conference to follow the Nairobi Assembly (1975). A year later, from December 9-21 1976, some 1800 Africans from evangelical, ecumenical, and African Independent Churches gathered at Nairobi to be welcomed by the Chairman of PACLA, Gottfried Osei-Mensah, along with other non-African representatives.

3.5 The WCC and the Nairobi Consultation (1975)

Known more for its statement on dialogue than on mission, the conference is a useful point of reference at which to move from a consideration of the challenges to mission to a preview of the challenges to dialogue in a pluralist context.

But, more immediately, it is important as a point of reference back to earlier times from which the on-going internal challenges to mission, which reached a height with the wrangles between Evangelicals and Liberals/Ecumenicals, could be revisited (see section 3.3 immediately above).

In Nairobi, in 1975, the most incisive phrase used to outline the mission of the Church is 'the whole Church bringing the whole gospel to the whole world'. How did this 'wholistic' perception and approach lose its edge to the divisions which later characterised the mission debate and frustrated the missionary endeavour?

The question could be answered by saying that although various aspects of the internal divisions of the Christian Church were implanted in Africa by Christian missions, the fact that they were never as meaningful there as elsewhere meant that – in an African context – it was much easier to emphasise the unity, oneness and wholeness of the Church in Nairobi than it would have been elsewhere (see Coker, 1981). Hence, outside Africa, the focus of this study may legitimately shift from a consideration of challenges to mission in an externally pluralist context to a consideration of challenge to mission in an internally 'plural' Church; the different institutions of which cannot agree on the 'givenness' of their intrinsic and essential unity of purpose.

The background against which the understanding of the unity of purpose in mission was reached at the conference is indicative, informative and instructive.

- First, although in Africa unity is never achieved ethnographically – hence, Martey (1993:11) speaks of Africa's ethnic pluralism - it has most certainly been achievable spiritually (Mozorewa 1991). Relatively fewer of the many conflicts in the continent have arisen as a result of religious differences than because of political and tribal concerns.
 - In the Nigerian Civil War, in the 1960s, for example, although Western and Northern Nigeria had large Muslim populations and Eastern Nigeria was mainly Christian, the conflict was really between the Ibos of the East and the Yorubas and Hausas of the West and North, respectively. It was not a religious war, as the Yoruba people are almost evenly divided between Christianity and Islam.
 - Traditional African religion, though somewhat specific to tribes, nevertheless has a unifying factor to it. Namely, it everywhere held, unbeknownst to early European anthropologists and missionaries (see Smith 1966), belief in the existence of a Supreme God who is in control over everyone and everywhere, and is not limited to space and time (see Idowu 1961, Mbiti 1961 and Danquah 1944, for example). Internecine wars have never been fought in Africa over traditional religions but over political hegemony.
- Second, such religious experience was enabling to Africans in that they were better able to mutate differences between religious beliefs and practices, cultures, language barriers and the like.
 - If they could easily see common grounds between faiths, then it was easier still for them to see common grounds between denominational groups of the Christian Faith (See Oduyoye, 1979:111). This is one reason why colonial powers of the past have been criticised for carving Africa into nation states belonging to Anglo/Franco-phone zones rather than to their pan-African unity. Colonialists could of course argue that there were wars in Africa before their arrival, and that post-colonial

conflicts in Africa have not arisen between nation states but within them. Hence, although Hutus and Tutsis straddle two countries in Southern Africa, Rwanda and Burundi, the conflict has never been between the countries but between the peoples. The anti-colonial responses are too detailed (see for example Maciver, 1970:273-291), however, to include here and somewhat outside our brief.

- The recognition of spiritual ties in a common humanity has meant that Africans have been able to apply values like respect for elders and authority to matters of faith and religious understanding. So Mbiti (1961:29) in fact says that most Africans do not see any contradiction in holding a mixture of beliefs and practices. Yet, more significantly, they could at one and the same time respect their past leaders as well as wish dearly to be guided by Christian moral and doctrinal principles. It is foreseeable – in this context - that although conflicts could easily arise, they could also be easily resolved. Furthermore, it is very likely that forgiveness and reconciliation could be readily found in such situations of conflict, as has been the case with post-apartheid South Africa.
 - Some African scholars (e.g., Kubi *et al* 1979) have therefore advocated greater world tolerance based on the recognition of one God from whom all movements take their origin. They argue that a belief in one God who is the source of one world and one human race renders all racism and ethnocentricity heretical.
- Third, and nevertheless, Kato (1973:121) warns that this richness of thought could be more in danger of corruption than of being the means by which Western Christianity is enriched. This is because in the West politics is the voice always calling the shots in the global scene, being the custodian of resources and maker of provision. For, as the saying may go: 'he who pays the piper dictates the tune'.

Also, African richness of thought is further lost because – as Fashole-Luke (1975) makes bold to say - although many students from the continent enter the West with it, they do not impart it to Westerners. Rather they return with sophistication, having digested the theologies of scholars like Aquinas and

Tillich. Gone is their simplicity and cultural openness with which they left Africa. Adhering is, at best, a liberal ecumenism or, at worst, an aggressive evangelicalism, with the poisonous elements opposing Western positions. By implication, the question is: can more people 'break bread' together across denominations and nations, given this situation?

- Fourth, Adeyoye (1979:111-115) develops the contribution from Africa further in relation to his 'sense of personal wholeness' intelligence. She variously intones:
 - A sense of wholeness of the person is manifested in the African attitude to life. Just as there is no separation between the sacred and the secular in communal life, so there is no separation between the soul and the body in the person. Spiritual needs are as important for the body as bodily needs are for the soul. Moreover, for a wholesome life, people not only have to be at peace with themselves but also must be fully integrated in the community. The African contribution can help purge the Christian religion of the separation of the human being into body, soul and spirit.
 - In relation to the African belief that God delegated authority to intermediary beings, there is in apposition the widespread sanctioning of belief in the “divine right of kings”. Yet, scholars have observed that as a political tool, the notion only worked in traditional Africa when belief in the Supreme Being was taken seriously.
 - Covenant-making being a major characteristic of African life provided a basis against which Africans understood the new covenant to be so binding on Christians as not to allow them too much scope to wrangle unnecessarily over doctrinal and denominational matters.
 - Reconciliation being a most sought-after ideal in Africa, broken relationships are never allowed to go unhealed. Sacrifices were performed and communal meals shared to restore normality. There is a sense in which this is a foreshadowing, though not a parallel, to the Christian belief in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, namely, that - as with the Old Testament sacrifices – when a life is given back to God it is sanctified and restored.

Equally incisive are the observations made at regional level in conferences in Africa from the 1960s onwards.

- In 1963, the All-Africa Council of Churches (AACC) was formed at the same time as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). At its first meeting in Kampala deliberations - far from being on a disputation between Evangelicals and Liberals on the nature of mission - hailed the occasion as an opportunity “to discover and love one another” (Bassham, 1979:136). Indeed, the general agenda revealed that Africans could little afford time to bicker among themselves over the content of mission as is the case in the West. They needed, through mission, to address the problems of family life, cultural variations, poverty, education, housing and employment as much as church growth, for which there was still ample opportunity on the continent itself. Within these, they also needed to deal with the thorny issue of polygamy which had caused many problems in mission over church discipline and to make a sympathetic plea for consideration and understanding concerning it. Needless also to say that African Christians needed to find a way of both developing the Church and working with Islam and African traditional religions, as the other two main religions practised or revered in the continent (Parrinder, 1975).

With the growing move towards independence, Africans had a pressing need to help themselves with the building of an African identity in the aftermath of colonialism. It is significant that - as we have noted in Chapter Two - it is no coincidence that the building of nation states in Africa went hand in hand with the growth of African independent churches, more akin in mood and mode to Pentecostalism than to any of the mainline churches.

The Kampala Report (1963) encouraged African Christians to identify with and to share the aspirations of the African nations. It says: “We exhort the churches of this continent to participate in the building of the African nation” (see Bassham, 1979:139). Aware of the power of nationalism, the Assembly spoke of the Church as a 'prophetic watchman' witnessing to the divine demands for truth, justice and peace and against all forms of oppression, discrimination and injustice.

- On the surface - but not unless the mind of African Christians reviewed above is unknown - it would appear that such a quest stands squarely on the side of the Liberals in the Western Church who advocate social action and a social gospel. As a matter of fact, since the Kampala Conference (1963) made an impressive statement on 'Freedom and Unity in Christ' in relation to the establishment of a new chapter in the life and history of the Church in Africa, there is clearly no room for an assumed partiality in this matter.

- The Second Assembly of the AACC held at Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in 1969 equally based its focus on a cohesive theme, namely, 'Christ at work in Africa today'. With this in view, it was able to declare that the underlying task of mission in the political and economic sphere should be informed by the recognition that “all men are created in the image of God as equals before him and are entitled to a share of the world's wealth according to their needs” (see Bassham 1979:141).

- At the third Assembly, held in Lusaka, Zambia, in 1974, the conference likewise emphasised two issues.
 - the need for a moratorium on finance and expenditure, whereby Africans are to be freed from their dependence on foreign and personal finance and be self-reliant.
 - the need for African churches to undertake the essential mission of the Church in the continent.

The report called on all Christians to stop supporting oppressive political, military and economic structures “which hinder the fulfilment of God's plan for full freedom and justice for all humankind”. It further advocates the translation of the “one faith of Jesus Christ to suit the tongue, style, genius, character and culture of African peoples” (Bassham, 1979:143-5).

The Nairobi Assembly developed this by suggesting that each local church should aim at having sustained and sustainable relationships with other local churches in conciliar gatherings, wherever they were needed for the fulfilment of their common mission. (Report, 1975:60)

Muzorewa (1991:63) presses home the kind of cohesiveness African theology could bring to the mission debate which - despite the insights from Nairobi and other African consultative summits - seemed to have fallen on deaf ears among Western churchmen and women.

He develops the view of African spirituality being a source of potential success in mission. He makes the point that the discouraged and condemned doctrine of ancestorology could enhance this contribution by promoting a greater appreciation of 'this life' and 'the next life'. This, he says, will enable people to devote a greater energy to mission as the reason why the Church exists because if life is meaningful here and "goes on", and does not end with mortality and finitude, there would be much more willingness on the part of man to be more pro-active than passive, more selfless than selfish in mission. He finds justification for this in the death and resurrection of Christ which, he says, is the model for victors, adding that the sense of continuity puts the Church in the hands of God where it belongs, rather than in finite hands.

Calling on all Christians to take time to witness, Muzorewa (1991:101) further advocates that there should be no embarrassment at the thought that in witnessing they will be in fact only the vehicle or mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. He lampoons the individual Christian's ineptitude in mission by saying that those who are embarrassed are they who have absorbed a sufficient "psychological dosage" of Western decadence. Turning the focus again on Africa, he attributes the rapid expansion of Christianity there to witnessing, concluding that "it would be fair to say that the lack of witnessing in Euro-American Christianity contributes significantly to the non-growth in membership".

Much of this is as good as saying that European and North American churchmen have no justification for disputation which itself challenges mission from within, given the enormity of the challenges from outside. It was for this reason that Thooft (1974:30) initiated the European response on the eve of the Nairobi Consultation (1975) by asking these two questions:

- Is the ecumenical movement suffering from institutional paralysis?
- Should the ecumenical movement follow the agenda of the Church or the agenda of the world?

While there would have been splattered responses to these questions from Europeans and North Americans, they have largely been muted in African writers constrained - for the most part - to mouthing the theological platitudes (Fashole-Luke, 1975:206) they have picked up from the stances to which they are obliged.

European though he is, Thooft (1974:56) may thus encourage looking to Africans not only for an answer to the questions he raised but to a satisfying (not satisfactory) one. One such answer came through the Kuruman (South Africa) Report (WCC October 1995) which abounds with an African provision of free metaphors for our understanding of the theology of mission. Coming as a result of a consultation on the viability of Ecumenical Theological Formation held in Kuruman early in August 1995, it made the following significant affirmation of the value of African tradition for the Christian Church:

One metaphor which spoke to us in Kuruman was that of God as the root of the human tree with its many branches, all of which belong together and draw sustenance from the same source. African culture depicts the intertwined character of human society, in which all members are organically related in their need, their solidarity, and their sharing.

Kato (1973:149) had in fact expressed the African answer to Thooft's (1974:30) second question (see above) clearly like this: The ecumenical movement should follow the agenda of the Church rather than that of the world because the concerns of both 'Ecumenicals'/liberals and 'Evangelicals'/conservatives is the concern of God. His word is more than those who, as liberals - believing only that the Bible *contains* the word of God - find problems with it because they do not accept its absolute nature. Likewise, his word is equally more than the understanding of those who, as conservatives, fundamentally believe that the Bible *is* His word.

Why could this understanding not be reached, if only to diminish the challenges to mission in the second millennium? To endorse this, Thomas (1980:106) raised the pertinent question and provides an answer as follows:

Why have many African Independent Churches (AIC) shown consistent and spectacular expansion while many historic Churches have stagnated and shown little growth? Daneel, himself both a participant and researcher on independence in Zimbabwe, answers that a key factor is the “Africanised Missionary Strategy” of the AICs, particularly the prophetic movements. He calls upon the historic mission Churches to “appraise this aspect with humility and a willingness to learn”.

Are all these points adequate enough to be convincing to the Western mind steeped in tradition and churchmanship? The next section will be further illuminative of this.

3.6. The Kairos Document

What is this document and what light does it throw on the mission situation? Kairos is a remarkable document produced ecumenically by Christians at a time of political crisis in apartheid and pluralist South Africa. In an age when there is much evasion of responsibility due to moral cowardice, it witnesses to an occasion when the trumpet did not 'give an uncertain sound' and demonstrates how imperative it is for the Church to speak decisively to the public realm. Since it is obvious (by now) that the mission of the Church is struggling - faced with the challenges of pluralism and the in-house problem of ecumenism - the Kairos Document provides an extremely useful and comparable way of dealing with challenges to mission.

Edited in 1997, the foreword written by the then British Council of Churches (now Churches Together in England) to the first edition included the following comments (KD 1985.iv):

After extensive discussion amongst the Kairos theologians and the regional groups around the country, and after considering all the contributions from various groups, Churches and other persons here and abroad, and further, because of a desire to keep the documents to a minimum, amendments, elaboration and additions have been made only where it was absolutely necessary for greater clarity. We have tried to maintain the quality of the first edition, its mood, sharpness, vigour and simplicity, because this is what the signatories and others demanded. It has to be left as a prophetic word, a proclamation.

With this statement of interest, overwhelming excitement was generated in the black townships of South Africa, as it reinforced the people's faith and hope for a new and just society. It came as an empowering instrument of faith, committing them more than ever before to the struggle for justice and peace in the country. It was welcomed as a statement of what it means to be truly Christian in a turbulent apartheid society.

According to the contribution of the churches of Britain and Ireland in the preamble (KD 1985: v), the document also clawed back some hope for missions. Many of those who had abandoned the Church as an irrelevant institution that supports, justifies and legitimises a cruel apartheid system began to feel that if the Church becomes the Church as expounded in the document, then they would return to it. Even those who considered themselves to be 'non-Christians' began to say that if Kairos is Christianity, then they would become Christians.

Like any challenging material, the document provoked negative reactions from some - mostly conservative - groups like the 'Gospel Defence League' and 'Christian Mission International'. Their call for the banning of the document came as no surprise as they were known for their support of the apartheid regime and their attack on any one who challenged it.

A biblical and theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa, Kairos arose out of the struggle to discover how to respond as Christians to what it calls "a situation of death". Described as "the movement of grace and opportunity, the favourable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action", it provides a critique (a) of "State Theology" which gives theological justification of the *status quo* and (b) of "Church Theology" which in a "limitedly guarded way is critical of apartheid". It promotes "prophetic theology" - as an alternative to these two - in which biblical teaching on suffering and oppression relates the seriousness of social structures of oppression in the country. Defining the South African regime as tyrannical, it challenges Christians to participate in the struggle for liberation.

Emerging from the theological reflection of a serious group, Chikane (see Lossky *et al*, 1991:10) - an influential contributor to the production of the Kairos Document - said of the process of compilation:

Reflection on experience in faith becomes the word of God. This document is actually a by-product of a process: the process of struggle to remove the apartheid regime. This is the issue, not the document *per se*.

Regarded in South Africa itself as a theological watershed, the Kairos Document calls for Christian action against a state which is described as “having no moral legitimacy” and which has “become an enemy of the common good”. For the Church to be the Church, it is required to be “unequivocally and consistently with the poor and the oppressed”. As not all Christians or churches in South Africa were prepared or ready to make this choice, the document was sub-titled: 'Challenge to the Church', a name which was replete with echoes from the title of one of its topics, 'Challenge to Action'.

Responses to this challenge in the shape of ecumenism or mission have never been low, and are seen from Appendix 3 of this study. Hence there is no further need to be detained here, as we systematically proceed to examine 'State Theology' with a view to understanding how diametrically opposed it was to mission theology.

3.6.1 State Theology

'State Theology' is defined as the theology the state uses to justify, maintain and perpetuate an unjust apartheid system. How was it supposed to have done this? The Kairos Document calls attention to four key examples to show how this happened:

- The first was by the misuse of biblical texts in support of the regime, as with – for example - the use of Romans 13:1-7 to maintain that an absolute and 'divine' authority is given to the state.
- The second was by the use of the idea of 'Law and Order' as the sole determining factor of control and of what may be regarded as just or unjust.
- The third was by the use of the word 'communist' to brand anyone who rejects 'state theology'.
- The fourth was by the use of the name of God – in some relation to the concept of the divine right of kings - to justify the regime.

The then British Council of Churches, in their book *A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (1996), made what follows known as to how Romans 13:1-7 was applied wrongly. The state claimed with it that:

- People must all obey the governing authorities, and since all government comes from God, he appointed the civil authorities.
- Anyone who resists authority is rebelling against God's decision, and such an act is punishable.
- Good behaviour is not afraid of magistrates; only criminals have something to fear. To live without being afraid of authority, one must live honestly and even thereby be honoured by the authority.
- The state is there to serve God for one's benefit. If one breaks the law, however, he/she may well have to fear. The bearing of the sword has its significance. The authorities are there to serve God. They carry out God's revenge by punishing wrongdoers.
- Therefore people must obey, not only because of being afraid of punishment but also for their consciences' sake.
- For this reason, also, people must pay taxes, since all government officials are God's officers. They serve God by collecting taxes. People must pay every government official what he has a right to ask for – whether it be direct or indirect tax.

Several criticisms of the regime followed as a result of this publication. A special issue (WCC 1985:15) challenged the Church to react to the misuse of the Romans text by the then government in South Africa as, at other times, by totalitarian regimes. Appalled by the attempts of such regimes to legitimise an attitude of blind obedience and absolute servility towards the state by quoting this text, the well-known Clump (1957:65) had pointed this out some thirty years before:

As soon as Christians, out of loyalty to the gospel of Jesus, offer resistance to a state, their collaborationist theological advisers are accustomed to appeal to this saying of Paul, as if Christians are here commended to endorse and thus to obey all the crimes of a totalitarian state.

But what then is the meaning of Romans 13:1-7, and why is the use made of it by ‘State Theology’ unjustifiable from a biblical and Christian mission point of view? “State Theology” assumes that in this text Paul is presenting us with the absolute and definitive Christian doctrine about the state, in other words an absolute universal principle that is equally valid for all times and in all circumstances. Numerous biblical scholars and contributors (for example, Baseman, 1935:4-7; Clump, 1957:55-57; Sproul, 2002:209-225) have branded this as falsehood and roundly criticised it.

Pobee (1985:40) brought in four areas which are pointers to the issues of obedience to the state.

- First, he argued that in the history of the Church Romans 13:1-7 and kindred texts have been infrequently quoted to enjoin uncritical obedience to the state. Power-thirsty exegetes will smell only the note obedience and ignore other aspects of it.
 1. The authority of the state is held under God. The state is the servant or agent of God. So it must first listen to God to discern God’s message and not automatically assume its thought to be God’s message. When it does the latter, it is guilty of idolatry.
 2. The claims of God are not always equal to the claims of the state. In any case the claims of God, including the power to administer justice and mercy, take precedence over the claims of the state to the right to administer law and order.

- Second, Pobee adduces Paul’s own words: “... it is not for nothing that they (i.e., authorities) hold the power of the sword (Romans 13:4)” to counteract the state view. Although, for most people, the emphasis of the power of the sword is on the authority to punish offenders, that is inadequate exegesis. Paul’s letter to the Romans needs to be interpreted with sensitivity to the Roman context. As applied to South Africa, the government cannot claim to be an agent of God for justice, when it unashamedly marginalises some citizens and in the process becomes the agent of injustice. It thus becomes a band of robbers, as St Augustine (*City of God*, AD 413-26) would put it. As such, it forfeits its right to

command the obedience of the people, because it is not fulfilling its God-given role.

- Third, for precisely this reason, Pobee (1985:41) stated that the government itself has become a band of robbers in St. Augustine's terminology, and therefore used instruments of violence. A Christian cannot with a clear conscience join the armed forces and police forces of a totalitarian state. It will be a mark of obedience to God to refuse to join the army and police as long as they are agents of a system of oppression.
- Fourth, Pobee argued that obedience entails also a rebellion of conscience illuminated by the Spirit of God. This means detecting and fighting for remedying the social and political ills of society. To be the conscience of society is not only to denounce evils, but also to engage in constructive activity to remedy its ills and wrongs.

Brockway (WCC, 1985:2), Programmes Secretary for Christian-Muslim Relations with the World Council of Churches, also commented on the Kairos Document. Portraying its challenge to Christians and the Church as a theological one, he drew a very interesting similarity between the Barmen Declaration in Germany in the 1930s and the Kairos Document.

The latter, sub-titled "A theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa", was, as Brockway expressed it, a theological comment with a difference that cannot fail to call to mind the 1934 Barmen Declaration of Germany's Confessing Churches. Like Barmen, it is an emphatic rejection of apostasy on the part of the State and the Church. But unlike Barmen, the challenge of the Church is specific about what Christians should do with references to the State on behalf of all the people of the nation.

How does Brockway work out the comparison?

- The framers of the Barmen Confession were, first and foremost, concerned about the challenge of the Third Reich on the governance of the churches and their effective substitution of the state and its leadership in place of their Christian faith, and even God.
- The framers of Kairos perceived a direct threat to church government from the state. But they charged church leadership with being in complicity with the state and its oppression, and they considered it blasphemous of the state when it calls upon the name of God.

Yet, concludes Brockway, there is a difference. For while Barmen simply rejects the heresy and apostasy of the Nazis and the German Christians, Kairos proceeds to enunciate an appropriate strategy for Christians in South Africa, to develop an action-based theology of mission for the social aid of the individual. However, although Kairos suggests various modes of involvement it does not prescribe the particular actions anyone should take.

Referring to Romans 13:1-7, Brockway defines oppression - in line with the "long Christian tradition relating to oppression" - as evil. For this reason, once it is established beyond doubt that "a particular ruler is a tyrant or that a particular regime is tyrannical, it forfeits the moral right to govern and the people acquire the right to resist". But, of course, everything hinges on the definition of a tyrant. At what point does a government become a tyrannical regime? The answer given is precise: a tyrant is an enemy of the common good; he/she governs in the interest of part of the people - not in the interests of all the people.

As mission is not served by wrong or tendentious interpretation and application of Bible passages by tyrants unjustly against people, the British Council of Churches was very much at pains to make this known in relation to the South African government's use of Romans 13:1-7.

From its submissions, we gather that what had been overlooked by the South African government is one of the most fundamental of all principles of biblical interpretation, namely, that every text must be interpreted in its context. To abstract a text from its context and to interpret it in the abstract is to distort the meaning of God's word. Moreover,

context is not only the chapters and verses that either precede or follow this particular text. Nor is it even limited to the total context of the Bible but includes a wider set of references.

The contention further state that, in the circumstance in which Paul's statement was made, he was writing to a particular Christian community in Rome which had its own particular problems in relation to the state at that time and in those circumstances.

The revised edition of the Kairos Document (1997) further went on to express that the Roman Christians to whom Paul was writing were not revolutionaries. They were not trying to overthrow the state, nor were they calling for a change of government. They were what have been called 'antinomians' with the belief that Christians - and only Christians - were exonerated from obeying any state because Jesus alone was their Lord and King. This of course was heretical and Paul is compelled to point out to these Christians that before the Second Coming of Christ there will always be some kind of state, some kind of secular government, and that Christians are not exonerated from subjection to some kind of political authority.

In critiquing the "State theology", the British Council of Churches' (KD 1997:3) analysis is that Paul is simply not addressing the issue of a just or an unjust state or the need to change one government for another. He is establishing the fact that there will always be some kind of secular authority, and that Christians as such are not exonerated from subjection to secular laws and authorities. The kind of state he is speaking of, however, is that of which he himself says, "The State is there to serve God for your benefit" (Rom. 13:5). That is the kind of state that must be obeyed. In this text Paul does not tell anyone what is to be done when a state does not serve God and does not work for the benefit of all, but has become unjust and oppressive.

It follows that - the document says (KD 1997:4) - those who try to find answers to the very difficult questions and problems of our time in the text of Romans 13:1-7 are doing a great disservice to Paul. The use that the South African "State Theology" made of this text tells us more about the political opinions of those who constructed it than of the meaning of God's word in this text. As one biblical school - quoted anonymously in the document -

puts it: “Their primary concern is to justify the interests of the state and the text is pressed into its service without respect for the context and the intention of Paul”.

Hoedemaker (1985) in his article ‘The Kairos Document: A Challenge to the Ecumenical Movement’ discusses the contextual mission application of the document in relation to two different slants:

1. it is bound up with a particular historical configuration;
2. it also refers to the life of the Church as the place where the truth which theologians analyse and comment upon is lived in ordinary human lives and relationships.

The Kairos Document related obviously to both slants; the difficulty seems only to be caused by its use of apocalyptic language, for example, that the god of the state is the devil and that Christians are fighting an anti-Christ.

But it might be asked at this stage: To what extent is the situation expounded in the Kairos Document applicable worldwide? Questions like this, stated Hoedemaker, should not be answered easily, as if they were self-evident. But insisting that they should neither be suppressed, he warns that contextual questions of truth offer themselves not for uniform analysis and solution but for a deepening of understanding on the issues debated. Hoedemaker then submitted that as the nature of a discourse changes under the pressure of contextual situations it will be difficult to apply contextual solutions or truths generally. (1985:40)

3.6.2 Church Theology

In other words, affirms Hoedemaker, the ‘Church Theology’, which the Kairos Document also rejects because it stands in the way of truth, has the potential of becoming and remaining a springboard for action in the global ecumenical struggle for common faith and witness. For the purpose of this study, it is submitted that this is not an easy road for academic discussion on the application of truth to follow, but a painful one requiring careful judgement, an open and compromising mind, and free and critical thinking (see section 3.6 below).

The ecumenical input of the Kairos Document (1985:54), therefore, gently nudges those who live in other situations to exercise restraint when they express themselves on it and when they discuss similar issues of mission, unity and ecumenism elsewhere.

At the same time, Kairos is - in a real sense - a challenge to all churches. For it is only the worldwide community of churches and Christians - which share not only the same gospel but also the same problem of the human community - that can keep alive the profound combination of truth and reconciliation on which the mission of the Church thrives.

3.7 Mission and free-thinking scholarship

Under this heading, we take up the concern of the foregoing section with the expectation that the difficulty of finding a consensus about the nature of mission would become even more acutely obvious. The work of critical scholars, old and new, will feature.

To begin with, Bosch (1991:218-220), in his chapter on Disciple-Making, calls attention to the difficulty of getting a universal acceptance for the Great Commission of Matthew, 28:18-20, despite the high prominence given (especially, but not exclusively, by Protestants) to it in missionary circles.

In his monumental work on the mission and expansion of Christianity in the first three centuries, Harnack (1908:40-41, n.2) even toyed with the idea that the words of the commission might be a later addition to the gospel, since he could not understand why Matthew would have added them himself. Even so, in the German fourth edition of his book, Harnack (1962) added that this “manifesto” (as he 'now' calls it) was a “masterpiece”. He summarised his comments on the passage by saying, “It is impossible to say anything greater and more than this in only forty words” (1991:225)

It was, however, not until the 1940s that biblical scholarship, pioneered by Michael (1941 and 1950/51) and Lohmeyer (1951), began to pay serious attention to Matthew 28:18-20. Since then there has been a sustained and, in fact, expanding interest among New Testament scholars in those closing lines of Matthew’s Gospel as scores of authors try to lay bare the origins and significance of this majestic passage.

In 1973, Joachim Lange devoted a monograph of 573 pages to a traditional and redaction-critical study of the pericope. A year later, Hubbard (1974) published another major monograph on it. Despite these advances, there still - so it appears - remains more to discover about the "Great Commission". Meier (1977:407) comments: "There are certain great pericopes in the Bible which constantly engender discussion and research while apparently never admitting to definite solutions; Matthew 28:16-20 seems to be such a pericope". "On one thing scholars agree, however", says Meier, "the pivotal nature of these verses".

Bosch (1991:57) is of the opinion that the way the "Great Commission" has traditionally been utilised to provide a biblical basis for mission has to be challenged or at least modified. But he also agrees that it is inadmissible to lift these words out of Matthew's Gospel, as it would allow them a life of their own without any reference to the context in which they first appeared. Indeed, he reckons that no exegesis of the "Great Commission" divorced from its moorings in this Gospel can be valid.

Nevertheless, the object of the whole Gospel itself is a matter of debate. Is it for the Jews or for someone else? Dobshutz (1928:343) called Matthew "a converted Jewish rabbi, and implied that he was seeking to convert his people. Stendahl (1968:23) likewise claimed that Matthew has arranged his Gospel in such a way that it would resemble the first five books of the Old Testament.

But others (see Brown, 1977:25-28) contend that the writer had only "re-judaized" the tradition handed down to him. Pointing to polemics against the Jews and their leadership in the Gospel, they claim a clear "Gentile bias" in it, which would be natural only if it had a Gentile destination (see Clark, 1980:4; Strecker, 1962:15-35). Yet the readership to which Matthew's Gospel was addressed is still baffling, since in the central section (Mt 8-17) there are some particularistic sayings which must have been extremely offensive to Gentile readers.

Nonetheless, it is possible – scholars say (see Molle, 1982:112; Senior and Mueller 1983:152) - to derive mission skills from Matthew because of the following indications:

- With a remarkable degree of consistency, he never allows his reader to wander off.
- There is praise for the Canaanite woman's remarkable faith (Mt 15:28) which resonates with Gentiles despite the particularistic sayings of 15:24 and 26.
- Mission involves - from the beginning and as a matter of fact - making new believers sensitive to the needs of others, opening their eyes and hearts to recognise injustice, suffering, oppression and the plight of those who have fallen by the wayside.

Jacques Matthew (1980:17) also makes the following significant contributions to the argument:

According to Matthew's "Great Commission", it is not possible to make disciples without telling them to practice God's call of justice for the poor. The love commandment, which is the basis for the Church's involvement in politics, is an integral part of the mission.

To become disciples means a decisive and irrevocable turning to both God and neighbour. What follows from there is a journey which, in fact, never ends in this life, a journey of continually discovering new dimensions of loving God and neighbour, as the reign of God and his justice are increasingly revealed in the life of the disciple.

3.8 Mission and millennium preparations

In March 1993, the central committee of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), meeting in Iserlohn, Germany, considered a proposal by Alexandros Papaderos (the commission's chairman) for an ecumenical "Act of Unity" to mark the end of the second millennium. The proposal - particularly focused on Europe and the Mediterranean region - suggested a solemn act by which all the burdens and mutual condemnations of the past would be removed from the life and memory of the Church, and all the agreements reached would be officially received and affirmed. Specifically suggested was a gathering of the heads of all participating churches, who would confess together the common apostolic faith according to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as an affirmation of the unity, which had been discovered and embraced again during the last century of the second millennium. When this proposal was considered further in the Joint Working Group between CEC and

the Council of European Catholic Bishops' Conferences, it was felt that the gathering of heads of churches should rather be envisaged on the global level and that care should be taken not to raise hopes which would not materialise. No further initiative was therefore taken.

In the WCC, discussions for the year 2000 began during the September 1994 meeting of the executive committee in Bucharest. A strong feeling emerged that the WCC should not itself organise any global ceremonial activity, but should rather encourage and assist its member churches to develop appropriate forms for an ecumenical observance of the year 2000 in each place. It was noted that:

From a Christian ecumenical perspective, the change of Millennium receives particular significance by virtue of the fact that we look back at a thousand years of Christian division and often-violent inter-Christian conflict, of Christian imperialism, denominationalism and colonialism. No observance of the year 2000 should overlook these features of the second Millennium.

The main reason why this planning had the significance it had was the emergence of the ecumenical movement during the last hundred years and the qualitative change it brought in the relationship between the Christian churches, ushering in a new understanding of Christian calling in today's world. The end of the millennium was thus seen as an invitation to the churches to be liberated from the burden of the past and to move into the third millennium with a visible manifestation of unity. Any observance should therefore be oriented toward repentance and forgiveness, commemoration and liberation, thanksgiving and hope.

Two years before the end of the millennium, in September 1998, the WCC held its Eighth Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe. The Assembly also marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of the world body at the First Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948. The jubilee not only offered an opportunity for celebration, but also became an invitation to the member churches to renew the ecumenical covenant and to reaffirm their commitment to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Harare Report, 1998.). The WCC itself says of the occasion that it was the culmination of a reflective process which for several years had been focusing on a common understanding

and a common ecumenical vision facilitating the move into the 21st century.

Indeed, a postscript to the working draft of the policy statement for the Harare Assembly which was put before member churches and which - after further discussion and revision by the central committee - ultimately became the basis for action reads:

The courageous declaration by the First Assembly that “we intend to stay together” must come alive in each new generation of Church leaders. For many, this commitment made in Amsterdam fifty years ago is a distant historical memory. For some, it is totally unknown. A new and challenging reformulation of the concern for unity is needed; a new way of seeing the nature of our shared obligation to pursue unity which could provide coherence to all existing efforts.

At the invitation of Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the WCC, an informal meeting took place in the Ecumenical Centre, Geneva, on May 6, 1997. The aim of this meeting was to share information and explore what avenues might be pursued to prepare together for a truly ecumenical witness to mark the dawn of the new millennium (see WCC, 1997:33).

He then attempted a tentative synthesis of the information he had received regarding the celebratory plans of the churches. The following is a compendium of some of the activities of common interest planned:

- Local churches and their national ecumenical organisations had started making plans to celebrate the millennium which needed a touch of assistance to mature.
- Some churches had come together to plan attempts at reaching a common confession of faith, to discuss baptism and possibilities for a 'Week of Prayer for Christian Unity', and the celebration of Easter on the same date in 2001.

As instances of common plans with remarkable specificities in contextualised celebrations, the following were identified and highlighted:

- In Australia, ‘a pilgrimage to the desert’ was planned as an expression of repentance and reconciliation with the Aboriginal people.
- In Scotland, a “Church Assembly” - expected to go beyond the normal deliberative character into taking positive action - was scheduled for the beginning of the new millennium.
- The Second Ecumenical European Assembly in Graz planned to focus on

reconciliation.

- The Middle East Council of Churches planned celebrations with a specific emphasis on Christian presence and witness in the region.
- The WCC Harare Assembly planned to focus on the theological understanding of repentance, hope and common commitment to Christian unity both for its Jubilee commemorations and millennium celebrations which coincided.

In addition, there were also cases where single denominations or churches planned independently without enlisting any ecumenical cooperation. For example:

- In Jerusalem, representatives of Orthodox Churches had a meeting to plan “exclusively” Orthodox celebrations.
- For the millennium Lambeth Conference, the issues of social justice, marginalisation, and foreign debt were put on the agenda.

In the forward planning, some of the main churches - inevitably to play an important reconciling part – were the Church of England and its worldwide Anglican Communion, the Roman Catholic Church and the Methodist Church. The plans of the Church of England and the Methodist Church are treated here, but that of the Roman Catholic Church will feature more appropriately in the next chapter.

The Church of England had the onus of liaising with the British government, the national ecumenical bodies and the interfaith groups. That aside, its Anglican Communion had wider initiatives to take. Accordingly, the Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Panama in October 1996 approved the following resolution (ACC, 1996:3) that:

... this Anglican Consultative Council requests the Secretary General to respond positively to the request to the Anglican Communion from the people of the Municipality of Bethlehem to assist in a millennium project to establish a town planning design for the city. This project will first provide a feasible study, for consideration by the Standing Committees of ACC and the Primates and the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem and the Middle East, concerning the renovation of Manger Square. Such a study would secure information regarding personnel and finance, as well as possible ecumenical involvement, to complete such a programme to celebrate the dawn of the new Millennium for World Christianity. A support group made up of members from around the Communion should be established to assist in this developmental task. To ensure ownership of the project by the wider Church, the Secretary General is asked to keep the Provinces informed and to invite responses and indications of commitment.

Using the motto “2000 Years since Bethlehem”, the World Methodist Council (WMC) prepared to mark the new Millennium by proclaiming it “The Year of the Lord’s Favor”.

The purposes of the celebrations were delineated as an effort to:

- link God’s revelation in Bethlehem to the present, so that people come to know Jesus Christ in new ways,
- convey the miracle of Jesus' birth in a small town,
- experience anew the wonder and joy of that first Christmas, and
- enter the new millennium with confidence, bearing witness to the One Saviour and Lord as the world’s hope today.

In promoting this, the WMC offered its member churches preparatory reading resources and studies, suggesting opportunities to join other Christians ecumenically in commemorating the 2000th Christmas in each place and in witnessing to the “Year of the Lord’s Favor”

3.9 Summary and projected analysis

The chapter was introduced by a restatement of its problem, objective and methodology, and with a briefing of the subheadings under which its contents would be discussed: the WCC and the Uppsala Report, the WCC and the Melbourne Report, The WCC and the San Antonia Report, the WCC and the Nairobi Consultation, Mission and Free-thinking Scholarship, Mission and the millennium celebrations.

- The problem is that mission seems diametrically opposed to the ideals of pluralism within or outside Christianity. How is its welfare to be promoted in a pluralist context?
- The objective was to resolve this problem by answering the question asked. It was looked at through the experience of the global 'ecuminate' (the WCC), augmented – where necessary - by that of regional 'ecuminates' (such as Churches Together in England and Wales) in significant regard to inter-church relations, in the first instance.

- The methodology through which this objective was to be achieved was by a study mainly of WCC Assemblies and Reports with the help of official and freelance scholarship, covering a wide range of views.

3.9.1 Official WCC Documentary Evidence

The WCC Reports generally indicate an on-going debate (if not 'in-fighting', squabbling and wrangling) between two groups (Evangelical/conservative versus Ecumenical/liberal), broadly representative of one or other of the constituent churches of the world body. These two groups, generally speaking, tend to stick adamantly to two opposing positions over the nature and purpose of Christian mission to such an extent that there is discernible a 'rift' or a 'crisis' within Christianity and the world body. It is interesting to note that the rift occurs over the very thing by which they are – judging from the earliest expression of the objectives of the WCC (in 1948, see section 1.6 above) - supposed to be united (i.e., mission). This then creates a challenge to mission itself from within Christianity, which tends therefore to leave the challenge from the multi-faith community unaddressed. The following points are noted:

- Essentially, the official documents reveal that whereas the Evangelicals take the view that mission is the proclamation of the gospel for the conversion and evangelisation of people without a Christian faith, Liberals believe that – in addition – mission carries a concern for the social wellbeing of the recipients of the gospel. The Uppsala Report (1968), for one, reveals that Evangelicals are so opposed to this liberal position as to think of it in terms of a betrayal, not so much of Christian witness but of the billions of people who (they believe) would – as a result – not have the opportunity to receive the gospel. Liberals, for their part, argue that social action motivated in love would in fact lead to greater involvement in the world, greater participation in the secular order, and create greater opportunities for mission. According to the San Antonio Report (1990), they see this as an actualisation of the 'Word made flesh' in the 'word made deed' where positive action is taken.

- The Reports further reveal that the occurrence of a rift – which seemed undiminishing (see the Canberra Report 1991) as the twentieth century drew to a close - is rather odd, considering that as early as the Nairobi Assembly in 1975, under an African temperament of reconciliation, the WCC was bidding for tolerance and oneness. Indeed, Nairobi, Lusaka, Kampala, South Africa (with the Kairos Document) all offered African ways of getting over Christian and religious divisions and of taking on plurality in mission work. Unfortunately, this went unheeded in the West for one reason or the other. Nor did the hard work of the WCC and regional ecumenical bodies towards a united witness with millennium celebrations do much to change this facade as the year 2000 approached.
- But the documents also reveal that there were non-African as well as African attempts at bridging the gap in the rift. There were, for instance - at Uppsala – Evangelical-Liberals who urged colleagues to accept both kinds of mission outreach: gospel proclamation and social gospel. They opted for conciliar fellowships, *koinonia* (Canberra 1991), visible unity and full communion (Santiago 1993). At Melbourne (1980) - described as perhaps the most insightful of conciliar assemblies of the century - it was accepted that kingdom gospel included as much concern for the poor as concern for its proclamation. In-fighting was recognised as unhelpful to the cause of mission since it could be seen through by would-be recipients. Then Vancouver (1983) contributed to this significantly as well. For there Evangelicals made the most positive of contributions with their realisation that failure over mission at conference level fuels failure for mission in the field. Above all, it was conceded that failure to carry out field mission is indeed a gateway to a loss of missionary jobs in the outside world.
- It was left to San Antonio (1990) to urge that words be turned into action and to foster cooperation through the tempering down of positions on both sides. Then - with its pre-sessional meeting at Manila (1989) providing ample opportunity for Evangelicals to air their concerns without misrepresentation - the need for collaboration and cooperation was well and truly underscored.

- Canberra (1991) asked for a coherent theology of mission, and we are reminded that Lusaka (1974) had anticipated when it designed its cohesive mission theology. Kampala (1963) had asked for freedom and unity in Christ, and in the Kuruman Report (1965) the value of Africa to the Christian Church was recommended. Tambaran (1938) had commissioned an eschatological action to prevent the secularisation and politicisation of the Church, and the Kairos Document (1985, 1997) had answered this quest with a morally legitimate and prophetic theology which thundered against a tendentious State Theology and a compromising Church Theology in South Africa. All this may not have happened had Nairobi (1975) not turned the searchlight on the Church itself, asking for the Church's mission to respect the spiritual ties in a common humanity.

3.9.2 Scholarly Contribution

Two sets of scholars are in evidence. The first are those who work officially for the churches or the ecumenical bodies, and include Thooft (1974), Frazier (1981), Brockway (1985) and Bosch (1991). The classical and distinguished theologian Karl Barth (1978) also features significantly in this group. The second group is constituted of commentators who work independently as academics or freelance theologians, and include Bassham (1979), Oduyoye (1979), Pobee (1985) and Muzorewa (1991). Their contributions are anonymously reduced and synthesised within their groups, which are treated one after the other.

Among the attached commentators, opinions are as divided over the nature and purpose of mission as they are from within the WCC or – with the noticeable exception of the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) – the regional ecumenical bodies. Certain subsidiary points emerged:

- There was of course an excellent response to the African bid for reconciled and synthesised thinking on mission from Europe when the question was raised as to whether the ecumenical movement is suffering from paralysis and following instead the agenda of the world rather than its Church. But a greater African challenge from the Kairos Document - replete with memories of a European one from the Barmen Declaration - ensured that Church complicity with wrong interpretations and use of

the Bible to support oppression is not condoned. This was taken further with regard to the lamentable failure of commentators to accept with one mind the great missionary Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, the authenticity of which has been vigorously and continually debated from the start of the twentieth century.

- It is submitted that preoccupation with on-going polemic over mission is – as the Melbourne Assembly affirmed – unhelpful to missionaries in the field, becoming itself the problem, not to say the challenge. Then - from a well-known source - the eminent concept of *Missio Dei* was introduced to suggest that over mission - which is of the very nature of God - there should be no divergence of opinion.
- From free-thinking contributors, a set of biblical commentators argued on either side of the debate as to whether or not the Matthean Great Commission is authentic. For most African scholars this is unbecoming of Christians who should be aware that there are more important things – e.g., the reduction of poverty and enhancement of human equality – with which mission ought to be concerned. They indeed suggest (with some European approval) that Westerners may – if they cannot understand Christian obligations by themselves – try to understand them through the eyes of African spirituality.
- Although in Africa ethnic plurality and ethnic group differences have led to a breakdown of the political system and presented obstacles to national unity in many countries (Burundi, Rwanda, Nigeria, Kenya and Gambia as the best known examples), African theologians submit that there is much on offer to the Christian Church from the values of African traditional beliefs.
- Indeed, of these values the most to be appreciated is what is referred to as 'a sense of wholeness manifested in the African attitude to life'. With this, there is no separation between the sacred and the secular in communal life, neither is there a separation between the soul and the body in a person. Spiritual needs are as important for the body as bodily needs are for the soul. Also, because in African ancestrology 'life goes on' and does not end with our mortality, this provides a sense

of continuity which puts the Church's mission in God's hands where it belongs, rather than in finite hands. Then, above all, Christ's death and resurrection furnishes the models for victory over mortality for the African Christian.

- With the same intensity of thought, South African scholars came down clearly with the Kairos Document against the use of Romans 13:1-7 by their state to justify oppression. To them, it is equally reprehensible to leave oppression unchallenged in what can only be a misguided belief that it is not biblically the task of mission to challenge oppression and inequality. With this, it does seem as if the position of conservatism in Christianity is forlorn.

3.9.3 Summative Conclusion

This is reached in relation to two technical and elucidating features of the study, and treated in order:

- The Central Theoretical Argument
- The formulated definition of mission
- The instituted theological paradigms: pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism.

3.9.3.1 The Central Theoretical Argument

The impression that Evangelicals have not generally responded adequately well to the challenges of a pluralist society cannot yet be fully confirmed, as much more information is still to be considered under 'dialogue'.

But it does appear as if the Evangelical position regarding mission is itself the major challenge to mission, given that Evangelicals are uncompromising in their limitation of mission to the proclamation of the gospel and to conversion. They find it difficult to accept the more compromising position of Liberals which holds together both a proclamationist and socialist view of mission. It is difficult to see how they could do better faced with the pluralism of the outside world when they are little able to compromise faced with a plurality within Christianity. The saying is apt: charity begins at home.

Yet, Evangelicals have to be credited with the virtue of still being seen to be talking since they have not backed out of the ecumenical bodies in which the debate goes on. Their position, then, is not one of dialectical polemic but one in which they agree to differ. Chapter Four will reveal what happens when – as expected - mission is not less but more challenged in the outside world and dialogue is suggested as the way out.

Of course, it ought also to be remembered that – in offering some form of compromise – Liberals have themselves not conceded all on mission, being – so to speak - less conversionistic and more proclamationistic.

3.9.3.2 The formulated definition of mission

Has mission followed the path of its definition? Has it lived up to its expectation, literally, biblically, historically and scholastically?

Literally, it is evenly defined as the 'sending out' of 'persons' to 'people' for a 'task' and with a purpose. For the most part, the missionary endeavours of the Church fulfil this with the sending out of missions abroad. But – with regard to the objective (purpose) of mission – it appears that too much emphasis on one or the other of the objects (persons/people or task) of mission obscures the purpose.

- Biblically, mission is explicitly commanded and commended in the New Testament in both the Acts and Matthew's Gospel. Invariably, the purpose is explicitly said to be for witness and conversion of people in the world. Except perhaps for the agenda which Christ laid out for mission in Luke 4:18-19, nothing much is said in these explicit texts about offering help to the poor, the afflicted or oppressed. Hence, one contributor is noted to have remarked - when commenting on a conciliar report (Uppsala) in which greater stress was put on the welfare aspect of mission - that he missed the emphasis on the biblical basis of mission. Nevertheless, there are implicit grounds for seeing the offering of assistance to the poor as part of the purpose of mission. It is most potently implied in the works and words of Jesus and his apostles who preached kindness and went about doing good.

- Historically, missions seemed to have adopted only the primary purpose of evangelisation and conversion from the earliest times. Only in the twentieth century did they take on a concern for the poor and the oppressed in the wake of the ecumenical movement and the work of WCC. Hence, biblically-minded churches (Evangelicals) were somewhat unable to accommodate it, and hence the conciliar assemblies of the WCC became a battle ground in which the war over the purpose of mission was fought between, broadly, Evangelicals and Liberals. The rift/crisis created has never been healed, despite much conciliar effort and ecumenically-planned celebrations at the millennium. The crisis remains perhaps the greatest challenge to mission from within pluralist or, the diversity of Christianity.
- History's strong support for a conversionist purpose of mission is illustrated closer to home by the work of St Patrick of Ireland who evangelised the heathen and barbaric tribes of the mainland. Notwithstanding, there is also clear evidence that the conversionist task was not performed solely by preaching but with the assistance of royal and papal patronage, sound theological knowledge, ability to adapt local cultures and to reduce local languages to writing, together with strong faith and heroics. All of these indicate that there should be scope for accommodating a wider purpose into mission than that of evangelisation and conversion which were originally the only explicit goals.
- Scholastically, those who were commissioned by the WCC or by regional councils or by their churches showed a willingness to be as versatile in the debate as did the free-lance writers. Among the former, there were suggestions: that the purpose of mission should include a mixture of the two expressions and be centred on Christ; that African spirituality should influence Church thinking and action on mission in a conciliatory way. Among the latter, it is openly acknowledged that it is difficult to get universal acceptance for the Great Commission in Matthew's Gospel, arguably the more explicit of the two explicit passages on mission and its purpose.

3.9.3.3 The theological paradigms

On the basis of this chapter, the challenges to mission are determinable in relation to the theological paradigms (exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism) as follows:

- Conservative Evangelicals are exclusivist about mission. For them, mission is the exclusive prerogative of the Church exercised exclusively for gospel proclamation and conversion – not for social welfare. They wish to exclude from any discussion with those who consider that it could include a dialogue between (a) Christians over a modification of their view and with (b) a plurality of other faiths and non-faiths whose adherents are the object of missions. Liberal Evangelicals are plural-inclusivist about mission. For them, mission is an opportunity to include the plurality of views on it held by fellow churchmen and women in dialogue, and there from to reach out in missions to the plurality of faiths and non-faiths by conversation and Christian witness. They do not consider that it might be a watering down of the inalienable right of the Church to evangelise, mixed with a pandering to those who seek to blur the differences between faiths in the interest of peace.
- Liberal Catholics – as with Vatican II - are inclusive-pluralist about mission. First admitting the existential fact that there is a universe of faiths, they go on to maintain that these faiths have each their own intrinsic goodness and value. Unwilling to consider that this somewhat goes against the exclusive claim of the Church to being the only salvific path; they shun as well the dread of counting Christianity as just another brick in the wall of many faiths.
- It follows then that there is no church tradition with whose attitude to mission pluralism (pure and simple) could be tallied.

The implication of this analysis is that mission is progressively challenged as the context moves from exclusivism (with Liberal Evangelicalism) to inclusive-pluralism (with Liberal Catholicism). It is not that it is more or less challenged by one group or the other, but that (1) it is challenged in different ways in each context, and (2) it is challenged corporately by all groups through the divisions they manifest to it.

Two matters emerge from this for further consideration. The first, whether exclusivism is – by its very nature – more of an opposite to pluralism than to inclusivism; and – if so – whether this does not ultimately spell a disaster for mission when challenged in a pluralist context. The second, whether – if it were possible in this study to introduce the grouping of Conservative Catholicism (in conscious and diametric opposition to Conservative Evangelicalism) which – by its very nature would be exclusivist – it would not be appropriate to suggest that at that point the churches have turned full circle and reached a meeting point regarding mission. This would be an important step if Christianity is to stem the tide not only of pluralism, but more so of secularism. Chapter Four will be revealing in these directions.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR: CHALLENGES TO DIALOGUE

4.1 Introductory parameters

Having systematically considered the challenges posed to mission in the pluralist context of Christianity itself, it is now appropriate to examine the challenges to dialogue in the Christian and wider pluralist contexts. As mission and dialogue are twinned in the minds of some Christians (see Coker, 2002:3-5), this is also the opportunity to consider the pluralist society's challenge to mission. This ultimate exercise might not have been necessary had the Church itself (through Evangelical exclusivism) not presented a first hurdle - in the way of mission - over which a jump has not yet been made. The trend of the argument is that such a jump could not be made unless the churches engage in meaningful dialogue with each other.

As in Chapter Three, discussions here will be primarily informed by the work of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the pluralist domain of the global society. This will be supplemented by information from any regional group with the same ethos, such as the former British Council of Churches (BCC) - as it operates in its current regional names (Churches Together in England and Wales, Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland).

The problem the chapter is seeking to solve is this: if, as it appears to some Evangelical Christians, mission and dialogue are diametrically opposed, how could an objectionable pluralist society be reached with the message of salvation?

The objective of the chapter is to resolve this problem. In the process, it will be also asked: how illustrative of the problem for dialogue is the situation of the WCC and other inter-denominational endeavours? Could dialogue be the way forward both to jump over the hurdle for mission created by some Evangelicals, so as to be able to overcome the natural challenges of a pluralist context?

The methodology through which to achieve this objective is to study the official reports of the WCC Assembly at New Delhi (1961) and elsewhere, the communiqués of BCC meetings, as the most appropriate regional ecumenical body in a nationally pluralist context, and the work of both officially-commissioned (e.g., Siddiqui, 1997; Faruqi, 1995/7;

Ariarajah, 1985) and independent scholarship (Thooft, 1974; O'Sullivan, 1991; Scherer and Bevans, 1995/99). In this way, coverage of a wide range of views is categorically and systematically ensured.

Before moving on to the main considerations of the chapter, it is worth recalling that in Chapter Two the use of 'dialogue' in the context of religious pluralism was defined through the theological paradigms (exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism) introduced solely for this purpose. It is not an exclusivist phenomenon whereby other religions do not matter, nor is it comfortably inclusivist whereby other religions only matter if they serve the purpose of one. It is pluralist because all religions matter and conversation from one to the other is only possible by logic and reason not because it is religiously superior. As seen from Chapter One and subsequently, Evangelicals have difficulty with this because they are exclusivists in the sense that to them the Christian is unique and superior and could not be compromised in any way. The discussions that now follow will illustrate further the tenacity with which they hold this position.

4.2 The WCC and New Delhi (1961) with Nairobi (1975)

Better known for its deliberation on mission than on dialogue, the New Delhi Report (1961) emphasises mission as central to the work of the Church. However, it delivered a pragmatic rather than deliberative message on dialogue in that it brought together persons of disparate groups operating within the mission of the Church from the New International Missionary Council (IMC) and the WCC itself. The IMC integrated with the WCC and became first its Division on World Mission and Evangelism and later (in 1971) its Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (Beyerhus, 1995:214). This was a triumph for the objectives of dialogue in principle if not in name. It made a clear statement that dialogue was the answer to the internal challenges to mission posed by Evangelicals and Ecumenicals engaged in an on-going struggle over the objective of mission.

The Assembly itself took as its theme the 'concerns of missions in an industrial setting'. Not much different from a 'pluralist society' with its emphasis on expansion, growth and production, an 'industrial setting' was seen as challenging enough a setting for mission and dialogue as was a multicultural or multifaith society. Its Report tacitly acknowledges this

and explores the necessity of reconciling different world-views within the industrial *cum* pluralistic society.

Scholars (Eck, 1985:40; Jones, 1997:21) therefore legitimately issue a directive from this, namely, that dialogue between faiths is not as injurious to Christianity as the promotion of individual self-interest by churchmen and denominations. Indeed, the Assembly itself somewhat anticipated this by raising a question loosely as follows: What is God saying to and hearing from the Church and the world? If this was not a vindication of dialogue, what else could it have been?

Notwithstanding, the position of Evangelicals at New Delhi, as we have seen in Chapter Three, was that such a statement was “proof of apostasy” and strongly militates against any vindication of dialogue between Christians and with other faiths. In the sequels to New Delhi - at Wheaton (Illinois) and Berlin in 1966, and Uppsala in 1968 - they further pressed on with their crusade. Championed at these meetings by McGavran and Beyerhaus (see IRM, 1996: pp 335-7), they vigorously opposed interfaith dialogue as a betrayal of the gospel.

The New Delhi Assembly, nevertheless, represents the public launching of a new era in the ecumenical movement. Attention was not so much focused on what God was saying and doing in the Church (and hence to the world), but on what God was saying and doing in the world (and hence to the Church).

Thooft's (1974:25) concern about the impact of interfaith dialogue on the missionary enterprise was raised in this frame of mind. It came from the sense of urgency for world mission felt at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. It came from the conviction that the “decisive hour of Christian mission” had come which compelled J.R. Mott to call the World Mission Conference in 1910, with the primary purpose of pooling resources and developing a common strategy for the “World Conquest” for Christ. In this, the task of “taking the gospel to all the regions of the world” was seen to be of such importance that it had to transcend and eventually overcome all theological and confessional differences among Christians.

Thus in New Delhi, inter-religious dialogue tremendously impacted on the ecumenical debate, witnessed further by the impassioned, acrimonious and deeply divisive debate over interfaith dialogue at the Nairobi Assembly (1975). After that, it had far reaching, decisive and deeply disturbing impact on the movement itself. It was the cause of the 'showdown' within the ecumenical fellowship, between traditional understandings of mission as a converting instrument and an emerging concept of 'mutual witness'.

Ariarajah (1995:66) confirms that in this showdown every arsenal at the disposal of the traditional understanding of mission was brought out to ward off dangers presented by inter-religious dialogue.

'Cometh the hour, cometh the man'. It has been perceived that if 1910 was the "decisive hour of Christian mission" for J.R. Mott, Nairobi 1975 rather than New Delhi 1961 was "the decisive hour for interfaith dialogue" for Stanley Samartha (1995:60).

What saved the hour from being a skirmish, however, was the convincing witness given by those - mainly from the New Delhi school of thought in Asia (like Lyn A. Desilva and J.R. Chandran) - who were patient and skilled practitioners of dialogue. Also, the assembly was made up of a traditionalist majority not willing either to betray Old Mother Mission or to deny the experience of those who had entered into a new relationship with their neighbours through dialogue. In so doing, Nairobi - as a fitting companion to New Delhi - opened a new door to the understanding of mission within the ecumenical movement.

As a result, the "guidelines for dialogue" drawn up within two years of the Nairobi assembly stated that "dialogue has a distinctive and rightful place within Christian life." It went further to affirm that "in giving their witness, they (Christians) recognize that in most circumstances today, the spirit of dialogue is necessary". Then it clearly affirmed (see Ariarajah, 1995:5):

For this reason we do not see dialogue and the giving of witness as standing in any contradiction to one another. Indeed, as Christians enter dialogue with their commitment to Jesus Christ, time and again the relationship of dialogue gives 'opportunity for authentic witness'. Thus to the member churches of the WCC, we feel able with integrity to assure our partners in dialogue that we come not as manipulators but as genuine fellow pilgrims, to speak with them of what we believe God to have done in Jesus Christ who has gone before us, but whom we seek to meet anew in dialogue.

Ariarajah (1995:71) notes with gusto that the Vancouver Assembly (1981) chose the word “witness” in preference to “mission” with a view to enhancing this position. In its section on “Witness in a divided World” it spoke about dialogue as an “encounter where people holding different claims about an ultimate reality can meet and explore these claims in a context of mutual respect”. It went even further to say that from dialogue “we expect to discern more about how God is active in the world, and to appreciate for their own sake the insights and experience people of other faiths have of the ultimate reality”.

As could be expected, this bold assertion about the presence of God in experiences of others was again challenged in several other official statements, including those from the World Mission Conference of San Antonio (1990) and the seventh assembly of the WCC in Canberra (1991).

It will be considered with a summary of our survey in the next chapter how entrenched this position may or may not be among Christians with an evangelical background. Here, it would suffice to say that the unwillingness of their churchmen to accept dialogue is due to the overlaying of the missionary quest with a soteriological concern. The 'world' is an alien environment from which souls must be saved and protected, not a place in which 'proven' matters of faith are challenged and discussed. All earthly things (including 'church unity') are transient and passing, and it is pointless therefore to expend valuable time, energy and resources on them. It is more important to proclaim the message of eternal salvation and win converts into the Church for salvation than it is to seek church unity, unless the latter was a means of more effective evangelism.

How did the World Council of Churches develop and initiate the process of dialogue with non-Christian religions?

To answer the question how conversation began, historical information is again required. It started in 1961, in the same year of the New Delhi Assembly, when the International Missionary Council (IMC) merged into the WCC. The world council's department of Evangelisation and IMC then formed a division which became the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). Although its first meeting, in Mexico City in 1963, had as its themes “witness in six continents” and “witness of Christians to men of other faiths”, consensus understood that dialogue was in this framework of mission.

A multi-religious dialogue organised in Ajaltoun (Lebanon) in 1970 was a turning point for the WCC. This dialogue was concerned with the experience of living together with other faiths, rather than a discussion about them and the nature of dialogue. Invitations were sent on a personal basis to 28 Christians, 3 Muslims, 3 Hindus and 4 Buddhists. For the participants, what was important was “not just dialogue but the special kind of community that the dialogue seemed to bring about” (see Eck 1985:16). After Ajaltoun, Christians associated with the WCC held a number of meetings the same year on the issue of dialogue with people of other faiths. The following year, at the 24th meeting of the Central Committee of the WCC at Addis Ababa, a sub-unit on 'Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies' was established.

The problem still, however, remains how to relate the question of mission to other faiths. The report of the WCC's Seventh Assembly in Canberra (1991) admits:

Interfaith dialogue has proved difficult for some Churches and Christians because of our continuing problems in understanding religious plurality and God's relationship to people of other religious traditions.

The Evangelicals, who emphasised the centrality of Christ as Saviour, were put on the alert with the liberal publication of statements like: 'We should take careful note of the fact that Christ did not send his disciples to convert the whole world to the Church but rather sent them out to become “Christians” in order to be a “disciples”' (see Canberra Report, 1991). These turned Evangelical suspicion to distrust. So, when in 1968 the WCC published its Uppsala Assembly Report, the Evangelicals saw a clear betrayal of mission. About this, McGavran (1997:40) remarked:

From beginning to end the document is studded with the word mission. But while the word mission is repeatedly used, its meaning is nowhere that of communicating the good news of Jesus Christ to unbelieving men in order that they might believe and live.

The first declaration by the Evangelicals was issued in 1970, known as the Frankfurt Declaration. It renewed commitment to mission and strongly opposed the World Council of Churches position on dialogue. The document was the brainchild of a number of German confessional theologians. It speaks about “a fundamental crisis” in the organised

churches. The teaching that “Christ himself is anonymously evident in world religions” was strongly opposed by the declaration, which rejects:

the idea of ‘Christian presence’ among the adherents to the world religions and a give and take dialogue with them as substitute for a proclamation of the gospel, which aims at conversion.

The declaration quite clearly established dialogue as a means of ‘Missionary communication’ and nothing more. But Evangelicals, two years later, published their opposition to this in response to the WCC’s call for a world-wide conference on Inter-Christian consultation (see *Salvation Today*, 1972). They criticised the WCC for having tampered with the term ‘salvation’. As one commentator (see Bassham, 1979:63) puts it, terms like ‘salvation’ have been ‘devalued’ in the diluting process. Their eternal significance has been minimised and their temporal meanings underlined. He went on also to criticise the WCC’s approach to other key biblical terms, like ‘mission’, ‘evangelism’ and ‘conversion’, pleading that the “Evangelicals should work and pray that this deliberate debasing of Christian currency ceases and that the reformation of the social order should not be substituted for salvation”.

4.3 WCC-commissioned guidelines on dialogue

In view of such antipathy, at various times in its enduring history the WCC has endeavoured to define and redefine dialogue of both kinds, interdenominational and interfaith.

In the 1960s, the World Council initiated and developed a process of dialogue with non-Christian religions, on account of which it is quite timely to focus on the dialogue with Islam and the response of Muslims. Here the work of Siddiqui (1997), a Muslim reporter on these dialogues, is crucial. Despite the bilateral slant, he is at pains to remind us that the WCC began its dialogue programme multilaterally and enthusiastically with Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others.

An initial dialogue with Muslims took place under its auspices at Cartigny in Switzerland in March 1969. Siddiqui (1997:33) recalls that participants (22 in all) at this dialogue recognised that while “Christian/Muslim dialogue is occurring in many places”, the gathering “represented an attempt to take up the conversation at an international level”. They agreed that the followers of both religions are facing the “questions of the modern world” and argued that dialogue must concern itself with what serves the true liberation of human. The consultation affirmed the following threefold aim of dialogue:

- i. Dialogue should lead both religions to greater mutual respect and better understanding of each other.
- ii. Dialogue should raise the questions which can lead each of the religions to a deepening and renewal of spirituality.
- iii. Dialogue should lead both Christians and Muslims in accepting and fulfilling common practical responsibilities.

Despite these statements, the dialogue did not seem to many to have taken the path the WCC wanted. Deliberations, at times, gave way to heated debate in which participants seemed intent on voicing their deepest grievances. Also, Muslim participants invited individually by the WCC – there being no comparable internationally representative body among Muslims – did not appear to be representative in their arguments of views endorsed widely within the Muslim community. Then, when the WCC attempted to correct this by inviting participants whose views were 'widely accepted' by Muslims, it regrettably found that they proved to be very obdurate as partners in dialogue.

For these reasons, after the Colombo Dialogue in 1982, the WCC shifted its focus from international to regional level. Also, with the additional burden of financial constraints, it decided to close its Dialogue Unit, merging it with the Secretariat. Put under enormous pressure from the Evangelical Churches, it became evidently clear to the world body that what was at stake was not just its impetus towards dialogue but its very understanding of the relationship of 'dialogue' to 'mission'. The Evangelical Churches, it appears, were apt to misunderstand every step taken by management and decision-makers at the WCC, and so Samartha (see Siddiqui, 1997:32) appropriately sums up in this way:

Dialogue emerged out of the womb of mission and it has never been easy to cut the umbilical cord and to recognise the independence of the growing child without denying the relationship.

Siddiqui (1997:32) buttresses this position in his comments that the Evangelical understanding of dialogue is that it is a missionary activity. Equally so, Fitzgerald (see Siddiqui, 1997:39) - a member of the theological workshop at an inter-Christian consultation organised by the Conference of European Churches in Salzburg on relations with Muslims in 1978 - revealed this difficulty:

We were to produce a theological statement underpinning the understanding of and practice of Christian-Muslim relations. There were some in the group for whom the only possible attitude towards Muslims was one of direct evangelism, the explicit preaching of Jesus Christ with an invitation to accept him as Lord and Saviour. For them, a broader view of God's plan for salvation in which there might be a place for Islam was anathema. They would not even agree to disagree. And so the final Report from the Consultation, in the section 'theology' carried an eloquent blank page.

In the intervening years, between the 1960s and today with still an enduring blank regarding the part dialogue could play in a pluralist situation, there had been the Lausanne Consultation in 1974 at which things were looking up for dialogue. There 'dialogue' was accepted as a serious means of evangelism, Peters (see Siddiqui, 1997:42) – a key participant - gleaned that it is a procedure of the friendly exchange of views and convictions; the ultimate sharing of experience, needs, aspirations and frustrations “with a view to dissolving the difficulties, obstacles and prejudices in the heart and mind of the unsaved person”. Why is there now a shift from this position?

Soon after Lausanne, the 1978 North American Conference of Muslim Evangelisation took up the question of dialogue with Muslims. It discussed in great detail the ways and means of Muslim evangelisation. According to Siddiqui (1997:43), this was the forum at which Daniel Brewster (a major contributor) also observed a change in the WCC's position on the role of dialogue. He pointed out that while at the New Delhi Assembly in 1961 dialogue was seen as a “useful means of evangelism” by the Uppsala Consultation (1968) dialogue had moved out of the sphere of mission and had become instead part of a more general sphere 'continuing Christian obligation'. In defence of their own position by which this change was achieved, the Evangelicals argued that though one cannot force the conversion of Muslims into Christianity nevertheless they can be compelled to come into it.

At the North American Conference (1978) Brewster's paper submitted three stages through which the WCC could engage in dialogue.

- i. By ecumenical reflection among Christians.
- ii. By gathering for actual dialogue with Muslims.
- iii. By undertaking relief and development ventures.

The WCC rejected the first two approaches but held tentatively to the third. Brewster then suggested that if some form of dialogue were to be found to be profitable towards the 'winning of Muslims', it would be incumbent on Evangelicals (the main opponents of his submission) to plan how it should be done.

Indeed, there have been a number of Protestant Evangelical-inspired structures set up towards dialogue since Lausanne in 1974 (see IRM 1996: 335-7). But these have all successfully maintained the pressure on the churches not to go too far with dialogue, compelling them to return to the pre-Lausanne position – the 'original position' of Christian supremacist dialogue with other faiths, especially Muslims.

This dialectical position has been somewhat furthered by the adoption of a pro-Zionist, pro-Israeli, anti-Islamic 'polemism' by some fundamentalist Christians in America, which in turn has only served to widen the gap between the Muslim community and fundamentalist Evangelical Christians (see IRM, 1996: 335-7).

Apart from listing these fundamentalist Evangelical Christian challenges to dialogue, Siddiqui (1997) also highlights several other areas of the challenges beholden to the observer. One such beholder is Martin Kretzmann (see Siddiqui, 1997:40) who thinks that in the absence of a clearly defined pluralist understanding of other religions, any encounter between Christian and Muslims is an

... illustration of the determination of the Christian to meet the Muslim within the framework of our Christian understanding of him, rather than a willingness to see him at the point of his self-understanding. If we now make clear ourselves what that self-understanding is, we are handicapped, not so much by our self-understanding as Christians, as by the difficulty of ridding ourselves of those concepts which have accrued to us through a confusion of our faith with our religion, and our religion with our culture, concepts which by contrast make us understand the Muslim in categories which he does not recognise as a true and essential picture of himself.

Another beholder Hassan Saab (see Siddiqui, 1997:50) with the recognition that Christian and Muslims judge each other in the light of their own experiences, makes this remarkable point:

Christians and Muslims tend to judge each other's religion through the prevailing Christian and Muslim conditions. Muslims would associate Christianity with the aggressiveness of those Christian rulers from whom they have suffered for a century and a half. Christians would associate Islam with Muslims' state of backwardness, with which they became familiar in their modern contact with Islam. The rejection of aggressiveness would then imply a rejection of Christianity. Disgust with backwardness would entail disgust with Islam. This would happen unless Christians and Muslims could set a demarcation line between religious ideals and human realities.

Siddiqui (1997:50-55) then addresses the challenges to dialogue from several apprehensions entertained by Muslims.

- I. Some Muslims view dialogue initiated in the West as dialogue with secularism. They argue that when Muslims deal with Christians in the West, they are in fact dealing with secularism. This finds support in the sensational remarks of Gai Eaton (Siddiqui, 1997:52), a phenomenologist, as follows:

We (Westerners) are not really facing for the most part the problem of dealing with Christianity. We are facing the problem of dealing with Secularism in a particular guise – let us say with a good leverage of the Christian faith ... The modern Christian often seems to be more like the child of that tradition than the child of Christianity, when Christianity was a solid all-embracing and all-powerful faith.

- II. Muslims distrust the capacity of the West to reproduce views representationally expressed by an official Umma versed in Arabic or an Eastern language (viz., Turkish, Farsi, Urdu) but not English or a European language (viz., French, Italian, Spanish). This mistrust is compounded by the already-mentioned fact that Islam does not have an officially representative body, internationally or regionally. It relies on Muslim governments, who have no mandate from the Muslim community, to appoint representatives to speak at formal consultations on behalf of Islam. Consequently, they are cautious in dialogue and are not vocal representatives of the Muslim community. Hence, they confine their presentations, as far as possible, to quotations from the Qur'an and the Hadith.

III. Muslim mistrust also appears at a political and intellectual level. Western Christianity, it is reckoned, can afford to engage in dialogue where Islam cannot because the West is politically and intellectually better equipped. These were views Siddiqui (1997:53) elicited from individual Muslims and expressed as follows:

- Christians dominate too many discourses in the world today and so dialogue as a whole is an extension of Western Christian dominion.
- Dialogue is the child of the secularisation of Western society, and those who engage in it are beneficiaries of a recent phenomenon in world history.

Furthermore, the situation is not enhanced by either of these well-researched intelligences:

- the fact that the dialogue agenda is only set in the West. Raji al-Faruqi (in Siddiqui, 1997:55) noted that the WCC did not accept Libya's invitation to join in Tripoli's Islamic-Christian dialogue in 1996. Remarking sarcastically about this, he says that the WCC participates only in "dialogue held under its own auspices... under its own terms and with Muslim representatives of its own choosing".
- the fact that Muslims are increasingly studying, being born and settling in the West. They are systematically socialised and seasoned in Western ways, which are all too often un-Christian, not to say un-Islamic.

However, it has to be noted that as recent cases (from 2000 to 2005) of terrorist attacks in Western cities by people with extremist Islamic ideologies reveal (see especially *The Guardian*, 1.12.05), this is not necessarily in the interest of the West.

IV. The Islamic doubt is also centred on the trustworthiness of dialogue as an instrument from which Muslims would benefit. Taught as a university subject but little lived out, Muslims see dialogue as a Social Science discipline, not a means of fair delivery of gains to multilateral or bilateral partners in religious dialogue. Again, Siddiqui (1997:54) shows that this view is held by reproducing the words of a Muslim respondent who says dialogue is "an extension of a dominant Western Christian Judaic intellectual scenario".

- V. Yet another aspect of Muslim apprehension is compounded in what they see as an unfortunate legacy of history. For centuries, 'knowledge' was 'at the service of the empire' and 'orientalism' (the attempt to bring to the West the knowledge and languages of the East) was less noble in its purposeful intentions. Muslims thus perceived the West and Christianity in general as together a disintegrating force for Islam, the countries of which were never to be allowed to exist independently of the West.
- VI. Muslims, according to Faruqi (in Siddiqui, 1997:75) do not believe that Christian-Muslim dialogue has sufficient magisterial authority to reach the common Man. Thus, he invited the Tripoli Conference (1996) to “pick up the banner of the common man of the world ... representing the religious and moral conscience of Christendom and Islam”, and argued for the development of a spiritual front on which much-needed authority for debate will be constituted. In his article, 'Islam and Christianity: Diatribe or Dialogue?' he insists that dialogue should not remain on the level of theological discourse alone, but rather should recruit support to enable it to assume international authority.

Siddiqui (1997:61) focuses on six prominent Muslim personalities who participated in the formative periods of organised dialogue and who represent a wide spectrum of Muslim opinion. He also examines three international Muslim organisations which - at the time - had responded tentatively to proposed dialogue and were beginning to take their own initiative. Then he urges a visionary and innovative initiative of dialogue, not simply between Church and Islam, but also between values and cultures.

Siddiqui (1997:32) records that a consultation among Christians - mainly from the Muslim world - about relations with Muslims took place at Broumana (Lebanon) in June 1966. Thirty scholars, from seventeen countries, participated. Hayward (see Siddiqui, 1997:29), a research secretary on the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, states the reason for the consultation in these words:

Speaking in general terms, no religion, save Judaism, has showed itself so impervious to the Christian appeal as Islam, the third of the religions of the Biblical God. Islam represents a deliberate challenge to the Christian Church. But Christians, by and large, fail to take steps to make any real approach to Muslims.

The consultation, however, was widely divided on such basic issues as: Do the Muslims worship the same God as Christians? Or, does God in some way work within other religions too? Notwithstanding, Christian participants at the consultation agreed to meet again with Muslims.

Another consultation took place in March 1967 in Kandy (Sri Lanka) at which three Roman Catholics nominated by the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions (now, the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue) participated. Agreement was reached on a statement that highlighted that “salvation in Christ has often been too narrowly understood”. Pointing out the nature of dialogue emphasised by this statement, Siddiqui (1997:31) says:

Dialogue implies a readiness to be changed as well as to influence others. Good dialogue develops when one partner speaks in such a way that others feel drawn to listen, and likewise when one listens so that the other is drawn to speak. The outcome of the dialogue is the work of the Spirit.

The consultation recognised that Christians would not understand the place of other religions and their traditions, including Islam, unless they have a living experience with them. Siddiqui (1997:57) therefore surmises that there seems to be a hidden agenda “to live down the suspicions and prejudices perpetuated by Christians against Muslims and to convert Muslims by invitations for dialogue”. The study also urged Christians to “take seriously also the Qur’anic doctrine of the primeval covenant of God with man” by which Islam is believed to be essentially older than Christianity.

For Muslims, Christianity and Judaism are integral parts of Islam, insofar as Islam accommodates earlier revelations as a part of its own theology. Islam’s relation with the two religions is further cemented by the Prophet Mohammed’s familial lineage through Ishmael, Isaac and Abraham. Abraham is an important figure whom the Qur’an frequently mentions as a model for all Muslims to follow. As a result of this historical and theological linkage, the position of Jews and Christians is clearly defined in the Qur’an and in the Sunnah of the prophet; they are declared to be *Ahl-al-kitab* (the people of the book).

The Kandy Consultation (1967) resulted a year later in the appointment of Stanley J. Samartha, a WCC theologian, to explore the implications of a programme on “The work of God and the living faiths of men”. Samartha’s paper (see Siddiqui, 1997) found two defects in the wider debate for dialogue. He writes:

The whole discussion was moving almost exclusively in the sphere of Western philosophy and theology. The discussion about other faiths was almost totally unenlightened by any real dialogue with people who HELD THESE FAITHS.

Muslims’ attitudes to dialogue are still bound by certain apprehensions. Hence, from the outset of their participation in the dialogic process they began to question the whole approach to it (see Eck 1985:15). Is it a genuine effort at ‘reconciliation’ and bridge-building? Or is it yet another disguised method of missionary ‘strategists’ serving the purpose of evangelism? Others (see Ali, 1987:71) see it as an act of Christian desperation in the face of crass materialism and remorseless secularisation. Furthermore, in the eyes of some Muslims (see Ali, 1987:15), there is no need to engage in dialogue, simply because the Qur’an says so. It stipulates that Jews and Christians cannot be ‘friends and protectors’ of Muslims (Sura 5.5). They also adduce historical evidence in support of their claims by reference to the political malaise of colonialism in the past and - more recently - the Gulf War with which official Christianity has been associated. Others suggest that the Qur’anic injunction ‘to you your way and me mine’ (Sura 65.3), should be the norm, and dialogue an exception.

Yet, in spite of the slowness of progress in dialogue with people of other faiths which such apprehensions engendered, there still remains a strong commitment to it not only from the WCC, but also in local churches. Also, Christians appear moderately to have an open mind in Britain, for example, towards building good relationships with people of different faiths and beliefs (see Chapter Five). The question, however, is: to what degree can this attitude be lived out in secular and multicultural Britain? In answer, attention needs - at some point - to be drawn to the nature of Islam in Britain in order to understand what the likely outcome of such efforts in developing a good Christian/Muslim (and Christian/other faith) relationship would be.

More immediately, it must be amply clear by now that the Guidelines on Dialogue issued at the Cartigny Consultation of the WCC - far from being followed in the bilateral relations between Christians and Muslims – have hit an impasse. Would a multilateral situation fair better? The answer would be clearer from the commissioned works of Faruqi and Ariarajah.

4.4 WCC Guidelines and multilateral dialogue

Faruqi (in 1997:55) ventures much wider on to multilateral relations to find an answer as to why WCC guidelines on dialogue are not holding. He chose to look at the position on dialogue reached at the Second Vatican Council (1962-68) and the views of leading Protestant Theologians.

As would be recalled from Chapter One of this study, the Second Vatican Council issued a number of declarative statements to conclude its deliberations. Faruqi seems happy about much of the declarations issued, and shows an appreciation for the stand the Council took on issues of social justice, moral values and peace. Nevertheless, in one case – that of the *Nostra Aetate* dealing with positive action and dialogue – he was less convinced of the approach of the Council. In one of his papers on Islam and other faiths, he (WCC 1979:6-9) describes the Council's attitude of the decree as 'paternalistic'. Commenting further, he says that Roman Catholicity has – with its assertion that outside its Church there is no salvation – withdrawn with one hand what it gave with the other. He backed up this conclusion by submitting that the Church still believed:

- twenty centuries after Jesus, that Judaism is religiously accepted as a preparation for Christianity;
- fourteen centuries after Muhammad, that Islam is a tolerable approximation of Christianity.

Faruqi (WCC 1979:6-9) reasoned that any success attributed to *Nostra Aetate* could only be accredited to the fact that it stopped “the calling of non-Christians by brand names”, though it is not at all clear to us what he means. He says that the document is “too modest a communication” because on the issue of dialogue “Catholic Christianity is still to be heard”.

“As to Protestantism”, he continues, “we have still heard nothing regarding Islam except rumours and hearsay from individuals”. Examining the role of Paul Tillich as a leading Protestant theologian, he analyses his work on Christianity's encounter with the world religions. Observing how Tillich repudiates neo-orthodoxy which denies the existence of a problem for Christian over human's natural religion, and how he suggests that it is possible for Christianity to be self-critical of its relation with other religions, Faruqi expresses hope and encouragement. But in that Tillich also subjugates self-criticism to a criterion of a Christian's ability to receive “Jesus of Nazareth as ... Christ”, Faruqi further feels somewhat disappointed. As he contends, with that criterion, “the basis is not God, nor the will of God, but the Christian figuration of God”. He continues: “... loyalty to figuration produces footnotes and commentaries, not knowledge”.

As an instance of dialogue at work, Faruqi (see Siddiqui, 1997:57) wrote to Tillich, sending him his article on Islam and Christianity. As he got a positive response, he seemed – though surprised – to have regained hope. In his own words, he “recaptured” his “lost optimism”.

Such optimism became a reality with the formation of organisations, by religious individuals and groups, to meet certain social and political needs, e.g., the provision of support for the homeless and refugees. In the mid-1980s, a faith alliance produced a manifesto for human rights and racial justice that was signed by various leading British religious figures (see Gill, 1985:51).

There has also been a noticeable growth in Britain of inter-religious activities within organisations that are not themselves particularly religious (e.g., Faith Asylum, formed in 1993 to promote interfaith concern for refugees and asylum seekers; and the Central London Interfaith Refuge Network established in 1996). The aims of such organisations appear to be compounded in a desire to raise awareness of the religiously pluralist nature of British society and to engage people from various traditions in dialogue. Many of the organisations involved in this development are concerned with issues of peace; justice and the environment (see Weller *et al*, 1997).

In his work on religions in the UK, as director of a multi-faith organisation, Paul Weller (and others 1997:23) included reflections that clearly express the amount of work and effort made in dialogue with different faiths. For example, Weller recorded that the United Nations Association Religious Advisory Committee has for many years produced briefing papers and other materials to support religious communities which assist in the observance of worship and vigils for United Nations Day. Also, Amnesty International's Religious Bodies Liaison Panel has held annual conferences at which material on religious and human rights have been produced. More importantly, from our point of view, this organisation has conducted arguments for human rights among world religions. On this account, it has sought and received the support of religious communities and leaders both nationally and internationally.

There have been, in Britain too; moves by public authorities to promote interfaith cooperation. One of the most significant has been the establishment, by the Department of Environment in 1992, of the Inner Cities Religious Council. This has a membership from the Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh communities and was designed to foster partnership between the government and faith communities in tackling urban social and economic problems. Its regional conferences have brought together people from different faith communities to explore ways in which they can work together, as well as with the local public agencies. Some local authorities, such as Birmingham Council, have also set up consultative machinery involving their local faith communities.

In fact, as the United Kingdom - like many other countries - grows more culturally and religiously diverse, concerns are sometimes expressed that the process is leading to the fragmentation of social unity (see Summer, 2005: Race Relations Report). These concerns express anxiety that alongside the strains imposed by economic change, there is erosion of the traditional sources of moral authority which underpin both civic and personal values. Of course, given the nature of a pluralistic society, agreement (unlikely to be reached) has to be sought for a common authority to which various religious groupings and individuals could look for guidance. In this, interest has centred on the extent to which such shared values can provide a sufficient degree of coherence in the public sphere such as Faruqui (in Siddiqui, 1997:55-65) would endorse.

In a global context, these issues have been explored and developed in the recent declaration of the World Parliament of World Religions ('Toward a Global Ethic') held in Chicago in 1996. The declaration affirms that there is "a minimum fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards and fundamental moral attitudes" among the religions (see Weller *et al*, 1997).

It further affirms that the principles of a global ethic - to which both religious people and humanists might be able to subscribe - are as follows: There should be

- i. no new global order without a new global ethic
- ii. a fundamental demand for every human being to be treated humanely
- iii. commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order
- iv. commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness
- v. commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women

Back in the UK, in the approach to the year 2000, the ecumenical Christian body, Churches Together in England (CTE), called for a wide ranging debate - involving people of all religions and none - about "common values", as people reflect on the changes that are hoped for in society. This was heeded in some measure, and the Baptist Section of the CTE itself was able to meet and release the following declaration in 1999:

We confess with sorrow that members of other faith communities have encountered a lack of welcome and respect, and even racism, from some British Churches.

We affirm our commitment to the long-standing Baptist principle of liberty of conscience and religious practice. And we call on our Churches to recognise the presence of other faith communities in their locality and to work with them for the achievement of economic, social and racial justice.

We reject approaches to evangelism which "target" members of other faith communities in ways which are clearly not loving and dishonouring to Christ. We endorse endeavours to witness to people of other faiths and none in culturally sensitive ways.

We believe that the integrity of worship of different faiths, including our own, must be respected and not compromised, whilst recognising that there are occasions when our common humanity requires us to stand alongside others. Interfaith gatherings, which meet specifically for worship, are therefore, ambiguous and inappropriate.

We repudiate the pressure from some quarters towards syncretism.

We invite our Churches to engage in sensitive evangelism that involves

- (a) A meaningful dialogue that listens as well as speaks
- (b) An authentic witness that testifies by actions as well as by proclamation to the love of Jesus Christ and salvation, which is to be found in him alone, since we believe that Jesus Christ is the unique revelation of God

As the new century approached, the quest for common values appeared likely to become an increasingly significant dimension of interfaith dialogue and relations in the UK. This was because the debate was seen as being crucially important to the development of a shared and stable framework for a plural society. Accordingly, the Interfaith Network Statement on 'Inter-religious relations in Britain' in 1991 (see Weller *et al*, 1997:54) reads:

Our religious traditions offer values and insights of great worth to society, and provide a framework of meaning within which individuals can interpret their experience... Both within and between our communities, there are significant differences in the ways in which we translate these values and ideals into ethical judgements concerning specific personal and social issues. But a recognition of the extent to which we share a range of common values and ideas can contribute to a wider sense of community in our society.

In addition, the Interfaith Network Code of Practice on 'Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs' provides a framework within which religious communities may find helpful and constructive ways of living and working together with mutual integrity for the positive benefit of all. The Code offers the following encouraging and strengthening briefs (see Weller *et al*, 1997:77):

A) As members of the human family, we show each other respect and courtesy. In our dealings with people of other faiths and beliefs, this means exercising goodwill and:

- (a) Respecting other people's freedom within the law to express their beliefs and convictions.
- (b) Learning to understand what others actually believe and value, and letting them express this in their own terms.
- (b) Respecting the convictions of others about food, dress and social etiquette and not behaving in ways which cause offence.
- (c) Recognising that all of us at times fall short of the ideas of our own traditions, and never comparing our own ideals with other people's practices.

- (d) Working to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict.
- (e) Always seeking to avoid violence in our relationships.

B) When we talk about matters of faith with one another, we need to do so with sensitivity, honesty and straightforwardness. This means (see Weller *et al*, 1997:78):

- (a) Recognising that listening as well as speaking is necessary for a genuine conversation.
- (b) Being honest about our beliefs and religious allegiances.
- (c) Not misrepresenting or disregarding other people's beliefs and practices.
- (d) Correcting misunderstanding or misrepresentation not only of our own but also of other faiths, whenever we come across them.
- (e) Being straightforward about our intentions.
- (f) Accepting that in formal interfaith meeting, there is a particular responsibility to ensure that the religious commitment of all those who are present will be respected.

C) All of us wanting others to understand and respect our views, we may realise that some people will also want to persuade others to join their faith. In a multi-faith society, where this is permitted, the attempt should always be characterised by self-restraint and a concern for the other's freedom and dignity. This means (see Weller *et al*, 1997:78):

- (a) Respecting another person's expressed wish to be left alone.
- (b) Avoiding imposing ourselves and our views on individuals or communities, who are in vulnerable situations in ways which exploit their vulnerabilities.
- (c) Being sensitive and courteous.
- (d) Avoiding violent language, threat, manipulation, improper inducements, or the misuse of any kind of power.
- (e) Respecting the right of others to disagree with us.

Weller and others (1997:69) state that the aim of the Interfaith Network – established in the UK in 1987 and now linking some eighty religious and educational organisations up and down the country and internationally - is “to advance public knowledge and mutual

understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of different faith communities in Britain, including an awareness both of their distinctive features and of their common ground and to promote good relations between persons of different religious faiths.”

It provides information and advice on interfaith matters and on establishing contact with religious communities in Britain. It holds regular national and regional meetings and has organised seminars and conferences on a variety of issues and projects including the quest for shared values in multi-faith relations, the role of the media in reporting on the religious life of Britain, planning, registration and other issues relating to places of worship in a multi-faith society.

The network also encourages wider participation of religious communities in British public life. It is a forum for information, exchange and encounter. Its goal is to promote mutual understanding, rather than to represent the views and positions of its member organisation to others. On occasions, however, its officers have issued statements which have a direct bearing on inter-religious relations in the UK (see Weller *et al*, 1997:80).

In 1993, it issued a short Code of Conduct on ‘Building good relations between people of different faiths and beliefs’ drafted by a multi-faith working group and endorsed by all its member organisations. It also produced a longer document entitled: Mission, Dialogue and Inter Religious Encounter. In 1995 translations of the Code were done in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu.

For all religions, the existence of other religious traditions raises many profound questions. At a practical level, living together in a multi-faith society means that communities need to develop positive ways to interact and cooperate. Therefore, for both theological/philosophical and practical reasons, faith communities in the UK have been giving increasing attention to relationship with people belonging to other religious traditions.

For example, the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland has within it a Commission for the Interfaith Relations, and a number of its member churches have their own committees which focus on interfaith issues. Some of these bodies are concerned with particular bilateral relations, for example, as with Roman Catholic–Jewish relations committee. These various bodies have produced material on issues that arise for Christians understanding in a multi-faith society with a historically Christian background.

The Week of Prayer for World Peace is an annual event that seeks to engage people of all religious traditions in common prayer for peace. It was initiated in 1974, and was observed during the week in October which precedes One World Week. One World Week itself is sponsored by the Christian churches and by developmental agencies, although people of other religious traditions also participate in it, especially at local level. Specifically, religious events are organised across the UK in connection with both weeks.

With such efforts being made to build good relations between faiths, there is hope that through dialogue the way would be paved to better understand how to deal with the challenges facing mission in a pluralistic society. The optimism of Faruqui whose work inspired these movements is therefore not forlorn, as we now proceed to see what Ariaraja has to offer.

4.5 The WCC work of Ariaraja

As the WCC's Director of Dialogue in the august moments of the Council's mission and dialogue debate, Wesley Ariaraja (1985:9) asked for a clear description of the problems facing mission and dialogue. He himself raised the questions:

- (i) was dialogue seen as opposing mission?
- (ii) was dialogue seen as questioning mission?

Commenting on the Nairobi Conference (1975), Ariaraja (1995:12) remarked that many traditional theologians saw dialogue as something that shook the theological foundations of the Church. It not only challenged traditional Christology and Missiology, it threatened the very *raison d'être* of the Church for engaging in mission and dealing with other faiths and non-faiths.

Writing on the impact of inter-religious dialogue on the ecumenical movement, Ariaraja (1995:2) made bold to say that there have been some dramatic changes that have been reached in discussions on mission and dialogue. Accordingly, he points out the following:

A) The first breakthrough came when in 1956 impetus was given to the need to continue the inconclusive and deeply divisive debate of Tambaran (1938) over Kraemer's preparatory work on the Christian message in a non-Christian world. Readers the world over were asked to pick up a study project centred on 'the Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men'. In doing so, Davanadua (see Ariaraja, 1995:13), director of the study centre in Bangalore decided that a Christian discussion of the living faiths must be informed by real encounters with persons of other faith traditions. Ariarajah considers this remarkable, considering that Devanadua was primarily interested in nation-building in post-colonial India.

This was an important landmark in the history of mission and dialogue because it established the principle that people of non-Christian faiths should no longer be the object of Christian discussion, but partners in conversations. Thus, the concept of 'dialogue' was truly born, and it was to make a decisive impact on mission within the ecumenical context.

B) The next landmark occurred with the confidence created by the actual encounter with people of other faiths. It led to a plea from Samartha (see Ariajah 1995:73) for a "post-Kraemer theology of mission" that would no longer see people of other faiths as non-Christians, but as people who lived by faith convictions of their own. The passion with which this new view was held was reflected in an article Samartha wrote in the *Indian Journal of Theology*, which has been referred to by Clark (1980:45; see Ariarajah, 1995:6) as Samartha's incidental and "final epitaph on Kraemer".

C) With the passing away of Kraemer, the exclusivist era (see Chapter One) in the history of mission and dialogue had ended. It was an era which, at its height, was marked by aggressive certainty, unbounded enthusiasm, directional confidence and an assured hope for the coming harvest. There is no doubt that Kraemer dominated the

scene of that era and that - with his massive scholarship and real concern for the mission of the Church – he upheld many drooping spirits on mission boards (see Ariarajah, 1995:7).

Ariarajah (1995:5), however, was quick to see through the problem for dialogue. It was bigger, he suggests, than any harm to it which an exclusivist thinker or an evangelical preacher could inflict. It was compounded in a lack of a theology of dialogue capable of helping local churches and ordinary Christians deal with living in a pluralistic society. The need for such a theology became, he argued, more and more noticeable as interfaith dialogue became more and more widespread as an activity.

Ariarajah (1995:10) then commendably relates this lack of a theology of dialogue for the local churches to the fact that – as already seen – at the Nairobi Conference (1975) Christian traditionalists found dialogue threatening to the theological foundations of the Church. Revisiting that debate, he underscored the point that the fears and anxieties then expressed by traditionalists are the real reasons why local churches have no means of handling a “seeking community with people of other faiths”.

Ariarajah (1995:21) further devotes space and time to considering the roots of the controversy over dialogue at the Nairobi Conference (1975). Believing it was not just prompted by traditionalists for their own sake, he notes that its roots lie deep in the Christian affirmation that there is 'one' Lord and 'one' faith, and that this emphasis on 'one' easily became a claim of 'only' in the hands of missionaries. Precipitating this, as a rather one-sided Protestant interpretation of the person and work of Christ, he says categorically that this is how other world faiths came to be reduced to a vast and endless mission field.

As to whether Orthodox and Catholic Christianity could have fared any better with the development of a theology of dialogue to respond to the challenges of a pluralist society, Ariarajah (1995:22) seems unconvinced. However, he appears to suggest that those who have followed the development of the dialogue debate with the WCC would know that in

the period following Nairobi (1975) and Vancouver (1983) there have been positive attempts at settling the debate, discountenancing denominational positions.

It is useful to hear from a non-committed independent source at this critical stage in the study.

4.6 A WCC-free contribution (Visser Thooft)

Up till now, Thooft's (1974:30) third question (see section 3.4) has not been featured. He asked: Should Christians replace mission as it has been practised by a dialogue with other faiths?

In fairness, Thooft (1974) was concentrating on ecumenism (the forging of unity of purpose and mission between churches which have come together) rather than – strictly speaking – on mission and dialogue, asking – as he did – whether the ecumenical movement has a future. But within this focus, significant traces of much appraised material on dialogue could be detected. Within the pulse of the ecumenical debate, he himself was able to discern and contribute to the increasing impact that religious dialogue and its quest were having on the train of thought being voiced. They were the sources of yet more difficult, painful and deeply divisive issues to the churches in the ecumenical movement and to their concern for mission.

Thooft (1974) further recognised that the emergence of inter-religious dialogue impacted – to varying degrees – on the different partners in the ecumenical movement. The Roman Catholic Church, for its part, was able during and after the Second Vatican Council to develop teachings and engage in activities that promoted the capacity of its churches to respond to the challenges of a multi-religious society. The Protestant Churches, for the most part (see Thooft, 1974:67), sought after further clarifications of the points at issue through their scholars. So, the Presbyterian writer, Cantwell-Smith (1983:41), for instance, was most creatively and courageously insistent on the need for clear definitions and explanations of terms (e.g., inter-religious, interfaith) used to avoid confusion. In the current study, 'inter-religious' and 'interfaith' are used interchangeably.

Thooft (1974:33) was also specifically concerned with the impact of interfaith dialogue on mission. This was a natural progression by him from concern for the ecumenical movement to concern for mission, recalling that the ecumenical movement itself had actually emerged in 1910 out of a sense of urgency for a united approach to world mission (see Chapter One). It was the conviction then that the “decisive hour of Christian mission” had come that impelled J.R. Mott to convene the World Mission Conference of that year with the primary purpose of pulling resources and developing a common strategy for the “world conquest” for Christ. Ariarajah (1995:3) – to revert to him *a fortiori* - therefore concluded that the task of “taking the gospel to all the regions of the world” was seen to be of such importance as to transcend any theological or confessional differences Christians had. Little was it known that the centrifugal task of talking with non-Christians was yet to come.

The problem with interfaith dialogue as a tool for mission which caught the concern of Thooft (1974:33) was what Ariarajah also perceived and succinctly expressed as follows: that whereas with interfaith dialogue people with other faiths and non-faiths are subjects/partners in matters of faith and belief, with mission they are supposed to be objects of Christian outreach.

One could, of course, systematically question Thooft's failure to see – as we have seen earlier in this study – that if confederate churches in the ecumenical movement were unable to talk among themselves well enough to resolve their differences over the objective of mission, it would be most unlikely that they could talk with other faith groups to resolve differences with a view either to converting them or to co-existing happily alongside them as co-faith communities.

Further evidence of the failure that dialogue within Christianity has inadvertently undergone is not now admissible – as we have seen - in the stand off between interest groups over whether dialogue with people of other faiths fits with the purpose of mission. It is seen in the failure of interest groups to talk themselves into coming together where this has been proposed. In this scenario, the proposal is the 'thesis', the failure to talk and come together the 'antithesis'; there being no 'synthesis' with no possibility of another agreement through conversation looming in sight. Thus, although the foundations for the International

Mission Council were talked through and accepted in 1910 (the thesis), they were rejected in 1948 with the missionary movement's decision to stay out of the WCC when the 'Faith and Order' and 'Life and Work' groups came together to form the World Council (the antithesis). That Thooft (1997) did not see that no synthesis to this situation was imminent because of the failure in inter-Christian dialogue is doubtless the best indication of how short-sighted even the most erudite of minds could be over the tricky matter of dialogue.

That there were voices, too, from the very beginning that called for a different approach – from that of the deeply-held convictions on mission which motivated the early ecumenical entrepreneurs – was not advanced by Thooft (1974). Easily, conversations were not held with these voices to make a difference. Hence, as they were soon marginalised and had little impact on the primary thrust of winning the world for Christ, they revolted. In other words, there was no real 'dialogue about dialogue', all because mission was seen as a matter for the internal discussion of the Church and her missionary arm over which there could not possibly be disagreement.

4.7 Other WCC-free crucibles (O'Sullivan, Scherer and Bevans)

It is legitimate, as a result of what is derived from Thooft's work, to seek further insights from other independent contributors in the field. Here we have chosen to look at the work of O'Sullivan (1991) and of Scherer and Bevans (1995), as they seek to find a synthesis by considering why there should be dialogue and what obstacles there are to successful dialogue, respectively. Can there be synthesis with them?

Answering the question: 'why dialogue?' O'Sullivan (1991:31) made four salient points as follows:

A) Dialogue is a necessity for the powerless, as a means of empowerment. It enables the disadvantaged party to negotiate from a position of strength. It follows also that dialogue induces the advantaged to join in a process of contrivance in which they do not seek to dominate or pressurise the disadvantaged. This process of divesting itself of power, and of powerlessness becoming power, is manifested in the life and person of Jesus.

In the New Testament, the Epistle to the Hebrews sums up this element about Jesus by saying that 'although he was a son, he learnt obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.' (Heb. 2:9-11) Born in a humble background, he was empowered to engage the religious authorities of his day in discourse on equal footing, and though he was God - St Paul affirms - he humbled himself.

B) Dialogue is necessary as a means of keeping conversation going even if there has been an impasse. In this sense, it is a useful way both of toning down high expectations about results as well as of keeping hope alive. In this sense, too, dialogue is like prayer in which life is led in hope, whether or not there is clear confirmation that the prayer is answered.

In the New Testament, perhaps the best justification for projected dialogue, as for perpetual prayer, is the parable of the persistent woman in Luke's Gospel. Although the odds were staked against her – the judge being so unjust – her persistency paid off, the lesson being that if the contending parties keep knocking or keep talking there will be dividends to gain in the end. (Luke 18:1-8)

C) Dialogue is necessary to engender an understanding of oneself, of one's values, attitudes and prejudices. Without this inner or intra dialogue and centredness, dialogue with others is extremely difficult because one contender will be less able to convey the right essence of himself or herself to the other party. Also, growth in self-knowledge is not only a prerequisite but also a consequence of dialogue in that as the participant learns about the other, his or her own awareness of himself or herself becomes more activated. It is part of the wider requirement needed in order to understand the other party and to understand the situation in which dialogue is taking place.

D) There is historical, if not scriptural, support for this view in the very way the history of the world has moved. The more cultures have learnt about other cultures and civilisations, the more they have tended to understand and appreciate their own. At the same time, it could be said that the corollary is also true, namely, the more

cultures know about themselves, the more they appreciate value in others.

E) Dialogue is necessary if there is to be a genuine sharing of life and the world's resources. More often than not, this involves sharing poverty, insecurity, and a search for justice and liberation. In other situations, it would also involve sharing in richness, security and a search for happiness and freedom of expression. This kind of outcome and outreach frequently brings its own rewards: a deeper awareness of the bonds of humanness and humaneness, a movement towards the unity of all women and men, and – in consequence - a deepening of faith and a liberation from ghetto mentality.

It needs to be said, however, that prejudices, suspicions and biases stand in the way of this noble ideal. It is not easy for people to give up deeply held views and traditions especially in the sphere of religion. Without openness and willingness to listen in order to understand, it will be difficult for dialogue opportunities to occur.

Indeed, other advocates for dialogue like Ariarajah (1995), Eck (1985) and Knitter (1984) always start with the ideals such as are proposed by O'Sullivan (1991). But such ideals in themselves are not enough to conceal the fact that demography is full of examples of regimes where the sort of cooperation envisaged in the ideals is forbidden. In some Islamic countries in the Middle East and Africa, people are not allowed to practise their faith if they are not Muslims. A single example will be adequately illustrative of this situation.

In the Islamic Republic of Mauritania in Saharan Africa with a population of 2.3 million, governance is solely by Sharia Law. All citizens are Sunni Muslims by law and all visiting non-Muslims are forbidden to enter Muslim places of worship. As a result there are no local non-Muslims, and Christian expatriates are few.

This then is a useful point at which to consider obstacles to dialogue.

As authors who were primarily concerned with finding new directions in mission and evangelism, Scherer and Bevans (1995:81), are surprisingly versatile in their attempt to grapple with obstacles to dialogue as follows:

- Insufficient grounding in one's own faith.
- Insufficient knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of other religions, leading to a lack of appreciation for their significance and even at times to misrepresentation.
- Cultural differences, arising from different levels of instruction, or from the use of different languages.
- Socio-political factors or some burdens of the past.
- Wrong understanding of the meaning of terms such as conversion, baptism and dialogue.
- Self-sufficiency, lack of openness leading to defensive or aggressive attitudes.
- A lack of conviction with regard to the value of inter-religious dialogue, which some may see as a task reserved to specialists and others as a sign of weakness or even betrayal of the faith.
- Suspicion about the other party's motive in dialogue.
- A polemical spirit when expressing religious convictions.
- Intolerance, which is often aggravated by association with political, economical, racial and ethnic factors; a lack of reciprocity in dialogue, which can lead to frustration.
- Certain features of the present religious climate, e.g., growing materialism, religious indifference, and the multiplication of religious sects, which creates confusion and raises new problems.

With respect to the above, we may make the following points as an evaluation:

A) Many of these obstacles arise from a lack of understanding of the true nature and goals of inter-religious dialogue. These need therefore to be constantly explained and patiently listened to.

B) The Church's commitment to dialogue is not supposed to be dependent on success in achieving mutual understanding. It should flow from the initiative that God took in entering into a dialogue with humankind and from the example of Jesus Christ whose

life, death and resurrection gave to that dialogue its ultimate expression.

C) Obstacles, though real, should not lead to an underestimation of the blessings of dialogue or to a bid to overlook the results already achieved. There has been a growth in mutual understanding and in active cooperation between contending parties. Dialogue has had a positive impact on the Church itself. Other religions have also been led through dialogue to renewal, great openness, and less inhibition and insularity among her members. Inter-religious dialogue has made it possible for the Church to share gospel values with others. How far could this have been taken with millennium celebrations?

4.8 Dialogue and millennium celebrations

Among the moves which the WCC felt desirable to make prior to the millennium was the establishment of a conciliar process. This was to develop already-established interactions of various degrees of partial fellowship comprehensively and holistically, taking forward – for example - the following bilateral agreements between:

- the Church of England and the Nordic Lutheran Churches (including the German Churches)
- (ii) the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Churches (on the doctrine of justification).
- (iii) the Lutheran Churches and the United Reformed Churches (in full communion since 1973)
- (iii) the Lutheran Churches and the Methodist Churches (in the Luxembourg Concord 1976)

It is important to note that although these bilateral dialogues were taking place, the multilateral dialogue that started at the beginning of this century also continued within the context of the WCC and especially in relation to the work of its Commission on Faith and Order. The ecumenical convergence texts on “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry”, as well as the ecumenical explication of the apostolic faith as confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381), are major fruits of this work which have been widely acknowledged. Both texts clearly show that bilateral and multilateral dialogues are inter-

related and must not be played off against one another.

Another desirable move was made in relation to the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. This took the form of preliminary studies in the context of some bilateral dialogues, as between:

- (i) Roman Catholics and Lutherans in the United States.
- (ii) The Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion at an international level.

In his 1995 encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*, Pope John Paul II called on the leaders and theologians of other Churches to engage with him in “a patient and fraternal dialogue” about a new understanding of the papal office which would take account of the new ecumenical situation, yet ensure that the principles of primacy were retained. For the Roman Catholic Church what is at stake here is the question whether an ecumenical interpretation and reception of the decision of two Vatican Councils is possible.

Factually, the ecumenical dialogue was developing nationally more than either the multilateral or bilateral dialogue exhibited. There was, as the millennium drew closer, much more participation by churches in the dialogue of their national bodies than was revealed by the work of regional or global ecumenism. As a result, there is in fact much more Church fellowship, for example, between the churches of the Reformation than there had been a quarter of a century before the end of the millennium. Furthermore, in Europe more than ninety Churches have officially confirmed their participation within the Luxembourg Concord, affirming that they are in full communion with one another.

It is envisaged that for this dialogic process to continue beyond the millennium four large traditional Christian families are to be involved in any reordering:

- (a) the Orthodox Churches of the Eastern (Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian) traditions,
- (b) the Roman Catholic Church,
- (c) the Protestant Churches including the immediate pre- and post-Reformation Churches, and
- (d) the Churches represented in the Evangelical-Pentecostal tradition.

While this fourth, and most recent, grouping of churches has certainly emerged from the

Protestant tradition, they have taken on their own character to such a degree as to make it necessary for them to be considered in their own right.

The significant preparations of the Roman Catholic Church towards the millennium celebration were channeled through the Great Jubilee Central Committee of its Ecumenical Commission. From this, Apostolic Letters (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*) were sent in October 1996 to national committees of regional churches (e.g., Graz, Hong Kong, Harare); these [letters or churches?] envisaged the assembling of pan-Christian meetings focusing on Jesus Christ and making specific proposals for celebrations. They encouraged local churches to discuss the life and witness of persons who could - through their contextual experience – be appropriately recognised as 'martyrs', without entering into a debate on 'martyrdom', but discovering together the significance and power of committed or dedicated lives transformed through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

Preliminary studies towards the millennium celebrations were proposed in 1998 on various themes, some of which were explored during the WCC's Canberra Assembly in 1991. For our purpose, the two most essential of the themes on mission and dialogue are:

- (a) Spirit of Truth: Set Us Free (as an affirmation that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of the new evangelisation), and
- (b) Spirit of Unity: Reconcile Your People (as a call to repentance for our disunity, and as an ecclesiological reflection on the Holy Spirit who encourages dialogue and gives unity in diversity).

4.9 Summary and projected analysis

The chapter was introduced with a restatement of its problem, objective and methodology, and with a briefing of the sub-headings under which its contents would be discussed: WCC New Delhi Assembly, WCC Guidelines on Bilateral Dialogue, WCC Guidelines on Multilateral Dialogue, WCC-commission work of Ariaraja, WCC-free work of Visser Thooft, Other WCC-independent crucibles, Dialogue and Millennium Celebrations.

- The problem is that dialogue and mission appear to some Evangelical Christians to be

diametrically opposed. How could dialogue work with mission to face the challenges posed by pluralism with which mission is also diametrically opposed?

- The objective is to resolve this problem by answering the question asked. It is looked at through the eyes of the global ecumenical experience of the WCC, supplemented – where necessary – by that of regional ecumenical bodies, in significant regard to inter-church and interfaith relations.
- The methodology through which the objective is achieved is by an examination of the WCC New Delhi Report and the BCC communiqués, with the help of the contributions of official and independent scholarship, covering a wide-ranging set of views.

4.9.1 Official WCC Documentary Evidence

As almost all of these reports deal largely with mission, the only one adduced here – and that with a technicality – is the New Delhi Report (1961) and its sequels with the Wheaton/Illinois Report (1966), the Berlin Report (also 1966), and the national BCC communiqué on dialogue. Reference is made in the process to the Uppsala Report (1968) which featured prominently under 'mission' in Section 3.1. The main thrust of the New Delhi Report was its pragmatism, symptomatic of dialogue not in words but in action, bringing - as it did - disparate and dispirited elements together from opposing church groups. Besides this, it was shown that dialogue is not as injurious to mission as is promoting the self-interest of one's own church objectives. The questionnaire provided a prediction which will be helpful in the analysis of field data in Chapter Five, namely, that there is vigorous opposition to dialogue among Evangelical Church leaders which has slipped down to their membership. It also gave this formula:

$$M = S - D \times E - \text{ChU/ChrU.}$$

This is a formula that I invented.

When transposed, this formula provides a most insightful explanation regarding Evangelical thinking on dialogue: 'Mission' equals 'Soteriology' (*the gaining of salvation by those to whom the word is preached*) minus (*without/discountenancing*) 'dialogue', multiplied (*increased*) by 'Evangelisation' minus (*without/discountenancing*) 'Church Union/Christian Unity' (*any upset this might cause for attempts to make the Churches one*

or to bring Christians together). The place of dialogue in the equation is infinitely inferior, and the question remains: how could the formula be transformed?

4.9.2 Scholarly Contribution

Only with scholarship (both attached and unattached) is there an argument in favour of revisiting dialogue and transforming the formula.

A) This happened with the astuteness of the WCC to have commissioned two Muslim scholars with the task. They carried out studies of the situations for bilateral dialogue between Christianity and Islam and multilateral dialogue which gave more or less similar indications, namely, that on dialogue, Evangelicals – rather unfavourably to the conclusions of the last chapter of this study (see section 3.8 above) – were not even agreeing to disagree; that they had a soft spot for fundamentalist tendencies in the USA; that this is the background against which Muslim apprehension and other-faith mistrust is to be understood; and that dialogue therefore initiated in the West – although with conciliar and ecumenical authority - does not have magisterial authority.

Other conciliar consultations reported in the process by the work of the commissioned scholars are:

- (i) the Broumana/Lebanon Report (1966) which raised the questions - 'Do the Muslims worship the same God as Christians?' 'Does God in some way work within all religions?'
- (ii) the Colombo Conference (1982) which shifted focus from the international to the national level, as it tried to decide how to establish the link between Christian 'mission to' and 'dialogue with' non-Christians.
- (iii) the Barnabas Consultation (1998) which reported on the disadvantages that Christians experience in Islamic countries with intolerant regimes.
- (iv) the Wheaton/Illinois and Berlin Consultations (1966).
- (v) the prominent Uppsala Consultation (1968) at which Evangelicals vigorously opposed dialogue.
- (vi) the Cartigny/Switzerland Consultation (1969) which emerged with a threefold aim in bilateral Christian/Muslim dialogue: mutual respect, renewed spirituality,

acceptance of common responsibilities.

(vii) the Salzburg Consultation (1978) at which it was revealed that for some Evangelicals God's plan for salvation in which there might be a place for Islam was anathema.

(viii) the New Delhi Consultation (1961) which contrasted with Uppsala on the relationship of dialogue to mission: for whereas evangelically at New Delhi dialogue was a useful means for mission, at Uppsala it became imperatively an instrument for conversion.

B) With the independent scholars, agreement with the official researchers could not have been more precise. The question: 'should mission be replaced by dialogue?' was answered with a categorical 'yes' because of the impact dialogue would have in interfaith relations which were eventuating everywhere. They raised the rhetorical question: 'If churches were failing to agree among themselves, how could they agree with others?' In the mission debate, they noted that while a 'thesis' and an 'antithesis' have already occurred through dialogue, there is as yet no sign of a 'synthesis' taking place. Detecting that the search for a synthesis may be difficult, they also noted that there are therefore many obstacles to dialogue.

Both sets of scholars - except for occasional glimpses recalling the unique claims of a faith for helpful awareness about them - did not attempt to deal exhaustively with the beliefs and practices of world religions. Nor did they attempt to argue doctrinally for the veracity of any faith, or to judge their values. As with the purpose of this study, these aspects were assumed. They simply discussed what they discovered about dialogue and spelled out what it should involve and what approaches to it are best in a pluralist society.

The contributors indicate various ways in which interfaith dialogue itself impacted on the debate. Hence, within two years of the Nairobi Assembly, the WCC Guidelines on Dialogue were drawn, and people became increasingly aware that the churches did not have a theology of dialogue. Also, it became clearer that there is no room for dialogue in some Islamic countries (like Mauritania) with an exclusivist society, in which only conversion to Islam of infidels (including Christians) would do.

The scholars also advocate experiential dialogue in which each partner in a dialogue enters into the experience of the other in an effort to grasp that experience from within, after the pattern set at the Lausanne Consultation (1974). In this way, religious people will not judge each other unduly from the comfort of their own knowledge and thinking. This parallels the ability of some Christians to be self-critical which also gave hope to non-Christians.

The scholars also saw through the difficulty of the relationship between dialogue and mission as one in which the child (dialogue) has never been free from the mother (mission). With mission, other faiths are objects for conversion; with dialogue they are subjects, not so much for discussion, but to converse with (Samartha, Thooft). The reality is that dialogue is the 'open sesame' for other voices that have a relevant say and participation in the pluralistic world.

The scholars further furnished copious examples of dialogue with interfaith relations, operated by both religious and secular non-governmental and statutory organisations. They revealed very many happenings of positive outlook in this area through an extensive interfaith network, showing how religious communities can find helpful and constructive ways of living and working together for the positive benefit of all, with mutual integrity.

4.9.3 *Summative Conclusion*

This is reached on the objective of the chapter by revisiting the three technical and defining features of the study: the Central Theoretical Argument, the formulated definition of dialogue, and the instituted theological paradigms (pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism).

4.9.3.1 *The Central Theoretical Argument*

The impression that Evangelical churches have not generally responded adequately well to the challenges facing mission in a pluralist society - which was waiting for more information from this chapter - can now be confirmed. Over and over again, it has been seen that this group of churches is being called to respond more and positively to meaningful dialogue and to a wider understanding of mission.

It is also confirmed that it is because of this failure of Evangelical churches to respond

positively to dialogue that – twinned as they are – 'mission and dialogue' appear to be diametrically opposed to each other. Time and time again, it is suggested that they are not so opposed, but are related – as one analogy puts it – as mother is to a child who has not yet been weaned.

It is further confirmed that with the failure of Evangelicals to accept dialogue - when it was promoted at the WCC - to assist with the problem of presenting mission in a pluralist world, a 'crisis' was caused, just as a 'scandal' was caused with the introduction of dialogue by Liberals. The 'crisis' meant a continued acrimonious debate between left and right to the point where it might have been possible for sections of the WCC to be marooned away in the rift that occurred. The 'scandal' meant that mission had become a challenge to itself about which dialogue itself was unable to do anything.

Now and again, it is shown – as in Chapter Three with unreceived and untutored African spirituality and intelligence - that this (crisis/scandal permutation) ought not to have been the case. For even interfaith relations in the givenness of the pluralist context were impacting on dialogue (and mission), and mission is not a matter over which there should be disagreement.

4.9.3.2 The formulated definition of dialogue revisited

Has dialogue – in facing challenges in a plural society - lived up to its expectation?

A) Literally, defined 'as a discourse or conversation, orally or in writing or by both, to resolve a problem' (see 2.5 above), it appears it has in some ways but not in others.

When a Muslim contributor, commissioned by the WCC in 1996 to look at multilateral dialogue, felt disappointment at a Protestant theologian for subjugating being self-critical as a Christian to the ability to receive Christ, he wrote to him and got a reply which he said renewed his 'optimism' (see 4.3 above).

Nevertheless, a synthesis with respect to agreement and disagreement over mission could not be found in inter-church dialogue despite the fact that interfaith dialogues were already taking place and plans for a common celebration of the new millennium

were well under way.

B) Biblically, dialogue does appear more explicitly in Matthew's Gospel as a way of ultimately resolving disputes through the Church. But it also seems that Jesus did contemplate the possibility that even dialogue might not work and that problems might have to be unresolved, in which case the offending party will remain accursed.

Ironically, here it is the Church itself that is defaulting on dialogue, since the offending party – the Evangelical Church – is very much part of its universal manifestation and operation within the global conciliar fellowship of the WCC. Consultation after consultation of the WCC and its working parties and regional assemblies have failed to reach an agreement over 'dialogue about dialogue', not to mention 'dialogue about mission' or 'dialogue about/with other faiths'. As an instance of the reason for this debacle, it is reported that it was the Evangelical churches that put the Colombo Conference (1982) under pressure to redefine the relationship of dialogue to mission in hitherto unacceptable ways. In this, it can be understood why it is reported that the gap between Evangelical Christians and Muslims has widened.

C) Historically, dialogue was an essential way of resolving conflicts within the Church and in the world in general. Christian apologists used it in the first five centuries of Christendom by letters to convince sceptics, and they even stressed the need for clear language in the dialogic process, comparable to the same quest which in modern times has come from Western and Eastern Christian scholars of the Protestant tradition.

Nor was dialogue seen as a one-way process, with only one possible outcome. It called for much openness, and the Church fathers led this campaign by the way in which they – Christian apologists though they were – spoke in favour of freedom of religion. Hence, it is not right to suggest that dialogue is a child of secularisation; though it is noticeable that it is the same proponent who also maintains that dialogue involves readiness to change as well as to influence others.

The Evangelically-inspired dialogues which require dialogue to be an instrument for conversion are by no means true to its historical roots but are simply halfway houses of the pre-Lausanne (1981) disposition. Dialogue cannot be used to force or compel people into accepting the gospel as would be possible in an exclusivist situation (for example in Mauritania or any other intolerant Islamic state or a totalitarian regime, not in Britain or any other democratic state even with a singular ethos in the global village).

Nor then is dialogue faring well if faiths or faith groups are suspicious of it simply because it is initiated by another faith. It is not justifiable then for it to be seen as having a hidden agenda or an ulterior motive and as having come from desperation because of the failure of mission. It does require to be taken in good faith as a well-meaning phenomenon and with a high degree of blind trust. It is by no means a threat to the Evangelical view of mission as was felt at Nairobi (1975). It is not a strategy for conversions to Christianity, as Muslims, in particular, have often felt. It is bid for a discussion, a conversation, requiring attention and serious consideration.

D) Scholastically, the WCC was objective enough to appoint two Christian and two Muslim scholars to study and report on interfaith dialogue. The Islamic authors vented the feelings of aggrieved Muslims on Christians and showed why they did not trust Christian-initiated dialogue. It is a product of Western secularism and an 'unweaned' child of Christian mission. The Christian writers called for a real dialogue with people of other faiths on their terms and dealt with the vexing question of whether interfaith dialogue was a challenge to Christian mission. It is not, and both sets of authors remained cautiously optimistic about what the dialogic process could achieve.

Freelance contributors were even more optimistic. On whether dialogue should replace mission, the answer was a definite 'No'. This is because the difference between mission and dialogue is as profound as follows: whereas with dialogue non-Christians are subjects and partners, with mission they are objects and targets. In similar vein, a team of three scholars saw dialogue as useful for the powerless, and

creative of a deeper appreciation of one's own culture. With versatility, they delineated several obstacles to dialogue, of which perhaps the three most severe and worthy of note are: suspicion of the other party's motives and intentions, superiority/inferiority complexes, and intolerance.

4.9.3.3 *The theological paradigms*

Instituted within the scholastic input of Chapter Two, dialogue is considered as falling within the inclusivist paradigm which affirms that there is a salvific presence of God in all religions, but with Christianity remaining definitive as God's authoritative revelation.

Does the evidence presented in this chapter stand up to this proposition? It is determinable on the information adduced here that easily dialogue is neither exclusivist nor pluralist for most churchmen, Evangelical and Liberal Ecumenist. Their ideology more akin to exclusivism than to anything else, only moderate Evangelicals show interest in dialogue, and this with a distorted goal - a view to converting outright the other party/parties. Conservative Evangelicals do not even go so far as to contemplate any involvement in dialogue.

It is precisely for this reason that other faiths, Islam in particular, could be seen to entertain doubts as to the trustworthiness of dialogue, and whether it is of benefit to them. Indeed, it took the work of another WCC-commissioned scholar (Samartha) to uncover that controversy over dialogue is deeply rooted in the conservative Evangelical (Protestant) attitude to it. Couched in the truly evangelical affirmation of there being one Lord in Christ, all other faiths became a vast mission field. Thus, the plea came again and again for practitioners of other faiths not to be seen as non-Christians but as believers in their own right.

If that wrote the epitaph of a premier exclusivist, it almost certainly gave dialogue - as championed by Liberals at Tambaran (1938) - a real opportunity to have 'come of age' and to live up to its name, even though by then the Roman Catholics and Orthodox Churches had still not spoken on the issue. When the Roman Catholics did indeed speak at the end of Vatican II (1968), they did so with a showing forth of the pure inclusivist intention to respond actively to the conversational and religious needs of a multicultural society.

Has the chapter then achieved its objective of resolving the problem of how dialogue could work with mission in the face of the challenges of a plural society? The answer seems to be positively so, the information sources having been used to show that dialogue does not replace or undermine mission but supplements it in what would have been a no-go area. In short, there is every indication that the negative formula ($M = S - D \times E - ChU/ChrU$) which first emerged in section 4.9 could indeed be positively transformed. As to precisely how the twins would together stand in meeting the challenges of the pluralist society, only the next chapter will tell.

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: PLURALISM REVISITED

CASE STUDIES AND FIELD WORK

In the last two chapters, it has been descriptively and 'pre-emptively' shown that as mission (Chapter Three) and dialogue (Chapter Four) are enormously and individually challenged in a pluralist context, they need each other if the challenges are to be logically and effectively met. In this penultimate chapter, it only now remains to see - from field research and case studies – how mission and dialogue could indeed work together given the multi-dimensional nature of the challenges they face in a multicultural setting.

The case studies are extracted from existing studies and are used as studies of 'control' groups to throw light on the problem debate. The field research is qualitatively done based on methods suggested by the ethnographers, Hammersly and Atkinson (1983). Their methods are most appropriate, given the degree of personal involvement in the problem debate (see section 1.2) when in the mission field in West African and as church ministers. The London-based survey - small but significant – was carried out among three major Christian denominations (Roman Catholics, Church of England, Methodists) and the two main Muslim divisions (Sunni and Shiite). Questionnaires (see Appendices 5 and 6) sampled across age, gender, social and ethnic backgrounds to achieve a clear understanding as to what part these factors play in modifying group understanding of and attitudes to mission and dialogue. An equal number of questionnaires (25 per group) was given to each of the Christian and Muslim sub-groups, for which the returns were as follows:

CHRISTIANS		MUSLIMS	
Roman Catholics	14	Sunnis	10
Church of England	12	Shiites	6
Methodists	8	Other	2

No significance is vested in the number of returns per group, and no league-table assessment is necessary. Return and recollection provisions varied, and these in themselves may be explanatory of the scales of returns, among other things such as personal interest and/or circumstances of the questionnaire receivers.

The case applications act as studies of 'ethnographic' communities with significant bearing

on our analysis. They are strategically-introduced 'control groups' focusing only on three ethnographic situations:

1. The Muslim communities (both Sunni and Shiite) which offers a clear opportunity to consider bilateral relations with Christians, within a society of multilaterally-related communities.
2. The Baptist Church which has a distinctively fundamentalist approach to mission to the virtual exclusion of dialogue, in a pluralist society.
3. Two non-pluralist societies depicting (1) an African Muslim community offering an exclusivist Islamic model, and (2) a European Christian community offering a non-Islamic exclusivist model.

In the presentation of data and analysis, there is some attempt to stratify primary information in figures and percentage. But this gives way – in a qualitative study – for the most part to a configuration of results in summative and descriptive/prosaic form.

The cluster headings under which the summary of results and reporting now proceeds are:

- (a) Case Study: Bilateral relations in a pluralist situation (Christians and Muslims)
- (b) Case Study: Unilateral focus in a pluralist situation (The Baptist Church)
- (c) Case Study: Unilateral focus in singular situations (in Europe and in Africa)
- (d) Field Study: Analytical basis
- (e) Field Study: Christians
- (f) Field Study: Muslims
- (g) Field Study: Interviews of people with no-faith

5.1 Case Studies: Bilateral relations in a pluralist situation (Christians and Muslims)

As this study has a global frame of reference, it will be also appropriate to take seriously the multicultural nature of Britain and of London in particular to which it makes special reference. Here, the objective is to grapple with Islam's bilateral relations with Western civilisation and Christianity in multicultural Britain. It is important also to distinguish carefully between this section and Section 4.2 where Christian/Muslim relations are considered specifically with regard to 'dialogue'. The object here is to examine this relationship in its wider context, which includes considering how the designated religions

interrelate in matters of social, educational and political concerns.

The *Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity in Britain* (ISIC) in Plaistow, London - in its bulletin of June/July 1966 - published an article clarifying the *Sitz im Leben* of Islam in Britain. The article drew attention to the considerable challenge posed by Islam to the United Kingdom (UK) and especially to her Judaeo-Christian heritage. It shows the following goals as expressed intentions of Islam:

- that the UK should be one of Islam's key missionary targets in Europe.
- that Islam's goal should be to change the country's institutions and convert its people.

By way of demographic information on Islam in Britain, the ISIC Report (1996:5) could not be clearer. There has been a Muslim presence in the UK since the early nineteenth century, but the Muslim community only began to increase significantly in the 1950s and 1960s with the arrival of large numbers of workers from the Indian sub-continent. As about half the Muslim population in 1996 were born in the UK - and because there are Muslims from other countries who do not all speak Arabic or the same language - the Report noted an increasing tendency for members of the community to communicate in English. Islam is thus 'indigenised', thereby creating both opportunities and challenges to the UK, and particularly to Christians.

In a more sustained demographic part of its Report, the ISIC (1996:12) drew from the 1991 census (which did not ask for details of religious affiliation) to estimate that there were about 1.5 million Muslims in the UK (about 2.7% of the population at that time). Like all such figures, this estimate has obviously now - a decade on - been superseded with a figure closer to three million Muslims in Britain (UK Channel 4 Debates, Summer, 2005).

The Report also revealed the following facts:

- that the Muslim population is not evenly spread throughout the UK, but is concentrated in a South East and North West axis from Kent to Lancashire, with about 60% of all Muslims living in London and the South East. Within this broadly defined axis there are some high concentrations as in Bradford

where 50,000 Muslims overwhelmingly live in only seven of the city's 23 wards.

- that about three-quarters of the Muslims in Britain are from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, with the remainder coming from a wide range of African, Middle Eastern and other Asian countries.
- that about 16,000 Muslims were given refugee status between 1982 and 1991, with more given exceptional leave to remain.
- in the decade preceding 1996 about 10-20,000 ethnic Britons, predominantly middle class women, sometimes from Church backgrounds, have converted to Islam.

On social and racial issues, the ISIC (1996:15) found it difficult to make valid generalisations, though Islam in the UK is heavily impacted by cultural and community issues. Islam's moral teachings give it a heavy stand against racism in marked contrast to the pattern in British society where racism, institutional or personalised, seems endemic.

The fact that local community in Britain particularly in urban areas had begun to show signs of cultural breakdown and fragmentation seemed to favour the Muslim appeal to Islamic cultural lifestyle rather than that deriving from the Christian message which traditionally and historically sustained it (see Section 2.2).

By the time Islam began gaining ground in England, people had become less inclined in England to take family and local ties and loyalties as seriously as they did in times past. They therefore opted for a more individualistic, isolated, busy and less religious lifestyle. The Islamic and Asian cultures seem more able and willing to combat this secularism than those of Western Christianity. Alternatively, perceived failure to combat Western secularism meant that Islamic and other minority-ethnic individuals were to simply withdraw to their own cultures and national traditions rather than seek being absorbed or integrated into the British society.

Of course, it cannot be too loudly said that radical Islam - with its commitment to extremism and reactionary brotherhood – is an aberration of the increasing secularisation of

the UK. As has been seen with recent events in London in the summer of 2005, radical Islam appeals to disgruntled sections (young British Muslims and converts) of the Muslim communities who seek an identity other than 'British', however this is defined. Groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Muslim Parliament urge Muslims to make their primary loyalty to the Ummah (i.e. the World-wide Muslim community) rather than a nation state such as Britain.

The ISIC Report (1996:17) further notes that Muslims have been deeply affected and disturbed by the secular society. This is seen most in the case of many young Muslims who are children of Albion (West) rather than of the Orient (East). Their way of thinking has been so affected by British education that they will do even what were hitherto unthinkable things in Islamic culture: questioning their parents, dressing un-Islamically and behaving in all sorts of ways not commensurate with the tenets of the faith, e.g., using drugs and drinking alcoholic beverages. Many girls rebel against parental expectation of an early arranged marriage, preferring instead to study or work with the hope of marrying out of love eventually.

The Report (1996:17) also states that British Islam - like world Islam - is not monolithic, having undergone changes in the 1980s from traditional Islam, through secular Islam, to radical Islam. Nor were these phases in themselves monolithically-successive states in the transition process; they were developmental phases in which there was first traditional Islam, then traditional and secular Islam, then traditional and secular and radical Islam.

The Report (1996:18) describes these phases as follows:

A) The traditional phase: This was when there were still many Muslims, particularly the older generation, who considered themselves to be conservative in their understanding of their faith. They were moderate and rejected both radical and secular Islam and wished to accommodate their brand of Islam in British society. Such sentiment is valuable, since there have been many successes in accommodating Muslims at local level. For example, Cleeve (1996) argues that in the early days of Muslim immigration in England in the 1950s and 60s, there was integration of a kind in Slough to the west of London. That enabled Muslims to utilise general rights of citizenship to the point where the 1980s Slough Borough Council had three Muslims.

The Council was able to recognise the burial rites of Muslims with some approval from the host community. There was a general awareness and genuine recognition of the requirements of Muslim patients in Slough hospitals. Many Slough Muslim children attended school with children of other religions, although there was evidence of some reluctance on the part of members of the host community to allow their children to remain in schools with a majority of Muslim children.

B) The secular phase: This began when from the 1980s Islam was characterised by poor organisation, ineffective use of money, lack of confidence, and - above all - by individuals' self-centredness, whereby Muslims were largely concentrating on their jobs and getting on with their lives. Islam makes little difference to the everyday lives of such people, though they would nevertheless call themselves Muslims.

C) The radical phase: This being the phase, dating from the 1990s, in which Islam has been driven by fundamentalist and extremist notions and actions. There were growing demands from Islamic groups for Islam to develop a separate and distinctive identity. Increasing demands were made for separate Islamic schools, radical Imams were recruited to British mosques, young boys were sent to madrasses in Pakistan and young girls taken abroad to be married to Muslim men whom they had not met.

Traditional Islam in Britain, the Report (1996:19) therefore concludes, is faced with challenge from both secular and radical Islam.

On education, the Report (1996:11) shows that Muslim parents in Birmingham started demanding only Islamic religious education for their children. Initially these parents were quiescent about this and prepared to accept the *status quo*; the demand has only taken place as Muslims grew in numbers and confidence. In some cases, the parents have expressed a wish to remove their children from religious education so as not to allow them to receive any teaching in the Judaeo-Christian ethic. Moving on, the next demand that has more recently (see Anwar 1979:21) been made is for Muslim schools to be grant-aided, comparable in this regard to church schools. In this climate, it is possible that in due course demands may be made for amendments to the present agreed syllabuses in favour of an

Islamic syllabus which gives directive for everything to be taught from an Islamic perspective.

Politically, the following points can be summarised from current affairs (Thames Educational Institute Lectures 2004/5), with insights from the ISIC Report (1996:12-21) study where necessary and possible.

A) The primary aim of British Muslims is for more representation and a higher profile in local government councils and in parliament at ministerial, cabinet and prime ministerial levels. A greater hold on the media and popular press is deemed desirable so that Muslims can influence ideas, policy and legislation. Along with this, the use of a variety of different methods – intellectual, democratic and (bordering on the illegal) intimidation, not to say terrorism (in the case of extremists) - is also appealing. It is reckoned as well that although mainstream Muslim politicians are genuinely concerned with the issues that impact upon their communities (e.g., housing, employment, health), they are undercut by activists with a hidden agenda who also want to shift public opinion in British society (with the law) in favour of Islamic ideals. It is indeed foreseeable that if people became more sensitive to Islamic concerns, the incorporation of personal family laws based on Sharia (Islamic law) into British family law (involving, for example, marriage inheritance and other civil matters) will the more readily be facilitated.

B) Nationally and locally, according to the ISIC Report (1996:7), the Labour Party is much more influenced by Muslims than the Conservative Party as - at the time – the Muslim vote invariably went overwhelmingly (up to 90%) to Labour. The importance of the Muslim vote to political parties cannot be underestimated as there are about 30-35 marginal constituencies where it could be vital to a swing in favour of one or the other party. It is of course not clear yet how the recent bombings in London (in July 2005) by extremist young British Muslims may or may not alter this position.

C) Currently, there are about a dozen Muslim parliamentarians with many more candidates waiting to come in when the opportunity affords. Provided Muslims

organise themselves, lay aside their intra-community differences and follow the democratic process, there would hardly be a problem in their having increased representation in the political institutions of Britain. The problem is that nationally and locally, Muslims have tended to retreat from mainstream affairs, which has only served the purpose of making sure they are marginalised generally in British society.

Thus they formed instead their own political party (the Islamic Party of Great Britain) organised and led by British converts to Islam. Like the Christian Peoples Alliance Party (formed later by an Evangelical British African-Asian and London mayoral candidate, Ram Gidooman, in 1999) it has achieved little politically. It fielded a few candidates at the 1992 parliamentary elections and much more at the local elections, but did not succeed in having any elected representatives in either. Such a sectarian party is unlikely to achieve much in parliament, and extra-parliamentary Islamic action has ensued with the formation of a Muslim Parliament (whose representational capacity is not precisely clear) to replace it.

What about censorship? 'Slowly and subtly', the ICIS Report (1996:8) states, 'it is becoming more difficult to express even valid criticism of Islam. By arguing that any such criticism is an instance of Islamophobia, Muslims are beginning to change popular thinking and talking about Islam'.

On history, the Report (1996:11) notes an attempt by Muslims to re-write it from a tendentious perspective and without objectivity. The name of the game is concentration on what is good in Islam, demonising Christianity by drawing attention to the uglier episodes of Christian history such as are demonstrable by the crusades. Christian wrongs done to Islam (e.g., as may be seen with the Bosnia genocide in the 1990s) are highlighted, while Muslim persecutions of Christians and Jews from the seventh century to the present day are ignored. The dissemination of all this is possible because Muslims are increasingly holding and generously funding academic and teaching posts - as well as setting up Islamic Studies departments - in British universities. Furthermore, books and other resources carrying such interpretations of history are made easily available, and it is clear that even where the 'received wisdom' of such publications are not acceptable because of lack of academic rigour, the critics are branded as ardent oppressors of academic freedom and Islam.

Institutionally and socially, there are – the ISIC (1996:17) article reports - in excess of 4,000 Muslim organisations in Britain: some political; some educational; others missionary - like the Dhima (Islamic mission) - and charitable. As noted already, many of these have as their aim raising the profile of Islam in the UK and seeking to increase the influence of Islam, with a view to effecting the eventual Islamisation of the UK. For this, there is funding of the organisations and British mosques from many Islamic groups abroad which have bases in London. In this way, the UK is made a communications centre for Islam. Where this is radical Islam, a consistent anti-UK and anti-Semitic Islamic line of propaganda can – as said above – be expected.

Of these organisations, the Report (1996:23) indicates, there are between 150 to 200 groupings with violent intentions. These are clandestine in operation, fluid in composition, diffused in aims and of close family or national ties. Little or nothing can be done about them because accurate knowledge of what goes on in a ‘family mosque’ is virtually impossible to obtain, both in terms of religious teaching and in terms of extra-curricular activities, such as military training. Informed sources (see Shaw 1988) suggest that these ‘cells’ range from groupings like Hizb ut-Tahrir and Hizbullah - both of which are well known to the authorities and the media - to others about which very few outside the groupings themselves have heard. It is not too difficult, the Report (1996:23-25) concludes, to suspect the trend a Muslim agenda in the UK is likely to follow. In its view, it may include some of the following:

A) Changing the blasphemy laws (biblical Exod. 20:17; RC canon 2323; UK civil, 1643) so that any challenge to the status of Mohammed as a prophet and the Qur'an would be illegal. It does seem, however, with the recent tumult and outrage caused by cartoons of the prophet in Belgium (March 2006) that far more would be needed to accommodate Islam under the blasphemy laws to satisfy Muslims than had hitherto been required for Judaism and Christianity.

B) Amending the law so as to define Islam as a race under the Race Relations Act (1976). This runs the risk that anything deemed anti-Islamic, including academic

questioning of the *bona fide* nature of Mohammed's prophethood, could be considered incitement to racial hatred.

As an instance of what really may be ahead, the ISIC Report (1996:8) concludes with these words from a British Muslim. Arguing sarcastically for a change of Britain to a Muslim country he says that the "implementation of a coherent, integrated curriculum, with in-built continuity and development, is essential if the Muslim youth of this country are to take their place in Islam. That must be our goal or we have no business being here and may Allah grant us success".

If pluralism is being besieged by bilateral relations in this way, how would it fare in relation to a unilateral focus which is even less tolerant of pluralism? The next two Case Studies with the Baptist Church in multicultural England and Islam in an African but unilateral context will illustrate the answer to this question.

5.2 Case Study: A unilateral focus in a pluralist situation (the Baptist Church)

The Baptist Church is chosen because although the Baptist Union of Great Britain – like all other churches – is demonstrably aware of the multicultural and multi-faith nature of modern British society, it has stuck more tenaciously to its 'one document' call and – unlike the other churches - has never directly engaged in dialogue with other faiths. Nevertheless, it has done some in a small way indirectly through its participation in successive stages in the work of the main ecumenical body in Britain which operated first as the British Council of Churches (BCC), then as the Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland (CCBI), and from 1990 as Churches Together in England and Wales (CTEW). Indeed, even at the ecumenical level, the Baptist Union has not been as forthcoming as the other churches regarding interdenominational dialogue. While it has been keen and willing to work closely together with some denominations, there is no doubt a vociferous minority within it which is against working with Roman Catholics because of the age old theological and ecclesiological reasons on which the Reformation and Protestant cause was built, but upon which it is not within the brief of this study to elaborate.

It gives some credence to the suggestion that the Baptist Union was keen to work with some churches in the ecumenical movement, that the CCBI's significant 1994 meeting was in fact

convened in the Baptist House in Oxford. At that meeting, where new ideas for new national ecumenical bodies were mooted, the Union voted 68% in favour to joining the new ecumenical body on the understanding that after five years the decision was to be reviewed. After 1995, at the Plymouth Assembly, the Union again voted in favour – this time by an overwhelming 82% - to continue to be part of the CCBI.

Facilitating this Case Study is a booklet prepared by the Baptist Union of Great Britain. This is a Report (see Appendix 7) published by the CTEW in February 1996 with the title *Called To Be One* on the activities of the Baptist Church and its work within the ecumenical movement. It affirms that the Holy Spirit has been at work during the lifetime of the churches, drawing Christians closer together. It rejoices in the deep relationships which have occurred in so many places on the journey.

The Report (1996:2) was faithfully received by the Council who encouraged churches and colleges to study the document seriously and to give it much-deserved attention. Reviews and articles about the Report were published in the official London Baptist Association information magazine and distributed to churches, associations and colleges. Baptist churches were themselves further encouraged to take part in the various ecumenical discussions of the Report and in workshops on it. A workbook and a video on ecumenism were produced to facilitate the workshops which were organised by intermediate ecumenical bodies and by Churches Together in Britain.

The Baptist Church itself responded to this acclamation of its Report in several pragmatic ways.

- A) In December 1996 the executive committee of its Faith and Unity Commission held a special residential consultation to begin to prepare the formal response. This meeting developed and refined reflections and feedback received from the associations, churches and colleges.
- B) A draft version of the Union's response was produced after the Faith and Unity Executive Committee met with the Board of General Superintendents and the Doctrine and Worship Committee.
- C) A debate was held on the Report and the responses at the Baptist Union Council in March 1997.

- Paragraphs II and III (see Appendix 7) were unanimously agreed as in keeping with the responses received by the Council.
- Paragraphs IV, V, VI, VII were accepted without dissent as in agreement with responses from the Faith and Unity Executive Committee itself.

D) A special Baptist Assembly seminar was convened in April 1997 which provided a forum for churches and their representatives to discuss the Union's response and what action the Union might take in the light of this forum.

These steps taken, the Union then tried to identify an overall strategy which would help the churches focus on the next stage in ecumenical relations. It raised the question: what kind of visible unity would best serve the mission of God in England as the churches move into a new millennium?

In response, the Council expressed a wish to adopt and to affirm the following as the five marks of mission as they appeared in the Report (CTE, 1996:2-4).

- To proclaim the good news of the kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by living service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

With this, it does seem as if the Baptist Church had taken a quantum leap of faith and crossed the barriers which were creating an impasse between Evangelicals and Ecumenicals on the international plane at the WCC (treated in Chapters Three and Four of this study). It seemed prepared to see in mission both proclamative (marks 1/2) and restorative (marks 1/2/3) objectives and functions.

To put this in further perspective, according to Bochenski *et al* (1993:12), the majority of Baptists would tend to assume that to be an Evangelical and at the same time an

Ecumenical is a misnomer or oxymoron. They would fiercely resist such a description as – in their thinking - there is no correlation between these terms and the roles implied are diametrically opposed to each other.

Andrew Green (1987:18) discusses the theological background of this tendency, in order to sustain which, Evangelical/Baptists need to claim to be mere champions of Christian orthodoxy, standing in the mainstream of the historic witness of and to Christ.

But perhaps the best gains from all this for the ecumenical mission of the Church are to be seen in the Union's expression of fundamental commitment to cooperation with other churches because:

- God, the starting point, is a missionary God and his prompting in mission is that it should be carried out in unity.
- Unity is the gift of God and must be the subject of much prayer as well as action.
- The gathering and responses evoked by the Report itself bestows a great deal of insight which - dynamically and prophetically - “set us on fire”.
- There is recognition that hard issues have been set before other member bodies of the Church. The visible unity being a common faith in Jesus Christ rather than baptism, there is an acknowledgement by the Baptist Church itself of the need to reflect further on certain aspects of Baptist practice regarding initiation, baptism and the Eucharist (CTE, 1997:10).
- The Baptist Union believes that it is urgently necessary to develop a shared *koinonia* and mission.
- There is a desire to share spiritual gifts and traditions openly and in an honestly critical way.
- In this regard the Union also believes there is a great need to create opportunities for leaders and key officers of the member churches in the Council to meet in prayer, reflection and friendship together.
- The Union recognises that the training of future generations of ministers and

clergy would be better done together than separately in order to provide insights into their churches' mutual richness and diversity. To achieve this, the matter of training needs to be seriously addressed. It is not only a question of learning about other traditions, but of immersing oneself in the realities of traditions other than one's own.

- The union believes, at an early stage of development, they should move towards sharing jointly within the CTE the work they undertake on social and political action and recognise the need to desist from doing work unilaterally in these areas without - at least - prior consultation.
- As a Union, following a denominational confession, ecumenism is one of ten key issues that are laid down for the renewal of their life together, within and without the Baptist Church. If the Church acts independently, it must do so with the other churches in mind. If it acts ecumenically, it must do so with the Baptist Confession in mind.
- The Baptist Church, at the end of the day, wishes "to say, as one of the free Churches, in a spirit of love and respect for our sisters and brothers in the Church of England, we believe we could pursue the future ecumenical pilgrimage more easily with an Episcopal Church disestablished rather than established... We recognise the issue is sensitive for all of us, but conscious of our developing relationships and the thrust of *Called To Be One*, we believe the issue should not be ignored" (CTE Review 1997).

While it would seem clear - with these reasons – that a unilateralist Church (by an interfaith yardstick) is prepared to be multilateralist in inter-denominational terms, it would nevertheless be equally clear that it is prepared to do this only on its own terms. Choosing only the Church of England, and its world-wide Anglican Communion, but then seeing the establishment of the Church of England as "an obstacle to ecumenical mission", it is in short clearly indicating that (1) even in denominational terms, it prefers bilateralism to multilateralism, and (2) it is little prepared to work with the secular state even indirectly (through its bilateral partner) to resolve the vast array of problems facing the *status quo* and the enormous challenges facing mission presented in a multicultural society.

Yet, in one crucial area, namely 'baptism' – the lynch pin of the Baptist movement and arguably a much trickier issue for ecumenism than establishment – the Baptist Church appears to be less fastidious and more compromising. Hence, the following Union comments appears in a Response Document and Appendix to the 1996 Report (CTE Review 1997:1-21):

- There is a move among some Baptist Churches to refrain from baptising by immersion those who have already been baptised as infants, who have been brought up in the Christian faith and who have already made a profession of faith either in confirmation or in some other way, and who regard that as valid for themselves in good conscience.
- Some Baptists also affirm the sentiment that if a candidate for believer's baptism, who had already been baptised as an infant, felt strongly that God was calling him or her to be baptised by immersion upon profession of faith, the Baptist minister would feel obliged to take this into account. However, they would prefer to substitute the word 'congregation' for 'minister', which is truer for their ecclesiology.
- For all Baptists, children are widely recognised as being part of the family of the Church. Infants are thus welcomed in an act of thanksgiving and blessing and subsequently nurtured until they reach an age of understanding and commitment. So, children who have not been baptised as believers are not normally encouraged to participate in the Eucharist.
- For most Baptists, there is a place for a suitable service of reaffirmation for those who wish to reaffirm their baptismal vows. However, it is not felt that this addresses the question of those who seek baptism as believers. Some churches have a covenant, which is renewed annually, which contains elements of personal re-dedication.

There is, however, still to be found some anecdotal evidence that the Baptist Church –

while perfectly capable of being open and accommodating with ecumenical relations – is quite unwilling to proceed with ecumenism glibly when dealing with the central matter of baptism.

- It responded to hard-line accusation that it had accepted the principle of a common baptism via the WCC's Statement on Baptism issued at the Canberra Assembly in 1991 (see section 5.2 above) – calling for one baptism to be the way of entry into the sacramental life of the Church – by issuing this statement (CTE Review 1997:17): “some believe we now share a common baptism, but this is not true for all of the member bodies of the CTE and must be addressed in an honest way”.
- It responded to centre-ground criticism that its position on baptism is not precisely clear because of observable inconsistencies in the practice of baptism among its churches by admitting to this as a matter for attention and redress.

Returning to the Church's ecumenical capabilities, there are further aspects to note:

- The Union was able to have recourse to its sister churches in the CTE, for instance, regarding the development of a comprehensive policy on baptism which would both meet its Church's needs and the common objectives of the WCC.
- Although it is not the custom of Baptists to repeat the Creed as an act of worship, Baptists believe in the faith to which the historic creeds bear witness. Indeed, at the founding of the Baptist World Alliance in London in 1905, participants at the first act of this world communion were able to recite together the Apostles' Creed. Also, the Union participated in international discussions on the Nicene Creed arising out of the deliberation at various congresses. It acknowledged that this participation was to its enrichment in the *koinonia* and an absolute test of discipleship, whereas non-participation - as might also occur with the use of exclusive creeds – could lead to ecumenical hypochondria.
- The Union takes cognisance of the diversity within its own family of

churches (national and international) to see a model typifying the entire ecumenical movement which is comprised of the CTE at national level and WCC at international level. Like itself, the ecumenical bodies provide a basis whereby the unity of churches in their different forms and perspectives could be visible.

- The Union accepts the need to establish common discipline for consultation and prayer. This will systematically facilitate acting together and interchangeably by membership and ministry. It will also ecclesiastically provide a genuine forum from which responses to social and political issues can be unitedly addressed.
- The Union also finds itself eager to affirm much of the common vision set out in ecumenical documents. From its evangelical believer's perspective, it would wish to restate such affirmation as follows (CTE, 1997:28):

The unity of the church is a part of God's mission or reconciliation in which a broken world and divided communities are healed. It is a tangible sign of God's plan whereby the whole of creation is transformed.

God unites all Christians by grace through faith, and in baptism brings them into membership of the one Church of Jesus Christ.

Most definitely, the Eucharist is less tricky than baptism for ecumenical relations where Baptists are concerned. Hence, the following statement from the Response Document (CTE Review1997:16) is made as well:

For Baptists sharing in the Eucharist is an acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The unity of the body of Christ is constituted not by the sacrament, but by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The table therefore is not the source of unity but a manifestation of it. They do not accept the need to rethink their concept of unity in the light of our present practice of the admission to the Eucharist, where the invitation is given to all who love and serve Jesus Christ as lord, regardless of Church affiliation.

But could the unilateralism of the Baptist Church - so strident where interfaith matters are

concerned – still somehow surface to further disturb interdenominational matters? This is a matter which calls for an examination of the ecclesiology of the Church – in theology and applied theology.

5.2.1 Baptist ecclesiology

For Baptists, the Church is defined as the ‘gathered community’ of those with saving faith. Such an assembly (*ekklesia*) does not need the authority of any person or body outside itself to make it legitimate. Each local gathering of believers is a visible expression of the body of Christ.

In the slightly wider Evangelical context, this definition may include “those people past, present and future who have received salvation through faith in Christ” (Bochenski *et al*, 1993:22) as members of the Church of Christ. With a stress on saving experience gained through personal acceptance of Christ in the hearts of believers, the suggested communion of saints across time and eternity is the more readily made and accepted.

In other traditions, Christians may define the Church in other ways. For example, they may look for specific ‘marks’ such as the presence of the sacraments, the scriptures, authority and discipline.

Michael Green (1976:256-74) moves the ecclesiology of the Baptist Church back to the issue of baptism which it considers to be the mark of the Church. Making the subtle evangelical distinction between a 'believer' and someone with a 'personal faith in Christ', he argues that the Church cannot be made up only of believers. It would include, he says, those with a 'personal faith in Christ' of which baptism is therefore the sign. He goes on to suggest that what is practised in the Baptist Church is 'believer's baptism', not infant or adult baptism, because a baby is incapable of personal faith and an adult may not be a believer. The Church therefore is constituted of the totality of baptised believers with a personal faith. Baptists are not primarily interested in the credentials of bishops, or the way the sacraments are administered. What they want to know is that the baptism is significant enough to enable the believer to make the desired growth.

Coupling this kind of non-conformist abrasive ecclesiology with the discordant anti-

ecumenical voices within the Church, it is not surprising that the question was raised in the *Baptist Times* (15.01.1998, front page caption): Do Baptists make good ecumenists? In subsequent issues, it evoked the following responses:

- From Andy Bruce, minister of Mansfield Road Baptist Church Nottingham:

Baptists have a reputation as being among the ecumenically awkward squad, but we often overlook them. I would say, a substantial majority of Baptist churches is heavily involved in their local ecumenical groups and that this is the heartbeat of inter-church relationships – working together in the local community. Most Baptist churches are quite involved and committed at their own level.

- From Phil Jump, minister of New Paddington Baptist Church Surrey:

You only have to read the last few editions of the *Baptist Times* to recognise that working with other churches, even Baptist ones, is not exactly our strong point. I sense that many Baptists still treat the ecumenical process with great unease, but we've come a long way in the last ten years or so.

And concluding, he says:

It's important though, that we analyse our motives - many still have a long way to go in learning to truly embrace and accept those of other denominations. As I have read and re-read scripture, both the Old and New Testaments, it seems to me that God is as much concerned with sincerity of his people's actions than their correctness. I wonder if we always recognise that when evaluating practices of others.

- From Andrew Moore, a retired but itinerant minister in Paisley representing the Gospel Truth Mission:

I think that, generally speaking, they don't. They are too independently minded. In fact, some Baptist Church members find it very difficult to work with other Baptist churches in the area.

He also noted that there may be regional differences governing the attitudes of Baptists in this matter:

I found people down south were far more willing to work together. I really enjoyed it, getting together with other Churches. But it isn't so easy up here in Scotland.

- From David Parsons, minister of Stratton Green Baptist Church Swindon,

the following thoughtful and thought-provoking comments:

There are possibly two questions here. The question could mean 'Are Baptists seeking to be ecumenical?' Or it could be asking, 'are ecumenical Baptists good at working ecumenically?'

I think we need a definition of ecumenism. Do we mean by ecumenism that we are grouping so-called mainline Churches together, such as the Church of England, Methodists and the United Reformed Church, or do we widen the net and include any and every identifiable group of churches that are allied together? Do we still call it ecumenism when Baptists work with house churches, community churches, pentecostal churches - and the like - rather than with the mainline Churches?

In answer to the question 'Are Baptists seeking to be ecumenical?' then from experience I would say 'yes'. But some are seeking to be so more than others and some are seeking to be ecumenical with churches other than mainline churches. If the question is asking 'Are ecumenical Baptists good at working ecumenically?' then again from experience I would say that while there is considerable variation in ecumenical involvement, generally, Baptists work very well indeed, giving considerable commitment to ecumenism.

I think that, generally speaking, Baptists do not feel comfortable with ecumenism that has been hierarchically conceived, but will work with churches with which they perceive they have things in common,

From such responses, it is conceivable that there are significant numbers of Baptists who are not overwhelmingly enthused about ecumenism. This therefore leaves those who work in local ecumenical partnerships in a niche and it is hardly surprising that they are generally willing only to cooperate on projects that do not impinge on the doctrinal position of their Church.

Thus, while at the Baptist Assembly held at Leicester in April 1989, it was agreed that there should be continuing involvement in the ecumenical process, it was nevertheless stipulated that this would be through new structures in the newly-named Churches Together in England (CTE) and Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (CCBI). The debate itself revealed the tension within the denomination about the value of such ecumenical commitment. While only 27% of the representatives present voted against it, they were of a significant minority; whereas the views of those voting in favour ranged from those with deeply-held commitments, through those who wished to go forward in faith, to those who

were still faintly suspicious.

Much of this ecclesiastical pessimism and wrangle, Michael Green (1976:256-274) thinks, is due to the divided root of Baptists, coming – as they do – from Calvinist and Arminian soils which developed two different visions of Church life based on 'diversity' and 'association' respectively. He writes:

As Baptists, we may differ from our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we do not differ in love. Though we place high value on the local Church and its liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to administer and interpret the laws of Christ, we believe that our associating together as Baptists with our differing insights enhances our witness to the gospel.

The clarion call therefore to every Baptist church by the then President of the Baptist Union in 1998, Douglas McBain, was that every effort must be undertaken to associate and work in local ecumenical partnership.

But despite this, signs of ecumenical antipathy have persisted, though not without a glimmer of hope in some noticeable ways:

- One of the key speakers at the Baptist Union Assembly in Blackpool in 1998 was the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Basil Hume. Although this was risky and attracted criticism and attacks, the Baptist Union used the occasion to encourage other mainline churches to work in ecumenical projects.
- In Lent 1998, the *Baptist Times* (12.03.1998) reports, a Baptist minister and field officer of Churches Together in England (South Division), Roger Nunn, with a fellow ecumenical officer, Bernard Longley, had audience with the Pope at Rome on Ash Wednesday. Under the caption “Signs of Ecumenical Commitment in Rome”, the article reported these comments from Roger Nunn:

It was a sign, I believe, of the ecumenical commitment to the Roman Catholic Church.

I am well aware of the many questions that the Roman Catholic Church raises for Baptists, and I do not underestimate the distance still to be travelled in our pilgrimages.

But I was struck by the obvious holiness and profound commitment to the cause of Christ and his Church that we met in so many. Being in Rome at the time of the making of new cardinals gave a sense of the catholicity, the 'everywhereness' of the Catholic Church, and its determination to hold things together when so much is tending to pull it apart.

In the *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), as the Pope expresses his concern for the unity of the whole church yet acknowledges that his own role is a barrier to the unity, he helps in resolving that paradox.

Baptists must come to terms with the Roman Catholic Church and relate to it at every level, both to learn the reality behind the myths, and to share their own convictions. We will be surprised, as our own group often was, at how much we have in common.

An independent report (*BU Main Stream Report* 1998:62) called upon the Baptist Churches within the Union to work toward changes in the new millennium needed to overcome the barriers in the way of working successfully with other mainstream Churches, by:

- Transforming the whole ethos of the superintendency, with a view to facilitating denominational consultation.
- Subjugating their independence in a way which neither curtails their power nor diminishes their effectiveness in regard to communion.

In other words, it strongly reaffirms the basic conviction expressed in the Baptist Union's declaration that all churches should have liberty to interpret the mind of Christ for themselves.

Indeed, it is precisely because the Baptist churches have gradually renounced the use of power over each other that they are able to constitute a Union and join with other denominations.

- Rediscovering how to relate to one another in effective fellowship and productive mission;
- how to take the risk in mission and dialogue with other churches and other faiths;
- and how to make mission more vibrant, all-embracing and better equipped for the task that lies ahead.

If, however, it is so difficult to get Evangelicals to get into discussion with non-

Evangelicals on ecumenical cooperation, how much more difficult would it be for them to discuss how they might get into a dialogue with the holders of other faiths? With a very large influx of Muslims now in Britain and the scary rise of Islamic fundamentalism, with a growing zeal of world religions to move into Europe, could Baptist ecclesiology ever allow a free discussion with Muslims, for example?

Unless this were to happen, it could easily be argued that the unilateralist position of the Evangelical Baptists will ensure that the pluralist context remains a 'no go' area for mission and dialogue. If the Baptist Church cannot without difficulty cooperate with other Christians, how can it hope at all to be able to reach out to non-Christians, especially to Muslims, the rise of fundamentalist groups among whom is even now threatening the stability of the multicultural society? We need to look at the situation in a non-pluralistic, exclusive Islamic society for the provision of an answer.

5.2.2 Baptist mission

What else then can Baptist mission be apart from evangelisation and conversion? The answer has to be 'precious little more'. Indeed, precious little is achievable in an attempt like this to crystallise Baptist mission from Baptist ecclesiology. Nevertheless, it is worth the effort even if to reinforce this awareness. Allusions to special Baptist statements and events are indicative.

O'Sullivan (*CD* 2005.1) reporting on the Birmingham Baptist World Centenary Congress in July 2005 noted that Billy Kim, as President of the Baptist World Alliance, stated that, because the world has changed, if the mission is to reach the world then the methods must be changed. What was implied takes us back to the already-discussed debate (see Chapter Three) about whether mission provides food for the soul alone without feeding the body. Illustrating his point from his own experience, O'Sullivan notes that he converted after having received and accepted kindness from an American government officer during the Korean conflict.

While the reports of this congress celebrated the cultural diversity of participants, they

nowhere indicated any appetite for a dialogue mission either within religious pluralism or in the wider gamut of secularism. Concerned with the Church's future in America, Africa and Asia, the congress still showed great concern for the spreading of the gospel around the world even while acknowledging that the churches in developing countries are larger and more vibrant than churches in the West. Such awareness nevertheless led to recognition that there is ample scope for mission in Western paths, and the work of community and sport chaplaincies were highlighted as examples of how mission (seen as synonymous with evangelism) could be conducted in the West.

On a spiritual note, prayer and music were highlighted as essential in modern mission and evangelism. In a changed world of human selfishness, they are needed to redirect minds to God. Prayer should be, the conference was told, at the forefront, while evangelism is carried out with more sensitivity in Eastern Europe, more generosity to developing countries, more fun-based purposefulness in scripture unions, and more care in fundamentalist Muslim countries.

5.3 Case Study: Two non-plural situations (*Ireland and Mauritania*)

To be able to assess the challenges to mission and dialogue in a pluralist society, a consideration of singular/exclusivist societies is necessary. This will objectively provide the study with a different scenario in which the presence or absence of the challenges to mission and dialogue would assist in articulating the nature of such challenges in a pluralist society.

Saliently, two case study groups of different religious orientation feature: that of a singular society with a Christian ethos and that of a singular society with an Islamic character, Islam being a major proselytising faith with Christianity. This comparison will systematically ascertain the degree to which the challenges to (Christian) mission and dialogue in a pluralist society are the direct result of religious plurality or of the true nature of Christianity. In focus are:

- Ireland as a singular society with a Christian background in Europe.
- Mauritania as a singular society being a Muslim country in Saharan Africa.

Ireland is the only obvious choice of a singular society with a Christian background, it being so close to the United Kingdom as the immediate field of study. Mauritania has already been introduced in this study (see Section 4.6) as illustrative of an Islamic state in Africa to which attention has also been focused.

5.3.1 Case Study: The Republic of Ireland

Known for its Christian ethos and origins, the history of the whole land of Ireland (North and South/the Republic) has been influenced by the Roman Catholic Church from the beginning to the present day. Even at the height of the influence of the English Revolution in 1536 – when the Dublin Parliament was imposed on to accept anti-papal legislation – the country was little perturbed by the attempt of the Tudor monarchy in England to exercise control in it. Only a heavy-handed political conquest made the enforcement of the religious legislation possible. Yet, even the Irish people who were loyal to the English throne remained Catholic and stiffly resisted anti-papal policy with successive parliaments. The result, Corish (1965:545) says, was that the “anti-Catholic laws in Ireland were never as stringent as those in England”.

The nearest Ireland, therefore, ever came to becoming more than a singular Catholic community with a small minority of Protestants was when in the seventeenth century the community itself “tried to work out a scheme of political existence under the English Crown” (see Corish 1965:545). It did not materialise because Protestants were few in most of the country.

In this situation, the attempt, however, by England to impose Protestant superiority in the North East where Protestants were numerous (because of the military gains of Oliver Cromwell and William of Orange and an extensive plantation in the area of settlers under James I) by giving them political and social prerogative and relegating Catholics “to a position of permanent political impotence”, as Corish (1965:545) writes, was the last straw. It signaled the start of a divided Ireland (North and South), the South being the Republic on which the focus of the study continues.

The singularity of the Republic was led by the Roman Catholic clergy versed (because of

continental training) in the Counter Reformation which the Church was experiencing by the end of the sixteenth century. Continuing from the days of a joint Ireland, this ingenuity of the Roman Catholic priesthood remained the spiritual sustenance of Catholics which kept them going through the penal code of the eighteenth century designed to perpetuate Protestant ascendancy until the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. So, although the penal code and the statutes against the Roman Catholic clergy were severe, they were hardly enforceable and not strong enough to induce or force the mass of Catholics to change their religion.

The outcome was that the singularity of the Catholic community of Ireland gained much impetus. Then, of course, with the Irish Protestants (who had separatist political ambitions) in the North demanding a repeal of the Act of Union in 1800, the political partitioning of the country was to follow. When it happened, the North (North East) had a majority of Protestants, the South (the Irish Republic) a substantial majority of nearly 95% Catholics spread over 26 counties.

As a result of this homogeneity in the Republic, the Irish Church had always been able to act with a singular mind from the outset. Before the ninth century, with the remarkable flowering of learning which it experienced, the Irish Church was able to undertake extensive and unimpeded missionary activity in Britain and Europe, the advance of which only the Viking raids and the growth of civil strife could have stopped. This was because the country was so strengthened by its one-faith situation, and it remained free from schism or heresy within its Church, that it could afford to focus abroad. Focusing abroad, Irish Catholic priests have constituted the contingent through which the missionary work of the Roman Catholic Church has been advanced in the developing world to this day. Working through the churches as well as educational establishments, they have carried out in South America, Asia, Africa and elsewhere the outreach work of the Church in no uncertain terms. As an instance of this, it was reported in September 2002 that an Irish Catholic priest, Patrick Joseph Kelly, went underground in Zimbabwe to flee the wrath of Robert Mugabe whose government intelligence had accused him of “preaching opposition politics” and sympathising with workers affected by land reforms (ENI, 2002.09).

Ireland remains, in the twenty-first century, a singular state in which mission work is not

seriously challenged, and in which the question of dialogue among faith groups is understood – in the changing times – along with the changing aims expressed in the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council. There are not – in its situation – two or more churches or religious groups but one. While – in this situation – there remains an intellectual basis on which to think about mission and the importance of dialogue in the process, to the Irish Church such dialectics as there are over these issues in the WCC and in Britain must seem outlandish in the least. It was to be expected that in such a situation, any non-Irish presence within its borders would be open to its mission without objection. The vital question is: Could this situation be replicated in a singular Islamic context?

5.3.2 Case Study: The Islamic Republic of Mauritania

A largely desert country, Mauritania links the Arab-Maghreb of North Africa and the trans-Saharan mass of Africa. Its independence in 1960 opposed by Morocco to the North and the Polisario from within, it went through a period of military instability, and is currently still under military leadership, the last but one (Maaoulya Taya) having been overthrown in a coup in August 2005. Citing the threat of terrorism, Taya made himself unpopular by cracking down on extremist Islamic activities. However, his critics decried this move as aimed at stifling political change.

It is of the utmost interest in this study to note that in Africa, a continent that traditionally prides itself on religious freedom, a Mauritanian Government website release in 2005 stated that the country's population (from a July 2004 estimate) was nearly 3,000,000 (2,998,563 to be precise) of which 100% were Sunni Muslims.

Although the website (www.mauritania.com) reported that the country had a literacy rate of 41.7%, it also reported that half of the population depended on agriculture and livestock for a livelihood. Many of the nomads and subsistence farmers, nevertheless, had been forced into the cities by recurrent droughts in the 1970s and 1980s. Hardly an economic situation on which independence from the international community could be built, the report confirmed that there had been cutbacks on the production and exportation of iron ore which constituted nearly 40% of the country's exports because of a decline in the 1990s in the world's demand for this mineral. Against this downside factor, the nation's coastal waters were said to be among the richest fishing areas in the world, its first deep-water port having

been opened in 1986. Fortunately also, in 2001, in common with the fortunes of other Arab countries, offshore oils wells were explored, indicating a potential extraction in tracts of 80km which – if sold at the world price current at any given time – could substantially reduce the country's foreign and international debt build-up of which no figure is given.

Other significant information from the report includes the following: there are more males (51.8%) than females (31.9%) in the nation (on a 2003 estimate); the official language is Arabic but Pulaar, Soninke, Hussaniya, Wolof and French (as the former colonial language) are spoken; the legal system is a combination of Shari'a Islamic law and French civil law; the GDP real growth rate is 4.5% (by a 2003 estimate); unemployment was in 1999 at 21%; and the latest government agenda for development emphasises reduction of poverty, improvement of health and education, and privatising the economy.

Significantly, a BBC website overview (bbc.co.uk) indicates that much of Mauritania's media (the press, radio, television and news agency) is state-owned and state-run, and notes the following:

Under Mauritania's press law, newspapers may be banned for publishing material that “undermines” Islam or is perceived to threaten national security.

The overview also gives the following historical résumé of Mauritania's profile:

In the Middle Ages, Mauritania was the cradle of the Almoravid movement, which spread Islam throughout the region and for a while controlled the Islamic part of Spain. European traders began to show interest in Mauritania in the 15th century and in 1814 it came under direct French rule.

Remaining one of the poorest countries of the world (bbc.co.uk) could Mauritania really – on its determination to exclude other religions – do without foreigners whom it accuses of threatening the fishing industry through overexploitation? Could it do without the loans from international bodies such as it received in February 2000 under the HIPC and the IMF (www.mauritania.com), the donor and lending countries of which are mostly non-Islamic? Could its singularity allow it to hear the preaching of the non-Islamic voice which suspects that slavery is still practised within its borders despite its official banning of the trade in 1981 (bbc.co.uk) Are there not similar aspects (e.g., freedom of religion) under French civil law - which it also accommodates alongside Shari'a Law – that are good enough reasons to agree that singularity could be subject to a religiously conversational challenge from outside

which would be less irksome than its military challenges from within?

A comment on unilateralism and singularity

In moving on, it has to be said that it appears from these two cases that – until it is challenged by the intrusion of a different mission from outside - religious singularity in a state is comfortable with (1) protecting mission within itself, and (2) exporting mission to other areas. Is it likely to be able to understand that when it executes the second activity it is in fact saying that there should be scope for the same activity (albeit of a different brand) to be exported from another state to its own state? This question finds an expression in our field studies.

5.4. Field Study: basis of analysis

Received data from questionnaires and interviews will be summarised here according to the aim (i.e., whether to gain information on *mission* or *dialogue*) of the questions asked. Summaries will be presented in figures with notes – denominationally - in the first place, and then in percentages. This will facilitate interpretation and over-viewing.

5.4.1 Questionnaire - the mission question

The mission question (Appendices 6 and 7, Question 4) asked *whether the respondent has ever been approached by a religious campaigner with a view to conversion*. It is complemented by two sub-questions (Questions 5 and 6), depending on whether the response to the main Question 4 is 'yes' or 'no'. If 'yes', the respondent answers Question 5 (*How did you react?*); if 'no', he/she answers Question 6 (*How would you react, if approached?*). The objective of this question is to determine whether the multicultural society is fertile ground for a non-Christian's own missionary zeal, and how much of a challenge this constitutes to Christians and Church mission.

One could of course legitimately question whether asking questions of Christians as to whether they have been approached for conversion in a country which is - traditionally at least - Christian and from which missions went out to evangelise others is reasonable. Does it not, it might be asked, indicate that - much more than being challenged - the mission game is over, as this one time President of Union Theological Seminary in Manila

– E.P. Nacpil (see Costas 1974:134) seems to indicate?

The missionary today is a symbol of the university of western imperialism among the rising generation of the developing countries. The present structure of modern missions is dead and we ought to eulogise it and bury it. In other words, the most missionary service a missionary under the present system can do is to go home.

John Gatu (see Costas 1974:133), one time General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in East Africa, indicts the mission enterprise abroad from another angle. Expressing radically the view that the continued sense of domination by foreign missions inhibits many churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America from developing, he explains:

Our present problems can only be solved if all the missionaries can be withdrawn in order to allow a period of not less than five years for each side to rethink and formulate what is going to be their future relationship. The churches of the developing world must be allowed to find their own identity. The continuation of the present missionary movement is a hindrance to the self-hood of the Church.

The voices here are congruous also with that of those – both Western and of the two-thirds world - (see, for example, Muzorewa 1991:101-3; Bosch 1991:1-5) calling for Christian missions from abroad to come to England and reclaim the ground in what is often said to have fast become a post-Christian secularist and multi-faith society. They are saying to the Christians of the Mother Churches: 'no point parenting abroad, when things are not right at home', as the following data flatly indicate:

- Lapses in church attendance are a big problem in Europe:
 - In England, in 1989, according to the UK Anglican statistics, in the Church of England some 1.8 million were baptised, some 8.7 million confirmed, but only a mere 0.7 million were communicant members.
 - In Norway, in 1990, according to statistics supplied by Cotterell (1990:177), while some 97.6% claimed to belong to the Lutheran Church as state Church, attendance was limited to a mere 3% at weekly services, and at other churches to some 10% weekly.
- Recidivism is another problem in Europe. It was reported (Cotterell, 1990:177) that about 1.8 million people leave the Church in the continent each year.

The protagonists are expecting a buoying-up of the faithful, a rekindling of the fire in the

nominal Christian and a re-visiting of the lapsed and flagging through the living and new witness of the African, the West Indian, the Asian, and the Latin American. They are not expecting a reclaiming of the ground for religion by the non-Christian missions, and certainly not the conversion of Christians to other faiths.

Critique, therefore, as Bosch (1991:1-4) makes clear - of the outcome of Western Christian mission to the two-thirds world is unfavourable and challenging.

- It emanated from the decline of Western theology and Christian church life.
- It failed to convert the followers of other religions because of the vigour displayed by them.
- As it did not vanquish these religions and secularism, it helped confound the expectations of those who believed that they would vanish from the face of the earth with the spread of Christianity.
- It did not succeed in changing the image of Christianity as a Western religion which lasted up until the first half of the twentieth century (*IRM* 1995:7, see also section 2.2 above).

Nevertheless, the aim and objectives of this study are not over because of these failures. It is fair to say, too, that the Church has not abandoned mission as a result, but is persevering with it despite – as Tesfai (1995:8) notes – significant changes that have profoundly affected its constitution and prior constituencies. Therefore, Rahner (1976:54), writing about the future of the Church, stated encouragingly that the Church has moved in the last hundred years from being a church of the West to being a Church present in varying extents in all parts of the world, everywhere become a genuine element of all cultures and nations. Today more than ever, he insists, it has everywhere become the basic sacrament of the world's salvation.

This both justifies the condescension of the Church to the national norm of a Western democracy such as England's and allows Christians to consider whether the society in which they live is not as good a place for non-Christian, as it is for Christian, mission. It also justifies the questionnaire format and the need for Christians to be respondent of questions about non-Christian conversionist approaches.

No attempt is made to determine which religious group has more right to proselytise in this fluid and open situation. But because conversion to Islam may happen – in some cases – at the pain of death to the convert, it calls for greater understanding between faiths and the secular community. It is extremely significant – in this regard - that when the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, sought moral and spiritual accompaniment, it was not just to the Vatican Envoy at the UN that he turned but to world religious leaders (see *The Baptist Times* 31.08.2000:4).

5.4.2 Questionnaire - the dialogue question

The dialogue question (Appendices 5 and 6, Question 7) asks *whether religious people should be able to approach people of other faiths with a view to conversion*. 'Be able to' assumes a yes/no response, the goal of which is to test whether the ground is good for dialogue. Hence there is no follow up question for a 'yes' reply. By contrast, there is such a question for a 'no' answer in Question 8 which acts as a probe and changes the word 'approach' in Question 7 tactically to 'talk to' and subtends the words 'with a view to promoting understanding' enticingly at the end of the question. It thereby reads: *If no, should they be able to **talk to** people of other faiths with a view to **promoting understanding**?* The objective here is to calculate whether Christians could (in the absence of mission and outreach) accept the challenge – not of seeing 'dialogue' as putting Christianity at par with other religions/cultures – but of using it as a stepping stone to mission.

While it may be inconceivable that any one should reject the encouraging of creative dialogue, it cannot be forgotten that religious fervour based on uniquely cultural and theological claims and world-views have been the cause of many wars.

The Evangelical world-view is a strong case in point as an obstacle in the way of dialogue. We may have recourse to Chapter Three where a definition of the tenets of Evangelicalism is attempted. Here, it would suffice to say that the dialogue question is not introduced with interdenominational conversation in mind, even though – as we saw also in Chapter Four – dialogue is as much an urgent need among Christians as it is between faiths, divided as Christians are over what the task of mission should be. This division of course flies in the

face of Christ's categorical remark in Matthew's Gospel that a divided kingdom cannot stand, and his plea in John's Gospel for all - irrespective of their denomination or theological persuasion - to come together as one. (Matthew; John 17).

The Evangelical world-view also – as we have seen - constantly retards the mission thrust of the WCC in its approaches to dialogue with non-Christians, failing to get consensus on the task and goal of mission. This is because there is in it – and this at the cost of repetition - a central tenet giving a resolute commitment to the urgency of converting the world to Christ. According to the Frankfurt Declaration (March 4, 1970) – in which the Evangelical position was spelled out with steel-hard clarity - the “primary frame of reference” for understanding Christianity and evaluating other religions is and can only be the Bible. In as much as “salvation” is due to the sacrificial crucifixion of Jesus Christ, which occurred once and for all and for all mankind, and “in as much as this salvation can be gained” only through participation in Christ, the biblical verdict is always to be upheld. This Declaration, formulated by the Tübingen Evangelical theologian, Peter Beyerhaus (see Knitter, 1985:75-78), goes on to affirm: “We therefore reject the false teaching that the non-Christian religions and worldviews are also ways of salvation similar to belief in Christ”.

This means that there is “an essential difference in nature between the Christian Church and other religions”. To substitute a “give-and-take dialogue” with other religions for “a proclamation of the gospel that aims at conversion” is absolutely rejected as a prostitution of the gospel. The bottom line of the Declaration is an urgent appeal to all Christians to take up their missionary obligation to all non-Christians.

The Declaration was formulated as a counter position to an “insidious falsification” of the motives and goals of the Christian churches within the WCC. The crisis, according to the Evangelicals, was caused by the new attitudes toward other religions and by the humanising tendencies sweeping through many ecumenically-disposed Protestant churches.

This therefore means that the form of the dialogue question as it appears cannot be acceptable to Evangelicals, unless it is designed as follows: *Should Christians be able to*

approach people with other faith with a view to converting them? To which, there could only be one answer, whether in England or anywhere else in the outside world: Yes. Hence, the question to the Uppsala Convention in 1968: “Will Uppsala betray the two billion?” (see Section 3.1).

But, as we have seen in Section 4.2 with the Lausanne Congress (1974), this is not a categorical Evangelical position. There was a shift of emphasis with it in the Frankfurt Declaration from the conservative Evangelical approach to other religions. Besides clearly affirming the necessity of “Christian social responsibility”, this position recognises the need for “that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand”. Yet, while this statement in itself seems to indicate a new openness to the value of other religions, it is really in essence only a qualified recognition of dialogue as “indispensable to Evangelism”.

But what about other Protestant and Roman Catholic positions on dialogue? Are they more forthcoming? The central difference between the mainline Protestant model and that of the conservative Evangelical, as stated by Knitter (1985:75), is that the mainline Protestants seek a more positive, more dialogical Christian approach to other faiths. Against Barth and many contemporary conservative Evangelicals, they argue (from the New Testament and from human conditionality) that Christians not only can - but also must - recognise that the God revealed in Jesus is truly speaking through voices other than that of Jesus.

They therefore conclude that all the religions of the world play a part in salvation history. According to a key protagonist, Werkzeuge (see Knitter, 1985:79), God’s will to save is not confined to the Christian drama and “all that happens in the world, in nature and history, is a whole, which - in its individual moments - serves as God’s means for realizing the goal of his love”. The religions are willed by God, and their gods, it is contended, are “representatives” of the Almighty. They are his “tools” and the religions as “ways of salvation”.

Does the third model, the Catholic Church, agree with one or the other of these preceding models? This study has already shown (see Chapters Two and Four) that of the

confessional attempts to formulate a Christian response to contemporary religious pluralism, the Roman Catholic effort is perhaps the most thoughtful, seeking progressively to come up with ways of holding the unique claims of Christianity in tact and being sympathetic to the beliefs of other religions at the same time.

Gerald Anderson (see Knitter, 1985:80), one of the most noted North American Protestant missiologists, in a survey of the past Roman Catholic attitude towards other religions, characterised and predicted the future of Roman Catholic mission theology in this way:

Roman Catholic Mission theology has undergone more radical change in these fifteen years than in the previous century, and there is obviously a great deal more ferment to come in the last fifth of the twentieth century. What we see so far, in my judgment of Catholic Mission theology, is that by AD 2000 it will be as far from our thinking today as Catholic Mission theology was twenty years ago.

Whether or not this has proved to be true will be considered under 'Roman Catholics' in the field research summaries.

The Second Vatican Council (1963-68) especially with the “*Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*” established this tradition of being forward-thinking on dialogue. Most resolutely than ever before, the Council so affirmed the universality of grace and salvation that it reckoned that even the expressed atheist who follows the conscience is movable by grace and can partake in eternal life.

Indeed, for the first time in its history, the Roman Catholic Church in its official statement singled out and praised the religions of the world for the way they have answered “those profound mysteries of the human condition”. The Council summarises the beliefs and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam and recognises that they contain what are “true and holy”. It further holds that they reflect “the truth that enlightens every human being” and exhorts Christians “prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness of Christian faith and life, to acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral good found among those persons” who hold them sincerely.

5.4.3 Questionnaire - other questions

On questions (Appendices 5 and 6) about whether or not respondents are practising Christians/Muslims (Question 1), and on their level of contact with other faiths (Question 2), the intention is simply to gain an insight into the degree to which people's attitudes to mission and dialogue are affected by the intensity of their faith and their ability to mix in the multicultural society. No great depth of analysis is given to this as the main analysis is done on the overall position of groups as Christians or Muslims, as Catholics or Protestants, Sunnis or Shiites, respectively.

Likewise, although sampling is done across age, gender and ethnic backgrounds, the information gained here is by no means the deciding factor. The reply of the Scottish Baptist Church minister indicating that Baptists were less inclined to ecumenical cooperation in Scotland than in England (see Section 5.2) is the clearest indication as to how information about these factors may be used. They may assist us in determining whether cultural variations are more significant at times than religious or denominational ones in our attitudes towards mission and dialogue.

5.4.4 Interviews and observations

An original intention to interview religious leaders fell through because only in the case of a few groups (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England) is mission seen to be the prerogative of missionaries and mission workers. By observation, it is surmised that most deeply and truly religious people will feel a need to share their faith either by word of mouth or in deed.

Instead, for this reason, interview is directed to people who did not feature in the questionnaire survey, that is those with no particular faith. The precise questions they were asked on mission and dialogue are found in Appendix 8, and a summary of some of the views expressed is given in Section 5.7.

In both of the field studies that follow, there will be extended notes on the religion as well as the denomination or group that is being studied before a summary of data is accomplished.

5.5 Field Study (Christians)

One poignant and perhaps fundamental point to note in this section is that with all these different theological positions, it is not easy to have unanimity of understanding and purpose among Christians either about mission or about dialogue. Participants in the mission field may express a sense of being united in Christ but when it comes to the matter of dialogue with non-Christian religions this sense often fades into disagreement and divergence, which further complicates the situation for carrying out the mission of the Church.

It will be most rewarding to see how the views of individuals differ from the formative world-views of the religion/denomination to which they adhere, since these - in a large measure – usually determine his or her position.

Each denomination has an approach that others would not subscribe to fully. In the sections dealing with each ethnographic group studied this 'differentia' will be explored with regard to the theology of the Church/Islam. Here, it will suffice to make only a couple of illustrative points. For example, although Catholics held the view until Vatican II that there is no salvation outside the Church, they would nevertheless more easily accept that salvation is available to non-Christians than Baptists would. For this reason, Catholics might be also more accommodating of religious pluralism than would Baptists. Then it might further be expected that Catholics would pay more attention to dealing with the issues of justice, health and poverty than Baptists who – as part of the Evangelical tradition (see especially Section 2.3) - would seek to place more emphasis on mission and evangelism.

It is by reason of this divergence of views that Knitter (1985), writing on Christian attitudes towards religious pluralism, categorised Christian theologians in the three models adapted in this study as theological paradigms (exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, see Section 2.7) according to which attitudes to mission and dialogue are analysed.

In the process, it may be somewhat lamentable to Christians that their theologians have

never succeeded in searching for and finding a common theological basis for mission. Ariarajah (1995:5) argued that the second and equally important regret is that the Church never found what could make sense of interfaith dialogue, even while it became a serious and widespread activity (see Section 2.4).

Neither the Orthodox Church, nor the Roman Catholics, nor yet the churches of the Protestant tradition could go beyond – as we have seen – glibly avowing “one Lord, one faith, one saviour, one way, one community” in statements where 'one' became “only one”. Could Christian people somehow see through this to understand that with respect to mission the Church needed and is obligated to the world of other faiths as the ‘mission field’? This remains to be seen.

Each of the ethnographic summaries that follow will be treated under teaching on mission and dialogue, questionnaire responses, and analytical summaries.

5.5.1 Roman Catholics (RCs)

Following the three headings just outlined, we begin this summary on Roman Catholics with the Church's teaching on mission and dialogue.

5.5.1.1 RC teaching on the Church, mission and dialogue

Roman Catholic (RC) theology of the Church and on mission and dialogue are best represented from deliberations at the two Vatican Councils.

The First Vatican Council (1868-70) dealt with ecclesiology or organic structure of the Church with regard to the issue of infallibility of the Papacy and collegiality. It more or less agreed, on the basis of the fact that cardinals were elected to Conciliar Commissions, that the Church is constituted democratically enough to be able to reach decisions which could be decreed for Roman Catholics to follow (see *The Dogmatic Constitution* 1.5). This agreement was strengthened by the fact that decisions were not taken until prepared drafts of issues to be considered had been fully debated. In this sense, the Council – dealing with the relation between Church and State – considered that the Church was at par with the State insofar as there were elections and debates in both institutions. The age old issue as

to which is supreme did not form part of the discussion.

The spirit of Vatican II (1962-68) which – it has been said – went beyond its letter (see McConnon in Quin, 1970:1049-50) to recapture the theology which see both the lowly and exalted state of the Church. It is an instrument of God which speaks in humility and in confidence to Christians and all mankind.

For this reason, the Council asked for an increase in those expediting of such things about which both church mission and state mission are concerned: Christian social activity and the provision of education for all children. To enhance the relationship with the state, it called for the Church to adapt itself to meet the changing conditions of the modern world.

The reason given for this (see *De Ecclesia* 1.23) is that the Church has a sacramental nature which promotes union with God and the unity of the whole human race. McConnon (in Quin, 1970:1045) writes:

The Church is a sign of unity. Through it, Christ, its founder, shows the power and presence of God, acting upon society, upon mankind, upon the world itself; and the action is the same as Christ's action on Calvary – bringing mercy and pardon to men.

The Church is not an instrument of triumph and it does not therefore compete with the state and other social systems and cultures for pride of place but adapts itself to them. It is a missionary Church and the people of God are missionaries or instruments through whom God unites and sanctifies mankind. Hence, the Church does not wish unwittingly to become involved in politics, but should make pronouncement on things in which it is competent. Nor should its representatives compromise with worldly powers but should be effective in speaking against injustices as equally as it is in leading worship in which such evils are preached about. Though salvation is open to all, non-Christians may not be blamed for not knowing Christ and his Church. Catholics are encouraged to join in ecumenical activity while to the Catholic theologians belong the business of ecumenical dialogue.

5.5.1.2 RCs' responses to questions on mission and dialogue (14 respondents)

On the mission question – Q4 - (i.e., *whether the respondent has ever been approached with a view to conversion*) and its augmentations (*If 'yes' – Q5 -, how did you respond? If 'no' – Q6 - how would you react, if approached?*).

a) 7 said Yes

As to how they responded:

- 3 said Positively
- 4 said Negatively

b) 7 said No

As to how they would react, if approached:

- 2 said Positively
- 5 said Negatively

On the dialogue question – Q7 - (i.e., *whether religious people should be able to approach people of other faiths with a view to conversion*), and its augmentation – Q8 - (*If no, should they be able to **talk to** people of other faiths with a view to **promoting understanding?***):

a) 7 said Yes

b) 2 were undecided

c) 5 said No

Of these 5, the probe (Q8) - *as to whether talking for understanding should be encouraged* – got the following replies:

- 4 said Yes
- (N.B. These are the appropriate 4, through an additional 4 also said Yes)
- 1 said No categorically

5.5.1.3 Analytical comments

To the Mission Questions (Q4 & Q5/6), those who responded positively to an approach (Q5/3RCs) and those who would react positively if approached (Q6/2RCs) form a total of only 5 RCs out of 14, less than 50% of all RC respondents.

This shows that RCs are not following the encouragement given to them at Vatican II to be

at ease with other faiths. Why is this so? This may be because of the level of contact which RCs have with people of other faiths as the evidence shows. More than half (8 to be precise) of the 14 RC respondents had 'very little' or 'no' contact with people of other faiths. But not all of these are those who say they responded or would respond negatively to an other-faith conversion process approach:

- RC/A, for instance, a black female, aged between 26 and 45, who has 'very little' contact with people of other faiths because of 'lack of time' says she will react positively if approached.
- Likewise RC/B, another black female of African background, in the same age bracket, whose very little contact is avowed to be out of 'lack of interest', nevertheless says that when she was approached she responded positively.

Their attitudes and responses are very different from

- RC/M's, for instance, a white British female, between the ages of 26 to 45, who says she has no contact because of 'lack of time'. She has never been approached but is one of those who say they will react negatively if approached.

It would seem - from these respondents - to assume that the female element is not a significant factor and that attention may be drawn rather to the cultural factor which - as we have seen - is indicative of flexibility where people (male or female, young or old) of African background (see Section 3.4) are concerned. Although a Scottish Baptist minister credited the people of England with more flexibility on ecumenical cooperation (see Section 5.2), it does seem that 'Englishness' is not a factor as favourable (for the English RC at least) to inter-religious tolerance as 'Africanness'.

To the Dialogue Question (Q7), those who responded positively to whether or not the opportunity should be there for religious people to approach other people were 7, precisely one half of all RC respondents. Of the remaining 7, 5 were negative and 2 were negative. With the aim of the question being to establish whether the secular democracy is right in allowing people to proselytise freely, it is remarkable that this study reveals that RCs appear transfixed about the matter. If it should be possible for a Roman Catholic in London to

approach a non-Roman Catholic, say a Hindu or a secularist, with a view to converting him/her, then it is equally right for the Hindu or secularist to approach a RC with the reverse intention, being aware that although the society is secular and multicultural it is traditionally also Christian. Hence the dilemma, which automatically calls in the probe (Q8) seeking to know whether any such approach should not be with the aim of promoting understanding (talking) rather than converting.

RCs being seemingly divided on the issue, the answer to Q8 has the decisive vote. Of the 5 that were negative to the idea of dialogue (Q7), only 1 (Respondent H) said 'no'. Thus, it does seem that in this regard RCs are keen to follow the guidance of Vatican II, though it has to be remembered that the Conciliar letter was more directed on RCs being engaged in ecumenical relations (activity) than in interfaith dialogue, as even ecumenical dialogue was recommended as suitable only for the theologians to engage in.

What about other Christian churches, as illustrated by Anglicans and Methodists?

5.5.2 The Church of England (Anglicans)

Given the three headings prescribed, the analyses proceed from a summary of the Church's teaching on mission and dialogue.

5.5.2.1 Anglican teaching on the Church, mission and dialogue

There is available a recent joint statement by Anglicans and Baptists from which this could be readily drawn. It is a report on what is called 'International Conversations' between The Anglican Communion and The Baptist World Alliance (2000-2005). It depicts the Anglican view of the Church as a eucharistic community with a unique history to that part which it constitutes. This worldwide communion of some 70,000,000 people is led by the Church of England (CE) which, at its height in the late 1970s, had over 18,000 parish churches in England, and which has been at pains to stress that these parishes are local eucharistic communities not structures. Baker (1980:8) writes:

When a church in London was destroyed by fire recently, a notice was posted next day in front of the smouldering ruins. It said: 'There has been a fire, but the Church is still here. We are meeting at...' and an address followed. The Church is not

buildings but people.

A national church, the Church of England is the Established Church in England with the King/Queen as its titular head since it separated itself (through Henry the VIII) from the Church of Rome in the 16th century. Thus closely linked with the official and public life of the country, there exists a formality whereby its archbishops – having been selected by the Church – are appointed by the Queen via the Prime Minister. Likewise, its diocesan bishops sit in the House of Lords and participate in some measure in the governing of the country. This arrangement has always been viewed as a mixed blessing, giving the nation a feeling of a religious commonality on the one hand but – on the other – compromising the standards of the Church.

In this sense, it is no doubt a challenge and a good thing that elsewhere the Anglican Church exists without this state connection. Indeed, it is very much a determinant in this study to consider whether or not the established link between Church and State does confer upon the nation a Christian status from which the presence of other denominations, faiths and non-faiths ought not to detract.

As this is investigated, it is worth noting that the Anglican Church has continued to develop its ecclesiology in such a way as to show that it increasingly sees the Church in both eucharistic and missionary terms. Whereas before the 1970s most priests celebrated the Eucharist with their backs to the congregation, forty years on most Anglican churches have so re-ordered their church layout that it is possible for the priest to face the people more or less from a central altar.

Though, like the Baptists to follow, Anglicans broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, for them nevertheless the Church is a living community of ministry and mission. Mission must have depth as well as breadth if the growth of the Church is – more than just being an expansion – to contribute to the Kingdom of God (The Joint Anglican/Baptist Report 2005.40). In the process, the rite of baptism – by which membership is enjoined in the Anglican Church – is significant. One African Anglican paper proposed that:

Baptism is the essential opening to ministry in the Church. The Christian is not baptised into a passive group of spectators but into action, into church, and also into service.

Anglicans acknowledge the need for dialogue with other faiths in varying degrees (see The Joint Anglican/Baptist Report 2005:40-41). While Western Anglicans generally take an *avant garde* approach to it, and African Anglicans see it as needed specifically in relation to Islam, Asian Anglicans say it should be marked in 3 ways:

- i) by sensitivity, respect and courtesy and with a genuine wish to listen to the other.
- ii) by the aim of telling the Christian story better.
- iii) by the aim of understanding the Christian story itself better

5.5.2.2 Anglican responses to questions on mission and dialogue (12 respondents)

On the mission question – Q4 - (i.e., *whether the respondent has ever been approached with a view to conversion*) and its augmentations (*If 'yes' – Q5 – how did you respond? If 'no' – Q6 – how would you react if approached?*).

a) 6 said Yes

As to how they responded:

- 4 said Positively
- 1 said Negatively
- 1 said Positively and Negatively

b) 5 said No

As to how they would react, if approached:

- 5 said Positively
- 3 said Negatively

On the dialogue question – Q7 - (i.e., *whether religious people should be able to approach people of other faiths with a view to conversion*) and its augmentation – Q8 - (*If no, should they be able to **talk to** people of other faiths with a view to **promoting understanding?***):

a) 5 said Yes

b) 2 were undecided

c) 5 said No

Of these 5, the probe (Q8) - *as to whether talking or understanding should be encouraged* – got the following replies:

- All 5 said Yes

5.5.2.3 Analytical comments

To the Mission Questions (Q4 & 5/6), Anglicans who responded positively when approached by people of other faiths and those who would react positively if approached came to a total of 9 out of 12 persons, i.e. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total respondents.

Though officially the Church of England because of its traditional position in the nation has been somewhat less expressive than the Roman Catholic Church about issues of Christian mission, this survey gives Anglicans in London a much higher profile as favourable to approach by another religious than their RC counterparts. But it is noticeable (from 6 responses out of 12) across samples and indices that Anglicans were more willing to qualify their answers in a way that preserves the diplomacy of their Church's political and social position. For instance, they were more willing to clarify the ambiguity in Qs 5 and 6 as to the meaning of positively and negatively (see Section 5.4). For instance,

a) CE/E, a white male aged between 46 and 60, having given a positive answer to Q5 (*as to how he responded when he was approached*) went on to add:

In the sense that I like ecumenism. I prefer my own denomination.

b) CE/G, a British female with African background, aged between 26 and 45, having also said that she responded positively to an approach, qualified it by saying:

Positively but not to join, out of respect.

c) CE/I, another British female of Asian background, between the ages of 46 and 60, likewise answered the same Q5 with 'positively' but added:

Out of respect, not in agreement.

To the Dialogue Question (Q7), Anglicans were evenly split (5 each way, with 2 clear

abstentions) between whether or not religious people should be able to approach others with a view to converting them. This may again highlight the Anglican dilemma of having to be supportive of both the national secular norms and the distinctive Christian understanding of the Church and its mission. Indeed, of the 5 who thought the opportunity to approach other faiths should not be available to religious people, 1 (CE/I) added: **not blatantly**. More significantly, of the 2 abstentions, CE/C suggested that it should depend on the nature of the context or country in which the approach is to be made (see Sections 5.2 and 5.3). CE/F said simply that there is no straightforward answer to the question and that in any case mission is the work of those who have been trained.

What about the Methodist Church, as a clearer form of evangelical Christianity?

5.5.3 The Methodist Church (MC)

In keeping with the three headings used in this section, the summaries will proceed under the sections, Methodist teaching on the Church and on mission and dialogue, Methodists' response to questions on mission and dialogue, and Analytical comments.

5.5.3.1 Methodist teaching on the Church and on mission and dialogue

In the UK, the Methodist world-view on the Church, mission and dialogue is uniquely linked with its understanding of the unity of the Church. It is determined at national level by the Methodist Conference in England, Wales and Scotland. The Methodist Conference's (June 1997) response to the Churches Together in England Report (CTE 1996) on ecumenism provides a framework for this. Declared at the ministerial and representative session which was held at the Westminster Central Hall in London, was it produced in Volume 1 of the Report's agenda. Commended to its member Churches for study, it has been seen as encouraging both to Methodists and across the denominations.

The CTE Report entitled - as we have seen (Section 5.2) - *Called To Be One*, was preceded by another CTE Report: *Called To Love And Praise* which had been finalised and received by the Methodist Conference in 1995. This had been written by the Faith and Order Committee of the CTE and was subtitled *The Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice*. Commended by Conference to the districts, circuits and local churches for study, discussion and response prior to the meeting of June 1997, it:

- a) acknowledges that the ecumenical movement has highlighted the diversity and differences of Christian traditions and also underscored the common faith which they share.
- b) speaks of the Church as one and says, 'because the basis of the Church's unity is God's own being and grace, that unity contains within itself a very rich diversity'.

On the actual Conference deliberations itself, the Agenda in Volume One (1997) reports on the acceptance of *Called to Be One* by the Methodist Conference as follows:

- a) Conference welcomed it and encouraged the Methodist people to study it. Its Introduction gives some recent history of the movement towards unity, the formation of Churches Together in England and - in section 1.13 - the beginning of the *Called to Be One* process.
- b) On the basis of some of the replies of member churches to the prior 1995 Report, Conference (1997) sets out provisional answers to the questions:
 - (i) How does your church understand the meaning of the word 'church' and how do individuals use the word?
 - (ii) How does your church understand the meaning of the word 'unity'? What kind of unity are you seeking?
 - (iii) How does your church understand the meaning of the word 'visible' in this context?

Sections 6.11 to 6.21 of Conference Report (1997) thus contain the description of the different models of 'unity': uniformity, federal unity, organic unity, unity not absorption, communion of communions, conciliar fellowship, unity in reconciled diversity.

Section 6.28 asks whether there is a common visible unity and speaks of the way forward together and the challenges of renewal, unity and mission.

A partial response from the provincial districts (based on replies from some rather than all their circuits) to the prior 1995 Report enabled Conference (Agenda Volume 1.1997) to summarise the disparate views of Methodists on the ecumenical questions in these ways:

a) On the question of the kind of unity being sought, it is said:

The unity which is being pursued is unity in mission. Greater local cooperation in mission will hold the total mission of the Church. Some major projects can only be done because of strong cooperation.

For the local Church, worshipping together is a focus for unity. For some there is a vision of local cooperation, but little interest in any change of national structures. For others the unity being sought is one, which would enable a member of one Church to enter into any other Church and be at home. This would require the mutual recognition of Ministries and an open table. Clearly there are a variety of models and it is difficult to envisage a common expression of visible unity.

In the variations of the responses there was, of course, some divergence from this position. More negatively and pessimistically, for example, it was said that:

- (i) the tasks of overcoming centuries of hurt means that visible and organic union will take a very long time.
- (ii) there has not been sufficient development of mutual respect among the denominational clergy to merit union; and that indeed
- (iii) some women Methodist Ministers are ostracised by clergy of other Churches, making for a fear of loss of identity in any unity scheme.

b) On the question of what is understood by the visible unity of the Church, it is said (Agenda, Vol 1, 1997.258):

There is a recognition of the inherent unity of the church as one in Christ. The responses are clearly in favour of unity in reconciled diversity, and some acknowledge that there is much more work to do. For some, reconciled diversity means doing one's best within a local community, to share resources and not work against each other. For others, it is a more positive working together in mission and community projects, and for yet others it is a legitimate diversity within one organisation (as already happens in many denominations). Some see reconciled diversity as an end in its own right. A few suggest organic union as a long-term aim. The hope is expressed that the Church of tomorrow will be not less varied than the Church of today.

Outside this consensus, a few replies showed opposition to any form of unity. Some see federal unity as a stage towards organic unity. This, however, may be a cry for the Methodist emphasis on 'connexionalism' to be part of any model of unity, given that with its interconnectedness the strong help the weak.

On the whole, it is clear that many Methodists are happy to be involved in their own locality working together with other non-Methodists on initiatives which have some impact on the community. But it does seem also clear that they are nowhere near ready to take steps to enter into relationships which require a deeper level of commitment.

c) On the question of what steps can be taken toward a vision of this visible unity, it is said:

At national level the churches must move towards full mutual acceptance of ministry and membership. There should be a real mutual respect for and acceptance of each other's traditions. The attitude of leaders is crucial at every level. It must be recognised that this means both clergy and laity, and national, intermediate and local levels.

Visible unity is the only real or worthwhile unity. Unless the ecumenical partners, and particularly the world, can see it as a whole, it will not be recognised and will not really exist.

The consensus seems further to indicate that bilateral conversations are to be encouraged whereby some churches journey together in twos as a sign to all. Indeed, where bilateral conversations have a realistic chance of making progress, multilateral talks tend to mean very difficult negotiations with a greater possibility of breakdown.

On the other hand, there is recognition that those who are not included in the bilateral talks might find it difficult to join the 'new' Church at a later stage. Local churches therefore should be encouraged to have closer cooperation and fuller commitment with each other; and all Church plants and chaplaincy work should be ecumenical.

However, some Methodists suggest that many Churches are better left alone as they may be struggling to maintain their own life and could little afford to expend time on working with other in a process which absorbs time, energy and resources.

The districts and circuits made this further spectacular recommendation to Conference:

The recognition of each other's ministries is paramount, and training for Ordained and Lay Ministry should be more genuinely ecumenical. An ecumenical strategy for clergy deployment should be developed.

Though Conference Report (1997:260) glosses over the differences between different churches and leadership structures, there is recognition that these have to be addressed. Otherwise, some local ecumenical partnerships may feel hampered by bureaucracy which is not understood. There could be frustration, too, over financial inflexibility from their parenting churches which could be injurious to the well-being of the group. This conclusion is therefore apt:

It must be recognised that the theological issues, which divide the denominations, do not particularly concern many church members. Many people tend to attend church where they are comfortable, regardless of denomination, and for many ecumenism is an issue even among those who feel that there should be greater moves made towards the bringing together of the denominations. There is no real desire for organic unity schemes. Not all denominations will be ready to move at the same time, or the same speed, so those ready to move should do so.

In addition, the following useful resolutions were made at the conference (Agenda Volume 1.15, 1997:261).

15/1 The Conference welcomes the opportunity presented to the Churches to share with each other their vision of the unity to which God is calling the church of Jesus Christ, while regretting that it did not prove possible for a wider range of partner Churches to have their views recorded in the published report.

15/2 The Conference recognises that unity is the gift of God as well as the calling of God and that its perfect realisation is to be awaited in the coming kingdom of God, but rejoices in the foretaste of that unity already experienced by the Churches in spite of their divided state.

15/3 The Conference affirms the goal of unity to be participation in a Koinonia, or communion rooted in the life of the triune God, made visible in such marks as:

- The profession of the one apostolic faith, which is grounded in the Holy Scripture and witnessed to in the historic creeds
- The sharing of one baptism and the sharing of one Eucharist
- A shared ministry of word and sacrament
- And a shared ministry of oversight

It believes that such communion embraces diversity without imposing uniformity.

15/4 The Conference affirms that the search for visible unity cannot be divorced from, or set in opposition to, obedience to the call to share in the mission of God to all humanity, by witnessing the good news of Jesus Christ, by engaging in his name, in service to the poor and the struggle for justice, and by being responsible stewards of the resources of the planet.

15/5 The Conference notes that experiences in local situations reveals widely different patterns of cooperation and commitment, some of which are enriching for all concerned, some regrettably, very difficult.

15/6 The Methodist Church is already engaged in exploratory bilateral, or multinational conversations in Wales and Scotland as well as in England, and will be taking decisions about the future of some of these things in 1998. The conference believes that such conversations, involving one or more particular Churches, may be a fruitful step towards a more inclusive unity.

The Methodist Church, as a missionary church, sees such unity as the basis of its work to the world at large. This is how Bates (1981:41) expressed the historical context in relation to these two aspects, Church unity and missions:

Methodism arose during the great expansion of the European nations, and Methodists travelled the world taking their faith with them so that today there is an estimated world Methodist membership of over 20,000,000 with a community attracted to it of 45,000,000.

As an evangelical church, which itself broke away from the Church of England, it does not particularly give centrality to dialogue with other religions, and Bates (1981:44) again says:

Methodism began as an evangelical movement to preach the gospel to anyone who would hear, and today Methodists are constantly trying to find ways of reaching people outside the church.

5.5.3.2 Methodists' response to questions on mission and dialogue (8 respondents)

On the mission question – Q4 - (i.e., *whether the respondent has ever been approached with a view to conversion*) and its augmentations (*if 'yes' -Q5- how did you respond? If 'no' -Q6- how would you react if approached?*).

a) 6 said Yes

As to how they responded:

- 2 said Positively
- 4 said Negatively

b) 2 said No

As to how they would react, if approached:

- 1 said Positively
- 1 said Negatively

On the dialogue question - Q7- (i.e., *whether religious people should be able to approach people of other faiths with a view to conversion*) and its augmentation – Q8 - (*If 'no', should they be able to **talk to** people of other faiths with a view to **promoting understanding?***):

a) 2 said Yes

b) 6 said No

Of these 6, the probe - *as to whether talking for understanding should be encouraged* – got a stunning agreement in the replies as:

- all 6 said Yes
- 1 said No categorically

5.5.3.3 Analytical comments

To the Mission Questions (Q4 & 5/6), Methodists who responded positively when approached by people of other faiths and those who would react positively if approached came to a total of 3 out of 8 persons, i.e., about a third of the total respondents.

With such low showing it could readily be said that the Methodists have expressed the mind of their Church to the open society where a counter-mission (i.e., the approach – and possible conversion - of Christians by people of other faiths) is possible. Indeed, one vociferous respondent who happens to be a local councillor, MC/A, a female of African-Caribbean background, aged over 60, simply noted she is happy as she is. As many as 5 respondents said that they have little or no contact with people of other faiths, which situation they mainly attributed to lack of time. But how is this unilateralist attitude further illustrated with regard to the dialogue questions (Q7/8)?

To the first dialogue question (Q7), Methodists – perhaps suspecting that the current situation in which people can freely proselytise their religion is more likely to benefit the more aggressive proselytes than most Christians – almost entirely (in 6 cases out of 8) said the opportunity should not be available to religious people to approach others to convert them. Nevertheless, it is an encouraging signal for dialogue that all 6 objectors to this kind of approach agreed (Q7) that the approach could be done with a view to promoting better understanding between peoples of different faiths.

Ironically, this may suit the temperament of their Church, as in the Evangelical tradition dialogue is not seen either as an instrument for Christian mission or as an activity of no evangelistic/missionary consequence even if initiated by Christians.

What about Islam? How would Muslims fare with mission and dialogue as an instance of how people who are not Christians see them both from their own and the Church's point of view?

5.6. Field Study (Muslims)

Although Muslims pride themselves on being far more homogeneous than Christians, they are still better studied in main and sub groups. Here our investigation continues with respect to the two main groups of Islam: Sunnis and Shi'ites, and a configuration of a third 'Other' who may be influenced by any one of the missionary groups: the extremist Wahhabiyya, the more liberal Qadiriyya and the Tarabiyya, and the speculative Ahmadiyya. The three headings under which summaries are conducted are – as always – 'teaching on mission and dialogue', 'questionnaire responses' and 'analytical comments'.

The treatment, however, is slightly different in this section because the two main Muslim groups do not have (see Section 4.3) synodical-type bodies making declarations about their teaching. For the most part they rely on the Qur'an and the Sunna/Hadith for this, regardless of their persuasion. It will be thus appropriate to have one section for all Muslim teaching on mission and dialogue, and two subsections drawing attention to the distinctions as far as possible.

Here, the consideration focuses more on these Muslims' own understanding of mission and dialogue than on their understanding of Christian mission and dialogue which has been the focus of much of what has been said before in Chapters Three and Four.

5.6.1 Inter-Islamic Teaching on mission and dialogue

Generally, Muslims are united in their use of the same Qur'an in Arabic as their scriptural basis. Translations, unless for spreading the faith in non-Islamic education, have been resisted in the hope of not corrupting the message as had happened to previous scriptures. As the book itself is not easy to read and understand, translations have been difficult, as is reflected in variations in the numbering of verses between translations, making it possible for the same texts to be found in earlier or later verses.

Despite the use of a firm text, divisions emerge, however, between Muslim groups over the interpretation and silence of the Qur'an as well as their understanding of their respective histories. For example, based on what Muhammad is reported to have said (*hadith*), the Shi'ites see *aqi* (reason) as an equally valid source of guidance (with the other Qur'an, the *sunna/hadith* – actions/sayings of Muhammad – and the *ijma/consensus*) where the Qur'an is silent. The same is not true with the Sunnis and their equivalent *qiyas* (analogy) which is rejected by some scholars as a source of conflict. Likewise, while Shi'ites accept the grandsons of Mohammad (Hasan and Husayn) as the rightful owners of the Caliphate, Sunnis do not; preferring instead the Umayyad dynasty and descendants of Abu Barker.

But even the Qur'an itself exhibits different attitudes to different religions. It refers to some as the 'People of the Book' (the *ahl al-kitab*), and to others as pagans and infidels (*kafir*). Of the 'people of the book', in Sura *Al'Imram* 3.64, it makes this positive remark:

Say (O Prophet): 'O People of the Book! Let us come together on a fair and noble principle common to both of us: never to worship or serve any but Allah, never to associate any being with Him, and never to take any one as lord beside Allah.'

It is usually accepted that the 'People of the Book' are the followers of Judaism and Christianity who were given a scripture before the coming of the Prophet Mohammad. The Qur'an, however, rejects the Christian belief that Jesus, whom it calls Hazrat Isa, was divine and the son of Allah. As a human prophet, he brought the *injl*, the Gospel, to mankind. For this reason, there is no enjoined need to convert Christians (and Jews) who should therefore be allowed to practise their religion peacefully.

Nevertheless, Sura 9.29 clearly gives permission to attack the 'People of the Book', Jews and Christians:

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His apostle, nor acknowledge the religion of truth (even if they are) the People of the Book until they pay the Jizya with willing submission and feel themselves subdued.

Again, positively of all religions it is said: 'Let there be no compulsion in religion' (*Al-Baqara* 2.256), and 'To you be your way, and to me be mine' (*Al-Kafirun* 109.6). In the Hadith it is reported that the Prophet said: 'Whoever oppresses any *Dhimmi* (the law protecting non-Muslim communities), I shall be his prosecutor on the Day of Judgement'. The Hadith clearly states that it is the responsibility of Muslims to be mindful of the rights of non-Muslims and show them respect and tolerance. It is for this reason that Muslims have – not infrequently – allowed non-Muslims to pray and worship in their own way.

But then more negatively there is an unconditional command to fight all unbelievers, instituting *jihad* against them indiscriminately in the verse known as 'the sword':

But when the forbidden months are past then fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war).

Thomas and Draper (2004:80) write:

Christian churches and Jewish synagogues are more common features of the Islamic cities under the caliphs who ruled the Islamic empire in Damascus and Baghdad, and Muslims would regularly visit Christian monasteries and meet Christians there.

5.6.1.1 Sunni Muslim (SM) teaching on mission and dialogue

It is debatable whether Sunni Muslims, as the mission-orientated brand of Islam, are more or less open to dialogue with other religions and world-views. While they sponsor missions in other countries and help fund projects that carry out the aim of converting others to Islam they are not known for their willingness to reciprocate. According to the *International Religious Freedom Report (12/2005)*, Saudi Arabia is a good example of this as its official Sunni religion does not encourage freedom of religion. Released by the US State Department, the report indicates that all non-Muslims face severe consequences if they practise their religion openly. Indeed, while it is enshrined in government law that they could practise their faith privately this basic right is not always respected by the people and the government itself. No attempt is made to encourage dialogue with other faiths and it had been noted that harassment by the *mutawa'een* (religious police) of people seeking to publicly practise their beliefs, let alone proselytise, was on the increase.

Why is this so? Though Sunnis display tolerance in allowing non-Muslims to enter their mosques and are willing in some respects to enter into dialogue with them (e.g., over theological issues), they have a very strong incline towards mission and conversion. This goes back to the fact that when Mohammad conquered Mecca the emphasis was on converting the people, particularly because the Jews had been vanquished. But what about the Shi'ites and others?

5.6.1.2 Shi'ite Muslim (ShM) teaching on mission and dialogue

There is not an awful lot of direct teaching by Shi'ites on mission and dialogue. Much has to be implied. As they consider even Jews and Christians as unclean and do not allow them to enter their mosques, they hardly entertain a wish for dialogue with non-Muslims, and even for very strict Shi'ites, especially in a stronghold of theirs like Persia (see Guillaume 1966:103). As they believe in the supreme authority of the law, they are not necessarily given to missionary work unless it is necessary for the security of their community as in post-war Iraq. What about other Muslims?

5.6.1.3 Other Muslim (OthM) teaching on mission and dialogue

This category is necessary because there are Muslims in Africa and non-Arab countries who do not consider themselves either Sunni or Shi'ite. Many of them, as stated already, embraced Islam having come under the influence of Islamic missions. Greater flexibility is therefore to be expected of these Muslims in relation to mission and dialogue than exists with the two main groups. Their greater exposure to Western education is also likely to be a factor in their thinking. For example, a West African-born Muslim presenter of a documentary TV programme on whether or not Muslims in Britain should refrain from polygamy, quite willing began the programme by expressing his dislike for polygamous marriages, having suffered in it himself (Channel 4, July 2009). He also prefaced his comment with the statement: 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do.' Is this justifiable for the Islamists on the wish of radical Muslims - which we have noted before - to make Britain an Islamic State?

5.6.2 Questionnaire Responses

Though the questionnaires are treated distinctively according to the three groups, it is worth noting, as authors and contributors do (see Guillaume 1966:103; Thomas and Draper 2004:163) that theory is not always borne out in practice. Hence, differences too in thought forms between the groups do not amount to much in every day life.

5.6.2.1 Questionnaire Responses: Sunni Muslims (10 respondents)

On the mission question -Q4- (i.e., *whether the respondent has ever been approached with a view to conversion*) and its augmentations (*if 'yes' -Q5- how did you respond? If 'no' -Q6- how would you react if approached?*).

a) 5 said Yes

As to how they responded:

- 1 said Positively
- 4 said Negatively

b) 5 said No

As to how they would react, if approached:

- All 5 said Negatively

On the dialogue question (i.e., *whether religious people should be able to approach people of other faiths with a view to conversion*) and its augmentation (*If no, should they be able to talk to people of other faiths with a view to **promoting understanding**?*):

a) 6 said Yes

b) 4 said No

Of these 4, the probe (Q8) - *as to w hether t alking f or understanding should be encouraged* – got the following replies:

– All 4 said No

5.6.2.2 Questionnaire Responses: Shi'ite Muslims (5 respondents)

On the mission question -Q4- (i.e., *whether the respondent has ever been approached with a view to conversion*), and its augmentations (*if 'yes' -Q5- how did you respond? If 'no' -Q6- how would you react if approached?*).

a) 1 said Yes

As to how he responded:

– He said Positively

b) 4 said No

As to how they would react, if approached:

– All 4 said Negatively

On the dialogue question – Q7 - (i.e., *whether religious people should be able to approach people of other faiths with a view to conversion*) and its augmentation – Q8 - (*If 'no', should they be able to **talk to** people of other faiths with a view to **promoting understanding**?*):

a) 2 said Yes

b) 3 said No

Of these 3, the probe (Q8) - *as to w hether t alking f or understanding should be encouraged* – got the following replies:

– 1 said Yes

– 2 said No categorically

5.6.2.3 Questionnaire Responses: Other Muslims (2 respondents)

On the mission question – Q4 - (i.e., *whether the respondent has ever been approached with a view to conversion*) and its augmentations (if 'yes' -Q5- *how did you respond? If 'no' -Q6- how would you react if approached?*).

- Both respondents said Yes
As to how they responded:
 - Both said Negatively

On the dialogue question - Q7- (i.e. *whether religious people should be able to approach people of other faiths with a view to conversion*) and its augmentation – Q8 - (If 'no', *should they be able to talk to people of other faiths with a view to promoting understanding?*):

- a) 1 said Yes
- b) 1 said No

To the probe (Q8) - *as to whether talking for understanding should be encouraged*, the sole respondent said Yes

5.6.3 Analytical comments

To the mission Questions (Q4 & 5/6), SMs responded almost entirely negatively to being approached by people of other faiths for conversion (9 to 1 against); ShMs similarly (4 to 1 against); and OrthMs likewise unfavourably (2 to 0 against). This could be read as Muslims being true to the *Dhimmi* which favours every human being to his/her own order. But it does not explain the rate of conversions to Islam that – from observation – could be seen to have taken place in Western cities in recent times. It rather explains Muslim desire not to be converted; there is a Sunni tradition to put to death anyone who converts from Islam, as illustrated most recently in the case of an Afghan who converted to Christianity, particularly in the light that some Muslims tend to brand Christians as unbelievers (*kafr*) as we saw in Section 5.2. Also, in the Middle East, in the late 1990s, a convert from Islam to Christianity was detained by the authorities simply because of his Christian faith. Both cases ended on a positive note as both men and their families were released and allowed to travel outside the countries of their incarceration (Thames Educational Institute Lectures, London 2005/6).

The mode of thinking revealed by the survey could also be explained with regard to Muslim resentment of Christian missionary activity, as the case of a Somalian Christian by the name of Xaaji reveals. In February and March 1996, Xaaji began to be very open in Christian witness. On the 3rd of April he was kidnapped while witnessing near his house in Mogadishu. The following day his body was found in an abandoned building close by. A dominant Somali Islamic group, Al-Itixaad al-Islami, claimed that they carried out his murder, adding that since they believed that Xaaji was the last Christian in Mogadishu they would turn their attention to Somali Christians in Nairobi, Kenya.

To the Dialogue Question (Q7), SMs were mostly (by 6 to 4) in favour of the right of religious people to approach others, even with a view to conversion. ShMs were 3 to 2 against, and OrthMs were 1 on either side.

It is difficult to see this as positive thinking in favour of dialogue because those who – across the divide - said 'no' to the right of approach were so categorical about it that they almost entirely said that an approach (Q8) should not even be allowed for the purpose of promoting understanding.

What is the position taken by people with no faith?

5.7 Interviews of people with no religion

The study would not be complete if no reference was made – in the pluralist society – to people who consider themselves as having no religious faith. Some 10 people in London with such orientation (chosen at random across various age groups, ethnicity and social background) were interviewed. Two main questions and their probes (see Appendix 8) were used, and what follows is a selection of two of the most insightful comments bearing on their understanding of the mission and dialogue debate.

5.7.1 Non-Religious (NR) people on mission

Q. (Main) *Do you think Christian mission is facing a serious challenge in this society?*

A. (NR/06. Male, school teacher, African background, 46-60).

This challenge is real, but often ill perceived, and sometimes not noticed at all. It is important to state that the challenge does not lie with Muslim people as such, but rather that there is within British society an element with its own distinct culture and character, which tries to draw people away from the rest of society.

Q. (Probe) *Why could Christians from abroad (Africa in particular) not be more influential in mission in this multi-cultural society?*

A. (NR/06).

Real integration is not easy. The combination of snobbery, racial prejudice and complacency makes it difficult for outsiders, particularly those with racial, cultural and religious differences to be fully accepted.

Q. (Probe) *How challenging is racism as a obstacle to mission, considering that converts to Islam are increasingly from black and ethnic minority groups?*

A. (NR/02 British African-Caribbean, 56-60, community development worker).

Racism, subtle or overt, is a live issue: most immigrants, as well as second generation Muslim Britons, have experienced it first hand. One result of this is a high conversion rate to Islam amongst the British African-Caribbean community. Many young blacks feel they have a minimal stake in society, and are susceptible to Muslim sects, such as the nation of Islam, which portrays Christianity as the white man's religion and stresses self-worth and empowerment for the black man.

Q. (Probe) *Assuming that the Church is unable to reach people like yourself, is there anything anyone else could do to eradicate things like racism and xenophobia?*

A. (NR/07 English male, 26-45, computer specialist)

There are things that government can do: raising education standards must be a priority and issues of deprivation and discrimination needs to be addressed. Ordinary Britons like me can empathise with unjustified attacks on Islam, without accepting that all criticism constitutes Islamo-phobia. Muslims themselves will have to face up to serious issues that perhaps they have avoided. In what does their identity lie? What language is to be their *lingua franca*? What are their expectations? How are they to engage with a civil society in which they are a minority? Christians, too, may have to refrain from the proselytising of Muslims, in which case they can expect the same restrictions to be applied by Islam to Muslims.

A. (NR/05. English, female, 26-45, mother and grandmother)

A realistic inner-city policy may reduce the degree to which ghettos become a problem. In particular, it would help if there is a deliberate attempt made by all

people in this country to do this, regardless of origin, nationality, background, loyalty to queen and country.

5.7.2 Non-Religious (NR) people on dialogue

Q. (Main) *Some Churches initiated dialogue between religions to improve relations between them; why do you think some people do not wish to see dialogue as a way forward?*

A. (NR/01. Female post graduate student, 26-45, English)

It does not take much guessing to know why dialogue, especially with Muslims, has not made much progress. Islam is seen through the actions of fanatics of fundamental Muslims in Iran, and Libya, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Middle East. The violence of Islam with hostage-taking, bombing by suicide and terror squads does not give it a credible image and Western people are less prepared to trust it enough to be willing to engage in constructive dialogue with it. The death sentence imposed on the author, Salman Rushdie, also added to the mistrust of Islam as a peaceful religion.

Q. (Probe) *Would you care to blame non-religious people, rather than say Muslims, for failure of the dialogue process?*

A. NR/03 British mixed race, 60+, retired civil servant)

No, we should accept that there are many Muslims who are seeking to change Britain away from the tradition of her Judaeo-Christian roots and Islamise our institutions through individual conversions. To this end, they will use all available means: they will seek to change the way we think about Islam, by censorship and control of information, change the educational system, use democratic politics where this can deliver, and threaten violence if it will not. They may then actually engage in violence; let us be prepared for this eventuality.

5.8 Summary and projected analysis

This penultimate chapter was introduced with a restatement of its problem, objective and methodology. The cluster headings under which its summaries are produced are listed as: Case Study - bilateral relations in a plural situation (Christians and Muslims), Case Study – unilateral focus in a plural situation (the Baptist Church); Two Case Studies – unilateral focus in singular situations (Ireland and Mauritania); Field Study – analytical basis, Field Study – Christians, Field Study – Muslims, Field Study – no-faith people.

- The problem the chapter looked at is: how can a divided church carry out mission and dialogue in a plural society with the help of case studies and field research?
- The objective performed aimed at creating a better understanding of mission and dialogue by way of finding a way of achieving church unity and world peace through case and field study.
- The methodology by which this is achieved is through qualitative research into the ethnographic communities of Christians and Muslims in plural and singular contexts, in unilateral focus, in bilateral and multilateral relations.

5.8.1 Case Studies

These were threefold: of bilateral relations in the UK between Christians and Muslims, of a unilateral focus by the Baptist Church in the UK, and of two other unilateral focuses in Europe and Africa.

They reveal a situation in which - while Christians are pulling back from mission work in the UK because of the multicultural society - Muslims are using it as a way of promoting Islam. For instance, while there is a modification of the taking of Christian assemblies in schools, Muslims are at the same time creating more and more separatist Islamic schools and seeking state funding for them.

They also reveal that the Baptist Church, as a conservative Evangelical Church, typifies a church with a one-sided focus in a pluralist society. It pays little deference to society's multicultural constitution, and is up against a brick wall in trying to expedite the Church's mission with regard to interfaith dialogue.

They further reveal that knowledge of non-pluralist situations amply illustrates the nature of a pluralist society. They are very persuasive in favour of the *status quo* in a Christian context (as in Ireland) and very oppressive of the visiting norm or minority in a Muslim context (as in Mauritania).

Altogether, they reveal that the problem is not with mission or dialogue itself but with the context of pluralism and the attitude of the vehicle of mission (i.e., whether or not the religion or denomination chooses a uni-, bi- or multilateral approach to mission).

5.8.2 *Field Studies*

These were also threefold: of Christians in three denominations (Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Methodists), of Muslims in two main groups (Sunnis and Shi'ites), and of non-religious people in the secular state.

The surveys revealed differences in the attitudes of Christians to how the permutations of a pluralist society are to be viewed. The individual attitudes seem to be denominational and a clear distinction could be made on overall attitudes to mission and dialogue between Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Methodists.

The same is not true of Muslim groups, the two main ones (Sunnis and Shi'ites) almost agreeing that missionary approach to themselves from another religious group (even that of Christianity in a traditionally Christian country) is unacceptable. For this reason they seem also to be willing to suggest (quite in contrast to the general impression) that Muslims must themselves not make any such approaches to others in the pluralist society.

The interviews of non-faith persons also reveal a striking awareness of the difficulties facing Christian mission in a pluralist and secularist society. The interviews tell of attitudes of a secularist tendency – in spite of Islamic fundamentalism, and perhaps because of it - not to notice these challenges. But the interviews also indicate that this tendency has changed on account of the most recent events of Islamic terrorism in London. The interviews shows great awareness that racism is part of the reason why flagging Christian mission could not benefit from missionary returns which African and other overseas Christians are able to offer. At the same time, as with discrimination, it encourages ghetto situations in which Muslims become more radicalised.

5.9 Summary and projected analysis

This is reached with regard to the problem and objective of the chapter and by revisiting the three technical and defining features of the study: the Central Theoretical Argument, pluralism and non-pluralism, the theological paradigms all assist immensely to shape and give clarity to the thesis in general.

5.9.1 The Central Theoretical Argument revisited

The impression that Evangelical churches have not generally responded adequately well to the challenges facing mission in a pluralist society is confirmed. The Methodists and Baptists were the least complimentary of dialogue with non-Christian religions compared with the Roman Catholics and Anglicans.

Although dialogue does not undermine mission (Section 4.8), they seem to be struggling rather than walking together. This is because evangelical Christians are not as broad-minded about them as Roman Catholics, nor as diplomatic with them as Anglicans. They are too blunt in most cases and discountenancing of the pluralist society.

5.9.2 The formulated definition of pluralism re-visited

The research revealed from two control case studies of Ireland and Mauritania (as singular/non-pluralist contexts) that pluralism is much too open a society for mission and dialogue to be carried out from a position of strength. It does not have the directiveness of a singular society to offer mission workers and very often it prefers to gloss over difficult issues rather than to deal with them. It fears and avoids confrontation so as not to offend anyone, but in so doing it weakens its institutions, for which the Church and its mission are the most likely to suffer.

Nevertheless, pluralism has its virtues. It is a good climate in which to build a one-nation world and a very healthy democratic ideology. It could encourage conversation – if not conversion – and dialogue between people of all faiths and non-faiths in a way which in turn could bring about stability in world affairs.

5.9.3 The theological paradigms revisited

For this reason, it can be said that Britain is a pluralist context, in which the different religions could be seen as equally salvific paths to God (see Chapter Two). Christian and Roman Catholics Ireland are more inclusivist, and Islamic Mauritania an exclusivist context. It is not precisely clear how in a pluralist context Christians who oppose free approach intend to meet the requirement of the Church's mission (apart from through the use of the media and broadcasting) to approach people in pluralist contexts in England or anywhere else.

To conclude, it is submitted that (1) pluralism poses enormous challenges to mission and dialogue; (2) mission needs dialogue to function effectively as a tool for the kingdom of God in a pluralist context; (3) ecumenism and interfaith dialogues are two ways by which the historical Churches would overcome their theological and ideological inhibitions in this context, both in coming together and working together in a unit of some kind, and relating and working with the multi-faith world.

6.0 CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

As the aim of this Conclusion is to bring things together as much as to make a decisive statement, it will be built on the conclusions to all the chapters of the study. Then, for a rounded position, it will include a final conclusion together with some predictions predictions.

6.1 Summary and projection analysis to Chapter One (Introduction)

This introductory chapter illuminated the four main chapters of the thesis by looking at matters of its problem and background, aims and objectives, and methodology. The summary used the information gained analytically to project thinking into the contents and arguments of the four chapters. It also stated the Central Theoretical Argument, defined some key words, and described a developmental history of the WCC.

In brief, the Central Theoretical Argument is now restated as saying that the fact that 'mission and dialogue' is seen by some Evangelicals as 'mission *versus* dialogue' is the reason for their poor response to the work of the WCC.

On behalf of the WCC, the chapter stated that had it not advocated and requested Church unity so loudly, nothing much would have been done about it. Such organic unity as the Anglicans and Roman Catholics pursued in the past was the direct outcome of the WCC's work, though a question remains: should the goal of all unity talks be geared towards reconciled diversity?

The second chapter dealt with the problem, objective and methodology of the thesis in relation to the definitions and explanations of the main terms of concern: mission, dialogue, pluralism, with the definitions of challenges and context following closely on.

- The problem with pluralism, it was said, is that it is by its very nature challenging to mission and dialogue. The problem with these two aspects is that although they are twinned in the work of the Church, some church folks see them as diametrically opposed. The objective of the chapter was to define and

explain pluralism, mission and dialogue, with challenges and context. Its methodology, it was said, will enhance these definitions by hermeneutical and critical use of biblical and historical data and with material broadly selected from scholarly arguments.

- Within that framework, the projection analysis is based on the fact that mission and dialogue (with pluralism) will be seen as having made a journey from the beginning to modern times through the eyes of biblical, religious and secular history. This would allow for investigation as to how mission was perceived in the past and how it was challenged in certain historical modes. The projection analysis will seek to highlight how the link between Western culture and Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may or may not have helped the cause of Christian mission. It will promote debate that the multi-faith communities of the pluralist world have their own world-views which are necessary to be understood by Christians if they are to carry out mission effectively. It will thus wrestle not with how these world-views are formed but with how they impact individually and collectively on those who hold them within a given religion and how they shape the attitude and character of devotees. It will show that the pluralist position suggests that there is in fact a common content to the world's religions, and that each in its own way is equally salvific.

The third chapter deals with the study's problem, objective and methodology in relation specifically to mission.

- The problem for mission, it was said, is best illustrated by the ebb and flow in the history of the WCC. The objective of the chapter, therefore, was to further illustrate how the problem is compounded for mission by challenges from without and within Christianity. Its methodology engaged critical use of WCC documents and scholarly views in broad discussion.
- Within that framework, the projected analysis is that mission - having gone, and still going, through a crisis – should be aware of this crisis if it is to effectively overcome the hurdles facing it in a pluralist context.

It will be further argued in this chapter that:

- the perennial division among mission theologians on what the task and mandate of mission should be reveals the level of the crisis in mission, and that failing to get consensus in this matter is a source of constant frustration in the mission thrust of the Church and the work of the WWC.
- the denominational divide in itself poses a hindrance to the overall success of mission, and that confessional theology can be inhibitive if participants are reluctant to move from their denominational persuasions.

The fourth chapter deals with the study's problem, objective and methodology in relation specifically to dialogue.

- The problem for dialogue, it was said, is best illustrated by the ebb and flow in the history of the WCC. The objective of the chapter therefore was to further illustrate how the problem is compounded for dialogue by challenges from without and within Christianity. Its methodology engaged critical use of WCC documents and scholarly views in broad discussion.
- Within that framework, the projected analysis is that with dialogue 'charity begins at home', and that:
 - The largely frosty responses which dialogue receives from most Evangelical conferences is a poor showing of Christian charity and injunction to follow the scriptural instructions to engage in meaningful conversation for conflict resolution.
 - Criticism of WCC's approach to dialogue with non-Christian religions is unfair, coming – as it does – in the context of a clarion call for unity.
 - Use is made of the work of Wesley Ariarajah (1995) on the impact of inter-religious dialogue on the ecumenical movement, and those WCC-free commissioned works of Siddiqui (1997), Faruqui (1995 and in Siddiqui, 1997) and Thooft (1974) on dialogue are also significant.
 - The challenges to Christian-Muslim dialogue include the facts that:
 - at times these organised dialogues dissolved into heated debates in which the participants seemed to want to pour out their grievances;

- in the absence of an internationally representative body of Muslims, the WCC was dependent upon invited individuals whose views were not widely endorsed within the Muslim community itself.

The fifth chapter deals with the study's problem, objectives and methodology as revealed specifically by case and field studies on mission and dialogue.

- The problem for mission and dialogue is that they are subjected to world-views which shape the individual's thinking within the group. It is difficult in those contexts – without mitigating circumstances – to find independently-expressed personal views. The objective of the chapter was therefore to overcome this problem in order to have information that would facilitate a qualitative conclusion. Its methodology thus engaged both qualitative and quantitative research methods of case and field studies, respectively, identified 'main' and 'control' groups (i.e., chiefly, of distinctively pluralist and non-pluralist contexts, in the first place); and used data from them comparatively and analytically:
 - ethnographic studies of control groups of non-pluralist (both Christian and Islamic) orientation and unilateral focus (such as is held by the Baptist Church) are most decisive;
 - such studies facilitate the understanding of the dynamics of pluralism and are very useful in combating the obstacles it presents.

This introductory chapter was itself concluded with this incisive overview. Namely, that the chapter remains the means by which the study is held together and cemented. It is the basis on which the study - as an academic exercise - sustains its credibility, and on which it – as a work aimed at aiding a crisis – provides ideas for those wishing to see Christian mission and dialogue succeed in a pluralistic country and world. Given the tools of the chapter, it is appropriate to proceed with the priorities of defining pluralism, mission and dialogue (with challenges and context) in Chapter Two.

6.2 Summary and projection analysis to Chapter Two (Pluralism, Mission and Dialogue)

The chapter began with a stating of the problem faced by mission and dialogue in a pluralist context, by asking questions about the nature of pluralism, mission and dialogue and by spelling out its objective and methodology. It also introduced the main key words (pluralism, mission and dialogue, with challenge and context).

- The problem is pluralism, with the seemingly unmitigated threat it poses to mission and – by association – dialogue.
- The objective was to start finding a solution to this problem by attempting in the first place to be clear about what the key issues, concepts and terms involved really mean.
- The method through which this objective was to be achieved was by a description of biblical, historical and scholarly information about these key issues, concepts and terms. This was assisted by certain prescribed tools of biblical selection and hermeneutics, historical scheming and judgement, scholarly viewing and criticism. Biblical selection, for instance, was aided by thematic application, historical scheming and schematic application. Scholarly viewing was aided by the application of expository and analytical works covering a wide range of views, past and present.

Into this theoretical frame were introduced three theological paradigms: pluralism, exclusivism and inclusivism which tally roughly with the three central aspects (pluralism, mission and dialogue, respectively) of the study. These paradigms were useful for analysing data especially from the churches and their scholars who are protagonists of one or other, two or all, of the trio (pluralism, mission and dialogue).

6.2.1 Biblical Evidence

In terms of the biblical evidence for the trio, the following were, implicitly or explicitly, thematically adduced:

- For pluralism: implicitly, from Genesis 16: 2 and 9.
- For mission: explicitly, from Acts 1:8 and Matthew 28:19-20.
- For dialogue: more implicitly, from Acts 19:8-10; Job/Psalms/
Somewhat explicitly: from: Matthew 8:15-17.

6.2.2 Historical Evidence

In terms of historical evidence, the trio drew the following data:

- For pluralism, for which two contexts were chosen: a specific one (Britain) and a general one (the world), the following data were schematically selected. For Britain, two periods of pluralism were detected: (1) An ancient implicit one: from early times to the Reformation (2) A modern explicit one: from post-war, twentieth century Britain, to the present time. For the world, it was observed that although the pluralism is explicitly obvious in the very existence of many nations and religions, it was never avowedly acknowledged because: (1) Biblically, there occurs a scandal of particularity as – in the main world-view of Judæo-Christian religion – other non-Jewish nations are only acknowledged by default. They are Gentiles (the nations) and in time – are expected to lose their identity and become Christians. (2) Politically, the language, history, religion and culture of the West were given pride of place for a number of reasons: imperialism and colonialism not the least. For a great while it looked as if the global culture was to be homogeneously based on the culture of the West. This was expected to be the case even at the UN with over 250 independent nations from the four corners of the globe.
- For mission: although the Church was from the beginning racially mixed, its conversionist drive was towards oneness globally. In this, there are some significant features to note: Britain and the West played an active part in Christian missions in the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; in this, it has to be said that colonialism had a tendency to seek to impose a single culture empire-wide. Both for and against oneness, it is noticeable that although certain languages (Latin and Greek) had pride of place as biblical and liturgical languages, from the second century Christian missions had started using other languages in worship (translation of the Gospel, too, having began as early as the fourth century); this meaning that Christianity is at one and the same time one faith for all peoples and ideals for several expressions. Missionary bid towards conversion and oneness did not halt the process of schism and disunity which (despite Christ's prayer for oneness in John 17) bedevilled the Church from the very beginning; such disunity having been

submitted as one of the reasons why Islam was able to overrun Christian North Africa in the seventeenth century and disunity between different brands of Christianity being seen also as one reason why some missions failed (as for example with the conversion of Russia where the Tsars had to choose between Eastern and Western Christianity). Mission was throughout facilitated by several factors (imperial patronage or papal commission; gifted, talented and committed faith heroes; sound theological knowledge and acute administrative skills; reduction of local language to writing; translation of scripture into local language; discovery of the new world overseas). Likewise, it was throughout thwarted by several other factors (Church disunity and division, Christian disagreement; ruling class oppression; resistant faiths and ideologies; Islam as a proselytising religion; delay and indecision; transformation of aim from mission to crusade; failure to appreciate local cultures and customs; failure to introduce dialogue in difficult situations; the Crusades; the Reformation).

- For dialogue, the evidence found as follows: written dialogues were conducted with people of the Jewish and Gentile faiths by early Church fathers known as apologists; the importance of clear language in dialogues was early perceived by the Church fathers amidst the conflict of religions in the Roman Empire; somewhat in favour of dialogue, Church fathers spoke for freedom of religion, and spoke (rather like the modern inclusivist-pluralist) of non-Jews and non-Christians knowing the God of Moses; there was a noticeable lack of conversation in the Church between the Councils of Chalcedon (451) and Trent (1545).

6.2.3 Scholarly Appreciation

In terms of the contribution of the paradigmatic scholars to the debate, the following information emerged:

- For pluralism, God – not Christ – is the Sun at the centre of the universe of faiths.
- For mission, 'people' (as recipients and as envoys) – not 'task' – is the emphasis. Mission becomes exclusivist, evangelical, strictly conversionist and non-

dialogic where the emphasis is on 'task'. As people-orientated, it takes on the character of an entry into the experience of others, in the same way as God entered human experience with Christ. It fosters social activity motivated in love.

- For dialogue, inclusivism carries the day. This is because the Church is for all and God desires to save all; non-Christians could be anonymous Christians; knowing other faiths leads to a clearer understanding of one's own faith; other religions are not just human constructs, God being absolute.

There are many pointers from this Chapter to the fact that pluralism - though by its very nature a challenge to mission - could in fact be an opportunity for mission; if only mission could be allowed to be partnered by dialogue. We are yet to decide whether mission is an exclusivist or inclusivist – if not pluralist – concept.

This chapter sought to provide a basis for clear thinking with regard to the aim of the study. The next Chapter examined further ramifications in practice, with especial regard to the work of the WCC.

6.3 Summary and projection analysis to Chapter Three (*Mission*)

The chapter was introduced by a restatement of its problem, objective and methodology; and with a briefing of the subheadings under which its contents would be discussed: the WCC and the Uppsala Report, the WCC and the Melbourne Report, The WCC and the San Antonia Report, the WCC and the Nairobi Consultation, Mission and Free-thinking Scholarship, Mission and the millennium celebrations.

- The problem is that mission seems diametrically opposed to the ideals of pluralism within or outside Christianity. How is its welfare to be promoted in a plural context?
- The objective was to resolve this problem by answering the question asked. It was looked at through the experience of the global 'ecumenate' (the WCC), augmented – where necessary - by that of regional 'ecumenates' (such as Churches Together in England and Wales) in significant regard to inter-church relations, in the first instance.

- The methodology through which this objective was to be achieved was by a study mainly of WCC Assemblies and Reports with the help of official and freelance scholarship, covering a wide range of views.

6.3.1 Official WCC Documentary Evidence

The WCC Reports generally indicate an on-going debate (if not 'in-fighting', squabbling and wrangling) between two groups (Evangelical/conservative versus Ecumenical/liberal), broadly representative of one or other of the constituent churches of the world body. These two groups, generally speaking, tend to stick adamantly to two opposing positions over the nature and purpose of Christian mission to such an extent that there is discernible a 'rift' or a 'crisis' within Christianity and the world body. It is interesting to note that the rift occurs over the very thing by which they are – judging from the earliest expression of the objectives of the WCC (in 1948, see section 1.6 above) - supposed to be united (i.e., mission). This then creates a challenge to mission itself from within Christianity, which tends therefore to leave the challenge from the multi-faith community unaddressed. The following points are noted:

- Essentially, the official documents reveal that whereas the Evangelicals take the view that mission is the proclamation of the gospel/word for the conversion and evangelisation of people without a Christian faith, Liberals believe that – in addition – mission carries a concern for the social wellbeing of the recipients of the gospel. The Uppsala Report (1968), for one, reveals that Evangelicals are so opposed to this liberal position as to think of it in terms of a betrayal, not so much of Christian witness but of the billions of people who (they believe) would – as a result – not have the opportunity to receive the gospel. Liberals, for their part, argue that social action motivated in love would in fact lead to greater involvement in the world, greater participation in the secular order, and create greater opportunities for mission. According to the San Antonio Report (1990), they see this as an actualisation of the 'Word made flesh' in the 'word made deed' where positive action is taken.

- The Reports further reveal that the occurrence of a rift – which seemed undiminishing (see the Canberra Report 1991) as the twentieth century drew to a close is rather odd, considering that as early as the Nairobi Assembly in 1975, under an African temperament of reconciliation, the WCC was bidding for tolerance and oneness. Indeed, Nairobi, Lusaka, Kampala, South Africa (with the Kairos Document) all offered African ways of getting over Christian and religious divisions and of taking on plurality in mission work. Unfortunately, this went unheeded in the West for one reason or the other. Nor did the hard work of the WCC and regional ecumenical bodies towards a united witness with millennium celebrations do much to change this facade as the year 2000 approached.

- But the documents also reveal that there were non-African as well as African attempts at bridging the gap in the rift. There were, for instance - at Uppsala – Evangelical-Liberals who urged colleagues to accept both kinds of mission outreach: gospel proclamation and social gospel. They opted for conciliar fellowships, *koinonia* (Canberra, 1991), visible unity and full communion (Santiago 1993). At Melbourne (1980) - described as perhaps the most insightful of conciliar assemblies of the century - it was accepted that kingdom gospel included as much concern for the poor as concern for its proclamation. In-fighting was recognised as unhelpful to the cause of mission since it could be seen through by would-be recipients. Then Vancouver (1983) contributed to this significantly as well. For there Evangelicals made the most positive of contributions with their realisation that failure over mission at conference level fuels failure for mission in the field. Above all, it was conceded that failure to carry out field mission is indeed a gateway to a loss of missionary jobs in the outside world.

- It was left to San Antonio (1990) to urge that words be turned into action and to foster cooperation through the tempering down of positions on both sides. Then - with its pre-sessional meeting at Manila (1989) providing ample opportunity for Evangelicals to air their concerns without misrepresentation - the need for collaboration and cooperation was well and truly underscored.

- Canberra (1991) asked for a coherent theology of mission, and we are reminded that Lusaka (1974) had anticipated this by setting out cohesive theology. Kampala (1963) had asked for freedom and unity in Christ, and in the Kuruman Report (1965) the value of Africa to the Christian Church was recommended. Tambaran (1938) had commissioned an eschatological action to prevent the secularisation and politicisation of the Church, and the Kairos Document (1985, 1997) had answered this quest with a morally legitimate and prophetic theology which thunders against a tendentious State Theology and a compromising Church Theology in South Africa. All this may not have happened had Nairobi (1975) not turned the searchlight on the Church itself, asking for the Church's mission to respect the spiritual ties in a common humanity.

6.3.2 Scholarly Contribution

Two sets of scholars were seen to be in evidence. The first were those who work officially for the churches or the ecumenical bodies. The second group was constituted of commentators who work independently as academics or freelance theologians.

Among the attached commentators, opinions were as divided over the nature and purpose of mission as they are from within the WCC or – with the noticeable exception of the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) – the regional ecumenical bodies. Certain subsidiary points emerged:

- There was of course an excellent response to the African bid for reconciled and synthesised thinking on mission from Europe when the question was raised as to whether the ecumenical movement is suffering from paralysis and following instead the agenda of the world rather than its Church. But a greater African challenge from the Kairos Document - replete with memories of a European one from the Barmen Declaration - ensured that Church complicity with wrong interpretations and use of the Bible to support oppression is not condoned. This was taken further with regard to the lamentable failure of commentators to accept with one mind the great missionary Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, the authenticity of which has been vigorously and continually debated from the start of the twentieth century.

- It is submitted that preoccupation with on-going polemic over mission is – as the Melbourne Assembly affirmed – unhelpful to missionaries in the field, becoming itself the problem, not to say the challenge. Then - from a well-known source - the eminent concept of '*Missio Dei*' was introduced to suggest that over mission - which is of the very nature of God - there should be no divergence of opinion.

- From free-thinking contributors, a set of biblical commentators argued on either side of the debate as to whether or not the Matthean Great Commission is authentic. For most African scholars this is unbecoming of Christians who should be aware that there are more important things – e.g., the reduction of poverty and enhancement of human equality – with which mission ought to be concerned. They indeed suggest (with some European approval) that Westerners may – if they cannot understand Christian obligations by themselves – try to understand them through the eyes of African spirituality.

- Although in Africa, ethnic plurality and ethnic group differences have led to a breakdown of the political system and presented obstacles to national unity in many countries (Burundi, Rwanda, Nigeria, Kenya, Gambia are the best known examples), African theologians submit that there is much on offer to the Christian Church from the values of African traditional beliefs.

- Indeed, of these values the most to be appreciated is what is referred to as 'a sense of wholeness manifested in the African attitude to life'. With this, there is no separation between the sacred and the secular in communal life, neither is there a separation between the soul and the body in a person. Spiritual needs are as important for the body as bodily needs are for the soul. Also, because in African ancestrology 'life goes on' and does not end with our mortality, this provides a sense of continuity which puts the Church's mission in God's hands where it belongs, rather than in finite hands. Then, above all, Christ's death and resurrection furnishes the models for victory over mortality for the African Christian.

- With the same intensity of thought, South African scholars came down clearly with the Kairos Document against the use of Romans 13:1-7 by their state to justify oppression. To them, it is equally reprehensible to leave oppression unchallenged in what can only be a misguided belief that it is not biblically the task of mission to challenge oppression and inequality. With this, it does seem as if the position of conservatism in Christianity is forlorn.

6.3.3 Summative Conclusion

This was reached in relation to two technical and elucidating features of the study, and treated in order: The Central Theoretical Argument; the formulated definition of mission; the instituted theological paradigms (pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism).

6.3.3.1 The Central Theoretical Argument

The impression that Evangelicals have not generally responded adequately well to the challenges of a plural society cannot yet be fully confirmed as much more information is still to be considered under 'dialogue'.

But it does appear as if the Evangelical position regarding mission is itself the major challenge to mission, given that they are uncompromising in their limitation of mission to the proclamation of the Gospel and to conversion. They find it difficult to accept the more compromising position of Liberals which holds together both a proclamationist and socialist view of mission. It is difficult to see how they could do better faced with the pluralism of the outside world when they are little able to compromise faced with a plurality within Christianity. The saying is apt: charity begins at home.

Yet, Evangelicals have to be credited with the virtue of still being seen to be talking since they have not backed out of the ecumenical bodies in which the debates go on. Their position, then, is not one of dialectical polemism but one in which they agree to differ. Chapter Four will reveal what happens when – as expected - mission is not less but more challenged in the outside world and dialogue is suggested as the way out.

Of course, it ought also to be remembered that – in offering some form of compromise – Liberals have themselves not conceded all on mission, being – so to speak - less conversionistic and more proclamationistic.

6.3.3.2 The formulated definition of mission

Has mission followed the path of its definition? Has it lived up to its expectation, literally, biblically, historically and scholastically?

Literally, it is evenly defined as the 'sending out' of 'persons' to 'people' for a 'task' and with a purpose. For the most part, the missionary endeavour of the Church fulfils this with the sending out of missions abroad. But – with regard to the objective (purpose) of mission – it appears that too much emphasis on one or the other of the objects (persons/people or task) of mission obscures the purpose.

Biblically, mission is explicitly commanded and commended in the New Testament in both the Acts and Matthew's Gospel. Invariably, the purpose is explicitly said to be for witness and conversion of people in the world. Nothing is said in these explicit texts about offering help to the poor, the afflicted or oppressed. Hence, one contributor is noted to have remarked - when commenting on a conciliar report (Uppsala) in which greater stress was put on the welfare aspect of mission - that he missed the emphasis on the biblical basis of mission. Nevertheless, there are implicit grounds for seeing the offering of assistance to the poor as part of the purpose of mission. It is most potently implied in the works and words of Jesus and his apostles who preached kindness and went about doing well.

Historically, missions seemed to have adopted only the primary purpose of evangelisation and conversion from the earliest times. Only in the twentieth century did they take on a concern for the poor and the oppressed in the wake of the ecumenical movement and the work of WCC. Hence, biblically-minded churches (Evangelicals) were somewhat unable to accommodate it, and hence the conciliar assemblies of the world council became a battle ground in which the war over the purpose of mission was fought between, broadly, Evangelicals and Liberals. The rift/crisis created has never been healed, despite much conciliar efforts and ecumenically-planned celebrations at the millennium. The crisis remains perhaps the greatest challenge to mission from within plural Christianity.

History's strong support for a conversionist purpose of mission is illustrated closer to home by the work of St Patrick of Ireland who evangelised the heathenish and barbaric tribes of the mainland. Notwithstanding, there is also clear evidence that conversionist task was not performed solely by preaching but with the assistance of such stakes as royal and papal patronage, sound theological knowledge, ability to adapt local cultures and to reduce local languages to writing, strong faith and heroics; all of which indicate that there should be scope for accommodating a wider purpose into mission than that of evangelisation and conversion which were originally the only explicit goals.

Scholastically, those who were commissioned by the WCC or by regional councils or by their churches showed a willingness to be as versatile in the debate as did the free-lance writers. Among the former, there were suggestions: that the purpose of mission should include a mixture of the two expressions and centred on Christ (Bonino); that African spirituality should influence Church thinking and action on mission in a conciliatory way. Among the latter, it is openly acknowledged that it is difficult to get universal acceptance for the Great Commission in Matthew's Gospel, arguably the more explicit of the two explicit passages on mission and its purpose (Bosch).

6.3.3.3 *The theological paradigms*

On the basis of this chapter, the challenges to mission are determinable in relation to the theological paradigms (exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism) as follows:

- Conservative Evangelicals are exclusivist about mission. For them, mission is the exclusive prerogative of the Church exercised exclusively for gospel proclamation and conversion – not for social welfare. They wish to exclude from it those who consider that it could include a dialogue between (a) Christians over a modification of their view and with (b) a plurality of other faiths and non-faiths whose adherents are the object of missions.
- Liberal Evangelicals are plural-inclusivist about mission. For them, mission is an opportunity to include the plurality of views on it held by fellow churchmen and women in a dialogue, and therefrom to reach out in missions to the plurality of faiths and non-faiths by conversation and Christian witness. They do not consider that it might be a watering down of the inalienable rights

of the Church to evangelise mixed with a pandering to those who seek to blur the differences between faiths in the interest of peace.

- Liberal Catholics – as with Vatican II - are inclusive-pluralist about mission. First admitting the existential fact of there being a universe of faiths, they go on to maintain that these faiths have each their own intrinsic goodness and value. Unwilling to consider that this somewhat goes against the exclusive claim of the Church to being the only salvific path, they shun as well the dread of counting Christianity as just another brick in the wall of many faiths.
- It follows then that there is no church tradition with whose attitude to mission pluralism (pure and simple) could be tallied.

The implication of this analysis is that mission is progressively challenged as the context moves from exclusivism (with Liberal Evangelicalism) to inclusive-pluralism (with Liberal Catholicism). It is not that it is more or less challenged by one group or the other, but that (1) it is challenged in different ways in each context, and (2) it is challenged corporately by all groups through the divisions they manifest to it.

Two matters emerge from this for further consideration. The first, whether exclusivism is – by its very nature – more of an opposite to pluralism than to inclusivism; and – if so – whether this does not ultimately spell a disaster for mission when challenged in a pluralist context. The second, whether – if it were possible in this study to introduce the grouping of Conservative Catholicism (in conscious and diametric opposition to Conservative Evangelicalism) which – by its very nature would be exclusivist – it would not be appropriate to suggest that at that point the churches have turned full circle and reached a meeting point regarding mission. Chapter Four will be revealing in these directions.

6.4 Summary and projection analysis to Chapter Four (*Dialogue*)

The chapter was introduced with a restatement of its problem, objective and methodology; and with a briefing of the sub-headings under which its contents would be discussed: WCC New Delhi Assembly, WCC Guidelines on Bilateral Dialogue, WCC Guidelines on Multilateral Dialogue, A WCC-commissioned work, Some WCC-free works, Other WCC-independent crucibles, Dialogue and Millennium Celebrations.

- The problem is that dialogue and mission appear to some Evangelical Christians to be diametrically opposed. How could dialogue work with mission to face the challenges posed by pluralism with which mission is also diametrically opposed?
- The objective was to resolve this problem by answering the question asked. It was looked at through the eyes of the global ecumenical experience of the WCC, supplemented – where necessary – by that of regional ecumenical bodies, in significant regard to inter-church and interfaith relations.
- The methodology through which the objective is achieved is by an examination of the WCC New Delhi Report and the BCC communiqués, with the help of the contributions of official and independent scholarship, covering a wide-ranging set of views.

6.4.1 Official WCC Documentary Evidence

As almost all of these reports deal largely with mission, the only one adduced here – and that with a technicality – is the New Delhi Report (1961) and its sequels with the Wheaton/Illinois Report (1966), the Berlin Report (also 1966), and the national BCC communiqué on dialogue. Reference is made in the process to the Uppsala Report (1968) which featured prominently under 'mission' in Section 3.1. The main thrust of the New Delhi Report was its pragmatism symptomatic of dialogue not in words but in action, bringing - as it did - disparate and dispirited elements together from opposing church groups. Besides this, it was shown that dialogue is not as injurious to mission as is promoting the self-interest of ones own church objectives. It provided a prediction which will be helpful in the analysis of field data in Chapter Five; namely, that there is vigorous opposition to dialogue among Evangelical Church leaders which has sipped down to their membership. It also gave this formula:

$$M = S - D \times E - \text{ChU/ChrU}$$

When transposed, it provides a most insightful explanation regarding Evangelical thinking on dialogue: 'Mission' equals 'Soteriology' minus (*discountenancing*) 'dialogue' multiplied (*increased*) by 'Evangelistic activities' minus (*discountenancing*) 'Church Union/Christian Unity'. The place of dialogue in the equation is infinitely inferior, and the question remains: how could the formula be transformed?

6.4.2 Scholarly Contribution

Only with scholarship (both attached and unattached) is there an argument in favour of revisiting dialogue and transforming the formula.

- This happened with the astuteness of the WCC to have commissioned two Muslim scholars with the task. They carried out studies of the situations for bilateral dialogue between Christianity and Islam (Siddique) and multilateral dialogue (Faruqui) which gave more or less similar indications: namely, that on dialogue, Evangelicals – rather unfavourably to the conclusions of the last chapter of this study (see section 3.8 above) – were not even agreeing to disagree; that they had a soft spot for fundamentalist tendencies in the USA; that this is the background against which Muslim apprehension and other-faith mistrust is to be understood; and that dialogue therefore initiated in the West – although with conciliar and ecumenical authority - does not have magisterial authority.

- Other conciliar consultations reported in the process by the work of the commissioned scholars are:
 - the Broumana/Lebanon Report (1966) which raised the questions - 'Do the Muslims worship the same God as Christians'? 'Does God in some way work within all religions'?
 - the Colombo Conference (1982) which shifted focus from the international to the national level, as it tried to decide how to established the link between Christian 'mission to' and 'dialogue with' non-Christians.
 - the Barnabas Consultation (1998) which reported on the disadvantages that Christians experience in Islamic countries with intolerant regimes.
 - the Wheaton/Illinois and Berlin Consultations (1966).
 - the prominent Uppsala Consultation (1968) at which Evangelicals vigorously opposed dialogue.
 - the Cartigny/Switzerland Consultation (1969) which emerged with a threefold aim in bilateral Christian/Muslim dialogue: mutual respect, renewed spirituality, acceptance of common responsibilities.

- the Salzburg Consultation (1978) at which it was revealed that for some Evangelicals God's plan for salvation in which there might be a place for Islam was anathema.
 - the New Delhi Consultation (1961) which contrasted with Uppsala on the relationship of dialogue to mission: for whereas evangelically at New Delhi dialogue was a useful means for mission at Uppsala it became imperatively an instrument for conversion.
- With the independent scholars, agreement with the official researchers could not have been more precise. The question: 'should mission be replaced by dialogue?' was answered with a categorical 'yes' because of the impact dialogue would have in interfaith relations which were eventuating everywhere. They raised the question: 'If churches were failing to agree among themselves, how could they agree with others?' rhetorically. In the mission debate, they noted that while a 'thesis' and an 'antithesis' have already occurred through dialogue, there is as yet no sign of a 'synthesis' taking place. Detecting that the search for a synthesis may be difficult, they also noted that there are therefore many obstacles to dialogue.

Both sets of scholars - except for occasional glimpses recalling the unique claims of a faith for helpful awareness about them - did not attempt to exhaustively deal with the beliefs and practices of world religions. Nor did they attempt to argue doctrinally for the veracity of any faith, or to judge their values. Like with the purpose of this study, these aspects are assumed. They simply discussed what they discovered about dialogue and spell out what it should involve and what approaches to it are best in a plural society.

The contributors indicate various ways in which interfaith dialogue itself impacted on the debate. Hence, within two years of the Nairobi Assembly, the WCC Guidelines on Dialogue were drawn, and people became increasingly aware that the churches did not have a theology of dialogue. Also, it became clearer that there is no room for dialogue in some Islamic countries (like Mauritania) with an exclusivist society, in which only conversion to Islam of infidels (including Christians) would do.

The scholars also advocate experiential dialogue in which each partner in a dialogue enters into the experience of the other in an effort to grasp that experience from within, after the pattern set at the Lausanne Consultation (1974). In this way, religious people will not judge each other unduly from the comfort of their own knowledge and thinking. This parallels the ability of some Christians to be self-critical which the classic Protestant Theologian, Paul Tillich, promoted and which gave hope to non-Christians.

The scholars also saw through the difficulty of the relationship between dialogue and mission as one in which the child (dialogue) has never been free from the mother (mission). With mission, other faiths are objects for conversion; with dialogue they are subjects – not so much for discussion – but to converse with. The reality is that dialogue is the ‘open sesame’ for other voices that have a relevant say and participation in the pluralistic world.

The scholars further furnished copious examples of dialogue with interfaith relations, operated by both religious and secular non-governmental and statutory organisations. They reveal very many happenings of positive outlook in this area through an extensive interfaith network, showing how religious communities can find helpful and constructive ways of living and working together for the positive benefit of all, with mutual integrity.

6.4.3 Summative Conclusion

This is reached on the objective of the chapter in relation to three technical and defining features of the study: The Central Theoretical Argument; the formulated definition of dialogue; the instituted theological paradigms (pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism).

6.4.3.1 The Central Theoretical Argument

The impression that Evangelical churches have not generally responded adequately well to the challenges facing mission in a plural society - which was waiting for more information from this chapter - could now be confirmed. Over and over again, it could be seen that this group of churches are being called to respond more and positively to meaningful dialogue and to a wider understanding of mission.

It is also confirmed that it is because of this failure of Evangelical churches to respond positively to dialogue that – twinned as they are – 'mission and dialogue' appear to be diametrically opposed to each other. Time and time again, it is suggested that they are not so opposed, but are related – as one analogy puts it – as mother is to a child who has not yet been weaned.

It is further confirmed that with the failure of Evangelicals to accept dialogue - when it was promoted at the WCC - to assist with the problem of presenting mission in a plural world, a 'crisis' was caused, just as a 'scandal' was caused with the introduction of dialogue by Liberals. The 'crisis' meant a continued acrimonious debate between left and right to the point where it might have been possible for sections of the WCC to be marooned away in the rift that occurred. The 'scandal' meant that mission had become a challenge to itself about which dialogue itself was unable to do anything.

Now and again, it is shown – as in Chapter Three with unreceived and untutored African spirituality and intelligence - that this (crisis/scandal permutation) ought not to have been the case. For even interfaith relations in the givenness of plural context were impacting on dialogue (and mission); and mission is not a matter over which there should be disagreement.

6.4.3.2 The formulated definition of dialogue

Has dialogue – in facing challenges in a plural society - lived up to its expectation?

- Literally, defined 'as a discourse or conversation, orally or in writing or by both, to resolve a problem' (see 2.5 above), it appears it has in some ways but not in others. When a Muslim contributor, commissioned by the WCC to look at multilateral dialogue in the 1996, felt disappointment at the Protestant Theologian for subjugating being self-critical as a Christian to the ability to receive Christ, he wrote to him and got a reply back which he said renewed his 'optimism' (see 4.3 above). Nevertheless, a synthesis with respect to agreement and disagreement over mission could not be found in inter-church dialogue despite the fact that interfaith dialogues were already taking place and plans for a common celebration of the new millennium well under way.

- Biblically, dialogue does appear more explicitly in Matthew's Gospel as a way of ultimately resolving disputes through the Church. But it also seems that Jesus did contemplate the possibility that even dialogue might not work and that problems might have to be unresolved, in which case the offending party will remain accursed. Ironically, here it is the Church itself that is defaulting on dialogue, since – the offending party – the Evangelical Church – is very much part of its universal manifestation and operation within the global conciliar fellowship of the WCC. Consultation after consultation of the WCC and its working parties and regional assemblies have failed to reach an agreement over 'dialogue about dialogue', not to mention 'dialogue about mission' or 'dialogue about/with other faiths'. As an instance of the reason for this debacle, it is reported that it was the Evangelical churches that put the Colombo Conference (1982) under pressure to redefine the relationship of dialogue to mission in hitherto unacceptable ways. In this, it can be understood why it is reported that the gap between Evangelical Christians and Muslims have widened.

- Historically, dialogue was an essential way of resolving conflicts within the Church and in the world in general. Christian apologists used it in the first five centuries of Christendom by letters to convince skeptics, and they even stressed the need for clear language in the dialogic process, comparable to the same quest which in modern times has come from non-polemic scholars. Nor was dialogue seen as a one-way process, with only one possible outcome. It calls for much openness and the Church fathers lead this campaign by the way in which they – Christian apologists though they were – spoke in favour of freedom of religion. Hence, it is not right to suggest that dialogue is a child of secularisation; though it is noticeable that it is same proponent who also maintains that dialogue involves readiness to change as well as to influence others. The Evangelically-inspired dialogues which require dialogue to be an instrument for conversion are by no means true to its historical roots but are simply halfway houses of the pre-Lausanne (1981) disposition. Dialogue cannot be used to force or compel people into accepting the gospel as would be possible in an exclusivist situation (for example in Mauritania or any other

intolerant Islamic state or a totalitarian regime, not in Britain or any other democratic state even with a singular ethos in the global village). Nor then is dialogue faring well if faiths or faith groups are suspicious of it simply because they are initiated by another faith. It is not justifiable then for it to be seen as: having a hidden agenda or an ulterior motive and as having come from desperation because of the failure of mission. It does require to be taken in good faith as a well-meaning phenomena and with a high degree of blind trust. It is by no means a threat to the Evangelical view of mission as was felt at Nairobi (1975). It is not a strategy for conversion to Christianity as Muslims, in particular, has often felt. It is bid for a discussion, a conversation, requiring attention and serious consideration.

- Scholastically, the WCC was objective enough to appoint two Christian and two Muslim scholars to study and report on interfaith dialogue. The Islamic authors vented the feelings of aggrieved Muslims on Christians and showed why they did not trust Christian-initiated dialogue. It is a product of Western secularism and an unweaned child of Christian mission. The Christian writers called for a real dialogue with people of other faiths on their terms and dealt with the vexing question of whether interfaith dialogue was a challenge to Christian mission. It is not, and both sets of authors remained cautiously optimistic about what the dialogic process could achieve. Freelance contributors were even the more optimistic. On whether dialogue should replace mission, the answer was a definite 'No'. This is because the difference between mission and dialogue is as profound as follows: whereas with dialogue non-Christians are subjects and partners, with mission they are objects and targets. In similar vein, a team of three scholars (see 4.8) saw dialogue as useful for the powerless and creative of a deeper appreciation of one's own culture. With versatility, they delineated several obstacles to dialogue of which perhaps the three most severe and worthy of note are: suspicion of the other party's motives and intentions, superiority/inferiority complexes, and intolerance.

6.4.3.3 *The theological paradigms*

Instituted within the scholastic input of Chapter Two, dialogue is considered as falling within the inclusivist paradigm which affirms that there is a salvific presence of God in all religions, but with Christianity remaining definitive as his authoritative revelation.

- Does the evidence stand up to this proposition? It is determinable on the information adduced here that easily dialogue is neither exclusivist nor pluralist for most churchmen, Evangelical and Liberal Ecumenist. Their ideology more akin to exclusivism than to anything else, only moderate Evangelicals show interest in dialogue, and this with a distorted goal with a view to converting outright the other party/parties. Conservative Evangelicals do not even go so far as to contemplate any involvement in dialogue.
- It is precisely for this reason that other faiths, Islam in particular, could be seen to entertain doubts as to the trustworthiness of dialogue, and whether it is of benefit to them. Indeed, it took the work of another WCC-commissioned scholar (Samartha) to uncover that controversy over dialogue is deeply rooted in the conservative Evangelical (Protestant) attitude to it. Couched in the truly evangelical affirmation of there being one Lord in Christ, all other faiths became a vast mission field. Thus, the plea came again and again for practitioners of other faiths not to be seen as non-Christians but as believers in their own right.
- If that wrote the epitaph of a premier exclusivist (see 4.8), it almost certainly gave dialogue - as championed by Liberals at Tambaran (1938) - a real opportunity to have 'come of age' and live up to its name, even though by then the Roman Catholics and Orthodox Churches had still not spoken on the issue. When the Roman Catholics did indeed speak at the end of Vatican II (1968), they did so with a showing forth of the pure inclusivist intention to respond actively to the conversational and religious needs of a multicultural society.

Did the chapter achieve its objective of resolving the problem of how dialogue could work with mission in the face of the challenges of a plural society? The answer seems to be positively so, the information gathered having shown that dialogue does not replace or undermine mission but supplements it in what would have been a no-go area. In short, there is every indication that the negative formula (M = S – D x E – ChU) which first emerged in section 4.9 could indeed be positively transformed. As to how this would be done and how the twins would together stand in meeting the challenges of the plural society, only the next chapter – through its findings in the field - would tell.

6.5 Summary and projection analysis to Chapter Five (Pluralism Revisited)

This penultimate chapter was introduced with a restatement of its problem, objective and methodology. The cluster headings under which its summaries are produced are listed as: 'Case Studies' covering bilateral/unilateral relations/focus in a plural situation and unilateral focus in singular situations; 'Field Studies' of Christians, Muslims and people with no avowedly religious commitment.

The problem the chapter looked at is how can a divided church carry out mission and dialogue in a plural society with the help of case studies and field research? The aim was to create a better understanding of mission and dialogue by way of finding a way of achieving church unity and world peace through case and field study. The methodology by which this was achieved is through qualitative research into the ethnographic communities of Christians and Muslims in plural and singular contexts, in unilateral focus, in bilateral and multilateral relations.

6.5.1 Case Studies

These were threefold: of bilateral relations in the UK between Christians and Muslims, of a unilateral focus by the Baptist Church in the UK, and of two other unilateral focuses in Europe and Africa. They reveal a situation in which - while Christians are pulling back from mission work in the UK because of the multicultural society - Muslims are using it as a way of promoting Islam. For instance, while there is a modification of the taking of Christian assemblies in schools, Muslims are at the same time creating more and more

separatist Islamic schools and seeking state funding for them. They also show that the Baptist Church, as a conservative Evangelical Church, typifies a church with a one-sided focus in a plural society. It pays little deference to society's multicultural constitution, and is up against a brick wall in trying to expedite the Church's mission with regard to interfaith dialogue. They further indicate that knowledge of non-plural and singular situations amply illustrate the nature of a plural society. They are very persuasive in favour of the *status quo* in a Christian context (as in Ireland) and very oppressive of the visiting norm or minority in a Muslim context (as in Mauritania). Altogether, they reveal that the problem is not with mission or dialogue itself but with the context of pluralism and the attitude of the vehicle of mission (i.e., whether or not the religion or denomination chooses a uni-, bi- or multilateral approach to mission).

6.5.2 Field Studies

These were also threefold: of Christians in 3 denominations (Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Methodists), of Muslims in 2 main groups (Sunnis and Shi'ites), of non-religious people in the secular state. The surveys revealed differences in the attitudes of Christians to how the permutations of a plural society are to be viewed. They seem to be denominational in the individual attitudes and a clear distinction could be made on overall attitudes to mission and dialogue between Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Methodists. The same is not true of Muslim groups, the two main ones (Sunnis and Shi'ites) almost agreeing that missionary approach to themselves from another religious group (even that of Christianity in a traditionally Christian country) is unacceptable. For this reason they seem also to be willing to suggest (quite in contrast to the general impression) that Muslims must themselves not make any such approaches to others in the plural society. The interviews of non-faith persons also reveal a striking awareness of the difficulties facing Christian mission in a pluralist and secularist society. It tells of secularist tendency – in spite of Islamic fundamentalism, and perhaps because of it - not to notice these challenges. But it also indicates that this tendency has changed due to the most recent events of Islamic terrorism in London. It shows great awareness that racism is part of the reason why flagging Christian mission could not benefit from missionary returns which African and other overseas Christians are able to offer. At the same time, as with discrimination, it encourages ghetto situations in which Muslims become more radicalised.

6.5.3 Summative Conclusion

This is reached with regard to the problem and objective of the chapter, and in relation to the three technical and defining features of the study: The Central Theoretical Argument, Pluralism and non-pluralism, the theological paradigms

6.5.3.1 The Central Theoretical Argument

The impression that Evangelical churches have not generally responded adequately well to the challenges facing mission in a plural society is confirmed. The Methodists and Baptists were the least complementary of dialogue with non-Christian religions than the Roman Catholics and Anglicans. Although dialogue does not undermine mission (Section 4.8), they seem to be struggling rather than walking together. This is because evangelical Christians are not as broad-minded about them as Roman Catholics, or as diplomatic with them as Anglicans. They are too blunt in most cases and discountenancing of the plural society.

6.5.3.2 The formulated definition of pluralism revisited

The research revealed from the control case studies of Ireland and Mauritania (as singular/non-plural contexts) that pluralism is much too open a society for mission and dialogue to be carried out from a position of strength. It has not the directiveness of a singular society to offer mission workers and very often it prefers to gloss over difficult issues than deal with them. It fears and avoids confrontation as not to offend anyone, but in so doing it weakens its institutions, for which the Church and its mission are the most to suffer. Nevertheless, pluralism has its virtues. It is a good climate in which to build up a one-nation world and a very healthy democratic ideology. It could encourage conversation – if not conversion – and dialogue between people of all faiths and non-faiths in a way which in turn could bring about stability in world affairs.

6.5.3.3 The theological paradigms

For this reason, it can be said that Britain is a pluralist context, in which the different religions could be seen as equally salvific paths to God (see Chapter Two). Christian and Roman Catholics of Ireland are inclusivist in context, and Islamic Mauritania is an exclusivist context. It is not precisely clear how in a pluralist context Christians who oppose a free approach intend themselves to meet the requirement of the Church's mission

(apart from through the use of the media and broadcasting) to approach people in pluralist contexts in England or anywhere else.

To conclude, it is submitted that (1) pluralism poses enormous challenges to mission and dialogue; (2) mission needs dialogue to function effectively as a tool for the kingdom of God in a pluralist context; (3) ecumenism and interfaith dialogues are two ways by which the historical Churches would overcome their theological and ideological inhibitions in this context, both in coming and working together in a unit of some kind, and relating and working with the multi-faith world.

6.6 Final Conclusion

The study reveals that the challenges to Christian mission and dialogue in a pluralist society both real and numerous.

- Mission itself is its own first challenge. It is challenged from within (by conservative Evangelicals) to accommodate dialogue. It is also challenged from within (by Liberals) and without (other religions), both of whom do not wish it to be a clear instrument of evangelisation and conversion. Had Christians been united in mission and had the churches conversed well with each other about mission to the point of agreeing in the body, mission and dialogue together would have responded well to the challenge of being a blessing in the pluralist society.

- The empirical study (Chapter Five) confirms that in this regard there is potential for mission and dialogue (twinned biblically, historically and scholastically) to partner each other in the task of evangelism, preaching the gospel, teaching the faith, spreading the message, supporting the people, promoting tolerance and goodwill, enriching the poor, empowering the weak, resolving conflicts, diminishing all forms of racism, discrimination and prejudice, extremism and fundamentalism, and secular arrogance which claim individual rights but not responsibilities, among other local and global needs currently seeking urgent attention.

- In this sense, mission and dialogue are challenged into transforming the formula from one in which they are on opposite sides of the equation (as in sections 4.7 and 6.4)
- $M = S - D \times E (- ChU)$
- (where 'mission' could only gain the 'salvation' of many by excluding 'dialogue' (at the expense of Church Union) through an abundance of 'evangelism') to one in which they are on the same side, as in:
- $M + D (+ChrU) = S \times E$
- where **mission** and **dialogue** pull together in strength with **Christian Unity** to attain the **Salvation** of many through unfettered **Evangelism**.

- Dialogue is challenged from without (by non-Christians) to prove that it is not a child of mission and Western secularism, but a twinned partner with it for the common good. Pluralism challenges it to demonstrate that the link between Christianity and itself is – even if providential –ideological and not con-substantial. It ought – in this regard – to show understanding of other world-views in the multicultural, multi-faith and multi-religious society. It is challenged from within and without to be a subtle aid to mission in the conversation with non-Christians aimed at spreading the good news.
- Dialogue is challenged to offer collectedness in the face of what could be seen as a crisis for mission in a pluralist context. It is challenged to get missionaries and missionaries to understand that mission is more about people than about places and task. It should be able to indicate in this respect that mission is about celebrating diversity within and without Christendom, about the oneness and unity in this process not about one language.

The study further illustrates that the challenges are addressed to the Church (all churches) and to Christians, not just to missionaries and missionaries. The role of the global and regional councils (e.g., the WCC and the BCC/ACC) - while pivotal as the forum for debate - may not overshadow this. Often (as was noted in the descriptive study) they do not have the representation of main denominations like the Roman Catholics or the Orthodox Church, and there are too many small churches which see their role as preaching to the converted and sustaining their membership. Very often, individual Christians, too (as the

study empirically reveals), see themselves as responsible only for their own individual salvation and welfare, understanding mission then as being the prerogative of those with a specialist ministry.

Despite all this, the indication is that the challenges to mission and dialogue in a pluralist context are not of a crippling nature but a reaffirming one. In that case, here are some essential questions on which to conclude.

6.6.1 The purpose of dialogue in mission

First, 'what is the purpose of dialogue in mission'? The evidence clearly reveals that much depends on the person to whom the question is addressed. For a strict evangelical Christian, any dialogue would have to be in the interest of furthering the mission of the Church. In a religious pluralistic context, there is no scope for dialogue being a basis against which the faith and mission of the Church could be questioned. On the global stage, Iraqi Muslims, for example, – even though they belong mainly to a fundamentalist Islamic Shi'ite group – cannot expect Christians to speak with them if there is a possibility of a negative outcome for the mission of the Church. The overwhelming news that Christians are diminishing in numbers in Iraq since the invasion by the Western coalition and the fall of Saddam Hussein may be seen as an indication that dialogue cannot be of any real purpose in mission in the global village. The truth of Christianity, for the strict Evangelical, must prevail in every situation.

If on the other hand, the context is national secular pluralism as in modern Britain, the strict Evangelical will see no point in talking with – for instance – those who are called 'choral atheist'. Being professional singers who participate in intoning works like Bach's *St Matthew's Passion* and Handel's *Messiah* without believing their content, they are easily to be lampooned as hypocrites by the far right Evangelical. To them (the strict Evangelical) their behaviour is even more disgusting than that of the avowed atheist or agnostic like Richard Dawkins of modern scepticism, or the most radical Islamist who believes in carrying out violent acts in the name of God.

But other Christians – with a more open approach - would see an opportunity in dialogue for mission and would be willing to rise to the challenges it presents. It is not a crisis for mission but a chance for it to build on earlier gains in mission. They will see 'choral

atheists' as initiating a form of dialogue which is implicit in the fact that they are singing about God at all. Some such person, though not subscribing consciously to the goodness of the sacrifice of God could be able to understand it as an expression of universal suffering and perhaps move from there to conviction, from doubt to faith. Hence, dialogue's purpose in mission is to bring alive to the non-Christian the element of faith as it is known to the believer in a way that is non-threatening.

6.6.2 Is dialogue a means of understanding other faiths?

Second, we need to conclude further on whether another form of the challenge presented to mission and dialogue itself is to inculcate understanding of other faiths in a pluralist context. Is dialogue a means to understand other faiths and learn from them? The study reveals that Christians, regardless of their persuasion and strength of feeling, would generally accept this. But where they would differ is with regard to their understanding of whether the aim in view is either to affirm the pluralistic viewpoint that all faiths are equally salvific paths to God or to acquire a modern way of preaching the exclusivist message that Christianity is the only way to God.

Against the background of a pluralistic context, whether national or international, the study reveals that most Christians would be willing to settle for the former position with a modification. Namely, that although the world is pluralistic in religious and secular ways, this does not take away the truth that Christianity offers the best opportunity for salvation. Many are willing to make this modification not in the name of their strongly held belief that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, as the Apostle Paul puts it, but in the interest of peace. Too many are the conflicts which have arisen as a result of religious and political obsession and hatred. On July 25, 2007, a Korean Christian aid worker was murdered by his Taliban captors, after having devoted his time and life to helping the less fortunate. In September of the same year, in Britain, there were failed car bomb attacks in London and Glasgow which readily gave religion, and Islam in particular, a bad name. In such cases, it matters little whether the atrocity is committed in the name of one religion or another, and many Christians are therefore willing to encourage dialogue to pacify religious extremists.

Many Christians would indeed not undervalue the gain of learning from other faiths, as the study also reveals. Apart from doctrinal and theological issues which are often the divisive elements in this task, Christians and others would benefit from understanding the commitment of others to prayer and worship, to discipline and good behaviour, which are certainly not the monopoly of any single faith. Properly conducted dialogues are helpful in this regard. They assist in promoting mutual understanding and trust and in removing prejudices on which conflict thrives. They are therefore a panacea for peaceful co-existence.

6.6.3 Is dialogue in mission an instrument of Christian witness?

Third, we need to decide whether or not dialogue in mission is borne of Christian witness and respect for others? With a slightly different stance from the conclusion just reached in 6.6.2, it needs to be made clear whether 'respect for others', for instance, is not in itself a distinctive Christian theme, i.e., a theme which is not just taken on by Christians as a result of the challenges of a multi-faith, multi-cultural society. The study shows that while early Christian missionaries to Africa and elsewhere have often been accused of being insensitive of the culture of the people, many were the indications that educated missionaries always sought to take the culture and language into account. Also, there is little doubt that the Golden Rule, for instance, is enshrined in the teaching of Jesus, the Gospels and other New Testament writings taking a clear lead in preaching respect of others.

In addition, Church historical records revealed that the fathers were even clearly expressive of the belief that God had not entirely left himself without a witness while the witness of Christ was to come. Similarly, in recent times – faced with matters such as gay marriages and the tendency for human rights to insist on the accommodation of all aspects of human life - Christians have been urged to follow the path of love rather than rejection of others. This is why the Church of England, for example, has ordained women even though the practice does not meet with universal approval from all religious and Christian groups. This is why the Church comes in for the heaviest criticism when it does not make its feelings known about the oppression of such people as blacks in the era of slavery and Jews in Nazi Germany.

But the question is by no means an attempt to ignore the rights of Christians themselves, and the daily concern of the present time that Christian patterns are being systematically eroded in the modern society is real. While in some university and college campuses, for instance, there is observable growth in Islamic organisations among students, Christian groups are known to have been declining because of growing hostility towards the faith from secularists. Most Christians accept dialogue as the means of redressing the balance. This has more chances of improving relations between Christian students' unions and the wider students' unions in secular universities. University and college chaplains too could make a difference, given the lessons gained from positive dialogue

6.6.4 What about biblical salvation?

Fourth, we need to conclude on this vital question, having adduced many biblical passages (e.g., Jn 14:1-6; Acts 4:12; Mt 28:16-19) which indicate the 'uniqueness of salvation in Christ' within Christendom. Are these merely representations from an ancient text? To the secularist they may seem so. But to the Bible-believing Christians, to make a tendentious distinction in Christianity, they have a perennial and lasting value insofar as Christians remain committed to them even though assailed because of them. They are the divine word as it has been revealed to them through the writing of inspired scriptures. Many have been the attempts in recent times to counteract the 'Dawkinian' view that God probably does not exist by appealing to philosophical and scientific ideas. Christians would do well to remember that faith is not a delusion but an experience of its own. At the end of the day, such a text as that which proclaims that God was reconciled to mankind through Christ while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:10) cannot delude the Christian any more than science could. It remains a conviction of great value, a pearl of great price.

6.6.5 What about the benefit for the Churches

Fifth, and lastly, we need to conclude on how the study could be of benefit to the Church, in particular how dialogue in mission would benefit the Churches mentioned in this study.

The Roman Catholic Church from Vatican II had always prided itself as offering leadership in dialogue. But in recent times statements from the Vatican have not always lived up to this ideal, and have been the source of aggravation between Muslims and Christians. The study shows that it will benefit from a tangible renewal of this effort where non-Christian

faiths are concerned and, through its many arms and groups, with other Christian denominations. It is not necessarily called upon to take such radical steps as to consider the ordination of women at a time when Anglo-Catholic clergy, opposed to such a move, are seeking accommodation with Rome. But it should consider other denominations not as junior partners who may not be consulted if disillusioned Anglican clergy, for instance, wish to be welcomed into its ministry, but as equals with whom meaningful dialogue should be conducted. It should consider extending its communion with other Churches eucharistically as well.

The Anglican Church needs to be a religious mouthpiece for the Church and other faiths within the secular society. It may also be useful if it could use its various chaplaincies, and community chaplains, to conduct this dialogue. Although it has the potential and resources, it has been much too parochial and bureaucratic in its operation.

The Methodist Church has recently been inclined to develop its ministry through local ecumenical projects. This practice, as useful as it is, will benefit from the work of small church plants and house groups. This will enable the Church to reach far more people than it is reaching at the moment, especially in the cities where its membership has been in decline. It will do well to set up units to promote reconciliation and build bridges among fragmented families and groups.

Finally, the Baptist Church, being so low on dialogue, might be able to consider developing areas of discussion which would not appear so threatening to them as dialogue. These could be through the development of Christian radio, television and the internet. Utilising also their Christian newspapers, they would be able with more open-mindedness to offer positive help to various communities struggling to deal with social ills and violence.

These recommendations should encourage Christians to respond in better ways to the needs of their society and the world, and my hope is that this is not just a forlorn intellectual hope but one to be actualised with the true realism of a sustained study.

7.0 ANNEXURES

7.1 Annexure A - MAJOR AFRICAN RELIGIONS 1900 – 2000

DATE	POPULATION (In millions)	CHRISTIANITY percentage of total population	ISLAM	ATR
1900	108	9	32	59
1970	346	41	41	18
1980	457	44	42	14
2000	804(Estimate)	49	42	9

Source: D Barrett, World Christian Encyclopaedia, Oxford: OUP 1982, p.201

7.2 Annexure B - SWANWICK DECLARATION

Appointed by other Churches and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we declare that this, the broadest assembly of British and an Irish Church ever to Meet in these islands has reached a common mind. We are aware that not all Christians are represented amongst us but we look forward to the time when they will share fully with us.

We came with different experiences and traditions some with long ecumenical service, some for which this is a new adventure. We are one band of pilgrims. We are old and young, women and men, black and white, lay and ordained and we travelled from the four Corners of these islands to meet at Swanwick in Derbyshire. There we met, we listened, we talked, we worshipped, we prayed, we sat in silence, deeper than words. Against the background of so much suffering and sinfulness in our society we were minded of our call to witness that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. We affirmed that this world with all its sin and splendour belongs to God. Young people called on us to be ready to sort out our priorities so that we could travel light and concentrate on our goal. Driven on by a gospel imperative to seek unity that the world may believe, we rejoiced that the pilgrims together are strangers no longer.

We now declare together our readiness to commit ourselves to each other under God. Our earnest desire is to become more fully, in his own time, the one Church of Christ, united in faith, communion, pastoral care and mission. Such unity is the gift of God. With gratitude we have truly experienced this gift, growing amongst us in these days. We affirm our openness to this growing unity in obedience to the Word of God, so that we fully share, hold in common and offer to the world those gifts, which we have received and still hold in separation. In the Unity we seek we recognised that there will not be uniformity but legitimate diversity.

It is our conviction that, as a matter of policy at all levels and in all places, our Churches must now move from cooperation to clear commitment to each other, in search of the unity for which Christ prayed and in common evangelism and service to the world.

We urge Church leaders and representatives to take all necessary steps to present, as soon as possible, to our Church authorities, assemblies and congregations, the Report of this Conference together with development proposals for ecumenical instruments to help the Churches of these islands to move ahead together.

Continuing to trust in the promised gifts of the Holy Spirit, we look forward with confidence sharing with our own Churches the joys of this historic Conference. We thank God for all those who, from Lent 86 and before, have been part of this pilgrimage. We feel their presence with us. We urge our Churches to confirm by decision and action the hopes and vision on which we have laid hold, and which we shall no let go.

This is the new beginning. We set out on our further pilgrimage ready to take risks and determined not to put off by “dismal stories”. We resolve that no discouragement will make us once relent our avowed intent to be pilgrims together. Leaving behind painful memories and reaching out for what lies ahead, we press on towards the full reconciliation in Christ of all things in heaven and on earth, that God has promised in his Kingdom.

Lord God, we thank you for calling us into the company of those who trust in Christ and seek to obey His will. May your Spirit guide and strengthen us in mission and service to your world. For we are strangers no longer but pilgrims together on the way to your Kingdom. Amen.

Source: *On The Way To Fuller Koinonia, Swanwick: WCC, 1994 p 225*

MERTON AFRICAN ORGANISATION

Mission Statement

This organisation is for all Africans. It aims to benefit men, women and children of African descent living in Merton, by providing advice and information on the following: housing, health and hospitalisation, business start-ups, marital problems, education, adult literacy and numeracy, racial and social harassment, adoption and fostering, sickness and disability claims, employment and unemployment problems, problems relating to old people and pensions, imprisonment and detention.

The organisation will also provide scope for social and cultural entertainment and education.

It will seek to give its users a most friendly and reassuring environment in a context where many feel unwanted. By this it is to be expected that membership will enjoy a better quality of life and the twin stresses of life in a modern society and living away from home will be minimised.

Source: Merton African Organisation, Draft Release, London August 1995

7.6 Annexure F - INTERVIEW OF NON-FAITH INDIVIDUALS IN LONDON

Two questions were basically asked after it had been ascertained whether or not the interviewee was religious.

1. The Mission Question

Main Question

What is your view on Christian mission for conversion? Do you think Christians are facing a challenge to their mission work in this country?

The Probes

What sort of problems do you think these might be?

Should there be a restriction on whether religions should be able to approach other and non-faith people to convert them?

Would you like to tell me a bit more about your background?

2. The Dialogue Question

Main Question

What is your view on dialogue between religions and people? How important is it in bridging gaps between peoples of different backgrounds and cultures?

The Probes

Do you think Christians are facing a challenge to initiate dialogue in this country?

What sort of problems might these involve?

Should there be a restriction on whether religions should be able to approach other and non-faith people to discuss faith in relation to its problems and possibilities?

Would you like to tell me a bit more about your background?

Thank you for your help: Please forward this to: C Mereweather-Thompson, Greenwich School of Theology, c/o Thames Educational Institute, Bredinghurst Sch, Stuart Rd, Lond SE15

7.7 Annexure G - DECLARATION OF THE BAPTIST UNION

INTERFAITH RELATIONS IN THE DECADE OF EVANGELISM

I. We confess with sorrow that members of other faith communities have encountered a lack of welcome and respect, and even racism, from some British Churches.

II. We affirm our commitment to the long-standing Baptist principle of liberty of conscience and religious practice. And we call on our Churches to recognise the presence of other faith communities in their locality and to work with them for the achievement of economic, social and racial justice.

III. We reject approaches to evangelism, which “target” members of other faith communities in ways, which are clearly not loving and dishonouring to Christ. We endorse endeavours to witness to people of other faiths and none in culturally sensitive ways.

IV. We believe that the integrity of worship of different faiths, including our own, must be respected and not compromised, whilst recognising that there are occasions when our common humanity requires us to stand alongside others. Interfaith gatherings, which meet specifically for worship, are therefore, ambiguous and inappropriate.

V. We repudiate the pressure from some quarters towards syncretism.

VI. We invite our Churches to engage in sensitive evangelism that involves:
-A meaningful dialogue that listens as well as speaks.
-An authentic witness that testifies by actions as well as by proclamation to the love of Jesus Christ and salvation, which is to be found in him alone.

VII. Since we believe that Jesus Christ is the unique revelation of God

Source: CTE Report 02.1996.3 Called To Be One.

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8.2 ABBREVIATIONS OF BIBLIOGRAPHY

AACC	All African Conference of Churches
ACC	Anglican Consultative Council
AEAM	Association of Evangelicals for Africa and Madagascar
AUP	African University Press
BT	Baptist Times
BoT	Banner of Truth
CTE	Churches Together in England
EN	Evangelical News
GST	Greenwich School of Theology
GTC	Geneva Theological College
IMC	International Missionary Council
IRM	International Review Mission
ISIC	Institute for the study of Islam and Christianity
KR	Kampala Report
NDR	New Delhi Report
SBLS	Society of Biblical Literature and Scholarship
TEI	Thames Educational Institute
UR	Uppsala Report
WCC	World Council of Churches
WVM	World Vision Magazine
WTC	Westminster Theological College