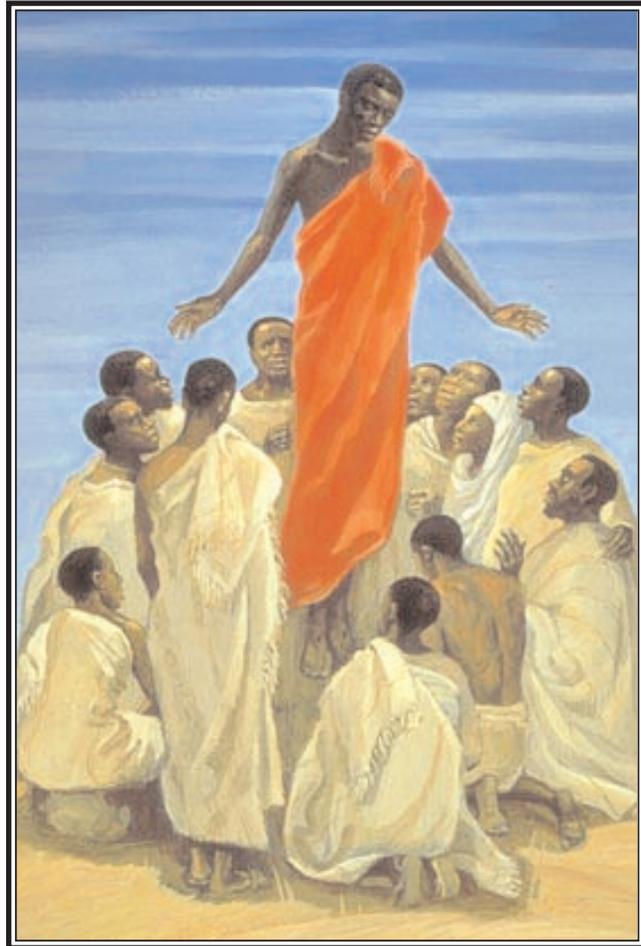


CHRISTIANS IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

INSIGHTS

The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary



FALL 2003

JONES • BODMAN • WALLS • ECK • SHAW • HAM • BANDA
LAKAWA • HAM • BABINSKY • JENSEN • ROBERTS • GEORGE

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COVER: "The Ascension," Vie de Jésus Mafa. Reprinted with permission.

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The painting on the cover of this issue of Insights features a depiction of the Ascension of Christ from the African perspective. Moreover, our cover image invites the reader to consider a global perspective—a 360 degree view, if you will—of the world-wide church which claims Jesus Christ as its center and its head.

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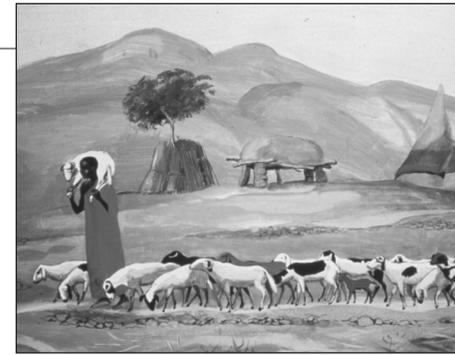
When I was growing up, the word “interfaith” was a far smaller word than it is today. In my childhood, it was used primarily to describe the relationship that began developing among different kinds of Protestants; and later between Protestants and Catholics; and then, later still, between Christians and Jews. The Interfaith Center, for which President Dwight Eisenhower laid the cornerstone, was envisioned in the middle of the twentieth century as a kind of “motherhood” headquarters building for the national offices of the Episcopal and Presbyterian and Congregational and Methodist churches, among others. Somehow, our interfaith experiences covered then a far narrower—quainter, even—spectrum of possibility than they do now.

Paradoxically, though, as our world gets smaller the word “interfaith” gets larger. It presses western Christians beyond the Protestant-Catholic-Jewish consensus with which, across recent decades, we have become comfortable; and pushes us toward an ever-widening and increasingly complicated arena of religious discourse. The question, “What does it mean to be a Christian in today’s world?” is posed in an altogether new environment and with new urgency.

In this interesting and challenging time, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary is particularly blessed by the presence of two new scholars in our midst. Arun Jones, assistant professor of mission and evangelism, and Whitney Bodman, instructor in world religions, arrived here just a little over a year ago. Already, they are both in great demand as interpreters and sense-makers for people struggling to relate their faith to a smaller world. In the pages that follow, Arun offers a clearer sense of how Christian faith is emerging around the globe, and what challenges we face in North America as we seek to understand our place in global Christianity. Whit’s essay specifically engages what it means for us as Christians, especially in the United States, to understand Islam; and for us and Muslims to foster conversations with and deeper respect for one another. Arun and Whit are joined by Diana Eck of Harvard, Jane Shaw of Oxford, and Andrew Walls of the University of Edinburgh, each of whom reflects upon various aspects of what it means for Christians to renegotiate their faith in conversation with persons of other faiths. Our pastors’ panel is written by leaders in the church in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, and our “Christianity and Culture” column is written by Sherron George, who, in addition to teaching at Austin Seminary and serving in the offices of the General Assembly, has served in the mission field in Brazil for many years.

We hope that this issue of *Insights* will be useful to you as you endeavor to live faithfully, and boldly, in this ever-smaller world!

Theodore J. Wardlaw
President, Austin Seminary



Vie de Jésus Mafa

LEARNING TO LIVE AS CHRISTIANS WITH WORLD CHRISTIANITY

ARUN JONES

Since the turn of the most recent millennium, Christians in North America have become increasingly aware that their historic faith is no longer largely theirs. As the cover of *Newsweek* on April 16, 2001, announced, and Philip Jenkins’ *The Next Christendom* argues, Christianity at the beginning of the 21st century is a decidedly non-western religion, if one uses sheer numbers of adherents to locate a faith. Since Christianity claims to be a catholic religion, it behooves western Christians to get to know non-western traditions and to interact in ways that represent the spirit of the faith.¹ In this essay I would like to undertake three broad tasks. The first is to offer, in response to Philip Jenkins, some of my own sense of the nature of “southern” or “non-western” Christianity. The second is to highlight some important factors in the development of ecumenical relationships between the forms of Christianity of Europe and Euro-America, and those of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania. Finally, I would like to take a suggestion from the past to point us forward in our pilgrimage in catholicity.

THE CHARACTER OF NON-WESTERN CHRISTIANITY

Philip Jenkins identifies one of the most salient differences between non-western and western Christianity: the former’s assumption of the prevalence and the power of a supernatural world.² Forces such as spirits and demons, for example, are simply

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assumed to be part and parcel of the cosmos for most non-western Christians; they are part of their “plausibility structures,” to borrow a term from Peter Berger.³ These plausibility structures impinge on all sorts of non-western church beliefs and practices. The Bible, for example, is taken at face value when it refers to miracles or evil spirits; ecclesial offices, such as that of exorcist and prophet, play an important part in the life of the church; and Christians (along with people of other faiths) often look for healing through supernatural or divine intervention rather than through western medicine.

A second characteristic of non-western Christianity, issuing from the first, is that it is most often found in religiously charged environments. People outside the West care deeply, often passionately, about religious matters, and this is evident in their practice of religion. It is no wonder that Philip Jenkins can imagine a world full of armed conflict based on religious allegiance, since violence is one way in which religious passions are displayed.⁴ It is not, however, the only way. Billions of people peacefully practice their faith through means such as acts of personal and communal piety, charity work, pilgrimages, and missionary endeavors.

A third characteristic of non-western Christianity is that it usually occurs in a context of religious pluralism. Christians find themselves living next to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of numerous primal religions. They must learn how to relate to, and interact with, people of other faiths. Again, violence has been one way that people of differing religious backgrounds have dealt with one another, but so has peaceful social and religious intercourse. The totality of interfaith communion must not be forgotten in our assessment of religious interaction through history.

A fourth hallmark of non-western Christianity is that it is profoundly Christian by being profoundly local. As Lamin Sanneh and Andrew Walls have forcefully argued, Christianity is a vernacular religion which is constantly being translated into new languages and therefore new cultures.⁵ Over the long term, Christianity has thus tended to conform itself to local conditions, rather than forcing local conditions to conform themselves to universal religious norms (as is the tendency in Islam). Even the idea of “Christendom,” which was imposed upon Latin America, was a result of such local adaptation among European barbarian tribes, who took over structures of the Roman Empire they conquered.⁶ Thus it seems to me that non-western Christianity, rather than giving birth to a new Christendom, will in fact inspire local (vernacular) loyalties. Moreover, because of the power of western globalization, these local loyalties will be intense.

In the early 1960s, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz made the profound observation that as new nation states were being formed in Asia and Africa out of territories formerly ruled by European powers, local (what he called primordial) loyalties of kinship, language, religion, and culture grew stronger even as the nation states were trying to develop national loyalties.⁷ As Geertz put it, “peoples of the new states are simultaneously animated by two powerful, thoroughly interdependent, yet distinct and often actually opposed motives—the desire to be recognized as responsible agents whose wishes, acts, hopes, and opinions ‘matter,’ and the desire to build an efficient, dynamic modern state.”⁸ New civil loyalties provoked “primordial sentiments,”⁹ for while

membership in a nation state made a person a citizen, it was participation in the local group that gave the citizen a sense of identity and belonging.

Similarly today, the force of western globalization will only cause primordial loyalties to strengthen in reaction. It is no accident that Hindu and Muslim fundamentalism have been rising with the forces of western economic and cultural hegemony. Moreover, those spearheading such fundamentalism are participants in that globalization. Inasmuch as the forces of globalization affect Christian communities, and inasmuch as Christianity is a vernacular, translated religion, Christianity combined with ethnic, caste, tribal, racial, and other such “primordial sentiments” will provoke stronger and fiercer local loyalties. What we may very well see in the future is not, as Samuel Huntington has so forcefully argued, a clash of religious civilizations, but myriad clashes between the force of western globalization and localized socio-religious groups.¹⁰

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS

The potential for conflict between Christians living in the West and Christians living in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania makes the task of relating across cultural, linguistic, and theological lines even more pressing. In the second part of this essay I would like to highlight what seem to me to be three rather obvious, yet crucial (and often forgotten) factors that profoundly affect our relationships with one another.

The first is that there has been a long history of relationships between western and non-western Christians, a history we need to remember and draw upon, a history marked by much genuine friendship and love but also by misunderstanding, resentment, and at times hostility. Thus it should not be surprising to find that current attitudes of non-westerners toward westerners, even within the church universal, are characterized by ambivalence, paradox, and complexity. It would be helpful to keep in mind that Christians outside the West are highly sensitive to westerners’ sense of their own superiority, especially because westerners came preaching a gospel of equality and mutual respect.

A second factor that influences relationships between western and non-western Christians is the tendency of any people to understand foreigners according to their own categories. So we in the West unthinkingly evaluate others by our own criteria. A good example is the characterization of non-western Christians as “conservative.”¹¹ The terms “conservative” and “liberal” are, of course, terms used to describe the ideological bent of those in the western universe of ideas, but can be misleading in trying to understand the ways in which Kenyan or Sri Lankan or Fijian Christians think. Certainly, we can apply our own litmus test of whether one is “conservative” and “liberal” to non-western Christians, and depending on whether the litmus paper comes out blue or pink on the issue of say, the practice of homosexuality, we can confidently declare them to be conservatives or liberals in general. Yet we have really learned nothing about the thinking of Christians outside the western mindset by using this test. Is an African Roman Catholic archbishop with a powerful ministry of exorcism and supernatural

healing a conservative or a liberal? If he then gets married is he a conservative or a liberal? Just as western liberals were disappointed by revolutionary Latin American Christians who did not turn out to be true liberals, western conservatives will undoubtedly become disappointed that Asian Christians are not conservative in ways they had assumed.¹³

The third important factor influencing relationships between western and non-western Christians is the material wealth of the westerners. It is surprising that Philip Jenkins, while acknowledging the material poverty of Christians in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, does not really seem to take this poverty into account when speculating about the future of Christian life. History has shown repeatedly that a few people with money and power can and do control great numbers of people without either. No matter how small the number of western Christians becomes, wealthy westerners will continue to exercise a disproportionately greater influence on the future of Christian life around the world. Western material wealth is as much a curse as a blessing in Christian relationships across cultures.¹⁴ Even though this wealth should not matter, it almost always does. Those holding the wealth spend much time and energy planning how best to use it, or not to use it, and the temptations for both givers and receivers to use it for leverage and control are always great.

THE NEXT STEP TOWARD CATHOLICITY

Given the daunting factors of a complicated history, differing worldviews, and greatly disparate wealth, how can we live as followers of Jesus Christ in a new time of world Christianity? At the World Missionary Conference of 1910 held in Edinburgh, Scotland, one of the few non-western Christians allowed to address the assembly was the Reverend V. S. Azariah, a churchman from South India. Azariah lectured on “The Problem of Co-Operation between Foreign and Native Workers,” and he tactfully yet forcefully demonstrated that far too many western missionaries were treating Indian Christians as second-class citizens, as a subservient order of humanity.¹⁵ The problem at the time was one of “race relationships,” or racism as we would say today, for included in Azariah’s analysis of interracial relationships was the role of ecclesiastical power and money. Azariah asked the crucial question, “What should be the relationship of the foreign missionary to the Indian Christian leaders?” And he answered, “Surely, that of a friend.” Azariah closed his highly acclaimed speech with a powerful appeal for friendship. “Through all the ages to come the Indian church will rise up in gratitude to attest to the heroism and self-denying labours of the missionary body. You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for *love*. Give us FRIENDS!”¹⁷

Azariah’s appeal is as profound today as it was almost a century ago. The right way forward in the relationship among Christians across languages, cultures, and nations is through the cultivation of friendship.¹⁸ What Azariah was aiming for, I think, was the development of reciprocity, mutuality, and respect among Christians with significant differences in culture and outlook, as well as in convictions regarding orthodoxy and

orthopraxy. Merely to say that we should love one another is not enough, Azariah argued, for love can be expressed in many ways. “Friendship is more than condescending love. I do not for a moment deny that the foreign missionaries love the country and the people of the country for whom they have made such noble sacrifices, but friendship is more than the love of a benefactor.”¹⁹ Friendship is struggling to understand, respect, and work with others, without belittling oneself. It is only through the practice of friendship that the difficulties of our checkered history, our limited understanding, and our disparities in wealth can be properly engaged. And it is deep, Christian friendship that is the way forward into the unity of Christ to which we are all called. As Azariah put it, “The exceeding riches of the glory of Christ can be fully realized not by the Englishman, the American, and the Continental alone, nor by the Japanese, the Chinese, and the Indians by themselves—but by all working together, worshiping together, and learning together the Perfect Image of our Lord and Christ. It is only ‘with all Saints’ that we can ‘comprehend the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God.’”²⁰

NOTES

¹ “The Changing Face of the Church,” in Newsweek, April 16, 2001; Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2-3.

² Jenkins, 123.

³ As cited in Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 8; see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966); also David Bosch’s discussion of Michael Polyani’s work in *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Mission Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 358-361.

⁴ A number of non-western Christians have therefore disagreed with the typical western liberal position (espoused by President Bush, for example) that Islam is a peaceful religion and Islamic violence is perpetrated by extremists and fanatics on the fringes of the religion. See Lamin Sanneh, review of Historical Atlas of Islam, rev. and exp. ed. in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27:3 (July 2003), 134.

⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989); Andrew Walls, “The Translation Principle in Christian History” in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 26-42.

⁶ Walls, 20-21. Walls has pointed out that it is interesting how, with the exception of the special cases of Ireland and Poland, the countries which remained Catholic after the Reformation generally had been part of the old western Roman Empire.

⁷ Geertz, “The Integrative Revolution” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: BasicBooks, 1973), 255-310.

⁸ Geertz, 258.

⁹ Geertz’s term.

¹⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

¹¹ Jenkins, 7.

Continued on page 34



Jeff Christensen/REUTERS/TimePix

MUSLIMS OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

WHITNEY S. BODMAN

On March 18, 2003, the House of Representatives of the Texas State Legislature in Austin was opened, as usual, with prayer. The members bowed their heads and heard these words:

Our Lord, what a joy and security it is that we pray together. Our Lord, take us out of the darkness of our sins, ignorance, and weakness, and grant us the light of your love, hope, and mercy. Make this city and our whole nation of America a place of hope, peace, and security because you are, O Lord, the source of peace. And from you, the peace comes.... Whatever our circumstances are, allow us to stand altogether in the circle of your light and love, and share it with others. In your name we pray. Amen.¹

The difference this day was that the prayer leader was Imam Moujahed Bakhach of the Islamic Association of Tarrant County, the first ever Muslim to open a Texas legislative session.

Such manifestations of a growing pluralism in the United States are not without their tensions. In Seattle, Washington, two weeks earlier, Imam Mohamad Joban, of the Islamic Center of Olympia, presented a brief opening prayer in that state's legislature. In part, he said:

We open this session of House of Representatives in the name of Allah, the one God of Abraham, God of Moses, God of Jesus, and God of Mohammed, peace be upon them all.... We ask Allah or God to bless the State of Washington so it may continue to prosper and become a symbol of peace and tran-

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quility for people of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. We pray that Allah may guide this House in making good decisions for the people of Washington.... At this time, we also pray that America may succeed in the war against terrorism. We pray to God that the war may end with world peace and tranquility.²

But in Seattle, at least two state legislators pointedly walked out. Representative Lois McMahan commented, "It's an issue of patriotism.... The Islamic religion is so...part and parcel with the attack on America. I just didn't want to be there, be a part of that.... Even though the mainstream Islamic religion doesn't profess to hate America, nonetheless it spawns the groups that hate America."

The complexity of Islam in America is framed by these events—acceptance, rejection, official recognition, confrontation, and suspicion. Muslims in America experience both greater freedom to practice their faith than they have known in many parts of the Islamic world, and greater suspicion, especially after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, of their Islamic identity.

In the Christian community, one also finds a complex of attitudes. On the one (theological) hand, we are divided as to the degree of welcome our own faith should extend to another tradition. Do we worship the same God? Does God hear, or attend to, the prayer of a Muslim? On the other (political) hand, we are uncertain as to the loyalty of Muslims to our American heritage and polity. What is the relationship between the Islamic religion and the disrepute of America in much of the world? Do "they" hate "us"?

This question is all the more difficult because the "they" and the "us" are not clearly distinguished. As I write, the morning newspaper tells of the attack on American residential compounds in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Al-Qa'eda is suspected. One of the American dead was Obadiyah Abdullah, an employee of Vinnell Corp., formerly of the U.S. Army. Is he a "they" or an "us"? Likewise, hundreds of the U.S. troops in Iraq have been Muslim, and hundreds of the victims of the World Trade Center attack were Muslim.

The United States remains a predominantly Christian country. While Muslims and other religious traditions are growing, even the most ambitious estimates of the Muslim population put it at seven million, less than two percent of the population. The difference is that the Muslim population is now a wealthier, more professional segment of the national mosaic, and thus more able to build mosques and be a more public presence in the American landscape.

This raises two critical questions: How will the Muslim presence affect the fabric of America, and how will America change the face of Islam?

A GROWING PRESENCE

Muslims have been in America for centuries. Though there are some claims that the first Muslims came with Columbus or even before, it is more reliable to look to the rise of the African slave trade as the initiation of Muslim presence here. Perhaps fifteen percent of the slaves brought to this country were Muslim. For the most part, under the extreme duress of slavery, their Islam vanished. There are some notable excep-

tions to this—a few individuals such as Job Ben Solomon (d. 1773), a freed Maryland slave whose story was recorded by Thomas Bluett, and the Bilali clan of the Georgia Sea Islands.

The next impetus for Islam in America came from the growth of immigration especially from 1895 through the early 1920s. Immigrants were largely Lebanese and Syrians, most of them Christian, but not all.

The major growth of Islam in America in this past century began in the African-American community. During the Reconstruction period after the Civil War, some African Americans, notably Edward Blyden, spoke not only of returning to Africa, but of returning to Islam as well. Second, Marcus Garvey organized the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) which promoted unity and pride among blacks, supported a consciousness of Africa and return to it, and encouraged African Americans to think of themselves in unique ways. Third, in the 1920s a Muslim missionary movement, the “Ahmadiyyas,” distributed Qur’ans and taught about Islam, mainly along the east coast.

The consequence of these factors was the emergence of a number of African-American unorthodox Islamic movements. The most famous has been the Nation of Islam, but others—the Moorish Science Temple of America and various orthodox Sunni congregations—also emerged. The restriction of immigration in the early 1920s meant that Islam was, at this time, largely a heterodox American movement in the African-American community.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, this began to change. In 1965, with the signing of the Immigration and Nationality Act, America’s doors opened wide to Muslims from all parts of the Islamic world. This was the American tradition of hospitality, enshrined at the foot of the Statue of Liberty, at work. Many of these new Muslim arrivals were already highly educated or came to America for university training and stayed. They were attracted not only by the educational and economic opportunities here, but also by American values of freedom of worship and speech, of civil rights and representative government. They often came from countries in which they could not worship freely, or live safely—countries struggling to emerge from colonialism and still caught in the agonies of imagining a future.

THE CURRENT COMPLEXION

Of the six-to-seven million Muslims in the United States now, perhaps thirty percent are African American. They are mostly Sunni Muslims, not members of the Nation of Islam. The latter group still has a significant influence in the black community, but probably numbers no more than 25,000 members. About thirty percent of Muslim Americans are from South Asia, mainly India and Pakistan. Perhaps twenty percent are Arab. (This is surprising to many, since Islam is commonly associated with Arabs, but in fact only twenty percent or so of the Muslim population world-wide is Arab.) Although Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, very few Indonesians have immigrated to America.

Though Islam is growing in the United States, it is largely growing by immigra-

tion, not conversion. A survey of mosques in America, conducted by a consortium of Muslim organizations and guided by Hartford Seminary’s Institute for Religious Research, found that almost all mosques (631 sampled out of a total of 1209) had recorded at least one conversion in the past year, but very few, more than ten.³ The largest Muslim organization in America, the Islamic Society of North America, is largely led by first-generation immigrants.

These immigrants have shaped the nature of the Islamic presence in several ways. First, since most mosques include members from a variety of countries, no one culture usually dominates. This means that cultural aspects of Islamic practice tend to be cancelled out.

Every religious community tends to combine both elements of religious orthodoxy—the beliefs and practices that all believers everywhere will share—and a varying degree of local cultural elements. A Jewish friend of mine was astonished when she visited a synagogue in Spain and they took an offering during the Shabbat service. Such a thing was *never* done in any (American) synagogue she had attended. Similarly, in America, Christmas is a time for gift-giving, but in Italy, the tradition is to give gifts on Epiphany, January 6, in honor of the gifts of the wise men. It is La Befana, an old woman, who brings secret gifts to the children.

In the Islamic tradition, some countries celebrate the *mawlid*, the birthday of the Prophet. This is seldom celebrated in mosques in America. Similarly, many communities internationally will incorporate *zhikir*, a devotional practice usually involving rhythmic repetition of the name of God or some other short expression, into their congregational practice. This, too, is rare among American Islamic communities. Instead, these multinational congregations seek to practice an orthodoxy upon which they can all agree.

This is fairly novel in the world of Islam. In few other places in the world—Canada and Britain, notably—does one get such a mixture of Islamic traditions, and, therefore, the need to recover, or rediscover, or perhaps re-invent, what Islam is. Identifying what is truly Islamic requires extraordinary effort, making American Islam in some ways more intentional than much of Islamic practice elsewhere.

A second aspect of Muslim America is that in larger Muslim communities, the leadership is still trained in Pakistan or the Arab world. Islam is generally non-hierarchical. There are no equivalents to bishops or priests. A Muslim congregation may be led by whomever the congregation decides is the most capable and pious among them, but larger congregations will seek out an imam who is trained at an Islamic university such as Al-Azhar in Cairo, the oldest continually operating university in the world.

Imagine this scenario, a possible outline of the future: The children of current immigrants are attending American universities. They may take a course in Islam. If they do, their professor may well be a non-Muslim, but one who has studied Islamic history and tradition from a critical perspective. (By critical, I do not mean adversarial, but rather an approach that raises questions about sources, methodology, and perspective.) Their non-Muslim professor may well have read more of the classical Muslim tradition than either they or their teachers in the local mosque. Like those Chris-

tians who are exposed to historical criticism and Christian history for the first time in college, these Muslims will learn that Muslim history, like Christian history, shows a great diversity of tradition and interpretation, and that even now there are many suggesting new answers to the question, "What is Islam?"

It may well be these western-educated Muslims who will lead the Islamic Society of North America in thirty years. The Islam that they practice, and that shapes their thinking, will likely have a different texture, and a different awareness, than the Islam that their parents learned. This is speculation, but we are already beginning to see some changes in American Islam.

A third aspect of American Islam is the changing role of the imam. The clerics that serve American Muslim congregations are gradually finding that their roles are not modeled on the life of the imam in Jordan or Pakistan, but on the pattern set by Protestant clergy here. They are expected to visit families, to visit the sick in the hospital, to participate in interfaith organizations with Jews, Buddhists, and Christians, and to explain Islam to Americans, again and again and again.

This raises a final aspect of Islam in America. We are both welcoming to immigrant communities and suspicious of them. We are a nation of immigrants, but today's immigrants are in closer communication with their countries of origin. This not only encourages them to retain some of their home culture, but also means that they are heavily influenced by the national and international contexts of their countries of origin. And, it means that, while Americans have often been somewhat parochial in their understanding of the rest of the world, we now have in our midst many who are acutely attuned to events in other parts of the world. The global village is becoming local.

THE QUESTION

Are Muslims loyal citizens of the United States? Can they understand the American experiment? One will, of course, find a great deal of diversity within the Muslim community, but many, perhaps most, Muslims came here *for* the American experience, though not necessarily every aspect of it. The American sexual license quite apparent on TV and in supermarket checkout lines is a part of Americana many Muslims (like many other Americans) would prefer to avoid, but it comes with the larger package of freedoms.

After the attack on September 11 and the enactment of the Patriot Act, Muslims are not sure that America is loyal to them. At a recent meeting of the Austin Area Interfaith Ministries, a Muslim of Pakistani heritage received a distinguished service award for his years of interfaith work with Jews and Christians. Fighting tears as he accepted the award, he cried, "I am an American! I have lived here for twenty years and raised my children here. But now some of my friends are leaving the United States for Canada, no longer feeling welcome in America." The implicit question in his speech was: Now that you have honored me, will you also trust me?

There is a great deal to be explored in the complexity of the relationship between Muslims and Christians. America will be, as has often been the case through history, a unique environment in which to test old limits and new possibilities, not only of our

understandings of each other, but also of our self-understandings, as Christians, as Muslims, and as Christian- and Muslim-Americans. Much of the Muslim population here is new, just seeking its place in this society. I, myself, have found that Muslims have much to learn of the American way, but also much to contribute. Perhaps the greatest contribution may be to help all of us understand more richly the American experiment with liberty and hospitality. ❦

NOTE

¹ "First Muslim prayer given in House," TWEAN News Channel of Austin, 3/19/03.

² "Two lawmakers spurn Muslim's prayer," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 3/4/03.

³ Bagby, Ihsan, Paul M. Perl, and Byan T. Froehl. "The Mosque in America: A National Portrait." 62. (Washington, D.C.: Council on American-Islamic Relations), 2001.

WHITNEY BODMAN AND ARUN JONES:
CHRISTIANS AS CITIZENS
IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

One of the dreams of the missionary movement was for indigenous forms of Christian faith to grow up around the world. It seems that this has happened. But we hear from some quarters real anxiety being expressed about the shape Christianity is taking in other countries. Aren't Christians just Christians wherever they live?

Arun Jones: Missionaries, to my knowledge, never wanted to see a form of Christianity grow that was not in some way informed by the Christianity that they brought. Yes, they wanted indigenous Christianity, but when you press them in terms of specifics, there were always qualifications and hesitations about what shape indigenous Christianity took. Missionaries were often—not always, but often—caught in the middle between their sending agencies and the indigenous people who were hearing the gospel and interpreting it for themselves. In Africa, for example, there was the question of whether polygamy was consistent with Christianity. The sending agency back home would say, "Absolutely not!" Some Africans would say, "Why not? It's in the Bible." Missionaries would be caught in the middle. In a sense, the rise of non-western forms of Christianity is something that has taken place beyond the missionary project. Missionaries, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, would not have wanted a Christianity that was so indigenous.

BODMAN: OFTEN WE EMPHASIZE THE DOGMATIC ASPECTS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH, WHICH ARE WHAT DIVIDE US, RATHER THAN THE CATHOLICITY, THE COMMUNAL ASPECT OF OUR FAITH, WHICH EMPHASIZES OUR UNITY.



JONES: THE DESTRUCTION OF BOUNDARIES CAN ALSO LEAD TO A SITUATION IN WHICH NOBODY KNOWS WHO THEY ARE AND THEY CAN'T REALLY TALK TO EACH OTHER ANYMORE.



Are there criteria that all Christians all over the world can use to say, "This is clearly Christian. And that is not."?

Jones: Andrew Walls says that there are certain things that have characterized Christian communities throughout history: a use of common Scriptures, the use of bread, wine, and water for ritual. Now these are not strictly bread, strictly wine, strictly water—there have been substitutions. Even the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics disagree about what kind of bread you should use; others differ about grape juice and wine. But these elements have been used by Christians through time and across cultures. Andrew also says that the sense that God is present wherever believers are is also a characteristic. God is a universal creator and not a local deity. I would add a sense of catholicity, that Christians are called to reach across their ethnic boundaries in communion of some sort with other Christians. From my reading of church history, separation has always been painful for Christians. It is not the norm. The norm is Ephesians, we are one body, Jew and Gentile, not Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians going their own ways.

Diana Eck asks: How do we place ourselves in one another's company as Christians? How would you answer that question?

Whit Bodman: Often we emphasize the dogmatic aspects of Christian faith, which are what divide us, rather than the catholicity, the communal aspect of our faith, which emphasizes our unity. The very word "company," one with whom you would break bread, is an essential Christian concept, but we tend to reject it in favor of the dogmatic church. So to put ourselves in the company of Christians, I think, requires us to recognize that prior to our dogmatic commitments we are already in the company of others because Jesus has made us one body. Being one body means that dogmatic divisions must be put in a secondary role. There are also liturgical, or other, ways in which our distinctiveness as communities is recognized. One of the ways I approach teaching world religions to our students is that we study other religions in order to see ourselves in their reflection. They are mirrors. When one looks at Islam, one sees the fundamental importance of *ummah*, of the people of Islam, which is a world-wide community that is expressed symbolically in a lot of different ways. All Muslims pray toward Mecca. All Muslims ought to go to the *haj* and meet in Mecca with the world-wide community. They pray at the same time, at least with respect to the sun. There are all these expressions of unity that come when everybody prays in the same way. So whether they

are in Austin or Damascus, Muslim people coming from all over the world can join right in the prayers. It's a similar concept to that which is expressed in the Latin Mass they once had in the Catholic church. Wherever you went you could join right in the Mass because it's all in Latin, whether you're in the Philippines or in Jamaica. We have gone so much in the way of our separateness that we have lost the signs, the symbols, the expressions, and therefore the consciousness of our unity as a Christian community. And yet it is foundationally scriptural. We come into the company of others by recognizing that Christ has made us one company.

Is there a way to get that back?

Bodman: That's a hard one. I don't know whether it's possible. I think it is necessary. I guess I do really think it's possible, but we need to change the emphasis on individualism, and we need to create occasions where we gather ecumenically and see this not as secondary to our "real" worship in our own churches. We need to recapture and reclaim the unity essential to our Christian faith.

Jones: I think different Christian traditions would give different answers to your question. The Roman Catholic, of course, says it is the Mass that is a visible sign of the church's unity. And even though the Mass is now in the vernacular, the form of the Mass no matter where you go remains the same. So whether you understand what's being said or not, you know what's being said. You know what's being done. The *alleluia* before the gospel might be totally incomprehensible, but in a sense it is totally comprehensible because you know it. And you can appreciate what's happening without recognizing the actual words.

Both of you talk about the challenge of Christians living among other faiths: Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists. Is it possible for Christians to live among other faiths without the danger of violence?

Jones: Yes. It's happened for centuries. It continues to happen today. There are so many examples of where people of different faiths live together. I think our worries really come out of our history where our challenge of living together as Christians after the Reformation was to dissociate the violence from religion. Which is what [John] Locke, among others, tried to accomplish. I would add, we are much more comfortable carrying out violence as long as it's not religious. I think we're more comfortable with non-religious violence than with religious violence.

Bodman: It's not possible to live without the *danger* of violence. But it is possible to live without violence. As Arun says, throughout history it has actually been the norm to live without violence and the exception to have violence. And the violence is often not religious. You often hear that the primary cause of violence is religion. But that's nonsense. World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, most of the wars of the past century were not religious wars—they had nothing to do with religion.

How does the Christian faith help us live with others in peace?

Bodman: The essence of the Christian faith is communitarian—not communal, but communitarian. Which means that the fundamental ethic of the Christian is to reach

out to the Other.

We talk a great deal about reaching out to the poor, that is, the other defined by economic difference. But the gospel doesn't limit the definition of the Other. It's just the Other. So part of the very essence of our tradition is to reach out to every Other in hospitality, in grace, love, and care. The very concept of God the Trinity expresses difference held together in community. In a sense, living with the Other—whether it be the religious Other, the economic Other, the class Other, the gender Other—is the foundation of Christian practice.

Jones: I think my perspective comes out of my childhood in the Christian community in India. I would make a distinction between the way in which we reach out to other Christians and the way in which the Christian community reaches out to non-Christians. That means that the relationship is qualitatively different.

For example, I believe that we have commitments to one another as Christians that we don't have to people outside the faith, and vice versa. We have certain commitments to people outside the faith that we might not have to one another. And so living peacefully with people of other faiths—this needs to be thought through.

Bodman: I would raise a real question about that. It's like the way that we think of nations. We have very clear boundaries as nation-states, and so we tend to think in a very segmented and categorical fashion. We have Hindus. We have Buddhists. We have Muslims. We have Jews. But in the very historical foundation of our Christian faith, those categories were not clear. Jesus was a Jew, and we regard him, of course, as a Christian. So which was he? The categories are blurred. And what does it mean in Galatians that there is neither Jew nor Gentile? I think we need to question the degree to which we institutionalize and harden these traditions so distinctly.

Could we say, then, that the variety of early Christian congregations might provide a model for us?

Bodman: More than a model. Because modeling almost suggests that there's some clarity. What there is in the early church is a *demodeling*. The things that we would like to be clear and neat are confounded.

Jones: But how can we confound our categories unless we have a sense of who we are? In Acts, in James, and in the various Gentile Christian churches, yes, they're confounding each other. But the issue is, how do we recreate the boundaries?

Can you think of a specific example of what this boundary confusion and clarity looks like for Christians living in a non-Christian context?

Jones: My dad was a pastor of a city church in Kanpur, India. There was a woman in the congregation who married a Muslim, and he came to church every Sunday, but he remained a Muslim. He came out of respect for the family. The woman's mother, his mother-in-law, insisted he be baptized. She badgered and badgered him until he finally said, "I'll be baptized." He was baptized, and he never set foot inside a church again. I think that's a story where the disrespect of a person's otherness, in a way, destroyed the ability for communication and for dialogue and for real community. You see this all the

time in India. The accentuation of our boundaries and the tightening of our boundaries can lead to violence. But the destruction of boundaries can also lead to a situation in which nobody knows who they are and they can't really talk to each other anymore.

Bodman: I would say that the woman who insisted on his being baptized made a claim on him that was not true. She didn't allow him to define himself the way he is. She insisted that he be defined in her terms.

Several of the contributors to this issue have raised a concern about our tendency to only understand people in our own categories. Is there an alternative?

Jones: I would say it's impossible not to do that. On some level, that's just the way we think. We're always seeing the other through our own categories.

Bodman: It's normal. But I also think that part of the genius of the Christian understanding of community, of living in relationship with others, sabotages our narrow categories, and challenges us to discover the Otherness of others.

I get my hair cut by a woman who is a Shi'a Muslim but attends church every Sunday. I don't know whether she has been baptized. She regards herself as a Muslim with a devotion to Christ. So to me she is an example of the blurriness of the boundaries and the way real people challenge our categories. She hopes very much that her husband from whom she is now divorced and who has a drinking problem will also find Jesus and be rescued from his drinking problem. She is not hoping that he become Christian, but that he find Jesus. For somebody to insist that she take on the formal categories of our tradition would probably destroy it all.

Jones: According to research current research, four percent of [Asian] Indians today are Christians, and another two percent are crypto-Christians—so one-third of the people who follow Jesus in India are not baptized, may not go to church, and are living within their Hindu, Muslim, Sikh communities. But they follow Jesus.

Bodman: When I was in India, we met with a Catholic bishop who described how a young priest had come to the area from the West. He visited a family that had a crucifix on the wall, and a statue of Mary, and next to it a statue of Krishna. The priest said you can't have that. You must remove Krishna. When he visited a month later Krishna was gone, but so was Mary. Part of their devotion was syncretistic, and this priest did not understand that. For them, to take Krishna away meant that they had to take Jesus away too.

I think there's something in Christianity that we've lost sight of: We think we know the nature of God because we've written volumes of theology about it, and we do not remember that these are all human categories. And I would say that the commandment against making graven images is really fundamental. That's why it's right up at the top of the list.

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ANDREW WALLS

Cross-cultural transmission is the lifeblood of historic Christianity. Had it not been for some believing Jerusalem refugees in Antioch who broke with previous practice and talked about Jesus to their new pagan neighbors (Acts 11:19-21), the Christian faith might have collapsed after AD 70 with the Jewish state from which it arose. Had it not been for those Christians in the Roman Empire who responded to the invasions of those they saw as barbarians by introducing them to Christ, Christianity today might exist only among cultural minorities in the Islamic world. Had it not been for the missionary movement through which, directly or indirectly, Christianity became characteristic of substantial areas of Africa and Asia, we might in the coming century find Christianity had become a sect, perhaps even a sort of caste, in a pluralist, consumerist western society. The original church of Jerusalem, the Christianity of the Roman Empire, the Christianity of Europe from which came the Christianity in which we were nurtured, were all once flourishing institutions which were deeply rooted in their cultural settings. Each could claim to be the representative Christianity of its day. But none proved to be permanent. Christianity does not take a permanent hold on the lands and peoples that adopt it, in the way Islam does. The spread of Christianity is serial, not progressive; and representative Christianity moves over time from one people, one region, one culture to another.

It is in this context that we should consider the relation of western and non-western Christianity. The twentieth century transformed that relationship. At the beginning of that century, Christianity was essentially a western religion. It was beyond dispute the religion of the West, and well over eighty percent of those who professed it were living in Europe or North America. By the end of the twentieth century, however, the fastest recession in the whole of Christian history had shaken loose Christianity's hold on Europe, and had begun to erode even in the United States. Simultaneously, an equally rapid movement had brought substantial sections of the populations of certain regions of the world—Korea, some of the states bordering the Himalayan-Arakan ranges, among Chinese people both in the homeland and overseas, and above all in sub-Saharan Africa—into the Christian faith. The majority of Christians now lived in Africa, Asia-Pacific, or Latin America; the proportion of those living in Europe and North America was falling all the time. Christianity was now predominantly a non-western

religion, and all the indications were that it would become progressively more so.

In other words, the twenty-first century confronts us with a post-Christian West and a post-western Christianity, and there is little sign that the churches of either the West or the non-western world are as yet grappling with the implications.

The Christians of Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America are now the world's representative Christians. It is by them that the quality of twenty-first and twenty-second century Christianity will be judged. It is among them that the crucial decisions will be made which cumulatively shape the church's response to its mission. And it is they who will be the principal agents of that mission, with western Christians as the assistants, the helpers, the facilitators. How Christians respond to the matters thrown up by the events that take place and the agendas that develop in Africa and Asia and Latin America will constitute the most significant areas of Christian thought and action. Western Christians have become accustomed to thinking of their forms and expressions of Christianity as the standard ones, and of themselves as the successors of those "apostles and elders at Jerusalem" who made the critical decisions about policy in the early church, and sent their representatives to be assured that the new departures in Samaria and Antioch were acceptable. But the Jerusalem church lasted barely two generations; and western leadership of a world church (though the process is partly masked by the West's continued possession of so much of the financial resources) has been steadily passing for some time. This has been interestingly displayed in the Anglican Communion, whose ecclesial structures reflect the new balance in the church more fully than most others do. Both at the last Lambeth Conference and in the more recent public controversies over sexuality—however one may view them—it has been evident that the theological and pastoral agenda of Anglicanism as a whole cannot be controlled or even led by the thought and practice of the homelands of Anglicanism, the areas where hitherto Anglican theological and practical norms have been set. And many of the churches of the non-western world have been tested by fire. Few churches have had to face what the church in China has undergone in the past fifty years, and emerged as it has done. Few have had so routinely to face war, epidemic, and genocide as those of East and Central Africa, or to give moral leadership to a nation as those of South Africa. Are these among the places where God has been preparing his people for leadership in God's mission in the present century? That century brings a new identity to western Christians. Their spiritual kith and kin are Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans; the interests of their nations may be defined along other lines. And whereas for several centuries Christianity has been associated with wealth and advanced technology, it will now be associated with the poor, indeed, with some of the poorest on earth.

The new configuration of the church makes possible an immense expansion of Christian thinking, and perhaps a period of creative theological activity to match that seen in the Mediterranean world in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries, and in Europe in the sixteenth. Theology is not a complete body of knowledge; it is an activity that is culturally conditioned. It is the process of making Christian choices intellectually, and the need for those choices arises from situations that occur in partic-

ular segments of social reality. The theological process requires the application of the scriptural tools to the intellectual materials locally at hand. The theology we now regard as classical, the received tradition, is the fruit of successive processes of Christian choice as the biblical tools came into contact with Greek philosophy, Roman law and Germanic customary law, and the European Enlightenment, along with many other forces. The present age will bring a developing encounter with the ancient cultures of Africa and Asia. Such encounters in the past have expanded the church's understanding of Christ and his salvation; for the theological process, though local, takes place within a church that transcends time and space, so its gains are not purely local or temporary. I suspect that one of the major areas of development will be in the apprehension of the spiritual world. Our present working systems of theology are shaped by the European Enlightenment, which produced a small-scale model of the universe and a clearly marked frontier between the empirical world and the world of Spirit, between natural and supernatural. Much of humanity—most of Africa, for instance—saw a larger, more populated universe, where the frontier between the empirical and the spiritual was constantly being crossed. The usual models of western theology have thus been too small to fit the experience of many Christians of the non-western world; they leave too many areas untouched by Christ, because Enlightenment thinking has nothing to say about those areas. But the Enlightenment model of the universe is losing some of its axiomatic character in the postmodern West; and theological activity born out of the pastoral urgencies of Africa and Latin America may find an unexpected resonance in western situations.

The new configuration produces a completely new ecumenical challenge, far more fundamental than questions about denominations or even confessions. Cultural diversity was built into the church forever at the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. There it was determined that Hellenistic Gentile Christians should find a Hellenistic Gentile way of being disciples of Christ, though hitherto the only lifestyle known among disciples was that of observant Jews. The Epistle to the Ephesians paints a picture of a bicultural church in which Jew and Greek are building blocks equally necessary in the new Temple, organs equally necessary in the functioning body of which Christ is the head. In the twenty-first century, the church is more culturally diverse than it has ever been before; more closely resembling, in fact, the great innumerable multitude taken out of every tribe, kindred, and tongue, than at any previous time in its history. This presents a problem, an opportunity, and a peril. The problem is how to share the church's resources equitably when so much of the financial part of those resources lies in those parts of the world where the Christian population is in decline. The opportunity is to experience that togetherness in diversity that the Epistle to the Ephesians describes as necessary to the attainment of the full stature of Christ. The peril is twofold: that the desire to dominate and direct takes over, or that, in postmodern fashion, we let countless separate Christianities flourish side by side without contact with one another. The real ecumenical challenge is for Christians of the whole *oikumene*—African, Indian, Chinese, Korean, Hispanic, Western and Eastern European, American—to realize the Body of Christ together, not just in special meetings, but as a func-

tioning people of God. It is in the United States where the clearest test may come, on account of another great fact of our time, the diaspora of non-western peoples to the West. This has brought Christians, and Christian congregations, from every part of the world to the United States, until the whole Christian *oikumene* is present in one large country. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, lies the possibility of realizing the Body of Christ—or of fracturing it.

Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America may now be the main theaters of the church's mission, but the re-evangelization of the West will be one of its most pressing tasks.

Again the presence of the non-western Christian diaspora in Europe and North America is relevant. All past Christian experience points to the importance of cross-cultural transmission of the gospel, but Christians from the non-western world may bring another benefit to western Christians in their engagement in the task of the re-evangelization of their own societies. As Lesslie Newbigin pointed out twenty years ago, African and Asian Christians are much more aware of the dangers of syncretism—the illegitimate marriage of cultural elements to Christian living—than are western Christians. From them, perhaps, western Christians may be helped to a Christian critique of their own culture and a livelier sense of the meaning of the gospel in the West. ☛

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DIANA ECK

Difference is the big question that bedevils us today. How do we handle religious difference in a world where there is so much of it, and in which it has become so troublesome? It is a question for those of us who seek bridges of understanding between people of different faiths. And it is a question for all of us who are Christians as we seek to understand and live with one another, creating Christian community with people with whom we differ, sometimes deeply.

Let's start with interreligious difference. There is no more important issue for Christians all over the world than our relations with people of other faiths. Our world is torn with conflict deeply rooted in religious attitudes, beliefs, and life-ways. Christians are majority populations here and minorities there. Muslims are majorities here, minorities there. In a world grown smaller with the communication revolution, our lives and our futures are interrelated and interdependent. How we in the United States handle our religious diversity and our new religious minorities attracts the attention of people around the world and has an impact far beyond our borders. As Muslims are singled out for detention without criminal charges or as Sikhs are the target of hate crimes, people around the world are watching and listening. What response, if any, will they hear from American Christians? Is the well-being of all people of faith of concern to us? Are all of us co-citizens in this land, or not?

The interfaith movement in the United States has taken great strides in the past decade, with local interreligious councils springing up in one city after another. One of the great gifts of interfaith relations is the ability to see the reflection of our own faces as Christians in the views and perspectives of others. We understand, perhaps for the first time, that in the eyes of many Muslims or Buddhists, Christians are all seen as pretty much the same. We are taken aback, and called to reflect on the homogenizing gaze with which we often regard Muslims, Buddhists, or Hindus. We do not see the nuances, the sectarian movements, the differences. Knowing as little as we do about other faiths, most of us settle for the broad-band term. And so it is with their views of us. A few years ago, a Muslim friend told me with some enthusiasm about a tape he had seen on interreligious dialogue at his local Islamic center. I was delighted, and asked him to tell me more about it. It was, as it turned out, a debate between the South African imam Muhammad Deedat and Jimmy Swaggart. My own faith, in that debate,

was presumably represented to countless Muslims by Jimmy Swaggart, and it took some time to explain to my friend just why that upset me so deeply. The recognition of our intrareligious differences is surely one of the fruits of interfaith dialogue.

We Christians are a diverse lot, both here and around the world. Not long ago, I spent a Sunday morning visiting churches in Dorchester, one of the urban districts of Boston. There are tens of thousands of people worshiping in Dorchester on a Sunday morning—none in ways quite like the Methodist Protestant tradition I know best. Dorchester is home to African, Haitian, Hispanic, Vietnamese, and Irish Americans. Some congregate in small storefront churches like the Zion Apostolic Church and the Pentecost Temple of the Holy Ghost. Some gather in huge auditoriums, like a 4000-member evangelical church in a former supermarket with a big white grand piano and a set of drums on the stage primed for high-energy worship. Down Blue Hill Avenue is the First Haitian Baptist Church, filled with the buzz of a dozen Bible study groups in different parts of the vast sanctuary, each being addressed by a teacher, all in French Creole. This diversity would be amplified by looking to other Boston churches. There are Vietnamese Catholic congregations and Korean Methodists. Hispanic communities have brought devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe to New England and Indian immigrants have brought the Church of South India. In short, there is a tremendous range of churches in the United States. The question we all must ask is also the question that world Christianity poses to us: How do we place ourselves in one another's company as Christians? Or do we?

Theological diversity is an even greater challenge. Not only are Southern Baptists, Episcopalians, and United Methodists different from each other, but each denomination has its internal differences. Each is riven with controversy and tension—the role of women in church leadership; the inclusion of gays and lesbians in membership and leadership; the relationship of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, the truth claims of Christianity in relation to all other faiths; and perhaps above all, the role and interpretation of the Bible in Christian faith.

As a professor of religion, I often caution my students against too reified and monolithic an understanding of any religious tradition. Our religions are long, historical arguments, I tell them. What we argue about as Christians is shaped by the particular story that has seized our hearts, minds, and souls, but our various arguments have been sustained for centuries. And so it is with other traditions. As a scholar, there is no avoiding Christian diversity, indeed Christian division and ongoing disputation. As a Christian, however, I have a stake in intra-Christian arguments. I still have Paul's vision of a community, the body of Christ, that is able to flourish in and through its diversity, without being torn apart in division.

For many years, the ecumenical movement, especially through its major instrument, the World Council of Churches (WCC), has served as one place where Christians can and do challenge each other to a wider and deeper understanding of their faith. It has been a dynamic movement, holding its meetings and assemblies in Uppsala and New Delhi, Nairobi, and Harare. In and through the ecumenical movement, Christians of Europe and the United States were able to hear the critical voices of South

African Christians during the struggle against racism and apartheid. In the ecumenical context, Christians of the United States are today able to hear the voices of Middle Eastern church leaders who challenge the morality of Christian Zionism and the tacit support it receives from the U.S. government. In and through the ecumenical movement, church leaders from many communions and nations were able to speak together against the war in Iraq, deploring the fact that “the most powerful nations of this world again regard war as an acceptable instrument of foreign policy.” If the WCC did not exist, it would have to be created. World Christianity needs a forum for the energetic encounter of the world's Christian communities.

Today, unfortunately, the ethnic, religious, and cultural fragmentation that has beset the entire world seems also to be at work in American churches. The ecumenical movement that would gather Christians from around the world has receded from American Christian consciousness, even in the mainline denominations that were its traditional supporters. We have lost our place to argue, to encounter our differences, to see our differences embodied in people, and to worship with these people nonetheless. And that is a very significant loss.

The weakening of the international Christian ecumenical movement seems to be part of America's wider cultural retreat from internationalism, as if the authoritative voices of people whose experience of the world is different from ours might threaten the surety and security of our own worldview. The United States has refused to sign the Kyoto Accords on the environment. The United States participated in the U.N. Summit on Racism, only to walk out when the inevitable resolution equating Zionism with racism was presented. We refused even to participate in the argument, to register our voice and our vote. And, of course, the United States has resolutely refused to be party to the International Court of Justice. The lukewarm support American Christians today give the World Council of Churches is, to be sure, part of this retreat from internationalism. In the face of growing globalism, our interdependence is ever more evident, and yet our response has been ever more evasive.

Might the growing Christian diversity of the United States in places like Dorchester provide the occasion for a vibrant new local and national ecumenism, or at least some alternative to a faltering international perspective? Or is our Christian diversity yet another instance of our fragmentation? A great downtown Boston Baptist church has a signboard that announces the times of its worship services—separate times for the Haitian congregation, the Cambodian fellowship, and the Latino worship. These multi-congregational churches provide the first, most local, opportunity for the mutual learning that is part of ecumenism. But will they be enclaves nesting in the same building? Or will they find ways to bridge difference in Christian community? Here in America the challenges are great, but the jury is still out. Michael Emerson and his colleagues have written both sides of the dynamic story in the books *Divided by Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2003) and *United by Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2000). Does the Christian diversity of America create ever more racial and cultural division? Or is there hope here for stronger bonds of unity across racial and cultural differences?

Theological and social differences are the most difficult of all. A case in point is

the disputation that has raged through one denomination after another on gays and lesbians in church leadership. All other differences aside, all denominations are up in arms over differences in sexuality. The issue is so controversial it can scarcely be raised for discussion in international ecumenical circles. Those of us who are supportive of gay and lesbian clergy, or who may be gay or lesbian ourselves, have much to learn from some Asian and African Christians who find even the discussion of these issues threatening. They, in turn, have much to learn from American gay and lesbian clergy, who are scarcely mysterious American deviants, but faithful Christians. Both have much to learn about the ways in which they handle the Bible, understand it, interpret it, and attempt to live in faithfulness to its fundamental teachings. Indeed, Christian difference is charged more powerfully by our different understandings of the Bible than by any particular issue—for they all stem from this. What does the Bible say about homosexuality? About women's leadership? About other faiths? About Christ? And how are we, in the tempests of our world today, to understand and interpret the Bible? Is Scripture a text, with words literally given by God? Or is Scripture our relationship with that text—dynamic, always interpreted, always a living relationship that speaks to the world in which we now live?

Finally, as we think about difference in the context of the churches today, all of us must recognize differences in wealth and power. At the recent General Convention of the Episcopal Church, the convention which voted to seat the first openly gay bishop in the church, indeed in the worldwide Anglican Communion, a Nigerian bishop warned, "When America sneezes, the whole world catches a cold." And he asked, politely, that America not sneeze too much. This is the differential of power. We can hear it, loud and clear. But what about this sneeze? Because a Nigerian church leader asks an American church not to sneeze, is that the end of it? Not if we value intra-Christian dialogue and even argument. The metaphor of scattering germs around the world is challenged. What if the American church is not scattering germs, but scattering seeds of justice and of love that will grow in ways that cannot be anticipated? Seeds that are unlikely to lead to the ordination of a gay bishop in Nigeria, but will yield a good harvest for a more inclusive church in Nigeria nonetheless?

How we handle our differences will be prognostic for the future of us all and for the future of a pluralistic world. Pluralism, after all, is not the creation of isolated islands of difference, but the engaging of difference in the creation of community. We need to understand those who are different from ourselves. *We need* those who are different in order to understand ourselves. *We need* them because they are the very people we most want to talk to, to persuade. And we need those places, like the ecumenical movement, where we come together despite our differences, where we search our souls and argue, and where we agree to go on finding community together, whether or not we finally agree. To walk out on differences, to let them become divisions, is to give up on the future. ☛

Jane Shaw is dean of divinity, chaplain, and Fellow of New College, Oxford. Her book on miracles in Enlightenment England is forthcoming from Yale University Press, and she is currently writing the history of a millenarian religious community in early twentieth-century Britain. She is the director of a large research project on modern prophecy and heterodox religious communities.

JANE SHAW

The average Anglican is now black, female, and African—not a Church of England white, male vicar bicycling around Canterbury in his Panama hat, though that image may still prevail in some quarters. The Anglican Communion is the world-wide network of Anglican Christians, all of which historically stem from the Church of England, many of them from the context of nineteenth-century colonialism, when Anglican missionaries took Christianity to Africa, India, and numerous other countries.

The significance of this African population for Anglicanism in the West was made clear recently, when two openly gay men, with partners, were appointed as bishops, in the Church of England and in the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. respectively. In the case of Canon Jeffery John, appointed Bishop of Reading in England, pressure from conservative evangelicals in England led to his forced resignation. A strong voice in the "crisis" which led up to this was the male African voice—bishops from Nigeria for example—who threatened to split the Anglican Communion if Canon John were consecrated as bishop. A couple of months later, Canon Gene Robinson was elected as bishop of New Hampshire in the Episcopal Church. Despite internal and external pressure, the General Convention ratified his election and his consecration is planned for later this year.

This demonstrated that homosexuality, in the ways in which we think about it as an *identity* with human rights, is a primarily western issue; and yet in recent years it has been made an African issue, primarily by conservative evangelicals who have enlisted African help to strengthen their position. In 1997, I taught a class at the Oxford Summer School of Theology on the history of sexuality and Christianity. Several bishops from Africa and a number of Nigerian priests were in the class. Whatever we discussed—asceticism in the early church, the significance of marriage in the Reformation, or modern homosexual identity—the African clergy only wished to discuss one thing: polygamy. This was the vital matter in *their* contexts. Could you baptise a man who had more than one wife? A year later, this had radically changed. In 1998, all bishops from around the Anglican Communion met at the Lambeth Conference and discussed homosexuality in the most bitter of terms. It was no longer just a "western issue" but a "global problem."

As arguments rage about the possible splitting of the Anglican Communion on this issue, two points are worth making for their larger relevance about global Christianity. First, key voices are missing in this raging debate: those of black, African women—even though that is the profile of the “average” Anglican. In the complicated politics of race and post-colonialism, women have once again been forgotten. We do not know what they think and feel about sexuality, though male bishops presume to speak on their behalf. In “world Christianity,” women’s voices are repeatedly ignored, for women are the poorest citizens around the world, and in many places have the least access to education and therefore possess high rates of illiteracy. Second, as the Anglican Communion struggles to find a way of staying together, we need to find a new model for unity. It may be that neither orthodoxy nor orthopraxis can be the basis for Christian unity in the future. We need a new model which allows diversity within unity. This may turn out to be true for other denominations and Christian groupings in the multi-cultural context of world Christianity.

Just as the Church of England struggles to understand its new position in the Anglican Communion and throw off its old imperialistic assumptions, so it needs to be right-sized about its place in Britain, too. Just a little while ago, I went, as always, to my local newsagent to buy the *Church Times*—the main weekly newspaper of the Church of England. I have been doing this regularly for several years now, and though the Asian British owner and I have always exchanged pleasantries, we’ve never had a personal conversation. But last week he suddenly asked, as he passed the *Church Times* over the counter, “Are you a nun, then?” “No, but I am a priest,” I replied. “NO!” he said, “That’s amazing. That’s great. How do you qualify for that then?” So I proceeded to tell him the ins and outs of getting selected and trained for ordination in the Church of England. He then slapped a key ring on the counter and pointed to a slightly fuzzy picture: “That’s my man,” he said, “Hare Krishna.” He then proceeded to tell me about his Hindu faith, revitalised by Hare Krishna. We didn’t have a long conversation—ten minutes or so—but we are better acquainted with each other’s religious traditions now, and we have a foundation for further conversations.

That conversation was emblematic of the religious situation in Britain today: illustrating the changing nature of what it means to be British; following the immigration patterns of the last few decades and the multiple faiths which now exist in Britain as a result; and the fact that, although the Church of England is the state church, it means very little to many Britons. And—I confess—the incident illustrated how very little we know about each other unless we make the effort to ask and listen. In analysing who we are as Anglicans and as British Christians, we cannot think only in terms of the Anglican Communion and world Christianity; we need to think also about our identity in terms of the diversity of British religions.

In a recent book, *Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain* (immediately recognisable by the picture of the Queen depicted as Asian on the cover) the British Moslem scholar Yasmin Alibhai-Brown discusses the ways in which the new Britain is necessarily multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, and points to the fact that this creates a certain (often rather ignorant) anxiety among all Britons, but particularly

white Britons. She argues that this is because we do not know each other. Our communities are so separated that we have no idea who the other is. And so, in writing this book, she set out to find out what different communities within Britain think of each other, interviewing more than 120 people—not only British Asians and British blacks but also British whites. Her conclusion in 2000 (and there is no reason to think things are any different three years later) was this:

As we reach the end of the twentieth century and shuffle into the next millennium, people of all backgrounds will need to broaden their ideas if only to survive the seismic changes that have started already. We must learn humility to look beyond our own worlds, obsessions, and interpretations. Somehow we need to break away from the foolish idea that we are all forever fated to remain disconnected; to shout across ravines and canyons at one another or gripe amongst ourselves about those on the other side.¹

We lack the British equivalent of Diana Eck’s pluralism project, but we very much need that sort of project in this country. A start has been made with the Kendal Project, directed by Linda Woodhead, which is primarily interested in the mapping of contemporary religious territory.² This task is vital because, as Britons, we need to learn about the diversity of faiths within our own communities and to begin some sort of genuine dialogue. As we face the challenge of the shifting picture of world Christianity, we need to know and reflect on who we are in order to engage meaningfully with others about their faith and their identity, at home and further afield. ❧

NOTES

¹ Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain*. (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2000), 17

² This maps the religious terrain of Kendal, a town in Cumbria, in the north of England. See <http://www.kendalproject.org.uk>

We asked church leaders representing various countries and continents to respond to the following question: What is the greatest challenge that faces the church in your region? Here is what they told us:

CARLOS EMILIO HAM (DMIN'99) *is a pastor in the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba who serves as program executive for evangelism and coordinator of the Mission and Ecumenical Formation Team with the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland.*

The greatest challenge the church faces today is to proclaim the good news of the gospel ecumenically, in dialogue, as "common witness"; to announce the gospel in collaboration and not in competition. We quote John 17:21 to stress unity, but Jesus prays to the Father for unity with mission "that the world may believe." Our divisions are a disgrace, and proselytism is counter-productive to evangelism.

Another challenge is to rescue the holistic and liberating meaning of the gospel. The good news is subversive, it seeks social justice, as Jesus says: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). The proclamation of the gospel has a prophetic price to pay. As evangelizers we are accountable to the "eu-angelion"—we are "angels" sent to this world to announce his kingdom.

The challenge of evangelism becomes increasingly relevant, especially after September 11, in relation to other faiths. A quotation from the 1989 San Antonio World Mission Conference notes: "We cannot point to any other salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God." Evangelism is sharing our humanity.

In our "globalized" world—of exclusion, terrorism, and fragmentation, of multifaceted and changing contexts—we acknowledge the urgency of mission and evangelism as reconciliation and healing. Inspired in this challenge the WCC is organizing the next Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, in Athens, Greece, 12–19 May 2005, on the theme: "Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile." We are called in Christ to be reconciling and healing communities.

SEPETMMY LAKAWA (MA'96) *is a pastor in the Protestant Church in Southeast Sulawesi and lecturer at Jakarta [Indonesia] Theological Seminary. She is currently enrolled in graduate studies at Boston University School of Theology.*

The year 1998, for many reasons, has been identified as a turning point in the life of the Indonesian people. This year marks the beginning of Indonesia's so-called new era

of reformation. However, that era of reformation has brought the emergence of new problems. Looking back, there was significant change, not only for the nation as a whole, but also for the lives of Indonesian women.

Prior to the resignation of Soeharto, Indonesia's second president, on May 21, 1998, there were at least two major acts of violence in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia: 1) The shooting to death of four Trisakti University students during a May 12 demonstration demanding Soeharto's resignation; and 2) massive acts of rape and sexual violence against Indonesian women of Chinese descent on May 13-15, along with the killing of hundreds of children and urban poor. Many remember these days as the May 1998 Tragedy.

This is the background for the challenges of the church in Indonesia today. The shift in our historical context has caused us to reinterpret what it means to be religious (Christian) as well as what it means to be a nation. Such reinterpretation must be done by churches, through an encounter with Moslems. The big challenge for the church in Indonesia is the social discontinuity intertwined with the dominant role of Moslems. Recent research ascribes this social discontinuity to the transformation of Indonesia from a tolerant and peaceful society to one that is racist and brutal. Therefore, being the church in Indonesia means developing new ethics of nonviolence which has to be rooted in a re-encounter between Christians and Moslems.

An example of such a re-encounter can be found in the Indonesian Moslem and Christian women who have intensively and continuously developed nonviolent ways to overcome violence. One of the approaches I have been involved with is that of providing a safe place for both communities to re-read our religious texts by interreligious perspectives.

Our social context provides a critical lens through which the call to be the church today must be reconsidered as a call to be a nonviolent community, attentive to the meaning of suffering, violence, and victory in our theological discourse. Women-to-women encounters have played significant and crucial roles in bringing out the voice of the voiceless in our society. They also create an imaginative, visionary discourse about what it means to be the church in Indonesia today—one not based on the majority definition of Indonesia, but on the call to life for all.

DEVISON BANDA *has been a congregational minister, chaplain, and academician in Zambia. He is principal and lecturer in New Testament at Justo Mwale Theological College in Lusaka, Zambia.*

One can describe the state of "church" in Africa as that of "joy amidst pain and struggle." The reader may wish to know that there is no report of any country in Africa in which the gospel of Christ Jesus, symbolised by the church, has not yet reached. There may still be clans and tribes to be reached, but it is much more the problem of conversion to Christianity from another religion that such clans may require. Any remaining "missionary work" in such places may be missionary work in a re-defined form away

from the traditional conception.

Indeed, everywhere across Africa the church is in a state of growth that can be measured in a numerical increase in membership across all age groups and in the quality of life, ethics, and value of human and family life even in very difficult conditions. Many denominations complain of inadequate resources for members in all their congregations. Theological institutions labour very hard to meet the demands made upon them; the church is growing so fast that the training of ministers lags behind. A good number of congregations across denominational boundaries are led by people with little or no theological orientation. Even in countries where persecutions of Christians by cruel and militant religions make common news headlines, the church continues to grow by the grace of God. In many African countries, the church manages within the available means to contribute to political, health, and socio-economic development. Yes, the words of our Lord Jesus, "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood/overcome it" (John 1:5) continue to be fulfilled in Africa. In other words, we thank God that Africa is changing from being the "dark continent" to being the "gospel light of the continents." Church life in Africa is characterised by the joy of worship through the celebration of music—even without modern instruments—dancing and responsive meditation, and in many cases the services are quite long. There is indeed a good variety of expressions of the Christian faith in many parts of Africa.

Unfortunately the church in Africa is confronted by many challenges. The above success story of Christian growth is taking place on a continent which B. F. Van der Walt correctly calls, "a bleeding continent that does not allow one the luxury to philosophise merely for one's own enjoyment." Here is a listing of some of the most notable challenges:

- the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the face of "world rhetoric" as an appropriate response (very serious challenge);
- the threat from militant religions, fundamentalism, and terrorism (both from beyond and within);
- the effects of war and oppressive regimes;
- extreme poverty and shortages of life necessities;
- lack of capacity to cope with natural disasters (e.g. current or looming starvation in parts of Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho);
- production of that which is not consumable and consuming what is not produced;
- negative effects of Eurocentrism in Christianity and the call to recover from it;
- acceptance of technology as a new global culture.

In spite of the agony and struggles, Christianity continues to be a success story in Africa. Therefore, though Africa is in the "so-called third world," if the trend of church growth continues, the continent is on the way to becoming the "first world of Christianity."

ADOLFO HAM is a retired pastor in the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba and serves on the faculties of the Evangelical Seminary in Matanzas and the Instituto Superior de Estudios Bíblicos y Teológicos in Havana, Cuba.

The greatest challenges for the Cuban church are two: 1) the issue of inculturation and 2) the issue of interreligious dialogue.

As to inculturation, the challenge is different when we compare the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant (Evangelical) churches. Since the Spanish colonization of the fifteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church has been a component of the Cuban culture. The Protestant Churches came at the end of the nineteenth century following Spanish domination and the occupation of the island by the United States of America at the end of the Spanish-American War. Naturally, the "Protestant gospel" arrived dressed with the "American way of life." It has been very important for the Protestant churches to participate in the making of Cuban culture—more so after they became autonomous from their "mother churches" in the U.S.A., at the triumph of the Cuban Revolution (1959). The churches in general have accepted this challenge in a very positive way and are participating creatively in the development of our culture. The second big challenge, in response to which we have not been so successful, is the issue of interreligious dialogue and collaboration. Most of our population is Roman Catholic by tradition, and it is a mixture of races including a large African element which stems from the time of slavery. There is a popular religiosity which syncretizes ingredients of Roman Catholicism and African religions—what we call "santería," which is found also in the Caribbean under different names. Although the problem is also controversial within the Roman Catholic Church, most of the Protestant churches consider these cults "satanical." The challenge for us is to analyze seriously the positive elements of this religiosity and how they could be incorporated in worship, missionology, and theology. The wider issue has to do with the other religions that are beginning in Cuba, due to a more liberal attitude of the government. This is the case of Islam, for instance, which is gaining a few adoptees, mostly from the black population. ❧

Living with World Christianity

Continued from page 7

¹² The reference is to Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo, discussed in Jenkins, 129-30.

¹³ I am personally doubtful that Philip Jenkins is right in his assessment that the Vatican is turning conservative in response to non-western Christianity. My own experience in the Philippines, along with conversations with Asian Roman Catholics in this country, leads me to believe that the Vatican is even less attuned to the spirit of Roman Catholic life in the non-western world than to the "liberal" constituency in the west.

¹⁴ See Jonathan J. Bonk, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991). V. S. Azariah, "The Problem Of Co-Operation Between Foreign and Native Workers," in *World Missionary Conference, 1910*, vol. IX, The History and Records of the Conference together with Addresses Delivered at the Evening Meetings (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1910), 309.

¹⁵ V. S. Azariah, "The Problem Of Co-Operation Between Foreign and Native Workers," in *World Missionary Conference, 1910*, vol. IX, The History and Records of the Conference together with Addresses Delivered at the Evening Meetings (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1910), 309.

¹⁶ Azariah, 313.

¹⁷ Azariah, 315. Italics and capitals in original.

¹⁸ The word "friendship" is a loaded one. Many ancient cultures regard the cultivation of friendships as a highly developed and even difficult art. In Azariah's social context, ties of family, caste and religion were the most natural, and the sufficient, relationships for life. Friendships were relationships beside these primary ones, involving a closeness and a distance not to be found in ordinary circles of family, caste, and religion.

¹⁹ Azariah, 308.

²⁰ Azariah, 315. See also Andrew Walls, "The Ephesian Moment," in *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 72-81.

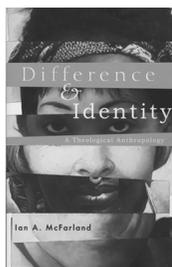
This study guide is provided in the hope that it might be helpful in using the materials and ideas in this issue of Insights.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Arun Jones says that "over the long term, Christianity, unlike Islam, has tended to conform itself to local conditions," rather than forcing local conditions to conform to "universal religious norms." Is this true? Is modern American Christianity a thermostat or a thermometer? Should we set the temperature of the culture or simply measure it?
2. Jones suggests that non-western Christianity scrambles our understanding of traditional western categories and terms. Are our traditional religious labels, denominations, and systems still relevant in a world where Christianity is increasingly non-western?
3. Whit Bodman concludes his essay with two critical questions: Are Muslims loyal citizens of the United States? Can they understand the American experience? How would you answer these questions? To these we add: Are these questions really new, or have they been asked of new Americans in every generation?
4. What will a significant and highly visible "Muslim presence" do to the fabric of American culture?
5. Will Islam flourish in America or will it be altered or transformed by the American experience? What might some of these changes look like?
6. Diana Eck asks: "How do we handle religious differences in a world in which there is so much of it, and in which it has become so troublesome?" In other words, how can we keep it all together without retreating into sectarianism or surrendering all integrity?
7. React to these observations from Carlos Ham: "Our divisions are a disgrace and our proselytism is counter-productive to evangelism," and "We cannot point to any other salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God."
8. Devison Banda characterizes the African Christian experience as "joy amidst agony" but says it "continues to be a success story." Do you agree? Why or why not?
9. Are there themes that run throughout these articles? Can you identify them?

Books recommended by Austin Seminary faculty

DIFFERENCE AND IDENTITY: A THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY, Ian A. McFarland. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001, 167 pages, \$16. *Reviewed by David H. Jensen, assistant professor of Reformed theology, Austin Seminary*



Mainline Protestant churches are in the midst of contentious debates about human difference: differences of human sexuality, the different religions of the world and their bearing on Christian faith, gender differences and their impact on hearing the gospel. When these debates rise above mutual accusation and labels of heresy, they occasionally seek to establish common ground with a wistful suggestion: “Deep down we’re all the same.” Ostensibly, this sentiment helps establish peace and squares with Christian understandings of human equality. In *Difference and Identity*, Ian McFarland—a systematic theologian at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland—claims this longing for similarity is both misguided and dangerous. The modern attempt to discern a common human “essence” of human persons obscures the difference that constitutes God’s creative life and marginalizes persons who do not conform to preestablished norms. By weaving together classical trinitarian and christological understandings of “person” with more recent strands of liberation theology, McFarland crafts a readable text that may help Christian churches re-frame contemporary discussions of personhood. These debates are not simply about how we understand ourselves, but how we live in relationship to the Triune God who is a communion of persons.

McFarland’s thesis is that the “distinctiveness of human beings within creation lies not in any intrinsic qualities or capacities that people share, but rather, in the differences that mark their lives under God” (vii). Post-Enlightenment Christian theology

has often imagined otherwise and leapt to facile considerations of human commonality. Several modern understandings of the *imago Dei*, for example, suggest a capacity or trait that all possess in common: physical characteristics, rationality, relationship, dominion, or freedom. When Christians specify these traits, McFarland argues, those persons who do not exhibit them sufficiently—infants and Alzheimer’s patients are but two examples—are invariably considered less than full human persons. This tendency to exclude the marginalized is the frightening underbelly of modern understandings of humanity. McFarland writes, “It is an ominous characteristic of the modern idea of equality that its emergence in the Enlightenment period went hand-in-hand with theories of racial and sexual difference that justified the exclusion of non-European men and all women from the equal status granted white men of property” (3).

McFarland’s alternative is to turn toward the gospel narratives of Jesus and classical trinitarian theology, both of which demand our encounter with difference. For McFarland, Jesus “is the one person through whom the personhood of others is visible” (23). Stated alternatively, Jesus is the image of God who unveils and claims us in God’s image. “We are able to encounter others as persons only insofar as we have already encountered Jesus” (26). Jesus Christ reveals the personhood of others; in the gospel narratives, Jesus presses his audience to embrace different others, particularly those—such as lepers, tax collectors, and prostitutes—who are considered sub-human. “One task of the church as it looks to Jesus is...to identify as persons those who are least like Jesus” (26). Human personhood, therefore, cannot be reduced to a common essence, but breaks forth in radically different shapes.

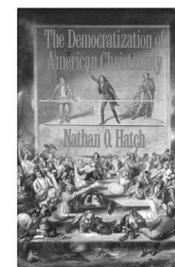
Drawing our personhood from Christ, we live “oriented to the other, but we are persons by virtue of God’s action toward us in Christ quite apart from our assuming any such orientation” (72). We are persons, in other words, not because of our embrace of others,

but because God embraces us in difference. McFarland suggests not that we “see the face of Jesus in the other” and thereby obscure the particularity of our neighbors, but that we “allow Jesus to show us the other” (75). Though we encounter others only through Christ, we cannot glimpse the face of Jesus if we allow other faces to fade into the background.

The book is full of brief theological portraits that compel the reader to bring ancient wisdom to contemporary questions: a rich discussion of the difference of the divine persons and its impact on our understanding of human difference; an interpretation of the image of God grounded not in some thing that humans share but in “some one outside of us” (28); an intriguing exegesis of the Good Samaritan parable, which refuses to define and thereby reduce the neighbor; and a chapter that characterizes human relationships in Christ as reciprocal, which explodes the often-invoked alternatives of hierarchy and egalitarianism.

Though McFarland’s work echoes with polyphonic refrains on every page, he claims that difference “is not a value in and of itself; it is valuable insofar as it is created by God.” Indeed, some shapes of difference—such as illness and sin—are the very structures that Jesus resists. These are the realities that “threaten to cut individuals off from the ensemble of relationships through which they find their identity as human beings” (139–40). By stressing the bonds of God’s relationship with us and our relation with each other, which are possible because of difference, McFarland glimpses our divergence not as a scandal to be overcome, but as a mark of God’s abundant world. His work is more substantive than a benign plea for toleration; it is a theological account of differences given by God. Human personhood, in the end, is derivative, drawing life from the God who is a communion of persons, endowing creatures who live from that communion. In an age where slogans for diversity mask our fear of difference (witness the Patriot Act), McFarland’s words are welcome indeed.

THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY, Nathan Hatch. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, 226 pages, \$19. *Reviewed by Ellen L. Babinsky, professor of church history, Austin Seminary*



First published fourteen years ago, Nathan Hatch’s *Democratization of American Christianity* is still in print, a testimony to the book’s staying power. The manuscript version of the book won the Albert Outler Prize in Ecumenical Church History of the American Society of Church History.

Hatch focuses on the fifty-year post-Revolutionary transitional period from 1780–1830, which, he argues, left an “indelible imprint upon the structures of American Christianity” (6). He works to set a counterpoint to conventional accounts of the developments in Christianity after the Revolution which ordinarily portray a diminishing of spiritual fervor in the churches. While this description may hold true for denominational congregations, such a portrayal does not tell the whole story, in Hatch’s view. Instead, he argues that American Protestantism has been “pushed and pulled into its present shape by a democratic or populist orientation” (5). Religious leaders during the post-Revolutionary period “pursued people wherever they could be found; embraced them without regard to social standing; and challenged them to think, to interpret Scripture, and to organize the church for themselves” (5). Hatch intends to sketch the contours of a “surge of movements fueled by the passions of ordinary people” and by “evangelical firebrands [who] went about the task of movement-building in the generation after the Revolution” (7).

Hatch is careful to outline what his book is not. It is not a denominational study, but it has an explicit Protestant focus. He is interested in more broad-stroke developments in the new nation, rather than regional developments. He does not attempt to trace the social background of the various groups; instead, Hatch “focuses upon the religious leaders themselves, particularly those who

mastered the democratic art of persuasion" to build religious movements (12). In this study of religious leadership and movement-building, Hatch examines five distinct traditions or mass movements that developed in this fifty-year period: the Christian movement, the Methodists, the Baptists, the black churches, and the Mormons (4, 13). The leaders of these movements who capture his attention are Barton Stone, the Christian; William Miller, the Adventist; Francis Asbury, the Methodist, along with his fiery co-religionist loose cannon, "Crazy" Lorenzo Dow; John Leland, the Baptist; Richard Allen, the African Methodist Episcopal; and Joseph Smith, the Latter-Day Saint, to name a few. These leaders, "inherently interesting personalities, unbranded individualists... chose to storm heaven by the back door" (13). People without the authority of traditional denominations claimed the validity of their religious experience and empowered the leaders of the popular movements. Hatch tells the story of "how ordinary folk came to... defend the right of common people to shape their own faith and submit to leaders of their own choosing" (14).

He traces the story of these movements through the "remarkable, if largely ignored" printed record of their leaders' values, goals, and of the religious cultures they constructed. These leaders understood the power of print, and were intoxicated by it. The rise of a democratic religious print culture put these rough, uncultured, obscure prophets into a public light shared by a Jonathan Edwards or Timothy Dwight. Hatch writes: "this material offers an unusual opportunity to enter minds unlike our own, to explore the assumptions, beliefs, and rhetorical strategies of obscure Americans who played significant roles in the religious affairs of the nation" (11). To pursue this goal, Hatch mines the pamphlets, booklets, tracts, hymnbooks, journals, and newspapers that flooded popular culture in the early republic. The biographical accounts and journals that Methodist itinerants kept, as well as the writings of other revivalists, proved to be invaluable resources. These sources give witness to the vitality and depth of spiritual experience which commended these preachers to the public alongside the most learned.

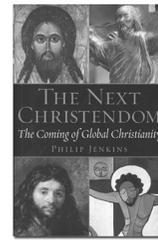
Hatch declares that the tendency to depict American Christianity from the perspective of the large denominations obscures the dynamism at the edges of the culture. One reason the early republic remains unexplored territory is the question of periodization: it remains either an epilogue to the Revolution or a prologue to the Jackson era; hence it is overlooked. A great deal of attention is given to the relation of the first Great Awakening to the Revolution; thus there is no overriding necessity to deal with the aftermath. Another reason is that the early republic is seen as being free of conflict and is skipped over in favor of examining the ferment of the Second Great Awakening of the 1830s and the conflicts emerging from it. In the context of Hatch's argument, however, the question of the sources of the second awakening becomes unavoidable. Hatch's thoroughgoing analysis of events preceding the Second Great Awakening makes sense of the events flowing from it. Hatch's study shows how popular religious movements and their leaders are the wellspring of the Second Great Awakening.

Hatch is fully aware of the irony of his accomplishment when he notes that the movements he describes evolve into the very sort of denominations from which these exuberant leaders distanced themselves. Another reason religious ferment in the early republic is overlooked is that historians from the denominations arising from the popular movements have had "reasons to sanitize their histories. Modern church historians have focused on those aspects of their own heritage linked to cultural enrichment, institutional cohesion, and intellectual respectability" (223).

Nathan Hatch offers a history of American Christianity in the early republic which is still compelling and engaging and deserves continued attention because his work demonstrates the dynamism of Christianity in America. He describes three characteristics of American Christianity which continue to give shape and tone to the discussions and tensions among Protestants. First, the vitality of religion among ordinary people remains notable; "at a popular level America is more pious than it was two generations ago" (211). Second, there is a "remarkable set of popular

leaders, persons who derive their authority not from their education or stature within major denominations, but from the democratic art of persuasion" (211). Third, he notes the dynamic periphery, "where these movements are fed by the passions of ordinary people and express traditional values of localism, direct democracy, ruralism, and individualism" (212). These observations seem as true to me now as they did fourteen years ago, and church leaders would do well to attend to the wisdom contained in these pages.

THE NEXT CHRISTENDOM: THE COMING OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY, Philip Jenkins. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 146 pages, \$28. *Reviewed by Kathryn L. Roberts, associate professor of Old Testament, Austin Seminary*



Christianity is alive and well, as Philip Jenkins ably demonstrates in *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. The good news he tells is that the gospel truly reaches to the farthest parts of the world, fostering communities of faith that

are vibrant, bringing in new converts who are daily being added to the church of Jesus Christ. Jenkins speaks with firsthand authority, having traveled extensively and also studied numerous accounts from the reports of missionaries, those of indigenous converts, and seldom-reported local church histories. His book presents a balanced and positive picture of the global church and the place of the U.S. and European churches within it. While he discounts any claims to personal prophetic gifts or divinatory knowledge, he offers more than mere statistics and a recitation of population shifts and growth trends. Jenkins attempts to address the "so what?" question, drawing a picture of a very different Christian "world" than the one we currently inhabit.

In order to move away from the confusion in referring to East-West distinctions when talking about the Christian

church and global patterns, Jenkins instead refers to the emerging church as the "global Southern" and to the traditionally European-North American church as the "global North." The book is careful about its labels and offers convincing definitions for terms one might traditionally gloss over too quickly. The discussion around the distinctions between sects and churches is extremely helpful (137ff).

Jenkins begins by bringing back into focus the truly eastern origins of what has been erroneously labeled "the western church." "Christianity has never been synonymous with either Europe or the West. In fact, theological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries tended to isolate European or western Christianity from the traditional Christian lands, and leave it out on a geographical and cultural limb" (18). As legacies of the East-West schism of 1000 C.E., "our" church history has largely ignored not only the thriving churches in the East, but also those in Africa and Asia. The Ethiopian church, for example, traces its roots to "one of the earliest Gentile converts identified in the book of Acts." Indeed, its rich religious tradition and practices purport to reach all the way back to Solomon. It is not entirely clear "whether early Ethiopians had been converted to Judaism before they found Christianity, or if (more likely) they just treated Old Testament models with much more reverence than would European Christians" (19). The view espoused in this book cuts against "the standard modern mythology about just how Christianity was, and is, exported to a passive or reluctant Third World. Over the past two centuries, at least, it might have been the European empires that first kindled Christianity around the world, but the movement soon enough turned into an uncontrollable brushfire" (53).

It does not take Jenkins' book to alert us to the shifting ethnic character of the world. Whole populations are on the move, whether under duress or seeking better economic opportunities. The fact that these populations are finding solace in the message of Christianity is heartening. The implications for Christian politics and practice are huge, and Jenkins attempts to address some of these and call attention to others.

There is also great optimism in Jenkins' portrayal of the church in the U.S., which he distinguishes from the church in Europe. Jenkins resists attempts to lump them together, pointing out that, unlike in European lands, the pews in the churches in this country are still being filled on Sunday mornings. He debunks what he calls the "myth of religious pluralism," making a rather convincing argument that by identification and in our public life, this country is still clearly "Christian." The pluralism we see around us is real, but it has more to do with the nation's "ethnic character," which "will also become less European and less white, with all that implies for religious and cultural patterns" (100). American society is moving away from "black," "white," and "other" demographic distinctions, in most cases reluctantly coming to grips with not only the sheer numbers but the cultural influence of Asians and especially Hispanics. "Within a decade, Latinos alone will constitute a majority of California's people. Latinos also make up one-third of the population of Texas, the second largest state, which could achieve majority-minority status as early as 2005. While the proportion of foreign-born people in Houston was less than three percent in 1960, today it is about twenty-five percent" (101). It is the author's conclusion that Christianity in this country is not weaker, just more difficult to recognize if one is seeking worshiping communities that reflect one's own majority, western image. Pentecostalism is the fastest growing Christian phenomenon in the United States. Christianity is not in decline, the definitions are changing (7-8).

At the heart of this shift is the seriousness with which Christian communities embrace, believe, and act out what they find in the Bible. The global South's cultural norms often find resonance in the tribal, ancestor reverencing, charismatically formed believing communities found on the pages of the Old and New Testaments. "The rising churches can plausibly claim to be following abundantly documented precedents from the founding ages of Christianity. The Bible itself so readily supports a worldview based on spirits, healing, and exorcism" (127). Brought into play with these cultural norms, these various

communities are distinctive and syncretistic. Jenkins tries to address questions of what is pagan and what is syncretistic Christian. One of his arguments is that Christianity itself has been remarkably adaptable through the centuries. Again it comes down to definitions and these are tricky at best. Quoting a leader in the emerging Brazilian church, Jenkins points out, "Their main appeal is that they present a God that you can use. Most Presbyterians have a God that's so great, so big, that they cannot even talk with him openly, because he is far away. The Pentecostal groups have the kind of God that will solve my problems today and tomorrow. People today are looking for solutions, not for eternity" (77). This may seem an unfair assessment, but on the practical plane, one can see its appeal.

The real strength in this analysis is its encouragement to the global North to make peace with and embrace change. Communities are always in flux or they are dead. There is much to be learned from one another and also to teach one another. "It would be singularly dangerous" if religious and racial stereotyping takes hold, Jenkins concludes. If "Christianity comes to be seen as, in effect, jungle religion, the faith of one-third of the human race would increasingly be seen as alien and dangerous, even a pressing social problem. The North, in turn, would define itself against this unfortunate presence: the North would be secular, rational, and tolerant, the South primitive and fundamentalist. The North would define itself against Christianity" (162).

"Christendom and After"
 AUSTIN SEMINARY'S
 2003 SETTLES LECTURES
featuring
ANDREW WALLS
Monday, November 3, 2003,
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CHRISTIANITY
 AND CULTURE



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OUT OF THE
 "SPIRITUAL GREENHOUSE"
 AND INTO CARNIVAL

SHERRON GEORGE

In his *História da Teologia na América Latina*, Rubem Alves argued that the vibrant Protestant youth organizations in Brazil in the 1950s and '60s, which were committed to societal transformation, functioned "as a 'spiritual greenhouse' that preserve[d] the youth from the contamination of the world."¹ The church didn't know what to do with them. It tolerated their gatherings as long as they provided "healthy diversion" and functioned as a "spiritual greenhouse," to protect young minds from the evils of dancing, smoking, and drinking.

It is not surprising that such "anti-Catholicism" characterizes Protestantism in Brazil, the world's largest Roman Catholic country. This helps explain Protestantism's relation with Brazilian culture and asepsis to religious symbols. When culture is "inter-

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woven with the Catholic liturgical calendar, it is necessary for Protestants to distance themselves from it.”² Crosses, candles, bells, Carnival, the lively June celebrations of Saints Peter, John, and Anthony, and, of course, the Virgin Mary, are vital parts of Brazilian culture and anathema to Protestants. My Brazilian co-worker, Dirce Naves, still suffers from the trauma caused by the way missionaries and the Protestant church “robbed” her of much of her culture in order to “de-Romanize” and “Americanize” her.

I left Austin Seminary in order to return to Brazil to work as Consultant and Regional Liaison in South America for the Worldwide Ministries Division of the PC(USA). Since I am no longer teaching in the seminaries of the more conservative Presbyterian denominations in Brazil,³ I have joined those who have come out of the “spiritual greenhouse.” Dirce and I are attending a wonderful Roman Catholic congregation which is very ecumenical and liturgically reminds me more of Austin Seminary than any Presbyterian church in Campinas. During a special youth mass with six priests, I was invited to join them and give the prayer after the Eucharist. I am preparing to teach a course in an ecumenical Lutheran Seminary in south Brazil (whose School of Music has a Carnival band). I have also taught courses at an ecumenical seminary in Chile.

Being out of the “spiritual greenhouse” has freed me to participate more fully in the beautiful and festive Brazilian culture. Soccer and Carnival are the two most pervasive cultural elements. I already love soccer. After missing Carnival for seven years, I was ready to be an observer-participant this year. Unfortunately, the violence caused mainly by drug traffic forced me to opt for being an attentive participant-observer. The powerful drug barons who control the slums in Rio organized attacks the week before Carnival which caused Rio to call in 3000 federal troops to guarantee security.

The spirit of Carnival is ignited in Brazil on January 1. The entire country comes to a complete halt during the five-day celebration before Ash Wednesday. Those who do not retreat choose one of three ways to participate: in the popular street festivals and parades that every town and many neighborhoods have, in the masked costume balls of the expensive private clubs, or in the official parades in the Sambadrome in Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo.

Carnival in Salvador begins on Thursday. This year 800,000 tourists crowded the historic city. Two million people filled the streets each night and formed a mass which stretched twenty-five kilometers. They danced, sang, jumped, and shouted all night as 170 different musical groups played. Trucks periodically sprayed water to cool everyone off.

Recife is a favorite in the northeast, with huge dolls parading, *maracatu* and *frevo* rhythms, and even a thirty-piece orchestra, in addition to samba. One group there, the Dawn Rooster, attracted 1.5 million people during their six-hour parade.

The most spectacular event and renowned party in the world is the official parade on Sunday and Monday nights in Rio, down the famous Sambadrome, work of architect Oscar Niemeyer, inaugurated in 1984. It begins at 9:00 p.m. and ends after sunrise. Each night seven samba schools have eighty minutes for their 3500-4500 members to dance down the 700-meter Sambadrome and make their presentation. Each develops a theme by writing a samba song, decorating floats (all manually pushed), and

designing costumes. From my observations of the parades and reports from TV and newspapers, I offer three reflective comments on this extraordinary cultural, aesthetic, social, and political event.

First of all, the creativity and rich aesthetic value is absolutely overwhelming. There is no way to describe the beauty of the colors, textures, music, dance, and art. It begins with the “front commission,” a group of ten to twelve professional dancers who repeatedly perform an amazing choreography, as do the flag-bearing couples. *Mangureira’s* theme was the Ten Commandments, with a dancer, Moses, who periodically levitated and exhibited flaming tablets with the inscription “Paz” (peace). He was surrounded by ballet dancers incarnating the ten plagues. Then came a magnificent eighty-seven meter opening float. The theme was developed by seven or eight dazzling floats interspersed among thirty *alas* (groups), each with a unique costume (some weigh up to forty kilos). A total of 3900 percussionists (250-300 in each school) led the song and dance; the music electrified the crowd of seventy thousand.

My second reflection concerns the sacramental or proleptic nature of the parade. Carnival is a popular folk festival with religious roots. It belongs to the masses. Inspired by the rhythms of Afro-Brazilian religions, samba and the “samba schools” were born in the hillside slums and peripheries of Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, Bahia. Their members choose and develop the themes and hold popular weekly rehearsals. Neighborhood musicians, seamstresses, and carpenters make the preparations.

Naturally, the media focus on actresses and actors, politicians, sports celebrities, and international tourists (twenty percent of this year’s 388,000 visitors) who occupy the luxurious box seats or buy \$300 costumes and join the parade. However, probably ninety percent of the approximately 4000 participants of each school are from the slums. It is their moment of inclusion, recognition, glory, dignity, joy, hope, and utopia; a moment to forget their problems and social exclusion.

While one of the floats portrayed “Social Chaos,” another envisioned “The Banquet of the People.” I saw in the parade a sign and sacrament of God’s reign of joy, abundance, and pleasure. Costumes and masks create a fluidity, a leveling of social frontiers, a reversal in which the “last” are included with equal dignity and beauty, where children and seniors participate actively. It was an announcement of God’s joyful reign of fullness of life and equality.

Finally, I was challenged by the powerful prophetic denunciations, protests, vindications, and social critiques. Themes ranged from Brazil’s African cultures and religions, to Brazil’s five World Cup championships, to the donation of organs for transplants (with floats and costumes of kidneys, lungs, bones, and skin). However, the prominent messages related to social inequalities and universal peace in times of violence imposed by drug traffic in Rio and the threat of war in Iraq. Brazil’s plea for a diplomatic solution to the crisis in Iraq and against a unilateral military intervention by the U.S.A. was expressed in many ways and places. Costumes of Bush, Saddam, and Bin Laden were seen throughout Brazil, all three as equally dangerous threats to world peace.

The focus of the winner, *Beija Flor*, was hunger, the main social program of our new President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, portrayed in a giant doll on the last float. It

linked the samba school's social projects with their hope in the new government. Their official theme was: "The People Tell Their Story: 'An Empty Sack Doesn't Stand Up, The Hand that Makes War Makes Peace.'" One line of their song said: "I want freedom, dignity, and unity." The *ala* titled "The Faithful—The Power of Faith that Moves Mountains" enacted with poignant realism a typical religious processional in the northeast and was applauded from start to finish.

Mangueira's theme was "The Ten Commandments: The Samba of Peace Sings a Saga of Freedom." The line of the song they repeated most was: "We want peace. Those who plant peace will harvest love." The epic struggle of the Hebrews in Egypt against hatred and injustice and their longing for freedom was majestically portrayed.

Carnival is over, so it is time for the year to begin. Lent is here. It is good to be back in this continental country. Now that I am out of the "spiritual greenhouse," my cultural and religious immersion is moving to new depths. Maybe next year I will be an observer-participant in Carnival. Come join the fun! 🎉

NOTES

¹ Rubem Alves, "As Idéias Teológicas e os Seus Caminhos pelos Sulcos institucionais do Protestantismo Brasileiro," in *História da Teologia na América Latina*, ed. CEHILA, (São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 1981), 137.

² Alves, 133-134.

³ See my article, "Brazil's Feisty Presbyterians," in the May issue of *Presbyterians Today*.



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