

Transformation and Tradition in Global Mission

Missions Organisations Conference, Cyprus 12-18 February 2003

Mission leaders experience 'beautiful solidarity in diversity' By Margaret S Lalom

In six intense days bracketed by 2000 years of Christian history, Anglicans from throughout the world explored the interlocking nature of continuity, change and context during a mission conference set in Cyprus, an island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.



The aim of the conference, entitled 'Transformation and Tradition in Global Mission,' was 'to explore new dimensions of our common mission.' By the end of their time together, approximately 110 men and women from 40 countries had recognised anew that the mission is God's, and that the Anglican Communion is uniquely qualified to serve that mission, if it uses the gifts God has given every member.

In the view of the Rt. Rev. Jubal Neves, bishop of Southwestern Brazil, the event demonstrated a new incarnational approach to mission -- a 'beautiful solidarity in diversity.'

Representing mission agencies, boards, and movements in most of the provinces of the Anglican Communion, they also represented every order in the church (bishop, clergy, laity, and religious). There were seminary deans and professors, provincial or diocesan staff members, voluntary agency executive directors and area secretaries, heads of special ministries and members of religious orders. There were members of the Anglican Consultative Council, the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism, and various official Anglican networks. There were church leaders who work essentially alone, among indigenous people or different faith groups, and others who function in complicated bureaucracies. More than half the group was ordained. Although women represented only one quarter of the total group, their credentials were no less remarkable than those of their male counterparts. Likewise, younger voices were in the minority -- by one count, there were 28 participants under the age of 45 -- and their intelligence, clarity, experience and energy made them dynamic leaders in the mix.

The days were filled with plenary speakers and small group discussions, Bible study and worship, workshops and special interest sessions, field trips and late night conversations.

Although they attempted to capture the sense of the conference in a joint statement entitled 'Communion in Mission,' the shimmering threads of the fabric that was woven during their life together cannot really be described.

The missionary journey of St. Paul came alive as they walked through Roman ruins in Paphos and visited the tomb of St. Barnabas in the northern part of Cyprus now occupied by Turkey. In fact, they even 'ran the race set before them', on an ancient weed-strewn track high above the sea. Professor John Barclay, professor of New Testament and early Christianity at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, led them in challenging daily Bible studies (using selections from Acts, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians), geared to help them understand Paul's missionary challenge.

The exposure visits to historic sites gave sobering evidence of the rise and fall of great civilisations, levelled by periodic earthquakes and subject to frequent invasions. The imagery of the fault line, first introduced by Prof. Barclay as he described the cataclysmic nature of Paul's conversion, took hold of their imaginations and cropped up in discussions of the state of the Communion and the nature of Church. For example, 'How wide can the fault line be, for people standing with one leg on each side?' Or, 'Has the Church planted well laid-out gardens on a bed of volcanic lava?'

Most participants agreed that we do not have to agree on everything to be Anglican - that indeed, our strength comes because of, not in spite of, our differences. But within that affirmation came some important warnings, and pleas, especially from Asia:

- Mission strategies that do not take into account local culture or circumstances can have fatal consequences.
- Depending on their location, Anglicans may be enjoying a social status that is nothing more than a continuation of the historical entrapment of colonialism, thus imprisoning themselves at the very time they need to be free.
- English is no longer the 'common language' of the Communion. Greater attention must be paid to translation into other languages, whether during meetings or in the production of documents, and to updating antiquated or inadequate Bible translations.
- Be mindful of those who are isolated by distance, by culture, by minority status. Be mindful of the pain felt by those who have 'no fruits' despite generations of effort, and of the shame felt by those who, wracked by war or drought or disaster, must beg for assistance.

Out of these challenges, that emerged during the course of an encounter blessed by a sense of love, respect, and enjoyment of each other, came a sense of renewed vision and call. There was a recognition that Anglicans are indeed 'companions on a journey,' separated by distance but understanding that everything connects, pointing the way to Jesus Christ, making sure that the church exists for mission. mission is not just another program of the church.

As they experienced themselves in a continuum of time (viewing artefacts from 7000 BC, contemplating contemporary mission issues, and joining their prayers to the saints who had gone before), so the Anglicans also found themselves understanding that every community, no matter how temporary, is impacted by its context. They had created a vital, worshipping community of their own, but were very conscious that they were located not only within the Anglican context of the Diocese of the Cyprus and the Gulf (which includes a church in Baghdad), but also within a very ancient Greek

Orthodox environment, and within the geo-political reality of the nation of Cyprus, where a new president was elected on the Sunday they were there.



They empathised with Greek and Turkish Cypriots alike as they walked from one side of Nicosia to the other, along a road made ominous with rolls of barbed wire and representing the division of the country since 1974. They could not help but wonder at the boundaries human beings create, the walls they build, in contrast to the unity that God wills for us all. Boundaries must be crossed for God's mission to be carried out.

In the joyous fellowship of worship, the conference participants recognised the precious gift of the multi-national, multi-lingual, multi-cultural community that is theirs, and responded with feeling to music led with vigor and grace by Geoffrey Weaver (author of *Lambeth Praise*, the worship book of the 1998 conference of bishops). "We're going to continue singing each other's songs," he would say, as he prepared the group for participating in the next Eucharist or Compline, successively led by persons from different countries or regions.

Four plenary sessions involved presentations and responses on key sub-themes, as follows:

- 'to renew our vision for mission through biblical and theological reflection, worship and prayer' (the Rt. Rev. Simon Chiwanga, bishop of Mpwapwa, Tanzania, and former chair of the Anglican Consultative Council, with a response by Ms. Edwina Thomas, director of Sharing Our Ministries Abroad and a founding member of the Episcopal Partnership for Global Mission in the USA);
- 'to gain a better understanding of contemporary mission issues and changing patterns in mission' (the Rev. Dr. Zac Niringiye, Africa region director of Church Mission Society in England, with a response by the Rt. Rev. Dr. John Chew, bishop of Singapore, South East Asia);
- 'to encourage the development of new networks among mission organisations, dioceses and parishes in the Communion' (Ms. Thomas, with a response by Dr. Niringiye);
- 'to be challenged by new church models in mission and evangelism' (Bishop Chew, with a response by Bishop Chiwanga).

Setting the theme on opening night was the Rev. Dr. Christopher Duraisingh, organiser of the World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Salvador Bahia, Brasil, in 1996, who is now teaching at Episcopal Divinity School in Massachusetts, USA. He emphasised that 'tradition-ing' (handing over) is essential to the transformation that occurs in the mission endeavour. The Rev. Canon John L. Peterson, secretary general of the Anglican Communion, described diverse and dramatic aspects of ministry and witness in disparate parts of the world. The Most Rev. Benjamin Nzimbi, Primate of the Anglican Church of Kenya, preached at the closing Eucharist and commissioning service. He emphasised that the church and its

organisations must be strengthened and transformed to carry out the mission of God, 'serving, healing, and reconciling a divided and wounded humanity,' in the words of David Bosch.

A total of 16 workshops were offered on four tracks (theological education, leadership and management challenges, contemporary mission issues, and partnership models), led by a distinguished array of missiologists and practitioners. Nearly 40 people listened to the Rev. Dr. Riad Jarjour, general secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, at the workshop on 'Peace, Reconciliation and Justice,' then proceeded to lift up many other parts of the world in need of healing. The Rev. Enock Tombe Stephen, general secretary of the Sudan Council of Churches, engaged his group in a spirited discussion on organisational development and change. Dr. Eleanor Johnson, director of partnerships for the Anglican Church of Canada, moderated a reflection on leadership in times of crisis or stress. The subject of Christian-Muslim relations prompted stark anecdotes of very dangerous times and places for an increasing number of places in the Communion. Activists in arenas as diverse as HIV/AIDS and contextual theology pressed on with their work, engaging others in their passion.

Not content with all of this, more than a dozen participants rallied their colleagues into attending special interest groups on Saturday night, to share more in areas not covered by workshops, such as the global refugee and migrant crisis.

Not surprisingly, the topics, the participants, and even the key motivation for having such a gathering were quite different from the last time such an event was staged. In December 1986 in Brisbane, Australia, persons representing mission agencies in nine provinces (Australia, Canada, England, Japan, Melanesia, New Zealand, Scotland, Southern Africa and the United States of America), met with 'partner church representatives' from a dozen other regions in the two-thirds world. There were 60 participants in all, only 7 of whom were women.

Two persons who attended Brisbane 1986, Bishop Neves of Brasil and Bishop Chiwanga of Tanzania, were present for the Cyprus event. As Bishop Neves noted, the present conference drew nearly twice as many people, with a significantly higher proportion of laity and of women and a much clearer sense that all in attendance were invited on an equal basis. 'The world has changed and so has the Anglican Communion,' Bishop Neves said.

Margaret S. Larom is the World Mission Interpretation and Networks Officer at the Episcopal Church Center in New York. She represented her province on MISSIO, the Communion's first commission on mission and evangelism, from 1994 to 1999.

Planning Team

The Planning Team responsible for organising the conference was appointed by the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism and included:

- The Rt. Rev. Harold Daniel, bishop suffragan of Jamaica, West Indies (chair);

- The Rev. Canon Tim Dakin, general secretary of the Church Mission Society in England;
- The Ven. Ng Moon Hing, archdeacon, Perak, West Malaysia and founder of Anglican Village Ministries in West Malaysia;
- Ms. Margaret S. Larom, on the Anglican and Global Relations staff of the Episcopal Church in the USA;
- Miss Marjorie Murphy, director of mission and evangelism, Anglican Communion Office in London, England.

Invaluable assistance with a thousand logistical details was given by the diocesan office in Cyprus, especially Ms. Georgia Katsantonis, personal assistant to Bishop Clive Handford.

Conference Statement

Transformation and Tradition in Global Mission - Mission Organisations Conference - 12-18 February 2003 - Lordos Beach Hotel - Cyprus

From: 110 mission practitioners and advocates from 40 countries representing mission organisations, voluntary agencies and synodical bodies.

To: The Churches of God in the Anglican Communion. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have come to the Anglican Communion Mission Organisations Conference in Larnaca, Cyprus, to take counsel, learn and explore how to be more faithful to God's mission in the world today.

Our theme: Transformation and Tradition in Global Mission. Transformation stands at the heart of mission. Tradition is dynamic, the body of faith we have received and are called to 'hand on' to others in the same spirit in which Jesus 'gave himself up' on the Cross.

Our setting: Cyprus offered important resonances. Our host diocese, Cyprus and the Gulf, serves a region that has always been a crossroad in mission. Here Paul and Barnabas launched their mission to the gentiles. The diocese includes Iraq, so the threat of war is felt deeply. Separation between the peoples of northern and southern Cyprus continues.

Through our Bible studies, particularly, we have reaffirmed that:

- God's grace (charis) has been poured out in order that we should be united with the whole world in a sacrifice of service, praise and thanksgiving (eucharistia). The Church thus exists for and by mission in the world
- the incarnation is the supreme model for our mission engagement
- we are called to live out our faith on the fault lines of a divided world
- faithfulness to God's mission is the principle from which the unity and strength of the Church is derived

We thank God for:

- the chance to meet globally, learn from one another and be inspired by the stories of risk and sacrifice for the gospel we have heard
- the Inter Anglican Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism (IASCOME), its role in fostering mission and evangelism, and developing and hosting this conference, the second in 18 years

We commend:

- hosting another such conference by IASCOME within the life of its next five year term

- the proposal for a global gathering of Anglicans in 2008, for bishops, clergy and laity, to discern God's will for the renewal of the Church in mission

We pledge ourselves to:

- ongoing transformation and renewal of our mission structures
- closer sharing between mission organisations and to seek new ways of working together in mission

We challenge the Provinces of the Anglican Communion to:

- appreciate the diverse cultures and contexts in which we live, work and witness, and find new ways to use these positively in our mission
- recognise that nurturing fellowship is more important than transaction of business
- greater understanding of how mission and evangelism is to be conducted in a post colonial Communion, and taking seriously the communication needs of non-English speaking contexts
- seek new models for mission engagement and being Church alongside traditional ones
- undertake conscious and sustained engagement with the world of Faiths
- encourage renewal in prayer and fresh approaches to fostering international chains of prayer and intercession
- work for justice, peace and reconciliation in places torn apart by war, violence, poverty and human misery
- strengthen work on behalf of refugees and displaced persons
- raise up a new generation of children free from the scourge of HIV/AIDS
- renew commitment to God's mission by providing sufficient resources for the task

Mission leaders pray for peaceful, just resolution to Iraq standoff

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The looming prospect of a US-led war against Iraq was much on the minds and hearts of Anglican mission leaders attending the "Transformation and Tradition in Global Mission" conference in Larnaca, Cyprus, 12-18 February. Although it was not on the agenda, the subject was discussed with real worry and some participants decided to draft a statement for the group to consider.

Most of the participants - though not all - subsequently signed on to the statement. The sheets of newsprint filling up with signatures from every continent - bishops, clergy, and lay people united in their passion for mission - presented a moving site in the conference room on the last day. While participants recognised that the conference has no official standing (compared to the Communion's recognised instruments of unity), they felt they could not in good conscience keep silent, said Ms. Bobbie Moore of the Church of Ireland.

The text follows:

We believe that God has a love and concern for all peoples in all nations.

God is actively working for justice, peace, and the wholeness of all people everywhere.

Our commitment to share in this love and activity of God (which we call the Mission of God) has brought us together from more than 40 nations.

We are aware that by meeting in Cyprus we are not only in the Anglican diocese which includes Iraq, we are also in a nation which has recently experienced bitter conflicts and where the international community is attempting to achieve a peaceful resolution through the work of the UN.

We encourage the international community to support the UN in their efforts to find a peaceful and just resolution to the current situation in Iraq.

We support the calls for peace made by Anglican and other leaders within the Christian Church and in the world.

We have been praying for the leaders and people on every side of this conflict, as have Christians throughout the world.

We encourage the church to continue to pray in the confidence that God's passionate desire is for reconciliation, justice and peace.