

ANGLICANS and the HOUSEHOLD OF ISLAM

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Have you met up with catacomb theology? Or oblique vocabulary, for example, “Babylon” as a cover for Rome in 1 Peter 5: 13? In the freedom of Canada one might not think much about the problems of communicating in a repressive religious society, or political system. But in the Islamic republic of Pakistan one would hesitate to publish a book on how to share your faith with a Muslim. How then can the good news be communicated? Historically Anglicans have been a model of sensitive witness through their biographies. Anglican missionary Thomas Valphy French became in 1877 the first Bishop of Lahore. Evangelism was a way of life for him. In his vast Diocese, as it was then, throughout his travels in the Middle East and in his final service in Arabia he remains a model an inspiration to all those who are concerned to reach out to the household of Islam. One of the tools they can use is the biography of Bishop French, which the Pakistan government has allowed to be published openly and which contains all the good news that Pakistanis need to hear.

Another outstanding Anglican, also a member of the Church Missionary Society, was Canon Temple Gairdner of Cairo. He experimented with appropriate ways of communicating good news in the Egyptian setting. In the early part of

this century he wrote such plays as “Joseph and his Brothers”, “Passover Night” and a magnificent one entitled “Saul and Stephen” depicting Saul’s conversion and the struggles of the early church in accepting the former persecutor. The ministries of reconciliation and encouragement are still needed today in welcoming new believers into the family of God.

Anyone concerned with the Iranian revolution and its implications for the Church in Iran will soon hear about Hassan Dehqani-Tafti, born of a Muslim father and a Christian mother, who eventually became the first Iranian Bishop of the anglican Church in Iran. The Bishop and his wife currently live in exile in the United Kingdom. He has provided us with the story of his own conversion in his book Design of My World.

The most distinguished Anglican apologist, thinker, writer and practitioner in the same field is Bishop Kenneth Cragg. It is significant that the Church Missionary Society in UK selected as its present General Secretary Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali from Pakistan. He is also well known for his concern to relate to Muslims and to encourage the church in its apostolate to the household of Islam.

Equally important are the ordinary foot-soldiers like the unnamed believers listed for their deeds of faith in Hebrews 11:29-38 “of whom the world was not worthy”. I lived for fifteen years in a remote town in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan and witnessed the faithful, costly demonstration of loving obedience and service by Anglican doctors and nurses. Such service needs strengthening and encouraging today whether it be by missionaries or tentmakers. So much for the distant sence – but what about our neighbours and responsibility to the strangers in our midst, to overseas students, to tourist, to refugees, to immigrants, to fellow-citizens? Among such the number of Muslims is ever

increasing by natural population growth, by immigration and by “da’wah” or Islamic mission. The churches sooner or later will have to come to grips with whether they are concerned only with pastoral matters and maintaining the status quo or whether they are embracing these opportunities of reaching out. I still hope that more churches in Canada will, on the basis of policy, appoint at least one person on their staff team to reach out in these areas and to train others. It is, indeed, welcome news that Archbishop George Carey is visiting Canada. His extensive travels as well as the expanding experience with Muslims in his own country will have given him special insights into the world of Islam.