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with the people of God from the beginning and throughout history; what is needed for today is to recover readings of the core texts of our faith which speak into our diverse contexts. For many Anglicans a deep engagement with the biblical text is the way through which they like to engage with people of other faiths. For example there is the Scriptural Reasoning method as practiced in the *Building Bridges* process initiated by the Archbishop of Canterbury. This method is based on a patient listening and conversation with the person of another faith, taking seriously both our and their scriptures, in order to understand and to witness; a combination of deep understanding and dedication in trying to see the Other as s/he is, at the same time an awareness of what it is to be a Christian.

At the end of their enriching dialogue the two presenters highlighted "Hospitality" as one of the characteristics of the Anglican engagement with people of other faiths. They also noted that they believed that the dialogical method in which they had chosen to make their presentation expressed something that was significant about Anglican theological methodology.

***An Evangelical view***

*An Evangelical approach to Islam was presented by Professor Thomas Schirrmacher, representing the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).*

Professor Schirrmacher began his presentation by highlighting the importance of the issue of Christian-Muslim relations for the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) today, particularly because of the following reasons: (1) these two religions comprise more than half of the world population; (2) almost 89 percent of what is said about religion in media today is related to either Christianity or Islam; (3) there is some violent history behind the two religions which is still remembered, although it is important to say that Christians and Muslims today are not responsible for what happened 500 or 1000 years ago; (4) unlike other religions, Islam's holy book includes many

statements about Christianity and therefore Muslims knowledge about Christianity derives from what they read in the Qur'an, which is not exactly how Christians understand their faith; (5) Islam differs from Christianity when dealing with issues concerned with the relationship between religion, society and state; (6) and last but not least, is the question of Islam-West relations which is on the daily agenda of Christian-Muslim dialogue today. More than 80 percent of WEA members live in the South and do not see Christianity as a Western religion, yet from an Islamic point of view Christianity is seen as a Western religion, and therefore Christianity is sometimes seen as responsible for military or political actions taken by secular western governments.

As a sociologist of religion, Professor Schirrmacher observed that as a result of globalization the number of people changing their religion is increasing rapidly. In comparison to 30 years ago, when the vast majority of the world population never had a real relationship with another religion, today the situation is totally different. This brings a lot of tension to the world and a lot of tension within each community, therefore it is very important not only to observe what is happening, but also to discuss it and try to understand it.

In response to the questions posed to this panel, he presented the WEA approach to Islam as expressed in its letter of response to *A Common Word*, starting the letter with the emphasis on peacemaking based on theological grounds, then moving to the second part "Your call, our call" which represents a typical Evangelical call to seek forgiveness that is only found in Jesus Christ; this call in particular comes in response to the invitation expressed in the Muslim letter which was perceived by WEA as a call to Christians to follow God according to Islam. The third section is on the topic of "love" which emphasizes that "Evangelicals think that theology comes before ethics." Here the WEA's response

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aims to put love into practice and therefore presents the personal relationship with Muslims as the key to solving many problems that cannot be solved in conferences and meetings, but by how millions of Christians and Muslims live together. Nevertheless, "this love must be deeply grounded in good theology and in Trinitarian theology," which is a unique feature of a Christian theology of love, that "Christian love is not a command given by God but the very essence of God."

Another point emphasized in the WEA response is the issue of religious freedom, about which it argues that "religious freedom always in history has preceded religions coming closer to each other" - giving the example of Catholics and Protestants in Europe, when political freedom came first and both sides stopped using state violence, then afterwards they started to talk with each other. Therefore the issue of religious freedom cannot wait until interfaith relations improve rather it should be addressed first. The last part of the WEA response concerns standing in solidarity with the persecuted church, which is another aspect of the Evangelical tradition. For the WEA, in the light of the discussion on religious freedom and on accepting and loving Muslims, it was important to have a clear statement on what they see as persecution of Christians in some Islamic countries.

Regarding theological resources and tools developed by the WEA on dialogue with Islam, there have been increasing efforts to collect more information and to try to learn more about Islam in different countries, in order also to understand the diversity within Islam. In this area the WEA have also tried to involve more specialists with Arabic language skills, since this is the language of the Qur'an. Professor Schirmacher highlighted in particular the WEA initiative to establish a series of institutes for Islamic studies that are producing study materials for the churches trying to answer all kinds of related questions. One such institute is the International Institute for Religious

Freedom, where they began extensive research and developed contacts to understand the experience of the Orthodox and Oriental churches who have lived together with Islam for centuries.

He then highlighted four key points that should be considered when summarizing the general approach of the WEA to Islam:

1. Mission and peace can go together, as it is expressed in 1 Peter 3: 15-17, which has become the rationale for WEA to witness and answer every question, including those asked by Muslims, but in gentleness and respect, without violating the human rights of other peoples, and with respect to their beliefs.
2. Witness is always related to the biblical notion of martyrdom and persecution, especially that, according to Professor Schirmacher, almost 50 percent of WEA members live in areas where they are in danger of persecution. This reality prompts Evangelicals to develop a "theology of persecution" to show that martyrdom and persecution are integral parts of their faith; nevertheless this does not give Evangelicals the right to react using violence against their persecutors, but to trust that they are in God's hand.
3. Personal relationship and hospitality to people of other faiths have been the source of strength of the WEA movement, which, according to Schirmacher, have led to the conversion of almost of 90 percent of Evangelicals.
4. In the relationship with Muslims it is very important for the WEA to distinguish between the question of witness to the gospel, and the political issues that are handled by governments, especially issues of human rights and religious freedom. For WEA, these are two separate matters. As an example, Professor Schirmacher stated that persecuted evangelicals should not react to persecution in any violent way; at the same time they are encouraged to use their legal rights as given in the legal system of their countries to stop this persecution.

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He concluded his presentation by offering a clarification on behalf of the WEA regarding attempts by some evangelical missionaries to convert members of other churches and expressed readiness to discuss this issue honestly with all churches.

**Panel Three: Contextual approaches to Islam: Christians in Islamic context**

*Panel three focused on the role of context in articulating theological thinking. Speaking from the experience of Christians living in Muslim majority contexts, it included presentations by Christian theologians from Lebanon, Nigeria and Pakistan, and was moderated by Rev. Dr Herman Shastri, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Malaysia.*

**An approach from the Middle East**

*The first input was given by Fr. Dr George Massouh, representing the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch, and the Balamand University in Lebanon. See p.60.*

**An approach from Africa**

*The second input was given by Bishop Dr Josiah Atkins Idowu Fearon, representing the Anglican Church in Nigeria and PROCMURA.*

At the beginning of his presentation, Bishop Josiah drew the attention of his audience to the fact that Nigeria is one of few countries in the world where both Christianity and Islam have an almost equal number of adherents. "This context is often described by 'Islamicists' and 'missiologists' as a 'flash point'". He therefore tried to give a brief historical background about Nigeria, to describe the context in which Christians and Muslims interact.

Linking the creation of the modern state of Nigeria to the British trade and colonial presence in the nineteenth century, he described the formation of a country of different tribal groups in response to the colonial control imposed by the British. He commented in particular that the British

made no attempt at encouraging unity between these tribal groups by putting in place an arrangement that would allow for the freedom of religion. As a result, at independence Nigeria began with two systems of governance: one for the South and another for the North (where *Shari'a* was practiced) with a modified version for the middle part of the country.

Islam first came to in Nigeria in the 10th century, and from there it spread westward culminating in the emergence of the Sokoto Caliphate. Christianity became known in Nigeria during the 15th and 16th centuries, then formally in the 19th century with the British merchants, through the western part of Nigeria, and from there it advanced northward across the country. The first contact between the two religions within the country was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and then in 1914 they became the two official religions in Nigeria.

Bishop Josiah then analyzed the relationship between the two religions in three different contexts within Nigeria: (1) where Islam is the dominant religion as in Sokoto state in the North; (2) where Christianity is a dominant religion as in the South, and (3) in the Middle belt states which used to be a battleground between the two. Reflecting on these three contexts, he argued that in many ways the current tensions within Nigeria are more complex than we are often made to believe. Religion is often given as the reason for the crises, though most are often caused by economic and political reasons. "A difference in religion, by itself did not usually cause any tensions but when religious differences were combined with ethnic or geographical differences that difficulties arose." Dividing Nigeria into states in 1967 changed the balance of power between the north and the south. In order to retain the dominance by the northern politicians, religion was brought to the fore, and it began to play a major role in the political and social lives of Nigeria. From then on Muslims began to complain about the dominance of the Christians and demand Islamic law