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# *Mission and Inter-Faith Relations in the Light of the Gulf War*

WALTER RIGGANS

## **Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to gather together some of the notes and reports on Christian responses to the Gulf War which have found their way to my desk; to feed in to this the results of conversations with Arab Christians, Jewish believers in Jesus, and a whole variety of Christians from the West; and, having reflected on all this, to attempt to encourage further debate by Christians, particularly specialists in mission studies. It is, I think, especially important to contrast the perceptions of the Middle Eastern peoples with those from the Euro-American world in this year of the 'celebration' in the West of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America.

An earlier version of this paper was delivered to the second annual conference of the British and Irish Association of Mission Studies in July 1991, and I am grateful not only for the invitation to give that lecture, but for the helpful comments which arose from the plenary discussion. This is in fact a drastically shortened version of my full treatment of the issue of the Gulf War, in which I also analysed the impact of the Gulf War on mission to Jewish people, but in this article we shall look only at the Arab and Muslim scene.

## **Euro-American perceptions of the war: religion and politics**

### *Pro-war with Iraq*

There was a great deal of genuine moral outrage felt and expressed on behalf of Kuwait. In many quarters Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was met with a numbed disbelief that such action was still possible. Even countries which chose to distance themselves, for political reasons, from the use of force, made it clear that they shared this horror and indignation. While it is all too easy, as we shall see, to belittle any presentation of genuine moral indignation by the Western powers, I think it would be altogether inaccurate to fail to appreciate the real contribution of this sense of outrage. Not everyone, and not every Christian, was motivated by pure self-interest.

The West has been reeling since its 're-discovery' of Muslims and Islam in the 1970s, when Islamic nations achieved economic, and therefore political, power through the manipulation of the world oil market. Muslims saw this time of strategic influence as the opportunity to re-assert themselves as Muslims in the world community, to liberate themselves from what was perceived as the culturally and religiously *Christian West*. It would not be inappropriate to say that many, Christians among them, reacted with panic. There was certainly a great deal of trauma, and the shock waves are still

being felt today. Indeed many in the West, again including Christians, determined that the power of Islam had to be destroyed. Everyman's engagement with Islam had well and truly begun!

What must not be avoided is the fact that this is very often linked with a denigration of Muslim people, and Arab people in particular. In fact many Christians and Christian organisations go so far as to demonise Islam, seeing Muslims as either servants of this demonic power, or its pitiful slaves. At the time of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, images of the Ayatollah Khomeini and a fanatical, despotic regime were still strong; images of the Western hostages being kept prisoner by fundamentalist Islamic groups were ever fresh; and of course the West was also deeply concerned with the plight of Salman Rushdie, involving death threats against not only him, but also his publishers and translators. Indeed more recent events, such as the knifing of the Italian translator of Rushdie's book, the murder of his Japanese translator, and the setting up of a self-proclaimed 'Muslim Parliament' in Britain, intimating that Muslims should be prepared to defy Britain's laws if they contradict those of Islam, have all served to reinforce the West's conviction that the power of Islam must be confronted and defeated.

Underscoring and seeming to confirm this fear of the overarching strategy of Islamic rulers like Saddam Hussein was his claim that this was a 'holy war' for Islam that he was waging. Saddam Hussein and several Islamic leaders repeatedly claimed that Allah would therefore defend Iraq and defeat the *infidel* forces of the West.

Many Christians in the West perceived this as a serious spiritual and missiological issue. What would happen if Iraq's forces did indeed defeat those of the Western coalition? What might the religious consequences be should the Islamic world proclaim victory over the Christian God and his forces? And so the cry went out from several quarters for an engagement with Islam in wholesale spiritual warfare. Prayer was being made for a decisive victory over the Iraqi forces and the downfall of Saddam Hussein himself. What are we to make of this attitude? In the context of this attitude how are we to interpret the relatively swift and easy victory of the coalition forces? The on-going tragedy of the situation cannot be left out of the equation here, and we shall return to the question of how to interpret the lack of any really decisive resolution of the problem.

Again, security in the region was put forward as a prime concern of the Western allies. In particular there was concern for the security of Israel, at least on behalf of those countries and authorities which are supportive of the State of Israel. Israel won admiration around the world for her decision to refrain from any retaliatory action against Iraq. Among the Christian groups which voiced their concerns and support for Israel most vocally was the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel, representing mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics in the USA. In one Statement they declared:

The NCLCI condemns Iraq's attacks on Israel and affirms its solidarity with the State and people of Israel in their hour of crisis and promise.<sup>1</sup>

1 *Jerusalem Post, International Edition*, 9 March 1991, (JP/IE). See also *Christian Life in Israel*, no. 35, Spring 1991, p 8.

There was, further, a great deal of euphoria expressed in the West that finally the United Nations had come of age, had taken an authoritative moral stance, and had shown this in political consensus and solidarity. However, as we shall see, the very solidarity of the UN was perceived by many, even in the West, as further evidence of moral bankruptcy. Nevertheless, Western pride in the UN's pronouncements and policy decisions played its part in the scheme of things. It is surely important for Christians to do some serious reflection on the role of the UN and other international humanitarian agencies within the plan of God for the extension of his kingdom. The Gulf War has placed this issue on the agenda once again, and it must be dealt with properly.

A culture-bound arrogance was not entirely missing from the perception of some evangelicals and mission agencies. There is, of course, a longstanding tradition among Western evangelicals of seeing the historic churches of the East as hopeless compromisers of the gospel: too much politics and not enough pastoral care; too much self-preservation and not enough mission to others; dubious theology, involving icons and mysticism; fear of the cost of discipleship. And so we see huge percentages of missions from the West spending huge percentages of their human and financial resources in seeking to convert members of the historic churches into good Western-type Protestants. This is defined as mission in the Middle East. But we shall return to this point later.

Our post-Christian Euro-American culture is a child of the Enlightenment, and we take for granted the separation of spirituality into the realm of private life and politics into the realm of the public arena. We call it an advance, evidence of civilisation. We also value it as a means of protecting religious minorities from any form of persecution. Some also interpret it as a useful corrective and purificatory experience for Christendom. There is much to be said for all this. However, it must also be noted that increasing numbers of Christians are expressing grave concern that the separation has been allowed to go too far, and that Christians need to regain the Biblical conviction that the public arena is also God's domain.<sup>2</sup>

Muslims reject the notion of separating religion from politics altogether, and this is perceived in the West, by Christian and non-Christian alike, as grounds for alarm. But of course the indigenous churches of the Middle East also reject this separation out of hand. It would be a great mistake to try to impose some form of separation on them too, since it is not even seen as a luxury they would dearly love to be able to afford. Instead it is seen as evidence of an impoverished spirituality and a useless piety. And yet the Gulf War has also put this issue squarely on the missiological agenda. Many Western Christians believe that it is part of their mission to the Middle East to try to establish this principle of the privatisation of religion throughout the region.

I submit that we have a lot of work to do on this issue in the coming decade. As part of this programme we should be trying once and for all to

2 See, for example, the efforts of the Moral Majority Movement in the USA, and the so-called Jesus Marches in Britain. At another level, there is the growing momentum behind the Gospel and Our Culture programme in Britain.

help rid the world of its misapprehension that the terms 'Western' and 'Christian' are interchangeable. They most certainly are not, even though the conviction that they are runs very deeply in some other cultures, as well as in some circles within Western culture.

### *Anti-war with Iraq*

The vast majority of people agreed on the need to apply political, diplomatic and economic pressures on Iraq. The sense of outrage was felt right across the family of nations. Differences arose concerning what type of pressure was appropriate, and for how long it should be applied. Even if it were to be determined that a war with Iraq would be a 'just war', then there would still need to be a full term given for sanctions to bite. This was the considered opinion of very many people, Christians among them. The fact that sanctions are still being imposed on Iraq these long months after the war has supposed to have been won, is interpreted as corroboration of the views of those who advocated the continuing of sanctions rather than resorting to open hostilities.

Many saw the Gulf War as primarily the dream of the military, especially in the USA. It provided a 'heaven-sent' opportunity to test the new technology in actual combat. Equally important, it gave the means to exorcise the demons of Vietnam. Those with this perception of the real motivation for war resisted it strongly.

For many people the decision to go to war so quickly was simply part of the West's bid for extended influence and control in the region. The decision, therefore, had to be resisted. Robert Lifton, a distinguished professor of psychiatry and psychology in New York, wrote in an American analysis of the Gulf War that America's joy in the conflict was rooted in the ongoing 'Vietnam syndrome', being in fact part of a psychological and political struggle to ward off a haunting sense of American decline.<sup>3</sup> In other words, there are analysts who see the Gulf War as an attempt to deny the West's decline as an old-style imperial force, utilising the model of over-whelming power as the model for international influence.

Many people outside of any committed Christian faith seemed to share some undefined sense that a cataclysmic war was about to be waged in the Gulf region. Saddam Hussein himself referred to it regularly as 'the mother of all battles'. Ecologists, and others with a particular concern for the natural world were especially distraught at the damage done to the environment, notably by Iraq's deliberate dumping of oil along the coastline. Somehow this seemed to reinforce the popular image of an apocalyptic scenario being played out in the Middle East. Some Christians accepted this scenario quite calmly, prepared to interpret events as not only under the controlling hand of God, but as actually part of his plan for the region and the whole world. Typical of this attitude is David Dolan, a Christian journalist who has lived in Israel for some years. He wrote a book in which he linked the Gulf War to the destiny of the State of Israel, employing characteristic millenarian views and arguments. At the close of the book he wrote:

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3 Quoted in *The Guardian*, 20 June 1991.

I think it is fair to speculate that the many biblical prophecies that speak of extremely dark days for the world just before the kingdom of God is fully established on earth may be nearing the time of their fulfilment.<sup>4</sup>

It goes without saying that this kind of attitude fills other Christians with alarm.

In many people's minds the plight of the Palestinians gave the lie to any talk about the West's genuine concern for justice and stability in the Middle East. Their claim was that the moral and political impetus to enforce UN resolutions regarding the Palestinians was at least as strong as that regarding Kuwait and Iraq's Kurdish population. The difference in attitude and action was taken as ample evidence of the West's self-interest in 'liberating' Kuwait. As the saying went, if Kuwait produced carrots instead of oil, then the UN would still be debating, and the USA would still be sending high level delegations to the Gulf to try to negotiate a solution. All Christians who have a particular concern for the Palestinian people will have to deal with this issue for some considerable time to come.

In essence, all the criticisms of the decision to go to war are based on this charge. Put simply it charges that behind all the talk about the sanctity of international law, the opportunities for a new world order once the Iraqi 'Hitler' was stopped, and the 'wondrous sea change' at the UN, lay the cynical calculations of Western economic and political protectionism. The history of Western involvement certainly seems to bear out this typology of self-interest, when we consider the Crusades, the partition of the old Ottoman Empire, the bolstering of undemocratic regimes, and the active arms trading to the region. The following Christian condemnation of America's exploitation of the situation is as strong as could be imagined:

Because the U.S. government needed a sufficiently dangerous enemy to justify our... desire to destroy militarily Iraq's nuclear weapons production sites, to reduce severely its armies and material, to undermine Hussein's potential regional populist power, to protect Israel, to establish a military base in the Middle East and to keep Gulf oil in friendly hands, the American political leadership (aided by most of the dominant media) attributed all evil to Hussein and all that was good, right and moral to the United States, its allies and the United Nations.<sup>5</sup>

While there can be no reasonable doubt of the truth of the charge of self-interest, it must also be granted, I believe, that there was a mixture of motives, involving moral outrage as well as protectionism. Indeed it was the combination of both which probably provided the irresistibly heady mixture that led to war. The former ingredient enabled the British Prime Minister John Major to speak of the allies' 'clean conscience', while the latter led to the broadly-based 'political consensus'. Of particular interest to theologians and ethicists is the question whether or not such mixed motives

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4 David Dolan, *Holy War for the Promised Land*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1991, p 235.

5 *Peace Petitions*, Spring/Summer 1991, published by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

disqualify a war, a priori, from being a properly constituted 'just war'. That debate was joined with much passion, as we shall see.

I myself became involved in serious and heated debates about whether or not the Gulf War was a just war in a way that I could not have envisaged up until the end of March 1991. So I will concentrate my remarks here on the particular context of those debates, namely the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. I was chosen to be one of the commissioners to the May 1991 Assembly, thereby participating in the many conversations and formal debates which took place there on this very subject. There was a high representation of Scottish forces among the British troops who went to serve in the Gulf conflict, and consequently a high representation of chaplains from the Church of Scotland. One of the major Reports to the Assembly was in fact the Chaplains' Report.

There were those in the Church of Scotland, as of course in all other churches, who had from the beginning spoken out in terms of the unquestionably just and righteous nature of the cause of the coalition governments and armed forces, and who consistently maintained the need 'to convey to the allied troops that God and right were wholly on their side'. Others could not go so far, and were deeply troubled by what they perceived as the 'moral dilemmas and ambiguities' inherent in the situation. Still others were convinced from the outset that this was not a just war, and that it could not be justified, at least not in the way it had been undertaken. However those who belonged to the second and third of these groups were still pastorally supportive of the chaplains and the families of the troops.

It soon became apparent, though, that for the chaplains this was not enough. They perceived the failure to claim the theological and moral high ground as an undermining of their Christian service. In other words, the issue of what is a just war is very much on the agenda once more. And in particular the question remains to be answered whether the Gulf War was an example of a just war. Those who said 'no' to this question included pacifists, Christians who see the modern technological revolution in warfare as rendering irrelevant the traditional definitions of a just war, and other Christians who assert that the traditional definition of a just war was not entirely met anyway.

How then shall we, with our especial interest in missiology, respond to this issue? We certainly cannot avoid taking it up in our own debates. I think the time has come for a full debate on the relationship between a Christian's just war and a Muslim's jihad!

Even before the land offensive was launched, Muslims throughout Europe were afraid of the consequences of the conflict on their own communities. They feared verbal and physical abuse by people in their neighbourhoods, and they were also frightened of the possibility of some form of internment or repatriation of Muslims who showed any kind of sympathy for Iraq.

Many Asian Muslims who have suffered terrible prejudice in Europe at the hands of local thugs and at the incitement of the National Front, etc., interpreted the West's move into the Gulf as just one more example of the bullying which characterises the West. To some minds it was not simply anti-

Islamic, but actually a racist enterprise, deeply anti-Arab in its motivation. What is more, many Muslims living in the West perceived Saddam Hussein as the first Muslim leader in their knowledge to stand up to the Bully, transferring their own awful experiences to that of the Gulf. It was not uncommon to hear of a sort of solidarity created around the issue of the Gulf War. Manzilla Paula Uddin, a Tower Hamlets Labour counsellor in London, said in one interview:

If the war doesn't bring us together, nothing will. The viciousness of the second world war united the Jews, and the events of the Gulf war will have the same effect on Muslims.<sup>6</sup>

Christian mission to Muslims will be (and already is) severely affected by this perception. It is also imperative that we tackle the issue of anti-Muslim prejudice. It exists even in some of the Christian missions to Muslims. A large percentage of Western people, Christians among them, equate the terms 'Muslim/Arab/Palestinian' with the terms 'terrorist/those with contempt for human rights and democracy'.

### **Middle East perceptions of the war: religion and politics**

#### *Welcoming the armed forces*

Not surprisingly, Kuwait, the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia called for Western help: they were helpless before the political will and armed might of Iraq; they knew that no other Middle East nation would want to take the Iraqis on; they probably suspected that there would not be much political will among some of the other powerful nations to help restore such an elitist regime; they were already involved in established relationships with the Western and industrialised nations; and of course they knew they could rely on Western self-interest.

Again it is hardly surprising that the Israelis welcomed forces which could help remove one of her most implacable and powerful enemies. Israel was delighted that forces from the West would come to dismantle Iraq's fighting machine. Moreover, she willingly complied with the wishes of the coalition governments by resisting the desire to retaliate herself for the attacks made upon her citizens and territory by the Iraqis. That response has suited Israel very well politically.

#### *Ambivalence towards the armed forces*

Many Westerners were completely baffled by the lack of concerted and unambiguous condemnation of Iraq by the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, or by other Islamic communities around the world. In trying to understand why there should be such a reluctance and ambiguity one must realise that there was a cluster of issues involved: fear of Iraq's military power; lack of trust and co-ordinated political will among the nations; most of the countries and associations (notably Iran, Turkey, Yemen and the PLO) were, and are, committed to their own strategic agendas; a reluctance to team up with Western, 'Christian' forces against fellow Arabs and Muslims,

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6 *The Guardian*, 3 May 1991.



not in fact seeing Saddam Hussein as any greater threat to the region than the Western allies themselves;<sup>7</sup> a reluctance to have foreign troops on Muslim soil, especially with prospects of a long-term stay and further permanent military bases in the Gulf; reluctance to team up with forces which were co-operating with, and indeed protecting, Israel; confusion at the signals being sent by various Islamic leaders about the holiness or otherwise of Saddam Hussein's war against the Western forces;<sup>8</sup> anger at the elitist regimes in Kuwait, the Gulf States generally, and Saudi Arabia, with the huge disparity between the wealth of the rulers and the poverty and insecurity of the majority of the people. Clearly there were mixed motives to be found throughout the Arab world as well.

As a matter of interest I will include some reflections on the perceptions expressed by African Christian students both at the college where I am a tutor, and at other British colleges, and also by African Christian leaders who spoke with one of my colleagues while she was on an extended teaching tour in Africa. I am sure that their sentiments would echo those of many in the Middle East and throughout the two-thirds world.<sup>9</sup>

They spoke of the rage and terrible shock they had felt when the USA had, with British help, bombed Mu'amar Qadaffi's headquarters in Libya a few years ago. They hated Qadaffi, especially as he had helped Idi Amin in various ways, but nonetheless this action was seen as an invasion of African soil and sovereignty by the West. Some spoke of a sense of anger at the West due to a displaced rage at their own impotence to deal with the situation themselves. They sensed that something of the same would be felt by their brothers and sisters in the Middle East. Most were sickened at the ease with which the West poured millions of dollars into destructive action in the Gulf region, while there was perceived to be no real commitment to saving millions of lives and the future of hundreds of thousands of square miles of country to the west of the Red Sea. Many also remembered their own experiences under colonial rule, and interpreted this conflict from that perspective.

### *Rejection of the armed forces*

The Western forces' presence (and subsequent 'victory') has been presented in many quarters as Islam's humiliation, with the 'betrayal' of Islamic loyalties by those countries which aided and abetted the Western forces contributing markedly to that humiliation. The implications of this perception will be actively with us for a very long time to come, and those involved

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7 See 'The Gulf: the view from Jordan', in *Christianity and Crisis*, 12 November 1990.

8 In late January 1991, Iraq's Religious Affairs Minister, Abdullah Fadel Abbas, convened a conference of three hundred and fifty Muslim delegates from some seventeen countries to express support for Saddam Hussein from an Islamic perspective. They duly obliged. On the other hand, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, which met in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, outlined Saddam Hussein's betrayal of basic principles of Islam. This ideological divide was evident throughout the Islamic world.

9 A selection of Asian Christian responses to the Gulf crisis has been published in *Al-Mushir* (The Counsellor), vol. 32, no. 4, Winter 1990, pp 142f.

in mission in the Middle East need to look long and hard at the implications.

Perhaps I could add here one or two further comments of concern to those involved in mission. First, one cannot build peace on the basis of conquest and humiliation. Somehow Muslims (and Christians?) must be encouraged to see the Gulf War not as having been waged against Islam itself, but as having been waged against a Muslim leader who himself betrayed his own people and the principles of Islam, intending to exploit Islam for his own purposes.

Secondly, it must be said that there is a sense of foreboding among many Christians that the Gulf War has led to the intensification of the sense of purpose of, and overall support for the policies and actions of, the various Islamic fundamentalist organisations throughout the Middle East (and beyond). There may very well be a further proliferation of such groups, a hardening of their resolve, a reinforcement of their sense of destiny, a greater willingness to take risks in their campaigns of violence and intimidation against both Westerners and Western-

oriented Arabs. Indeed we are already seeing an acceleration in the rate of growth of such organisations and political parties throughout the Middle East and North Africa. One might also predict that it will become increasingly dangerous for Muslim converts to Christianity and for Christian missionaries themselves.

Related to the perception of the war as imperialism, is the perception of it as crusaderism. While the two are inseparable, the distinction is, nevertheless, worth drawing. The perception is that Western Christendom is on the march again, seeking to dominate the East. The aim is not to restore Kuwaiti sovereignty, but

to humiliate the Arab nation and to destroy Saddam Hussein, the modern Saladin (*sic*), fighting heroically against 'the new crusaders' — the Western, Christian allies, and Jewish Israel.<sup>10</sup>

Farouk el-Manssoury wrote a trenchant review article last year in which he asked:

...was the Iraqi affair... not preceded by other epidemics of pathological hatred which engulfed the West...? In the eyes of the West, the only good Muslim is a compliant or a powerless one.<sup>11</sup>

The General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches commented:

the whole enterprise was perceived of by Muslims as a new Crusade, aiming at the disintegration of their religion.<sup>12</sup>

It cannot be stressed enough how important the on-going mythology of the Crusades is to the Arab psyche. Not only is this vital for all Westerners

10 Moshe Maoz, in *JPIE*, 16 March 1991. See also Bernard Lewis, *The Roots of Muslim Rage*, in *The Atlantic*, September 1990, pp 53f.

11 'Was the Gulf War a Crusade Against Islam?', in *Muslim World Book Review*, vol.12, no.1, 1991, pp 1, 6.

12 Gaby Habib, in *MECC Perspectives*. In the *MECC Newsreport* of August/September 1991, p 2, the war is actually referred to as 'the 1991 Middle East War', underscoring the perception that it was more than even a Gulf conflict.

to appreciate, but it is particularly so for those Christians who are supportive of mission to the Arab (and the Muslim) world. All subsequent relations with the West have been not only coloured by the memory of the Crusades, but in fact these have become the very pattern and guiding force behind the history of confrontation and suspicion between Muslims and Christians.

On the other hand, in the modern era, the West is seen as spiritually and morally bankrupt, having sold its soul to secular humanism and materialism, and so the real motive behind the West's presence in the Middle East today is perceived by many as the old desire for colonial or neo-colonial domination. Islam, they say, is seen by the West as the only force able to preserve the Arab peoples, thereby explaining the crusade to destroy Islam.

We will look at the implications of this Crusade mentality for Christian mission in our final section, but once again we can see how there can be no doubt but that the future is going to be very difficult for the life and work of Christians in the Middle East.

Not surprisingly, the PLO were keen to associate the Palestinian issue with the heart of the struggle in the Gulf War. There was, nonetheless, wholesale shock around the world at the extent to which they supported Saddam Hussein. For his part, he made a great deal of the claim that his intention was to liberate Palestine, seeking thereby to win support from across the Arab and Muslim world.

Indeed the Latin Patriarch, Michel Sabbah, the first Arab Roman Catholic Patriarch of Jerusalem, a Christian who was born in Nazareth, said in an interview in October 1990:

the Palestinians and the Arab people in general support Saddam Hussein and ask themselves why the world attacks him and has not considered intervention with regard to other conquests.<sup>13</sup>

Many Western Christians were fully in accord with this attitude. In December 1990 the National Council of Churches, an American 32-member body of mainline Protestant, Black, and fundamentalist churches, sent 18 representatives on a visit to the Middle East. On their return to the USA they made this statement:

The US would be hypocritical to react with military force to Iraq's occupation of Kuwait while tolerating Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>14</sup>

We have now come to the specific anxieties and causes for anger among the historic churches of the Middle East. Western Christians are known in the East to be unaware that there is a living Christian presence there at all. Middle Eastern Christians are frustrated by the assumption that Middle East = Arab = Muslim. Christians from the historic churches are angered when Western tourists ask them when they converted from Islam, assuming that this is in fact what must have happened. Listen to the words of Gaby Habib, the General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC):

For many Westerners, the issues which immediately come to mind

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13 *JPIE*, 6 October 1990.

14 *JPIE*, 24 December 1990.

regarding the Middle East are... oil and its relation to the international economic order and western interests; the Islamic revival and its perceived challenges to western culture; the security of Israel;... the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people; the enigmatic Lebanese tragedy; terrorism;... the security of the Gulf. The Church remains the most unknown entity in the Middle East, and the assumption that should be changed is that the Middle East is only the home of Judaism and Islam.<sup>15</sup>

It would be true to say that we have heard next to nothing about the Christians of the region during the whole period from August 1990 to the present moment, most especially in the public arena.<sup>16</sup>

In the eyes of Middle Eastern Christians, Western Christians are too individualistic, having precious little appreciation of the concept and reality of peoplehood and altogether ignorant of the political implications of the very presence of Christian communities in Muslim countries. These communities have lived as tolerated minorities for many centuries, a history which has produced more than its share of persecution and martyrdom. This in turn has created an experience with fears, tensions, and responsibilities which are beyond the imagination of most comfortable, individualistic, church-and-state-separated Western Christians. A great deal of their energy is expended on survival as communities. In 1980, a MECC/WCC Joint Consultation issued the following 'Guiding Principle':

It is imperative to secure continuity of Christian presence and witness in the area on the basis of the fact that Christians in the Middle East are the natives of these lands that under no circumstances should they abandon...<sup>17</sup>

It is undoubtedly true that very few Western Christians are aware of the terrible implications for the indigenous Christians of the Middle East when a conflict like the Gulf War is joined.<sup>18</sup> At the time of the Crusades the Eastern churches were made to pay dearly for the efforts of their co-religionists from the West. As Anton Wessels, Professor of the History of Religion and Missiology at the Free University of Amsterdam, has written recently:

These churches were seen as 'collaborators', a kind of fifth column, and they were treated accordingly. Eastern Christians were persecuted, driven into isolation, or forced to emigrate to the Byzantine Empire.<sup>19</sup>

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15 *MECC Perspectives*, October 1986, p 4.

16 For statistics and some details about the indigenous Arab Christians of the Middle East, including Iraq, and about the Christian communities among the 'guest workers', especially in the Gulf States, see Norman A. Horner: *A Guide to Christian Churches in the Middle East*, Mission Focus Publications, Elkhart, Indiana 1989.

17 *MECC Perspectives*, October 1986, p 24.

18 Indeed the repercussions of this conflict are being felt throughout the two-thirds world. Indigenous Christians in India and Pakistan, for example, have received very harsh treatment at the hands of Muslim opponents. Some Western mission agencies actually withdrew personnel at one point, and delayed the sending of others.

19 Anton Wessels: 'Muslims, Jews and Christians in the Middle East', *Studies In Interreligious Dialogue*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1991, p 92.

Christians in the Middle East have lived with the vulnerability which goes along with this negative attitude since the times of the Crusades. Indeed the Muslims hold Christians to be responsible for much of the region's problems through this relationship which they say leads the Eastern Christian communities to have divided loyalties.

The same pattern returned during the Western colonial period, from Napoleon's Egyptian campaign of 1798 till Allenby's capture of Jerusalem in 1917:

Muslims viewed the colonial enterprise as a renewal or continuation of the crusades; they presented it as a religious conflict. Once again, this... had disastrous consequences for the Christian communities in the area....Just as before... this led to the further isolation of the Christians in the area, or to their emigration.<sup>20</sup>

The same disastrous results followed the conflict of World War One, as summarised here by Betts in his comprehensive work in this area:

The First World War was, for the Christians of Syria, Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Anatolia (Turkey), a purgatory from which they emerged broken and decimated, a tragic chapter in their history of suffering which today... remains an omnipresent memory even to those born long afterward.<sup>21</sup>

Coming to the present conflict, Wessels concludes:

These churches will be further marginalised. In the case of the Maronites in Lebanon this situation will lead to a further militant ghettoization... and further acceleration of emigration of Christians.... The time is coming ever closer that one will no longer encounter Christians in the Middle East.<sup>22</sup>

The tragic fact is that Christians are abandoning the Middle East. There has been large-scale emigration for many years now, and the acceleration in numbers is unmistakable.<sup>23</sup> Is it ridiculous to suggest that Western mission to the Middle East should involve a resolve to help the indigenous Christians stay there, somehow seeking to guarantee their security, and a truly viable *modus vivendi*? Their political status at present is that of 'dhimma', or 'protected minority', dependent upon the grace of the Islamic State. Is this satisfactory? Is the very asking of that question evidence of typical Western Christian imperialism, or do we have a right to ask it for the sake of our Christian brothers and sisters living under these Islamic regimes?

The debate on 'identity' is particularly important and lively in the Middle

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20 Wessels, art. cit., p 93.

21 R. B. Betts, *Christians in the Arab East*, John Knox Press, Atlanta 1978, p 175.

22 Wessels, art. cit., p 95.

23 'The Pan-Islamic Conference in Lahore recently approved a secret resolution by which the countries of the Middle East are committed to expel all Christians from the region by the year 2000.... The Coptic minority in Egypt... are emigrating by the thousands to more benign places or, unable to resist the social pressures, convert to the Moslem faith. According to an estimate of the local church, about 15,000 Copts go over to Islam every year. Some 300,000 Lebanese Christians have left the Land of the Cedars since the beginning of the civil war.... How many Christians will be left in Bethlehem a few years hence?' (*Christians and Israel*, vol.1, no.1, Winter 1991/2, p 4.)

East these days. But of course the debate centres on the concept and reality of identity-within-community. In his recent book, Naim Ateek writes:

There are four important words that, cumulatively, make up my identity: I am a Christian, a Palestinian, an Arab, and an Israeli.... I hasten to add that the order is arbitrary and can be altered.... I have participated in lively discussions where young people hotly debated whether they are Christian Palestinians or Palestinian Christians, Christian Arabs or Arab Christians.<sup>24</sup>

Western missions which send people who are not only unaware of the significance and passion of these debates, but in fact cannot relate to them at all (since they really operate only out of their Western perceptions of individual, born-again Christian identity) are not respected by the Christians of the Middle East.

Comment must also be made on the growing conviction of the indigenous Christians of the Middle East that the key theological issue is that of justice. This is not shared by all Christians and mission agencies in the West. Yet already in 1975, the MECC Consultation at Broumana, Lebanon, issued a statement in which it said:

Witness is not a testimony in word alone: it is action, a cross-centred action.... It is fundamentally a close involvement in the struggle for justice and liberation.<sup>25</sup>

This is particularly seen to be the case regarding the Christian life and teaching of the Palestinians. Naim Ateek's book, quoted above has as its subtitle, 'A Palestinian Theology of Liberation', and in it he writes:

I have embarked on a Palestinian theology of liberation.... To pursue peace with justice is the Church's highest calling in Israel-Palestine today, as well as its greatest challenge.<sup>26</sup>

How, then, can Western mission agencies and churches respond positively to this perspective without losing sight of the other concerns of the Gospel?

### **The Post-war victims: a second mission, or the continuing mission?**

#### *Is the West responsible?*

The basic line of argument by those who see continued relief efforts for the Shi'ite and Kurdish communities as an expression of the West's Christian and humanitarian concern is that they are simply the victims of Saddam Hussein's retaliation. He is venting his rage and frustration at his humiliating defeat on his own people, and the West cannot really be held to be responsible for that. Such is the pathology of Saddam Hussein.

Others insist that the West's constant expression of hope that some group or other within Iraq would rise up to rid Iraq of Saddam Hussein, and the implication that support (especially American) would be immediate and

24 Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice And Only Justice. A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, Orbis Books, New York 1989, pp 13, 17.

25 MECC *Perspectives*, October 1986, p 37.

26 Op. cit., p 73.

substantial, did indeed encourage Iraq's minorities to make a (relatively) concerted attempt to wrest themselves free from his yoke. They would not have thrown everything into open revolt had they even suspected that the UN and its member nations would retreat behind laws of international protocol. In consequence, they feel betrayed by the West.

The impression given by official channels in the West (and this will accurately reflect the view of many) is that any continued aid is part of a *new* mission to the region. At best it could be thought of as a 'follow-up mission'. Quite a different view is taken by others, many Christians among them, who see it all as part of the *one* mission, however mistaken the intention or abortive the planning of that whole mission might have been.

Cardinal Basil Hume was speaking into this tension when he said in April 1991, 'the governments which made up the coalition forces have a continuing moral responsibility to help win the peace.'<sup>27</sup> Whether or not the Gulf War was a just war, can any Christian doubt the truth of Cardinal Hume's statement?

Lebanon never seems to be out of the headlines for long, yet most people in the West are ignorant of the view that the coalition forces in the Gulf War deemed Lebanon to be a worthwhile sacrifice for the prize of welcoming Syria as one of the coalition partners against Iraq. Needless to say, it is the Christian parts of the country which have suffered most over the past few months. Syria's price for her badly needed political support was a free hand in Lebanon, a sweeping under the carpet of her own oppressive treatment of opponents to her ruling Ba'ath regime, and an ignoring of her support for international terrorism. A new Syrian-controlled government now sits in Beirut, controlling, in turn, some eighty per cent of Lebanon. Are the Lebanese simply to be written off as casualties of the war? There is widespread belief that the West has strengthened one dictator in the Middle East in its attempt to get rid of another.

We turn, now, to the broader picture. At the end of the land offensive the coalition forces spoke enthusiastically of a cluster of items on the new agenda for the Middle East. Among these was a breakthrough in Arab-Israeli talks about security in the region and about the Palestinian problem. We are now beginning to see that there may well be important steps forward being made in this direction. It is probable that the extra resolve of the USA and the United Nations to help mediate an Israeli-Palestinian negotiation comes as a result of the pressure put upon them by the Arab and Muslim nations to further justify their active co-operation with the West in dealing so swiftly and surely with the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait.

Already before the break-up of the Soviet Union the extent to which many countries of the region were turning to the West for increased support and political relationship was quite evident. This is particularly true of Syria (although she seems to be heavily involved in nuclear and conventional arms deals with former members of the Soviet Union too), Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and also Jordan, which is trying to re-establish ground that was lost through her refusal to condemn Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and to join the

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<sup>27</sup> Reported in *The Guardian*, 17 April 1991.

coalition forces. Peace talks got underway in Madrid, and there is definitely some progress being made, not least in the fact that Israeli and Palestinian delegates have begun to meet face-to-face, and there can be no doubt that the Gulf War process played a huge part in all of this. However, nowhere like enough dust has settled yet, and we need to wait to see what are the long-term prospects for peace in the Middle East.

With respect to other specific matters prophesied by the coalition powers there is still a great deal of confusion and inertia. There was a pledge to guarantee an international arms control package for the region, including tight revision of arms trading from the West and the Soviet Union (though of course the fall of the Soviet Union has changed all the equations in this regard). However, the evidence suggests that weapons are still being sold both by Western powers and by some in Eastern Europe. There was to be a programme to work towards economic stabilisation and a fairer distribution of wealth within the region, but nothing of any substance has yet been done in this direction. There was also to be a programme to foster greater co-operation among the region's nations. It is very difficult to gauge just how much progress has been made in this matter, but it does not seem extensive.

In point of fact, a new source of conflict has broken surface in the past year, threatening to be as divisive as any in the region, namely the issue of fresh water for Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Israel. A major conference to discuss the problem had to be called off in September 1991 because of the threat of boycotts if Israel attended, boycotts threatened by countries which were at the same time saying that they were prepared to enter into the process of direct peace talks with Israel!

In short, it is yet to be seen whether the West and its coalition partners can deliver the package which was promised. Just as important, it is yet to be seen whether they can demonstrate that this would have been impossible but for the Gulf War.

But the overall picture is broader than even this. From before the armed conflict began there was grave concern about the effects and after-effects of any war. We have in fact seen the fulfilment of prophecies about heavy civilian casualties (something like 200,000 during the month of hostilities alone), awful damage to the economic and social infrastructures, a dreadful knock-on effect on the economies of some of the poorest countries in the two-thirds world (some, like Yemen, suffering the punitive repercussions of not joining the condemnation of Iraq, but most — some forty-two third-world countries — simply experiencing economic and social trauma owing to the severe rise in the price of oil and other commodities during and after the war), terrible destruction to the region's ecological condition, creating a legacy of poor health and quality of life for people, fauna and flora alike, and of course a paradoxical intensification of many of the region's autocratic, anti-democratic regimes, increasing the tension, as states like Iran, Syria and Turkey watch to see how the dust settles in the coming months and years. In the meantime, Saddam Hussein himself is yet to acknowledge any criminal or unacceptable behaviour, and is yet even to begin any programme of rehabilitation or reconciliation.

Saddam Hussein is also as yet to begin any relenting on the oppressive



and manipulative treatment of Kurds, Shi'ites and Christians in his country. There are still many thousands of Iraqis in central and southern Iraq who have no running water or electricity; sewage and rubbish piles are often still high; food, especially baby food, is unattainably expensive; medical care is at a pitiful low; the estimated number of likely child deaths due to the conditions, within the calendar year 1991, was between seven hundred and fifty thousand and a million. Yes, we can refer again to *realpolitik*, and grieve over the fact that Saddam Hussein is deliberately choosing not to take care of his peoples, because it suits his political purposes not to, but does this mean that the coalition powers saw, and see this as an acceptable casualty-of-war scenario? As Christians, what do we say about this?

Then again the broader picture must take account of the awful state of affairs in Kuwait after the war. On the one hand, we recall with horror the torture and oppressive treatment of Palestinians there as the Kuwaitis sought to vent their anger and indignation. Martial law was only lifted after international pressure forced the Kuwaitis to allow civilian courts to try the cases of people accused of being 'collaborators'. Thousands of stateless Arabs have fled to southern Iraq, Jordan and elsewhere to escape their maltreatment, and even now this story is not yet over. On the other hand, in spite of pressure from Islamic groups and other nations, the ruling families are showing no desire to set reforms in motion which will begin to establish a proper standard of living for all the people of Kuwait.

And what about the refugees which have been created as a result of the Gulf War? There are an estimated three to four million displaced people. Something over two million people crossed national borders to seek refuge from the war and its aftermath. Close to one million went to Jordan alone. The tragedy the West is most familiar with is that of Iraq's Kurds, who fled across the border into Turkey, looking for sanctuary until the downfall of Saddam Hussein, but there were scores of thousands of foreign workers from all over the two-thirds world who were forced to leave the region without the money which they had come to earn for their struggling extended families back home in, for example, Bangladesh or Indonesia. Is caring for them and their overburdened countries part of the West's mission too?

How then are we to relate to the casualties of the war, past and present? As Christians, we dare not avoid this question, and as we debate among ourselves whether it is right to speak of this as a just war, we dare not shirk the responsibility of considering our accountability for these casualties.

#### *What about God's role in it all?*

It seemed to many that the debacle over the proposed Service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving, planned for 4 May, 1991, summed up the confusion about God's role in the Gulf War. Downing Street felt that such a service was appropriate, and that it would also be appropriate to hold it in Scotland, since so many Scottish troops had been involved in the conflict. The Queen would be there, as would senior government figures and leaders of the main opposition parties. Glasgow Cathedral was chosen as the venue, and the service would be the responsibility of its minister, the Revd Dr Bill Morris,

a senior chaplain to the Queen, and one of the Church of Scotland's ministers who made no anti-war statements of any sort.

However, Scotland's two most senior church leaders, the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Very Revd Robert Davidson, and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow, the Most Revd Thomas Winning, both of whom had expressed serious concerns about the decision to engage in war even before war was joined, were not invited to take part in the service. Only after considerable church and public outcry were they both invited to participate. Archbishop Winning significantly changed the text of the prayers he was expected to offer, omitting what he termed 'conversionary words' in favour of prayers voicing the need for reconciliation among the various conflicting parties. This was in keeping with the emphasis of the preacher, the Archbishop of York, Dr Habgood, who stressed the need to avoid all sense of triumphalism, and to realise the central role of repentance. It became an extremely controversial issue.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps most significantly of all, Professor Davidson, who was invited to lead the prayers of intercession, not only modified the text again, 'to stress the need for repentance', but also welcomed a group of school children from the three faiths, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, to join him in offering the prayers for peace and justice. Not only that, but they were encouraged to offer those prayers from within their own faith traditions. That also became an extremely controversial issue.

But the whole concept of the service was controversial. The churches were divided over the affair. Richard Holloway, the Episcopal Bishop of Edinburgh, called for an outright cancellation of the service, citing three reasons why Christians could not worship God in this way: there was no consensus among Christians that it had been a just war; the war, in any case, was not over, even if the main fighting was; the awful plight of the refugees and threatened minorities was an integral part of the whole involvement in the Gulf. The Revd Philip Crowe, Principal of Salisbury and Wells Theological College, used stronger rhetoric:

To thank God for any aspect of the Gulf War would, in my view, be not merely dangerous but an act of blasphemy.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, the service went ahead, and the controversy continues. Just as much consternation was expressed over the decisions to hold massive victory parades in Britain and the USA. In the USA, two parades were held. Washington's, held on 8 June, 1991, was billed as 'The Biggest Parade Since the End of World War Two', complete with troops, planes, fireworks and speeches. The one held in New York two days later was then presented as even 'bigger and better' including the exploding of a mock scud missile in the skies above New York. Present at that parade were some three hundred British troops and dignitaries, with a Royal Navy destroyer, HMS Edinburgh, at anchor in New York's harbour.

What caused far and away the greatest anger and disbelief, however, was the fact that originally an invitation had also been sent to the Syrian government for diplomatic, political and military representation. This pro-

<sup>28</sup> See *The Sunday Times*, 5 May 1991.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in *The Guardian*, 4 May 1991.

duced an uproar across America and Britain in particular. Americans challenged the decision in the light of Syria's presumed complicity in the 1983 bombing of the US Marine Barracks in Beirut, when 281 servicemen were killed. Britain challenged the decision, as did Americans, in the light also of Syria's presumed complicity in the 1988 Lockerbie disaster, when Pan Am Flight 103 was the victim of another bomb, and when 259 people were killed. The CIA began saying that Syria had been cleared of responsibility in that case, with evidence now showing that in fact it was Libya who was responsible for the bomb on board the plane. In fact there now seems to be some hard evidence from former East German files that Libya was indeed responsible for that act of terrorism. Be that as it may, Syria's association with international terrorism was too much for many people, and the Syrian government eventually responded to pressure by declining the invitation to participate in the parade celebrations.

Controversy also accompanied the decision to hold a victory parade in Britain, though it went ahead on 21 June, 1991. It was very subdued, even by British, as compared with American, standards, and was heavily undersubscribed by public and church interest. Many groups were formed to express opposition to the whole concept, including, for example, the 'Committee for a Just Peace in the Middle East', which claimed the support of many Christian clergy and intellectuals.

What then are we to make of the way God's role has been presented by the governments and churches of the West in these ceremonies?

Some of the readers of this article may have seen a published copy of Prof. Jan A. B. Jongeneel's 'Open Letter' to Dr Billy Graham in February 1991. This Professor of Missions at Utrecht University took great exception to the report that Dr Graham had prayed with President Bush, members of his cabinet, and high-ranking officers of the various armed forces, for God's blessing on the coalition's efforts. Prof. Jongeneel was convinced that Dr Graham had compromised the gospel of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, by not extending love and a spirit of reconciliation as much to Saddam Hussein as to George Bush, in the light of Jesus' command to love one's enemies and to bless those who curse.

At the close of the letter he moved on to another tack, maintaining what many would see as a prophetic stance in the whole situation:

As a missiologist I fear, moreover, that a victory on the battle field will turn out to be a pyrrhic victory. For many years to come, millions of Muslims in the whole world will remember this war as the war of 'western Christianity'... against a nation which in majority is Muslim.... For many years to come, the third world nations will remember this battle as the battle of the rich Northern part of the world, being hungry for oil (instead of being hungry after righteousness), against the South. May God enlighten your heart and mind to distinguish more clearly between patriotism and evangelism, between crusades and the Crucified, between westernization and Christianization, between oil and anointment with the Holy Spirit.<sup>30</sup>

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30 Printed in *Mission Studies*, vol. 8, no.1, 1991, p 115.

## Mission to Muslim people

### *Presuppositions, goals and methods*

It is always far too easy simply to state that everything must be re-evaluated, but I am not so sure that such a radical piece of self-examination would not have a place in the present context. There are many mission agencies, para-church bodies and local congregations involved one way or another in what they term mission to Muslims, but to whom are they accountable? How do they operate? What is their attitude to Islam, Muslims and mission?

We have already mentioned in this paper that many Christians in the West view Islam as a demonic power, and are motivated to a very large extent by the desire to destroy it as a world faith. This belief often spills over into a demonisation of Muslims, or at the very least, into a negative attitude of radical distrust and dislike. For not a few, it is admixed with feelings of racial prejudice. Missions need to be quite sure that they have purged themselves of any such attitudes.

On the other hand, controversy still surrounds the claim of some church leaders and specialists that Islam is a legitimate route to the one true God. Even the claim that it is an authentic schoolmaster to Christ is passionately denied by those Christians who at most could see it as a sincere attempt by humanity to find God. Perhaps it is time we initiated a series of programmes designed to help us wrestle more coherently and co-ordinatedly with this issue?

One particular issue which must be faced now, though, concerns the use of aggressive, military language by some agencies in the light of the Gulf War. Those of us who are aware of the fact that the war has been perceived as a new manifestation of the crusades will realise the danger involved in using such crusader-sounding language in mission-strategy and mission publications. At this time especially it is bound to reinforce the notion that the political and military strikes of the past months have been part of a larger strategy to seek to impose Western, Christian control over the Middle East.

Here are two examples of mission agencies which have published material in this vein in recent months. In the Fall/Winter 1990 edition of their magazine, *Reach Out*, the organisation Horizons commented that at last Christians in the West were waking up to the need to evangelise the Muslim world. These words are typical of the language used:

The Second World War resulted in a strong missionary movement, most of which centred on Asia and Europe. Is it possible that God will use the Gulf crisis to bring about an unprecedented missionary movement to the Muslim World? Are you ready?<sup>31</sup>

More explicit still are the words of MECO, who in their May-June edition of *Crossroads* make it clear that Western Christians are being called by God to engage in a war with Islam:

The spiritual battle for lives in the Middle East...is for the most part neglected.... Missionaries to Kuwait — none.... Missionaries to Iraq — none. Islam has almost complete ascendancy.... The world scene is

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31 *Reach Out*, Fall/Winter 1990, pp 14f. See also the Spring/Summer 1991 issue, pp 5, 10.

volatile, opportunities available today may be gone next week.... Let us seize the opportunities to fight for and establish a new regime.<sup>32</sup>

How much cross-cultural sensitivity lies behind this sort of statement and call? Even at regular parish and pulpit level there is a tendency to view the terrible political and social situation of the Middle East, in Israel especially, as part and parcel of God's great plan. It is all leading to the need for God to step in and sort it out, which was his purpose all along. How many sermons have been preached, particularly in the season of Advent, dwelling on the 'tragic irony' that the land of the 'Prince of Peace' is characterised by violence and oppression? That the region is made up largely of regular people trying to live regular lives seems to be lost on so many people, missions specialists among them.

It is surely important that missiologists and mission agencies of every sort come together soon to debate the issues involved in all of this.

### *Mission and dialogue*

The relationship between these two concepts and realities is a thorny one which has long been established on the modern agenda. The point which I want to make here is that even those Christians (and mission agencies) who want to maintain the need to share the Gospel with Muslims in the hope that they will turn to Jesus for salvation must seek to obey the commandment of God that we love our neighbour as much as we love ourselves. And on a most important level this means making sure that we do not misrepresent him/her to others or to ourselves. Western Christians are often guilty of just this vis-à-vis Islam and Muslims. Challenges need to be made to the missions about how they ensure that their staff and supporters are knowledgeable about Islam, about how Islamic states and societies work, and about the fears and aspirations of Muslim minorities in other societies. Ignorance has never been a virtue.

### *Working with, and through, the local churches*

It is my conviction and not mine alone, that successful mission in the Middle East depends upon working with the indigenous churches as well as with those churches which are themselves the fruit of nineteenth and twentieth-century mission. Reference has already been made to the woeful ignorance of some Western Christians of the existence of the indigenous churches and the tendency of western evangelicals to see them as hopelessly compromised in relation to the gospel, but there is good reason to believe that the future of mission in the Middle East lies in a partnership with the existing churches which respects local culture and local tradition, is eager to learn from the local church and to contribute to strengthening it, rather than to import alien culture and alien structures which in turn create dependency.

One point, however, which may well bear repeating, concerns the so-called guest-workers of the Middle East, those labourers from all over the two-thirds world who have been allowed by various governments to live in their countries in great numbers. Many thousands of these people are

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32 *Crossroads*, May-June 1991, pp 12f.

strongly committed Christians. Is it not important, then, especially in the light of what some see as the disqualification of Western Christendom to work in the region, to consider seriously working increasingly with and through them? This will, of course, involve just as much care and sensitivity as working with the indigenous churches.

### *Conclusion*

I hope that something of the complexity of the situation has been brought out in this article. It is very easy for Western Christians to evaluate issues like the Gulf War from completely Western perspectives, but this must be avoided. Indeed the truth in this case is that even within Western Christendom there is more than one way in which to assess the fact and the effects of the Gulf War. What I have intended to do is to help us assess the issues something over one year from the outbreak of the Gulf War. Events are still unfolding, however, and we are learning ever more about Iraq's secret stockpile of nuclear and chemical weapons-components, about the plight of the various displaced and oppressed persons in the Middle East, about the readiness of Israel and the Muslim nations to enter into negotiations over peace in the region.

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