

Samplings from Non-Western Christianity

Colleagues,

The second Thursday every month our local Lutheran Professional Church Workers Conference gathers for liturgy, program, business and lunch. This morning 30-some showed up. At lunch today one of my buddies commented positively about Thursday Theology, but couldn't resist the quip: "Some of them, Ed, are a bit long."

So in deference to such a "challenged" colleague I was going to post today one single page, the book review below. But then—Epiphanically via some Telstar in the sky—another item, unsolicited and authored by someone completely unknown to me, arrived in my in-basket. It fits the theme, so I'm adding it on. Thus all of you may share in my serendipity. [And you, brother "X" (you know who you are!), may stop reading wherever your energy expires.]

The book review is destined for *MISSIOLOGY*, the journal of the American Society of Missiology. Few of you on the listserve, I'm guessing, will see it there. Don't be scared off by the book's German title. Most of its chapters—and all of the review—are in English.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

ITEM I: BOOK REVIEW

**"Christen und Gewuerze." Konfrontation und
Interaktion kolonialer und indigener**

Christentumsvarianten

["Christians and Spices." Confrontation and Interaction between Colonial and Indigenous Varieties of Christianity]

Edited by Klaus Koschorke

Studies in the History of Christianity in the Non-Western World, Vol. 1

Goettingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

1998, 298 pp., paper, 98 German marks [= approx. US\$50.00]

"Christians and Spices. That's what we're looking for." So said Vasco da Gama's crew to the Arab merchants they met as they went ashore in India in 1498. That these Portuguese explorers were looking for spices is no surprise, but that they also expected to find Christians on location was unknown to this reviewer. And the story of their eventual encounter with the Thomas Christians (Syrian Orthodox) is one of the chapters in this book—including the episode of their initial thanksgiving mass celebrated in a Hindu temple. They thought it was a Christian church—even though the many arms on the statue of the Virgin did give them pause!

This volume contains the papers—eleven in English, eight in German—presented during the International Interdisciplinary Symposium "Christians and Spices" which took place in Freising, near Munich, 14-16 February, 1997. The theme, taken from the episode just mentioned, engendered wide-ranging discussion of the many different forms of interaction between indigenous Christians of the non-European world and the colonial Christianity of the west during the past five centuries. These forms run the gamut from friendly co-existence to conflict, and in some cases attempted take-over by the colonial Christians to see to it that the locals be brought into line with correct [= European] Christianity. Such attempts regularly failed.

At the same time this volume serves to begin a new series of studies to be published on the history of Christianity in Asia, Oceania, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. The Christianity found in these parts of the world has played an increasingly significant role in the context of World Christianity. Its long history can no longer be regarded as a mere appendix to Western mission and church history. These essays document that with 16 case studies and then three concluding papers probing “overarching historical perspectives” that seek to link the case studies.

The essays are gems. Some of the case studies, e.g., the da Gama story, the Jesuits arriving in Ethiopia, portray slice-of-life encounters the Westerners had with Christian communities already on location when “they got off the boat.” Others examine what happened between indigenous Christian varieties (initially rooted in early western mission activity) and the main-line missionaries who came centuries later. The venues for these cases are indeed international. Besides India and Ethiopia already mentioned, there is 18th century Congo Christianity, several cases from Latin America (Bolivia, Brazil, Peru), the Taiping Christians in China, as well as studies focused on Uganda, “the Arab world,” Korea, Nigeria, Ceylon, and “Asian Christian Writings for the 16th – 18th centuries.” Abstracts for each essay are present—in German, English and Spanish.

Herewith a bit more about one of the chapters. Its author is the only one I personally know, Martin Dreher, a Brazilian Lutheran. Dreher examines popular Catholicism and Pentecostalism in Brazil. “In Latin America, Pentecostalism is the major religious phenomenon of the 20th century. Today, after its introduction in 1910 . . . it has won at least 20% of the Brazilian population and has been able to develop its own indigenous forms. It combines traditions from pre-columbian America, African religiosity and Brazilian popular Catholicism.” (214) When 19th

and 20th century German and Italian immigrants brought authentic “Roman” catholicism to Brazil, there was no room left for such “folk-Catholicism.” Dreher shows how that oppression by the magisterial church, and the resistance it met in this folk piety, opened the gates for a symbiosis with Pentecostalism. Thus a religiosity that had become fundamental in Brazilian popular piety found a new channel for continuing its life—and is now booming.

For this reviewer CHRISTIANS AND SPICES opens a genuinely new frontier.

ITEM II: YESTERDAY’S EMAIL FROM INDIA (unedited text)

Dear and loving Rev. Edward H. Schroeder Greetings in our Lord’s matchless name.

I was born and brought up in an orthodox and prominent muslim family of India. I was a staunch muslim, studied Koran well and published books about Koran as its contents. But while studying in the university I was addicted on drugs and lost peace. Some of the Catholic brothers, who were studying for priesthood were my classmates. They advised me to believe Jesus as the Saviour. I denied and became violent towards them, because it was unimaginable for me to believe Jesus as the son of God and living God and also His crucifixion. But my Lord Jesus Himself showed me how and why He redeemed. And God has given me grace to accept Jesus as my Saviour and Lord. I suffered very many obstacles and persecutions from my own people. So I left home.

God filled me with His Holy Spirit and I’m preaching Gospel now and evangelising people, especially muslims.

From 31st Dec.evening to till 1st Jan. morning we had a full night prayer service at my residence. 142 people were participating. We together prayed to God to give salvation of Jesus for at least 2001 Muslim families during the year 2001 through our ministry. We also asked God to raise financial supporters and sponserers for us. Nobody is supporting us now, but God. I humbly request you to pray for us that God may send His Holy Spirit upon us to be a great witness among the Muslim world.

At any cost to win muslim world is our pledge in our Lord. We want to conduct Gospel conventions, personal and postal evangelism, correspondance courses, seekers conferences, training institutions, printing and publishing tracts and literature in different languages, establishing rehabilitation centres for those who will have persecutions and troubles and mentoring successors for this work. Please pray, ask your prayer partners to pray and if the Holy Spirit guides you please find some sponserers for this great task. Hope you will introduce all of your spiritual friends about me and our ministry.

Hereby I send you the model of a leaflet for Muslims. You may find mistakes, for my English is very poor. Hope you will correct and send it your friends also. If we get sponserers, we want to publish it in different languages. If you want to publish it in your journals, you are free to publish as it is.

Also if the Holy Spirit asks you to send some gifts or donations for this ministry, please send it in the account of "SALEM VOICE", A/c No. C&I 56 in the address of Bro. Paul Ciniraj Mohamed, Salem Voice, Baseelia, Devalokam (P.O), Kottayam, Kerala-686 038, INDIA. If anybody send foreign contributions, please send it in the account of Bro. Paul Ciniraj only.

Thanking you

Yours sincerely in our Lord
Bro. Paul Ciniraj

Leaflet for Muslims: Show us the straight path (Koran 1:5)

"Ih'dina Sirathwal musthakim" is the fifth verse of the first Surah of the Glorious Koran and it means "Show us the straight path". There is a tradition saying that 'sirathwal musthakim' is a narrow bridge over hell to the heaven which made out of seven torn pieces of a hair. The righteous can pass over the bridge without any trials; but the wicked will go to hell.

A worldly man cannot pass over the narrow bridge. Jesus says in the Book of Injil (Gospel) that "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Mt 7:13-14). In the Koran also Allah gives warning to the mankind "Lo! they who deny our revelations and scorn them, for them the gates of Heaven will not be opened nor will they enter the garden until the camel goeth through the needle's eye" (Koran 7:40).

As in the Koran there is a Right Narrow Path to get into the Heaven.

The Koran says: "Allah created Adam out of mud, fashioned him and told the angels to fall and prostrate before the man. Iblis (Lucifer) did not obey. God degraded him. Still he asked God to reprieve till the day when the human beings are raised from the dead. It was granted. Then Iblis said to God that he will lurk in ambush of man on God's Right Path. Again he said that he will go upon them from before them and from

behind them and from their right hands and from their left hands for God would not find most of them beholden” (Koran 7:10-17).

Mankind does not see the Right Narrow Path, because it is hidden by Iblis. Also he tries to lead them into wrong, broad and worldly ways. But the children of Abraham and Ishmael knows the broad path is not the right one to Heaven. So we pray to God to show us the Right Path.

Jesus said: “Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Lk 13:24). In the Scripture of Holy Bible, same Jesus declared : “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (Jn 14:6).

The Koran says in 19:21 about Jesus as a revelation for mankind and a mercy from Allah, and it is a thing ordained.

Jesus destroyed the head of Iblis, and opened the narrow door of Heaven. He says: “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). Also He has given grace for those who is born of God can overcome the world. Yes! It is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. (1Jn 5:4). But still it is very sad to say that Gospel is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God (2Cor 4:3-4).

The Bible says in 1Tim 2:5 that there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. The Koran also says very clearly that Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near unto Allah (Koran 3:45). So we may keep our duty to Allah and obey Jesus (Koran 3:50; 43:61).

May Allah bless all of us to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven through the Right Narrow Path, which is Jesus, the Word of God (Kalimathullah), the Spirit of God (Ruhullah) and the Messiah of God (Massihullah) who became ransom for many.

For more details please contact:

*Bro. Paul Siniraj Mohamed,
Salem Voice, Baseelia, Devalokam,
Kottayam-686 038, Kerala, INDIA
E-mail: siniraj@vsnl.com*