

General Introduction

C. T. R. Hewer

The eight keynote papers were circulated in advance to all participants, who were in turn requested to write comments, which were sent out to all those attending so that our discussions could begin in the most informed manner. These comments varied in length, with some being focused on the details of the keynote papers and others being more discursive. Five of these comments are here reproduced in full with named authors. The main points of the remainder are summarised in the following paragraphs, with attention being given to generality rather than a minute discussion of the issues raised in the keynote papers.

There was a general welcome for ACW as the initiative of a group of Muslim scholars, although the fact that many from the original group of 138 had not been conspicuous in their efforts to make its message known in their own communities or reach out to local Christian leaders or communities was noted. There was a widespread ignorance of the existence and contents of ACW reported from around the major areas of Muslim and Christian habitation represented by participants. It was particularly noteworthy that the document seemed to be unknown in seminaries and *madrasas*, as well as amongst local and regional religious leaders. If the message is to reach a wider audience, then a strategy needs to be developed to see it translated into regional languages and advocated in a structured way.

The lack of structured follow-up and practical outcomes towards which people could work in ACW was noted by some commentators as a "weakness" and by others as a "limitation". If it is to have any lasting impact, then it would need to be taken up by academics and religious leaders, on the one hand, and at the grass-roots level, on the other. No practical methodologies for doing this were forthcoming. There is a serious need for discussions to be opened up around the ethical themes of ACW between religious communities and secular societies, and also to broaden the scope of the religions involved, to include Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and followers of Traditional Religions. The natural social plurality in matters of religion, dominant

over centuries in the areas from which participants were drawn, was seen as a strength to be shared more widely. Within this context, in addition to the examples given in the keynote papers, particular attention could be drawn to the *pancasila* philosophy in Indonesia and the ability of African extended families to embrace the multiple religious affiliations of their members.

Two key elements in a way forward emerged: media and personal relationships. The impact of the media on matters relating to Christians and Muslims around the world was seen as a decisive factor, both in areas directly reached by the mass media and in those where their impact was discernable in a more remote way. Getting to know people personally and working with them in a relational way was highlighted as being all-important if progress is to be made. The very title of this publication gives vent to the dominant comment on ACW itself; there is a fundamental lack of emphasis given to justice, as a characteristic of God, an overarching ethical theme, a practical tool to set and assess targets, and as the grounding to transform ACW into a vehicle of change within Muslim and Christian communities worldwide.

The political situation of the areas from which the conference participants were drawn is well documented in the papers themselves. Two themes from the comments are worthy of particular notice: political structures and the relationship of religion and state. A common feature in the countries represented from Africa and Asia is that in recent decades they have emerged from periods of European colonial rule. One of the consequences of this process has been the maelstrom of forms of government with varying degrees of corruption. Many countries are still working through the effects of rule by the post-colonial elites, who were left in place at independence, in others, governments can be seen in terms of their military, tribal or feudal characteristics. The concomitant socio-economic situation of people can often be dressed in religious garb and is subject to malevolent manipulation.

The relationship of religion and state is a perennially controverted one, as the history of Europe alone can testify. The separation of both can take different forms and thus the terms "secular, secularity and secularism" are multivalent in their meanings. Voices were raised on this subject in the comments from a variety of contexts

and the Indian "secular neutrality of the state in matters of religion" was particularly emphasised. Thus the division of territory on religious grounds was seen to heighten Christian-Muslim tensions and the lack of a clearly articulated constitution for a nation was identified as a cause of the kind of vacuum that leads to undifferentiated calls for "the introduction of Shari'a". The only groups that tend to benefit in such situations are the political-social-economic elites. Whilst religious and theological debates and disputes can be ways to absorb the time, effort and funds of the poor; therefore a secular state could be seen as freed to work for justice and the human rights all citizens.

The first of our five discrete named comments comes from Dan Madigan and should better be viewed as a Christian theological reflection on ACW rather than as a comment on the keynote papers. Ataullah Siddiqui lays emphasis on the theme of justice, which became the dominant at Cadenabbia, as well as expressing reservations about the mistaken idea that the Shari'a is "ready and waiting for implementation" in Muslim societies and finally focusing on the ignorance of the other faith community amongst religious leaders. Hermen Shastri explores the dynamics of majority-minority living and draws attention to the need to distinguish global and local aspects and solutions in dialogue. Amir Farid speaks on behalf of a deeply-rooted tradition within Islam, which has not been to the fore in ACW discussions: that Q. 3:64 is intended to call Christians back to the doctrine of *tawhid* and purify their distorted notions of the one true God. Finally, Chris Hewer comments on some major themes of ACW and the keynote papers.