

# Jesus Christ, Saviour of the World: Exposition of Text and Sculpture John 4 and Jonathan Clarke's Cross of Christ "The Eighth Hour"



***Valedictory Lecture by Canon Graham Kings  
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## **A. Introduction**

All good theology is eucharistic and personal, so I would like to begin with thanksgiving. I am very grateful to the Centre for Advanced Religious and Theological Studies, to the Henry Martyn Trust and to the Cambridge Theological Federation for their extraordinary hospitality towards the Henry Martyn Centre and for the invitation to give this lecture.

Over the last few years CARTS has developed imaginatively as the co-ordinated research wing of the Faculty of Divinity. Sometimes it has seemed to grow on a 'wing and a prayer': in fact, the new Faculty building has its own CARTS wing and, I hope, prayer too. Sometimes the carts have come before the horses, but this has usually been soon sorted out. Professor David Ford's and Dr David Thompson's encouragement of the Henry Martyn Centre, as a

foundational focus for CARTS *projects* on mission and world Christianity, is greatly appreciated.

The Henry Martyn Trustees, chaired by Colin Parker, have been very trusting and patient in generously funding the founding of the Centre, as well as the Lectureship in Mission Studies. The Cambridge Theological Federation was made up of four institutions when I returned from Kenya and took up the new post in 1992, with a study at Ridley Hall. Now we are seven full members and two associate institutes, the Henry Martyn Centre being one of the latter, based here at Westminster College since the summer of 1995. Hugo de Waal and Graham Cray at Ridley Hall, and Martin Cressy and David Cornick at Westminster College, have been wonderfully welcoming as Principals.

Finally I would like to thank all the members of staff at the HMC, who form such a crucial, coherent and co-inherent team. Kirsteen Kim (in administration), Jane Gregory and Isobel Fox (in the library), Sue Sutton and Carole Pickering (in the archives) and Sue Anderson (in the Henry Martyn Hall). Together with Brian Stanley and Liesl Amos, in the Currents in World Christianity project just over the corridor, we have had much fruitful and playful interaction.[1]

John Oman was the fourth Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge and his seminal book, *Grace and Personality*, was first published in 1917[2].

Oman opened his book with considerations of God's grace and work in nature and history:

What all life does say to us is that God does not conduct His rivers, like arrows, to the sea. The ruler and compass are only for finite mortals who labour, by taking thought, to overcome their limitations, and are not for the Infinite mind. *The expedition demanded by man's small power and short day produces the canal, but nature, with a beneficent and picturesque circumambulancy, the work of a more spacious and less precipitate mind, produces the river. Why should we assume that, in all the rest of His ways, He rejoices in the river, but, in religion, can use no adequate method save the canal?* The defence of the infallible is the defence of the canal against the river, of the channel blasted through the rock against the basin dug by an element which swerves at a pebble or a firmer clay[3]

Later in the book Oman mentioned again the difference between a straight line and a curve:

..... grace is never a mere direct line of power, passing through us with impersonal directness, as light through window-glass, but is a curve of patient, personal wisdom, encircling and embracing us and all our concerns. *With this curve a true theology is wholly occupied*[4].

Jesus did not just pass through Samaria, from Judea to Galilee, but took a curve and stayed with the Samaritans.

Now to the texts and sculpture - Jesus Christ, Saviour of the World. We shall look first at two passages in the fourth gospel known traditionally as the Gospel of John and then at Jonathan Clarke's sculpture. In both sections we shall consider, with the help of poetry, issues raised for the study of mission and theology today, before concluding.

## **B. JOHN'S GOSPEL**

### **1. John Chapter Four - The Witness of Jesus to the Samaritans and of the Samaritans to Jesus**

This afternoon we do not have time to go into the detailed historical questions, but I have been helped very much concerning these by an perceptive study by Teresa Okure, Professor of New Testament at the Catholic Higher Institute of West Africa, in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Her doctoral thesis published in Tübingen by Mohr, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4: 1-42* has many fascinating insights from an African woman's perspective. Teresa lectured on Mission and Evangelism in the Federation in 1997 and she also gave a lecture in this building in March last year as part of the launch of the International Bible Commentary edited by William Farmer. Carrie Pemberton's Cambridge doctoral thesis assesses her key contribution to African theology.[5]

Jesus is exhausted and is in Samaritan territory. The Samaritans were seen by the Jews as having impure blood and as seceders from true Judaism. They were partly the descendents of the people whom the Assyrians brought into the conquered northern Kingdom after 721 BC and they worshipped at their own temple on Mount Gerizim. Jesus sits by the famous well at Sychar, which has been identified with the ancient Shechem, where Abraham first sacrificed when he arrived in Canaan and where Jacob bought a plot of land, had given the well to Joseph his beloved son, and was later buried. As a beggar, and a Jewish man, he asks for water from a Samaritan woman, a double scandal. Okure has shown how some Jewish rabbis believed that Samaritan women were menstrous from birth and thus were a perpetual source of

uncleanliness.[6] The woman is surprised by the irony of Jesus' request and, as usual, Jesus strikes while the irony is hot. He focuses on the gift of God and of living water, which can also mean bubbling spring water.

His insight into her marital status may echo the disorder in Samaritan religion, with their earlier worship of five gods. She recognises him as a prophet and asks about the competing rights of Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim. Jesus replies "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is now coming, and now is here, when the true worshippers will worship in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him". John 4: 22-24.

Intrigued, she raises the question of the Messiah for the Samaritans were expecting a teaching Messiah, like a second Moses, rather than the Jewish hope of a conquering Messiah, like a second David. Jesus then, himself, reveals his messiahship.

She leaves her water pot to spread the message and Jesus discusses mission with his returning and scandalised disciples. Other Samaritans from the city now come to believe through her witness and (after he amazingly agrees to stay for two days) through *his* own words and personal presence. They then declare "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world." (John 4:42). The title 'Saviour of the world' would have been known to many readers of the gospel as given also to Greek gods and to the Roman Emperor himself. Jesus was crucially - literally - different from these, as we shall see when we consider the cross.

Teresa Okure has drawn out various mission insights from Jesus' dialogue in this passage which are important for those who follow in the wake of Jesus' mission

Interdependence thus emerges as the primary mission feature inherent in this dialogue. Moreover it is Jesus who throughout adapts himself to the language categories introduced by the woman whose interventions he takes most seriously...[7]

Secondly, Jesus' manner and method of approach is "essentially one of humility and deep respect". He approaches as a beggar.

Thirdly, the woman speaks in generalized categories (Jews and Samaritans, Jacob and his household, the fathers, the Messiah will tell us), Jesus' message is primarily directed to her personally (if you knew, you would ask... believe me, woman; I am speaking to you, I am he.)

Fourthly, he leads her through a process of personal discovery and finally the stress is on salvation as the gift of God.

How may we apply this to mission and theology today?

May not a similarity be discerned between the relationship between Jews and the Samaritans and Christians and Muslims? For all have common ancestors in Abraham Isaac and Jacob and Moses but there have been important divergences.

To develop this relationship and particularly concerning the question of continuity and difference let us try focusing on a key, startling and (to a Muslim) blasphemous question. It came to me when we served in Kenya with the Church Mission Society. I taught in a college near Mount Kenya and while on holiday at the coast in 1988 visited a mosque in Mombasa, while Ali and our daughters waited outside.

### **Is Jesus the Son of Allah?[8]**

Kneeling alone on the soft carpet  
of a Mombasa mosque,  
Chandeliers above, galleries around,  
Stereo system stacked high in the corner,  
The quiet question came to me -  
Is Jesus the Son of Allah?

The question is not about Jesus, but Allah:  
The Arabic for God is more than a name  
but is He the same  
as our God and Father?

In Southern Sudan  
a Christian will answer, militantly, "No":  
In Pakistan  
a Christian may answer, philosophically, "Yes":

In Saudi Arabia  
a Muslim will answer, immediately, "No":  
So does it depend where we stand - or kneel?

El Shaddai of Abraham  
Is revealed as Yahweh to Moses,  
But not as Ba'al to Elijah:  
What of Almighty Allah?

The crucial clue may lead us to  
A Muslim now submitting  
To the Ultimate Submitter,  
Jesus the Messiah.

He does not change his God,  
for God is One,  
But discovers in the Son  
That God is strangely, inconceivably great,  
because He became so conceivably small;  
That God, in the end, is mercifully just  
since He has absorbed the evil of all.

We may, perhaps, then whisper  
that Jesus is the Son of Allah:  
But in this naked act of naming,  
the active Word transforms the Name.

Prostrate upon the carpet of a Mombasa mosque,  
Softly to Jesus, Son of Allah, I prayed;  
Then rose again to slip outside  
and join my wife and daughters,  
who were waiting in the shade.

The shape of the poem is my praying as a Christian in an empty mosque in Mombasa. It considers the question of continuity between the concept of God in Islam and the 'God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>[9]</sup> The Arabic word 'Allah' predates Islam

and is used today as the word for God by the Coptic Church of Egypt. After discussing different contexts (where the ratios of Christians to Muslims vary), the 'cross-like' clue to the question comes from thinking about a Muslim convert. One of the root meanings of the word Muslim is 'one who submits'. Islam has always claimed Abraham as a Muslim, because he submitted to God: this poem etymologically presents Jesus Christ as the complete 'Muslim', in that only he has fully submitted to God in life, and particularly in death.

Is the relationship between the Christian and Islamic concepts of God one of continuity like the relationship between the Mesopotamian High God El (often with the added adjective Shaddai - 'Almighty') and the unique name revealed to Moses, Yahweh?[10] Or is the relationship one of confrontation similar to Yahweh's confronting of Ba'al through Elijah prophetic miracles.[11]

There is continuity of the concept of God for the converted Muslim, for God is One, but also paradoxical new insights come through Jesus Christ who really was crucified (and not replaced by another at the last moment, as mentioned in the Qur'an). God in his Son enters his own created world and, in the crucified Christ, takes away and into himself, the sin of that world. Thereby, conflicting Islamic adjectives for Allah are reconciled.

This continuity is recognised, although the word 'perhaps' shows hesitancy in the consequent mixing of different 'languages registers' between Islam and Christianity. The answer, however, is so horrific to Muslim ears that it can only be whispered, not shouted.

In this shameless juxtaposition of three concepts 'Jesus', 'Allah' and 'Allah having a Son' (a dangerous 'naked act of naming'), the Logos (who was in the beginning with God) is so powerful that he changes the inner meaning of the name 'Allah' into something like 'Abba', the Aramaic address to God introduced by Jesus.

In realising this, I have to change my posture in prayer to one more appropriate. I secretly enunciate the new insights by praying to Jesus as the Son of Allah and then quietly leave. After the continuity, the contrast: women who were the first witnesses of the risen Jesus, in Islam are kept in the shadows.

## **2. John Chapter Nineteen - The Roman Governors Witness to the World that Jesus is the King of the Jews**

Jesus is proclaimed as the Saviour of the world by the Samaritans in chapter four, and in John chapter nineteen he is ironically proclaimed by the Roman Governor as King of the Jews.

The themes of testimony and trial are woven throughout the fourth Gospel.

Who is on trial in chapter nineteen? Is it Jesus, the Holy One, or Pilate, who is afraid that if he sets Jesus free he himself will be brought to trial before the Emperor? The leaders of the Jews have already condemned themselves for blasphemy out of their own mouths: 'We have no king but Caesar.'

Pilate had an inscription written and fastened to the cross; it read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews'. This inscription, in Hebrew, Latin and Greek, was read by many Jews, since the place where Jesus was crucified was not far from the city. So the Jewish chief priests said to Pilate, 'You should not write "King of the Jews", but rather "He claimed to be king of the Jews".'. Pilate replied, 'What I have written, I have written.' John 19:19-22

Most students of the New Testament consider that Mark was the first written Gospel. However, maybe we can see a supreme irony in Pilate's order concerning the 'title' written above the cross of Christ. Perhaps he who condemned Jesus wrote the first 'Gospel' - the Jews first, but also to the Gentiles, since it was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek for *all* to see. I wrote this poem on Good Friday in 1999 at St Andrew's Church Chesterton.

Jesus the Sacred, tried before Pilate;  
Pilate the sacred - trial before Caesar:  
Jesus, entitled to justice from Rome,  
Entitled by Pilate 'The King of the Jews'.

First written Gospel, translated for all,  
Title deeds of the Kingdom of God;  
Proclaimed to the city, unchanging Word,  
'What is written is written', bequeathed to the world.

But what does it mean today 'bequeathed to the world'? We turn now to consider the question of **eternal salvation and people of other faiths and suggest a new Matrix**

The popular contemporary matrix of 'exclusivism', 'inclusivism' and 'pluralism' concerning this subject of salvation and people of other faiths has become tedious and tendentious. It may be that these 'isms' need to become 'wasms'. They are regularly repeated without much thought and were developed from a



so-called 'pluralist' position, with other positions being plotted from that perspective. In my following suggested alternative matrix, the phrase 'the proclaimed Christ', includes within it the sensitive, integrated sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ by word and deed. The word 'salvation' assumes the importance of temporal salvation in this life, but the focus in this matrix is on 'eternal salvation' beyond death.

### **(i) The Narrow Scope of Salvation**

In this understanding salvation is centred on Jesus Christ for those who respond in faith to the proclaimed Christ and eternal punishment is expected for those who have never heard of Christ and for those who reject the proclaimed Christ.

### **(ii) The Wider Hope of Salvation**

In this understanding salvation is centred on Jesus Christ for those who respond in faith to the proclaimed Christ and for those who respond in faith to 'God' as they know him. Judgement as banishment into eternal nothingness[12] (i.e. a reversal of creation *ex nihilo*) is expected for those who reject the proclaimed Christ or 'God' as they know him.

### **(iii) The Cosmic Promise of Salvation**

In this understanding universal salvation is effected for all, centred on Christ, for those who respond in faith to the proclaimed Christ, for those who respond in faith to 'God' as they know him and for those who reject the proclaimed Christ or 'God' as they know him. There is judgement in time (in this life), but no eternal judgement.

### **(iv) The Natural Assumption of Salvation**

In this understanding universal salvation is effected for all, centred on 'God', with Jesus as merely a human prophet. There is no judgement in time or in eternity. The advantage of this new matrix, it seems to me, is that it relates to the doctrine of judgement as well as to the doctrines of salvation and of christology. It also frees up the categories by having four rather than three. In the traditional matrix, the 'narrow scope' would probably be labelled as 'exclusivist'; both the 'wider hope' and the 'cosmic promise' would be lumped together as 'inclusivist' and the 'natural assumption' would be seen as 'pluralist'.

The major division in terms of high and low christologies is between the first three and the last. The major division in terms of judgement for eternity (or universalism) is between the first two and the last two. The major division in terms of the validity of mission is between the first three and the last.

Very conservative Christians have traditionally held to the narrow scope, but this, in effect, involves the doctrine of 'condemnation by geography or chronology'. If you were born outside of an area where, or before the time when, the good news of Christ had been effectively proclaimed you would be automatically condemned on the last day. This does not match the criteria of the *justice* of God. Paul argues in Romans that God is just even on terms of human justice.

Universalists, with a high Christology have felt most at home with my third position, the 'cosmic promise', but often discussions on universalism betray an uneasy ambivalence about the biblical passages that denote judgement for eternity. It seems to me that the warnings of Jesus and Paul were not empty words. This position may claim to be strong on grace but it seems to me, to be weak on human responsibility.

The fourth position of 'natural assumption' involves a radical re-interpretation of the doctrine of God (cutting loose from Trinitarian understandings) which in effect cries out for a new religion. It is weak on biblical exegesis, for that is seen as less important than philosophical considerations.

I would see myself as fitting into the second 'wider hope' position. This holds to the reality of eternal judgement but avoids the twin injustices of eternal punishment (by holding to the doctrine of 'annihilation') and of 'condemnation by geography and chronology' (by stressing the validity of the open response of faith in 'God' as he is already known, before the good news is proclaimed). It holds together the key conviction of Paul that in the end all things will be summed up in Christ (Ephesians 1:10), with his own warnings, and those of Jesus Christ, concerning eternal judgement. After judgement back into eternal nothingness, all that will be remaining, (with many many surprises, including people of other faiths) will indeed be 'in Christ' and summed up in him.

For the cross of Christ is at the epicentre of history. As a stone dropped into a pond causes ripples in all directions, (including downwards into the water) so

also the epicentric cross has effects backwards to the patriarchs as well as forwards to us and outwards to those who have not yet fully heard of Christ, but are open to God as they know him. Salvation by faith (not by religious observances), by Christ (even if unknown) and by the cross (which challenges all claims on God) seem to me to be 'three themes in one' that bring the promise of God's hope.

And now to the sculpture.

## B. JONATHAN CLARKE'S "THE EIGHTH HOUR"



### 1. The Story and Stories of the Sculpture

I am delighted that Jonathan Clarke and his father, Geoffrey, can be with us tonight and for the loan of this extraordinarily powerful sculpture 'The Eight Hour'. I first met Jonathan on Tuesday of Holy Week this year by chance in a gallery in Aldeburgh, where I was staying with my parents. I had been asking the Director of the gallery about possible sculptures suitable for a huge three storey stair well for Islington Vicarage and he said, pointing to a man who had just entered the gallery, "Here's your man" - not quite *Ecce Homo* - but close!

In the conversation Jonathan mentioned that he was part of the CARTS project, Theology Through the Arts, directed by Jeremy Begbie and had been commissioned by Ely Cathedral to create a large sculpture for the north wall, near the entrance. I learnt later that he had also created the Stations of the Cross for Southwell Minister, near Nottingham.

The Director described to me the sculpture Jonathan had at home, the Eighth Hour, and I was intrigued because I was preaching on Good Friday, at St Andrew's Chesterton, and had not yet found a focus for attention. I later phoned Jonathan and arranged, without seeing it, to have the sculpture on loan and pick it up from his home, near Bury St Edmunds the next evening en route home to Cambridge.

I tried to remember where I had previously seen such a distinctive aluminium surface, but could not grasp it. It became clear when Jonathan explained that he had learnt his craft of sculpting in polystyrene and pouring molten aluminium onto the mould, thereby vaporising it, from his father Geoffrey Clarke.

Geoffrey had pioneered this method and had been commissioned by All Souls Church Langham Place, London to make a modern pulpit in 1975. I had dusted and cleaned that pulpit every week for the academic year 1977-8 as the caretaker at All Souls before coming up to Cambridge.[13]

This father-son apprenticeship is very Johannine. C.H.Dodd has called John 5:19-20 the 'parable of the apprentice son'. "Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing."

I was very moved on seeing the sculpture for the first time and even more so when there was a deposition to remove it to our home. I drove to Cambridge at 30 miles an hour, as a hearse with a body in the back, arrived home at 10.30 and Ali, Miriam (our middle daughter) and I sat for 2 hours gazing at it and seeing new things in it. Miriam saw a skull in the torso (Golgotha). We noticed the twisted body and also twisted cross. The arms of the cross are Christ's arms and are twisted in 3 dimensions. They are twisted vertically, horizontally, and in line with each other.

Christ is not so much on the cross as in the cross. The cross is taking over him. He is being embedded in it. He may be seen as struggling, fighting and pushing away the sin and evil trying to stop it taking over him (almost in the atmosphere of Gethsemane 'Father take this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done').

He may also be seen as being engulfed by the sin and evil of the world, taking it on voluntarily, on our behalf. Both fighting it and vanquishing it, by being vanquished. Ultimately putting evil out of circulation by absorbing it himself. The bending of the head and the leaning forward of a muscular figure also may bring to mind an Old Testament hero.

Can you see the figure of Samson in the temple of the Philistines? Judges 16: 29-30 tells the story of Samson's death:

Samson put his arms round the two central pillars which supported the temple, his right arm round one and his left round the other and, bracing himself, he said, 'Let me die with the Philistines.' Then Samson leaned forward with all his might, and the temple crashed down on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those he had killed in his life. Judges 16:29-30

Jesus' death was the reverse of Samson's. The people throughout the world whom he saved in his death were more than those he had saved in his life. Maybe we can see Samson here reconfigured?

One of the fundamental charges against Jesus had to do with the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem (Mark 14:48). Witnesses could not agree, but in the fourth Gospel Jesus says 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again' and the writer adds 'The temple he was speaking of was his body.' (John 2:21).

We turn now to ...

## **2. The Sculpture and Primal Religion: Insights from Europe and Africa**

For what struck me on seeing the cross at first, in the context of the gallery near Bury St Edmunds, was the portrayal of the death of a hero of European primal religion, sometimes called pagan religion. Jonathan currently has an exhibition at Chappel gallery near Colchester of warrior heads and these seem to reflect his interest in Norse and European heroes.

C. S. Lewis was intrigued by Northern mythology as a young boy and throughout his life. A major part of his conversion to Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world concerned the relationship between Norse and European mythologies and the life and death of Jesus. On 19 September 1931 at Magdalen College, Oxford (the scene of much recent media attention) he walked and talked with two Christian friends, J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson (who taught English at Reading). Tolkien left at 3 in the morning and Dyson left at 4.00am. On 18 October in a letter to his long-term friend Arthur Greeves he explained what had been holding him back:

My puzzle was the whole doctrine of Redemption: in what sense the life and death of Christ 'saved' or 'opened salvation to' the world... What I couldn't see was how the life and death of Someone Else (whoever he was) 2000 years ago could help us here and now - except in so far as his *example* helped us. And the example business, tho' true and important, is not Christianity...

Now what Dyson and Tolkein showed me was this: that if I met the idea of sacrifice in a Pagan story I didn't mind it at all: again, that if I met the idea of a god sacrificing himself to himself ... I liked it very much and was mysteriously moved by it: again, that the idea of the dying and reviving god (Balder, Adonis, Bacchus) similarly moved me provided I met it anywhere except in the Gospels. The reason was that in the Pagan stories I was prepared to feel the myth as profound and suggestive of meanings beyond my grasp even tho' I could not say in cold prose 'what it meant'.

Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with the tremendous difference that it *really happened*: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remembering that it is God's myth where the others were men's myths: i.e. Pagan stories are God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as He found there, while Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call 'real things'. Therefore it is *true*, not in the sense of being a 'description' of God (that no finite mind could take in) but in the sense of being the way in which God chooses to (or can) appear to our faculties.[14]

How does God today choose to reveal himself, not to our universal faculties but to our University Faculties - of Divinity, History, Archaeology and Anthropology, and Natural Sciences? That is, I believe, the heart of the high calling of the Centre for Advanced Religious and Theological Studies.

And CARTS is CARTS not CATS. The study of religion - the R in CARTS - is an essential part of it. This is where we in Europe can be helped by theologians in Africa. Kwame Bediako from Ghana, who kindly preached at

the inauguration of this Henry Martyn lectureship on 22 January 1992 and later gave the Henry Martyn Lectures in 1993, has written:

By all indications, in Africa it is religion - and the findings in the history and phenomenology of religion - which have become the handmaid of theology.[15] ... If it has any validity, the African vindication of the theological significance of African primal religions also goes to affirm that the European primal heritage was not illusory, to be consigned to oblivion as primitive darkness... A serious Christian theological interest in European primal traditions and early Christianity amid those traditions, could provide a fresh approach to understanding Christian identity in Europe too, as well as opening new possibilities for the theological enterprise today...

For the signs of what appears to be a post-modernist rejection of the Enlightenment, seen partly in the resurgence of the phenomenon of the occult as well as some of the other features of the 'New Age', bearing the marks of a primal world-view, are sufficient indicators that a primal imagination suppressed rather than purged and integrated, rises to haunt the future.[16]

This is an important part of the project being planned in CARTS, Mission in the First Millennium, with which I have been involved with Winrich Loehr and Jayakiran Sebastian from Bangalore[17]. The emphasis will be on the expansion of Christianity southwards to Ethiopia and eastwards along the silk road to India and China, as well as traditionally westwards into the Roman Empire, but the project also plans to consider deeply Bediako's challenge to primal religion in Europe and its relevance to today's missionary and theological enterprise here.[18]

## **D. Conclusion**

So to conclude and to move on. My own description of mission studies is *missio quaerens intellectum* (mission seeking understanding).[19] It stresses the foundational starting point of engagement in mission and the exciting movement of inquiry, which rejoices in ever widening horizons. The study of mission organically develops into the study of world Christianity and these two have their own integrating dynamic of 'movement' and 'horizons'.

Mission and world Christianity relate not only chronologically - in that the present world-wide Church is historically the fruit of various missionary movements (including significant indigenous movements) - but also creatively today - in that people in mission are being sent 'from everywhere to everywhere'.[20]

Current systematic theology has had to take into account various features from around the world.[21] Eurocentric theology has been named as such and now African, Asian Latin American and Pacific theologies bring biblical perspectives and correctives. I believe it is an important part of the vocation of the Henry Martyn Centre to focus this stimulus in Cambridge.

It is my conviction that mission and theology interweave and interpenetrate more than is usually appreciated. To return to the theme of living water, mission is the river which waters the gardens of theology:[22] when it is blocked the gardens become a desert. Without the river of mission insights permeating all theology, mission often becomes merely an added extra, rather than theology becoming what it is called to be - 'theology *ad extra*' - facing towards the outside. The current 'Mission in Theology' lecture series, organised by Dan Hardy and Brian Stanley for the CARTS project Currents in World Christianity, is raising many, encouraging, fascinating insights on this subject.

It may be worthwhile trying to extend John Oman's parable of the river, with which we began to stress how the theme of mission as the river, is also focused on Jesus Christ. The good Oman wrote "...but nature, with a beneficent and picturesque circumambulancy, the work of a more spacious and less precipitate mind, produces the river." I would add that, although the river meanders its way, it does so from the spring to the sea. There is a definite beginning and an end, an alpha and omega.

In this meandering definitiveness there may be a reflection of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the World. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is also the Moving River in between. Jesus Christ combines in himself the Alpha, the Moving Way and the Omega. Thus we can see in him, an assurance of God's good news, which en route is diverted but in the end is not distorted.

He is the living spring which never dries up but continually wells up to eternal life. He is the boundless sea which never ends but for ever receives the river of Life. He is that moving river which bends and turns but presses it way onwards.

To this Jesus Christ all are invited and many become part of him as the Moving River. They are 'backdated' and counted as part of him from the



Beginning[23], even though they may join him very late. They are assured of being with him at the End, for nothing can separate them from this Moving River.[24] So in him not only does the fullness of the Godhead dwell but also the fullness of humanity, that multitude that no one can number.

I leave you here with a final short poem, in which I have tried to meditate on this biblical theme.

### **By the Waters of Delivery**

By breathing and brooding

By breaking and birthing

By parting and loosing

By stirring and soothing:

By giving, re-living

By stilling, refreshing

By drowning, immersing

By raising, re-versing

You, Lord, deliver us.

## **NOTES**

1. John Casson, a former assistant to Brian Stanley, left an eschatological gift embedded in my computer on his last day. Every time I typed my name, the phrase 'John Casson is cool' came up on the screen. He only showed me how to undo the trick five minutes before leaving.
2. John Oman, *Grace and Personality* (Cambridge: CUP, 1917).
3. Oman, *Grace*, p. 14.
4. Oman, *Grace*, p. 188.
5. Carrie M. Pemberton, 'Feminism, Inculturation and the Search for a Global Christianity: an African Example, the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians', Cambridge PhD dissertation 1999.
6. Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: a Contextual Study of John 4:1-42* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), p. 96 n. 37.
7. Okure, *Johannine Approach*, p. 130.
8. Graham Kings, 'Is Jesus the Son of Allah?' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* Vol 14 No 1 January 1990, p. 18.
9. Galatians 1:3, 1 Corinthians 1:3 and Ephesians 1:2.
10. The priestly writer makes the identification in Exodus 6:3. 'I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them.'
11. 1 Kings 18.
12. The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *The Mystery of Salvation: the Story of God's Gift* (London: Church House Publishing, 1995),

- p. 199: 'Annihilation might be a truer picture of damnation than any of the traditional pictures of the hell of eternal torment.'
13. It also just so happens that one of the curates then, Graham Claydon, is my predecessor in the Vicarage in Islington.
  14. Walter Hooper (ed.) *They Stand Together: The Letters of C.S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves (1914-63)* (London: Collins, 1979).
  15. Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: the Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press/Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), pp. 261-2.
  16. See Winrich Loehr, 'Mission in the First Millennium' *Mission Studies* Vol. XV - 2, 30, pp. 29-39 and 'Patristics and Mission: Mission in the First Millennium' pp. 170-175 and J. Jayakiran Sebastian 'Sensitivity and Proclamation: Perspectives on Mission from the Writings of Cyprian', pp. 40-50.
  17. For a fascinating appreciation and critique of Kwame Bediako's writings see Valentin D. Dedji 'Paradigm Shifts in African Theological Debates: From Liberation to Reconstruction' Cambridge PhD dissertation 1999.
  18. This deliberately echoes Anselm's definition of theology, *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding).
  19. See Michael Nazir-Ali's refreshing theological perceptions, in *From Everywhere to Everywhere: a World View of Christian Mission* (London: Collins, 1991). It is worth comparing the two editions of David F. Ford's excellent overview, *The Modern Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1989 and 1997). Perhaps they reflect a shift from 'modernity' to 'postmodernism'. The new edition is vibrantly more global in scope and compelling to read. A chapter on theology of mission (by Lamin Sanneh) is included together with excellent detailed chapters on African, Asian and Latin American theologies and much more.
  20. This may be too comfortable a figure for some, since a lot of creative mission and theological thinking is done amidst violence and poverty and oppression, but it has various profound biblical resonances.
  21. See [CWC Seminars](#).
  22. Blessed in Christ before the foundation of the earth. Ephesians 1:3.
  23. Romans 8: 38.