

# Baptist Engagement with Islam



# Baptist Engagement with Islam:

*From Helwys to Today*

By

Clinton Bennett

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Baptist Engagement with Islam: From Helwys to Today

By Clinton Bennett

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**Dedicated to Rekha Sarker Bennett BA MSc Dip Ed Grad Dip Psych  
PGC Forensic Psych PQSW MBPsS**

**And to the memory of**

**Joan Bennett SRN SCM (1922-2007)**



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Since places in the Indian Sub-Continent feature prominently in this book, a word about their names. I decided to use the modern names for such cities as Dhaka, Kolkata and Chennai rather than their colonial names or spelling but, at least when initially mentioned, I place the colonial name in brackets. The exception is for Madras as a place of publication in the References where I use Madras and bracket Chennai because, unlike Kolkata, Chennai does not resemble the colonial name. A word also on footnotes and References. Unattributed news items in missionary magazines or in a BMS Annual Report are cited fully in footnotes but are not listed in References.

When an online source's URL is given in a footnote these also do not appear in References. I give the date that I accessed internet material (which does not always remain online). The *Baptist Magazine* included copies of the *Missionary Herald* which was also printed as a separate item. Content was the same but pagination in the *BM* ran continuously across all items, which meant that the separate issues of the *MH*'s page numbers were different. In referencing material from the *MH* I add 'with the *BM*' when the page or pages cited were accessed in a *BM* rather than in a stand-alone issue. A word too on spelling and dates. For the former except within a citation I use American English. For dates, I use the British day, month, year rather than the American month, day, year. When describing a text-based engagement with the religion I use 'Islam.' For face-to-face encounters, I use engagement with Muslims.

I also want to express my gratitude to Rev Robert Edgar, L.Th, Dip. RE, who first introduced me to Thomas Helwys and the Baptist commitment to religious liberty during preparation for my baptism on October 25 1970. Helwys and religious liberty feature in this book. Robert was pastor of the Lower Clarence Baptist Church, NSW 1968 to 1971 when he resigned from the ministry to take up a government appointment in Papua New Guinea. Regrettably, I failed to keep in touch with him but without his enthusiastic sermons and skilled instruction I probably wouldn't be a Baptist-I was raised Anglican-and this book would not have been written. Some may question my right to self-define as a Baptist because I do not currently belong to a local Baptist church. However, I am a personal member of the Alliance of Baptists which I represent in the Inter-faith work of the National Council of Churches USA. A committed ecumenist, I am also, since December 17, 2022, a priest of the Old Catholic Apostolic Church-almost forty-five years since my ordination on 2 July 1978 as a Baptist minister. OCAC's Patriarch, Bishop Adrian Trimlett-Glover, understands and supports my wish to maintain a Baptist, alongside my new denominational identity. To adapt a phrase used by New Yorkers, you can take Bennett out of the Baptists but you can't take the Baptist out of Bennett. I remain proud of the Baptist heritage of defending universal religious freedom and think that this volume also demonstrates a degree of Baptist distinctiveness in encounter with Islam such as commitment to ecumenical partnerships, to contextualizing the gospel into Muslim milieux, and willingness by some to engage with the Qur'ān as a book through which God also speaks.

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Finally, I am dedicating this book to my wife, Rekha Sarker Bennett, for making life worth living in the face of serious illness, and in memory of Joan Bennett, my mother. A consummate professional in her nursing career, she taught me to do my best despite challenging circumstances such as those experienced during this past year. She delivered babies in the back of vehicles, traveled by helicopter to accompany a patient to the hospital, and responded to medical emergencies in the hamlet where we lived in Australia-far from any health care facilities-treating injuries and wounds with limited resources but calmly, skillfully, and creatively. This is the second time I have brought Rekha and Joan together in a book dedication, but both women have been constantly in my thoughts of late and I can think of no more deserving dedication at this time.

Clinton Bennett  
Kingston, NY, USA March 2025

## ABBREVIATIONS

**ABCUSA:** American Baptist Churches USA. Traces its history to the first Triennial Conference of 1814. From 1907 it was known as the Northern Baptist Convention, and from 1950 to 1972 as the American Baptist Convention.

**ABMU:** American Baptist Missionary Union. Founded as the Baptist Board for Foreign Missions in 1814, became ABMU in 1845, and American Board of International Ministries in 1973.

**ABTS:** Arab Baptist Theological Seminary. Founded by Southern Baptist missionaries in 1960. Located at Mansourieh about 10 km from Beirut, Lebanon.

**ACW:** *A Common Word Between Us and You*-open letter sent to church leaders signed by 138 Muslims 13 October 2007 organized and written by Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

**AFBS:** American and Foreign Bible Society formed by Baptists in 1887 when the American Bible Society (founded 1816) refused to fund printing Bibles using ‘immerse’ for *baptize*.

**BCC:** British Council of Churches. Established in 1942 succeeded in 1990 by the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (renamed Churches Together in Britain and Ireland in 1999).

**BFBS:** British and Foreign Bible Society founded in 1804.

**BGCT:** Baptist General Convention of Texas. Founded in 1886 now brands as ‘Texas Baptists.’

**BHS:** Baptist Historical Society (UK) established 1908.

**BJC:** Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. Developed from the Southern Baptist Committee on Public Relations founded in 1936 became Baptist Joint Committee for Public Affairs in 1946. Name changed to BJC for Religious Liberty in 2005.

**BM:** *Baptist Magazine*. Published monthly from 1809 to 1904 also contained several other Baptist periodicals.

**BMS:** Baptist Missionary Society. Founded in 1792 as Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen. United with the General Baptist BMS (founded in 1816) in 1891. Known as BMS World Mission since 2000.

**BTS:** Bible Translation Society. Founded as a BMS auxiliary in 1840 by Baptists who disagreed with the BFBS' translation policies. Operated until 1961.

**BU:** refers to the Baptist Union of Great Britain (and, until 1985, Ireland) which now brands itself as Baptists Together. Founded by Particular Baptists in 1832 this united with the General Baptist New Connexion (founded 1770) in 1891. References to BUs elsewhere will be qualified with the countries or states' names.

**BWA:** Baptist World Alliance. Founded in 1905 consisting of national Baptist bodies. Holds a World Congress every five years.

**C of E:** The Church of England (England's Established church).

**CBF:** Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Founded in 1991 originally by former members of the Southern Baptist Convention.

**CBS:** CBS Broadcasting, Inc, a US-based TV, and radio network originally the Columbia Broadcasting System.

**CMS:** Church Missionary Society. A C of E mission agency founded in 1799 known as Church Mission Society since 1995.

**CNB:** Christian Broadcasting Network founded by Pat Robertson in 1960.

**CNI:** Church of North India, a united church formed in 1970 with Baptist participation.

**CNN:** Cable News Network.

**CRC:** Community Relations Councils were set up in Britain's urban centers under the Community Relations Commission (established 1968). In 1976 this became the Commission for Racial Equality and in 1991 CRCs were renamed as Racial Equality Councils.

**CRPOF:** the Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths. Established by the BCC in 1977, it operated in the BCC's Conference for World Mission until succeeded in 1993 by the Churches' Commission on Interfaith Relations.

**CRRU:** the Community and Race Relations Unit of the BCC operated from 1971 until 1992. The Projects Fund made grants to local organizations combating racism.

**CRT:** Critical Race Theory

**CTE:** Churches Together in England is the national ecumenical body for England set up in 1990.

**EBCG:** Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia. Began as the Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia in 1919, it became EBCG after Georgia's independence in 1991.

**EBF:** European Baptist Federation established in 1964.

**HMI:** Henry Martyn Institute, Hyderabad, India. Founded in 1930 as the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies became 'Institute' in 1960.

**IM:** Insider Movement/s refers to Muslim believers in Christ who remain embedded in Islamic settings.

**IMB:** International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Conventions founded in 1845 as the Foreign Mission Board became IMB in 1997.

**IMC:** International Missionary Council founded in 1921 merged with the WCC in 1961 as its Division for World Mission and Evangelism.

**IRM:** *International Review of Missions* is a journal founded in 1912 by the Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference (1910). Since 1961 it has been published by the WCC.

**ISNA:** Islamic Society of North America founded in 1981. Partnered with various Baptist bodies in the Baptist-Muslim Dialogues of 2009, 2012 and 2018.

**LBEC:** Lebanese Baptist Evangelical Convention, founded in 1955.

**LGBTQ+:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and other sexual identities.

**LMS:** London Missionary Society founded in 1795. Interdenominational but mainly Congregationalist.

**LSESD:** Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development founded in 1998 when Southern Baptists handed over educational bodies and other agencies to local Lebanese Baptists.

**MBB:** Muslim Background Believer/s.

**MH:** The *Missionary Herald* was the monthly magazine of the BMS from 1819 to December 2000, when it was replaced by *World Mission*. The *MH* was printed with the *BM* until 1904 and separately as a stand-alone publication. Pagination differed between these two editions, but content was identical.

**MW:** *Muslim World* journal. Founded by Samuel M. Zwemer in 1911 and edited by him until 1948. It was published as *Moslem World* until 1947. It has had various subtitles. Since 1938 edited at Hartford Seminary, CT (now Hartford International University of Religion and Peace),

**NCC** is used for the National Christian Council in India formed in 1923. Known as the National Council of Churches in India since 1979.

**NCCC:** The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA formed 1950.

**NZB:** *New Zealand Baptist*. This magazine was published monthly by New Zealand Baptists from 1883 to 2002 when its name and format changed.

**NZBMS:** New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society founded in 1885.

**RAS** (also **MRAS**): The Royal Asiatic Society, London (and Member of) founded 1823.

**REC:** Racial Equality Council/s in the UK operate under the Equality and Human Rights Commission which replaced the Commission for racial Equality in 2007.

**SABMS:** South Australian Baptist Missionary Society founded in 1864 united with other state societies in 1913 to form Baptist Mission Australia.

**SACRE:** Standing Advisory Council/s on Religious Educations statutory bodies within each Local Education Authority in England and Wales responsible for overseeing Religious Education (agreeing or revising a

syllabus) and collective school worship. Members reflect the area's religious demography.

**SBC:** Southern Baptist Convention founded in 1845.

**SBTS:** Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at Louisville, Kentucky founded in Greenville, SC in 1859.

**SEBTS:** Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC. Affiliated with the SBC. Founded in 1950.

**SIM:** non-denominational mission agency founded as the Soudan Interior Mission in 1893. Has merged with several other organizations and is now known as SIM.

**SPG:** Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. A C of E mission agency founded in 1701 became the United Society when it merged with Universities' Mission to Central Africa in 1963. The Cambridge Mission to Delhi merged in 1968. Now known as United Society Partners in the Gospel.

**SWBTS:** Southwestern Baptist Theological College at Fort Worth, TX. SBC affiliated. Founded in 1908.

**UCC:** United Church of Christ, the largest Congregationalist body in the USA formed in 1957 by the merger of several earlier organizations.

**USCMO:** United States Council of Muslim Organizations founded 2014. Co-sponsors the National Muslim-Christian Initiative with the NCCC.

**WCC:** World Council of Churches founded in 1948.

**YMCA:** Young Men's Christian Association founded 1844. Has associations in 120 countries.

## INTRODUCTION

### AIM, SCOPE, OUTLINE, BACKGROUND: TWO APPROACHES – CONFRONTATION AND CONCILIATION

Baptists have engaged in mission and evangelism on every continent since William Carey (1761-1834) and his colleagues formed the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathens (Now BMS World Mission) in 1792. The British General Baptist Missionary Society, founded in 1816, united with the Particular Society in 1891. The overseas missionary work of American Baptist Churches officially began in 1814 as the Baptist Board for Foreign Missions. It is now the American Board of International Ministries. This was followed by the Southern Baptist Convention's Board of Foreign Missions (now the International Mission Board) in 1845, and in 1850 by the Canadian Baptist Mission. In Australia, the first Baptist mission agency, the South Australian BMS, began its work in 1864. The New South Wales BMS began in 1884, followed by societies in Victoria (1885), Queensland (1887) and Western Australia (1896). These state level organizations merged as the Australian Baptist Mission (now Baptist Mission Australia) in 1913. The New Zealand BMS began in 1885. From their beginning among English religious refugees in Amsterdam in 1609, Baptists have established congregations, local associations and national unions or conventions in 128 countries and territories of which 245 belong to the Baptist World Alliance (founded 1905). Today, Baptists are the world's fifth largest Christian denomination. For other Baptist mission agencies see William Brackney's *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists* (2009).<sup>1</sup> However, relatively few Baptists, whether at home or working overseas, have chosen to engage with Muslims. During my time as a BMS missionary in Bangladesh (1979-1982), of the thirty or so BMS personnel there, I was the only one who specialized in engagement with Islam. The pioneer Baptist missionaries in India mainly focused on evangelizing Hindus producing such texts as Carey's partial translation of the *Ramayana* (1808-1810) and William Ward's four-volume

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<sup>1</sup> Brackney, *Historical Dictionary*, 390-393.

*A View of the History, Literature and Religion of the Hindoos* (1811). The former did not impress the BMS' home secretary, co-founder Andrew Fuller (1754-1854), who famously complained that Carey had wasted time on a "piece of lumber."<sup>2</sup> John Thomas (1757-1801), a missionary in India from 1786 to 1792 before the BMS was formed who returned there with Carey in 1793, once said that were an angel to appear and ask him what he wished to be he would reply, "A faithful witness of Christ amongst the Hindus, till death."<sup>3</sup> He does not appear to have had many dealings with Muslims. He was aware that Bengali Muslims outnumbered Hindus and of linguistic differences between Hindus and Muslims that would prove significant in later efforts to communicate the gospel message among the latter; "one of our difficulties is that the people hereabouts speak a mixed language, part Persian, part Bengali [Bangla] and part Hindustani or the Moore language; so that we do not understand them nor they us."<sup>4</sup> He started to translate the Bible into the version of Bangla spoken by Hindus.

Recently, some Baptists-especially in North America-have represented Muḥammād as a pedophile and as a terrorist. Muslims have expressed highly critical responses. Yet, from the beginning of their missionary efforts, some Baptists—including Carey and Ward—have reflected on and engaged in the task of presenting the gospel to Muslims. Some of these Baptists perpetuate negative tropes about Islam, and see Muḥammād as a militant, womanizing, warmongering opportunist, and take their place alongside Methodists, Anglicans, Catholics, and others who set out to confront Islam with its falsehood. Others, however, deserve to be recognized as pioneers of a more nuanced Christian engagement with Islam. Several formed genuine friendships with Muslims. The story of Baptist-Muslim engagement has not been written in any detail, which this book aims to remedy. For this writer, filling this lacuna in missiological literature has a personal dimension. As a former missionary in Bangladesh, a former Baptist minister and community worker in a mainly Muslim area of Birmingham, UK, a professor teaching courses on Islam including at several summer schools in India, and as a participant in Christian-Muslim dialogue, Baptist peers have been rare. Yet early in my engagement with Islam I discovered the contribution of Lewis Bevan Jones (1880-1960), a Baptist, and his conciliatory approach to Islam has influenced my thinking ever since. In my research on Christian attitudes towards Muslims for various publications I encountered other Baptist contributors, some significant,

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<sup>2</sup> S.P. Carey, *William Carey*, 215.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, *Life of John Thomas*, 409.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, *Life of John Thomas*, 283.

some less so. Highly critical of Islam, some want-or wanted-to demolish or defeat it, to wipe it off the globe. Others, though, see or saw truth in Islam and want-or wanted-to build on this. In their engagement with Muslims, Baptists have made valuable contributions to missiological thinking. Two tracks can be identified. One is confrontational. It aims to confront Muslims with Christian truth, to prove to them that Christianity is superior, denying any relationship between Muslims and the God of Jesus. These Baptists say that Allah is not the same God that Christians worship. This represents the exclusivist paradigm that only those who verbally accept Jesus as savior are redeemed. The alternative track-of which traces appear in some early Baptist writing-is more conciliatory, inclined to allow that Muslims as Muslims may be included within God's gracious purposes. In my writing, I have proposed "an alternative soteriology" as follows:

If we separate faith, as God's free gift of grace from both the work of sharing the gospel and from the individual's free response to this, the possibility that anyone who turns to God will find themselves embraced by God's limitless love remains open. They may turn to God as a practicing Hindu or Muslim and experience spiritual renewal *without* becoming Christian. Failure to share may mean that some miss the opportunity to discover the faith tradition that will best nourish them, so while we should not agonize about results there is a duty involved here.<sup>5</sup>

This draws on several of the Baptist writers discussed below who argue that, in witnessing to Muslims, Christians need to be sensitive to their cultural, social and community contexts. Obviously, this book cannot refer to every Baptist who has engaged with Islam, but it does aim to include the most significant of them.

**The first chapter** of this book argues that the core Baptist principle of "soul competency" provides a foundation for Baptists to not merely tolerate Muslims' freedom of religion but to respect their faith choices. After a brief description of Baptist origins, it examines how Thomas Helwys (1575-1616), co-leader of the Baptist congregation in Amsterdam which gave birth to the Baptist denomination, then pastor of the first Baptist congregation in England and Rhode Island's founder, Roger Williams (1603-1675), specifically included Turks (a synonym for Muslims in seventeenth century English) in their pleas for religious freedom. Helwys' was the first such plea in the English language. He ended up in jail for his nonconformist views, where he died. Before examining Williams' contribution, the chapter briefly sketches the story of English Baptists. Williams and John Clark (1609-

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<sup>5</sup> Bennett, *In Search of Understanding*, xxxv.

1676) are perhaps the only Baptists who have drawn up charters, those of 1644 and 1663, for a state, the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. The 1663 charter guaranteed its citizens the right to follow their own judgements and consciences in matters of religion which later became known as “soul competency.” Williams called it “soul liberty.” Provided that people did not disturb the peace, they could follow any religion they choose. This separation of religion from state control lies behind the US Constitution’s First Amendment of 1791 drafted by James Madison (1751-1836). Known as “the theologian of the first amendment” Baptist John Leland (1754-1841) helped convince Madison that protection for religious freedom was needed at the federal level. He also specifically included Turks in his 1790 plea for this based on the primacy of the unfettered conscience. The chapter ends with a discussion of Baptist distinctives to provide background on who Baptists are. It suggests that recognition of the Bible as having final authority in matters of belief is especially relevant to the encounter with Islam because, for Baptists, any understanding of Islam must have a Biblical foundation.

**Chapter two** describes the views of three English Baptist clergy on Islam and of William Whiston (1667-1752), an ordained Anglican, who began attending a Baptist church. The three clergy were John Evans (1767-1827), a prominent General Baptist minister, Samuel Pearce (1766-1799), a co-founder of the BMS, and Samuel Green (1796-1883) who served for a decade on the BMS Committee. Whiston was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lucasian Professor at Cambridge until the University accused him of being anti-Trinitarian and expelled him. A prolific writer, his work has several references to Islam worthy of attention. While some debate his Baptist status, his material relating to Islam may be the first by a Baptist or by a close ally apart from earlier inclusions of Muslims in pleas for religious freedom described in chapter one. However, apart from Leonard Busher (fl. 1614) and John Murton (1558-c. 1625) those did not allude to any specifics about Islamic history, or beliefs. Evans’ section on Islam in *A sketch of the several denominations into which the Christian world is divided* (1795), which had sold a million copies on both sides of the Atlantic when he died, repeats many negative tropes. However, inclusion in a book on Christian denominations suggests that he thought that Islam was related to Christianity and that its claims merited consideration. Pearce’s “Letter to the Lascars” (1798) was a polite invitation addressed to Muslim sailors who came ashore in Britain to embrace Christianity. It used “Allah” and shows some knowledge of Muslim beliefs which are referenced but not ridiculed. For this, a recent Southern Baptist commentator, David Norman, an adjunct professor at several seminaries, takes Pearce to task. It is undoubtedly the

first such evangelistic attempt by a Baptist. However, in 1807-as discussed in chapter three-, when William Ward's paraphrase of this tract was combined with another text, into which the recently converted Farsi translator at the Serampore Mission Press inserted the word "tyrant" and other material, a negative reaction almost led to the press being shut down by order of the government. Green, a son and father of Baptist clergy, who championed the Church of England's disestablishment authored several books. His *Life of Mahomet* (1840) was the first Baptist attempt to write a substantial book on Islam although it depended heavily on secondary sources, and rather too heavily on one of these. Pearce and Evans received honorary degrees from Brown University, Rhode Island. Degrees awarded by North American institutions are mentioned here and elsewhere in this book to indicate the close ties that existed at this time between British and American Baptists. Brown, founded by Baptists in 1764, saw its role of recognizing Baptist accomplishments as transatlantic in scope. How Baptists who engaged with Islam trained and prepared for this emerges as a major theme in this book. I can't resist adding how many times Americans have expressed surprise to hear that I was ordained as a Baptist minister in England, exclaiming that they did not know there were any Baptists there!

**Chapter Three** moves to the work of Baptist missionaries in India, beginning with William Carey and John Thomas then discussing Joshua Marshman (1768-1837) (Carey and Marshman were also recipients of honorary degrees from Brown), and William Ward (1769-1823) who spent three months in the US in 1820 raising funds for Serampore College. It will be seen that, despite their reputation for mainly engaging with Hinduism, they did not neglect Islam. Carey and Ward printed and distributed tracts—including Bangla and Persian (Farsi) translations of Pearce's "Letter to the Lascars" (1801) (more of an abstract)-which pioneered Baptist interest in producing literature culturally and religiously tailored for Muslim readers. Marshman's remarks on Islam were wholly negative but Carey saw "many good observations and rules" in the Qur'ān that "should be observed" even though it failed to tell people "how God can forgive sin consistently with his justice, and save sinners in a way in which justice and mercy could harmonize."<sup>6</sup> Several aspects of the legacy of the Serampore Trio (Carey, Marshman, and Ward) that has subsequently characterized Baptist engagement with Islam will be identified including the need to contextualize the gospel, to build on what is wholesome in Islam and to cooperate with other Christians across denominational boundaries. Baptists have, as we will see, experienced challenges-as did Carey-in practicing the latter and at times

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<sup>6</sup> Carter, *Journal and Selected Letters*, 58 (Journal, 9 May, 1795).

chose to act alone. Yet they have achieved an established record of ecumenical involvement. Carey and his colleague also expressed concern for people's physical and social welfare leading campaigns for reform. Their view of mission was holistic and did not focus only on the next life.

**Chapter four** looks at Baptist engagement with Muslims in India by later missionaries (after 1837). Discussing each subject in chronological order based on the date of their main writing on Islam, or activity, this survey begins with the most prominent Baptist convert from Islam during this period, Wilayat Ali, who became a lay missionary and acting head of the Delhi Mission. Greatly admired by Anglicans as well as by Baptists he regularly preached to Muslims in the bazaar and was very explicit in depicting Islam as wicked.<sup>7</sup> Murdered during the revolt of 1857 when he refused to repudiate his faith he is numbered among the "Delhi martyrs."<sup>8</sup> An evangelical India army officer, Stephen Glyn Wheler (1802-1865) was responsible for Ali's conversion. An Anglican, Wheler enjoyed very close relations with Baptist missionaries who admired his evangelical zeal, and his commitment to the welfare of Indians especially orphans.

Next, engagement with Muslims by James Smith (1817-1898) (who had worked with Wilayat for nine years and had appointed him to Delhi), is discussed as typifying the dominant approach at this time in his work with Muslims. Smith focused on members of the leather worker community (*Chamars*) but he is also important for his holistic view of mission and efforts to build a self-supporting Indian church in line with Carey's original vision. The chapter then turns to the work of Ali's widow, Fatima (d. 1898) and Harriet Tompkins Smith (1830-1907) who in 1867 began the Zenana mission in Delhi which pioneered a more personalized, invitational approach to evangelizing Muslims. The survey continues with an analysis of a book in Urdu (1866) and English (1867) by a free-lance missionary and former East Indian Company army officer, William Robertson Aikman (1822-1902), which can be situated within the context of the controversial or confrontational approach. Aikman regularly preached in Baptist churches. Baptist involvement in producing Bible translations, and other texts in Mussulmani Bangla (Bengali), is examined next. Recently, such translations have become known as MITs (Muslim Idiom Translations). This work began in 1876 with the efforts of Robert John Ellis (d. 1877) and was taken up after his death by George Henry Rouse (1838-1909). From then until towards the end of its operation (in 1972) the press continued to play a

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<sup>7</sup> J. Smith, 'Martyred Wilayat Ali,' 643.

<sup>8</sup> Bryan, *Great Christians*, 36-37.

central role in facilitating Baptist engagement with Islam. Two articles are then discussed by Oberlin College graduate, Isaac Allen (1831-1911), who served with BMS in India from 1863 to 1885. He engaged in exchange with Muslims and wrote about Islamic revival. He was confident that revival movements among Muslims would fail, and that the “crescent was waning, not waxing...sinking from view-for ever.”<sup>9</sup> A decade after Allen’s article, John Drew Bate (1843-1923) of the Allahabad Baptist mission—a Member of the Royal Asiatic Society—published a book (and left a manuscript of a sequel) that drew on his extensive study of Islam and Christian-Muslim engagement. Finally, George Henry Rouse, an heir of Carey’s Bible translation legacy who worked with Ellis (and who was awarded an honorary degree by a North American college) set a high standard of specialized engagement with Muslims with his tracts, and gospel translations, written in Mussulmani Bangla and printed at the Baptist Mission Press. Rouse also bridged late nineteenth, and early twentieth century, Baptist engagement with Islam and was known to the next generation of contributors. All these men were familiar with and contributed to what at this time was called the controversy with Islam. In contrast, Fatimah and Harriet spent years forming close relationships with Muslims in their homes and were markedly less confrontational. However, all represent a model of sustained commitment to engagement with Muslims that was unusual for this time and went beyond the contributions of earlier Baptist missionaries.

**Chapter five** moves into the early twentieth century. It begins with the contributions of William Goldsack (1871-1957) from South Australia whom Rouse influenced, John Takle (1870-1939) from New Zealand, Lewis Bevan Jones, the India born son of a BMS missionary from Wales and his wife, Violet Rhoda Jones (1883-1972). Each took part in one or more of the series of international conferences seeking to promote, resource and coordinate Protestant mission to Muslims and were the most noteworthy of Baptists participants. Several others will be mentioned. These conferences met in Cairo (1906), Lucknow (1911) and Jerusalem (1924) and linked Baptists in India with such leading thinkers about Christian-Muslim engagement as Samuel M. Zwemer (1867-1952) and W.H.T. Gairdner (1873-1928) based elsewhere. Goldsack, who transferred to the British BMS, Jones, and Joel Waiz Lall—a BWA Vice-President when he died in 1924—were set aside for full time engagement with Muslims in 1914, the first time that the BMS designated personnel for this work. Goldsack and Jones undertook specialist training in Islamic studies unlike their

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<sup>9</sup> I. Allen, ‘Revival of Islam,’ 39.

predecessors who were self-taught in this. Joel gained the Master of Oriental Languages degree from Punjab University. In this chapter, we will see Baptists working cooperatively with other missionaries to share strategies and ideas about how best to approach Muslims. This can be seen as a type of fulfilment in the specific field of mission to Islam of William Carey's dream of a world missionary gathering which he had suggested might take place at the Cape of Good Hope in 1810. Takle founded the Missionaries to Muslims League in India in 1912 to help carry out the Lucknow Conference's recommendations and edited its newsletter until Jones succeeded him in 1920. Like their colleagues in other denominational mission agencies, these Baptists were concerned to build on Islam's beliefs about Jesus as a schoolteacher pointing to the Gospel based on Paul's view of the Law at Galatians 3: 24. All contributed to the production of a Christian literature for Muslim readers, some more polemical, some less so. Jones' main literary contributions are discussed in the next chapter since they were published after 1930.

This chapter explores Jones' developing invitational approach to Muslims during his time in old Dhaka (1909-1930 - living in the Muslim bazaar from 1920) which called for forming enduring friendship with them and finding ways of showing real interest in their lives, and of assisting them in practical matters. Jones' wife, formerly with the Baptist Zenana Mission, worked side-by-side with him in engaging with Muslims. Jones argued that missionaries will find uplifting Christ in their lives more effective than doing so by their "preaching" and "writing."<sup>10</sup> Next, Lall's contribution is discussed. An alumnus of the Baptist Boarding School at Delhi, Lall loved Arabic and Farsi and distinguished himself as a student at St. Stephen's College where he later taught. Cooperation between the Delhi Baptist Mission, and the Anglican Cambridge Brotherhood that founded and ran St. Stephen's is an example of a successful Baptist ecumenical partnership. This was cited at the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference (1910).<sup>11</sup> During World War I, in tune with Muslim sentiment in India, Lall questioned the West's claim to moral superiority over the East in a series of Urdu lectures. This distanced him from Christianity's collusion with imperial domination which expatriate missionaries—including Takle—tended to see as providential. Initially, though, Baptists in India had a complicated and, at times, less than friendly relationship with the colonial authorities arriving there at a time when, even though some evangelical chaplains engaged in missionary work, it was officially prohibited. Carey and Thomas

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<sup>10</sup> L.B. Jones, *People of the Mosque*, 309

<sup>11</sup> World Missionary Conference, *Report of Commission VIII*, 20.

went to India without a license from the East India Company sailing on a Danish ship. From 1893 until 1800 when they moved to the Danish colonial enclave of Serampore their mission work in India was technically illegal. Some early missionaries who lacked licenses were expelled or asked to leave voluntarily. John Lawson was imprisoned and ordered to leave India but allowed to stay when the Mission pleaded that his ability to cut Chinese and Bangla type was indispensable. The association of Christianity with colonialism and Western power hindered its progress in India, where, despite the presence of ancient Christian communities, many Indians regard it as foreign and exotic. For some, missionaries were functionaries of the British empire. However, the actual relationship between missionaries and imperialism is complex as will be seen throughout this book. Jeffrey Cox (1947-2020), an historian raised in a Southern Baptist church who became a Quaker, explores these complexities, ambiguities, and sometimes contradictions in *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940* (2002). He examines the tensions between how missionaries both benefited from (and often promoted) imperialism while also championing the rights of stigmatized and oppressed people in India and aspiring to equip the Indian church to thrive when British rule ended. In this chapter, it will be seen that some Baptists rejected what they saw as a failed approach to Islam—the confrontational, polemical approach—in favor of a more invitational approach pioneered by the Zenana missionaries. Several were open to the fulfillment theology of religions popularized by John Nichol Farquhar (1861-1929) which, derived from Matthew 5: 17, saw Christianity’s role as building on all that is good, and of divine origin, in other faiths. Here, reference will be made to the writing of Oxford graduate Charles Bowden Young (1880–1963) of the Delhi Baptist Mission, a major figure in the relationship between that mission and the Anglican SPG mission, who became Vice-Principal of St Stephen’s College. He proposed the “fulfilment” view before Farquhar’s classic *The Crown of Hinduism* (1913) was published.

**Chapter six** continues this trajectory with Jones’ role as a co-founder of the ecumenical Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies at Lahore in 1930 of which he was Principal until 1941. Unlike many Baptists, Jones recognized in Islam a finding as well as a seeking of God and invited Christians and Muslims to share their spiritual experience with each other. He did not insist that Muslims accept every aspect of Christian doctrine but instead emphasized inner transformation. He emphasized why Christians believe their doctrines rather than presenting these as perfect, infallible statements. For him, they express inner convictions in “the poverty” and limitations of

“human language.”<sup>12</sup> Acts of kindness, too, could communicate the gospel more eloquently than words, especially those that invite controversy or angry rejoinders. Winning hearts, for Jones, took priority over gaining an intellectual victory. Violet Rhoda Jones was also involved in the work of the Henry Martyn School co-writing *Woman in Islam* (1941) while Irene G. West (1907-1994), a staff member from 1947 to 1959, single handedly kept the school open during a difficult period in its history when, post-partition, interest in its work declined. She again served from 1962 to 1965 at its branch in Dhaka, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). From April 1<sup>st</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> 1959 she participated in the ecumenical Study Conference at Asmara, Eritrea that “expressed a distinctive new spirit in the Christian approach to” Muslims that aimed to relate “the Christian message constructively to Islamic thought and experience and to enter as fully as we may into areas of mutual practical concern.”<sup>13</sup> The school became an Institute in 1960. Ian Henderson Douglas (1920-1975) of the American Baptist Missionary Union played a leading role in redefining the institute’s role. He was director during the period of 1962-1967 and aligned the institute with “a global trend towards interfaith dialogue” in the spirit of the Asmara conference focusing less on the conversion of Muslims.<sup>14</sup> He took part in the WCC Broumana meeting 16-23 June 1966 on Muslim-Christian encounters presenting a paper. The World Council of Churches (formed 1948) established its Dialogue Sub-Unit in 1971. Former HMI staff member David T. Lindell (1924-2010) defined “dialogue” as involving listening and learning “rather than” declaring and dominating and as recognizing “the worth and integrity of other people who find identity and values in cultural terms and patterns of life that differ from ours.”<sup>15</sup> In 1990, the Institute changed its name to the Henry Martyn Institute International Centre for Research, Interfaith Relations, and Reconciliation. It now occupies its own compound in Hyderabad, India. Baptists can take pride in having helped launch, and sustain, this valuable resource for Indian Christians and for people of all faiths. I attended its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 1980 and later spent several extended periods there researching, and lecturing. This chapter also discusses the contribution of Edward Leslie Wenger (1908-2000). Born in what is now Bangladesh, he was the great-grandson of BMS missionary John Wenger (1811-1880), the noted Swiss born Bible translator and recipient of an honorary doctorate from Brown under whom Rouse had initially worked. Professor at Serampore, and for many years the lead

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<sup>12</sup> L.B. Jones, *Christianity Explained*, 94.

<sup>13</sup> Weber, ‘Out of all Continents,’ 50.

<sup>14</sup> D’Souza, ‘Evangelism, Dialogue,’ 165.

<sup>15</sup> D’Souza, ‘Evangelism, Dialogue,’ 166 citing *Director’s Report*, 1975, 6.

Baptist negotiator in church unity talks in North India, Wenger led a seminar for HMI on “the cross, in the context of Muslim opposition to it” in 1963.<sup>16</sup> Fully informed by contemporary discussion on Christianity’s relation with other faiths within the international and ecumenical missionary movement, Wenger’s scholarship contributed significantly to theological reflection on religious pluralism. I met him before going to Bangladesh at the BHS Summer School at Norwich 13-16 July 1977 and later in Bangladesh when he served the International Christian Church in Dhaka as interim pastor in 1979-1980. Wenger’s wife, Winifred Edith Wenger (1906-1991), engaged in *zenana* work and stands in a succession of female missionaries and associates, too often overlooked in historical accounts, who developed close relations with Muslim women. Another was Hilda McClean (1879-1938), an Australian Baptist missionary in Bengal, to whose memory the Jones dedicated *Woman in Islam*. Rouse’ wife, Lydia Miriam Rouse (1839-1884), supervised the *Zenana* Mission in Calcutta. Goldsack, and his wife, Charlotte Farquhar Goldsack (1871-1969), built a *Zenana* house (where the single female *Zenana* missionaries lived) in Pabna. The chapter concludes with my association with the Henry Martyn Institute.

**Chapter seven** looks at contemporary and recent Baptist engagement with Islam discussing important contributions to what I am characterizing as the dialogical and contextual approaches to Islam. Dialogue aims at countering misunderstanding, promoting friendship and collaboration in areas of mutual concern. Contextualization aims to win Muslim converts by embedding the gospel in Muslim culture instead of extracting them from their community, networks, and cultural milieu which Jones had found problematic, and counterproductive. These contributors are Harvey Cox, the renowned Harvard theologian, his former student Charles Kimball-Cox sat on Kimball’s dissertation committee-and Phil Parshall who spent thirty-nine years as a missionary in Asia. Cox encouraged those involved in Christian engagement with Islam to affirm common ground and to move “beyond dialogue” to liberation “praxis,” a “step in anticipation of God’s justice.”<sup>17</sup> Kimball directed the National Council of Churches’ Middle East Office from 1983 to 1990. Kimball has visited the Middle East over thirty-five times. He and I were both members of the World Council of Churches’ working party that drafted *Issues in Christian-Muslim Relations* (1992). On May 10, 2003, soon after the US led invasion of Iraq, Kimball debated Albert Mohler, Jr, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, on national television saying, “When we begin to talk in monolithic terms

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<sup>16</sup> Douglas, “Foreword” in Wenger, *They Looked at the Cross*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> H. Cox, *Many Mansions*, 178.

as though there is one true way and only one acid test for true Christianity, then we are starting down the road, I think, to the kinds of things that lead people to justify almost anything in the name of religion.”<sup>18</sup> In 2007, Kimball’s affirmation that Christians and Muslims worship the same God while speaking in Austin, TX triggered protest resolutions by two associations of churches’ calling for the Baptist General Convention of Texas to “publicly denounce such false teaching.”<sup>19</sup> This was reported in the *Arab News* and elsewhere including *Baptist World Global*. Parshall was highly regarded by the missionary community in Bangladesh during my time there for his contribution to contextual theology and I heard him speak at a conference in Dhaka. He supports the C4 model on the C1 to C6 spectrum of Christ-centered communities found in Muslim contexts developed by John Jay Travis (1998) and regards C5 as a step too far. C4 refers to ‘*Isa* believing Christians who retain many Islamic elements but are identifiable Christian. C5 are believers in Jesus who remain legally and visibly within the Muslim community but openly share their faith, while C6 believers are secretive about their faith. Christian missionaries in Bangladesh and elsewhere among Muslims often used the C1 or C2 paradigms—which produces churches that are essentially foreign, and exotic for Muslims even when the vernacular is used. Carey had wanted Indian Christianity to develop its own forms and expressions of the faith which it did, but by drawing on Hindu vocabulary and concepts Muslims were marginalized. Parshall’s interest in contextualization builds on earlier Baptist work in translating the bible into Mussulmani Bangla. Model C3 uses Muslim elements such as dress and music. The chapter ends with a brief comment on how some evangelicals—such as Parshall—embrace the principles of dialogue rejecting confrontation in favor of the conciliatory approach to Islam.

**Chapter eight** contrasts these contributions with the views about Islam – which perpetuate the confrontational approach - expressed by Baptists Ergun and Emir Caner, Jeremy Vines (SBC President 1988-1990), Jerry Falwell, Sr (1833-2007), Pat Robertson (1930-2023) and R. Albert Mohler. The work and publications of the Jenkins Center for the Christian Understanding of Islam at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, launched by Mohler in 2014. is discussed. Finally, I describe the

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<sup>18</sup> Cited by Jeff Robinson, ‘Mohler on CNN’ *Baptist Press* 1 October 2004 at <http://m.bpnews.net/15908/mohler-on-cnn-authentic-christianity-seeks-to-meet-iraqs-deepest-need> accessed 28 October 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Barbara Ferguson, ‘Professor’s Comments on Islam,’ *Arab News* online 13 May 2007 at <https://www.arabnews.com/node/298346> accessed 28 October 2023.