

### *Director's Word*

*Dec 2019*

Dear friend,

The wonderful season of Advent is upon us. Amidst the expectation and hope, Mary reminds us that God's is an 'upside down' kingdom, where rulers are dethroned and the humble poor raised up. It's shocking, uncomfortable stuff. The apostle Paul states the same, reminding the Corinthians that not many of them were wise, influential or strong but God has chosen the weak and foolish to display the power of the gospel in Christ.

Age seems to be one of the areas where God often ignores conventional wisdom. Think how many young people God chose to use through the Scriptures: Joseph, Samuel, David, Naaman's servant girl, Daniel, Jeremiah, Mary, John, Timothy and Jesus himself, aged 12 in the temple. It's not that God shows favouritism to young (or old), as if age in itself matters; he simply looks beyond age to the heart.

It's one of the strengths of the OCMS PhD that we provide space for mature scholars. Most of students are in their forties and fifties, some in their 60's. No problem! John Wycliff was in his forties when he got his doctorate in Oxford and by the time he died aged 60 he had set in motion the first English translation of the Bible that was to turn the church upside down. The brilliant thing about our experienced leaders is that they have so much to bring into conversation with scholarship.

At the same time, I have also been asking God to give us some younger scholars; women and men who, God willing, have a lifetime ahead to serve in the Kingdom. It has been a special thrill, therefore, to welcome three in their 20's in the most recent cohort of new students. Coming from Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Puerto Rico, they bring with them the dynamism, curiosity and expectation of youth. Pray for them, and for more like them, to be stirred by God to use their intellectual capabilities fully in the service of God and the transformation of mission.

As 2019 draws to a close, join us here in OCMS in thanking God for a wonderful year, including a flourishing PhD programme, growing Guided Study programme, the launch of the Integrated Mission Leadership certificate, new forms of publishing, two excellent global consultations and so much more. Pray with us that God would continue to grow us as a community that reflects his upside-down kingdom, where our hearts are aligned with His heart, fully available to serve him in our generation.

Blessed Advent and Christmas season.

Paul Bendor-Samuel



### Seminar in Mizoram, India (November 11-14)

Thomas Harvey and Marina Behera travelled to India to both meet with key mission and ministry training institutions in Kolkata and Aizawl in India and to present papers at the 'Mission from the Margins Conference' in Aizawl. Dr Harvey presented his paper on Mission, Suffering, and Martyrdom, and Marina presented on the difficulty of defining centres and margins. The conference was attended by pastors, missionaries, scholars, and students. Key meetings were held with the principals of Bishops College, the Senate of Serampore, United Bible Seminary, Aizawl Theological College and the Synod Mission Training centre. These meetings were critical to gain recognition of OCMS and also to facilitate future students to train at OCMS. The trip and conference were organised jointly by EMW of Germany and OCMS and served to strengthen ties with EMW as well.

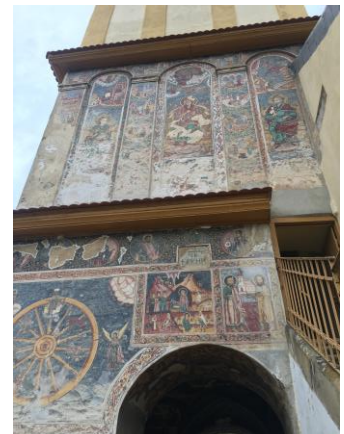


### Exploring Partnership with the Orthodox Church

A year ago, we reported in InSpired on the trip to Romania made by faculty members Paul Woods and Marina Behera. This November the two Pauls, Woods and Bendor-Samuel, returned to participate again in the Sibiu annual mission consultation. They were accompanied by Dr Ralph Lee. The visit was part of an intentional commitment to explore partnership with parts of the Orthodox Church around the world.

Dialogue between evangelicals and Orthodox Church communities has been growing since the formation of the Lausanne Orthodox Initiative in the 1990s. At the invitation of theologians in the faculties of Sibiu and Cluj, OCMS is developing a partnership agreement that will enable students to study at OCMS and for joint research projects. Initial focus will be on the impact of secularism in Romania and on the Romanian church.

At the same time, we are looking to deepen relationships with the Ethiopian Church. Ralph Lee is currently a part-time volunteer faculty member with OCMS, bringing more than 20 years of experience of working with the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia including seven years lecturing in the main Orthodox seminary in Addis Ababa. In January Paul Bendor-Samuel and Ralph will visit Addis with a view to forging stronger academic links there. Do pray for these relationships and for the funding that would enable Ralph to lead the OCMS Orthodox project.



### Interview of a New Student



My name is Mirzabek Dosov. I am an ethnic Tajik, born in Uzbekistan from a Muslim background. I have nine siblings. I came to Christ when I was 10 as a result of change that happened in the life of my father. God radically changed his life, and when I was a child this attracted my attention to Christ. Later I had a chance to have theological training in Eastern Europe and then continued my education in Western Europe.

What made you decide to pursue a PhD?

I am 25 years old. I am convinced that God has called me to be involved in theological training in Central Asia. As a professor in a theological college in Moldova which is mainly focused on training Central Asian students, I believe I have to be a lifelong learner.

Secondly, I want to help to construct a local theology and find a local expression of the Christian faith. I am a pioneer in getting a Ph.D. from the local indigenous context. One of the reasons why we are not able to critically reflect on and analyze our own settings for better engagement is the lack of properly trained and equipped people. We have to find ways to make sense of the Christian faith for our complex and diverse local context.

With my research I trust I can join the wider academic discourse and discussion for promoting the values of the Kingdom, which will in turn have a positive impact on my country.

Why did you choose OCMS?

I have chosen OCMS because of its focus on mission, contextual missiology and theology. I believe that OCMS is a unique place for people like me who seek to thoroughly understand the local context and find a new way of witnessing for the Kingdom.

How did you find the Research Induction School?

It has been an extremely important time of getting the big picture of what research is all about. It was also a break from my overwhelming ministry and a time to read and to reflect on my own research.

Tell us something about your PhD project.

My research interest is the social and public engagement of the local church. I want to understand the role of the indigenous church in Uzbek society today and how contextual missiology might help the indigenous church in Uzbekistan better manifest the Kingdom of God. I believe if the Gospel is not relevant to the local society and does not address its existential needs and concerns, it will never belong to the local people. In our process of contextualization, we have to find not only an effective and appropriate way of proclamation but also a contextualized way of transformation. I hope that my work will expand the concept of contextualization from a holistic perspective.

### New Regnum Books

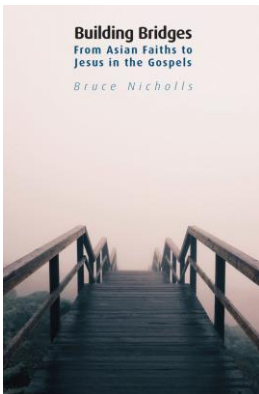
#### **Bruce Nicholls, *Building Bridges: from Asian faiths to Jesus in the Gospels* (Oxford: Regnum 2019)**

Scholars and practitioners share an interest in the theme of 'building bridges across faiths'. Bruce's work is similar to these publications and yet it is significantly different, because: i. it takes a modest yet effective step in the direction of not just seeking to connect the divide between Christianity and Islam or Hinduism, but four major faiths thriving in South Asia: Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Islam. ii. The author is not a South Asian but has as much right to speak as an insider having lived and worked here for about 40 years. iii. In attempting to achieve its objectives, the book rightly relies on Asian writers more than the Western sources. Even though the author's personal experiences do not always appear on the surface as narratives explicitly illustrating his positions, his long personal engagements as a theological educator, pastor, producer, leader of nationwide organizations, and a lover of South Asia/South Asian people undoubtedly inform the book's content.

In speaking of building bridges, his approach is refreshingly self-critical. In each of his chapters engaging with a specific faith, he interrogates what he sees as the 'roadblocks' which need to be transcended before any bridge building can be effective. The aim of bridge-building is not therefore for the Christian to go across but

rather meant to facilitate or encourage the crossing-over of the seekers. These are people of faith who are drawn toward the Gospel as they see signs in their own traditions leading to the Gospel. Their journeys are made easier by the Christian who merely removes the obstructions. The true agency here rests with the seeker who reads the Gospel out of personal choice and encounters Jesus who waits to meet them.

This book is significant for South Asian Christians in particular but also to any Christian living with or next to Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists. It is a gentle reminder for Christians to realize their calling as facilitators in God's mission so the people of faiths have the possibility of encountering Jesus when the hindrances in their way are removed.



Reviewed by Dr David Emmanuel Singh, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

#### THANKS FOR READING

We hope you've enjoyed our updates. Even though we can only feature a few people and events each time, we love sharing glimpses into the work here at OCMS. Do send us your own news; we love hearing from you.

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God bless you abundantly.