

Missionary Profile: Rev. Ernest N. Hahn

Dates of Service

1953-78

Field

India

Call Assignment

Evangelical Missionary (Muslim ministry)

Biographical Summary

I, Ernest Hahn, graduated from the University of Toronto in 1947 and from Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, in 1952.

During World War II a part of Greta's family left Lithuania when the Russians sought possession of it. She lived in Germany for some time and eventually came to Canada in 1948. Prior to leaving Lithuania she finished teachers' training school. In Toronto she completed half of the course in nurses' training. She already knew about the Gossner Mission, a Lutheran mission in N.E. India, of which at that time her uncle was the director, and thus she already had a penchant for Christian mission.

At that time, the LCMS Board for Missions, along with Dr. Henry Nau and The Society for the Promotion of Mohammedan Mission, pushed Greta and me to come to India as soon as possible, in particular to join Dr. Henry and Mrs. Helen Nau, then in their seventies and in Vaniyambadi, before they departed from India. (The Naus first came to India in 1905.) Muslim mission had started in Vaniyambadi in the 1920's (see Adolph Brux and Ralph Burow), stopped and needed to be revived.

Prior to our arrival in Vaniyambadi (South East India, Henry and Mary Esther Otten had come to Wandoor (Kerala, S.W. India). Soon after our arrival Roland and Mary Helen Miller joined the Ottens in Kerala. Then Luther and Gladys Engelbrecht came as our co-workers, residing in Krishnagiri, some thirty miles from Vaniyambadi. Shortly thereafter, four Indian couples were assigned as co-workers in reaching out to Muslims, for whom all of us were grateful. Eventually they were to take over the ministry.

But why the Muslim emphasis? With the partition of India into India and Pakistan five years before, had not all Muslims in India departed for Pakistan? Though it appeared to us that few Christian missions were actually working among Muslims, still masses of Muslims remained in India. Today, in fact, India remains the second or third largest Muslim country in the world, perhaps with about four to five times as many Muslims in India as there are people in Canada!

Our activities in India? We all started with language studies. The Engelbrechts and the Hahns began with Urdu, since Muslims in our area preferred Urdu, though our state language was Tamil. In keeping with the times, we and our Indian co-workers reached out through Christian educational and medical institutions (already established, thanks to the missionaries who preceded us), the reading room, visual aids, Scriptures and literature and, of course, personal contact. A Bible correspondence course office in Vellore kindly added Promises of God, a course designed for Muslims. In our first term, we had the rather unusual opportunity to show films periodically, some Biblical films also, in a few Muslim institutions. And our numbers being so small, the possibilities for outreach, even within the limited geographical borders of our Lutheran mission, seemed unlimited -- not to speak of the borders beyond.

Our co-worker in Vaniyambadi, R. Devadoss, discovered a few pieces of well-located property which, with the help of some friends in Canada, it was possible to purchase and on it construct a simple multipurpose building, close to the Islamiah College. It served as a chapel, a nursery school, a conference centre, Bible class, a convenient place to meet, and a small hostel. When Brother Devadoss took over as leader of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC), Ambur District Evangelism Circle and the village VBS programme, the hostel provided facilities for village students to study in a high school. Among these students were some Gypsies. The building also offered Bethesda Hospital a place to

operate a clinic in Vaniyambadi especially for women and children, and for TB and leprosy patients. Local Bible women also served in the clinic. A clinic for women and children is still (2009) in operation.

Several decades before, MELIM (Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission) had established its first hospital in Ambur. Bethesda Hospital proved a boon to many town and village residents, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, for miles around. We attempted to visit patients at the hospital regularly, in particular the TB ward. Some of the Muslim patients already knew from the Qur'an that Jesus had opened the eyes of the blind, healed the leper and even raised the dead -- the bare facts only. From the Bible we presented the details of these unique works of Jesus. For some patients we offered to pray. Other patients asked us to pray for them. In time, the Christakula Ashram, located some twelve miles away in another direction, also invited us to visit patients in their hospital, especially their Muslim patients. Occasionally they invited us to their eye camps in various towns in which they treated and operated on a host of patients with a variety of eye problems -- patients who otherwise probably would never get such an opportunity for treatment. The circumstances and procedures may have appeared crude, even an ordeal for the patient. Yet for many patients, much the happier with their sight, the whole event was, shall we say, a sight to behold, a blessing.

In our area we saw only a few converts from Islam. One of them, Indreas Din, a former Muslim and prayer leader in a mosque, joined us in Vaniyambadi -- and, later, Luther Engelbrecht and his Indian co-worker in Krishnagiri -- in reaching out to the Muslims.

From his small tea shop in Vaniyambadi, close to the IELC elementary school, he poured tea and passed out Gospel portions, especially to Muslims. At times, he was also invited to other parts of the country to serve as a colporteur of the Gospel. He reminds us also how grateful those of us who have worked especially among Muslims should be to The Bible Society for the provision of Scriptures in so many different languages. With the help of the Reform Church of America, the American Bible Society produced a filmstrip *A Teahouse along an Indian Road* about Indreas Din.

On the home front, apart from normal domestic activities, Greta kept busy with visitors, mostly Muslim ladies and their children. On some occasions she was able to show them filmstrips on the life of Christ. She, too, became involved in treating patients, mostly Hindus, through her little house dispensary and, with gratitude, remembers the opportunity to help many people in the surrounding villages.

Years before our arrival in India, some Christian missions had already established a resource centre, the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies, that would enable Christians from various denominations to work together toward a more effective outreach among Muslims. Eventually, this school, later called The Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies, found a permanent centre in Hyderabad in South India. Here all of us were able to participate more conveniently with H.M.I. personnel and other Christians in South India associated with H.M.I. and its activities. We helped and were helped. Such co-operation facilitated the production and distribution of literature which helped the Christians to better understand their Muslim neighbours and provided Muslims with a clearer understanding of the Gospel in a variety of Indian languages along with Urdu and English. We also contributed to H.M.I.'s periodical, *The Bulletin*. Then there was the conducting of seminars on Islam and the sharing of the Gospel with Muslims. Through regular summer seminars, some lengthy and some short, we contacted students from many of the seminaries in South India. On a few occasions theological students from Iran joined us. At times the seminars took place from within the seminaries themselves. In some instances, it became possible to help bring in a well-known Islamic scholar such as Willem Bijlefeld, Kenneth Cragg and Wilfred Cantwell Smith for these seminars. These activities brought us into contact with other Christian ministries such as the Union of Evangelical Students of India, Operation Mobilization, etc. Thus we saw a little more of India also. Here, too, we thank the LCMS Board of Missions who helped all of us to use our furloughs for further study that enabled us to communicate more effectively with Muslims and, at the same time, to encourage Christians to become involved in this ministry. (Try Kenneth Cragg,

The Call of the Minaret for an advanced publication on the subject, to which all of us have been indebted. The book was published in its first edition by Oxford in 1956; later editions also have been published.)

A year or so before our departure from India, we were able to see -- and help a little -- Christian Mission Service, a German mission, begin an orphanage across the road from the compound on which we resided.

In 1978, after 25 years in India, we sensed it to be the will of God that we return to Canada. For some years Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh had been coming to Canada as new immigrants. Arabs from many countries were also present. Then came the Iranians during the time of Ayatollah Khomeini along with Muslims from Somalia and other nations and the Tamils (about 200,000, mostly Hindu) from Sri Lanka.... Shall we say the list is formidable? About one third of all these Canadian immigrants and refugees have settled in or around Toronto, the city we claim our own. With the encouragement and help of St. John's Lutheran Church, Toronto, Wheatridge (Canada) and other congregations, individuals, and a small executive committee *Philoxenia*, Hospitality Ministry came into existence officially in February 1979 as a Christian (Lutheran) ministry of friendship, understanding and faith sharing -- especially with Muslims. Here in Toronto, too, we have been able to link up with the already established Fellowship of Faith for the Muslims (FFM), at that time an evangelical and interdenominational ministry focused on information about Islam and Muslims and on prayer for Muslims throughout the world, and soon to initiate Muslim Friendship Ministries as a Christian outreach to Muslims in Toronto and surroundings.

Then, for the past few years, Hospitality Ministry and LCMS's Slovak District together have engaged in Christian outreach to the new Canadians in Montreal.

Since our return to Canada, Greta and I have visited India twice, on both occasions with the purpose of promoting the cause of reaching Muslims. Currently, we hear more about Muslims coming to Jesus as Saviour and Lord in several places in India's Tamil Nadu.

Here and abroad, how great the challenge!"

Phase 2 and 3 Information

Inspiration:

After deciding for Christian ministry as a vocation and soon after having taken an elementary course on the history of Islam, I opted for serving as a missionary among Muslims. What began to be clear was the size of the Muslim World and the minimal Christian concern for reaching out to Muslims with the Gospel. At that time Muslims numbered some 250-300 million, one person in seven in the world a Muslim. It was also at that time that Dr. Henry Nau and the Society for the Promotion of Mohammedan Mission were encouraging the LCMS Mission Board to revive Christian mission among Muslims.

Today, it seems Muslims number about one person in five in the world. Given that God's love embraces the Muslim World also (John 3:16), should not their dramatic numbers offer us further inspiration to reach out to them? ... Dr. Nau, are you around here somewhere?!

A distinct peculiarity of Islam for Christians:

Islam is a post-Christian religion, the only post-Christian religion in the world of significant size. Generally speaking, Muslims see Islam as the correction, as well as the continuation and culmination, of Christianity. Islam understands the true Jesus to be the Jesus of the Qur'an, not the Jesus of the Bible, for, according to many Muslims, the Christians have corrupted the Bible and distorted the person of Jesus. Jesus is a prophet, not the Son of God, because God has no wife and no son, i.e., John 3:16, good news for Christians, is blasphemy for Muslims! He escapes the cross and death, for how could God allow the prophet Jesus to be so badly treated! God takes Him to heaven and He will return again on the Last Day. Christians, therefore, must understand what Muslims not only understand about Jesus but also misunderstand about Him and Christian faith. On the other hand, need we mention that Christians have misunderstandings about Islam and Muslims?

Are Christians, more and more, "getting an attitude" towards Muslims?

Years ago our senior LCMS missionary among Muslims, Henry Otten, himself at that time quite new in India, related how one night he and a few Christian brothers visited a nearby village with a projector, literature and filmstrip on the life of Jesus. Task accomplished. On the way home -- the night was very dark -- one of the Christians fell into a well. Thank God, there were other Muslims around to help rescue the Christian brother!... Given among Christians an intensifying animosity towards Muslims, it does seem imperative that we Christians consider reviewing our attitude toward Muslims, does it not? Or may it be that we are not mad and frustrated but simply disinterested?

Thank you, Brother Amirullah Alvi

Soon after arrival in India, I met Amirullah Alvi, pastor of a small Urdu speaking congregation in Hyderabad, South India. As I recall, he was the first Christian convert from Islam I had met. And what started his conversion? "One of my teachers at school," he said, "was an Englishman, a well educated and dignified man. During our Bible study class, he always first carefully brought out his Bible from a clean and beautiful silken cloth, just as Muslims do with their Qur'an, never holding it below their waist or placing it on the floor. As a Muslim I had always heard from Muslims that Christians had changed their Bible, that the Christians had corrupted their Book, (the Injil, Evangel) that God had given to Jesus. But if this were the case," I thought, "then why did this man, so intelligent and of such good character, so respect and honour the Holy Bible?"

Continuity:

I cannot recall his name anymore. We'll call him Abdullah. I do recall meeting Abdullah in Vaniyambadi. He told me he had become a Christian years ago (probably when Brux and Burow were in India). Thereafter the Muslims ostracized him. He could find no work. No one helped him.... So he was compelled to return to Islam.... Before he left, he told me his favourite hymn was *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* -- and wept. If I did not weep when he wept, I should have. I never saw him again.

In 1965-66 we furloughed for a year in Chicago, close to Greta's relatives in Chicago's "Little Lithuania." In Chicago we met Dr. and Mrs. Brux who kindly invited us to their home. Dr. and Mrs. Brux were the first LCMS missionaries to serve specifically among Muslims. We told them that we occupied the same house they had occupied and that on occasions we met Muslims in Vaniyambadi who still remembered

them. We also thanked them for the second story they had added to our big mud-brick home, the only “air conditioning” we ever really enjoyed in India. When we left Chicago to return to India, they kindly took us to the airport.

Persecution of Christians – and others:

While in India we, too, enjoyed remarkable freedom to share the Gospel. However today and in the immediate past few years, many Christians (and at times Muslims also) in various parts of India have become subjects of persecution at the hands of a few Hindu organizations in India. Christians continue to suffer persecution, especially in some areas of the Muslim and Communist worlds. We wonder to what extent the LCMS and LCC, their congregations and districts understand and respond.

Early in the era of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, two of the Iranian students who attended our summer seminars on Christian-Muslim relations in India were murdered in Iran. (See the DVD, *A Cry from Iran*.)"

An extracurricular activity?

During our first term in India, an Englishman, still at the time the director of deaf work in Madras State (later Tamil Nadu), invited us to visit India's third oldest school for the deaf in Tinnevely. I had never met a deaf person, much less seen a deaf school - and what an education I got from this school! Thanks especially to an Indian sister, Esther Cornelius, who sought out deaf children anywhere at any time, the I.E.L.C. eventually began a deaf school in Ambur. Muslim children also come.

So were our visits to this school "extracurricular"? In any case, ministry to the deaf, the blind and other handicapped people in India remains challenging. After this incident, we always wanted to see a deaf school in India before our departure. We did. And, thanks to Esther Cornelius, a blind school also. Praise God!

Muslims: How to Respond, Concordia Publishing House 1996: <https://www.cph.org/p-20084-how-to-respond-to-muslims-3rd-edition-ebook-edition.aspx>.

Understanding Some Muslim Misunderstandings, Fellowship of Faith for the Muslims and Philoxenia/Hospitality Ministry: <https://www.ffmna.org/product-page/understanding-some-muslim-misunderstanding>.

God's Good News for the Sick, Path of Peace, Esslingen, Germany by Dr. Ibrahim Omarkhan Deshmukh and Ernest Hahn, 2004; Parts: 1. Sickness and Suffering 2. Miracles of Jesus 3. God Heals Today (the testimony of I.O. Deshmukh from India, himself a medical doctor and a convert from Islam, and his personal experience of sickness, suffering and faith healing, and the benefit of this experience in treating his patients).

We are grateful for opportunities we have had to work with several converts from Islam on such literature projects also.