

Jeremy Hinds (1932-1993): Teacher and Apologist to Christians and Muslims

by

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Introduction

The 21st Century has seen a spiralling decline in the relationship between Christian and Muslim communities in various parts of the world with 9/11, 7/7 in the UK, and conflicts in Israel/Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan giving cause for increasing animosity. In Nigeria alone there has been a catalogue of conflicts resulting from a cocktail of ethnic, political, economic, social and religious factors, and pre dating the conflicts in the West. This has led to increased polarisation of, and separation between communities. Now insult and accusation are the language of public statement.

To reflect on the life and work of Jeremy Hinds a man who placed Christian Muslim dialogue, relationship and witness at the centre of his ministry might help us in finding the way ahead in our time. In this paper adapted from my Masters thesis I want to give a brief biography and introduction to Hinds' approach.¹

A Brief Biography

"I find it hard to understand why I have been chosen to give this opening paper at this important gathering to which so many of you have come so far to attend. If I am wearing the clothes of a Hausa mallam (teacher), that is because I feel most comfortable that way and that is the way I have adopted and feel most at home."

With these words Jeremy Hinds opened his address to the *Joint Christian Ministry to West Africa Assembly*, (JCMWA) in 1984.² They express Hinds' emphasis on identification with the Hausa Muslims among whom he worked.

John Stott in an interview with Steve Turner quoted Max Warren the former General Secretary of CMS as having said "the only effective missionary to the Muslim world was someone who had been tempted to become a Muslim." Stott explained, "What he meant by that was that missionaries to Muslims must go on reading and rereading the Qur'an until they find the attraction of it. They have to find what it is about Islam that holds so many people."³ Jeremy Hinds identified with Muslims not only through his knowledge of the Qur'an but in his whole way of life. He, together with his family passed the test of Parshall's cross-cultural communicator in terms of dress, language, and attitude to time, food etc.⁴

This was a cross-cultural leap from Hinds' beginnings in Southport, Lancashire (North West England) in what would have been a very monochrome white community. He was born on December 16th 1932, educated in Sedburgh, and after National Service (a compulsory period

in the armed services for all 18 year old men after World War II) he went up to Oxford University in 1954 to study Greats. In a letter to James Tweedie⁵, Hinds gives some biographical detail and describes how he first met Hausa Muslims while he was doing his National Service in Northern Nigeria (This would have been in the early 1950's). He himself told me that he had a choice of playing Polo or learning Hausa and as he did not like Polo he decided to learn Hausa. His Hausa teachers were only too willing to talk about their religion, Islam.⁶ Hinds had little Christian commitment until he went up to Oxford where he came to a personal experience of, "the overwhelming joy of forgiveness through the death of Christ."⁷ Immediately he felt that he should go back to share this news with his Hausa friends in Northern Nigeria. This shaped his further study. On the advice of Max Warren (The General Secretary of CMS) he took a second degree in Theology⁸ before a year of Arabic and a period of Qur'anic study with the help of retired missionaries from Egypt and Palestine.⁹ He was influenced by a book 'The Ugly American' which told "the story of a Roman Catholic priest who studied Communism so much that he knew their doctrines better than the Communists he met."¹⁰ Hinds set this as his goal, knowledge of the Qur'an and Islamic Theology so that he would be able to listen and understand Qur'anic exposition given in the traditional way.¹¹ However, to this traditional interpretation he brought the critical scholarship of his academic training.

It was 1962 before Hinds departed for Zaria District in Northern Nigeria to work as a lay evangelist. Here he developed relationships with the small Christian Community in Wusasa, many of them converts from Islam and also with local Muslim teachers. Hinds would often visit with converts from Islam such as Malam Idi Kano and, usually at the home of the Malam (Teacher).¹² He described the exchanges thus,

*"Sometimes the argument gets heated but it is because we are talking about things we hold dear. We end in peace and a good cup of tea and refreshments until the next time."*¹³

In 1966 he was asked by the Diocese of Kaduna (read Diocese of Northern Nigeria) to be the Principal of a new training institute (The Diocesan Training Centre [DTC]) to prepare men for catechist and ordained ministry. Hinds developed a communal style of life among the students. For Hinds his identification with the people led him to consider a cross-cultural marriage before he met and married Wendy in 1970.¹⁴ Wendy became a great support to Jeremy, and occasionally when ill health prevented him from presenting a conference paper, she would read it on his behalf. He held the role of DTC Principal for three years and then covered a number of interregnums between Principals until 1979, when a heart attack forced him to leave the DTC and Wusasa. Throughout this period he continued to visit local Malams and to read the debates between Muslim scholars in the Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwobo (tr. 'truth is worth more than a penny') and the New Nigerian newspapers. After recuperation in the UK, Hinds returned with his family to Nigeria to take up a post as lecturer at The Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN), Bukuru (he had two years lecturing at Bukuru in the mid 1970's before continuing his ministry at Wusasa). Here his influence reached students from many of the church denominations founded by the Protestant missions to Northern Nigeria. At the same time he was appointed as a consultant to the Pan African Islam in Africa Project (now PROCURA – Project for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa) and so was able to share his expertise more widely. In 1987 Hinds resigned from his post at TCNN and was seconded by CMS to work with the Bible Society. One project was to enable the transliteration of Bible passages from Hausa Roman script into Ajami (Hausa written in Arabic script). Although this was never completed in his time, Hinds oversaw the publication by the Bible Society of

booklets in Ajami telling the story of the prophets, Noah, Abraham, Moses etc. It was also during this period that he completed the Qur'an Word Studies, written to stimulate dialogue.

In a visit to Liberia one of the Bishops pleaded with Hinds to relocate there. Hinds felt that he had shared his knowledge with many Christians in Nigeria who were now in positions of leadership and that the need was greater in Liberia.¹⁵ It was agreed with CMS that, after a period in the UK, Hinds and his family would base themselves in Monrovia. However by 1991 Liberia had disintegrated into civil war. The plan was put on hold and Hinds turned to dialogue with the Asian Muslim communities in the North West of England (e.g. Oldham, Blackburn, Preston, etc), made up of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis who had settled in the cotton mill towns at about the time that Hinds first went to Nigeria. Here Hinds continued his dialogue and debate usually accompanied by Christians from a local church, and often meeting Muslim leaders at the mosque. Hinds was never a lone ranger but, rather he wanted to stimulate the involvement of Christians who lived in communities cheek by jowl with Muslims. Hinds was supported in this work through CMS and the Jerusalem Trust from 1992 until his death in July after a massive stroke.

Introduction to Hinds' Approach

For Hinds the view that Muhammad had no part in the shape and form of the Qur'an did "him a great disservice",¹⁶ rather having heard the stories of the men of God of the Old and New Testaments, Muhammad wove them into the shape in which we find them in the Qur'an.

Nigel Stone (a former student of St. John's College) in his 'Report on a three-month exchange visit to the Theological College of Northern Nigeria, Bukuru in 1984' summarised Hinds' teaching on a Christian approach to Muslims.¹⁷ Muslims should not be dismissed as 'infertile ground nor should they be approached through traditional methods of evangelism. Rather, Christians should seek to determine the exact form of the religion (or sect of Islam) and get acquainted with their beliefs and practices by study and dialogue. The advantages of this method are:

- a). A ministry of reconciliation rather than alienation will develop in the local community.
- b). The Christian witness will be better able to get alongside and understand the non- Christian group.
- c). You will earn the respect of such groups because you have taken an interest in them.¹⁸

Hinds saw his ministry as twofold, as a teacher to churches about Islam and as an evangelist to Muslims.¹⁹ I believe his role as a teacher to Christians stems from his understanding of evangelism.²⁰ This had to be church based to be effective and therefore the churches had to know how to relate to Muslims for outreach to be effective.²¹ Hinds wrote that there were two groups of Christians who needed to study the Qur'an, those who felt called to work with Muslims and those who disliked them.²²

Hinds never spoke of Jesus mosques and he may have been less in favour of such a concept than Parshall.²³ Hinds arrived in Nigeria a few years before Igbos were massacred by the Hausa following the Igbo led coup and assassination of Tafawa Balewa and Ahmadu Bello and other Northern political leaders. Tribalism has been a constant problem in Nigeria, even in the churches. Homogeneous local churches can be perceived as a denial of the unity that exists in

Christ across ethnic differences. Latterly in Hinds' work among Asian Muslims in Lancashire he would always attempt to work with local Christians whatever their race or denomination.²⁴ He believed that local churches should be ready to change in order to accommodate Muslim converts. In his address to the *JCMWA Assembly* Hinds had two key principles for witness²⁵:

a). That converts should remain in the state in which they were called based on

I Cor.7:17-24. Hinds applied this to mean that converts from Islam should be allowed to read the Qur'an alongside the Bible and to pray five times a day using Christian content. That is, the Holy Spirit should be left to show new converts what they should and should not do. As much as possible they should not be extracted from their communities.²⁶

b). That salvation needs to be made immediately obvious to those to whom we wish to commend it.²⁷ That is, it should be seen in the lifestyle of the Christians. So for Hinds, "theology means explaining how God is actually working in front of us."²⁸ He held a holistic view of mission (i.e. that the gospel involves ministering to body, mind and spirit) believing that Christians involved in social action among Muslims would inevitably be asked questions about their faith and those going to declare their faith would get caught up in social action.²⁹

In the same paper, (*JBTS*) Hinds set out his belief that "the Qur'an and Islamic theology lead inevitably to the Gospel of Jesus Christ."³⁰ Later he described his "particular interest" as ... "the development of ideas basic to the gospel from the Qur'an."³¹ One example is that of atonement, a concept examined in the Qur'an Word Studies.³²

In summary Hinds always adopted a culturally relevant and sensitive approach to the Hausa or the Asian among whom he worked. He never targeted the weaker members of a community but would always work through leaders of mosque or village.³³ Though he read widely and wrote many papers,³⁴ he was no ivory tower theologian or apologist but had time to meet ordinary Muslims in mosque and home and to sit alongside listening and sharing.³⁵ Hinds' approach in Nigeria and in England was incarnational involving the development of relationships across the religious divide.³⁶

Hinds' Writing.

Jeremy Hinds' writing centred on enabling Christians to gain an understanding of Islam, Muslim thought and culture and, particularly of the Qur'an, as well as providing material to serve as a starting point for dialogue.³⁷ The Qur'an Correspondence course³⁸ was written to help Christians to read the Qur'an, to understand its historical setting and how it was put together. Hinds' *Qur'an Word Studies*³⁹ were written for dialogue rather than as a book. They were produced in loose-leaf format with permission to photocopy for use within a group and with guidelines for how to lead a group discussion.⁴⁰ The material came out of Hinds' experience of dialogue with Muslims in Nigeria and elsewhere, fused together with ideas of Christian converts from Islam.⁴¹ In particular, Hinds also acknowledged the debt he owed to Malam Idi Kano, a Qur'anic teacher who converted to Christianity and used the Qur'an extensively in his preaching.⁴²

Here is a summary of Hinds' second Qur'an Word Studies **Is God Our Father?** (A Study of Walad, Ibn and Ruh)

Hinds seeks to discuss a topic at the heart of the Christian understanding of God. He begins with a question, "Is it possible that the relationship of father to child could be the aim of our creator God for human beings?"⁴³ Hinds suggests that Father might be the hundredth name of God for which some Muslims have been seeking.⁴⁴

He then proceeds to examine the two names for son (walad and ibn) in Arabic.⁴⁵ Walad is related to the physical act of procreation and it is this idea which Muhammad rejected, for he thought that Christians believed that God had taken a human wife and produced a son and that the Trinity were the Father, Son and Mary.⁴⁶ This must be set in the context of Meccan pagan beliefs in which Allah had begotten three daughters.⁴⁷ Hinds notes that there are only two suras where the Qur'an speaks of Jesus or Christians as ibn Allah, Suras 5 & 9, and these are thought to have been the last Suras revealed to Muhammad; and after he met with orthodox Christians and discovered that they did not use walad but ibn when talking of Jesus as Son of God. Ibn has a much wider meaning than walad and can simply express the idea of a close relationship.⁴⁸

To the question of the Qur'an in Sura 5: 18 as to why Christians and Jews should call themselves sons of God (Ibn Allah) and yet be chastised by God, Hinds answers by reference to Heb.12: 5-8. It is just because we are God's sons that he disciplines us.⁴⁹ For though we are God's servants might it not be possible for God in his mercy to declare us his sons?⁵⁰ Hinds notes the relationship between son and Messiah in the Old Testament⁵¹ (the anointed one = al Masih in the Qur'an) and receiving of the Spirit and sees this as being fulfilled in the New Testament.⁵² He sees in the Qur'an "two signs which show that Jesus should be called Son of God in that (1) he should be called Messiah, (2) that he should uniquely receive the Holy Spirit."⁵³ He rejects the Islamic interpretation that the Spirit is the angel Gabriel, for that would infer that the angel Gabriel was breathed into Adam rather than God's spirit.⁵⁴ He concludes his argument by showing how Jesus passes on the Spirit to his disciples who are thus given the right to become children of God.⁵⁵

Hinds accepts a critical study approach, but he never seeks to knock down the Qur'an in polemic fashion, but rather to argue from the actual Arabic words used and the historic context of the 'revelations'.⁵⁶ The discussion is useful for both Christian and Muslim for it helps both sides to understand an issue that has separated Christians and Muslims without seeking to denigrate either 'Holy Book'.

Conclusion

Jeremy Hinds entered into the culture and life of the Hausa people. Later in the UK he adopted the same approach in meeting Asian Muslims. Certainly there can be no place for what Kung describes as the "Old mission approach" ... of... "immunizing through slander."⁵⁷ However Hinds' approach and his writings came out of a deep respect for Muslims, the Qur'an and their religious beliefs and practices. Many of his arguments were the development of the thought of Muslims such as Idi Kano who came to faith in Christ and yet believed he was still a 'Muslim'; for a Muslim is one who has surrendered to God. For Idi Kano complete surrender and peace only came in Christ.⁵⁸

Jeremy Hinds believed that his calling was as teacher to Christians and evangelist to Muslims⁵⁹ but he accepted many approaches to Muslims and encouraged each Christian to find their own calling.⁶⁰ The Church has to witness in word and *deed*, lifestyle is as important as what is said. For Hinds, relationships took priority over programmes. From this perspective it was not Hinds as an individual that was involved in witness but his whole family who ate 'tuwo da miyan

kuka'.⁶¹ Hinds did not interpret Bible and Qur'an as a European but as a fellow Hausa sitting under the shade of a tree and explaining what God in Christ has done.⁶² I believe it was Hinds' respect for, identification and deep interaction with the Hausa people in Nigeria and then later with Asian Muslims in the UK that validated his use of the Qur'an.

One area where Christians might seek to dialogue with Muslims today is with regard to the concept of 'Jihad'. It is a basic tenet of Islam which some would put alongside the Five Pillars of Islam. However the interpretation of the term among Muslims is divided between that of the pacifist journey of the soul to Allah which includes doing battle with all that leads away from God, and the militant Al Qaeda understanding of seeing the threat as an external one from the infidel, the enemies of Allah and seeking to bring his judgement of the sword on those who reject or stand in the way of Islam. There is of course a parallel with the idea of a crusade as going to war or the alternative of bringing individuals to a personal relationship with God. Such a dialogue could help Christian and Muslim to a better understanding of the other community and assist in looking for ways of peaceful coexistence.

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² 'Reaching Out in Word' a paper presented at JCMWA, 'Reaching Out in Jesus Name' 11-15 Nov. 1984 Minutes, Exhibit 6.

³ Church Times, 13 Oct. 1995, p.10

⁴ Parshall, *New Paths...* pp.97-125

⁵ Petch, Appendix 8, Hinds to Tweedie

⁶ Personal Discussion

⁷ Petch, Appendix 8, Hinds to Tweedie

⁸ Daily Telegraph, Obituary, July 23rd 1993

⁹ Petch, Appendix 8, Hinds to Tweedie

¹⁰ Petch, Appendix 8, Hinds to Tweedie

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Personal Discussion

¹⁵ Phone interview with W. Hinds, October 12 2006

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ A copy of this report is archived in the library of St John's College, Nottingham

¹⁸ Ibid. p.12

¹⁹ JCMWA Assembly Minutes 1984, p.4)

²⁰ cf. Michael Green, *Evangelism Through The Local Church*, London 1990.

²¹ JCMWA Assembly Minutes 1984, p.1 re- witness to the Fulani and the unfriendly local church.

²² Ibid.

²³ cf., *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism* pp.157-180.

²⁴ Hinds, CMS Link Letters 88, Jan.1991; 89, 1991; and 95, Jun.1992.

²⁵ JCMWA Assembly, 'Reaching Out in Word' 1984, p.1

²⁶ Ibid., p.2

²⁷ Ibid., p.2

²⁸ 'The Qur'an and Muslim Theology, The Christian and the Gospel', at Jos-Bukuru Theological Society, [JBTS], Mar. 4, 1985, p.1

²⁹ Petch, Appendix 8, Hinds to Tweedie p.2

³⁰ JBTS, Mar.4, 1985, p.2

³¹ Ibid. p.4

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- ³² Qur'an Word Studies (QWS), Word of Life, P.O. Box 14 Oldham
- ³³ Hinds, JCMWA Assembly, 1984, p.5
- ³⁴ See Petch, Appendix 6 for a list of his publications and papers
- ³⁵ JBTS Paper, Mar. 4, 1985, p.4
- ³⁶ Daily Telegraph, Obituary, July 23rd 1993
- ³⁷ I include a bibliography of Jeremy Hinds' writing
- ³⁸ Qur'an Course, London, CMS, nd.
- ³⁹ Qur'an Word Studies (QWS), Word of Life, P.O. Box 14 Oldham. The Word Studies and the Qur'an Correspondence Course are available to purchase from www.kitab.org.uk
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p.iv
- ⁴¹ Word Study 4, 'The Death of Christ', Hinds acknowledges his dependence on Iskander Jadid, The Cross in the Gospel and the Qur'an, and also from his in depth reading of different Muslim interpretations of the Qur'an and Islamic Theology. (e.g. Hinds, 'Texts About Jesus by Ibn Arabi and Al Ghazali' in ed, Niels Arendt, Islam in Africa Project International Course, "Islam and Christianity", 14-21 Oct., 1986, Freetown, Sierra Leone.)
- ⁴² Hinds, 'Report on the Project for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa, Nigeria North, April 1989, noted the completion of nine dialogues "in honour of Mallam Idi Kano, showing how the Qur'an points to the truth of the Gospel."
- ⁴³ Qur'an Word Studies (QWS), Word of Life, P.O. Box 14 Oldham, p.13
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Qur'an, Sura5: 116
- ⁴⁷ Qur'an, Sura53: 19ff.
- ⁴⁸ QWS, p.18
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid. p.17
- ⁵¹ Ibid. p.19-20
- ⁵² Ibid. p.21
- ⁵³ Ibid. p.21
- ⁵⁴ Ibid. p.22; cf. Qur'an Sura 38:72-73
- ⁵⁵ Ibid. p.23-24
- ⁵⁶ Ibid. p.18 e.g. in determining the dating of the suras p.18
- ⁵⁷ Kung, p.22
- ⁵⁸ cf. QWS. 'Peace and Surrender'
- ⁵⁹ Hinds, JCMWA Assembly, 1984, p.4
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ a traditional Hausa dish of stiff guinea corn porridge and soup made from baobab leaves
- ⁶² Hinds, 'The First 25 Years After Nigerian Independence, Hausa Polity, Islam and Modern Political Aspirations', unpublished paper, p.1