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OttawaWatch 56: The view from Jakarta

By Lloyd Mackey

I had almost forgotten about Jeff Hammond, the pastor of a 15,000 strong church in Jakarta, Indonesia, who spent several days in Ottawa in 2005, sharing his views about Christian Peacemaking in a dominant Muslim society. Re-reading this in 2021 reminded me of the occasional approach to “analysis” journalism. To use baseball pitching terminology, it involves the “long slow curve followed by the fast break”. In this case, toward the end, you will find the fast break – the concepts of conciliation that help bring the reduction of conflict in a mixed Christian/Muslim society. And the concepts can prevail, whether the dominant religion is either Christian or Muslim.

For starters, Edna and I would like to wish God’s best at Christmas to the readers of OttawaWatch.

For us, it has been a very different kind of Advent season, with each of us being in different parts of Canada, involved in our particular Hill activities.

As I write this, I am in a hotel room in Moncton and, in a few minutes will head out to a Blessings Christian Marketplace bookstore to meet people who might want to buy a copy *The Pilgrimage of Stephen Harper*. And Edna is in Saskatoon, in connection with her Hill work.

We will be back together Thursday (December 22) in Ottawa, from where we intend not to stir until after New Year’s, when we will go together to Saskatchewan for 10 days.

We are grateful that Christmas, the birth of Christ and the redemptive reason behind it are very much in evidence in Canada. True, the trend toward renaming the season “the holiday” seems to have gathered some momentum. But there are a fair number of people who, even though their adherence to Christianity is nominal or non-existent, are happy to rebel against those who would remove the C-label from Canadian civilization.

And, to us, at least, that is good news.

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And that introduces us to Jeff Hammond of Jakarta, Indonesia and, indirectly, to the subject of Christian Peacemakers in Iraq.

Hammond and his wife, Annette, spent several weeks in Canada earlier in the fall, including a few days in the national capital, in the interests of providing their take on Christian-Islamic relations in Muslim-dominated Indonesia.

Hammond, an Australian, is co-pastor of a 15,000-strong charismatic church in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, that goes by the name of Abbalove Ministries.

Abbalove has grown despite the fact that the freedom of non-Islamic religions is considerably limited, there, by Canadian standards. Part of its growth is undoubtedly connected with Bless Indonesia Today Foundation (YBI), a ministry that brought Hammond to North America. In effect, Hammond would maintain, the growth of the acceptance of the Christian gospel is nourished by its humanitarian outreach – as well as being motivated by it.

He describes YBI as “an evangelical humanitarian foundation formed to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, rescue the oppressed, heal the sick and save the lost.”

And he points out that it was formed in early 1998, in response to the economic collapse in Indonesia. During that period, it assisted in feeding 5,000 families a month.

Today, YBI is involved in several projects, including the rebuilding of villages to enable the return of people from refugee camps. One such village is in a place called North Sulawesi: its restoration has involved the building of 300 houses, a school, shops, a church plus medical and community facilities.

But Hammond has other things on his mind, as well, as he points to the October 29 beheading of three teenage girls in a terror campaign against Central Sulawesi Christians. The beheadings were the latest, apparently, of attacks which included Christian villages being burned down, churches being destroyed and Christian leaders, pastors and community leaders assassinated.

The full story is not denied by Indonesian leaders. In fact, according to Hammond, the nation’s president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, condemned the attacks and called on security forces to hunt down the perpetrators.

Hammond suggests, however, that often, in Indonesia, the words of the nation’s leaders are not always followed with action, particularly where attacks on Christians are concerned.

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That, then, was a fair part of the burden of Hammond’s message to Canadians. And he says people wanting more information may e-mail www.blessindonesiatoday@bigpond.com

But, after hearing what he had to say, I turned to a different question, based on something I had heard a back in 2002, at the Presidential Prayer Breakfast in Washington.

One of the speakers, there, a leader from a country where the Islamic influence is strong, told the group that he was “a Muslim who has put Jesus in his heart.”

Hammond confirmed that in many Islam-dominated countries, there are many such people – and that their faith in Jesus was real and valid. But he also suggested that they must monitor their own words and actions carefully, in order to protect themselves from being ostracized from the larger community.

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A few weeks after Hammond shared his thoughts with me, the world learned of the kidnapping of four members of a Christian Peacemakers' team in Iraq, apparently by an until-then-unheard-of fundamentalist Islamic offshoot.

Two of the four are Canadians. And they are part of an activity of which we hear very little.

Further, they work with conflict resolution techniques and activities that are biblically-framed – many of them espoused by evangelical Christians who are part of the Mennonite and Anabaptist movements.

They work in dangerous territory. But they are doing something that, in this journalist's modest view, could lead to solutions in due course. And those solutions could come through a deep understanding of the very nature of religion-based conflict.

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At Christmas, it is good to reflect, for a moment, on that kind of peacemaking. Many of my readers know that I spent my early years in journalism in the Fraser Valley, and learned a bit about the Mennonite approach to conflict.

That experience has not turned me into a raging pacifist, particularly because I see peacemaking and peacekeeping as something that can exist in parallel to military action, not as a substitute for it.

But it has, I believe, caused me to be aware that there is a biblical approach to conflict resolution that, applied judiciously, might make a real difference.

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