

PRESENT - DAY CHRISTIANITY IN THE GULF STATES OF
THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

By
Norman A. Horner

The histories of early Christianity include many references to thriving Christian communities along the Gulf Coast of the Arabian peninsula, but from the eighth century onward those communities gradually disappeared under the impact of Islam. Overt evangelistic outreach is even yet an impossibility in that particular region. There are, however, ongoing missionary activities of many kinds, and the undramatic, low-key Christian witness of an expanding foreign population has a significance that missiologists should not overlook.

Kuwait, Bahrian, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Oman are the most important of eleven sheikdoms and emirates that extend the length of the Persian (or Arabian) Gulf and around the tip of the Arabian peninsula to the border of Yemen. It is a generally arid and sparsely populated region where the economic and cultural character has undergone more rapid and far-reaching change in the last ten years than has happened almost anywhere else on earth. Oil production is the common denominator of the new prosperity and social upheaval in all but three or four of those states. The influx of foreigners - largely Indian, Pakistani, Iranian, European, and American - now vastly exceeds the native population in several of them (notably Kuwait, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai). This accounts for a higher percentage of Christians in the total population than one would expect to find in such strong-holds of very conservative Islam. The number of truly "native" Christians is, however, infinitesimal - less than 150 in total along the entire length of the peninsula from Kuwait to Oman.

Arabic-speaking expatriates (including Christians) from other parts of the Middle East are there in considerable numbers, but the largest Christian community by far is Indian. This may seem surprising, since India itself is only about 2 percent Christian. Indian Christians, however, have been more inclined than Hindus to work abroad; the Muslim nations have received them more readily; and they have in turn attracted others from their own communities to join them. Thus as many as 30 percent of the Indians now living in the Arabian Gulf States may be of Christian background. Very few hold top positions in the economic structures of the region. Most of them are employed in secondary jobs with oil companies or trading firms, in various medical services, as merchants working independently or for small companies, as household servants, and so forth. Nevertheless, they are the backbone of the work force and are likely to be prominent in the area for a long time to come.

Among the eleven Gulf States, five members of the political federation known as the United Arab Emirates are not included in the purview of this article: Sharjah, Ras-al-Kaimah, Ajman, Fujairah, and Umm-al-Quwain. These represent highly traditional Islamic societies, with total populations ranging from only 6,000 in Ajman to no more than 60,000 in Sharjah. Western

influence has thus far been minimal in all five. Few expatriates, and hence very few Christians, are residing in any of them. This is not to say that there is no Christian witness of any kind, but only that it is more limited than in the six states that have been selected as our focus.

Three generalizations can be made about Christianity in the Gulf area as a whole: (1) A remarkably large part of the total Christian population is from South India; (2) the majority of these Indian Christians are Roman Catholics; (3) until recent years the non-Catholics among them met together in what were known as "Malayalee congregations" (Malayalam-speaking), which assemblies included people from such varied ecclesiastical backgrounds as Mar Thomite, Syrian Orthodox, Church of South India, Pentecostal, and Brethren. As numbers increased with further immigration from India, they divided into the communions of their origin and, in some cases, sent for Indian priests or pastors to serve on a full-time basis. In several places, however, the Malayalee congregations continue to meet on special occasions, a vestige of the earlier commonality, but also a continuing expression of the ecumenical spirit that has emerged throughout the Gulf States where Christians have no vested interests to protect, since they are almost all temporary residents.

Statistical estimates of total Christian constituency anywhere in the Middle East are approximations at best. Those I have published concerning other parts of that vast region embrace all the people who belong by birthright to the several Christian "millets." Such a procedure for the would-be statistician is justified, because churches in the Middle East tend to be composed of ethnic groups as a whole; they are social as well as religious units. In the Gulf States, however, where most Christians are temporary residents, the socio-religious life-style is significantly different. It seems more realistic, therefore, to include only those who are regarded as taking some active part in the life of the various churches and worshiping communities as such, and the following statistical tables have all been compiled on that basis.

KUWAIT

	Percent of total Christian community	Percent of total population
Eastern Orthodox.....6,000 (Antioch Patriarchate)	14	0.75
Oriental Orthodox.....10,000	25	1.25
Armenian.....6,600		
Coptic.....1,300		
Syrian Orthodox Church of Malabar 2,100		
Assyrian ("Nestorian")... 400	1	--
Roman Catholic.....19,500	48	2.40
Latin-rite.....13,000 (1/2 Indian)		
Melkite.....2,900		
Maronite.....1,800		
Chaldean.....1,200		
Armenian..... 350		
Syrian..... 200		
Coptic..... 50		

	Percent of total Christian community	Percent of total population
Protestant and Anglican..	4,700	12
Anglican.....	1,350	
Mar Thomite.....	1,600	
Evangelical.....	1,300	
Indian Pentecostal	200	
Church of		
So. India.....	100	
Indian Brethren...	100	
Seventh-Day		
Adventist.....	50	
TOTAL.....	c.40,600	c.5%

Kuwait is an area of 9,370 square miles. The population is now estimated at more than 800,000, having increased by nearly 30 percent since 1970. The vast majority of the people live in Kuwait city and in nearby Ahmadi; others are in scattered oil camps. The number of nomadic tribespeople is variously estimated but probably not large. Considerably less than half the total population is native Kuwaiti, the rest being expatriates including Europeans, Americans, Iranis, about 25,000 Indians, and a roughly equal number of Pakistanis. Thus the government's expressed goal of maintaining a balance - 50 percent native and 50 percent foreign - is a long way from realization.

Thirty years ago Kuwait city was a relatively quiet Arab town, living chiefly on the proceeds from pearl fishing and trade with India and the African coast. Then came oil, and a totally different way of life. Today this sheikhdom ranks second among the nations of the world in petroleum export and fourth in crude-oil production. Its per capita gross national product is highest in the world. The last remnants of the old city wall were demolished in 1957, and an ultramodern metropolis has arisen literally on the desert sand. There are plush and very expensive hotels, high-rise office buildings, apartment houses and condominiums (all air conditioned), wide boulevards with superb lighting, and the very latest in electronic equipment. The cost of living is very high, but so also are salaries and wages.

Medical care is free, and free public education is rapidly expanding. Thus the medical and educational services once provided largely by Reformed Church in America (RCA) and Roman Catholic missionaries have given way to institutions in which some of these missionaries still serve, but now on government salaries. Mission schools have disappeared altogether. Only the Armenian Orthodox any longer maintain a church-related school, and it is strictly for the children of their own expatriate community.

Journals of the several churches represented in this country report their respective activities from time to time, but little has been attempted by way of a more inclusive description. Monsignor Victor Sanmiguel, Roman Catholic Apostolic Vicar for Kuwait, has published the only effort thus far to treat the subject comprehensively. His booklet, The Christians of Kuwait (1970), is already out of date (the

inevitable fate of any such survey within a few years after publication), but it remains a valuable contribution to ecumenical understanding. It is beyond the scope of the present article to describe the life of the churches in detail. Suffice it here to note two items of ecumenical interest.

The building of the National Evangelical Church of Kuwait (NECK) is used by such a variety of groups throughout the week as to require a very precise hour-by-hour schedule. In addition to both Arabic- and English-speaking congregations of the NECK itself, five others conduct all their activities within its walls: Mar Thomite, two Syrian Orthodox bodies (one affiliated with the Patriarch in Damascus and the other related exclusively to the Catholics in India), the Malayalee Congregation, and the Church of South India. St. Paul's Anglican Church in the same city also makes its building available to three or four Indian congregations of diverse ecclesiastical origins.

The Kuwait Church Council is an informal but very active group of clergy and lay leaders who meet periodically for matters of common interest. Except for the Council of Churches in Sudan, it is the only ecumenical association in the Middle East to which Roman Catholics belong officially.

BAHRAIN

	Percent of total Christian community	Percent of total population
Oriental Orthodox.....	5	--
Syrian Orthodox Church of Malabar.... 200		
Roman Catholic.....	63	1.22
Total.....2,700		
All Under Latin-rite Capuchin priests; all services in English except when visiting priests meet separately with Melkites, Maronites, Syrian and Indian Catholics		
Protestant and Anglican....	32	0.63
National Evangelical Church.....450		
Arabic.....60		
English....180		
Tamil.....128		
Urdu.....50		
Telegu.....35		
Anglican.....500		
Mar Thomite.....200		
Indian Brethren.....100		
Awali Inter- denominational..... 75 (Employees of oil company in Awali)		
Indian Pentecostal.... 75		
Church of South India. 75		
St. Thomas Evangelical.10		
TOTAL.....c.4,300		c.1.85%

Bahrain is a group of more than thirty very small islands situated some twenty miles from the eastern coast of the Arabian peninsula. The largest of them, Bahrain Island, is 231 square miles in area. The total population of this sheikhdom is estimated at 220,000 (including about 40,000 foreign residents), half of whom live in two cities: Manama, the capital, and Muharraq. Because the expatriate community is proportionately smaller than in some of the other Gulf States, so also is the percentage of Christians to the total population.

Here also petroleum is the major source of wealth. However, oil production did not begin on a large scale until the 1950s and the reserves are thought to be less than in some of the adjacent areas. For this reason there is less extravagant affluence than, for example, in either Kuwait or Abu Dhabi, and a more traditional way of life. Serious efforts are being made to diversify the economy by introducing new industries. Among such projects is an aluminum plant that may continue to operate economically on the very large supply of natural gas long after the oil reserves have been depleted.

Bahrain was one of the first areas outside the Arabian mainland to accept Islam, and it remains religiously conservative. There is nevertheless a cordial relationship between the present sheikh and the Christian communities. For example, the sheikh gave one fourth of the total construction cost of the large new Evangelical Church building and attended the dedication service in person. The three church-related schools are located in Manama: Sacred Heart (Roman Catholic), St. Christopher's (Anglican), and the American Mission School (Reformed Church). All three maintain a high educational standard, and some of the sheikh's own family still get their early education at St. Christopher's. Religious instruction as such is limited to very general courses called "religious science."

Most of the Roman Catholic faithful (about 2,500) are concentrated in Manama where they have a fairly large church building. Another 200 live in Awali, an oil-company town. All services are held in English because that is the only language understood by the Catholic constituency as a whole. The majority, of course, are Indians--but they have no Indian language in common. In addition to the Catholics of Latin-rite background there are many Indian Chaldeans (Syro-Malabar Church), and some Melkites, Maronites, and Syrian Catholics from various Arab countries. Having no resident priests of the Oriental-rite churches, they all attend the Latin-rite services together.

About 500 people, mainly British, actively participate in the Anglican Church--400 of them in Manama and the rest in Awali and elsewhere. A small congregation of Indians, belonging to the Church of South India, uses the Anglican Church building for services in their own language and under lay leadership.

The new building of the National Evangelical Church is large and centrally located in Manama. The English-speaking congregation of 180 is self-supporting. The Arab congregation has about sixty members of whom 40 percent are Bahraini citizens, most of the latter born outside the country. Indian and Pakistani groups that use the same building are the

Malayalam-speaking Mar Thomites and smaller groups of people holding services in Tamil, Urdu, and Telegu. Adjacent to the church building there are three other institutions related to the Reformed Church mission. A mission hospital is staffed primarily by Indian, American, and European doctors and nurses. The expanding and improving medical service under government auspices now modifies its ministry to some extent. There is less need than formerly for surgical services, but it is still recognized as the best medical center in Bahrain for internal medicine and gynecology. The American Mission School, formerly a girls' school only, is now coeducational with classes to the eighth standard. The Family Book Shop is the largest in the Gulf area, staffed by missionary personnel of both the Danish Mission and the Reformed Church in America. Under the auspices of the Middle East Council of Churches, a plan is under way to form an association of Christian bookshops, linking those in the Gulf States with others in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. A major purpose of such an association is to encourage more Arab Christian leadership by providing greater job mobility and financial security for employees who come from the surrounding countries.

The Ecumenical Fellowship, an inter-church association of clergy and laity, meets informally from time to time. They indicate a growing interest in the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and note that common worship is easier than projects in common. There is no possibility, they say, of undertaking the kinds of social and educational services in which churches should ideally work together. "The Bahraini government would merely say, 'we don't need your help; we have money enough to take care of this ourselves.'"

QATAR

	Percent of total Christian community	Percent of total population
Oriental Orthodox.....	3	--
Syrian Orthodox Church of Malabar.....100		
Roman Catholic.....	78	1.66
Total.....2,500		
All services conducted in English		
Protestant and Anglican....	19	0.40
Anglican.....350		
Mar Thomite.....150		
Indian Brethren..... 45		
Indian Pentecostal..... 30		
Arab Evangelical..... 25		
TOTAL.....c.3,200		c.2.06%

The Qatar peninsula is 4,000 square miles in area. Estimates of total population vary greatly, but the most realistic figure seems to be 150,000. Of these, no more than 40,000 are native Qataris; the rest are Indians, Pakistanis,

Iranis, Baluchis, and assorted Europeans including about 1,800 British. More than half the population of the country (about 80,000) and most of the Christians live in Doha, the capital city and major port. Two other ports are Zekrit on the west coast and Umm Said on the east. Some Christians also reside in Dukhan, an oil center.

There are no church buildings in Qatar, and only one resident clergyman of any denomination, a Roman Catholic Capuchin father. Catholic congregations meet in Doha and at three other centers. In Doha they use the recreation hall of the oil company's Indian employees. Most of the members are Indian, but there are some British and a few Arab Catholics from other parts of the Middle East--Maronites, Melkites, Syrian Catholics, Chaldeans--and even a few Orthodox who have no congregation of their own. All services are conducted in English for want of any other common language. The priest's request for permission to erect a church building was refused by the government three years ago, but he continues to hope for some reconsideration of the matter.

A congregation that meets in the auditorium of the British School designates itself as "Anglican and Allied Churches in Doha." It is in effect a community church of largely European membership, but there are Indian members as well, and a few Arab Anglicans and Protestants from Lebanon and Palestine in particular. In the recent restructuring of the Anglican Archdiocese of Jerusalem, this and its sister congregations in the neighboring countries have become part of the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf. The archdeacon, whose residence is in Abu Dhabi, spends several days each month in Qatar (Doha and Dukhan) in pastoral services. The Mar Thomite people in Doha worship for the most part with the Anglicans. They arrange social gatherings of their own community and, on occasion, have a liturgical service led by a visiting priest from Bahrain.

With a total of less than fifty members, the Indian Brethren have nevertheless organized three separate groups in Doha. The smallest of them, the Bok Singh Fellowship, uses English because it includes people of several language backgrounds. The other two conduct their meetings in Malayalam and Tamil respectively.

It is difficult to know how many Protestants there are among the Lebanese and Palestinian communities in Qatar. According to one of them, there are not more than twenty-five and they do not meet together for religious services. He added: "We are only here temporarily, and we are not looking for trouble. It's easy for people to worship in English or some Indian language, but to do it in Arabic is simply to invite problems." The lay leader of the Bok Singh Fellowship volunteers his own less-than-generous interpretation of the matter: "The Arab Protestants here want only to make money, so they try to leave the impression that they are Muslims."

300 on Das Island (all men), and 200 in Al Ain. The prominently located Catholic compound in the city includes the large church building, the only two church-related schools in the country, and a club house. One of the schools, supervised by the Holy Rosary Sisters from Palestine, is taught in Arabic and English and now has 800 pupils. The other, with some 300 Indian and Pakistani children, is staffed by a community of nuns from India and is taught in Hindi, Urdu, and Arabic.

St. Andrew's Anglican Church is no more than a hundred meters from the Roman Catholic complex and fronts on the same seaside avenue. The congregation of about 500 (with another 300 in Al Ain and Das Island) includes people of many different denominational backgrounds. This building is also used by a variety of other congregations: Mar Thomite, Indian Pentecostal, Indian Brethren, and even by the Syrian Orthodox of Malabar prior to the construction of their own church in 1973.

The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM) has been in Abu Dhabi for about sixty years, involved primarily with a thirty-bed hospital at Al Ain. At times they have had a total missionary staff of twelve or thirteen, and there are still seven or eight. The hospital in Al Ain was developed before there were other medical facilities in the country, and these missionaries have had some freedom to conduct Bible classes and worship services among the patients. They minister to a group of about twenty Arab Christians, most of them employees of the hospital itself and mainly from other parts of the Middle East. Only two or three are native Abu Dhabians.

DUBAI

	Percent of total Christian community	Percent of total population
Oriental Orthodox.....	7	0.25
Syrian Orthodox Church of Malabar....250		
Roman Catholic.....	62	2.0
Total.....2,000 All services conducted in English and according to the Latin rite		
Protestant and Anglican...	31	1.0
Anglican/Community Church..... 600		
TEAM/Community Church..... 100		
Mar Thomite..... 200		
Indian Pentecostal.. 60		
Indian Brethren..... 30		
<hr/> TOTAL.....c.3,250		<hr/> c.3.25%

The Dubai Emirate is an area of 3,900 square miles. The estimated total population is 100,000--half of which is found in the port city of Dubai. An important creek, wide enough to admit some commercial traffic, runs through the center of the city, giving it a special character among the cities of the Gulf area, and Dubai has been called "the pearl of the Arabian coast." The country has smaller oil reserves than some of the other Gulf States but there is considerable off-shore drilling and the world's largest under-water storage tank. Because the economy is more diversified, with substantial trade in gold, pearls, and so forth, it is less inflated and life there is more stable.

The Christians in Dubai are approximately equal in numbers to those in Abu Dhabi and similarly distributed among the different communions. Nearly two thirds of them are Roman Catholics--again Indians in the majority, but including Europeans, Americans, and some Arabs from elsewhere in the Arab world.

The Anglican/Community congregation has a somewhat more multid denominational character than those in the countries to the north, although it is officially part of the diocese. The present pastor served for many years in various places with the Mission to Seamen, and he continues to spend a considerable part of his time in that particular ministry because hundreds of ships call at the busy Dubai port throughout the year. Two missionaries of The Evangelical Alliance (TEAM) have recently organized a conservative-evangelical congregation, composed largely of British and Americans, using the Anglican church building for their services.

A priest who serves the Mar Thomite congregations in both Dubai and Abu Dhabi (two hours away by car) prefers to reside in Dubai where the cost of living is less, and because he is obliged on occasion to travel much farther southward in his ministry to the smaller Mar Thomite community in Muscat. The resident priest of the Syrian Orthodox Indians in Dubai also goes periodically as far as Muscat in Oman for pastoral services.

OMAN		
	Percent of total Christian community	Percent of total population
Oriental Orthodox.....	8	negligible
Syrian Orthodox Church of Malabar....125		
Roman Catholic.....	42	"
Total.....700		
All services in English and according to the Latin rite		

Oman (cont'd)	Percent of total Christian community	Percent of total population
Protestant and Anglican...	50	"
Protestant Church of Oman:		
English language..	500	
Urdu.....	100	
Arabic.....	20	
Mar Thomite.....	150	
Indian Pentecostal..	30	
Indian Brethren.....	30	
TOTAL.....	c.1,650 ²	c.0.225% ³

The Sultanate of Oman is different from the other coastal states of the Arabian peninsula in nearly every way--topographically, culturally, economically. It covers a relatively large area, 107,000 square miles. Much of this is desert, with bare, moonscape mountains near the coast and in some other sections, but the far southwestern province of Dhofar is in the monsoon area, forested and source of the best frankincense in the world. Oman has sovereignty over three of the nine villages in Al Ain Oasis, a fertile region that continues into Abu Dhabi. There is also an Omani dependency at the tip of Cape Musandan (entrance to the Gulf of Oman) that is inhabited by people of an entirely different culture.

The sheer, craggy mountains around the twin cities of Muscat and Matrah are studded with very picturesque sixteenth-century Portuguese watchtowers, some of which are still used by the Omani police and military forces. Muscat is a major port and probably the older of the two cities. Matrah was once a center for caravan travel from the interior and still has a large and colorful Arab market of the traditional kind. A large part of the Christian population is concentrated in these two urban centers.

A coup led by Sultan Sayed Qabus bin Said in 1970 brought marked social progress, and there are current efforts to make the government more representative. This ruler, and about three fourths of the population, belong to the Ihmadi sect of Islam in which the practice is an elective rather than hereditary choice of the Imam or religious leader.

Copper has long been mined in Jebel Akhdar. Oil was discovered only in 1964 in the central part of the country. Production facilities are currently 85 percent owned by Shell, and oil revenues have continued to rise. Unfortunately, however, nearly half the national income has been used in recent years to support military operations in the war with neighboring Yemen.

At certain periods in past centuries, Oman ruled both Zanzibar and Mombassa. This international involvement, along with the strategic geographical location of the sultanate, has made for a considerable mixture in the population, including many people whose origins were in Zanzibar and Baluchistan. In an estimated total population of 750,000, no more than 30,000 are expatriates, and hence the percentage of Christians

in the country is lower than in the other Gulf States included in this particular survey. The foreign population includes some 12,000 Indians, about 10,000 Pakistanis, 2,000 British, 3,000 other Europeans (of whom a substantial number are Dutch), and 100 Americans.

Roman Catholic influence in Oman dates to the Portuguese incursions of the sixteenth century. There is no resident priest for the congregations now in the country, but a Capuchin father comes all the way from Bahrain every two weeks to spend three or four busy days in Muscat and other centers. The Catholics have long wanted to build a school, especially for the Indian children, but they have neither the money nor the government's authorization to begin.

Three years ago, the ruler of the country gave to the Christians a piece of land next to the Christian cemetery on the outskirts of Matrah. Catholic and Protestant churches have now been built side by side. The location is some distance from the center of town, but the city is rapidly growing in that direction and cheap public transportation is a possibility in the very near future. This is the first Catholic church building to be constructed anywhere in the sultanate in recent centuries. As a symbol of continuity with the past, a stone from the ruins of a sixteenth-century monastery (probably Franciscan) was placed in the foundation.

Prior to the construction of the new Catholic/Protestant compound, Protestant congregations related to the mission of the Reformed Church in America had the only church building in the country. It is an attractive building in Muscat, used also by Roman Catholics, Syrian Orthodox Indians, Mar Thomites, Malayalee Congregation, and a group of about 100 Urdu-speaking Pakistanis who maintain a close relationship with the Reformed Church missionaries. One of the RCA missionaries serves as pastor to an Arabic-language community of about twenty people. Some of them live in Muscat; others are in Matrah where they use a small meeting room on the old mission compound. All twenty are Omani citizens, although some came originally from other parts of the Gulf area.

Medical and educational institutions developed by the Reformed Church in America are worthy of special note. Both hospitals and schools have been taken over by the government in recent years, but a number of the missionaries continue in their old positions. They are still salaried by the RCA mission board and prefer the freedom of that arrangement. The Assada Maternity Hospital in Muscat has fifty-five beds and averages about fifteen deliveries every day. An RCA missionary nurse is still matron. Al Rahma Hospital in Matrah accommodates nearly eighty inpatients and an almost endless stream of outpatients. Sunday is still observed as the weekly holiday by the staff of both hospitals (although that is not permitted at any other government institution) and the mission-hospital atmosphere is still evident in most other ways. A missionary nurse continues as matron and four RCA-appointed doctors remain on the staff. On the other side of the mission compound from Al Rahma, a small hospital for tubercular patients and a leprosarium--both developed years ago by the RCA mission--continue in almost exactly the way they always have, except that they are now owned by the

government. The school in Muscat, formerly known as the American Mission School for Girls, has become coeducational and is no longer independent of the government's Ministry of Education. Its principal, however, is the same missionary who has served in that capacity for many years, and the RCA continues to provide other missionary teachers. With a student body of only about ninety, classes are small and a generally effective level of education is possible. The quality of the Arabic-language instruction has come under some criticism recently, however, putting the future of the school in some jeopardy.

The Family Bookshop remains solidly under church auspices. As the only bookstore in Muscat (except for a tiny shop selling Muslim literature only), it serves a very wide usefulness.

Summary

Thus, in the Arabian Gulf States from Kuwait to Oman one finds monotonous similarities as well as significant differences in the situation of the Christian populations.

Throughout the area Christians are almost entirely expatriates, and hence their number in a given place is proportionate to the size of the foreign population as a whole. Their religious impact on the daily life of the region is therefore quite different from that of the indigenous Christian communities who lived there in early centuries, but it is not inconsequential.

An ecumenical spirit is encouraged by the very foreignness Christians have in common, and because they are obliged for the most part to share the use of church buildings. Yet divisions in some cases are not only perpetuated but actually compounded, as among the small and fragmented groups of Indian Brethren.

In several of these sheikhdoms and emirates there are more Christians (albeit foreigners) in relation to the total population than one would expect to find in any conservative Islamic state. Nevertheless, Muslims are and will continue to be the vast majority. The Arabian peninsula to which these states belong culturally and geographically is not merely part of the Muslim world--it is the religious center of that world. Yet certain rulers (notably those in Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, and Oman) give considerable encouragement to Christian activities through personal friendship and generosity. This may be because the early missionary contributions through schools, hospitals, and welfare programs have not been forgotten. As a secular historian notes: "In Kuwait, as in Qatar and the Trucial States, such educational and health facilities as existed were largely provided by Christian missionaries, true pioneers in ecumenism who had stayed on in Arabia to teach and heal even after discovering the impregnability of Muslim belief."

The American Chargé d'Affaires in Muscat said in conversation with the present writer: "America has had all kinds of diplomatic, cultural and trade relationships with the Sultanate of Oman since the early 1800s. But what the Omani people will remember longest are the hospitals and schools founded by the Mission of the Reformed Church in America." The fact that missionaries continue to stay and to work willingly at the behest of governments in the Gulf States, long after most mission schools and hospitals have been nationalized, can only strengthen that kind of good will.

THE DECEMBER SEMINAR

"Lay Involvement in Mission"

The choice of this topic must have been a response to a real need if we judge by the considerable interest shown even at this early stage. Already representatives of four groups involved in lay missionary work have decided to come to the Seminar. They are Fr. Jack O'Brien, mhm of the Irish Missionary Union, Mr. Chuck Lathrop of the Maryknoll Lay Missioners, Fr. Dermot Doran, csps of the Spiritan Mission Institute in Canada, and Mr. Motuale Balume of Service et Développement, Lyon, France. Other groups who have indicated an interest in attending are the British Volunteer Lay Movement, the International Liaison (Washington D.C.) and the Peruvian Lay Missionary Institute. Some of the participants having read about the Seminar in a notice we placed in Crux, Origins, and Mission-Inter-Com, wrote to ask if they might participate. They see this as an opportunity not only to meet other people in lay missionary work, but to have contact with the generalates as well.

A Seminar Committee has been formed and includes Sr. Gemma de Sa, scmm-m, Fr. William Halliden, scs and Fr. Jerome Heyndrickx, cicm. They have met with the Executive Committee to draw up plans for the preparatory meetings and the Seminar. Your questions or suggestions may be given to any of the Seminar Committee or Executive Committee members.

We are in the process of contacting a number of other lay groups besides those mentioned above. One of our recent visitors was member of a secular group--the Canadian Universities Overseas Programme--and he gave us an interesting picture of the organization and his work in Papua, New Guinea. We hope to assemble a valuable collection of information about various models of lay involvement as well as details about the type of recruitment, training, conditions of service, etc. It is felt that a greater knowledge of lay involvement will expand our view of modern mission theology.

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Sedos Schedule

19th October - Fr. Muskens "The Catholic Church in Indonesia" - 4 pm. at the Dutch College

28th October - Fr. M.Crosby, ofm-cap on "Corporate Investment and Social Responsibility"
(place to be announced in 15th October Bulletin)

During November - Preparatory meetings for Seminar on Lay Involvement in Mission

24th November - (in conjunction with Educ) - Meeting with representatives of the World Bank

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NEWS FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Announcements:

CEVAM Scholarship--A few scholarships are available for sisters in high positions to participate in the CEVAM workshop to be held here in Rome from 20th November to 16th December. Inquiries should be made to Fr. Benjamin Tonna - 45 Bushett Road, Rabat, Malta - Tel. 67.44.08.

Human Rights Conference--sponsored by the Irish School of Ecumenics in Dublin 30th November to 4th December 1978. This is by invitation only, but any Sedos member interested, can contact the Executive Secretary.

Visitors--Past, Present, and Future:

Fr. Kerkhofs, sj of Pro Mundi Vita and Brother Novatus were in Rome gathering information on "New Beginnings", a research project on new forms of religious life. If you know of such groups in Europe, they would be interested in contacting them. You can either send the information to the Sedos secretariat for forwarding or write directly to Pro Mundi Vita, rue de la Limite 6, 1030, Brussels.

Miss Moira Tothill of the Ecumenical Research Unit in Pretoria, South Africa visited and shared information of their present project on the Identity and Role of the Catholic Priest. This is part of a research project on youth and vocations being prepared for the hierarchy of Southern Africa. The present preliminary work looks at the image of the priest under the following headings: The otherness of the priest; the mandate given the priest; the priest as father; the priest as leader and the priest as a professional..a man of standards. (cf. Sedos Documentation No. 4/3031 and 4/3032).

At the end of September, we expect Mr. Larnaud of the Catholic Office for with UNESCO and Fr. Joblin, sj of the ILO in Geneva.

From October 23rd to 27th, Ms. I. Kurz of Misereor will be working in Documentation preparatory to Misereor setting up its own Documentation Centre.

Meetings attended:

From the 21st to the 26th August I attended the conference of the International Association of Mission Studies at Maryknoll New York. I participated in the Workshop on Marxism in which the tape of Fidel Castro's talk to religious leaders was played and discussed (cf. 15th September Sedos Bulletin).

In September I attended the Pro Mundi Vita Seminar on "Human Rights and the Church's Responsibilities". The resolutions should be published shortly and the seminar itself will be the subject of a PMV dossier.

- 17th September - Talk on "Human needs and the Mission of the Church" - meeting of provincials of the Passionist Order.
- 22th September - meeting on the Melbourne Conference at the Secretariat for Christian Unity.
- 28th September to 1st October - meeting of Catholics Concerned with China.

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