

Oddbjørn Leirvik. Charismatic Mission, Miracles and Faith-Based Diplomacy: The Case of Aril Edvardsen (pp 131-144).

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## **Charismatic Mission, Miracles and Faith-Based Diplomacy:**

### **The case of Aril Edvardsen by Oddbjørn Leirvik**

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It is often observed that in the age of globalisation religions have come to play an increasingly important role in political tensions and violent conflicts (Stålsett and Leirvik 2004). Because of this (perceived) reality, religious communities and leaders are often called upon to contribute to reducing the potential for conflict inherent in all religious traditions, and to commit themselves to peaceful dialogue between different faiths.

Many observers would be accustomed to seeing commitment to interfaith dialogue and generous attitudes towards other religions as characteristic of a modern, liberal type of Christianity. In this perception, interfaith dialogue is linked with certain other issues that loom high on the agenda of liberal Christianity. For instance in a recent book by Marcus Borg (who writes from a North American context), he suggests that the three most divisive issue among the churches today are (1) the ordination of women, (2) the attitude towards gays and lesbians and (3) the theological attitude towards other religions. According to Borg, liberal Christians typically take a liberal, accepting attitude in all these issues – underpinning their view with a historical, dialogical and metaphorical understanding of the Bible (Borg 2003).

The conservative strands of Christianity, both fundamentalists and charismatics, have so far not been known to participate very eagerly in peace-building dialogue through mutual understanding and cooperation between religions. There are signs that this is about to change however. The present chapter aims at shedding light upon this significant shift, by looking at recent developments in the ministry of a prominent Charismatic missionary from Norway, Aril Edvardsen, the founder of the Proof of Faith World Mission (“Troens Bevis Verdens Evangelisering”). Edvardsen is rooted in the Pentecostal movement and has to a large extent related himself to Pentecostal networks. However, he professes that he has always felt an ecumenical orientation and according to

his 2004 biography, he does not really regard himself a Pentecostalist any more (Rem 2004: 129). He remains, however, a Charismatic missionary and miracle preacher, with a worldwide agenda and a growing commitment to faith-based diplomacy.

The forms of faith-based diplomacy in which Aril Edvardsen has engaged himself should probably not be regarded as isolated phenomena but rather as part of a global trend. There are in fact many indications that as Pentecostal and other Charismatic churches and communities gain significance in religious and political terms, at least some of their constituencies and leaders take on greater responsibility for social and political developments even at a global scale. Formerly this would be quite unusual due to charismatic religion's mainly otherworldly focus.

### Conservatives in dialogue

At least in the Western context, it is an indisputable fact that initiatives towards interreligious dialogue have often come from liberal circles in the churches. But this is not the entire picture. In the case of the Roman-Catholic church, it is right that the more generous attitude towards other religions that was expressed in the documents of the Second Vatican Council was indicative of a relatively liberal theological trend typical of the 1960s. In more recent years, however, in international forums we have seen several examples of conservative Catholics siding with conservative Muslims in issues involving so-called "family values". In the United Nations, Muslim diplomats have been approached by American Christians who would like to strike conservative alliances in the issues of abortion, homosexuality and combating of aids (Bjartvik 2002). Combining open and conciliatory attitudes towards other faiths with a strong commitment to conservative family values was in fact a striking feature of Pope John Paul II's ministry.

In a similar vein, a good number of Norwegian Muslims have expressed their support for the Christian Democratic Party, in appreciation of the party's traditional stand in similar issues: restrictive legislation regarding pornography, alcohol and abortion; resistance to homosexual partnership; affirmation of family values; and not least sensitivity towards religious minority rights (Brekke 2002: 80f).

Whereas liberal Christians speak of the “softening impact” of interreligious cooperation and a corresponding conversion to a relational understanding of religious truth (Ahlstrand 2003), at least some conservatives distinguish sharply between case-to-case cooperation in the political field on the one hand and human relations (not to speak of theology) on the other. In 2002, the director of a Catholic family- and human rights institute involved in UN lobbying said that Muslim diplomats could be seen as “allies, but not necessarily as friends” (Bjartvik 2002).

It would be far too simplistic, however, to imply that conservative Christians involved in interreligious dialogue and cooperation are merely tactical in their manoeuvres. There is also good reason to question the dualistic notion of pre-packed sets of combined attitudes that could be labelled as either “conservative” or “liberal” respectively. In real life, one will often find combinations of attitudes that contradict such simplistic categorisations.

## Faith-Based Diplomacy

Before turning to Aril Edvardsen’s current activities in the field of interfaith dialogue, I will take a detour via the recent American notion of “faith-based diplomacy”. The notion has been launched by Douglas Johnston who has both an academic, political and military career and is currently the director of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy in the US. His book from 2003 *Faith-Based Diplomacy*, which carries the subtitle “Trumping Realpolitik” (Johnston 2003), was a follow-up to a book from 1994 that received much attention in international discussions of religion and politics: *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Johnston and Sampson 1994).

Johnston’s vision of faith-based diplomacy positively affirms the return of religion to politics, and highlights the special competence that religious people have in what he terms “faith-based peacemaking” (Johnston 2003: 18). Increasingly, Johnston’s International Center for Religion and Diplomacy has engaged Muslim partners, perhaps most conspicuously in the Sudan where a peace treaty between the warring parties in north and south was finally signed in January 2005. In the Sudan, Johnston’s centre has engaged both the Sudan Council of Churches, Muslim leaders and the Islamist government in “faith-based dialogue” aimed at reconciliation training; formation of an

interreligious council; establishment of an independent human rights centre; involvement of religious leaders in the peace process; free movement of religious leaders and the protection of holy places. Describing his centre's activities in Sudan, Johnston mentions that its incipient activities were accompanied by Christian-Muslim prayer breakfasts. He explains that their Muslim partners in Sudan have been very comfortable working within a spiritual rather than a purely secular, realpolitik-oriented framework. He also notes that his centre's dialogical endeavours have taken place at a time when normal diplomatic relations between Sudan and the US were virtually non-existent (ibid: 8f, 20f).

How does Johnston fit into the liberal-conservative pattern? In the US, Johnston has belonged to the inner circle of the National Prayer Breakfast, which is organised by the so-called Fellowship Foundation of which Johnston was formerly a board member (Getter 2002). The Fellowship Foundation, which is headed by Doug Coe, has received some critical attention for its blend of conservative Christian networking, interfaith engagement, and secretive "back-channel" activities in politics. In tune with the vision of Abraham Vereide, the Norwegian-American founder of the National Prayer Breakfast institution, the Fellowship has espoused the idea of change from above and targets consistently top-level politicians, businessmen and religious leaders.

After having lived undercover at their training centre, journalist Jeffrey Sharlet characterised the members of the Fellowship Foundation as "America's secret theocrats", with strong visions of changing not only domestic but indeed world politics (Sharlet 2003). But the change they are aiming at is not supposed to take place under the banner of "Christianity" and certainly not in the name of "Christendom". As the title of Sharlet's critical article – "Jesus plus nothing" – indicates, the Fellowship focuses its worldwide networking efforts on the person of Jesus Christ whose prophetic mission and healing power is also (as the Fellowship sees it) recognised by many other religions than Christianity.

In December 2004, the Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet* published a series of critical articles about alleged links between the ruling Christian Democrat Party in Norway and the Fellowship Foundation (Gjerstad and Ellingsen 2004). The Christian Democrat Parliament member Lars Rise, who is coordinating a "Forum for faith and

values” in the Norwegian Parliament and is also the main person behind the party’s relative success among Muslim voters, is part of the international circle around the US National Prayer Breakfast. It was in fact Doug Coe who in 1996 inspired him to make contacts with the Muslim constituency (Brekke 2002: 79).

The Norwegian “Forum for faith and values” is focused on Jesus as a model for wise leadership (Gjerstad 2004). In other connections, Lars Rise has referred to interreligious “Jesus-groups” that have been initiated by the National Prayer Breakfast network and attracted wide interest in leadership circles in Middle Eastern and Asian countries.<sup>1</sup>

### Aril Edvardsen in Pakistan and Sudan: faith- and prayer-based diplomacy?

Turning now to the Norwegian Charismatic evangelist Aril Edvardsen, I will raise the question of whether his combined activities of mission and dialogue fit with Johnston’s concept of faith-based diplomacy, and whether or not Edvardsen can neatly be categorised as either “liberal” or “conservative”. I will focus on his missionary and dialogical activities in Muslim majority contexts, with concrete reference to his latest campaigns in Pakistan (1999, 2000, 2002) and Sudan (2005).

Judging from his magazine’s reports from Edvardsen’s campaigns, his preaching includes classical items as the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God in Christ. Most of the space, however, is devoted to reports of the numerous healing miracles that are said to have taken place his evangelical meetings.

There are also other Norway-based evangelists and miracle preachers (such as Bjørnar Heimstad and Svein-Magne Pedersen) who have been campaigning in Pakistan. The distinct contribution of Aril Edvardsen lies in his additional commitment to interfaith dialogue. Along with large evangelical meetings and seminars with local pastors, since the late 1990s Edvardsen has staged interfaith dialogue conferences with leading religious and political personalities in Pakistan. As indicated by a “State leader promo” produced by his organisation (Edvardsen 1999b), his dialogical strategy resembles that of the Fellowship Foundation in targeting top-level leaders. In addition, and as before, he addresses the general public as a missionary and miracle preacher.

When presenting his campaigns in the Muslim world (which are often called “friendship crusades”), Edvardsen makes no secret of his missionary intentions. But he twists them in the direction of a non-confessional type of Jesus-piety reminiscent of the Fellowship Foundation’s insistence on “Jesus plus nothing”.

Striking examples of how his combination mission and dialogue works in practice can be found in Aril Edvardsen’s reports from his organisation’s activities in Pakistan. Since 1970, Edvardsen has staged a number of evangelical campaigns in Pakistan (Fida 2002: 14), (Rem 2004: 172-206). Then for the first time in 1999, he added a dialogue conference to his evangelical campaigns. After his evangelical meetings in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, he staged a dialogue conference in Lahore. Here, he was able to rally a great number of Muslim and Christian leaders under the slightly ambitious heading of “Universal peace and harmony”.

After the campaign, his magazine reported on “miracles in Pakistan”. The primary miracle was that he was able to preach the Gospel to thousands of Pakistanis (most of them Muslims) and also to heal many of them. The second miracle (referred to as such in his magazine) was that Aril Edvardsen was commended by the President of Pakistan’s Parliament, Mohammed Rafiq Tarar, for his efforts towards interreligious reconciliation. In return, the President received not a crucifix but a Norwegian flag planted in a Viking ship.

In the case of Edvardsen’s campaigns in Pakistan, it is probably pertinent to speak of miracles in more than one sense. The more “traditional” miracle (in a Charismatic sense) was the gathering of thousands of Muslims who in his evangelical meetings received his charismatic proclamation of the healing power of Christ. Tuning in to widespread expectations in folk Islam to the healing powers of Jesus, Edvardsen was also invited to the home of two Muslim leaders who asked him to pray for their diseases in Jesus’ name (Edvardsen 1999a), (Mydland 1999). As Edvardsen notes, “Muslims in Pakistan – from the greatest Muslim leaders to ordinary village people – have got an enormous faith in Jesus as a healer” (Edvardsen 2001b: 9).<sup>2</sup> The healing power of Jesus is in fact a classical feature of Muslim images of Jesus Christ (Leirvik 1999). However, in folk Islam such expectations are by no means restricted to Jesus and his

representatives. On the contrary, Edvardsen's miracle preaching "in the name of Jesus" corresponds with a much more general expectation to holy men (in particular, Sufi saints) and their healing powers (Ahlberg 1990: 211f)

Taking away nothing from the traditional focus on healing miracles, the discursive novelty in Edvardsen's missionary language lies in his additional reference to the Christian-Muslim dialogue conference as a miracle. Since the latter part of the 1990s, interreligious dialogue has become an important part of Edvardsen's agenda. Later in 1999, and as a follow-up to his dialogue effort in Lahore, Edvardsen hosted a Christian-Muslim dialogue conference in Norway, under the same heading as in Pakistan ("Universal peace and harmony"). On this occasion, and for the first time in Norway, a large group of Pentecostal leaders visited a Norwegian mosque and received Muslim leaders in their church (Mydland 2000), cf. (Leirvik 2001: 214). By some conservative Christians in Norway, Aril Edvardsen has been criticised for his open-minded approach to Islam and Muslim faith. Because of renewed critique prior to the conference, he had to retract his initial plans of praying together with the Muslims during the mutual visits in mosque and church.<sup>3</sup>

Three prominent Muslim leaders (headed by Dr. Abdul Qadir Azad who took part in the private prayer session mentioned above) and the Charismatic Christian leader Marqus Fida came together from Pakistan to join the conference in Norway. Indicative of his readiness to participate also with people from more liberal circles in the churches, together with some other Lutheran colleagues I was invited to represent the Church of Norway.

In November 2000, Edvardsen visited Pakistan again. On the invitation of President Mohammad Rafiq Tarar who wanted him to pursue his dialogue for peace, Edvardsen hosted a second round of Muslim-Christian dialogue conferences in Pakistan, near Faisalabad and in Lahore (Edvardsen 2001a). Naturally, he also staged a large evangelical campaign which he subsequently described as "the greatest friendship crusade of his life" (Edvardsen 2001b). As in 1999, healing miracles was a main focus. On this occasion, his magazine could even report of a dead baby seemingly having been brought back to life. In his magazine's reports on healing miracles, there is rarely a



critical note. In this particular case, however, one may observe a certain reservation on Edvardsen's part. He emphasises that as a Westerner, he is not accustomed to this type of miracles. In his magazine, he states that he doesn't really know whether the baby was actually dead – he has only got the baby's grandmother's word for it (Edvardsen 2001b: 9f). Nevertheless, both a promotional video and later issues of his magazine continued referring to the resuscitated "miracle baby" in Faisalabad (Edvardsen 2000), (Edvardsen 2001c), (Edvardsen 2002b: 30).

However, like in 1999 the reports from his campaign reflect a widening notion of miracles. The video production from his campaign in 2000 gives ample place to Edvardsen's contribution to the strengthening of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Pakistan (Edvardsen 2000). In the 2000 peace conference, both members of the Pakistani government and the Norwegian ambassador to Pakistan took part, in addition to some 300 religious leaders (Edvardsen 2001a: 5).

In 2002, Edvardsen ventured a third campaign in Pakistan (in Lahore), repeating his success from 1999 and 2000 in a similar combination of dialogical and evangelical events (Rem 2004: 172-206). His biographer Håvard Rem, who accompanied him to Pakistan, notes that posters produced by the local organisers showed Bollywood style pictures of Edvardsen – either together with the king and queen of Norway or with healed Pakistanis from previous campaigns (ibid: 198).

The outcome of his campaign was once again reported in his magazine as "A historic miracle crusade in Islamic Pakistan" (Edvardsen 2002a). The bulk of this issue of the magazine is dedicated to a detailed report of all those who were miraculously healed when Edvardsen proclaimed Jesus as the healer of body and soul in Gaddafi stadium in Lahore. One of the local imams reportedly asked Edvardsen to visit his home and pray for his sick daughter (Rem 2004: 181). According to Edvardsen's magazine, more than 87 000 received also a catechetical follow-up (Edvardsen 2002a: 13). But as in 1999, his achievements in the field of dialogue are also described as a miracle. In the 2002 dialogue conference, both Muslim, Christian and Sikh leaders took part.

In one of Aril Edvardsen's evangelical meetings in 2002, even Tahir ul-Qadri, the charismatic leader of the organisation Minhaj ul-Quran, turned up and stood hand in hand

on the podium with Aril Edvardsen and his main Christian partner in Pakistan, Marqus Fida. Tahir ul-Qadri used to be known for his apologetic and at times confrontational approach to Christianity. When ul-Qadri first visited the Nordic countries in the 1980s, the website of his organisation boasted that he had totally silenced the Christian leaders whom he confronted, obviously in rather war-like dialogues. His book about *Islam and Christianity* from 1987 reveals much of the same confrontational style (ul-Qadri 1987).<sup>4</sup> When Tahir ul-Qadri came to Norway in 1999, however, he put polemics aside and staged instead an “International Peace Conference” in Oslo. Three years after, together with Aril Edvardsen in Pakistan, he appeared in a soft interfaith style, reportedly reading from the Sermon on the Mount (Edvardsen 2002b: 15, 28).

The main features of Edvardsen’s campaigns in Pakistan recurred in his mission to Sudan in 2005. During a planning visit in February 2004, Aril Edvardsen met not only with local Christian partners but also made contact with the very prominent Muslim leader and politician Sadiq al-Mahdi (Edvardsen 2004c), (Edvardsen 2004d). During his conversations with Sadiq al-Mahdi, they reportedly discussed politics and interreligious relations as well as the image of Jesus Christ in Islam. Furthermore, he met with the newly established Sudan Inter Religious Council, which is partly an offspring of the activities of Douglas Johnston’s centre. As presented in his magazine, Aril Edvardsen’s plans were prefaced by Biblical prophecies for the land of Sudan. But they were also explicitly linked to the ongoing peace process in this ethnically and religiously divided country, a peace process in which Norwegian mediators (not least from the Christian Democratic Party) have played a central role (Edvardsen 2004b).

When carrying out his planned campaign in February 2005 he was able to assemble tens of thousand of listeners in the largest football stadiums of Khartoum and Omdurman. Although thousands of people were said to have run to the podium to accept Jesus as their Saviour, the events focused upon by Edvardsen’s magazine indicate once again that miraculous healing was a prime attraction (Edvardsen 2005: 17).

Like in Pakistan, Edvardsen’s evangelical campaign in Sudan was linked with a high profile peace conference for religious and political leaders. According to his

magazine he was afterwards contacted by Somali and Kenyan politicians who wanted Edvardsen to involve himself in peace-building work in Somalia (Edvardsen 2005: 17).

### Inclusive Jesus-mission and faith-based diplomacy

How should Aril Edvardsen's activities in Pakistan, Sudan and other Muslim contexts be understood? Is what we see merely missionary activity supported by tactical manoeuvres and camouflaged by conspicuous dialogue events? Or are we witnessing a genuine, dual commitment to mission and dialogue, surpassing the old alternatives of conservative and liberal approaches to religious pluralism (Leirvik 2004)? And how does Aril Edvardsen legitimise his combined evangelical and dialogical mission in theological terms?

As for the implied theology of religions underlying his campaigns, Aril Edvardsen does clearly not belong to those conservative Christians who warn against Islam as an evil power or denounce Allah as an idol. For his insistence that in Arab culture, Allah is but the common Christian-Muslim name for the one and only God (Edvardsen 1997), he has been criticised by fellow conservatives. Although Edvardsen indicates that certain other religions are more liable to the influence of evil than one's own, he can certainly not be counted as a confrontational conservative. According to Edvardsen, any missionary effort directed towards Muslims should first of all confirm what they already believe in God. Only then can Christ be meaningfully proclaimed as the fulfilment of their (and every other believer's) spiritual longings. In tune with this approach, Edvardsen may describe the Qur'an as "the Muslims' bridge to Jesus" (Edvardsen 2003), cf. (Rem 2004: 183-195). Edvardsen's views on mission thus inscribe him in the ranks of those who propound a fulfilment type of missiology.

As indicated in the reports from his campaigns in Pakistan and Sudan, healing miracles constitute a most important part of his proclamation of universal promises fulfilled. In a video production from his 2000 campaign in Pakistan, the narrator explains: "At each meeting, Dr. Edvardsen takes time to pray for the sick. The people learn that Jesus not only has the power to take away their sins, but he can also perform the miracles of healing" (Edvardsen 2000).

However, in Edvardsen's view performing miracles and preaching the Gospel is not the same as spreading Christianity. Similar to the National Prayer Breakfast's Jesus-piety and their aversion against the notion of "Christianity", Edvardsen missionary vision is formulated as "an evangelical revival without the Christianity of the West". With reference to his TV-transmissions to the Muslim world (through the "Miracle" channel), Edvardsen underlines that his movement always advises Muslims who accept Christ as their Saviour and Messiah to call themselves "Jesus-believers" belonging to "Gospel centres", rather than "Christians" who will inevitably be associated with "the Christianity and churches of the West" (ibid: 19).

In his 2004 biography, Edvardsen expresses his expectation of an "enormous evangelical awakening" in Islam, a revival that in Edvardsen's expectation will probably be connected with marvellous "signs and miracles" – resulting in a movement of Jesus-believing Muslims that may take distinctively different shapes from that of organised Christianity. In an apocalyptic vein typical of much of his preaching (Rem 2004: 263ff), he also suggests that the prophesied awakening may be accompanied with global catastrophes that will lead to an "explosion" of people seeking God all over the world (Rem 2004: 194).

In terms of theology, Edvardsen cannot neatly be labelled as a traditional conservative. By some parameters, Edvardsen might seem to belong to the conservative camp. This is true both of his views on the inerrancy of the Scriptures, his avowed interest in eschatology and apocalypics, and his position in some matters pertaining to "family values". But it is in fact very hard to subsume Aril Edvardsen's religious, moral and political views under the dualistic categories of "conservative" and "liberal". For instance, in a 2003 interview with the Norwegian socialist newspaper *Klassekampen* he announced that he had given up his former resistance to free abortion. Notwithstanding his moral objections to abortion, he now affirms women's choice. In the same interview, he also states that he can see no problem in having women in church positions of any kind. He even reveals that his political sympathies have slid away from the Christian Democrats and back to his youthful commitment to the Social Democrats (Leer-Salvesen 2003).

In Norway, however, his political backing has primarily come from Christian Democrat-led governments. Previous to his later campaigns in Pakistan and Sudan, Edvardsen was able to obtain political (and some financial) support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for his evangelical-cum-dialogical mission in Palestine and North Caucasus (Brekke 2002: 15-25). In the case of Pakistan, Edvardsen's initiatives coincide in time with efforts taken by the Norwegian Church Aid and sponsored by the Norwegian government, responding to the stated ambition of a number of Muslim leaders to strengthen their commitment to interreligious peace building, and aiming at establishing a forum for Muslim-Christian dialogue in Pakistan. At a conference in Islamabad in September 2004, this initiative resulted in the formation of the so-called "World Council of Religions towards peace, reconciliation and justice".<sup>5</sup> (The process leading up to the Islamabad declaration was first facilitated by Alf Arne Ramslie of the Norwegian embassy in Islamabad; formerly a Pentecostal missionary).<sup>6</sup>

In preparation of Edvardsen's campaign in Sudan, he had meetings with Christian Democrat members in the Norwegian government.<sup>7</sup> In general, it seems that Aril Edvardsen links closely up with the official Norwegian policy of international peacemaking. A video produced by his organisation, labelled "State leader promo", demonstrates how successful he has also been abroad in gaining local political support for his peace and friendship campaigns – be it in Sudan, Pakistan, Caucasus, or Palestine where he was able to earn the confidence of Yassir Arafat himself (Edvardsen 1999b).

Edvardsen's mission may also have – at least indirectly – some tangible political *effects*, first of all as regards freedom of religion and a more relaxed, inter-religious atmosphere in civil society. In his magazine, the Christian leader Marqus Fida praises Aril Edvardsen for widening the scope of religious freedom in Pakistan (Fida 2001: 25) (Fida 2002).

Edvardsen's faith-based diplomacy might seem to correspond well with his self-understand as a messenger not only of Christ but also of "universal peace". However, in the theology of Edvardsen, "Jesus" and "peace" appears to be two sides of the same coin. Jesus Christ as the prince of peace seems in fact to be an established *topos* in Edvardsen's evangelical preaching, as expressed in a video production from his 2000 campaign in

Pakistan which also illustrates the combined themes of eschatology and the reign of peace:

He [Jesus] will come, and he will take the power away from the world ruler who at that time will be Anti-Christ. And when Jesus comes, he will judge everybody on the Day of Resurrection, and there will be peace in the world. Also the Qur'an tells the same and the Hadith also tells that Jesus, Isa, he will come, and he will take the power away from the Anti-Christ, and he will bring peace to the world (Edwardsen 2000).

## Conclusion

In my view, Aril Edwardsen's performance in Pakistan and Sudan are more than tactical manoeuvres on the part of a neo-Charismatic evangelist. A good indication that Edwardsen is seriously committed not only to mission but also to dialogue is the fact that he has lost some of his followers among fundamentalist Christians in Norway – because of his support for the Palestinian cause and his suggestion that Christians and Muslims basically believe in the same God. In a 2004 issue of his magazine, he warns against all kinds of fundamentalism, be it Christian, Zionist, Islamic, or secular. As for Christian varieties of fundamentalism, he even attacks certain forms of literalist approaches to the Bible (Edwardsen 2004a), cf. (Holbek 2003).

The political impact of Edwardsen's dialogical mission is hard to evaluate. There is an obvious need for more thorough examinations of how Edwardsen's dialogue conferences and interreligious network building link up with a growing number of similar initiatives recently taken by governments and religious leaders of different inclinations (especially after September 11, 2001). As noted, in his dialogue initiatives Aril Edwardsen targets religious and political leaders. His communication with the masses seems to be on a different level, tuning in with popular expectations of miraculous healing and a fuller life in countries where large proportions of the population have good reasons for feeling acutely vulnerable in terms of welfare and health. In both the political and religious realms, there is obviously a difference between manifestations of harmony and instant experiences of healing on the one hand, and long-lasting, deep-rooted change on the other.

Edwardsen's congenial blend of attitudes and practices (with their distinctive touch of "the miraculous") is hard to characterise as either "conservative" or "liberal". As indicated in this chapter, there are in fact many signs that these categories are currently being surpassed by much more complicated realities. The list of contributors to Douglas Johnston's books shows that well-known names from the "liberal" discourse of interfaith relations have no objections to contribute to a book that is edited by a former representative of "America's secret theocrats". Or maybe Jeffrey Starlet's label "secret theocrats" is only indicative of some liberals' reluctance to realise that religion in politics does not necessarily amount to theocracy.

In his explicit critique of fundamentalism Edwardsen certainly parts ways with many forms of conservative Christianity. When in 2003 Edwardsen countered attacks from "fundamentalist" Christians in Norway, he acknowledged that de-Christianisation has gone too far in our society. But his remedy is emphatically not more "Christian laws" but rather a broad mobilisation around what he terms "Christian values" (Holbek 2003). Like Johnston in his practice of faith-based diplomacy, Edwardsen's international campaigns indicate that such values could in fact be reformulated on an interreligious basis.

Is that his vision? Or is his vision rather (at the end of the day, not to say of the world) that the entire globe becomes united under Christ?

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## NOTES:

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<sup>1</sup> Personal conversation, 11 February 2003

<sup>2</sup> All quotes from Troens Bevis are rendered in English translation by the author of this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> *Dagen*, 23. november 1999, s. 7 (“Kritikk for muslim-bønn”) and *Magazinet* nr. 42, 19. november 1999: (“Felles bønn med muslimer i Pinsekirken in Bærum”).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the justified critique in (Lønning 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Source: web news posted by the Norwegian Church Aid  
(<http://www.nca.no/article/articleview/4112/1/414/>)

<sup>6</sup> Source: web news posted by the Norwegian Church Aid  
(<http://www.kirken.no/oslo/nyhet.cfm?nyhetid=28707>)

<sup>7</sup> Source: web news posted by Troens Bevis Verdens Evangelisering  
(<http://www.tbve.no/Nyheter.229+M5d31208b9d6.0.html>)