

WACC Scholars

Mr. Lwin and Mr. Sibanda's theses presented

On the 20th February 2002, on behalf of WACC I attended the public presentation of the theses of Mr. Mya Min Lwin and Mr. Useni Sibanda, two of the scholars financially supported by WACC through the Training Assistance Programme (TAP) during 2001.

David Adams, Dean of Communication, introduced the post-graduate students in Communication at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS).

The public presentation started with a few songs lead by Mr. Lwin. Ms. Catherine Ngongo, one of the other post-graduate students presenting their work who read a passage from the II Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 4, verses 1 to 12.

Following the reading, prayers and songs were shared bringing us to the coffee break. During the break I had the opportunity to talk to the scholars as well as to the Dean of Communication and to the Executive Director of the Centre, Dr. Chris Sugden.

The students talked about the subject of their thesis, the methodology they used and the implications of their studies for their future work.

All the scholars applied the theory learnt during their course to the particular cases of their home countries. The experience seems extremely positive for all students.

Mr. Mya Min Lwin's thesis was entitled 'Analysis and evaluation of the Myanmar (Burma) Baptist Church, with special reference to the 200 anniversary of its foundation'. Mr. Lwin, has so far, created a theoretical background in order to analyse the structure of the Myanmar Baptist Church. He has asked for an extension, which would allow him to collect raw data directly from the Church. Mr. Lwin aim is to critically analyse the data that will enable him to make a series of proposals for the reform of the communication department of the Baptist Church in Burma.

Mr. Lwin faces tough challenges as Christianity accounts for no more than 10 per cent of the population. Furthermore, Christianity is divided in different denominations, e.g. Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, etc. making it harder to build a common strategy. Christianity is also identified with the former colonial power Great Britain and, therefore, Christians are perceived as 'non-patriotic' or traitors.

The collection of data will offer Mr. Lwin a better understanding of the local needs and ideas on how to initialise change. He hopes to become the next Chair of the Baptist Church Communications Department. Supported by the authority of this position he will start, monitor and evaluate the changes.

Mr. Useni Sibanda's research was entitled 'The Role of the Christian Media in Zimbabwe'. He has concentrated on the role of two magazines in Zimbabwe analysing their impact from the point of view of social change, human rights and development using quantitative as well as qualitative techniques. Mr. Sibanda focused on *Motto*, the Catholic magazine, and *Voice*, the Evangelical paper, paying particular attention to their capacity to inform and shape the public opinion in the country. Thus, Mr. Sibanda has been assessing to what extent the religious media in Zimbabwe has operated as an agent for the redefinition of socio-political and economic issues.

Mr. Sibanda's findings suggest that the Christian media in Zimbabwe has been mainly passive. This is particularly true of the Evangelical Church. He is proposing to develop an active Church. Mr. Sibanda's main aim is to establish the foundations of an active Evangelical Church that does not simply react to events in the country but that participates directly in social issues affecting the whole population such as the redistribution of the land or the ability to resolve conflictive situations by peaceful means.

This positive event finished with reflections of Dr. Chris Sugden on the passage read previously.

For more info on WACC's training Assistance Programme write to Begoña de la Serna López.