

Muslims and Christians in the UK - a way forward?

In his Presidential Address to the General Synod this summer, the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke of Christian-Muslim relations in the UK following the London bombings. Here is an extract from his Address.

The horrifying news about the London bombings in July broke just as I was arriving at Batley in West Yorkshire for a day of visits to local Islamic institutions and meetings with clergy in the area who are involved in interfaith encounters.

It proved to be an extraordinary opportunity for saying things about the absolutely routine nature of friendly and lively relationships between Muslims and Christians in a good many parts of the UK - things which have informed our discussions here about 'Presence and Engagement', and which we shall all need to be heard saying quite a lot in days ahead, when the temptation to scapegoat our Muslim neighbours may be strong for some in our communities.

Routine friendship and co-operation remains the best hope we have in any conflict of finding ways forward; nothing really can substitute for face to face encounter, when even the sharpest differences of conviction (and no-one in Batley was out to deny these) can be held with respect. An over-used word, I know; but its origins, of course, have to do with looking carefully; to respect someone or some position is to pay it the compliment of real and lasting attention, the sort of attention we call 'loving' attention in other contexts.

But why not indeed think of respect as loving attention? To give time to following through why another believes and acts as they do, to treat this as a serious vocation, to assume that what is humanly significant for me is not going to feel completely different from what matters to my neighbour - this is a form of love, surely.

And as anyone who has been deeply involved with the encounter between faith communities will confirm, it is something quite different from compromise. The Latin Bible often uses the word that is at the root of 'respect' to describe God's attention to his creation; and there perhaps is our best clue to what it might really entail.

As Christians we've all received the Holy Spirit in the form of a seed. But now we must nurture that seed.
Don't let it lie dormant – let it germinate, push down roots; roots that get stronger and deeper daily.
Let his 'fruit tree' grow inside of us – the blossom becoming the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

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