



Today at Lambeth Palace 'In Good Faith', a new Christian-Jewish dialogue project, was launched. This is a joint initiative of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations, Ephraim Mirvis. Modelled on their own well rooted friendship, this partnership programme will ensure Priests and Rabbis based in close geographical proximity will be encouraged to explore mutual concerns and opportunities for shared action together, initially for the next year.

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and the Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis explained their vision and hope for the programme and its place within their respective understandings of the role of faith in society.

Archbishop Justin said: "It is in the everyday conversations, the grassroots initiatives and the building of local bridges between Christians and Jews, our synagogues and churches, that we will see real change and the hope for a divided world and nation..... I am so grateful to you for signalling hope when the temptation is to succumb to world-weary cynicism, pessimism, defeatism and even despair."

Chief Rabbi Mirvis said: "The most important part of today is tomorrow. It is what will result as a consequence of our collaboration. Therefore I give this challenge to you: don't just reflect in the future on what a lovely day this was in Lambeth Palace. The strength . . . of what we are doing . . . is to encourage us all to work together ... to guarantee that the outstanding relationships that we have at leadership level will trickle down to the grassroots within our communities, so that indeed as faith leaders, we will make a change in this challenging world of ours.

During the day mixed groups of rabbis and priests considered four topics – the challenge of creating and sustaining thriving faith communities, combating religious extremism, the Holy Land and its implications for inter-religious relations, and opportunities to contribute to the common good together. It is intended that this launch day will be a catalyst for positive dialogue relationships between pairs of priests and rabbis who will continue the day's conversations on a smaller scale in the weeks and months which follow.



Read the Archbishop's speech:

Chief Rabbi, fellow priests and rabbis and other guests, it is an enormous pleasure to welcome you all to Lambeth Palace today.

We're very, very grateful to the rabbis and to those from the Church of England who've come to share this day and spend time reflecting on the issues we're facing.

All times are insecure. One of the great foundations that we have to contribute to our society is to say there's no such as a secure time, but there is such thing as a faithful God – and that's very important.

But we are a time of particular uncertainty at the moment, and it's for that reason that the launch of the In Good Faith Initiative is both exciting and challenging. It's exciting because we are embarking on a voyage of discovery together. It's challenging because if we are to model relationships of trust and integrity beyond our synagogues and churches to a society that is manifestly struggling to cope with difference more and more, then we will need to move beyond superficial encounter and ceremonial embrace, to authentic and transformative exchange.

I think we need to hold onto that very carefully. It's not all that we've done over many decades has been always superficial and ceremonial. Far from it. But it is ever more important that the faith groups – and particularly because of the history that we share, of much tragedy and many appalling and terrible things from within the Christian community – it is really important that we are able to demonstrate an ability to deal with difference and seek the flourishing of the country in which we live.

It has been one of the greatest joys as Archbishop of Canterbury that I have enjoyed a working relationship with Chief Rabbi Mirvis that has blossomed into a friendship of mutual respect and admiration. The channels of communication between us are open and we are able to discuss sensitive matters on a foundation of transparency and accountability and goodwill. I trust Chief Rabbi Mirvis to hold me and the Church of England to account on anything and everything, not least our relationship to Judaism and our Jewish sisters and brothers in this country.

The national church has to own its own history of intolerance and deep-seated anti-Semitism – and we have to own that history. There are points of light, right back into the 18th century – one of my predecessors as Bishop of Durham, Bishop Trevor, purchased the Zurbarán paintings after the House of Lords rejected a Jewish emancipation Act, as a symbol of his intense disagreement with that decision.

As leader of the Church of England, I am very aware of this history and I am more than ready to be answerable and held to account for both unwitting implicit anti-Semitism, and the wilful and cavalier use of language, historical analogy or political example, by members of the clergy or laity. It happens. We know it happens. It is excruciatingly painful to us when we see it and hear it and recognise it, and we try and deal with it sharply and severely.

I would trust Chief Rabbi Mirvis to confront me with these damaging and detrimental instances, either directly or through an adviser or emissary. We have established our credentials and our joint commitment to work closely together for the good of the country and our two faiths. We share a resolve to bring into the open our differences, and to avoid sweeping what remains uncomfortable under the carpet – and if that means having to repent for the collective and specific sins of the Church, then I do so willingly.

This is a time when post-Referendum reflection has identified a country that is wrestling with issues surrounding integration and inclusion. And as we are aware, not only us but the United States and most of Europe. We have the Austrian presidential election, which, though only to a formal post, is one of great symbolic significance and one of great concern to us. We have a number of others that are equally worrying and unsettling; particularly the French elections next spring.

It is vital that we can make a substantial contribution to the debate around our shared values in this country – what the government has referred to as British values. As members of the Jewish and Christian communities, it is imperative that we remind the nation that our values have not emerged within a secular vacuum; but from the resilient and eternal structure of our Judeo-Christian theological, philosophical and ethical heritage. I'd want to add here that over the next 12 months this is one of the major themes of my writing and speaking – the issue of where we find our values, and a re-emphasis that we find our values in this country within the Judeo-Christian tradition, whether we are believers or not.

The right to life, liberty and the rule of law and robust democratic government does not come cheaply, nor is it held lightly. The roots of our freedom in this country are deeply embedded within our British constitutional and civic life *because* their foundation lies within the shared scriptural inheritance of our faith traditions.

Democracy is not in and of itself the final answer to things, nor is the rule of law. Martin Luther King did not accept the final authority of the rule of law when the law is unjust. Quite rightly, Bonhoeffer in the 1930s did not accept the final authority of the rule of law when the law was palpably racist, unjust and anti-Semitic. That's one of the reasons he ended up going to the gallows.

As for tolerance, it's a word like 'nice', isn't it? Completely meaningless and overused. Respect is something else – I won't go there.

The God who created us in God's own image, created us to be in relationship with him and with each other, freely and not through compulsion or coercion. There are consequences to non-relationship with God, but no compulsion to be in relationship – but you have to bear the consequences.

Our understanding of the rights and responsibilities that flow from our God-given inheritance as human beings, enable us – Jewish and Christian communities together – to be powerful and compelling advocates for freedom in British society.

The cutting edge of freedom must include the right to disagree, disengage and dissent.

It means the freedom of others to criticise us or our views, or for those of us who hold beliefs strongly to change our minds or our beliefs.

It means that we all need to be accountable to one another before God and we all need to affirm the right of others to not believe as we do.

What it doesn't mean is freedom without accountability to undermine each other's faith, whether casually, incidentally or wilfully.

What it cannot mean is the freedom to use language destructively and negatively about those who are different to us – or who take opinions and views with which we profoundly disagree. We have had egregious examples of that in recent weeks, aimed at our judiciary.

And what it must never mean is the denial of others to practise or not practise their understanding of their religious or secular identity.

Freedom must always come with responsibility if it is to thrive and endure.

Given that we share this understanding of our society and our place in it, we are in a remarkably strong place to model ground-breaking grassroots relationships which will spawn creative engagement and civic renewal, not only for our places of worship and faith institutions, but also for our whole society.

We are at a time of particular uncertainty. We need to acknowledge the deep sense of uncertainty and anxiety that pervades British society and public life today. The lack of integration is worrying and cannot be easily ignored after a referendum.

Our natural inclination is to avoid conflict, to hide the depth of animosity and fear that is so apparent, and to pretend that somehow all be well in the end. Pseudo-optimism masks the fault-lines that can soon become yawning chasms between people, communities and faiths.

We are called to model something qualitatively different. We are called to pray and to work for the flourishing of the whole of society. The vision and call from God through the prophet Jeremiah to the people in exile in Babylon is our call too. If the people of Britain flourish, then our communities, families, people and we will flourish too.

The other real temptation is for us as a country to turn in on ourselves, to become Little Englanders obsessed with its historical legacy of post-colonial guilt, mired in the internecine tribalism of north and south, town and country, religious and secular, baby boomer and millennial.

But there is another way.

If as a nation we can acknowledge and repent of our history of our abuse of power and position in the world, then we can move towards a recognition of the riches of our global links and contacts; of the experience of effective diplomacy and skills of peace-making, mediation and

reconciliation – and of the creative and innovative development of civic space.

The recent history both within Northern Ireland and within the rest of the United Kingdom demonstrates the willingness to move beyond the passive tolerance of diversity to actively seeking the flourishing of others through faiths forums, Near Neighbours projects, food banks, scriptural reasoning projects, joint educational initiatives and community regeneration schemes.

It is in the everyday conversations, the grassroots initiatives and the building of local bridges between Christians and Jews, our synagogues and churches, that we will see real change and the hope for a divided world and nation. I recently wrote an article in which I described anti-Semitism as the root of all racism in our society. It goes back so much further, beyond the Norman Conquest. It is deeply embedded in our thinking. If we uproot that root, it disempowers so much else that we hate and despise in our own attitudes among ourselves.

You are modelling a way of living today in your commitment to begin a journey of discovery together. I am so grateful to you for signalling hope when the temptation is to succumb to world-weary cynicism, pessimism, defeatism and even. You are a gift to the nation, and I hope a gift that we begin to unwrap today.

10 min read

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